



Sermon Transcription • Abbotsford

March 10/11, 2018 - Jeff Bucknam

Second Verse Same as the First - (Genesis 20:1-21:7)

[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]

So I bought a new car, this week ... it was time. Our other car is a minivan and I faced the embarrassment of that for long enough, and so we decided that we would actually join many of our peers and buy an SUV, which is apparently the thing you do when you live in the Fraser Valley, like an official member of the Fraser Valley community by buying an SUV. I'm not a big fan of the car buying experience, no offense to you if you are a car dealer here, but I have found in the past my experience has not been always positive. I always get frightened when I walk onto the lot that I'm going to get attacked and put in a dark room in the back and told that I have to take that extended warranty. So I'm a little uneasy, I don't think I'm alone in that sort of thing. My experience here in Abbotsford was awesome, every person I spoke to at every dealership was really, really great and very kind and the right mixture of pushy and not pushy. It was excellent. We ended buying a car, in the process of actually doing it though I was talking to my wife and telling her a couple of times about the worst car buying experience that we've had, which was not thankfully here. But years ago when we were first married, we lived in Eastern Washington State and we went to buy a car in the city of Spokane, which is about an hour and a half north of where we lived and the cars were cheaper there apparently. We were young, married, and didn't have much money so we had to buy one that was super cheap, like we were looking at that time in the three thousand dollar range. So that limits your choices on the car lot and when the guy comes out of the showroom and says, "Hey welcome here, what are you looking for?" and you say, "Three thousand dollars." He kind of loses a lot of interest in you. [Laughter] Some places had it, they were kind, they were like, "Here's one, here's one..." that sort of thing. We went to a number of different locations, they had an auto row there, just like our auto mall here. I do remember though this one guy, Toyota dealer, doesn't mean that Toyota is bad, I own one, it's great. But this guy, when we walked onto the lot, he came out, and he had a bit of a swagger to him, like this [walking], and what was really awesome about him is that he had his shirt like down here [pointing down], and he actually did have a medallion, you know the hair, [there is a lot of hair there], right, <clears throat> he was going for it. I kind of giggled when I first saw him, "Oh he's like an early hipster, you know," being ironic and all that. He came towards us, my wife, and I said to him, "We are just looking for a cheap car and stuff," and he said, "Well we have a few over there and stuff, but I got somethin' *real* special for you." [Laughter] And I said, "Oh, oh that's great." He said, "Come on over here, come on over here." And he takes us over and there is this brown, late '70's [this was in the '90's] about 20 year old, there's a brown, late '70's, pick-up truck that had about 250,000 miles on it, and it honestly looked like it had been through a war. It was there, you could see rust in it and stuff, he said, and no kidding he stood next to it and said, "Now this right here is a beauty," and he pet the top,



“This is a *beauty*, this car, I can’t tell you, I took it in on trade yesterday and haven’t been able to clean it up yet, but this car is something that you’re going to want to have a look at.” And I started a little giggle, and he goes, “What’s wrong?” [Laughter]

“You’re serious?”

“Yes I’m serious, you just sit inside.” So he gets me to sit in the passenger side, he opens the door, <creak> and then he sits down. It hasn’t been cleaned up at all, just a complete mess because the person just traded it in, and he takes the key and puts it in the ignition, he said, “You ready?” and I said, “Yup I’m ready.”

“No, no are you ready?”

“I’m ready.”

“Okay you ready?”

“Yeah! Do it man! I’m ready to hear the thing, here we go.” He turns the key and *boom*, backfire out of the exhaust and smoke everywhere, coming into the car. Now at this point any reasonable car salesman would say, “Oops my bad, this is not actually the car that is for you.” But this guy doubled down, he said to me, I am not kidding, he looked over at me he said, “Listen to this baby *purr*.” [Laughter] My wife who is a very sweet woman, would never laugh in the face of anybody, she does that at home. [Laughter] She starts laughing out loud, “<starts laughing> Oh my goodness, are you serious?<stops laughing>” He’s like, “No, this is great.” <rumbling car noise> And I’m like no I can’t do this and so I open the door and I start walking. “Where are you going? Where are you going?” he says. And I start walking, “I got to go.” We just started walking off. “You’ll be sorry!” [Laughter] So this time we were looking for a car, I say to my wife, “We could always go back to Spokane, right? We could get it from them.” [Laughter] Of course you would never go back to Spokane. It’s just the way it works as a consumer, somebody wrongs you by selling you something the way you don’t like, or it’s a piece of junk or whatever. You never go back to to the person who gives you the piece of junk. You get one chance as a business and if you fail in that chance, then I’m going to go away and write a Google review about you. Tell people on Yelp to avoid this particular establishment, right? Repeated errors are not something we put up with much in the business world. Fool me once, shame on you, fool me twice, shame on me. We usually have little patience for those who repeat their errors.

We do this in our workplaces as well, you know that of course. If you own a business or you are a boss of people, if the person who is serving under you and you have a particular job to do, maybe you have to make particular widgets and those widgets need certain things on them and you have to make them in a particular way, if the employee can’t do it. You don’t usually give them a thousand chances. If they are making the widget wrong you say, “You need to fix this,” and they keep making it wrong, “You need to fix this.” If it happens like this a few times you call him into your office and say, “This isn’t going to work. You might be gifted in a lot of things, but widget making is not one of them. Sorry you’re fired.” Repeated errors are not to be put up with. This story is about a repeated error, it’s about Abraham’s repeated error. And to be honest with you, when you read it, you get to the end of it and you should feel in your gut that given the fact that this man is unwilling to learn his lesson, what God should be doing in this moment is firing him. Just start over, you can do it with other people, God. You did with Noah that way, you were like, “You know what the whole world is a mess, we will just start with Noah.” But what God does instead of firing him is surprising. So Genesis 20, here’s what we are going to learn here. Two things, number one, we are going to learn something about the perpetual sin



of Abraham. And secondly, the persistent grace of God. The perpetual sin of Abraham and the persistent grace of God.

[The Perpetual Sin of Abraham]

Genesis 20:1,

“Now Abraham moved on from there”

There is the, the trees of Mamre, which is where he set up his tent. If you were here last week you will know that, he had a beautiful little grove, little orchard there. And he could see the land that the Lord was supposed to give him. But he's kind of a bedouin at this point, so he's going to pick up his tent and he's going to move around, it's not safe if you stay in one spot usually. Enemy hoards might come and attack your property. So he's moving around. Genesis 20:

“Moved on from there into the region of the Negev”

It's like saying from the Lower Mainland, it's just an area of the ancient world. Genesis 20:1,

“And [he] lived between [two cities, the cities of] Kadesh and Shur.”

That's like saying that he's living between Abbotsford and Mission. Genesis 20:1-2,

“For a while he stayed in Gerar, and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, ‘She is my sister.’ Then Abimelek king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her.”

Now Gerar is a little town that we don't know *anything* about because no one ever writes anything about it other than *here*, that led some scholars to think, “See it's fake.” No it's probably real it's just totally inconsequential, it is Matsqui, right? Listen, If you live in Matsqui you say, “Well I live in Abbotsford,” but it's an area. We know the area of Matsqui. There is a king in this place, Gerar, who we don't know much about, he's a king in the sense that he is the ruler of this particular little area of land and most of the people who live in the land there are likely related to him. But he's the biggest dude on the block in that area. *Abraham* also has a bunch of people with him, he's got a lot of servants, he's got a lot of cattle. He's been blessed actually by God as he's been travelling around, so when he brings his tents and they move in bedouin style into this little area it's very easy in towns like Matsqui, when a big group of people show up everybody knows about it. And King Abimelek says, “Woah, oh oh, you have enough people there who could probably beat us in a battle.” You could read back actually Abraham does win some battles to save Lot a couple of times in Genesis. “So you have enough people who could beat us in a battle so I don't want to fight you let's make a treaty.” The way you make a treaty is that if you are the king, King Abimelek, you'll look for somebody who is a member of the rival royal family. “So Abraham, do you have any members of your family whom I can marry so



that we can make a family treaty. So we are the same family.” And Abraham says, “Oh I’ve got one, I’ve got a sister, right here! Sarah.”

Now some of you should giggle at that point because this sounds familiar, and you would be right to say it sounds familiar when God calls Abraham in Genesis 12 out of Ur, his little town, Abraham goes to the Promised Land. He’s there for a little while but there is a famine there, he gets up in Egypt where the Pharaoh says to Sarah, “I like you, you look good, why don’t you come and be part of my Harem?” And Abraham says in that moment instead of what most men, most husbands would say, “And over my dead body!” He says, “She’s lovely, take her to be your wife, my *sister* Sarah.” This does not work out well actually, God has to intervene. Pharaoh ends up getting really angry saying, “Why have you lied to me?” But in Abraham’s mind it kind of worked out, right? He got Sarah back, he got to leave, it’s all good, so he decides, you know what, let’s try it again! And he does, Abimelek takes Sarah and God intervenes. Look at Genesis 20:3-5,

“But God came to Abimelek in a dream one night and said to him, ‘You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman.’ Now Abimelek had not gone near her, so he said, ‘Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation? Did he not say to me, “She is my sister,” and didn’t she also say, “He is my brother”? I have done this with a clear conscience and clean hands.’”

“Why are you so mad at me? I didn’t know? That guy said, ‘Have her.’ And she’s never said anything different. I mean I’m thankful I haven’t even gone near her and haven’t touched her, but come on.” The Lord understands his plight here, Genesis 20:6-7,

“Then God said to him in the dream, ‘Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against me. [*I’ve kept you* from sinning against me.] That is why I did not let you touch her. Now return the man’s wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all who belong to you will die.’”

Isn’t that interesting that the Lord says to this man. “I’ve kept you from sinning against me here. Yeah I know that you’re ignorant, I know you got thrust into this circumstance kind of unknowingly, so I’ve kept you back from sinning against me by having relations with her. By consummating the marriage.” Now scholars at this point start asking, how did the Lord do that? And there actually some hints in this passage regarding how the Lord did it. Later on, Abimelek is actually going to hand Sarah back over, he’s going to obey the threat here. “I don’t want to die, so I’ll hand Sarah back over.” And when he does, Abraham prays for him and he prays and this man. And it says Abimelek is healed, so that he can have children again and his wives can always bear children because for the time that Sarah’s been in their household he’s not been able to function. So scholars are looking at this and thinking oh my goodness, the Lord gave him an STD. And the Lord comes along and says, “Yeah that sickness that you currently have, its going to kill you ... or I can heal it. You can’t have kids right now, so it’s up to you. If you give Sarah back, I’ll heal it, if you don’t, you and all your people are going to die.” This is an easy one, okay. So Abimelek wakes up, Genesis 20:8-10,



“Early the next morning [I bet it was early, like time change early, he was ready to go. Early the next morning] Abimelek summoned all his officials, and when he told them all that had happened, they were very much afraid. Then Abimelek called Abraham in and said, ‘[AHHH!] What have you done to us? How have I wronged you that you have brought such great guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that should never be done.’ And Abimelek asked Abraham, ‘What was your reason for doing this?’”

You could just see the scene, where Abimelek is next to his throne and all his officials are there with their arms crossed and Abraham, “What is going on with you? Did I speak to you badly? Or did I do something that I don’t know about but that you would do this? Surely you have a reason for doing this, yes? Tell me Abraham, what are your reasons.” And here he gives his reasons, Abraham’s response. Genesis 20:11-13,

“Abraham replied, ‘I said to myself, “There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.” Besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother; and she became my wife. And when God had me wander from my father’s household, I said to her, “This is how you can show your love to me: Everywhere we go [Honey if you love me, everywhere we go], say of me, ‘He is my brother.’””

Spoken at many a marriage alter I’m sure. So he gives three reasons, yeah? Standing there in front of the King. “Okay, I’ve got *three* reasons why I did this. Number one, Abimelek, it’s kind of your fault. It’s kind of your fault because you look sort of mean.” That’s what it means that there is no fear of God. “You didn’t look like there was a fear of God in this place. You guys don’t look like moral people. And the way I know how it works. If I show up with all of these people and I don’t have somebody in my royal family who can marry you we’re going to go to war. And then you are just going to *steal* her, so Abimelek I’m actually saving lives here, so instead of being mad you should be thanking me that I did this. Kind of your fault, one. Second, it’s not actually a lie, like we have the same dad, different mother. It’s the way it worked in those days. That’s okay, so, she’s sort of *technically*, she’s my sister.

My boys when they were very little, I told one of them, “Don’t take the cookies from this packet of cookies from this cupboard, *don’t take* the cookies.” And later on I came around the corner and they had a cookie in his hand, crumbs everywhere, all over his face.

“Hey Dad.”

“I told you not to take the cookies!”

“Well Dad, here’s how it works, you said ‘Don’t *take* the cookie’ this cookie was given to me, see it’s different then taking.” Planning to be a lawyer soon. [Laughter]

“Technically, there is a loop here Abimelek. *Technically*, she is my sister, so I didn’t really lie. I saved your life number one, I didn’t really lie number two, and third if we are really going to blame the person responsible for these things can we just focus on God, on Yahweh, because I wouldn’t even be here if it weren’t for Him. He’s the one who has caused me to *wander*.” Did you see that word that’s in verse 13 there, “When God had me *wander* from my father’s household.” That would ‘wander’ in Hebrew is



used in all sorts of contexts to talk about sheep who *aimlessly* wander into hardship and trouble. So by using it, he's actually, it's what we call a perjorative, it's a negative connotation word, and so when Abraham says this about God, he's saying, "Man, you should know my background, I was minding my own business over in Ur, living the good life and this God comes along and lifts me up and you know where I've been? All over the place! Just *all over, constantly* in danger. You want to blame someone, blame God. I'm like a sheep."

Have you ever spent time looking at sheep, in New Zealand I spent lots of time seeing sheep everywhere before church. Sometimes before I'd preach I would go to this field that was near our church and the sheep paddock, is what they called it, and there was a bunch of sheep there and I would watch these sheep and they would go honestly they would go from blade of grass to blade of grass to blade of grass to blade of grass to the fence and some of them would get caught in the fence in the barbed wire and they would just sit there, "I'm dead." Right, this is what sheep do, it's a very interesting imagine that's used in the Bible of people like us. Because we are like that, what's in front of our nose is where we go. There is a purposelessness in their wandering and Abraham's saying, "There's a purposelessness in my wandering. God said something about land I saw it for a while but I'm not really there yet, and he's talked about kids and this whole thing has been a complete mess so *do not blame me* for this situation, Abimelek, *it's God's fault*, kind of your fault and I didn't actually, I didn't actually lie." Abraham sees himself as just trying to make the best of a bad situation he's been thrown into. "I'm the victim here," he says, "I'm the victim."

I want you to imagine for a minute that you invite me to go to your holiday on Spring Break with your family to Mexico, I know it's going to be a stretch, you would never invite me to do this but look, let's imagine, just for fun, that you invite me to come with you on your family holiday. "It's an all inclusive Jeff. So here's the pamphlet, website, you'll be sleeping in this sort of place and they got 15 restaurants and 37 pools and so many oceans whatever, and it's so beautiful you will love it."

"Great!"

"Okay we are going to leave at four in the morning."

"What?" I go to the airport meet you there, flight, I get put in the back of the plane, I come up to you halfway through, <starts whispering>"Why am I in the back of the plane? I don't like the back of the plane, I would much prefer first class. We are flying an airline I don't like, most of them...overnight, it's a long. You couldn't have picked a better airline?"<stops whispering> I say to you, "You couldn't have picked a better flight pattern?" So we get there, finally, I've been complaining a little bit for the first day, we finally get there,

"Okay Jeff, go to the pools, you can eat anything you want." I come back later that evening, you say, "Oh have you had a good day?"

"Well, um, not really because, like I don't really like the food, it's like, Mexican, I don't like Mexican, it's weird. Did you know that these guys don't speak English? I would prefer English, and being able to do that sort of thing, and the beach's sand is a little bit course, I like a finer sand when I'm sitting in my beach chair. And this guy looked at me wrong when he gave me the drink that I asked for, did you see, I got a sunburn right here. Do you know what, Hawaii is way better than this. Why didn't you take us to Hawaii. What's wrong with you? Do you know what's better than this, being *at home, in Abbotsford*, where I'm in my comfort!" Now if this goes on for a few days what kind of conversation are you and I



going to have? At some point you are going to come along and say, “Hey Jeff, we want take you to this place over there, there are planes there, get on it and leave! [Laughter] Like I blessed you and giving you all of this stuff. And all you can do is whine about it?” Yeah that’s right, that’s Abraham. The Lord has picked him up, blessed and blessed and blessed and blessed him, there’s future blessing in store and all this guy can do is complain. I’m the victim here he says.

Can we just review for a minute the contribution that Abraham and his family have made to the plan of God up to this point. Okay so Abraham starts and he is called out of Ur, he does show faith in this moment to leave his land and he goes and he offers his wife Sarah as his sister to Pharaoh, this of course doesn’t turn out well at all. But he thinks its not that big a deal. God takes some time in his fulfillment of the promise for a child and so they are sitting there thinking you know what, we are probably going to need to do this ourselves because this God sort of expecting maybe that and it’s been a number of years now and so Sarah says, “I have my servant here Hagar. Honey why don’t you go and you sleep with her and then we’ll provide the heir that way?” “Okay,” he says, “Awesome.” He goes and does that, she has the heir and when she has the child she gets a little bit snooty about it, Hagar does. And Sarah says, “I don’t like her anymore. Get rid of her.” So they cast her out, the Lord has to go and save *her* bring her back to the house. Oh maybe Ishmael will be the one who fulfills the promise, they think. Alright everything is taken care of. Meanwhile cousin Lot is over in Sodom just hanging out with the Sodomites, who are wicked people, doing all sorts of wicked acts. So he’s down there and the Angel comes and says, “Listen, we are going to judge this place.” And Lot’s like, “Oh actually why don’t you come inside before the men of the city come by and want to rape you.” That’s exactly what happens and Lot’s at the door saying to the men of the city, “Oh I know you want to rape these two visiting men, but I’ve got to two daughters for you, would you take them instead? My girls? No? No?.” Finally, of course, the Lord judges the city, Lot and his daughters end up in the cave. In this cave the oldest one says to the youngest one one day, “You know what there is no men around anymore, all the guys we know were burned in the sulfur. So all we’ve got left is our dad, so let’s get him drunk and we will sleep with him tonight.” They do, the first one does the first night, and said, “Hey it worked, tomorrow night you do it.” The youngest one does it the second night, they have kids through their dad, followed on by Abraham heading into Gerar and doing the same thing now, with Abimelek that he did with Pharaoh before. This would make a good reality TV show, yes? Like you expect the Kardashians to come around, Honey Boo Boo is going to come in here. [Laughter] *All* of the problems that exist with this scenario, with the fulfillment of the promise are *not God’s doing* they are Abraham’s doing and his perpetual sin. And you stop at this point and you think, “Really God? You couldn’t have picked a *better* family than this? You had the choice of *everyone* on the earth and not *one* of them would have been better than this. You should cast him aside, you should turn him to the side and you should start over, you have done it before. You did it with Noah, come on man, just start over.” He’s a repeat offender, he’s a perpetual sinner.

Of course before we’re too smug in our judgement of Abraham we probably should look in the mirror a little bit. I tend to think that you and I know a little bit about perpetual sin, about repeated error. There is a proverb in Proverbs 26:11, that says, “As a dog returns to its vomit, so fools repeat their folly.” It’s an interesting image. I have a dog, Jackson, he’s a black lab. He seems like he’s a good dog, he doesn’t do too many crazy things. I take him for a walk, you know twice a year or so. [Laughter] And



when I take him for the walk, we will be going down the path and every single bush this dog has to stop, have a smell, sniff of this and that. If he finds something left behind by another dog, it's not just sniffing it, he sniffs it for a second and then he starts rolling in it and, "You've got to get that all over me, it's like a good scent."

"Stop it Jackson, that's disgusting!" You pull him away. [Laughter] The next bush he does the same thing, he's rolling around. We've been in our house and we've seen spots in our house where apparently the dog let go of his innards but there's nothing left there. It's wet but something, where did it go? "Honey where did it go?" I say to my wife. She's like, "Probably back into him." Well good morning, right? Gross dog, you rub his face in it and he'll do it again. He does it again, there's something about dogs, there's some fundamental fact of doggishness that makes you keep going back to do the same thing. Yes it's disgusting, yes it's gross, but you keep doing it over and over again.

Yeah that's what fool's are like the proverb says. I'll be honest with you, we have a pension for foolishness. And we start early don't we, we start early with this. Standing before your parents, you were caught red handed, what do you do? You lie, you think in your mind if I say something different than what they know to be true, I can somehow doop them, I can get myself out of this. Of course parents seem to have an ability to know. "How do you know that was on my phone?"

"Because I'm not an idiot."

"Awww."

"You are grounded." Right? "I don't know why I did this," says the child sitting in their bedroom thinking to themselves about all the punishment and the ways that they have wronged their parents, it's so silly. A month later though, they are faced with the same situation and they look at their parents and they think to themselves, "You know maybe a lie would work here."

You'd think we'd outgrown that, right? You'd think at some point in our maturity we'd think, yeah actually you know what, no, learn your lesson the first time, its a lot easier. But we don't, there's a challenge in front of us and we're worried to death about our kids, about the finances, about our future, about tomorrow, about *all* sorts of things. "Ohhh no!! My life is going to be ruined because of this circumstance in front of me!" And then the Lord comes through for us in that moment. And we think to ourselves, afterwards, after the pressure is off, "Oh why do I worry so much about these things God? I feel so ridiculous, I'm not going to worry anymore." One month later though, another problem faces up, "Oh no!! Oh my life is ending!"

Men sit in the basements of their houses or closed rooms and turn the blinds and they look at the computer and they watch images and they think after it's done, "Why have I done this? This is absolutely ridiculous, it's lust, it's wrong, I know it's disgusting, I'm rolling around in it." And a week later or a month later, there you are again.

I don't like being so angry, I've got a short fuse, and just some things make me so mad, and I just get so mad and I yell at the people I love the most and then when my temper cools down and I sit there on the edge of the my bed and I think to myself, "What have I done? Like I don't want to be this person, I want to change, I want to be better at this." But a week later something else arouses your anger and



you are at it at again! Again, and again, and again, perpetually sinning. So look if you and I are willing to look at a guy like Abraham and say, “God should start over here with you.” I think we’d have to say the same words to ourselves, yeah? Most people who walk into church feel like God wants to get rid of them. I don’t care where you are on your spiritual pilgrimage in your spiritual life, most people walk in the church know deep down inside that they haven’t met up to the mark, they’re perpetual sinners. And that justice demands that God cast them aside.

[The Persistent Grace of God]

But this story is not just about the perpetual sin of Abraham, this is also about the persistent grace of God. Look at Genesis 20:14,

“Then Abimelek”

See what you expect at this point is God to show up and say, “Alright Abraham you are done, this is ridiculous, I’m so sick of your whining and complaining,” but here’s what he gets instead. Genesis 20:14-18,

“Abimelek brought sheep and cattle and male and female slaves [Listen to what he gets here, sheep and cattle, male and female slaves] and gave them to Abraham, and he returned Sarah his wife to him. And Abimelek said, ‘My land is before you; live wherever you like.’ To Sarah he said, ‘I am giving your brother a thousand shekels of silver. [It’s about enough to buy ten pieces of property as the equivalent. So I don’t know, what’s that in our day and age, right? A couple million?] This is to cover the offense against you before all who are with you; you are completely vindicated.’ Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelek, his wife and his female slaves so they could have children again, for the Lord had kept all the women in Abimelek’s household from conceiving because of Abraham’s wife Sarah.”

He’s basically rewarded, Abraham is *rewarded* for his actions. *What?!* God *blesses* the man through Abimelek. A few years ago I was sitting in a departure lounge getting on a airplane. Flight was about to board this guy shows up, he’s late and he just starts berating the airline personnel, so much so in fact they had to get the airport security over. And I was like, “Dude this guy is going to get kicked out of the airport.” The only word he did not use was bomb. All the others were in play. Just letting these people have it and have it and have it. I had to go to the bathroom right before the flight, so I came back, the guy was gone and I thought, “Oh he’s done! I wonder where they took him.” So we are boarding the flight, I get on the plane. This guy is sitting in the first row of first class and he’s got this champagne bottle next to him and a filled glass with champagne. Apparently he got priority boarding and all these things. I walked by him and I looked at him, just astonished, he looked back at me like, “Get out of here, go back to your spot, you loser.” And I walked by and thought this is *crazy!* You shouldn’t even be on the plane and yet you’re in the *best seat* with the *best stuff* and everyone is, “Oh sir, sir, sir, sir sir.” That’s a *scandal!* Abraham’s scandal. How does this guy get blessed like that, listen it gets worse or better depending on your viewpoint. Look at Genesis 21:1-8,



“Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old [Good child, bearing age, a hundred years old] when his son Isaac was born to him. Sarah said, ‘God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.’ And she added, ‘Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.’”

You know what’s lovely about this kid’s name is the whole story is encapsulated in it, isn’t it? The first time she hears about God’s promise to her, no you’re going to have the child. She just starts giggling, kind of a giggle of derision, “<starts scoffing laughter> You idiot God <stops scoffing laughter>.” An unbelieving, mocking, kind of laughter, yet now she’s like, yes but that laughter of derision has turned to laughter of joy.” <joyful laughter> I have a baby! I have a baby! I’m like so old, Isaac <stops joyful laughter>!” This should not have happened folks. Despite all the sin and the *Kardashian level* of family issues God keeps his promise to Abraham and Sarah. God should judge him and not bless him but He does it the other way around, so behold the persistent grace of God.

If you are a Mormon, you grew up believing, that if I sin against God and I ask for God’s forgiveness, God will forgive me on one condition, okay? That I never do it again. If I do it again, that is proof that I didn’t really mean the repentance to begin with, so the only way you can ultimately be forgiven before God as a Mormon is to be perfect after you start walking with God. You know what shocks me is I meet a lot of Christians who feel that way. Here’s the way it works, I start my Christian life, come to faith in Jesus and it’s on me, man. Like He kind of starts me, He sets me back to neutral, we even talk this way, God’s given me a second chance. I want to take that second chance. You know what we do with that second chance? Same thing Abraham did with it. And so we think, perpetually think, that God doesn’t actually like us, that if he had a chance to go back in time, He would just not really want to be involved with us. We are not the kind of *family* that meets the *standards*, He should just start over, that’s how we feel. Yet I got to tell you that’s not what the Bible teaches. I mean just think about the nation of Israel itself, okay? The people of Israel come out of the Red Sea, God saves them, they come on the other side, then the complaining starts, it’s nonstop, “Oh we don’t have enough bread.” “Well here’s some manna.”

“Oh but I’m thirsty. I love the meat, I need more meat.”

“Here’s some quail.”

“It’s not good enough, I just want to have more of it and better stuff.” God just constantly cares for them and then they end up worshipping the baals and the other gods and God as they make a golden calf. You want to reach in there and go, “Stop whining! You do realize how much better you have it now than then, that you’re God’s favoured possession but you don’t seem to focus on that. God gives them an image at one point, He says, “You know what it’s like to be me?” He tells one of his prophets, Hosea, He says, “I want you to go marry a prostitute,” and that prostitute then goes and cheats on him repeatedly. She has adultery, she’s an adultress, and God says, “That’s what I feel like, feel like I’m



married to an adulterous woman.” And it incenses Him so He says in a place like Hosea 11, we will finish with this, it’s a great passage, just follow it with me. He says, Hosea 11:1-9,

“When Israel was a child, I loved him and out of Egypt I called my son. [I saved them] But the more they were called, the more they went away from me. They sacrificed to the Baal and they burned incense to images. It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, [I’m their Daddy] taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love. To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek, and I bent down to feed them. [I’ve cared for them like a *loving Father* and *all they’ve done is turn away*. So now you can feel in this passage that He changes tone, the anger that this brings out in God verse five] Will they not return to Egypt and will not Assyria rule over them because they refuse to repent? [And the answer is *yes*] A *sword* will flash in their cities; it will devour their false prophets and put an end to their plans. My people are determined to turn from me. Even though they call me God Most High, I will by no means exalt them. [I’m *done* with this people! But then verse eight] How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboyim? [Those were two cities that were burned up with Sodom and Gomorrah. How can I judge you?] My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I devastate Ephraim again. For I am God, and not a man— the Holy One among you. I will not come against their cities.”

I can’t help but *love you*. Turn from me, and I just can’t help it. You know every Monday I fold clothes for my family, it’s my job. I have a deal with my kids, I tell them that, if I fold the clothes and leave them in your room and you put the clothes away in your drawers then I will come back and fold them again. If you choose to leave those clothes in your room and not put them away, or if you choose to throw all your clothes on your floor, I will not fold the clothes, in fact I will wash them and then I’ll pick them out of the dryer and just chuck them on your floor. I mean everything else is on your floor, so there you go, you can do it yourself. I have that rule. You’d think that this would motivate them. [Laughter] You know what I find every Monday, *every Monday*, you know what I find? I can’t see the floor in their room. Clothes I fold the week before are sitting over there, clothes everywhere. You know I go over to the dryer and I take clothes out and, “<starts huffing and puffing> I’m going to get them this time, marching up the stairs, That’s enough I’m sick and tired of this. I’m going to teach them a lesson <stops huffing and puffing>!” By the time I get up to the top of the stairs though, I’m like, fold the clothes, and tears, go put them in their bedroom. I just can’t help it, I can’t help it, I can’t help but love them. Listen, even though we perpetually sin, God remains persistently gracious. You may have sinned against him over and over and over again and wonder if He’s ready to cast you aside. Most people who are Christians think that way. But if you’re willing to turn around he stands ready to forgive, over and over and over again. So if you’re a believer in Jesus, He can’t help but love you. And that’s the kind of thing that might just make you laugh.

Let me pray for us, Father I’m thankful for your grace, I pray Lord that you will bless us today, give us a deeper understanding of your grace and a vision for it we pray. And Lord more than anything, I’m asking you by your Spirit to touch our affections here. That you would actually come and give us a



feeling in our hearts that, that you love us. We are thankful for the grace that's in our Lord Jesus, help us to sing about it now. In Jesus name, Amen.