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## FAITHFUL GOD OF THE ORDINARY

Genesis 21:22-34

By

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Genesis Lesson 44

## Faithful God of the Ordinary Genesis 21:22-34

Sometimes when you read the Bible, you get the feeling that God majors in the spectacular. He spoke and the universe was created. He rained down fire and brimstone to destroy wicked Sodom. He sent the plagues on Egypt and parted the Red Sea. He provided manna in the wilderness and brought water from a rock. We could go on and on recounting the mighty deeds that God has done.

All these things are true and wonderful. But the problem is, most of us don't live in the realm of the spectacular. We live with the daily, ordinary routines that characterize the greater part of our lives: getting ready for the day, rushing off to work, getting the kids off to school, shopping for groceries, paying bills, mowing lawns, and maintaining the household. Sometimes we may wonder, "How does God fit in with the ordinary?"

The question extends beyond how does God fit in with our ordinary *schedules* to, "How does God fit in with ordinary *people*?" After all, in the history of the church, not many of God's people have been able to speak to packed stadiums around the world, like Billy Graham. Most of God's people have been simple, ordinary folks who are not famous or politically powerful. They're people who live rather ordinary lives, except for one significant fact--their lives count for eternity because they are used by God to help fulfill His purpose.

As you think about Abraham's life, you realize that he was a fairly ordinary man, except that he was a man of extraordinary faith and obedience to God. His life wasn't made up of one spectacular event after another. Most days, he got up, made sure his animals were being cared for, dealt with problems like sick or straying animals, servants who had squabbles, and finding enough water and food for his flocks and family. The one great miracle in his life was the birth of Isaac in his old age. But other than that, Abraham's life was fairly routine. And yet he was used in God's great purpose of blessing the nations through Abraham's seed, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Genesis 21:22-34, we see Abraham in a scene from his ordinary life. Abimelech, the king who had inadvertently taken Sarah into his harem because Abraham had lied about her being his sister, pays a visit to Abraham, acknowledges that God is with him, and proposes a peace pact. Abraham uses the occasion to complain to Abimelech about a well which his men have taken from Abraham's servants. They formalize the peace agreement, Abimelech leaves, Abraham plants a commemorative tree, worships the Lord, and life goes on.

When you come to a passage like this in the Bible, the question is, *Why did God include this in sacred Scripture?* It seems to me that the answer is, *It shows the faithfulness of God in the ordinary.* It shows how God faithfully provided all that Abraham needed apart from Abraham's schemes. Throughout Abraham's story run two great promises which God made to Abraham: a son, through whom Abraham would become a great nation, and through whose descendants all the nations would be blessed; and, the land of Canaan, where his descendants would live. In seeking to bring about both of these promises, Abraham resorted to human schemes to help God out: with the son, he went in to Hagar and produced Ishmael; with regard to the land, his fears of being wiped out by the inhabitants of the land prompted him to lie about Sarah being his sister, not his wife.

In the immediately preceding verses, God has provided Isaac and dismissed Ishmael, so that Abraham would learn that God's promises do not depend on human schemes and effort for their fulfillment. Now, without Abraham's initiative or schemes, Abimelech comes and proposes this peace agreement, so that Abraham receives from God what he previously had tried to get through his deceptive scheme. Now Abraham and his descendants can dwell securely in the land. And, God provides for his need for water through this well. It is a beautiful illustration of how ...

God faithfully provides everything we need for life  
and godliness so that we can fulfill His purpose.

1. God faithfully provides security and protection.

One of Abraham's deeply rooted fears when God called him to leave his homeland and go to the land of Canaan was that the

people of the land would see his wife and kill him in order to take her. Because of that fear, before they left Haran, he and Sarah had worked out a deceptive scheme to pawn her off as his sister (20:13). It hadn't worked the two times they tried it. But Abraham still struggled with this fear long after he had been living in the land.

Here God shows Abraham that not only would the people of the land not take his wife, they wouldn't even take his well. If he would walk with God, so that it was evident to others, Abraham had nothing to fear. Though he was surrounded by pagans who had no scruples about murdering and plundering a wealthy man's belongings, Abraham could live securely because of God's faithful protection, apart from any schemes on Abraham's part.

One of the most comforting doctrines of Scripture is the truth that God providentially protects His children. A believer is invincible until it is his time to go. As David wrote, all our days were written in God's book before we even were born (Ps. 139:16)! We are secure in His providential care.

A few years ago, a Christian worker was scheduled to fly from New York to Chicago for some meetings before returning home to Los Angeles. His flight from New York was first delayed and then cancelled, so that he would have missed his meetings. So he changed his plans and flew home to L.A. Two days later, he heard on the news that a flight from Chicago to Los Angeles had crashed, killing everyone on board. Checking his ticket which he hadn't used, he realized that if his earlier flight to Chicago had not been cancelled, he would have been on that flight.

On the flight that crashed was a godly pastor from Southern California. His plane from Pennsylvania had been late, and a friend who had accompanied him to the Chicago airport said that he last saw him dashing through the terminal to make his flight home. But in his case, it was his final home, in heaven.

Why was one Christian man spared while the other was killed? We won't know God's purpose until we're in heaven. But we can have the comfort of knowing that both men were under God's providential care. When we lived in California and would take our young children to the beach, there wasn't a second while they were

playing in the waves that they were not under our watchful gaze. Even so, as believers, we know that every second of our lives is under the watchful care of the heavenly Father. As the psalmist proclaims, "Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, on those who hope for His loving kindness, to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine" (Ps. 33:18-19).

## 2. God faithfully provides for our basic physical needs.

Abraham took the occasion of Abimelech's visit to bring up the matter of a well which Abimelech's servants had seized from Abraham's servants. Abimelech claimed no prior knowledge of the matter, and the covenant the two men ratified stipulated that the well belonged to Abraham (21:30). In that desert land, a well was essential for survival, both for a man's flocks and for his family. Because Abimelech wanted this covenant to apply, not only to himself, but to his posterity (21:23), it secured this source of water not only for Abraham, but for his descendants. Isaac would later have to clear up some matters over several wells with Abimelech (chap. 26), but through this treaty, God was faithfully providing for Abraham's basic physical needs.

Jesus taught us to pray each day for our daily bread. Most of us in our land of plenty don't have to worry about where our next meal is coming from. Shortly after World War II, a woman went into a grocery store and asked for enough food to provide Christmas dinner for her children. When the owner asked how much she could afford, she replied, "My husband was killed in the war. Truthfully, I have nothing to offer but a little prayer."

The grocer, who was not a believer, was unmoved by her need. He sarcastically said, "Write your prayer on a piece of paper and you can have its weight in groceries." To his surprise, she pulled a folded note out of her pocket and handed it to him. "I already did that during the night while I was watching over my sick child," she replied. Without even reading it, he put it on one side of his old-fashioned scale. "We'll see how much this is worth," he muttered. He put a loaf of bread on the other side of the scale, and to his surprise, nothing happened. He added some more items, but to his consternation, still nothing happened. Finally he blurted out, "Well, that's all it will hold anyway. Here's a bag. You'll have to put

these things in yourself." With a tearful "thank you," the woman took her groceries and left.

The grocer later discovered that the scale was out of order. As the years passed, he often wondered if it was just a coincidence. Why did the woman have the prayer already written before he asked for it? Why did she come at exactly the time the mechanism was broken? Whenever he looks at the slip of paper that contains her prayer, he is amazed, for it reads, "Please, dear Lord, give us this day our daily bread." ("Our Daily Bread.")

That was an extraordinary way that God provided for His children. But we also need to see that His ordinary provision of our daily food is an example of His faithfulness. When we give thanks at the dinner table, we need to be *truly* thankful, and not just mumbling a ritual prayer before we say, "Please pass the potatoes." God faithfully provides for our protection and for our provision. But He doesn't just provide for our needs so that we can live comfy lives for our own happiness.

3. God faithfully provides so that we can fulfill His purpose.

Genesis 12:1-3 sets forth God's purpose to make of Abraham a great nation, to bless him and make his name great so that he would be the channel of God's blessing to all the families of the earth. This blessing would come through Abraham's descendant, the Lord Jesus Christ. For these promises to be fulfilled, God had to provide Abraham with a son, which He did in an extraordinary way in the birth of Isaac. He had to provide protection and give him the land, which He begins to do in a rather ordinary way through this peace agreement. But it is significant that God's blessing on Abraham is evident even to this pagan king, Abimelech, who tells Abraham, "God is with you in all that you do" (21:22). In an initial way, God is using Abraham to fulfill His purpose of blessing all the nations as he is blessed.

We don't know how much Abimelech knew about the one true God, but he at least knew enough to see clearly that God made a difference in Abraham's life. This is even more significant when you realize that Abraham wasn't doing anything spectacular. He was just living the ordinary, hum-drum, day-to-day existence of a nomad with his flocks and herds. He was God's number one man

on earth, but he wasn't holding miracle services. He wasn't a TV evangelist. He wasn't building a sprawling complex of buildings to house his international ministry. He wasn't traveling all over the globe. His calendar wasn't full of speaking engagements. He wouldn't have had much exciting news to report in his monthly fund-raising letter. He was simply living his daily life as the friend of God before the watching world. That world could tell that God was with him in all he did!

This is also remarkable in light of Abraham's past dealings with Abimelech. You'll recall that he had been deceptive, pawning off Sarah as his sister. Because Abimelech had taken Sarah into his harem, God struck him and all his household with some illness and threatened to kill them if he didn't return Sarah to Abraham. When Abimelech confronted Abraham about things, Abraham was rather uncomplimentary, saying that his reason for deceiving him was that he assumed that there would not be any fear of God among such people (20:11). Yet in spite of Abraham's sins and insensitivity, Abimelech here seeks him out because he recognized God in Abraham's life!

That leads me to ask, "Does the world see God in your everyday life?"

- A. For God's purpose to be fulfilled through us, the world should see God in our everyday lives.

Please observe:

*(1) The world is watching the lives of believers.* We don't always think about it, but if the world knows that we're Christians, they watch us to see if we're different than everyone else. They watch our attitudes, our words, and our actions. Are we cheerful and pleasant, even when we're mistreated, or do we grumble and complain like everyone else? Do we badmouth the boss or other workers behind their backs? Do we work hard or slack off? Are we honest, even in small matters? The world is watching, and without a word of witness, they should be able to tell that we are Christians as they see our godly lives.

Maybe you're sinking into sudden depression, because you're thinking, "I'm not perfect!" Stay tuned:

*(2) For the world to see God in our lives we don't have to be perfect.* Sometimes we think that we've got to be perfect before God can use us as a witness. Since we're not perfect, we do one of two wrong things. Some try to convey that they are perfect. They cover or deny their sin and try to make it look like they've got it all together. The trouble is, people can see that it isn't true. So they conclude that Christians are hypocrites, and they fail to see God in our lives.

Another wrong thing happens: An imperfect Christian concludes that he had better not say anything about his faith until he gets all his problems solved. The trouble with this approach, of course, is that we never get to that place. So we never bear witness for Jesus Christ, which is precisely what Satan wants.

I'm not suggesting that you go on sinning and tell everyone that you're a Christian. If you're not dealing with your sin and seeking to live a life pleasing to God, then you'd be better off not to let anybody know that you claim to be a Christian. But what I'm saying is that sinlessness isn't the requirement to bear witness for Christ. Just because you've blown it with someone in the past doesn't mean that you can't be used later to influence that person toward God. Asking their forgiveness is often the first step in that process. In spite of Abraham's past deception, Abimelech recognized God in his life. Why?

B. For God's purpose to be fulfilled through us, we have to walk with God.

Abraham was the friend of God. He walked in daily communion with God. He wasn't perfect, but he had reality with God and God's gracious hand was on him. One way Abimelech knew that Abraham walked with God is that Abraham had prayed that God would heal Abimelech and his family, and God answered that prayer (20:17-18). Perhaps Abimelech had heard of how God had given Abraham and Sarah a son in their old age. Abimelech could sense that in spite of Abraham's previous failure in the incident with Sarah, he was a man who walked with God.

Another step in Abraham's walk with God is seen in verse 33, where he plants a tree and calls "on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God." Planting the tree was an act to remind Abraham of

God's faithfulness, especially in the everyday matter of providing the well which supplied the water for this tree to grow. It also signified a tranquil, settled life, under God's providential care. The new name of God bore witness to God's unchanging faithfulness and to the fact that Abraham's faith was not in Abimelech nor in the treaty between them, but in the eternal God who was his dwelling place. Even in this ordinary incident, Abraham acknowledged God's faithful care for him.

The point is, as God faithfully provides protection and for our daily needs, and as we walk with Him and give Him the credit for His care for us, as Abraham did, He uses us in the ordinary matters of life to bear witness to a world that desperately needs to turn to Him. You don't need a theological education to bear witness by your walk with God. Your neighbor may have a Ph.D. and you may be a blue collar worker. But if you have the reality of a walk with the faithful God of the ordinary, your neighbor will know that you've got something he lacks.

### Conclusion

I read about a successful man who was on a business trip. He normally didn't attend church, but he was troubled about some matters and went to church, hoping to find some relief. The music and the sermon were okay, but didn't really help. As he was leaving, a young man walked up and quoted John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." The businessman didn't see how such a thing could be true and he didn't understand the connection between God's giving His Son and a person having eternal life. The man was educated and he articulately expressed his objections. Each time, the young man, who was retarded and knew only this one verse, responded simply by quoting John 3:16.

After this had gone on for several times, the businessman suddenly was struck with the simple truth of that verse. God burned the words into his heart and gave him the faith to believe. He got down on his knees and wept in gratitude. God used the only Scripture this retarded young man knew to give eternal life to this sophisticated businessman (told by Martin & Deidre Bobgan, *Competent to Minister* [EastGate], pp. 45-46).

If you know the Savior, as you walk with Him and enjoy His faithful provision, God wants to use the ordinary events in your life to fulfill His purpose of blessing all the nations through the Seed of Abraham, the Lord Jesus Christ. What a privilege to be used by the Eternal God as we live our ordinary lives on this earth!

### Discussion Questions

1. Where's the balance between taking measures for our own safety versus trusting God to protect us?
2. How much specialized training (if any) do Christians need to be effective witnesses for Christ?
3. How can we turn everyday situations into opportunities for telling others about Christ? How aggressive should we be?
4. What for you is the most threatening aspect about telling someone about Christ?

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