

I love Sarah she is this fabulously loyal wife who doesn't get treated that well by Abraham – but she sticks with him, and God sees her and looks after her. She suffers some bad times, but she is rescued.

My message this week is based on the fact that the Bible often records things that it doesn't teach. You have to be a bit discerning. The Bible doesn't teach passing your wife off as your sister. But it does teach that God sees and God responds.

I want to look at three stories today, twice Abraham passes off Sarah as his sister, and then I want to look at the way that Sarah treats Hagar and how God sees Hagar also and rescues her. Hagar sums up our story by naming a well Beer Lahai Roi – Well of the Living One Who Sees Me.

I want to talk today about hope and consequences. Because God sees there is always hope and because God sees there are always consequences. You cannot escape the eye of God, because God is divine he sees everything, better than CCTV, God sees everything we do and everything we experience; and therefore there is great hope – because God is a rescuing God and the evil that men do is not hidden from him. But also because God sees everything that we do, there is no way to hide from God, therefore there are consequences to our actions, and consequences in the, moral world are as inevitable as they are in the physical world.

Have you come across the Handmaiden's Tale? It's a famous book by Margaret Atwood, made more famous by the TV series. It's a dystopian view of the future where a corrupt conservative cult has taken over the country and fertile women are used to breed children for the rich and infertile. It's a modern take on the mistreatment of Hagar and Sarah and it highlights many of the things that go wrong when we start to see people for what use they can be to us, rather than for their inherent value.

In Genesis 12 Abraham goes south into Egypt... (You can read the story).

There is a pattern here. Abraham fails, out of cowardice and maybe out of greed. Abraham sins, this is not commendable behaviour, he dishonours his wife.

Then central to the story is the unspoken fact that God sees what Abraham has done.

Thirdly, notice that God acts, - there are serious diseases that break out.

Fourthly these diseases are a consequence, but they don't fall on Abram, they afflict Pharaoh and his house. The consequence hits someone else.

We heard about the consequences from Pharaoh.

Finally, Sarah is rescued from Abraham's failure.

Failure, Seeing, Action. Consequence. Rescue.

Note the consequence falls on Pharaoh. That's not entirely fair, but isn't that true to life, if I have too much to drink and drive home dangerously it's probably someone else who will bear the consequence.

5 Bricks.

In Genesis 20 it happens again. Abraham goes to Gerar and again passes Sarah off as his wife. This time it is King Abimelech who is affected.

Abraham goes in need, now here is the sad part, he assumes the worst of people, and so he fails. Not just Sarah but he fails his host. Fear is a great driver of failure.

God sees

God acts

Abimelech has a dream. And we find out later that the court has become infertile.

And Sarah is rescued again.

Now we find out more this time, apparently Sarah is Abrahams half-sister and so in one sense he's telling the truth – but it's a half truth. Like Bill Clinton – I did not have sexual relations with that woman. Rubbish he abused his power over a teenage girl.

So let me unpack what is behind this story. In some Theologies the gods are just like super heroes and they don't see everything. But in Christian Theology God sees everything, it's not like he goes looking he just sees everything. But there's more what is such good news is that God sees the heart. He knew that Abraham was doing this out of fear, it's still wrong, but he also sees sometimes better than we see for ourselves – our motives. And he sees that Abimelech is also innocent, so while there is a consequence it is not so bad. I proclaim hope – because God sees there is always hope for rescue. But also because God sees, you can't get away with things there is always a consequence.

In our time we might think of the horrific trafficking of poor women in Asia, Europe, America and even beginning in NZ. We might think of the high-end trafficking that Jeffery Epstein seems to have been guilty and we might ask – how long God. But in our time we do see hope, we see organisations fighting for trafficked women and we see the truth starting to come out. Hope and consequences. We see stories that once were hidden coming out. The NT proclaims that everything that is hidden will be revealed.

We need to continue to have a conversation about pornography church, in the past pornography was hard to access today it is hard to avoid. And because we live in a media world saturated in soft porn we have to be constantly vigilant. My friends the great news is that God sees, he knows what we are all exposed to, and he know our hearts – he knows whether we chose to look away from an inappropriate image, or quit viewing a series, and he knows if we are taking a second look where we shouldn't, whether it is just a second look at someone passing by that we should see as our mother, sister daughter – or something more sinister.

Our hope is that we cannot hide from God, and God can help when we confess our failings.

The consequences are there also, if we go down the rabbit hole of increasingly consuming pornography – there are consequences. It will consume us, it distorts our view of sexuality and does us no favours. It might damage our relationship.

But here's the one that we don't remember enough and that I want to come back to. In these stories the consequences of Abraham failure were born by someone else. We need to be reminded that if we consume pornography we are feeding a market that consumes young woman alive. And not just young women.

Today I want to say that there are consequences to our failings and they often fall on someone else.

When I was a new Christian I didn't want to sin anymore because I feared the consequence that would happen to me. As a mature Christian I have now come to see that often the consequences of my sin fall on someone else and that is so much worse.

I was chatting to some of the guests who come to lunch on Tuesday – and I was appalled to hear about the prices being charged by some motels for emergency accommodation. I heard a single night quoted as \$177 dollars a night. That the tax payer is forking out, and often counted as a debt to that beneficiary That motel is booked solid for 2 years. That is a rort. And God sees.

I want to look at a third story because sadly Sarah herself is affected by Abrams utilitarian view of relationships. In Genesis 16 she comes up with this idea about how they could help out God and so fulfil the promise of children. What she didn't get was that she was part of the promise. She suggests that Abram should sleep with her maid – and it's all downhill from there. From Hagar to the Handmaiden's Tale sleeping with someone in an unequal power relationship is just wrong. She who should be protecting her maid, shops her out to Abram. And this begins all manner of problems. Hagar falls pregnant – and begins to despise her mistress. Or maybe her mistress thinks she does. The Hebrew word for despised was despised – I think this was the inevitable consequence of Sarah's abuse of this girl. Sarah mistreats her, isn't that awful and Hagar runs away. An angel comes and send her back, because the inevitable consequence otherwise for the runaway is death in the desert. But Ishmael will be a problem child. And here Hagar has this profound theological insight. She names the well Beer Lahai Roi. Well of the Living God Who Sees Me.

In Genesis 21 Sarah has Abraham send Hagar away, but again God sees and saves. The same pattern a little different Failure, consequence, God sees, God acts, and there is a rescue.

We learn from these stories of failure that God sees. God sees everything. God sees when we wrestle in our heart. God sees when we are too tired or too lazy. God sees

And there are consequences.

If I show my husband a lack of attention, there will be a consequence, you see God's seeing is integrated with the moral mechanics of the universe. For every action or failure there is a consequence, God sees, the moral universe sees.

So I fail to cherish and my wife or someone suffers.

I fail to manage my temper and my children inherit a poor model

I fail to honour my parents, they suffer.

But actually seeing is hope.

The Christian hope is a massive Hope, our faith is that God has found a way of overcoming consequence not by the consequence falling on me, not by the consequence falling on someone else, but by the consequence falling on him, on Jesus on the cross. You see this is why the cross was necessary, it wasn't just that God wanted to say – it's ok, it doesn't matter, it's not ok and it does matter and in the moral universe just like the physical universe for every action there is a consequence.

And Jesus took the consequence of our failure on himself on the cross so that we don't have to bear them, and so that God is able to free others from bearing the consequence of our actions also.

And so I proclaim great news. God sees all, and he has stood in the way of the consequence of our failing so that consequences can be replaced with hope.

1. Two points to end on. When we wilfully sin we are as it were adding a stripe to Jesus' back, let's not treat sin so casually, because it is so costly for Jesus to mop it up for us. No he is not being sacrificed again, but our intentional sins have been added to his burden.

2. Whenever you see a hopeless situation, remember God sees, and God is in the business of rescuing.