



The Sermon

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Genesis 20:1-18

"Faltering Saints Held by a Faithful God"

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TRANSCRIPT

Let's look to Genesis chapter 20 this morning. I'm going to read a portion of this chapter and then ask the Lord to bless our time together and to help us to understand Genesis chapter 20.

"From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negeb and lived between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar. And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, 'She is my sister.' And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, 'Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife.' Now Abimelech had not approached her. So he said, 'Lord, will You kill an innocent people? Did he not himself say to me, "She is my sister"? And she herself said, "He is my brother." In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this.' Then God said to him in the dream, 'Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against Me. Therefore I did not let you touch her. Now then, return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, so that he will pray for you, and you shall live. But if you do not return her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours.'

"So Abimelech rose early in the morning and called all his servants and told them all these things. And the men were very much afraid. Then Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, 'What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done.' And Abimelech

said to Abraham, 'What did you see, that you did this thing?'" Let's pray and ask the Lord's blessing today.

[Prayer] Our Father in heaven, we come before You today asking, needing, desperately dependent for Your Spirit to help us. Lord, I'm very well aware that it would be of little consequence of how much time and effort I've put into preparation for this day, that if Your Spirit does not accompany that with power, I could do nothing on my own. I need Your Spirit to help me to communicate these truths. I need the Holy Spirit to direct and control my thoughts and my words. We need You, through Your Spirit, to allow our eyes to see the truths that are in Your Word. We need Your Spirit to give us eyes that see and ears that hear, hearts that believe, minds that understand, and a will that would obey. We ask that you would grant it in Your kindness today. Amen. [End]

I want you to consider the theme with me this morning of "Faltering Saints Held by a Faithful God. Faltering Saints Held by a Faithful God." I need to say this here at the very onset of Genesis 20, that Abraham is a believer. He's a man described in Scripture as having faith in God's promise. When you read Hebrews 11 it recounts those who lived by faith, and Abraham is there. You might make a note in Galatians 3:7-9 it says, "Know then it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed.' So then, those who are of the faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith."

It says in Genesis 15 - that you've already studied here - verse 6, that "Abraham believed the Lord, and it was counted to him as righteousness." Genesis 12 - you've covered this - has this beautiful explanation of this covenant that God makes with Abraham when he's 75 years old. Genesis 15, that covenant is confirmed. Genesis 17 - that I had the privilege to walk you through back in January - describes that covenant stands. And now in chapter 20, we're about 25 years later from chapter 12. And when you read chapter 20, we just kind of have to scratch our head a bit and say, "What is going on?" If I were to tell you that there is a man that God has chosen to establish His covenant with him, and if I were to tell you that this man is described in Romans as a man of faith, and Galatians as a man of faith, and Hebrews as a man of faith, and then you were to read Genesis 20, you would say, "What in the world is going on? This does not seem like a man of faith."

Abraham and Sarah are still waiting for the promise to be fulfilled. You'll remember from Genesis 12 and 15 and 17, that God has made a covenant with Abraham, that he and his wife Sarah are going to have a son and it's going to be a son of the promise, and that through them all the nations of the world would be blessed. But just as we have seen in Genesis 12 and 15 and 17 the covenant of God repeated, so in chapter 20, we strangely and sadly see also an old sin repeated. This is not the first time that we have seen Abraham try to pass off his wife as his sister to try to save his own skin. It says one author referred to this as disobedience déjà vu.

You're reading chapter 20 and say, "Where have I heard this before?" It's a different account. This is not the same account described twice, it's a different account, but the actions are the same, and it just doesn't feel like what you would expect a man of great faith to do. And yet the Bible does not shy away from calling Abraham a man of faith, which tells us from the very onset that if we are going to be God's people it is only because we are being held by a faithful God. That's true for all of us. Our hope is not in our strength, our hope is that we have a God who is faithful.

The hope of this, dear church, is that it's being held by a God who is faithful. And as we walk through Genesis 20, I want you to make note of a few things that I think will help you to understand the text, and I pray also serve as encouraging reminders for you in your own life. Number one, from verses 1 and 2, we see that, "Old sins return if they are not put away. Old sins return if they are not put away."

Let's go back to the text in verse 1: "Now Abraham journeyed from there toward the land of the Negeb," because Abraham journeys. That's how he lives, that's what he does. He's watched the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, he begins to head south. We don't know for certain, the text doesn't tell us exactly why he left. We could surmise it's likely because he's been looking down over that hill country in those cities and it's a very painful reminder of what he saw and of the destruction that took place there.

If you look at the text here it tells us that, "He settled between Kadesh and Shur, and lived for a time in Gerar." It's there on the border of the Promised Land. It's the place where the Philistines would settle. It's the capital city of the land at the time of the Philistines. It's a prosperous city. Maybe Abraham thought, "This would be a good place to settle for a bit. It seems

to be a prosperous, happening city, it might be a good place to conduct business." And when you get to verse 2, we see this old sin surface.

"Abraham said of Sarah his wife, 'She is my sister.' Sarah is in her nineties. Abraham's afraid that the king is going to see Sarah and that he's going to want to take her as his own, and so to try to protect himself, he says what he's already practiced and rehearsed with her, "If this comes up, we're just going to tell them you're my sister." His thinking is this: "If the king desires you and sees me with you, he may have me killed in order to take you as his own. So to protect me, let's just tell him you're my sister. He can take you, and that way I'm left okay."

If you're with us this weekend for the marriage conference this is not what we talked about doing. This is not what a godly leader looks like. We spent a lot of time this weekend looking at godly leadership from the husband and godly character from the wife; this is not what it looks like.

And maybe the first time this happens in Egypt, it's right after he's been given the covenant, maybe we could understand when it's brand new and the Lord's just freshly called him. Maybe we could understand in a moment of fear or a moment of weakness he does something kind of unthinkable. But this is nearly 25 years later. He's had the word of God and the promise of God and the presence of God and the covenant of God that has sustained him now for a quarter of a century, and here he is going back to the same old sin, which I think reminds us, if we're wise to see it, that no one is ever beyond temptation, and we must be on guard at all times.

I was telling our friends that we gathered with at the conference this weekend, Marcy and I, we've almost been married for twenty-six years. According to your bulletin we are young at heart, which is a nice way of saying, "You ain't young." Point taken. Twenty-six years of marriage later our marriage survives, because day by day we choose to be faithful to each other. Temptation does not take a time out; and in your walk with the Lord, you must choose to be faithful every day. And temptation is going to always be lurking around the corner, and we have to be on guard at all times.

And we look at even this example here in Abraham and say, "How is it that he's doing the same old sin? Why hasn't he moved past this?" And I just want to encourage you, my friends, to never become comfortable with your

sins. Too many people become comfortable with old sins. It's been a part of their life for so long: they've just always talked that way, they've just always treated her that way, they've just always gossiped that way, they've just always done these things. It's been a part of your life, whatever it may be; and if we're not careful, sins that are old become sins with which we get comfortable, and that is a very dangerous place to be. If you get comfortable with old sins, you're going to grow numb to its dangers. And hear me clear, friends, you cannot cultivate a garden of holiness while tolerating a section of sinful weeds. You can't do it; those weeds will spread. If you want to cultivate a garden of holiness in your heart, you must fight against your sin.

Now, why does Abraham do this? Verse 2, "Abraham said of Sarah his wife, 'She is my sister.' And an Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. It seemed to happen so easily. It seemed to happen without any struggle from him. Well, he does it because he's afraid, he's afraid of what the king might do to him. And so Abraham, whose faith is genuine, still falters. And what Abraham should remember is what we looked at back in January from Genesis 17, that God is El Shaddai, He's the God with all the might. And God's people need not live in fear when we understand and really believe our God has all the might.

But, doctrinal faith must be lived out in our lives every single day. To just simply read theology and debate theology and just to simply watch and listen to sermons all week long, those are wonderful, good, healthy things; but if it does not work through your mind into your heart and get lived out through your hands and feet on a daily basis, you've missed the whole point. If you were to ask Abraham, "Who is your God?" he would say, "He is El Shaddai. I know that He is. He revealed Himself to me in Genesis 17 as El Shaddai, the God with all the power, the God with all the might." The problem is, when he was then faced with a fearful situation, what he believed in doctrine he did not live out in daily practice. And this is a disconnect that will create much havoc on your life.

One of the things I love to do at my church in Oklahoma, every couple of months we do a thing called Ladies Night of Theology, and we gather for two hours, 6:30 to 8:30, and all I do is teach theology for two hours. We don't do small groups, we don't do discussion, we don't do talk back time. Those things are good, I'm not against any of those things, that's just not what we do on that night. It's just straight teaching. It's just two hours of teaching theology. I'm kind of surprised anybody shows up, but they keep coming. And we had about 280 ladies there last week; and on the one hand,

it's just a staggering thing to see that many ladies show up that just want nothing but theology, it's a wonderful thing. But the thing I have to remind them, and myself, over and over again, is that just showing up to study doctrine and study theology, while it's essential, is not enough. It must be lived out; it must be believed. And the way you know that it's being believed properly is that it's working itself in your daily choices.

Abraham's problem here is not that he doesn't know, it's that when confronted with a challenge, rather than trusting in El Shaddai, he begins to give in to his fears. But we've got to put our theology into practice. And what Abraham does here in these first couple of verses is he uses deception as his shield rather than trusting in God as his shield. Now before we're too quick to throw darts at him, I think every one of us in this room can say, "But we understand that problem."

It's one thing to be bold and courageous when you're surrounded by hundreds of believers, but what about when you are all alone? Well, we understand that fear can spring up within us. But the problem for Abraham in the early part of chapter 20 is he's relying here on worldly tactics and strategy rather than trusting in God.

So, verse 2, "Abimelech king of Gerar sent men and took Sarah." By the way, Abimelech here is most likely a title; probably not a proper name, most likely a title, like Pharaoh or like Caesar. The king sees Abraham, discerns he's a wealthy, powerful man, and the king figures, "An alliance between the two of us might be pretty good." And so he has his sister with him, so he's told. "If I take this powerful, wealthy man's sister as my own, then our families are connected, we have an alliance; and it's going to be good for Abraham because I'm the king, and it's going to be good for me because this is a wealthy new person here, and alliances make us stronger." And it all happens because of an old sin in Abraham's life that once again is showing itself. Old sins return if they are not put away.

But in verses 3 to 6, let me show you, secondly, the good news that, "God's sovereignty is greater than we imagine. God's sovereignty is greater than we imagine." Verse 3, "God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night and said to him, 'Behold, you are a dead man.'" How about that; quite the dream. "God says, 'You're a dead man, for the woman you have taken she is married.'" This is a true nightmare. Now I don't know about you; I've got a couple of recurring nightmares in my life.

When I was in high school and college I was a waiter, and now I'm 48, almost 49; it's been a long time since I've waited tables. I still have dreams where I've got just one table and I cannot get water to them. I go to the kitchen, I get distracted, I get water, I drop it, I break it; I get it again, and then I take it out, somebody stops. I can't get it to them. There's these people saying, "Are you ever going to come wait on us?" And I'm trying, I just can't get to them. I still have that nightmare.

I still dream that I show up as a young at heart 48-year-old. I show up, and I'm in high school, and I have a teacher that says, "Michael, you have a final exam today." And I say, "Oh, no, no, I'm almost 50. I've graduated high school." And they say, "I'm sorry, you've got a class; you've got to take that final right now." I have that nightmare all the time.

Well, frustrating as those two things may be, let me tell you: this is a nightmare. You're asleep, and God comes to Abimelech in a dream by night and says – here's the opening words: "Behold, you are a dead man." That'll get your attention. How sovereign is God? As sovereign as He chooses to be, which is complete, total sovereignty.

"You're a dead man." Abraham's cowardice and his lies have now put Abimelech in a very precarious position. As has been written, "Our sin has a wide net," – you need to remember that – "our sin has a wide net." Our sin impacts far more people than we realize in much wider and more profound ways than we know. But in spite of this sin of Abraham, verse 3, "But God came to Abimelech." God was still working. God was still sovereign. In spite of Abraham's weakness and in spite of his faltering, God is still God.

So, verses 4 and 5, "Abimelech" – it says – "has not come near her. And he said, 'Lord, will You kill a nation even though we're blameless?' He says, 'Are You going to take it out on us? You know, I didn't do anything wrong. Yet,' – verse 5 – 'did not he himself say to me, "She is my sister," and she herself said, "He is my brother"?' In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this.'"

And as you read this you stop and you say, "Wait a minute, the pagan king looks a lot better than the patriarch," right? I mean, Abimelech comes off looking much better here than Abraham did. God has revealed Himself to Abraham and called him and made a covenant with him and has revealed Himself to him; and yet, in his weakness, Abraham sins. When God appears to Abimelech, Abimelech says, "God, I've not done anything wrong. I've tried to be honest with this."

It reminds me of the book of Jonah, where you've got the prophet of God who is called to go and to preach, and the prophet of God runs away. And then he gets a second chance, and he preaches; and the Ninevites, wicked, evil people, the capital the Assyrian Empire, the king says, "Look, we're going to repent. All of us, we're going to repent; and maybe God will be merciful to us." And Jonah says, "This is why I didn't want to preach, because I knew God was a God of mercy," and he did not want the Ninevites to be saved. And you say, "The king of Nineveh looks much better than the prophet of God, Jonah." Same thing here in Genesis 20, which reminds us that even God's people in a moment in time can look awfully weak.

God said to him in verse 6, "Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against Me." God is more sovereign than you even realize. "It was I who kept you from sinning." And do you notice the end of that verse? It seems like almost a strange thing: "It was I who kept you from sinning against Me."

Well, Sarah's Abraham's wife. If there was going to be any particular person blamed here or sinned against, even though Abraham did wrong, wouldn't the problem be that another man had a relationship with Abraham's wife, and God says, "Before sin is a damage to man, it is first a dishonor to Me. You have sinned against Me, even if you don't know Me, believe Me, or have faith in My words." God is still sovereign over what faithful marriage looks like.

This is God's institution. It's not up to the world to define what marriage looks like, it is up to God to define that. And He says, "I have kept you from sinning against Me." Understand, my friends, that when you sin, it's not first about what it means to your reputation, it's not first how your sin impacts the joy in your own house, it's not first what your sin does to



another person. The first thing you must remember about your sin is it is a dishonor to the name of God. This is why we must take our sin so seriously.

He says, "I kept you from sinning." This is such an important thing. God struck Abimelech with some kind of illness, the text tells us, that prevented him from having relationship with Sarah. And this was essential. God had to keep him from sinning in this way. God had to make it where he physically was not able to have this relationship with Sarah, because if Sarah is not already pregnant by Abraham, if she gets pregnant by Abimelech, she's not going to be able to get pregnant by Abraham to have a child of the promise. If she's already pregnant by Abraham and doesn't know it yet and has a relationship with Abimelech, they're never going to know whose son this is. And everything about the covenant depends on the promise being kept that Abraham and Sarah together have a son. What's happening when you read verse 6 is that God is providentially protecting His own promise. God is more sovereign than we even realize.

I want you to notice, thirdly, in verse 7 that, "Our failures do not prohibit God's grace from being powerful through us. Our failures do not prohibit God's grace from being powerful through us." Look at verse 7: "Now then, return the man's wife, for he is a" – what's your word? – "a prophet." This is very striking to me. Abraham has been uniquely called by God, gifted by God, blessed by God. God has spoken to Abraham, led Abraham, provided for Abraham.

Shortly after the covenant is given in chapter 12, Abraham sins by saying that, "My wife's really my sister," to protect himself. Here we are twenty-five years later, he does the exact same thing again. This is embarrassing that a patriarch, this is embarrassing that a man who is called one of the faithful would do this. And yet, when God speaks of him, He says, "Abimelech, return the man's wife, for he is a" – I want you to notice what he does not say: "Abimelech, return the man's wife. I'm sorry he put you in this situation. But remember, Abraham's a coward. Return his wife to him." That's not what he says. He could have.

And God does not say, "Abimelech, you need to return Sarah to Abraham, because Abraham sadly is a liar. Go ahead and return his wife back to him." He could have; it's not what He says. He could have said, "You need to return Sarah back to Abraham, because Abimelech, Abraham's weak and he

dabbles in old sin. And that's the problem, this is a sinful man. You need to return Sarah back to him." That's not what God says.

He says, "Return the man's wife, for he is a prophet." This is the first time in your Bible the word "prophet" is used. The official explanation of the role of a prophet won't come until Deuteronomy. But this is the first usage of the word, and it reminds us that a prophet is not just about predicting the future, the work of a prophet is speaking the words of God and interceding for the people of God. Abraham has just been recorded interceding for Sodom and Gomorrah; he is the forerunner for the prophets who will come after him. And in grace, when God speaks of Abraham to Abimelech, though He could have referred to all of his sin, and He could have referred to the summary of all of his failures; instead, in grace, when God speaks of Abraham, He says, "Return Sarah to this man, for he is a prophet." What grace God shows to Abraham. Abraham is still God's man, unbelievably.

The church - I want you to make sure you catch both sides of this coin - on the one hand, our sin is a dishonor to God, and we must war with our sin. On the other side of the same coin, be reminded: our God is gracious.

Mark was very kind in his introduction of me this morning. I'm thankful for his friendship, I'm thankful for his kind words. He could have introduced me a different way. He could have called my wife and said, "Hey, would you tell me everything Michael's done in 26 years to disappoint you." He could have said, "Michael's coming to preach with us today, he sometimes is a very selfish man, he sometimes is a very prideful man, he sometimes isn't as thankful and grateful as he should be. Michael, why don't you come and preach to us." He could have. Those things would be true. We've been married 26 years, they've been 26 amazing, God-blessed, wonderful, joyful years. But there's had to be a lot of forgiveness, because we are very imperfect people.

When I introduce my son to somebody - I've got two sons. I could introduce them and say, "Hey this is my son Cael, this is my son Benjamin. You know, when they were 13 they got grounded for disobeying me. When they were 16 they lost their car keys." That's not how I introduce my sons. I say, "These are my boys." It's not because I've forgotten they're imperfect, it's because I choose to love them no matter what. And you may just need to be reminded this morning that God in His grace loves His children.

"Return Sarah back to Abraham, for he is a" – and I just kind of picture Abraham like covering his ears, "I don't want to hear what God thinks of me." "He's a prophet. He's My guy, I claim him. He's on My team. I know his sin, and his sin is a dishonor to My name, but I still set My love on Abraham. He's a prophet," which reminds us that our sin does not keep us from being useful by God. So should we just say, "Okay, if Abraham can lie and Abraham can be deceitful and God can still count him as a prophet and God still loves him, then should we just live sinfully, because God loves us anyway?" And the Scripture's clear on this in Romans 6:1, "God forbid that we would ever use grace as a license for sin." We don't want to live that way.

Look at verse 7: "Now then, return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, so that he will pray for you, and you shall live. But if you do not return her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours." And Abimelech may be saying, "Wait a minute, You're not even my God." And God says, "No problem, I'm still King," right? God's authority is far greater than people imagine it to be. And you can kind of imagine as God says, "If you don't do what I tell you to do, you're going to die," and you can imagine Abimelech saying, "Don't you know who I am. I'm the king." And God says, "That's cute." There's one Sovereign. It's not Abimelech, it's not Abraham, and it's not you; it's the King of kings. Our God is sovereign.

Fourth, we learn that, "Even our spiritual heroes are flawed. Even our spiritual heroes are flawed." Verse 8, "So Abimelech rose early in the morning and called all his servants and told them all these things. And the men were very much afraid. Then Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, 'What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done.' And Abimelech said to Abraham, 'What did you see, that you did this thing?'"

So, Abimelech says, "Abraham, what's your reasoning? You lied to me, you were deceitful to me; you said this was your sister. God's appeared to me in a nightmare and said, 'Behold, I'm a dead man.' What in the world? Why have you done this?" And it's interesting, because what you have happening now in Genesis 20 is a pagan king is confronting and rebuking the prophet of God. This is not how you would expect it to be. It does remind us though, I think, that all of us daily must rely upon the Lord. If you ever think you have outgrown your need for prayer and dependence upon the Holy Spirit, just remember Genesis 20, where Abraham, the man of faith, the patriarch, the man of the covenant with God, is able to sin and to sin

big, if he does not rely on the power of God. If we try to navigate the waters of our life on our own, disaster is always right around the corner.

And as you read this, especially if you've been coming to church here the last several months, and you remember the first time that Abraham did this, you might be thinking to yourself, "How in the world could Abraham be so foolish to sin like this again?" But can I, with gentleness and respect, ask you the same question: "Why do you keep doing the same sin over and over and over?" I don't mean to offend you in asking that, I just simply mean to help you understand that while what Abraham did was quite wrong, if we were honest, I think you and I have much more in common with Abraham here than we wish that we did.

Have you ever repented of your sin and in your heart said, "I'm never going to do this again?" only seven days later to say, "Here we are again, God. I'm not going to be materialistic, I'm not going to be greedy, I'm not going to be envious, I'm not going to gossip, I'm not going to lie, I'm not going to lust, I'm not going to disrespect my spouse, I'm not going to ignore my children, I'm not going to put things of the world above things of God," and only to come right back again and say, "I did it again." There's nothing that Abraham has done here that is right, I'm just suggesting to you and to me today that we may be able to see far more of our own heart in Abraham than we wish that we did.

He says, "Abraham, why have you done this?" And Abraham's going to offer three excuses for why he did this. Let's look at them, verse 11: "I did it because I thought to myself, 'There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.'"

Here's the first excuse. Abraham says, "I came to town, and it looked to me like there was no fear of God here." That's a euphemism, by the way, "the fear of God," referring to people without social standards, people without any kind of moral standards. He's just assuming that the people of this town have no social moral code or conduct at all, and he says, "I thought that you may take a liking to my wife, and if you thought she was my wife you may kill me to get rid of me, and that's why I did it, because everyone in this town is just so sinful," which is a bit ironic, because it's actually the king who is responding to God, and the man of God is not. He's just making an assumption. And he concludes that it's okay for him to sin as long as he thinks it will help him out. That's his first excuse.

The second excuse is given in verse 12: "Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father though not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife." In other words, "She is literally my half-sister." And what he does here is he tries to hide behind technicalities. His communication was clear: it was not to declare, it was to deceive. And then he wants to try to backtrack and hide behind matters of technicality. God is not amused by that.

We see a third excuse in verse 13: "And when God caused me to wander from my father's house, I said to her," - so this is a long time ago - "This is the kindness you must do to me: at every place to which we come, say of me, "He is my brother."" You know what his third excuse is? "I've been doing this for years. I didn't just do this to you, Abimelech, I've been doing this all my life. This is a long-standing tradition in my family," as if that makes it okay.

If I can build a bit of a bridge from Genesis 20 back to our marriage conference this weekend that a number of us were a part of: don't excuse the sins of your past as though the fact you've done them a long time makes them acceptable. "Well, I'm just selfish. I mean, I come from a long line of selfish people. I'm just stubborn; all the men in my family are stubborn. We just yell and scream, that's just what we do in this family," as if having disobeyed God and dishonored your spouse for a long amount of time somehow gives you a license to say, "It must make it acceptable."

And is there a little tinge of blaming God in verse 13? What do you think: "When God caused me to wander, when God called me, when God redirected my life, when God put me on this path"? It sounds a little to me like Genesis 3, when Adam said, "The woman You gave me told me to eat this."

You can just kind of see Abraham just grasping at everything: "Well, the reason I did this is because I thought the people in town were evil. Well, the reason I really did this is because I mean, technically, she is my half-sister, I didn't really technically say something altogether untrue. And well, I did this because we've always done this, this is just something we've done. It was our agreement; this was something that's been a part of our life for a long time. And in fact, I came up with this agreement, when God's the one who interrupted my" - you just kind of see him grasping, "I'm going to blame Gerar, I'm going to blame my past, I'm going to blame God's call."

You just kind of see him grasping for everything, which reminds us of this fourth truth I gave you that, "Even our spiritual heroes are flawed."

Let's be crystal clear on something: God gives people to the body of Christ as leaders, teachers, examples, role models; and these are good men and women that God uses, and we should honor them, and we should respect them. But if Genesis 20 teaches us anything, you never make a god out of a man. Our heroes are good gifts from the Lord; they make good heroes, they make lousy gods. All true men of the faith will deflect away from themselves and unto God because they recognize how inadequate they are in themselves. Even our spiritual heroes are flawed.

So let's stop and look what we've got so far. "Old sins return if they're not put away." It's kind of discouraging, we've all been there. "God's sovereignty is greater than we imagine." Well, that's comforting if you're on His side, that's threatening if you're not. "Our failures do not prohibit God's grace from being powerful through us." That's good; God can still use us, God is still gracious. And yet we're reminded that even the best among us are flawed, as has been well said, "The best of men are still just men at best." They're flawed.

So what do we do? We're weak, we sin. Our faith can be genuine but still falters. What do we do? And what does Abraham do? Well, let's bring this to a close as we look at a fifth thing in verses 14 to 18, that, "Prayer is always the right response, regardless of our condition. Prayer is always the right response, regardless of our condition."

This is beautiful here in verse 14: "Then Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and males servants and female servants, and gave them to Abraham, and returned Sarah his wife to him. And Abimelech said, 'Behold, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you.' And to Sarah he said, 'Behold, I have' - now watch this - "I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver." Maybe a bit of biting sarcasm here, a rebuke. "Sarah, I'm returning you to your brother. Just a reminder, the reason we're in this situation is because he claimed that's all it was." There's a bit of a rebuke here. Twenty-five pounds of silver he gives away here. "It's a sign of your innocence in the eyes of all who are with you, and before everyone you are vindicated."

Now look at verse 17: "Then Abraham prayed to God," – stop right there, look no further. What does the man of God do when he's in trouble? He prays. What does the man of God do when he's guilty? He prays. What does the man of God do when he has disrespected his wife? He prays. Prayer is always the right response, no matter our condition, no matter our situation.

Some of you may be, even right now in your heart of hearts, aware that though you're physically present with God's people at church, that you are running from God in your own life, and your life may be filled with all kinds of secret sin that nobody knows, and one of the problems with that is you're going to feel like you can't pray, because when you are running from God, it's so hard to stop and pray. But no matter your condition, prayer is always the right response. When you experience success, you'd better be quick to pray, or else pride is going to overtake you. And when you experience failure, you'd better be quick to pray, or despair will rule you.

Now notice what he does: "Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children, because the Lord had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife." Now catch this: with all the mistakes Abraham's made here, with all of his weakness and faltering faith, when confronted, he prays, and he prays for Abimelech. And what does he pray for Abimelech? That they would be able to bear children.

What is the one thing in Abraham's life that's the most frustrating reality? He and his wife cannot have children. Let me defend Abraham for a minute, because he looks really bad in chapter 20. Even in his weakness, by God's grace he is able to pray for somebody else to receive the very blessing that's been withheld from him.

The right response is always to be prayerful. And if all of your prayers are just about you, even though you may be a person who prays, if it's all about you, you will become a selfish person. If you want to test how much you really believe in prayer and how much you really trust the Lord, begin to pray for other people to be blessed and other people to be encouraged, even if it means they receive what you do not. Prayer is always the right response.

And isn't it amazing that earlier on, God said, "Abraham's a prophet, he will pray for you." Verse 17, "Abraham does pray to God, and God answers the prayer." I'm so encouraged by this, because it's so tempting to think, "Why would God answer my prayer? I'm so flawed, I'm so weak." I love the Lord, I love the church, I love my wife, and yet I'm such a flawed man, and I'm tempted at times to think, "Why would God answer my prayers?" Here's why: imperfect people are still powerful tools in the hands of a mighty God.

Trinity Bible Church, be encouraged by that truth today. Your life, your prayers, your ministry, it is still a powerful weapon in the hand of a mighty God. God uses imperfect people. God only uses imperfect people, right? He's going to use Abraham, though he lied. He'll use Moses, even though he killed. He'll use David, even though he cheated. We are all faltering saints being held by a mighty God.

And can I just close with this? God still claims Abraham, not because of how good Abraham was, but because of how gracious our God is. If you're here this morning and you don't know Christ as your Savior, and you think to yourself, "I don't know if I'm good enough for God to save me," be encouraged today. You'll never be good enough for God to save you on your own, nor do you have to be.

The story of the gospel is a story of grace: God setting His affection upon you, and in grace opening your eyes to your sinfulness and to His glory, and through His Spirit calling you unto Himself. And if this very day you have a sense of your own sinfulness, of your own need, and of the sufficiency of our God to save through His Son Jesus Christ, then this very day call on the name of the Lord. We are all weak, faltering, saints, being held together by a faithful God. Would you pray with me?

[Prayer] Lord, we thank You today for Your Word, and I pray that it would be an encouragement to these dear saints. Lord, I'm aware that if Your Holy Spirit does not accompany the preaching of Your Word with great power, it would achieve nothing, for we desperately need You. As we prepare to receive the elements of the Lord's Supper in just a moment, may You use these elements we hold in our hand to remind us of the sacrifice of Your Son. We ask You, prepare our hearts to worship in this way. It's in the name of Christ we pray. Amen.