



Genesis 12:1-8
The Story
Hey God: Can You Hurry Up?ⁱ

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This morning we continue our series of messages in “The Story” which is a look at the story of God, told from Genesis to Revelation. It’s a big-picture overview of the Bible and how we see God working in history.

As you may have heard, Apple had a big announcement this week about iPhone 8 and X (10), with a release date in early November. No 9? I don’t get that. But I guess this release announcement has a lot of people excited. While I’m mildly intrigued and like reading about the changes, I’m not exactly losing sleep over this. Maybe it’s a sign I’m getting old. I know a certain sign I’m getting old is when my kids know more about the upcoming phone and its features than I do – and I read a couple articles about it before they’d read anything. And as we were talking about it a little this last week, my oldest son in particular was adding commentary and critique on the new iPhone and its features as though he works in the industry. Man, I felt old.

No matter how old a person is, however, we all know that when you get a new phone, you sign off on their terms and conditions, even though no one reads it before they sign off on it, right? No one actually read that fine print. It could have a clause in there that you’ll give them \$1,000 a month for the next 10 years, and most people would not even read that. **That’s kind of what we saw Adam and Eve do last week: they didn’t read the apple terms and conditions.**ⁱⁱ ☺ (See what I did there?) And that has led to life as we know it: trying to do life on our own, apart from our creator, trying to make our own rules, and finding ourselves stuck in some pretty deep ruts and well-worn paths...but God continually is seeking after us to bring us back onto the straight and narrow path of living by faith in relationship with Him. And that’s one of the major differences between the Christian faith and all other religions, that we understand God to be a God of love and grace who takes the initiative himself to reach out to us. We don’t earn his love; we don’t earn His grace; we don’t earn a relationship with Him; he offers those things. That continues in today’s passage, too.

So God’s plan is to create a nation of people who will be faithful to Him, and

be a witness to the nations around them and to the world so that ultimately, all people might be drawn to Him. And out of all the possible candidates to begin this nation of many people, and to begin to populate it, he chooses Abram and Sarai – a husband and wife team who have no kids and have had their AARP card for a couple of decades or so at this point. You really have to wonder what God is doing here. I mean, if I were looking to populate a new nation through child-birth, this is *not* the route I'd go. Even Sarai and Abram have their doubts about this plan.

But we see here that: **God's grace is completely unmerited.** It's unearned. Abram and Sarai hadn't done anything to qualify themselves for this position. They didn't earn it. They didn't work for it. It's all in God's providence, and by His grace. And He chooses people for positions of leadership, for initiating new things, for building His Kingdom, who seem totally contrary to who we would choose. Why? Because it draws us to God. It helps us to see God's hand in the plans that unfold. It keeps us humble. It helps us to see that whatever it is that's accomplished was not done primarily by human endeavor, but by the grace and power of God.

So that's the plan that God hatches, to take these two and through their offspring that they don't yet have in their 70's, and through them create a nation. That's God's plan and promise to them. So: **The first thing that God asks them to do is to change their address.** He's moving them to a new land, a land that he will give to Abram and to this nation he's bringing about through him and his wife Sarai. It's going to be a big change in their lives...and they're in their 70's – which isn't ancient by any means, but this change reminds me of this question: How many senior citizens does it take to change a light bulb? Change? You want change?

But change they do. They move to a new land. In the New Testament, in Hebrews 11:8, the author makes clear what's going on here, when he writes, **“By faith Abraham (Abram), when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going” (Hebrews 11:8).** So Abraham is an example to us of living by faith. He stepped forward in obedience to God's call, even when he couldn't see where things were headed. So the two of them head to

this new land. And because they live by faith, everything goes exactly as planned and they live happily ever after. ☺

OK...that's not what happened. In fact, their only real claim to fame is that they moved to this new land. But they get that part right. Then, what actually happened is that some 10 years go by, and there still aren't any kids. In other words: nothing's happened. I'm sure they hollered out to God on more than one occasion, "Hey God: can you hurry up?" And so often when things don't proceed as we anticipate, like when things take longer than we thought they would, we get completely focused on the lower story...the human story. We see the limitations, the obstacles, the impossibilities, and so forth. **But what God wants us to do is keep our eyes focused on the Upper Story. To see what God is doing, to see things – as best we can – from his perspective.** And since God sees from the beginning of time into eternity, He has a time horizon that's a *little bit* bigger than ours.

But they stay stuck in the lower story, and don't trust God...and they think, "Maybe God needs our help." Always a dangerous statement to make. So Sarai makes arrangements for Abram to conceive a child through their servant, Hagar. To us, this seems just completely unfathomable. But in much of the ancient world, having offspring was enormously important, and if a husband and wife weren't having any success in having kids, this kind of arrangement was a common practice.

Now, I have to pause for a moment here. We read the Hebrews passage a moment ago and we saw how Abram is held up as a model of faith because he packed up and moved to a new address. And so often I've read that verse and I think of him as this great guy who had such faith that he was almost like a superhero. I mean, he's father Abraham...there's a children's song about him and his many kids, and we are one of them, and so forth. So he's exalted as this man of great faith. But here they are, devising their own plans to have offspring, rather than trusting God when God said that He would populate this nation *through him and Sarai*. What kind of faith is that? And what we see here is that: **People of "great faith" whom God works through in the Bible or in the world today aren't super-human.** They aren't super-talented. They aren't perfect. They don't have 8 days a week,

they aren't super-spiritual, and they don't walk on water.

This week, my wife thought I just about walked on water when I moved a heat vent in our house...I cut the hole for it, added 8 feet of ductwork under the house, connected it in the new location, patched up the old vent hole...did it all, and it only took 90 minutes. Gwen was ecstatic and thought I was a superhero! So I texted a friend to share the good news. I said, "I moved the heat vent last night in 90 minutes. Gwen things I walk on water!" He texted back, "Oh yeah!" And I immediately texted back, "Yeah, well, that probably won't last long and I'll start sinking like Peter in no time." And sure enough, it took less than a week. I do not have supernatural carpentry skills, or husband skills...and the heroes of faith of the Bible, like Abram and Sarai here, are not spiritual superheroes who walk on water. What we see is that they're a lot more like you and me than we often realize. **They're pretty normal people, who have a passion and a desire to please and trust God...but they're far from perfect.** Which is really kind of comforting and hope-giving, if you ask me: We can relate to them a lot more than we think we can. And it helps us to see that God can work through any of us in amazing kinds of ways. It takes faith...it takes trust and a willing to step out in some risk...but we do so knowing that God has our back will never leave us.

So 10 years had gone by, as I mentioned. They hatch their own plan. Abram has a child, named Ishmael, through Hagar, but Ishmael is not the one through whom God is going to work. God says that it will be a child of Abram's and Sarai's. Finally, another 13 years later, when they're in their 90's – the perfect age for raising kids, right? – finally Abram and Sarai have their first born child, Isaac. In fact, he's their only child. They're not going to set any population growth records at that rate, that's for sure! So then we think, "Well, God's plan wasn't just for Abram...it was for the generations that would follow after...maybe through Isaac God will get things rolling a little faster?" Well, when Isaac grows up and is of marrying age, he marries Rebekah. And do they have a boat-load of kids starting 9 months after the honeymoon? No! It takes 20 years before they have a child, when they have the twins, Jacob and Esau. But then Jacob has 12 boys – maybe girls too, but the boys are the ones we know of. 12! Even my family pales in comparison

to that! This is like a major population explosion. **So at that point things are off and running, and the beginnings of the population of the nation of Israel are more firmly planted. And it all happens in God's timing.**

So, before we wrap this up, I want to back up to Abraham and his son, Isaac. I said earlier that Abraham and Sarai's only real claim to fame in regards to having great faith was picking up camp and moving to a whole new country. Well, there is one other for which Abraham is known. When Isaac was a young boy, we have the event of God asking Abraham (his name is changed to Abraham at this point), as a test of his faith, to take Isaac to a mountain in the region of Moriah, and sacrifice his only son, Isaac. Abraham went on the journey with a couple of servants and some animals. At the base of the mountain, he left the servants to watch over the animals as he and Isaac went up the last bit to the top. In leaving them, he said to them, "Stay here until *we* return." Kind of interesting that Abraham uses the plural "we" when speaking of their return. He's trusting that God will make this all work out well.

And then, as they're walking up the hill, Isaac asked his dad where the animal was they'd sacrifice. Abraham's response was simply that God would provide the sacrifice. We'll never know if Abraham actually would have sacrificed Isaac or not, because in the nick of time, God provides a ram for the sacrifice. In God's timing, He provided what was needed.

It goes to show, once again, that: **God does things in His timing.** From Abram and Sarai becoming parents of Isaac in their old age...to the provision of the ram...to the birth of Isaac's twins 20 years after his marriage...we see that God works things out in his time.

And if you want some confirmation that God is really in the midst of these events and working them out in His time, then listen to this: Later in the Old Testament, in 2 Chronicles 3:1-2, we're told that the temple in Jerusalem – this was built by Solomon more than 1,000 years after the Abraham and Isaac sacrifice event...the temple where God's people would gather to worship and offer sacrifices to God...*that* temple was built on Mount Moriah – very close by where God tested Abraham's faith (many believe on the same mountain). **And closely connected – in fact, some say it's just part of the**

same hill – is the hill of Golgatha, where Jesus, God’s only son, was sacrificed on the cross. 2,000 years after God provided the sacrificial ram for Abram...2,000 years later, God provided the sacrifice once again, in nearly the same place, for all of us.ⁱⁱⁱ It’s the final one. Once again we see God taking the initiative, pursuing us, providing what we cannot, making a way for broken and sinful people to be in relationship with our loving and holy God.

You might be here this morning wondering about God’s timing in your life. Maybe, like Abram and Sarai, it’s kids – you want them sooner rather than later. Maybe it’s a search for a new job that’s progressing slowly. As a church family, most of you know that several months ago we presented plans for a church remodel, and things have moved slowly since then as we seek to get some people onto two teams to lead us through the next phase of raising funds and overseeing the building process. I’m trusting that this is all in God’s time, even if it’s not the timing I would have had. Or maybe for you it’s the opposite and things are moving too quickly – I know for me, I can’t believe that I have a sophomore in High School. Seems like just yesterday Gwen and I were returning home from Overlake Hospital with this little bundle of joy, and now I want to cry out, “Hey God, can you slow things down?!?” Maybe you feel like life is going by so fast and there’s not much time left to accomplish something you’ve always wanted to do, or that you’re running out of time to live by faith like Abraham and Sarah did, and to inspire others in their faith.

Whatever the situation is, God moves in His timing. We respond in faith and step forward as God calls us. Sometimes things move slowly more because of us, than because of God. I think we have to be honest with ourselves about that, too – if God is calling us to step out in faith in something, then what’s preventing us from doing that? Why delay? **But ultimately, the timing is the Lord’s.** And in His timing, He’s provided what we could never do ourselves, through Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. And the resurrection of Jesus gives us hope that through Jesus’ sacrifice, and through faith in him, we too would have a resurrection and eternal life like his. In the meantime, in the days that we have here on earth, God continues to pursue us and draw us back to Him and to carry out his promises. He did with Abraham and Sara. It took some

23 years from when He made the promise to them, so his sense of timing might not match yours, like it didn't match theirs. But God was faithful to them, and he will be faithful to you and to me as well. Let's Pray...Amen.

ⁱ Today's sermon correlates to Chapter 2 in "The Story." We took orders for the book at church for a few weeks. We ran out, and are getting more in time for the second Sunday in the message. You can also get a copy on your own online through many websites (Amazon.com, cbd.com, etc.). In fact, cbd.com (Christian Book Distributors) has them for \$5, hardback. Just search for "NIV The Story Bible."

ⁱⁱ It should be noted that we don't know what the fruit was they ate. In fact, odds are it wasn't an apple at all.

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.templemount.org/moriah2.html> - This is a nice summary article with a topographical map explaining all this.