

99-03-28b

Let's resume our study now in Genesis chapter 20. And as I pointed out last time and it's worth reviewing, because Abram in chapter 12 and Abraham in chapter 20 is not really functioning as he should, he almost takes himself out of the picture. We wind up learning a lot from the people that he is interacting with or the people that he is involved with.

We see Pharaoh's reaction in chapter 12, we see Abimelech's reaction in chapter 20. And there is a great contrast and I pointed out last time that the fact that Pharaoh is a total pagan, he is representative of Egypt in general, he is only concerned with himself. If you look back at chapter 12 verse 18, when he finds out he's got these plagues going on and wreaking havoc, and so he calls Abram before him and he says, what is this you have done to me? Well, this is the classic old viewpoint, everything revolves around me.

Of course, he is the Pharaoh, he can say that with some legitimacy. But from his point of view, he has been injured by Abram and that's all he cares about. He says, what is this you have done to me? Abimelech, in the same stage of the conversation, when he, God of course doesn't approach Pharaoh because God doesn't speak directly and have conversations with unbelievers, but he does speak with Abimelech.

And we see numerous clues here that Abimelech is a much different type of individual than the Pharaoh of Egypt. The first reaction, God comes to Abimelech in verse 3, came to Abimelech in a dream by night, this is Genesis 20 verse 3, came to him in a dream by night and said to him, Indeed, you are a dead man, or you are a dying one, literally, because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife. What is his response in verse 4? Abimelech had not come near her and he said, Lord, will you slay a righteous nation also? He is a much better hearted ruler than the Pharaoh.

His first thought, because this plague, this problem that has caused his diseased state and is bringing him to the point of death, we find out later in the chapter, has also spread to his household and apparently his entire little city state kingdom there. Gerar is not a huge land like Egypt, it's more of a city state, like the feudal system that they had in England in the Dark and Middle Ages, where you have a city surrounded by supporting farms and so forth and it's a relatively small area. Abimelech is still no mean personage, but he doesn't have a huge land like Egypt.

But apparently this plague strikes his whole kingdom, his whole area of influence. He says, Lord, will you slay a righteous nation also? Did he not say to me, she is my sister? Did she, even she herself, say, he is my brother? In the integrity of my heart, in the innocence of my hands, I have done this. This little conversation tells us a lot about Abimelech.

He is concerned with the moral wrong involved in this and he says, I didn't know that I was committing adultery or potentially committing adultery by taking this woman. They

represented themselves to me in a different relationship. I've done this in integrity of heart.

And this phrase is repeated by God, because in verse 6, God said to him in the dream, Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. This word we encountered earlier on in descriptions of Noah, who was a righteous man. We talked about Tamim.

You remember when we talked about Tamim? T-A-M-I-M. And it has an idea of wholeness or completeness. This is the phrase that Abimelech uses of himself.

He says, I did this with a complete heart. There was no gap. There was no subterfuge.

I wasn't trying to be devious and get away with something here. I did this in integrity. And Tamim has the idea of integrity, that this was done on the up and up.

Nevertheless, he is suffering already for this wrong that was committed, even though in the technical sense it is a sin of ignorance. He didn't know that he was taking another man's wife. Yet he is already suffering under the judgment.

They've already had the wounds closed up and nobody can have any children. Nobody can engage in any sort of intercourse to produce children because this disease has affected them in ways so that they can't even get together. This is how God has prevented.

He says, I withheld you from sinning against me. Therefore, I did not let you touch her. Apparently, the disease that has struck the household is something that prevents people from having either the desire or the ability to engage in intercourse.

And so no one has been able to go forward as far as multiplying with children or anything else. And this is a judgment for the sin and it's an indication that God is fully aware of what's going on and God is handling the circumstances. You remember what we talked about in the last lesson.

Leave the circumstances up to God. Even in the midst of Abraham's failure, he's not going to mess up the promise of God because God will make sure the circumstances turn out like they're supposed to. And there's a great principle here that is often overlooked.

We tend to think, well, I have failed. This has produced consequences and results and this is going to be like the balls on a pool table that clatter into one another and it changes the landscape of the whole world and I have created this whole complex of problems by my failure. Don't worry about the circumstances in the sense that you've got to go try to fix them all.

God has got his finger on the pulse of your life and my life and he will prevent certain consequences from taking place if they're out of accord with his plan. And by extension,

that also tells us that if there are repercussions, Joseph's brothers fail and sell their brother into slavery, no matter how much remorse they have or how badly they feel about that, they can't go unslave him. They can't run the film backward and have him rise back up out of the pit and take the goat blood off the coat and take back the lie they told their father.

It's a done thing. And all the remorse in the world can't undo what has been done. If we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and if we are pursuing our calling in his plan, there's a wonderful promise we can claim when we fail.

And this is not true of unbelievers and it's not true of believers who don't have any concern over where they are in God's plan. But when we take that attitude that David has in Psalm 51 and we acknowledge before God that we have failed and we receive his forgiveness and his cleansing, we claim his grace, we throw ourselves on his mercy and his compassion, we can have confidence that God has got the circumstances under control. God will not allow what we have done to spread beyond his control.

If there are repercussions, if there are circumstances that have resulted from what we have done or failed to do, leave them in the hands of the Lord. In some cases, God will let things happen. He let Joseph languish in prison, but it was a part of his plan.

God worked that together for good. Here, God prevents any sort of physical contact with Sarah even though she's been brought into the harem. It wasn't because Abraham had good foresight and thought, well, I'll make sure that this doesn't take place.

It was out of Abraham's control. It was out of Sarah's control. But it wasn't out of God's control.

And when you look, even in the midst of failure, you see the grace of God because God prevents Abraham from messing up his future, his heritage, the fulfillment of the promises that he would be the father of many nations and through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. If Sarah had been taken into the harem and had relations with Abimelech, now the birth of Isaac, what's going to happen to that? What's going to happen to the beautiful picture of God's rehabilitating her and Abraham and giving them this child and so forth? It's all messed up if this takes place, but God prevents it. And he took radical steps.

He put a plague on the whole kingdom of Gerar to make sure that this would not take place, or Gerar. So as we go past this, we don't want to lose sight of this wonderful principle, leave circumstances in God's hands. It does not mean that if we have committed a wrong that hurts others that we don't need to think and see if we need to acknowledge or to try to make right wrongs that we have done.

We have a responsibility in that area. But we sometimes get into thinking that, oh, I've

really done it now. I can never get back to where I was before in God's plan.

I'm too far down the road. I've made too many mistakes. My failures are too great.

The consequences are too numerous. Way back, I got off the track and I can never get back on the track again. There's no such thing as a track.

God's plan is not circumstances, it's the soul. And if our soul recovers, if our soul is back in the place where God's power can act on it, we're back in the plan of God. There's no such thing as, well, there's that high road I could have been on, but it's all gone now, and there's no help for it.

It's the soul that's inside us, and God can always cleanse. God can always forgive. His mercy endureth forever, and that's a long, long time.

And the power of God is the power that creates the universe. That bara create, the heavens and the earth, is the bara of creating a clean heart. The renewal of a right spirit, that's what God's going to do when he renews the heavens and the earth for the millennial kingdom.

If God can do that for the entire universe, He's not going to have a problem doing it for our soul. But we have to believe it, we have to claim it, and we have to keep that in our sights. These are the things that Abraham forgot when he went down there and made his old mistake.

When he took himself out, and he is now the bad example in this chapter, instead of being the good example that he was in chapter 18. Now we see Abimelech coming forward as a more honorable man. Look at Abimelech.

Abimelech is bringing up the issue of righteousness before God. Two chapters ago, it was Abraham talking to God and saying, will you slay the righteous with the wicked? Far be it from you, Lord, to wipe away the righteous with the wicked. If there are 50 righteous in the city, will you spare them? And God says, yes.

Now, Abraham's not even talking to God. Abraham's trying to do everything himself, and Abimelech is talking to God. And Abimelech is saying, Lord, will you destroy a righteous nation, someone who is not guilty of this act? They didn't pull Sarah into my harem, I did that.

He's acknowledging what he's done. He says, I did it unknowingly. I did it in the integrity of my heart.

I act on the information they gave me, but he doesn't deny what he did. He just says, I didn't know. God said, yes, I know that you did this in Tom.

Lev-Eve or Lev-Ave. Lev, L-E-V, is the word for heart in Hebrew. And he applies the

adjective Tom.

In integrity of heart, you did this, God says. And so two times you have the statement that this was done in integrity. Abimelech is the man with integrity.

Where's Abraham? He's cowering, afraid he's going to be killed. He doesn't speak up when they come and take his wife away. Kind of reminds us of Lot in the last chapter, chapter 19, when the messengers are there and the crowds of homosexuals are outside screaming for the messengers, bring them out here so we can have our way with them.

And Lot says, well, take my daughters. Have your way with them. And willing to sacrifice the women in the family for personal preservation or preservation of what you think is important.

Well, now here's Abraham doing the same thing, tossing Sarah out here to the harem so that he doesn't get killed. Shades of the old life. Shades of the unregenerate, undelivered, self-helping and self-defeating life.

But God controls the circumstances. He only lets these cause and effect relationships go so far. And he stops it before it gets to the point of messing up the fulfillment of his promise.

Verse 7, Now therefore restore the man's wife. He is a prophet and he will pray for you and you shall live. This is the only place in Genesis where this word translated prophet is used.

And it's the only place in Genesis where this word for pray is used. These are things that will be used much later. There are many other examples of intercession in the word, but this is the only place where these are used.

But abimelech, that integrity of heart, you find that being used over in chapter 6 and verse 9 of Genesis. Remember back in chapter 6 when we had Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord? You have chapter 17 and verse 1 when it says, I am almighty God, walk before me and be blameless. You have in Job 1.1, Job was an upright man.

This description is used of abimelech here. Same type of words found over in Job. It's found two or three places in Job actually.

But you have the intervention of God to keep this situation from getting out of hand and spoiling the true nature, the circumstances that are important in God's plan. God takes care of those. So then he says that Abraham has to do something to resolve this situation.

Abraham will pray for you. Restore to him his wife. Give him his wife back.

He will pray for you and you shall live. If you do not restore her, know that you shall

surely die, you and all who are yours. So abimelech's estimate is correct that his whole kingdom is in jeopardy.

Now, God speaks words to abimelech. What is abimelech's reaction? Abimelech rose up early in the morning. First thing in the morning.

As soon as he could rouse the rest of the royal court there. He called all his servants, told all these things in their hearing. And the men were very much afraid.

You get the idea. There is more response to the word of God in abimelech's heart and in abimelech's household than there is in Abraham's heart and in Abraham's household. Abimelech hears this word and he's up the next morning and he's acting.

He gets everybody together. He doesn't say, oh, what did I eat last night? That's kind of a, I don't know if anybody's going to believe me. He gets everybody together and says, look, God came, God spoke, this is what we've got to do.

And he acts immediately. So he's looking pretty good here compared to Abraham. All the men, they believe the king.

They're very much afraid. They recognize that this must be true. So when abimelech called Abraham in verse 9, he says, what have you done to us? He starts to sound like the king of Egypt.

He starts to sound like Pharaoh in chapter 12. What have you done to me? But he says, what have you done to us? What have you done to my kingdom? How have I offended you? What wrong have I done? Did I fall short in some area that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? Where is my responsibility in this? How did I? You see the difference in viewpoint. He's looking for the moral problem here.

Pharaoh didn't care anything. He tells Abraham, he says, I took your wife and now you take her back. You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done.

You see in this speech of abimelech, his perception and emphasis, priority on moral concerns. He's worried about what's right and what's wrong. Whether what he does is right or wrong.

Whether what Abraham has done is right or wrong. There's no inkling in Pharaoh's speech that he cares anything about what's right and what's wrong. He just wants the plague to go away.

Abimelech in verse 10 said to Abraham, what did you have in view that you have done this thing? What were you thinking? Abimelech knows that it's what you're thinking about that matters. Pharaoh, there was nothing back in chapter 12 on what's going on in the heart. Abimelech knows these things.

Abraham in verse 11 says, because I thought surely the fear of God is not in this place. The last 10 verses in this chapter have told us there is a fear of God in this place. When God speaks, Abimelech listens better than Abraham.

When Abimelech tells the dream to his servants, they're all afraid. They believe it. There's a great response.

This reminds us of another fact. There's a lot of emphasis in Christianity and in the church today on what are you doing for others? What are you doing in ministry? What are you doing to make an impact? What are you doing to spread the gospel and bring in the kingdom and so forth? We think we've got to get out there and do this. One of the great, prominent, and pretty good Bible teachers was on TV.

I heard him yesterday. He was doing a good job in a passage. Then he got to a certain point and he just flipped over to the we've got to go spread the gospel.

We've got to go do these things. We've got to make a difference. There's nothing intrinsically wrong with that.

But we are blind and we are deaf and we are dumb if the power of God is not working in our souls. This, again, is a circumstance. This is an outworking.

This is a result. These things that take place. The church today has missed it.

All of us together have gone into the ditch. The blind leading the blind. They all go into the ditch.

We think, and it's convenient. We can define it. We can quantify it.

It's an external thing. You can do it two or three times a week or however much you think is good enough for your guilt complex. Then you're done.

It's a much higher responsibility to have a minute-by-minute accountability for our soul and for where we stand before God. It's a lot easier to say, well, I went down and visited so-and-so. I did this.

I did that. I did something else. Here's the problem.

Here's a man who's receptive. We don't know too much about Abimelech's status. But one thing we do know from this passage, he's receptive.

When God speaks, he listens. When God commands, he obeys. Here's a man.

If anybody could have benefited from the presence of Abraham and from the presence of a man who's in a position to minister to him, God said, look, Abraham, you're going to be a blessing to everybody. Through you, all the nations of the earth are going to be

blessed. Well, Gerar is one of the nations of the earth.

They can be blessed through Abraham. But because Abraham has taken his eyes off the plan, taken his eyes off God, gotten his eyes on himself, God can't use him to speak to Abimelech. God can't use him to minister to Abimelech.

God's got to go do it himself because Abraham's taken himself out of the game. And this is what we've done as a church. We're all elbows and knees flying, trying to minister, trying to help people.

But because we're not focused on God, you can't lead somebody to God if you yourself aren't there. You can't speak the word of truth to others if you don't know how to make any sense of it in your own life. And this is the problem that Abraham has.

And so he's, for whatever reason, when he left Mamre and is down here in Gerar, you think, here's the man that has walked and talked with God. Here's the man through whom all the nations are going to be blessed. He's come into the periphery of Abimelech.

What an opportunity. Of course, you know the church today. What a ministry opportunity.

Abraham, give your testimony. Abraham, tell him the stories of God and so forth. Abraham can't do anything.

Abraham's afraid for his life. He thinks Abimelech's going to kill him for his wife. And so he's not speaking up.

Even when he does speak here, he says that, in verse 13, he's trying to explain himself. He says, well, she really is my sister because we had the same father, but we had different mothers. And we don't really know if this is true or not.

The earlier portions of the Bible don't tell us that Terah was Sarah's father as well as Abraham's. It doesn't mention it back in the end of Genesis 11 when we're finding out the family background and find out about Lot and stuff. It doesn't say that Sarah was Abraham's half-sister.

So we don't really know if this is true or not. And either way, it looks bad for Abraham because if it's true, then even in the patriarchal age, to be marrying your half-sister is kind of strange. And to have relied on that and not given the truth is bad.

If it's not true, then he's telling a bald-faced lie here when he's trying to dig himself out of a hole because he still hasn't gotten the picture. So either way, whether this is true or not, it doesn't reflect well on Abraham. Then he says in verse 13, And the verb here is in the plural.

It's the same word Elohim, but he doesn't say the Lord. He doesn't use God's name that

he knows God by. He calls him Elohim and he uses the plural verb so that it's the gods.

He says, well, I'm talking to a pagan here. He's insensitive. He can't even see how receptive Abimelech is.

Even after Abimelech tells him, I had a dream. I had a visitation from God. Abraham doesn't see that here's a man that's responsive.

Here's an opportunity to share the things of God with somebody. He's not in a position to get his own act together, much less try to help somebody else. And so when he does have the opportunity to speak God's name in the presence of this king, he doesn't do it.

He says, well, it was fate. When fate caused me to wander from the gods, just like they did in Rome and Greece, oh, the gods are responsible. And you can just substitute the word fate here because he's not talking about the personal God that he has walked and talked with.

He uses the plural verb. When the gods caused me to wander from my father's house, I said to her, this is your kindness you should do for me. In every place, wherever we go, say of me, he is my brother.

Well, we only have one previous instance of this. So once again, is this true or not? Is this only the second time Abraham has done this? Or has he been doing it all along? If he's been doing it all along, that's a pretty feeble way to live. Where is his faith in God? But if he hasn't been doing it, then he's telling Abimelech another lie.

So either way, Abram does not come off well here at all. It reminds us of looking at Lot in chapter 19. But look at Abimelech in verse 14.

Abimelech took sheep, oxen, male and female servants, and gave them to Abraham, and he restored Sarah his wife to him. You can't find a bad thing to say about Abimelech in this entire chapter. He does everything right.

He listens to the voice of God. He honors Abraham even when Abraham has wronged him, has lied to him, has swindled him and deceived him. He says, see, my land is before you.

Dwell where it pleases you. He doesn't drive him out like Pharaoh did. Why? He's been offended a plague has been brought on his house because of Abraham's lie.

Why doesn't he drive him out of the land like Pharaoh in the same circumstance? Because God said, this man is a prophet. This man will pray for you and you will live. Abimelech is applying the word of God.

God said, this man is a prophet. By the way, Abimelech seems to know what a prophet is. He seems to know what intercessory prayer is.

And so when Abimelech looks at Abraham, he doesn't see, here's the man that wronged me. Here's the man that lied to me and swindled me and manipulated me and mistrusted me and thought ill of me. He says, this man's a prophet.

God says, this man's a prophet. It doesn't matter what he's done. He's a prophet.

I'm going to honor him. And so he treats him well. He gives him these gifts and things.

Which, by rights, Abraham ought to be making restitution to Abimelech. But it's just the other way around. Abimelech is a blessing to Abraham.

And it's supposed to be the reverse. But Abraham has missed his opportunity. You think about the relationships between kings.

Abraham in this age is sort of in the status of Abimelech. He's sort of a peer. Because he's got a huge holding up there in Mamre.

He's sort of a feudal or a city-state type of potentate. And later on, you think about relationships between kings. You remember King David and Hiram, king of Tyre.

When you go over to 2 Samuel and you go over to 1 Kings. Turn over to 1 Kings 5. When David was first becoming king in Israel, there's a notation over in Samuel that he got in touch with Hiram, king of Tyre. And Hiram sent the wood and the materials down so that David could build his own house.

Remember the first thing he did after he took the city of Jebus from the Jebusites, he named it Jerusalem and he built a house there. And then he got to feeling bad because he had a house and the presence of God was still dwelling in a tent. And then you have 2 Samuel 7 and so forth.

But here in 1 Kings 5, Hiram, king of Tyre, this is after David has declared Solomon to be the king and so forth. So, Hiram, king of Tyre, sent his servants to Solomon because he heard that they had anointed him king in place of his father for Hiram had always loved David. Solomon sent to Hiram saying, You know how my father David could not build a house for the name of the Lord his God because of the wars which were fought against him on every side until the Lord put his foes under the soles of his feet.

But now the Lord my God has given me rest on every side. There is neither adversary nor evil occurrence. And behold, I propose to build a house for the name of the Lord my God as the Lord spoke to my father David saying, Your son whom I will set on your throne in your place, he shall build the house for my name.

Now therefore, command that they cut down cedars for me from Lebanon and my servants will be with your servants. I will pay you wages for your servants according to whatever you say. For you know there is none among us who has skill to cut timber like

the Sidonians.

Of course, the Tyre and Sidon region is now in modern day Lebanon. It's up to the north of Israel on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. So it was, when Hiram heard the words of Solomon, that he rejoiced greatly and said, Blessed be the Lord this day, for he has given David a wise son over this great people.

Here's Hiram. He's from Tyre. He's not an Israelite.

But when he came in contact with David, apparently he came to know David's God. And he says, In his words, the words of Hiram, king of Tyre, are in the word of God for all eternity. Blessed be the Lord this day.

Because he's blessed David with a wise son. David is a blessing to Hiram. David brings the knowledge of God to Hiram.

And they cement a friendship that lasts through David's life, through his entire reign in Israel, and into the reign of Solomon for at least ten years that I know of. In fact, for twenty years. Because we'll find later on that Hiram is mentioned as you go forward in Kings.

He's mentioned in his workmen and his laborers. There's a man from Tyre who was an Israelite. His mother was an Israelite.

His father was from Tyre. His name is Hiram. He comes down and he does all the bronze work and is the greatest craftsman on the planet for bronze.

So he comes down and makes a lot of the implements for the temple. But he's from Tyre. And he comes down.

Hiram sends him down. Then the ark is brought into the temple and so forth. And so you have down in 1 Kings 9 and verse 10, at the end of twenty years, when Solomon had built the two houses, the house of the Lord and the king's house.

So throughout the reign of David, from the time David came to the throne, David reigned, I think, forty years. Here's sixty years later. Hiram is still there.

He's probably a creaky old man, but he's still up there. Hiram, the king of Tyre, had supplied Solomon with cedar and cypress and gold as much as he desired. King Solomon then gave Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee.

So Hiram went from Tyre to see the cities which Solomon had given him, but they did not please him. So he said, What kind of cities are these which you have given me, my brother? And he called them the land of Kabul, as they are to this day. And Kabul, I could explain the Hebrew to you, but it basically means worthless.

It means good for nothing. So Hiram sent the king 120 talents of gold. You can already see the seeds of Solomon's failures after the temple project is complete, twenty years into his reign.

Solomon gives Hiram, who has done so much, who has contributed huge things to the building of the house of God, and is mentioned in that connection in the pages of Scripture. He gives him these little bitty towns up in Galilee. And Galilee has been notorious for centuries.

Can any good thing come out of Galilee? Remember when Jesus is first gathering His disciples? He's from Galilee. Can anything good come out of Galilee? And Galilee has a bad reputation because it's just a small farming community. So in return for all of his help, twenty years, sixty years of relationship with his family, Solomon, the best gift he can give Hiram is these little worthless, in the sense of any monetary value or any benefit to Hiram.

What's he going to do with these cities? There's no benefit to him. And he's kind of taken aback by Solomon's strange gift. And he says, what is this you've given me, my brother? And then you get the idea that at this point now, because Solomon is in his decline, Hiram, king of Tyre, is to Solomon what Abimelech is to Abraham.

He says, look, I'll show you what a good gift is. And instead of getting upset and unraveling and cutting off relations with Israel or something over this offense, Hiram sends the king, in verse 14, one hundred and twenty talents of gold. This is a huge amount of gold.

And it's like Hiram says, look, lest you forget how kings should treat each other, let me lead by example here. And he sends Solomon one hundred and twenty talents of gold. Hiram is an honorable man from first to last, everywhere you see him mentioned in scripture.

He is a lifelong friend to David. He's a lifelong friend to Solomon, even when he's offended by Solomon. He returns good for evil.

And you get the idea that this is sort of a little bit of a tap on the helmet for Solomon. Hey, here you've got Hiram. He's from Tyre, and he's got a better grip on what integrity and on what loyalty and honoring God in your dealings really is.

But this is an opportunity. You see the great blessing that came to Hiram and the kingdom of Tyre up there because of David and because David was in a place that was to be a benefit and be a blessing to Hiram. And Hiram comes to a knowledge of God, and Hiram honors God, and Hiram participates in the building of the temple of God, and he's not even an Israelite.

But he gets that privilege because he's responsive. He's like Abimelech. There's fertile

soil there for the knowledge of God.

David has the opportunity to be that blessing to Hiram. Abraham has the opportunity to be that blessing to Abimelech, but he's not, at least not initially, because he's lost the battle in his soul. It doesn't stop the plan of God.

God is still going to bless Abimelech. God is going to talk personally to Abimelech, which is a privilege he might not have had otherwise. But you see the lost opportunity.

Abraham doesn't get to fulfill that part of his promise. You will be a blessing to all the nations of the earth. Abraham has knocked himself out of that particular box at this time.

So something for us to remember. We have to tend to our souls first. Then we are fully equipped for every good work.

Good works don't equip our souls. Good works don't cleanse our souls. Good works don't create in us a clean heart.

Good works can't fill in the deficit and the gap and the bad viewpoint and the self-centeredness and the blindness that happens to us when we depart from that fuel that our soul has to run on, which is the word of God, the promises of God, the integrity of heart that God can give us. Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a right spirit within me.

That has to happen first. Then we can look at our opportunities. Then we can offer the sacrifices that please God because they come from a cleansed and rehabilitated heart.

That's really the message of chapter 20. And we see that Abraham is, because of his association with Abimelech, Abimelech is the one who tells him, Look Abraham, God says you need to pray for me so that this plague will leave my household. So in verse 17 of Genesis 20, Abraham prayed to God and God healed Abimelech, his wife, and his female servants.

Then they bore children for the Lord had closed up all the wounds of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife. So God uses Abimelech to bring Abraham back into the place of function. Now, because Abraham wouldn't pray to God and wouldn't talk to God about what to do in his circumstances, Abimelech says, Look, God told me you've got to pray for me.

You've got to get back into your intercession function that you were doing back in chapter 18 so that everything will get back the way it's supposed to be. And so God sort of prides Abraham back up to where he's supposed to be in this situation with his word, with what he speaks to Abimelech. He brings Abraham back to where he's supposed to be.

And that sets the stage for chapter 21 because now Isaac is going to be born. All of these things take place in the space of that year. God says, I will return in about a year and Sarah will have a son.

Abraham came perilously close to messing up the whole deal. If it wasn't for the grace of God and the active intervention of God, Sarah wouldn't have been in a position... She and Abraham couldn't have got together so that Isaac could be born because she would have been living down in the harem of Abimelech. But now, look at verse 1 of chapter 21, And the Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as he had spoken.

You get the idea that the narrator here is pointing out, this is what's supposed to guide life. This is what we're supposed to be watching for. The Lord did as he had said.

The Lord did for Sarah as he had spoken. That's where our attention needs to be focused. What has God said? What has God spoken? That's what keeps our souls right.

That's what keeps us, whatever our circumstances, in the position of being blessed and being a blessing to others. All of the opportunities we have for ministry and for benefit and blessing to others are only fulfilled when we're in that right place. We have to take accountability for our own souls.

God is not going to put his finger in there. God can move the rocks of circumstances. God can move the universe with his fingers.

But once he has delivered us with his mighty arm, we've got to claim that deliverance. We have to claim that grace. We have to do the Psalm 51 thing to be used in God's plan or else God's plan is just going to flow around us and go forward as it goes around Abraham in chapter 20.

But the Lord visited Sarah. This is a great verb that's used here, the idea of visiting. This word, when it says God visited, sometimes in the Bible this is a good thing and sometimes it's a bad thing.

In Exodus 20, verse 5, you will find God visiting for judgment. In Exodus 32, 34, you find God visiting for judgment. But there are also times when God visits for salvation or for blessing.

You see in Genesis 50, 24 and 25, we will arrive at this happy point in the book eventually. But look at Genesis 50, verse 24. Joseph said to his brethren, I am dying, but God will surely visit you and bring you out of this land to the land of which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac and Jacob.

And you have that fulfilled over in Exodus 4, verse 31. You find the same thing in Ruth 1, verse 6. You find the same thing in Jeremiah 29, 10. God will visit.

He will take a special interest either for blessing or for judgment. What is the special interest that God is going to take in us? Is God going to visit us for blessing? Is he going to visit us for discipline? We choose by what we decide to focus on. Are we going to focus on circumstances? Are we going to get into that old fuel of the self-centered life? Or are we going to keep our eyes on the Word of God, remember who we are and why we're here, and examine ourselves, see if we are in the faith, let the living and powerful Word of God do its work inside us to transform us, to cleanse us.

Slights and insults won't hook themselves into our souls if the power of God is active in there. Fear, fear of what may happen tomorrow. We didn't have time to look there this morning.

I wanted to go over to Matthew chapter 5. But you remember the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus says, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. And then just what Abraham does, pray for those who despitefully use you. You have Abimelech who inadvertently has done a wrong to Abraham because of Abraham's lie.

Abraham prays for him. You get over in Matthew chapter 6, in the section on take no thought, look at the lilies of the field. God clothes them, they toil not, neither do they spend, but Solomon in all his glory is not arrayed as one of these.

Why do you worry about what you're going to eat? Your Father in heaven already knows that you need these things. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you. Matthew chapter 6. That's what we learned by watching Abraham, and hopefully it will make a difference today and tomorrow and the next day.

This is a portion of the word of God that can make a difference in the way we think and in the way we approach our daily decisions. And if we do, then we are in a position to be blessed and to be a blessing to others. Let's close in prayer.

We thank you Father for the privilege of studying your word. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will use the truth of your word in His right hand as a sharp sword to divide asunder our souls and spirits and to let us see in the pure light of your word what our thoughts and our motivations really are. Help us to claim your grace and to be rehabilitated by your cleansing power so that we can fulfill our calling and fulfill the purpose that you have for us in this life.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.