

Henry Ow
HCC Sermon
Genesis 16:1-6

The God Who Sees Me

INTRODUCTION

1. Image: God helps those who help themselves.
2. Need: We wonder sometimes: Does God see me?
3. Subject: What should we do when we believe God averts his gaze from us?
4. Text: Gen 16:1-16
5. Preview:
 - a. What do we do when we believe that God doesn't see our troubles?
 - b. What happens when we take things into our own hands?
 - c. What do we need to remember when we face trouble?

BODY

- I. Belief that God doesn't see our troubles causes us to take things into our own hands (16:1-3).
 - A. Sarai's belief that God didn't see her affliction caused her to take things into her own hands (16:1-3).
 1. Sarai and Abram had not been able to conceive a child for 10 years (16:3)
 2. Sarai believed that God didn't see her affliction because he refused to open her womb (16:2)
 3. Sarai plans to give Abram her servant Hagar to conceive a child (16:2)
 - B. We think God doesn't see our trouble when God does follow our timeline.
 - C. We feel tempted to take things into our own hands because we don't think God cares about us.
 1. We take things into our own hands when we decide to date an unbeliever rather than wait for God to provide a believer for us to date.
 2. We take things into our own hands when we decide to false guilt to motivate people to serve rather than trust God to direct our ministry.
 3. We take things into our own hands when we decide to lie about qualifications to get a job rather than trust God to provide for us work suited to our abilities.
- II. When we take things into our own hands, it often leads to more trouble than we expect (16:4-6).
 - A. Sarai's plan causes trouble within Abram's family.
 1. The text's allusions to Genesis 3 spell trouble for Abram's family.
 2. Hagar looks down upon Sarai after she conceives (16:4)
 3. Sarai demands that Abram do something (16:5)
 4. Abram fails to recognize Hagar as his wife (16:6)
 5. Sarai's mistreatment of Hagar causes Hagar to feel (16:6b)
 - B. Taking things into our own hands often results in trouble.
 1. Dating a nonbeliever causes trouble internally and externally.

2. Motivating people to serve through false guilt leads them to wanting to serve less.
 3. Too many extracurricular activities can result in a child not caring about faith as they grow older.
- III. Only God can redeem a troublesome situation because he does see our trouble (16:7-16).
- A. God redeems the troublesome situation because he sees Hagar's trouble (16:7-16).
 1. God acknowledges Hagar when he calls her by name (16:7-8)
 2. God redeems the troublesome situation when he includes her descendants in the Abrahamic promise (16:10-12)
 3. Hagar acknowledges that God sees her (16:13-14)
 4. Ishmael reminds Abram's family that he sees and hears their trouble (16:9, 15-16) .
 - B. Pray to God for help because he sees your trouble.
 1. Pray for God's help when you feel discontent with your singleness.
 2. Pray for God to help you let things go when there's not enough help in ministry.
 3. Pray for God to help you let go of fearing that your child will not get into a school.

CONCLUSION

1. Summary: Belief that God doesn't see our troubles causes us to take things into our own hands. When we take things into our own hands, it often leads to more trouble than we expect. Only God can redeem a troublesome situation because he does our trouble.
2. Closing Image: Faith is only as good as its object. (Warren Weirsbe)

MANUSCRIPT

We often wonder: “Does God see the situation I’m in?” whenever we face a challenging situation. For instance, we have a desire to get married. But we’ve experienced a long season of singleness. Every believer we've dated didn’t work out. Does God see my dating situation? Maybe it’s a situation where you want to step down as a leader of a bible study, but you can’t find anyone to step up. Doesn’t God know that this bible study will dissolve without a leader? Maybe you submit your resume to multiple companies. You receive a polite email that says: “Thank you for applying but we don’t think you’d be a good fit” for some jobs. You receive nothing from others. Does God see the bind I’m in? You pray to God for help. No answer. Silence. It’s as though the line to heaven is busy. Only the small print word: delivered appears under your text bubble. We wonder: Does God see me? Does he see my trouble? Is he even paying attention?

What should we do in those moments? **What should we do when we believe God averts his gaze from us?** How should we respond when we feel God seems unresponsive? What do we do when we think God fails to see our trouble? Fails to see our situation. What do we do?

To answer this question, we’ll turn to Genesis, chapter 16. Genesis, chapter 16. Thank you, Lexi, for reading this morning’s text. Again, we’re in Genesis, chapter 16.

This summer, we’re going through a series on the book of Genesis. We decided this summer to focus on the life of Abraham. Let me give you a recap of Abraham’s life so far.

Previously in the life of Abraham, God had just helped Abram defeat several kings to rescue his nephew Lot. Following this episode, God reaffirms his covenant to Abram that he would make his descendants as numerous as the stars and his descendants would inherit the

land. While Abram believed God, he still lacked a son. No child. This brings us to chapter 16 of Genesis.

In this text, we'll answer three questions. We'll ponder about three things in the text. Let's think about these questions in sequence.

First, what do we do when we believe that God doesn't see our troubles? What is our typical response when we fail to see God at work? What are we tempted to do when we think God doesn't care about us?

Belief that God doesn't see our troubles causes us to take things into our own hands.

When we think that God is too busy to help, we help ourselves. We decide to adopt the mentality: God helps those who help themselves. If God doesn't want to do anything to help me get out of this situation, then I'm going to do something. **Belief that God doesn't see our troubles causes us to take things into our own hands.**

We see this in the text when **Sarai believes that God doesn't see her affliction causing her to take things into her own hands.** Sarai thinks to herself: If God doesn't do something about my problem, then I'm going to do something about it. What is the problem?

God promised Abram a child. But for ten years, there's no children. Every month for one hundred and twenty months, they waited to see if Sarai was pregnant. Nothing. Sarai and Abram had not been able to conceive a child for 10 years.

Look at the first half of verse 1. *Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children.* It's difficult to be the father of many children without even a single child.

Not having a child was a dilemma. In the ancient near east not being able to conceive a child would be considered shameful. Women had one primary role. Bear children. And Sarai

believed that God didn't care. He didn't see her. Why? Her womb remained closed. **Sarai believed that God didn't see her affliction because he refused to open her womb.** Look at verse 2. *And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children.* Look. See how God doesn't care. He hasn't allowed us to have children.

But Sarai has plans of her own. She decides to take the initiative. She takes things into her own hands. Maybe God needs a little help. **Sarai plans to give Abram her servant Hagar to conceive a child.** Hagar will serve as a surrogate.

Where does Sarai get this idea of using a surrogate? If a wife in the Ancient Near East failed to produce a child for their husband, then they could use their female servant as a surrogate. The husband would conceive a child with the female servant and the resultant child would be considered the child of the mistress. We might look at this practice as odd. But it occurred regularly in ancient times because they prioritized the birth of children.

Now Moses introduces Hagar in the latter half of verse 1. Look at it. *She had a female Egyptian servant whose name is Hagar.* Sarai explains the plan in the latter half of verse 2. *Go into my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.*

What is Abram's response? Does he say: "No, Sarai! God promised us a child. We need to wait for him. We need to trust. We need to believe in him." Nope. Hear the remainder of verse 2. *Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.* Maybe he thought the same thing as Sarai. Well... I guess if God doesn't want to do anything, then we've got to try something.

And they follow through with Sarai's plan. Look at verse 3. *So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife.*

Many of us can relate to Sarai. **We think that God doesn't see our trouble when he doesn't follow our timeline.** Sarai might have expected to have conceived a child five years after Abram received the promise from God. She didn't expect to wait five years. We might expect to be married by 25. We never expected to still be single at 30. Does God see my trouble? I didn't expect to be serving in this ministry for so many years. I hoped that someone would have replaced me by now. Does God not see my dilemma? Yes. I expected to apply for jobs for months. But I didn't expect to still be submitting resumes for a year. What is going on? Does God not want me to be employed?

As these thoughts linger, we decide to take things into our own hands. We sense that we need to help God. Maybe we can get him to move along. **We decide to take things into our own hands because we don't think God cares about us.**

Since all the believers we've dated are duds, we decided to expand my search range on my dating app. We'll include people from other faith backgrounds. We think we're strong enough in my faith. An unbeliever would not draw us away from God. No way. Besides, maybe as we date my unbelieving partner will be more open to the gospel. Who knows? God might use us to bring our significant other to faith. After all, God can do all things right?

Ok... If no one decides to step up to serve in this ministry, then it's time for me to motivate them to serve. Maybe people need some "conviction". We decide to employ the tool of "false guilt" to motivate people to serve. What do I mean by false guilt? Let me illustrate that for you. "Hey Jim! I noticed that you've been faithfully attending Bible study and you make some great contributions. Would you ever consider serving as a Bible study leader? No one else is willing to serve now. It would be a shame if we had to end this Bible study because we

couldn't find a leader. Think about all those people who won't grow in their relationship with God. Think about their eternal destiny. You're their only hope. Think about it." I think you get what I'm saying.

When you fail to receive any invitations for an interview, you decide to shift strategy. It's time to alter the resume. You've taken a single class on design software. Instead of writing: "Able to use CAD software" you decide to put down "Expert in using CAD software". Maybe you apply for a job in hospitality because you took a class in hospitality at UH. Instead of writing: "Took a hospitality class from UH" you decide to write: "Attended UH hospitality school". You see a position that requires fluency in Spanish. You took a few classes in High school. You write moderate fluency in Spanish when you can barely hold a conversation.

We decide to take things into our own hands when we don't think God cares for us. We feel the need to take charge because God seems to be ignoring us. Maybe he needs our help.

This leads us to the second question for us to ponder this morning. What happens when we take things into our own hands? What results when we decide to "help God out"? What occurs when we decide to engage in questionable behavior to get what we want?

When we take things into our own hands, it often leads to more trouble than we expect. Our efforts lead to more complications. Our plans result in more difficulties. It could create more issues. Helping God out often leads to more misfortune. **When we take things into our own hands, it often leads to more trouble than we expect.**

We see this in the text. **Sarai's plan causes trouble within the Abram's family.** There are details within the text that indicate trouble. First, The text's allusions to Genesis 3 spell trouble Abram's family. Look again at verse 3. *Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.* Remember how God

cursed Adam because he listened to the voice of his wife. Look again at verse 3. Note the verbs. Took.... Gave... Remember how Eve took the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil and gave it to Adam to eat. What is Moses trying to say here? Although it was permissible in Ancient Near East society for a husband to take a surrogate, God was not pleased that Sarai and Abram took things into their own hands. It resembled Adam and Eve doing what was right in their eyes. If you read the text, then you'll see how many words have connection to sight. Behold. Verse 2. Looked. Verse 4. Looked. Verse 5. To be followers of God means trusting God by doing things how he sees is right. How often do we find ourselves taking things into our own hands to do things according to the way of the world rather than according to the way of God?

Think about also the allusions to Abram's time in Egypt. When Abram went down to Egypt, he instructed Sarai to lie about her marriage to him so that she could potentially be another Egyptian man's wife. Here, Sarai tells Abram to separate from her and to marry another woman, Hagar. What goes around, comes around. But this again demonstrates a lack of faith on the part of Abram and Sarai. They decide to take things into their own hands. It will only lead to trouble.

We see even more trouble in the text. **Hagar looks down upon Sarai after she conceives.** Look at the latter half of verse 4. *And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress.* To look with contempt means to see someone beneath them. Now Hagar didn't say anything. But you and I know that you don't have to say anything to treat someone with contempt. I imagine Hagar strutting around with her baby bump. Every time Hagar sees Sarai, she gives her bump a little rub. Maybe there's a little nod. Hagar uses every nonverbal cue to say to Sarai: See this bump. Move over. I'm the matriarch of this family.

Well. Sarai won't have any of this. **Sarai demands Abram do something.** Look at verse 5. *And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you!* In other words, Sarai blames Abram for this. *I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw she had conceived, she looked at me with contempt. May the LORD judge between me and you!* Abram failed to protect Sarai, his wife, from Hagar's contempt. Per Ancient Near East custom, the husband had the responsibility to keep the slave woman, who conceived, in check. But he doesn't do anything. Look at verse 6. *But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your servant is the in your power; do to her as you please".* Abram says: I'm not going to do anything. But if you want to do something, then you're free to do it.

But there's another problem. Although Hagar conceives a child, **Abram never recognizes her as his wife.** Although it's clear in the text that Moses identifies Hagar as Abram's wife, Abram and Sarai only use Hagar's title. Servant. They don't even acknowledge her name. They see her as an instrument for their plans.

The trouble climaxes when **Sarai's mistreatment of Hagar causes Hagar to flee.** Look at the latter half of verse 6. *Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her.* Note the phrase dealt harshly. It's the same word used to describe how the Egyptians would afflict the Israelites in the book of Exodus. It's ironic. A Hebrew master afflicts an Egyptian slave. The slave flees. Abram's house is in complete chaos. Hagar loses a home. Sarai loses a servant. Abram loses a child. Troublesome.

Now let's take a moment to reflect. It's easy to say: "Are Abram and Sarai meant to be exemplars of faith?" They behave more like Canaanites than God's people. But don't we do the

same things? We take things into our own hands thinking we know best. Let me take control, God. Let me do what I think is right.

But if we're honest, then we would admit that **taking things into our own hands often results in trouble**. Doing things our way leads to disaster. It produces more problems.

Let's think about the examples I referenced earlier. Dating a nonbeliever causes trouble internally and externally. I mean that affects us and our relationships. Other believers choose to talk to us about how foolish our decision to date a nonbeliever is. It prevents us from being able to serve in a leadership capacity. If we're leading a small group, then it might require us to step down leading to the group to dissolve. If we're leading a SS class, then it requires other teachers to expend energy to cover for us. It might cause tension between us and believing parents. But dating a nonbeliever also causes troubles internally. We want to go to Bible study. Our significant other would rather go watch a movie. We take them to church. But they find the service boring. We feel like we're pulled into two different paths. We enjoy the relationship with this person, but we can't seem to enjoy your relationship with God. It causes trouble.

Think about motivating people to serve through false guilt. I confess that I have done this in the past. Hopefully, I don't do this anymore. But if you catch me doing it, then feel free to call me out. Think about it. Let's say you guilt trip a person to serve as a Bible study leader. Do you think that he would enjoy the experience? Do you think he would serve again? In fact, when they see you walking down the hallway, they decide to walk in the opposite direction to avoid you. **Motivating people to serve through false guilt leads to people wanting to serve less.**

Let's talk about embellishing your resume. Embellishing your resume could get you into trouble. The hiring manager typically runs a background check. If you put down a school you

didn't attend, then they'll know. If you decide to put down a skill you know, then an interviewer might test you on the spot. Here's the CAD program. Could you design a gyroscope for me using this program? They may even conduct the entire interview in Spanish. It will be embarrassing as they discover that you don't have the skill sets as advertised. And you'll still be out of work.

This brings us to the final question. What are we supposed to do when we face trouble? What should we know at those moments? What should we recall?

Only God can redeem a troublesome situation because he does see our trouble. We may feel like God has turned a blind eye. But he hasn't. He still has his eyes on you. He knows your difficult situation. Only God can help you. **Only God can redeem a troublesome situation because he does see our trouble.**

We see this in the text as well. **God redeems Abram's troublesome situation because he sees Hagar's trouble.** He sees Hagar's trouble and intervenes. His intervention will also help to resolve the issue with Abram and Sara. Look at verse 7. *The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur.* This is the first time in the Bible when an angel of the LORD appears. The angel of the LORD serves as a representative for God. Think about the US press secretary. When she speaks, she speaks for the white house. When they address the press secretary, they address the address office. The angel of the LORD is a stand in for God.

Note the word found connotes the idea that God chooses someone. This verse indicates that Hagar is one of God's chosen people. She is elect. Think about where God stops her. He stops her at Shur. Shur serves as the boundary between Canaan and Egypt. If she crosses over to Egypt, she has left the promised land. But God stops her right before she exits the promised land. Let's turn our attention now to the dialogue.

God acknowledges Hagar when he calls her by name. Look at verse 8. *And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" She said, "I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai.* As I mentioned before, no one addresses Hagar by name. This is the first instance. God calls her by name but also recognizes her status: servant of Sarai. Hagar even acknowledges that Sarai is her mistress.

God acknowledges Hagar. Next, **he includes her descendants in the Abrahamic promise.** This is how he redeems the troublesome situation. God redeems the troublesome situation when he includes her descendants in the Abrahamic promise. Look at verse 10. *The angel of the LORD also said to her, "I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude".* That sounds familiar doesn't it. She receives the same promise given to Abram. For her children will be included in the promise of blessing. Let's continue in verse 11. *And the angel of the LORD said to her, "Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the LORD listened to your affliction. He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen.* The angel informs Hagar of the gender of the child. It will be a boy. And this boy will resemble a wild donkey. Just as a wild donkey does his own thing, so will Ishmael. He will also be in constant conflict with his neighbors. He and the future descendants of the Abram will not dwell together. This doesn't sound like a child of promise. But he is nonetheless a child of Abram.

After this disclosure, **Hagar acknowledges that God sees her.** Look at verse 13. *So she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, "You are a God of seeing," for she said, "Truly here I have seen him who looks after me." Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it lies*

between Kadesh and Bered. Note the words: see. God of seeing. Him who looks after me. Even the name of the place: Beer Lahai roi has the word sight in it. If you look at the word: Beer Lahai Roi in your Bible, then you'll see a footnote. The footnote says that it means: The well of Living one who sees me. God does see her trouble.

God intends to send her back. Look at the instructions. Verse 9. *The angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress and submit to her."* Now you may be wondering: Why does God send her back? It sounds cruel to send Hagar back to experience the affliction of her mistress. But God has a message for Abram and Sarai. The message is in Hagar's womb. It's the boy, Ishmael. What does the name Ishmael mean? Look at the footnote. It basically means, the Lord sees. And what does verse 11 say: *You shall call his name Ishmael because the LORD has listened to your affliction.* God sees the affliction of Abram and Sarai just as he saw the affliction of Hagar. He's not distant. In fact, he hears. But will they cry out to him for help? Will they look to him for guidance? **Ishmael reminds Abram's family that he sees and hears their trouble.**

Note the emphasis on Hagar and Abram in the last two verses. Look at verse 15. *And Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.* Sarai is absent from these verses. She watches as Hagar gives birth to a son. Instead of attempting to take things into her own hands, she needed to learn to pray and trust God.

What is the lesson for us? If we know that only God can redeem a troublesome situation because he does see our trouble, then we have one thing to do. Pray. **Pray to God for help because he sees our trouble.**

Pray to God for help when you feel discontent with your singleness. It might sound something like: Heavenly Father, you are the one who provides for all my needs. You know that I desire to be married. I want to have a family one day. But I feel disappointed that no one I ever dated ever worked out. Help me though at this moment to find contentment in you. Instead of finding contentment in dating, getting married, and having a family, teach me what it means to have a holy contentment. Enable me to trust in your timing. In Jesus's name. Amen. This means remaining firm on your convictions to date a believer. For you trust it's better to believe that God's instructions for you is better than taking things into your own hands.

Pray to God to help you let things go when there's not enough help in ministry. I think the prayer might go something like this: Heavenly Father. You say that your word is God breathed and useful for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness. I confess that I feel frustrated by the fact that no one is willing to lead this Bible study. I'm not sure what you're doing. But if I don't find another leader, then I'll have to end the Bible study. It's hard for me to say that because I want it to continue. For the sake of my family and myself, I can't continue leading. Please give me direction on what to do. Whatever you direct, I will humbly submit. In Jesus's name. Amen. We often need to deal with our own expectations in ministry. We think that a ministry should continue when God might want the ministry to cease. It's better to allow a ministry to stop rather than motivate a person via false guilt to serve. Maybe someone will pick up the Bible study again later. Are we willing to submit to God's will?

Pray for God to help you not to embellish your resume but be honest. After all, God knows the job that fits your gifts and temperament. Consider asking him for help. A prayer might sound like this: Heavenly Father. You created human beings to work. You gave me skills to

utilize so that I might bless our community. But I confess that it has been hard being unemployed the last six months. It's discouraging to receive rejection letters. I admit that I feel tempted at times to embellish my resume. But I know that you want me to be honest. Help me Lord to trust that you will provide for me a job that fits. In Jesus's name. Amen.

What did we see in this text? Belief that God doesn't see our troubles causes us to take things into our own hands. What happens when we take things into our own hands? It often leads to more trouble than we expect. What should we remember when facing a troublesome situation? Only God can redeem a troublesome situation because he sees our trouble. What should we do? Pray.

Let me close with a quote from the pastor. Faith is only as good as its object. If we trust people, we get what people can do; if we trust money, we get what money can do; if we trust ourselves, we get what we can do; if we trust God, we get what God can do. When trouble arises, let us trust God rather than take things into our own hands. After all, he sees our trouble and hears our prayers.