

God Builds a Nation

Genesis 21-22

Last week we talked about how Genesis 1 through 11 is really the beginning of God's story. God creates a good world. Humanity is invited into relationship with Him. Humanity is invited to trust Him. And over and over again, God looks at His creation and says, "It is good." But then something happens. Adam and Eve stop trusting the goodness of God. They start believing maybe God is holding out on them. Cain stops trusting God too, and his jealousy and anger lead to violence. Humanity keeps spiraling further and further into sin, pride, violence, and brokenness until the whole world seems to fall apart.

By the time we get to the Tower of Babel, humanity is trying to build a name for itself apart from God. They want control. They want power. They want security without dependence on Him. And Genesis 1 through 11 leaves us with this huge question hanging in the air: Is humanity ever going to trust God again? Is anybody actually going to lean into the story God is trying to tell?

Then Genesis 12 introduces us to Abraham.

And Abraham is not perfect. I think sometimes we accidentally turn Bible characters into superheroes. But if you actually read Abraham's story, his family is messy. There is dysfunction. There are bad decisions. There are moments where Abraham shows incredible faith, and there are other moments where you want to grab him by the shoulders and ask, "What are you doing right now?"

Honestly, I think that should encourage us a little.

Because sometimes we think God only uses people who have everything together. We think God only works through people with perfect families, perfect pasts, and perfect lives. But the Bible keeps showing us the opposite. God works through broken people who are willing to trust Him.

And that is really what makes Abraham different. Not perfection. Trust.

God comes to Abraham and says, “Leave everything familiar behind and go where I tell you.” And Abraham goes. He does not know all the details. He does not know how everything is going to work. He just trusts that God is leading him somewhere good.

Then God tells Abraham something huge. He says, “I will bless you, and you will be a blessing.”

Now, when we hear the word blessing, we usually think about ourselves. We think about getting something from God. Better circumstances. Easier situations. More comfort. More happiness. But in Scripture, blessing is never supposed to stop with you.

God blesses Abraham so that the nations of the earth can be blessed through him.

In other words, God says, “I want My goodness to flow through your life into the lives of others.”

And honestly, I think we miss that sometimes. We spend so much time asking God to bless us that we forget to ask how He wants to use us.

God has never been interested in building a group of people who just sit around enjoying blessings while the world around them is falling apart. God blesses people so they can help bring healing, hope, grace, and restoration into the lives of others.

Then God tells Abraham, “Through your family, I’m going to bless the world.”

But there is a problem.

Abraham and Sarah cannot have children.

And instead of waiting on God, they try to solve the problem themselves. Sarah tells Abraham to have a child through her servant Hagar, and Abraham does. Ishmael is born. But later God says, “No, I’m still going to give you and Sarah a son.” And eventually Isaac is born.

But now the family situation is incredibly messy. There is jealousy. Hurt. Anger. Tension. Broken relationships. And eventually Hagar and Ishmael are sent away into the wilderness.

And this next part of the story is heartbreaking.

They run out of water. Hagar believes her son is going to die. So she places Ishmael under a bush and walks away because she cannot bear to watch him die.

Can you imagine how hopeless that moment must have felt?

No help. No future. No answers. Completely alone in the wilderness.

And maybe some of you know what that feels like.

Maybe not physically in a desert, but emotionally. Some of you know what it feels like to feel abandoned. Forgotten. Ignored. Alone. Some of you know what it feels like to smile around people while internally you feel exhausted, anxious, and overwhelmed. Some of you know what it feels like to wonder if anybody actually sees what is happening in your life.

But the text says something powerful.

God hears the boy.

God sees Hagar.

And God provides a well in the wilderness.

That matters because the story reminds us that God sees people the world overlooks. God moves toward broken people. God does not abandon people in the wilderness.

And immediately after that story, Genesis gives us another story right beside it.

God tells Abraham to take Isaac up a mountain and sacrifice him.

And if we are honest, that story feels heavy. It should feel heavy.

But Abraham lived in a culture where people believed gods demanded sacrifices like that. So Abraham may have thought, “This is just what gods are like.”

But the point of the story is that this God is different.

Abraham takes Isaac up the mountain. Isaac carries the wood on his shoulders. Abraham prepares the altar. And right at the moment where Abraham thinks he is about to lose his son, God stops him.

And Abraham looks up and sees a ram caught in the thicket.

God provides.

And Abraham learns something on that mountain that changes everything. God is not like the other gods. God sees. God provides. God stays.

And when you place Genesis 21 and 22 side by side, you start noticing all these connections between the stories. Both involve a beloved son. Both involve desperation. Both involve someone believing death is near. Both involve God providing salvation.

And buried right in the middle of the Isaac story is this moment that honestly hits hard.

Isaac looks at Abraham and says, “Father.”

Dad.

And Abraham responds, “Here I am, my son.”

That phrase matters.

Because Abraham stays present in Isaac’s moment of fear.

And all throughout Scripture, that becomes one of the defining characteristics of God.

When Moses asks God for His name, God says, “I AM WHO I AM.” In other words, “I am present. I am with My people. I have not abandoned them.”

Then eventually Jesus steps into humanity's brokenness. Humanity betrays Him. Rejects Him. Arrests Him. And instead of running away, Jesus steps forward.

Like He is saying, "Here I am."

That is the Gospel.

God does not abandon us in our greatest moment of need. He moves toward us.

And students, I think that matters more than we realize because a lot of people your age feel alone right now. We live in the most connected generation in history, but people are lonelier than ever. People have followers but no real friendships. People have group chats but still feel isolated. People are struggling with anxiety, depression, fear, identity confusion, pressure, insecurity, and exhaustion.

And into that kind of world, Jesus says, "Here I am."

The story of Scripture is about a God who sees you. A God who stays. A God who provides. A God who moves toward broken people instead of away from them.

And if we are going to follow Jesus, then we become those kinds of people too.

We become people who stay when life gets messy. People who notice others. People who care deeply. People who sit with hurting friends instead of ignoring them. People who are present.

Not people who have all the answers.

Not people who pretend life is perfect.

But people who say, "Here I am."

That is what God is like.

And that is what the people of God are supposed to look like too.

Implications

The first implication is this: God sees you even when you feel forgotten. Hagar thought nobody knew where she was. Ishmael thought he was going to die in the wilderness. But God saw them. Some of you feel invisible right now. Some of you feel like nobody understands what is happening in your life. But you are not invisible to God.

The second implication is that God is not waiting to destroy you. Some students picture God as angry, distant, and impossible to please. But Genesis 22 shows us something different. God provides. God rescues. God moves toward people in love. The cross proves that God would rather give Himself for you than give up on you.

The third implication is that your mess does not disqualify you. Abraham's family was complicated and broken, and God still worked through them. Your mistakes, your family struggles, your failures, and your past are not bigger than God's ability to redeem your story.

And finally, we are called to become "Here I am" people. This world has enough people who disappear when things get hard. Followers of Jesus stay present. We notice people. We care for people. We move toward hurting people the way Jesus moved toward us. When someone feels alone, forgotten, anxious, or broken, we become the kind of people who say, "Here I am."