Faltering Saints Held by a Faithful God

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 07 August 2022

Preacher: Dr. Michael Staton

[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us.!

We just did it. We thought we might have a few families, and the Lord just kept bringing more and more families to us. We anticipate that happening throughout this fall, and so we want to be quick not only to serve, but quick to welcome people into the life of our church.
Next week, you're going to see a lot of faces you don't know, and it may be because they're new. It may be because they've been gone a while. They may be first-time guests. It may just be people that are new because they're switching hours.
Just come to church prepared next week to be friendly, to be engaging, to make it as comfortable as possible for people to come and to worship and to hear about the Lord.
And then one last thing. As John mentioned, next Sunday night, we kick back off our Sunday evening service at 5. We're going to begin this semester. I'm going to be walking us through for about five or six weeks through the Lord's Prayer.
[1:25] So we'll sing in here as a congregation at 5 o'clock. We'll hear testimonies from church members, and then I'll be preaching through Matthew 6 on the Lord's Prayer. If you're able to, please make it a priority to come back, and we'll begin next week to bookend our Lord's Day with morning and evening worship.

Next Sunday, all of our students are here too. Our children, our youth, teenagers, they're all in here with us at 5 o'clock for that evening service. And then afterwards, as John mentioned, we'll do our big party for Kids Praise, Kinder Praise.
So it's going to be a great Sunday night next week. Make plans to come and join us, all right? Well, I want to do something kind of special this morning. I want you to open with me to Genesis 20.
We are walking through the Gospel of Mark. But since this is our last Sunday together, all in one service, I wanted to do something just kind of different here. And I want to go to Genesis 20 to a passage of Scripture that may be familiar to many of you and may be new to others.
But I think we'll be hopefully a good encouragement as we end this summer and also as we, for many, begin the process of going back to school and getting ready and our minds set on that.
[2:45] Genesis 20, we're looking at the life of Abraham. Abraham is a believer. He has faith in God's promise. We read about him in the New Testament in Hebrews 11.

Hebrews 11 is a chapter of the Bible often called the Hall of Faith because it makes mention of so many who were faithful and they exemplify what faith is all about.
Galatians 3 mentions Abraham as a man of faith. Genesis 15 says that Abraham believed the Lord and it was counted to him as righteousness.
Romans 4, 3 in the New Testament repeats that. That Abraham had faith in the Lord. And so several times we see this man Abraham held up to us as an example of the faithful.
In Genesis 12, eight chapters before what we'll look at today, there's a covenant God made with Abraham. Abraham was 75 years old and God made a promise to build a people from Abraham.
[3:57] Abraham was married through he and his wife. They were going to have a son and through that son would come the promise of God's people. When you get to Genesis 20, Abraham and Sarah are still waiting for that promise to be fulfilled.

We're 25 years later. And what we see is that covenant was made in chapter 12.
That covenant was then in chapter 15 confirmed. In chapter 17, it's reaffirmed. And now we come to chapter 20.
But through two and a half decades, the promise has not come. They have not been able to have the son of the promise.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

And a strange thing happens in chapter 20. Because in chapter 20, Abraham is going to repeat an old sin. Something from his past is going to find its expression in his life again.
[5:09] Charles Swindoll says of Genesis 20 that this is disobedience deja vu. Because when you read Genesis 20, you stop and you think, we've read this, haven't we?

Old sins come up. Genesis 20, starting in verse 1, says, From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur. And he sojourned in Gerar.
And Abraham said of Sari 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.
[6:21] 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 in all who are yours. In this kind of odd story that comes from a culture very different than ours, let's walk through this together this morning.
As we do it, I want to just highlight a few things that I want you to remember about you and about the Lord as we walk through Genesis 20. Number one, let's begin here.
Old sins return if they are not put away. Old sins return if they are not put away.
Back to verse 1 of chapter 20. Abraham is journeying. This is how he lived. Shortly after Solomon Gomorrah has been destroyed, he heads south. And he settles, it says in verse 1, for a time in Gerar.
[7:35] This is just over the border of the promised land. It's the place where the Philistines would settle. It's the capital city at the time in the land of the Philistines.

It's a prosperous city. Abraham knows it would be a good place to conduct business. And as they arrive in verse 2, Abraham tells Abimelech of his wife, Sarah, she is my sister.
He's done this before. When it seems like his life may be threatened, he says of his wife, she's not really my wife. She's just my sister. Now, why would he do that?
Because if the king takes a liking to his wife, the king may think, I want to take her for myself. And if you are her husband, I may need to eliminate you so there's not any problem.
So, Abraham, in a way to try to protect himself, devises this scheme that he did years ago. And he says of his own wife, she's my sister.
[8:44] Now, at this time, Sarah is in her 90s. Genesis 12, he did the exact same thing, but that was 25 years ago.

He is now 25 years older. And that old sin of deception finds expression again.
Which reminds us that nobody is ever beyond temptation and we must be on guard at all times. If you think that just because you get married, temptation goes away, you're wrong.
If you think that just because you make a lot of money, you're no longer going to be stingy, you're wrong. If you think that just because you've got some extra resources, that you're going to make the right choices with those things automatically, that's not how it works.
Temptation is always right around the corner. No matter your age, no matter your income, no matter your position in life. Here is Abraham, who in multiple places in Scripture is referred to as a hero of the faith.
[10:03] And yet, as an old man, he is once again falling back onto previous sins committed. I mean, maybe in Genesis 12 we can understand it.

It's a weird thing to do. It's the wrong thing to do. But he's just been called back in Genesis 12. The covenant that God made with him is new.
It's fresh. And though he's not a young man in Genesis 12, he is new to the covenant. Maybe in some way we can rationalize how in a weak moment he could do such a thing as pretend his wife was just his sister so that somebody could take her for themselves and excuse him and leave him alone.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

But even if you can come up with some way to excuse him and leave him alone, 25 years later, it's kind of hard to wrap your mind around why is he doing it now?
He's been walking with the Lord for a long time. He's had the promise of God in a unique way for years now.
[11:15] How does a man of such great faith fall so easily into old sins? I wonder if that's a question you've ever asked about yourself.

Most in this room are part of the faithful. Most in this room are here at church each Lord's Day. Most in this room read our Bibles. We love to worship. We enjoy studying God's word.
And yet, how often do you even find yourself falling back into old sins and giving in to the same temptation over and over?
Be careful. If you grow comfortable with old sins, you will grow numb to its dangers. And you cannot cultivate a garden of holiness in your heart if you tolerate a section for sinful weeds.
[12:34] We must fight by God's grace against our sin. I mean, Abraham's faith, while genuine, we have to admit it falters here.

What Abraham should have remembered is that God is still who he revealed himself to be. He is El Shaddai, the God with all the power, the God with all the might. But here's the problem.
Doctrinal faith must become daily faith. Teenagers getting ready to start school the next couple of weeks, you've been well taught.
You've been well trained. If you grew up through our children's ministry, you were taught the word of God today. In our youth ministry, you are taught the Bible over and over. You hear good, sound, quality preaching every Wednesday night in your youth service.
You have the Bible taught to you every Sunday morning in Sunday school and here in worship service. You are well trained students. You have doctrine. But your doctrine must become daily faith for you.
[13:39] Because temptation will not take a day off. Our theology must be put into practice. Abraham, though an older experienced man by Genesis 20, still falls into this temptation of using deception as his shield rather than trusting the Lord to be his shield.

Verse 2, And Abimelech, the king of Gerar, sent and took Sarah. And incidentally, just by way of helping you with understanding this here, Abimelech is a title.
It's not a proper name. It would be like Pharaoh or Caesar. This is the man's title, not his name. And he takes Sarah, Abraham's wife, to be his own.
Because Abraham said, she is my sister. In other words, you can take her, if you like her. Just leave me alone.
Old sins return if they are not put away. Now why does the king do this? Well, because he can tell by meeting Abraham, Abraham's a wealthy man.
[14:56] He can tell Abraham's a powerful man. And he assumes that if this is a powerful new man in town, it would probably be wise for me to have some kind of an alliance with him.

This wealthy, new, powerful man comes in. I can make an alliance with him. This lady that's with him is just his sister, as far as he knows, not his wife, as far as the king knows.
I'll take this lady for myself. And in so doing, I establish an alliance with this new, powerful businessman that's here. We see, secondly, that God's sovereignty is greater than we imagine.
God's sovereignty is greater than we imagine. Look at verse 3. But God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night and said to him, Behold, you are a dead man.
Because of the woman whom you have taken, she is married. This is a true nightmare, right? Abimelech goes to sleep.
[16:01] The Lord appears to him in a dream. And the Lord's first words to Abimelech are, You are a dead man. This is a real nightmare. I have a couple of recurring nightmares in my life.

I waited tables back in high school and college. I still, to this day, will dream that I'm a waiter at the same restaurant. And I may only have one table, but I just can't get water to them.
Every time I go there, somebody stops me and asks me to do something. And I just keep thinking, I've got to get to this table. And it's 20 minutes. I still can't get to them. To this day, I'll probably have this dream in two weeks when school starts.
I still dream to this day that I'm back at Westmore High School. And they'll say, Michael, you've got a final today. And I'll say, I graduated 30 years ago. They'll say, I'm sorry.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

You're enrolled in this class. You've got to take a final. And I'm like, I've been to school for 10 years since I finished Westmore. They said, it doesn't matter. I'm sorry. You've got to take a final. And I'll wake up sweaty and nervous.
[17:05] And I graduated high school 30 years ago. Well, this is not a pretend. This is a real thing.

This is the Lord appearing to Abimelech and saying, behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken. She is a man's wife.
Now, why is Abimelech in this dangerous situation? Because of the sin of Abraham. Joel Beeky says it right when he says that our sin has a wide net.
Our sin never just affects us. Our sin has far reaching ripples. And notice it says in verse 3, but God came to Abimelech.
God is still working. God is still sovereign. In spite of all the circumstances and all the disobedience, even of the faithful man, Abraham, God is still working.
[18:17] Now, look what Abimelech says in verse 4. Abimelech had not approached her. He hadn't laid a hand on Sarah. And he said, Lord, will you kill an innocent people?

Did he himself, speaking of Abraham, didn't Abraham say to me, she is my sister? And didn't Sarah say, he is my brother? In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands, I have done this.
And isn't it interesting that the pagan king comes off looking far better than the patriarch Abraham does?
It's kind of like in the book of Jonah. When you read the book and you've got the prophet Jonah who just comes off looking really bad.
And yet, you've got the pagan king there who repents and calls for a fast over all the land. And you're just kind of sitting there going, what is going on?
[19:19] The people of God don't look like the people of God at all. God says in verse 6, yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this.

And look at this. I kept you from sinning against me. So many things here to consider.
God says, I kept you from sinning. God's sovereignty is far more powerful than we might even imagine. I kept you from sinning.
But look at the end of that sentence. I kept you from sinning against me. Now, what's the issue? The issue is Abimelech has taken a man's wife and his plan was to have a physical relationship with her.
That was his plan. He thinks it's just Abraham's sister. In reality, it's Abraham's wife.
[20:24] And the Lord says, I kept you from sinning against who? God says against me. And you say, wait a minute.

Shouldn't this be, I kept you from sinning against Abraham? That's his wife after all. And God makes clear here that our marriage is first.
about a covenant with God. That's the most important part of our marriage. I kept you from sinning against me.
I did not let you touch her. We know from later in the chapter that God struck Abimelech with some kind of an illness. That kept him from being able to have a relationship with her.
And it's very important that this happened. When God says, I did not let you touch her so that you would not sin against me, we are reminded that the way we treat our spouse speaks more about what we even believe about God than what we believe about ourself or our spouse.
[21:49] The way I treat my wife, Marcy, speaks first about what I believe about God, our Creator. It's very important for us to keep in mind. But let's do a little theological digging here.

Why is it so imperative that God in His sovereignty would prevent Abimelech from physically being with Sarah?
God can appear in a dream. And He does to Abimelech. God can give Abimelech a temporary illness to prevent him from having a relationship with her.
And He does. Why is it so important? Keep in mind, the covenant God made with Abraham is that he and Sarah would have a son, and through their son would come the promise of all the future people of God.
Everything about salvation is wrapped up in this promise, the line through which eventually we get the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. If Sarah is already pregnant with a child from Abraham, say she doesn't know she's pregnant yet, but if she is pregnant, and she has a physical union with Abimelech, they'll never know.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

[23:30] Is this Sarah and Abraham's child, or is this Sarah and Abimelech's child? If she has a physical relationship with Abimelech, and he gets her pregnant, then she will not be able to conceive another son for a long time from Abraham.

Everything about the covenant, everything about the promise is wrapped up in this very situation, and the Lord's sovereignty is greater than we could ever even imagine, because God is providentially protecting His promise, even though His own children act faithless.
Aren't you glad that your security rests in the character of your God, and not in your ability to earn your salvation?
We as believers have been called by God, chosen by God, saved by God, sealed by God, secured by God, kept by God, and the promise of our eternal reward is in His inability to fail on His promise.
God says, I appeared in a dream to Him, and I kept you from sinning against me.
[25:08] Old sins return if they're not put away. God's sovereignty is greater than we can imagine.
Let me give you a third thing. 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.
It's an amazing, amazing thing happens in verse 7. Now then, return the man's wife, speaking to Abimelech, return the man's wife, for he is a, what's your word?
Prophet. It's the first time in the Bible the word prophet's used, by the way. He's a prophet. The official role of prophet will not be given out in detail until Deuteronomy 18, but this is the first time we see the word used.
To be a prophet isn't just to predict the future before it happens. It's to speak forth the words of God.
And this is so interesting to me because think of how the Lord could have referred to Abraham.
[26:32] The Lord says to Abimelech, hey, you need to give the man's wife back. I know he lied to you. I know he acted in fear. I know he acted in the old sins. I know he did not do the right thing.

Give the man's wife back to him, for he is a, what could God have said here? He's a liar? Give the man's wife back to him.
He's a bit of a coward. Give the man's wife back to him. He still dabbles in old sins, you know.
But what does God say? Return the man's wife, for he is a prophet.
Even in the weakness and the sin of Abraham, God still says, he's my guy.
[27:39] It's amazing. Because you could look at Abraham and in complete honesty say, this guy's just a cheat. This guy's just weak.

This guy just tries to protect himself. Those things are all true. And God says, in spite of his weakness, he still speaks for me.
He's still my prophet. I still claim him. It's amazing that in grace, God does not speak of Abraham as the sum of his failures.
Instead, he speaks to him of his usefulness for the kingdom. Some of you need to hear that this morning.
Some of you aren't proud of things you've done in your past. You may not be proud of what you did last night. And the enemy may try to convince you that because of your sin, because of your failure, because you gave in a temptation again, that God will have no use for you.
[29:11] Let me be clear. God's grace forgives. And if his grace doesn't forgive Abraham, it can't forgive you.

But if he can forgive Abraham, he can forgive you too. Now, does that mean we should take sin lightly? The New Testament speaks to that.
Should we just sin more and more so that God has to forgive and God's grace can abound?
Romans says, God forbid we would ever use his grace as a license or an excuse for our sin.
Absolutely not. not. But I do want you to know that God uses broken sinners.
He forgives. He restores. And he uses them. And there may be things in your life that you wish for all the world you could undo.
[30:19] There may be things you have done and ways you've treated people. There may be parts of your life that just really frustrate you and disappoint you and make it very hard for you to imagine God could still use you.

But our failures do not prohibit God's grace from being powerful through us. Return the man's wife for he is a prophet.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

Look what's next. Christ so that he will pray for you. Now if I'm a Bimelech I might be thinking I don't know if I want this guy to pray for me.
You got anybody else back there? Anybody who doesn't offer up his wife to a king? You? He's a prophet and he's going to pray for you.
Which leads us to a fourth truth and that is that even spiritual heroes are flawed. Even spiritual heroes are flawed.
[31:28] This is true in the Bible for sure. It's true in our life today. When you read about the heroes of the Bible we read about men like David Moses Abraham Peter strong men of faith except for the fact that Moses kills and Abraham lies and David cheats and Peter denies.

He's the best we got? Even our spiritual heroes are flawed. Look at verse 8. Abimelech rose early in the morning and called all his servants and told them 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 have been done. And Abimelech said to Abraham what did you see that you did this thing?
The pagan king rebukes and confronts the man of God. which reminds us that no matter who we are or are standing we must daily walk with the Lord.
[33:05] I mean if Abraham is capable of doing this let it remind us that all of us are capable of sin. And if you say to yourself why in Genesis 20 is Abraham being so foolish?

It's a fair question. I just caution you to have the courage to ask that of yourself too. Because see for all of us when we look at the foolishness in somebody else's life we see it so clearly yet so often miss the same glaring sins in our own heart.
We look at what somebody else does and say why would you do that? Why would you treat your spouse like that? Why do you lie like that? Why would you cheat like that?
Why would you be so full of pride like that? Why are you so worldly like that? Why don't you serve? Why don't you sacrifice? Why don't you love?
Why are you so materialistic? We see it in everybody else's life so clearly. but like the rearview mirrors used to say in the cars things may be closer than they appear.
[34:36] The pride you see in somebody else's life the laziness you see in your children that frustrates you the worldliness you see with your coworkers that frustrates you?

If we were honest those things may be much more near than they appear to us. Abimelech calls him out on it why have you done this?
Now what's going to happen in verse 11 is Abraham is going to offer up three excuses for why he did this. Abimelech says why did you lie to me and say that your wife is just your sister and in so doing God has to confront me and threaten to kill me.
Why have you done this? Excuse number one verse 11 Abraham said I did it because I thought there is no fear of God at all in this place and they will kill me because of my wife.
Abraham says well the reason I did this the reason I lied this way is it didn't seem to me that anybody here had any fear of God it seemed like an immoral evil place and I was afraid you would see my wife desire her for yourself and take her for yourself and if you did that probably kill me and I did it because everybody that I've met around here seems to have no fear of God just morally bankrupt people now I don't know what all the people were like but Abimelech seems to be responding at least in some way to what the Lord had said to him this feels like a pretty flimsy excuse here that Abraham offers up and the first thing he says is well I did this I lied because I didn't trust you what's he doing he's blaming somebody else for his failure you ever seen anyone in your life ever do that anybody ever blame somebody else for their failure when you're caught doing something wrong is your instinct ever to blame somebody else well the only reason
[36:52] I was speeding is I just don't agree with the speed limit well the only reason I raised my voice at you is because you just won't listen to me well the only reason why I stole the toy is because he wouldn't share it we're so good at this we're so good at this somebody confronts us with something we've done wrong we can blame somebody else without even thinking about it he gives a second excuse in verse 12 besides in other words if that didn't work let me give you a second one 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 he says she actually is my half sister which is true but that's not the intention with which he said it his purpose was very clear and it was very evident his purpose

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

was to deceive he tries to hide behind a technicality don't you love when you confront your child and they want to become

Perry Mason or if you're not old enough to know that one Matlock and if you're not old enough to become that one anyone that you know that likes to argue all of a sudden we want to become real technical don't we well technically I said I didn't exactly say and what we try to do is deceive with our words and find some loophole and sometimes we get by with it in a human sense but the Lord knows our heart let me be very clear with this God is never fooled by your word games never verse 13 he offers a third excuse and when
God caused me to wander from my father's house I said to her 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 this excuse is he says first of all the reason I lied about her is I didn't trust you guys y'all seem!
like a scoundrels and not just that but in a technical sense she is my half sister so I didn't really say anything that was altogether wrong and besides that we've been doing this for years ever since God told me to start wandering around city to city this was the agreement we made I told my wife whenever we come to a new town if it gets a little risky I'm going to tell them you're my sister and you play along with it here's what Abraham says is a third excuse we've been doing this for years he had gotten so used to living by this deception that the words just rolled off his tongue without ever having to think about it is every bad grade you make the teacher's fault is every mistake you make on the football field the referee's fault is everything you do at work when you were lazy your boss's fault is every time you disobey because your parents just don't understand kids these days is every time you lose your temper with your spouse because they just don't pay attention to you see for all of us we can get so used to making an excuse for our sin we don't even have to plan it it's just there it's just on the tip of our tongue we can lie and we can blame someone else and we can make excuses for it and is there a little tinge here of blaming
God verse 13 ever since God caused me to wonder after all I would have stayed home God's the one who told me to leave it does it sound to you a little bit like Genesis 3 God the woman you gave to me deceived me yeah if you can't blame somebody else you can always blame God God if you would have just answered this prayer I wouldn't have acted God if you would just give me what I want I wouldn't have to be so envious and Abraham just offers up excuse after excuse after excuse why because even spiritual heroes are flawed let me show you one last thing all that we've looked at this is the one thing I want you to walk away with prayer is always the right response regardless of our condition prayer is always the right response regardless of our condition look at verse 14 [42:43] Abimelech then took sheep and oxen and male and female servants and gave them to Abraham and returned his wife Sarah to him and Abimelech said behold my land is before you settle wherever you please see at this point Abimelech is not impressed with Abraham though he is impressed by Abraham's God verse 16 to Sarah he said watch this look I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver little sarcasm little rebuke there Sarah by the way I've given your brother remember that is of course who he told me he was it amounts to 25 pounds of silver it's your vindication before all who are with you and before everyone that you are cleared that Abraham prayed to God and God healed

Abimelech and his wife and his female slave so they gave birth to children because the Lord had completely closed all the wombs of the household of Abimelech because of Sarah Abraham's wife now there is a lot here to be frustrated about with Abraham but don't miss this Abraham prays for Abimelech to have children what is the biggest pain in Abraham's life that he and Sarah have not been able to have children the faltering prophet even on the heels of his sin and deception will still pray for another man to receive the very blessing that to this point had been withheld from him Abraham had forfeited the right to preach to Abimelech do you think Abimelech wants to hear Abraham's sermon no chance but he can pray for him you think Abimelech wants to take Abraham's discipleship class no way but Abraham can pray for him and he does in verse 17 Abraham prayed to God and God healed Abimelech this is amazing because even in a chapter where we see the worst of Abraham we see the best of Abraham's God God is still
El Shaddai the God with all the power and if God can use Abraham even though he lied and Moses even though he murdered and David even though he cheated and Peter even though he denied if God's grace can cover their sin and use them for his glory brothers and sisters God's grace can forgive you we are all faltering saints held by a faithful God so students you go back to school in a few days and there's some people there who know your worst days they know what you did last

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

year they know how you talked two years ago there's people that you think to yourself if I go and share the gospel with them they're going to say but didn't you used to do this we know who you were we know your past maybe but
God can forgive God can restore and even if someone won't let you speak to them they can never keep you from praying for them and our God still moves on behalf of those who trust in him Lord we thank you for your word and pray that it would be an encouragement to these dear people today I pray Lord that you would help each of us to have our confidence in you and even where we have been weak and failed in your grace that we would repent you would restore and use even imperfect people like us to accomplish your will in Christ's name amen

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host