**The Basis of Blessing**

 *The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised.****2****And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him.****3****Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac.****4****And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.****5****Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.****6****And Sarah said, “God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me.”****7****And she said, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”*

***8****And the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.****9****But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing.****10****So she said to Abraham, “Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac.”****11****And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son.****12****But God said to Abraham, “Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named.****13****And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring.”****14****So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. (Genesis 21:1-14)*

 We receive God’s blessing based on His declared promises. Greetings in the Lord as we talk today about both what the basis of the Lord’s blessing is, as well as how that is expressed in our unique situations. We will be talking about the passage that includes the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael, given that it was a foundational event in the Scriptural history. In fact, without their expulsion from Abraham’s family, the entire history of salvation culminating in Jesus Christ bringing salvation gets disturbed and negatively impacted. Thus, my hope is that with this message, we will be encouraged to seek God’s word for our everyday goings-on. Let’s see the above truth through the passage:

 God’s blessing can come in a strange way to us – but the manner in which it comes is not important; but rather, the fulfillment of His word. Getting into the Scripture reading, we see that God promised Sarah a child, and Sarah did just that. Isaac was born, circumcised and weaned, and then, after those initial years, Abraham held a great feast in honor of him. In that event, the Scripture says, “Ishmael laughed” or some translations say, “He played with” (with the meaning of “He abused”) Isaac – he made sport of him. In that moment, Sarah’s anger caught fire and she wanted to drive Hagar and Ishamel out of the home and family.

It is interesting to note that God took Sarah’s side this time, though He would usually support Abraham. However, there were already hints in Scripture that God was going to be with Isaac (as opposed to Ishmael). For example, the way both children were named was different. Ishmael was named by Abraham upon birth, while Isaac was named by God before He was even conceived. Then, in the Hebrew original, Ishmael was never referred to as “child” by God, but always “youth.” Isaac, on the other hand, was always the “child.” It was as if God was saying that Isaac was the accepted one for the blessing, while Ishmael was less blessed a clearly not an heir of the Lord’s promise.

 There was a connection between Sarah’s anger and the inheritance of Abraham, which was the primary blessing for her child. Sarah very bluntly wanted a driving out – a forced expulsion, using the same Hebrew word (*garash*) that was used when the Scripture was describing Pharaoh expelling the Hebrews out of Egypt.

In that day’s legal realm, technically, Ishmael had a right to (a part) of the inheritance, because he was the son of the patriarch too, and not just of the slave woman. In God’s eyes, however, only Isaac was to enjoy God’s promise. So, who receives the blessing? The one that is from and would be staying in Abraham’s family. God Himself affirms His own promise to Abraham – and if it were not so, things may have gone differently, because Abraham was much softer in his dealings with Ishmael. God’s inheritance, however, was based on His own promises that He previously spoke to Abraham, and not in response to human logic or the laws or customs of the land.

This is like when a slave, who had agreed with his master to buy his freedom by making yearly payments, decided to finish those payments even after the Emancipation Proclamation was sent out by President Abraham Lincoln. The slave had moved away from Viriginia to Ohio, but the storyteller said that the now free man walked the distance between the two states to pay his last bit to his former master with interest. The free man said that he didn’t need to pay off the debt, but he had given his word to his master, and he had never gone back or dishonored his own word. He felt that he could not truly enjoy freedom if he did not fulfill his promise to his former master.

Similarly, God’s blessing, when it is declared, is not to be received in any other way than how (and to whom) God promised to grant it. God will always fulfill His promise to bless us, just like that emancipated slave fulfilled his agreement.

Sometimes, the Lord’s promise, which we might perceive thru Scripture reading, has to do with our spiritual lives. Or, it may be that we have prayed for our children and we sense that God’s Word has a specific blessing for children who are faithful and obedient to Him. Whatever the source from which we sense or feel that God is promising a blessing to us, we need to respond by walking consistent with God’s declared promise. If the latter concerns our children, perhaps consistent prayer is the call for the day. If the promise has a condition related to our own walk of faith, then we need to grow our faith-life. If we sense a financial blessing coming, we are to get ready to receive it with grace and a grateful heart. If the blessing is related to an event or the fulfillment of an immediate need, then we need to approach it and its conditions by faith.

Therefore: just as God’s blessing came on Isaac and then eventually through Jesus Christ, it comes upon us also through His declared Word, which leads us to relationship with Him thru Jesus His Son, so that we can receive and experience the blessing as it was intended.

God’s blessing can come in a strange way to us – but the manner in which it comes is not important; but rather, the fulfillment of His word. We receive God’s blessing based on His declared promises. The Lord bless you all. Amen.