

Waiting for God to Act

- Read Genesis 16:1-16 and 18:1-15

Introduction

- *Old Testament women - a gauntlet has been thrown down!*
- We know that the Bible says God will provide for all our needs:
 - so as Christians its perhaps tricky to admit that we don't always believe it
 - or at least, we don't act as if it were true - which is perhaps a truer test of belief than just what we say!!
 - ("You Can Change" book: "Sanctification is the progressive narrowing of the gap between **confessional faith** and **functional faith...**")
- Don't we sometimes say, think we believe, that God will keep his promises, that he will provide...?
 - but then take matters into our own hands in some way...
 - **can be money... can be time... can be relationship... can be health...**
- God had made a promise to Abram and Sarai (Abraham and Sarah):
 - he said he would bless the whole world through the children he would give them

A Promise Grabbed

- I imagine that at first they waited eagerly... but month after month, and then year after year, Sarah failed to fall pregnant...
 - would God keep his promise?
 - its been ten years!!
- We don't know very much about Sarah's internal world:
 - what was she thinking through these years?
 - we know Abraham had his doubts - (15:2-3)
 - but we also know that when God answered (15:4) he trusted, he believed (15:6)
 - but Sarah... had she made that leap?
 - certainly by 16:2 she seems to have given up on herself being part of the fulfilment of the promise
- What was she feeling about God?
- What was she feeling about Abraham?
- What was she feeling about herself?
- So she takes matters into her own hands:
 - not God's suggestion, not his solution - not really much sense that since 15:6 Abraham or Sarah have really heard from God on this issue
 - this is a promise, a hope, a dream **grabbed**
- Now the "solution" would have been culturally acceptable
 - how acceptable it felt to Sarah from the outset we don't really know
 - all the signs suggest its a last ditch, a second best, a less than ideal way of going about things...
 - and she certainly regrets her decision pretty quickly, as Hagar "**began to despise her mistress**" (look down on)
- Notice what she does though:
 - who gets the blame? Not Sarah... but Abraham! (5)
 - and the anger, if not the blame, is then taken out on Hagar (6)
- God is merciful and gracious:
 - rescuing Hagar and her unborn son
 - revealing something of himself to Hagar, a direct engagement that Sarah doesn't

- appear to have until chapter 18, and then she is laughing in scorn at what the Lord is saying! (18:12)
 - and withholding his judgement from Sarah for her grabbing of the promise

A Promise Fulfilled

- The promise is not yet fulfilled, but it is still there:
 - the Lord's call continues to be for Abraham and Sarah to trust God...
 - thirteen years later it has still not been fulfilled when God reaffirms the promise (17:4,16)
- This reaffirming of the promise is repeated in the beginning of chapter 18:
 - its like God is driving home the point about him being a God whose promises can be trusted...
- God knows the state of Sarah's heart:
 - would we call it cynicism, or a weariness of spirit from long waiting?
 - but God knows where her (derisive?) laughter comes from (18:12)
 - does Sarah believe and trust yet?
 - its been a hard road for her... and there's still a way to go yet
- But there is progress - Sarah has her first direct contact with the Lord! (18:15)
 - (albeit he's telling her off somewhat for (what lay behind) her laughing)
- Ultimately, of course, God's promise is fulfilled: (21:2)

Conclusion

- But the question I suggest we are left with is this:
 - are we rather more like Sarah than we'd like to admit?
 - what traits of her do we see in ourselves?
 - there is a huge character challenge in waiting on God
 - waiting isn't easy
 - to act as if, as well as say that, God is good, that he will keep his promises, that he will be good to us...
 - ...when life doesn't exactly look like that
- Can be money... can be time... can be relationship... can be health... can be security... can be our children...
- Response: write down our hope or dream, a name or a whatever
 - write something above or below or around that applies the promise from Jeremiah 29:11 to that situation
 - it may just be a copying down of the verse, or even the reference
 - moments in prayer, asking God to help you trust him for his promise in that situation