

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar; ² so she said to Abram, "The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her."

Abram agreed to what Sarai said. ³ So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. ⁴ He slept with Hagar, and she conceived.

When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. ⁵ Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me."

⁶ "Your servant is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best." Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her.

⁷ The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. ⁸ And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?"

"I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered.

⁹ Then the angel of the LORD told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." ¹⁰ The angel added, "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count."

¹¹ The angel of the LORD also said to her:

*"You are now with child
and you will have a son.
You shall name him Ishmael,
for the LORD has heard of your misery.*

*¹² He will be a wild donkey of a man;
his hand will be against everyone
and everyone's hand against him,
and he will live in hostility
toward all his brothers."*

¹³ She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me." ¹⁴ That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered.

¹⁵ So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne. ¹⁶ Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael. (Genesis 16:1-16)

We Need to See Christ

Have you ever noticed that sign that's printed on the back of semi trailers? It says something like, "If you can't see my mirrors, I can't see you." Why would I care if a truck driver can see me? Because his vehicle is a whole lot bigger than mine, if the driver can't see me, he just might splat my little sedan or minivan all over the road. Usually seeing is a two way street. If I can see you that usually means that you can see me. But there are some exceptions. Soldiers are taught to use camouflage so that they can see the enemy without being seen themselves. Police officers use those little cameras to see what's going on in a room without letting the criminals see them. But those are exceptions to the rule that generally holds: if you can't see me, I can't see you. God is one of the exceptions. He sees us, even though we can't see him. This morning, in the book of Genesis, we have an example of God coming and showing himself to someone so that that person understood that God did see her. In her experience, he taught us to use our eyes of faith to see what our physical eyes can't.

We need to see Christ.

I. We need to see Christ to be certain that he sees us.

II. We need to see Christ to be able to reflect his love.

I.

The person that we're considering is Hagar. She was going through a tough time in her life. She could not see God's hand in the difficulties she faced. She teaches us an important lesson: **we need to see Christ to be certain that he sees us.**

Who was Hagar? She was an Egyptian slave of Sarah, the wife of Abraham. Sarah had a problem: she had been unable to have children and she was 75 years old. So she offered her slave Hagar as a surrogate wife to Abraham. Sarah's plan was that if Hagar conceived, her child would be considered to be Sarah's because Sarah owned Hagar. Very few people today would come up with a solution like this. But in that time and place, this was not as hair brained as it might seem to us today. They lived in a slave owning culture in which Abraham was probably fairly unique among wealthy men because he did not have a harem of wives and concubines.

But the fact that this solution made sense doesn't mean that it pleased God. And as so often happens when we come up with bright ideas that don't agree with God's command, this plan turned out to be a disaster. As soon as Hagar became pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. In that time and place, bearing children was the greatest honor a woman could have. Since Sarah couldn't and Hagar could, Hagar probably figured that she could take over as the number one wife and bump Sarah down. But Sarah clung to her position. In fact, she blamed Abraham for the whole disaster! Abraham, who went along with this scheme, went along with Sarah's vindictive behavior afterwards. And the end result was that Sarah "mistreated" Hagar. The Hebrew word here really means that she put her in her place and it implies physical abuse.

My friends, how often don't we find ourselves in situations like Hagar's? Now, obviously, we aren't slaves and the specific family situation has only the most general kinds of parallels. But the heart of Hagar's problem was the sinful behavior of believers. She was miserable because of things that other believers did to her. Sarah and Abraham decided to make her into a baby factory for their benefit – she had no say in the matter. And Sarah abused her to satisfy her own wounded pride and Abraham let her do it. My friends how often don't other believers make us angry? How often aren't we hurt by people that we expected better from – by people that we thought were examples of Christian faith and life? Sometimes, those Christians are members of our own family – parents, spouses, children, siblings. Sometimes, they're pastors and teachers. Sometimes they're members of our congregation. When they don't treat us as Christians should treat each other, we feel angry and hurt. And how often haven't we ourselves contributed to the situation? Hagar didn't make her life any easier by despising her mistress. That was sin, just as surely as Abraham and Sarah's treatment of her was sin. How often don't we forget our own part in the misery that others cause us?

Hagar tried to solve her problem by running away. Eventually she wound up at an oasis in the desert. And the Angel of the LORD appeared to her. Now, the Angel of the LORD here means more than a created angel like Gabriel. This angel said, **"I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count."** That's exactly the promise that God had given to Abraham and the Angel of the LORD repeated it as something he was going to do. The Angel of the LORD is God. In fact, we can be more specific. The Hebrew word of "angel" means "messenger." He speaks God's Word. In the very first chapter of John, God calls Jesus before he enters this world "the Word." He's the one who communicates God to us. The Angel of the LORD here is Christ before he's born in Bethlehem! Jesus appeared to Hagar and promised that her son, Ishmael, would share in the blessings God had promised to Abraham. That promise changed everything. .

Hagar went back. But before she did, she said, **"You are the God who sees me ... I have now seen the One who sees me."** Hagar rejoiced because God saw her. That tells us great deal about her mental state. When Sarah was using and abusing her, Hagar felt miserable and sorry for herself. She felt alone and friendless and abandoned by God. She couldn't see how God could possibly see her – how he could possibly be working in the way that Abraham and Sarah were treating her.

When we feel angry and hurt and miserable, don't we often feel sorry for ourselves? We may question why God is letting all this happen to us. Or we may just forget that he's there. We may be so self-absorbed that we don't think about him at all. We run away. We pout. Our wounded pride leads us to even more sinful behavior. And the more we focus on ourselves, the harder it is for us to see God working for us in our misery.

But in Hagar, we see God's solution: seeing Christ. That's what Christmas is all about. It's about seeing the God who sees us. In all our misery, in all the problems that we cause ourselves, in all the hurts that other sinners inflict on us, including the hurts caused by other Christians, Christ sees us. He is with us – he proved that when he was born as one of us. And he calls us to repent of our pathetic pride that wallows in our

misery. He calls us to see him – to trust that he is watching over us and guiding our lives and yes, even allowing misery to come into our lives so that he can bring us home to heaven. When we see that child in the manger as the God who sees us, when we see Jesus as the Savior who is intimately involved in our lives because he died to pay for our pride and sin and he rose to bring us home, that changes our attitudes about our lives. We trust in his love for us. We find joy even in difficult situations.

II.

In our gospel lesson for today, John wrote, **“No one has ever seen God.”** Yet, Hagar said, **“I have now seen the One who sees me.”** Did John forget these words? No. Both statements are true. John is talking about the Father. No one has ever seen the Father, at least not face to face. Hagar was talking about God the Son. And in our Bible there’s a footnote that offers an alternative translation: **“I have seen the back of the One who sees me.”** I don’t know why that’s only in the footnote, because that’s exactly what the Hebrew says. Now, Hagar did not mean that the Angel of the LORD had his back turned to her. Rather, she recognized that she was not seeing the full glory of God. We don’t even get to see what she saw. We don’t get to see Christ face to face. We see him only in the message. But in that glimpse of Christ, we see God. And we need to do that. **We need to see Christ to be able to reflect his love.**

When Hagar saw her Savior, she went back to Sarah and submitted to her. And it’s clear that Hagar told Abraham – and presumably Sarah – what had happened to her. The Angel of the LORD commanded Hagar to name her unborn son Ishmael. That’s what Abraham named the boy. All this shows Hagar’s faith. Where did Hagar get that faith? She was an Egyptian. The Egyptians did not worship the true God. There is only one place she could’ve learned that faith: in the household of Abraham. Even though she was a slave there, even though her fellow believers mistreated her, she had the blessing of knowing the true God through them. Her faith enabled her to reflect Christ’s love, by going home, by submitting, by sharing what God had done for her. The Angel of the Lord come to strengthen the faith that ultimately brought her to heaven.

John said in our gospel lesson, **“No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.”** He’s talking about Christ. He’s talking about the whole point of Christmas. Jesus came into this world to make the true God known to us. But in the manger, he didn’t show us God’s glory in fire and smoke. He showed us God’s glory in love and sacrifice. God’s greatest glory is God the Son’s willingness to join himself to our lives, so that we can join him.

You see, none of us can really see God. Hagar couldn’t look God in the face in all his glory. Why not? Because we’re all sinners. Sin doesn’t just make our lives harder and more complicated. It doesn’t just hurt the people around us who expect better from us. It doesn’t just leave us feeling guilty and downhearted. Sin separates us from God. It makes us outcasts who can only die and go to hell. So when God came into this world to save us, he came in the body of baby. He lived in our place. He lived a life without sin. He sacrificed and he paid for us so that by his life and death and life again, our sin is paid for and taken away forever.

And in that promise that our sin is gone, we do see Jesus. Not with our physical eyes – but just like he did with Hagar, God has worked through the imperfect people in our families and our churches and he has given us faith. He’s worked through pastors and teachers who disappoint us again and again. He’s worked through parents and siblings, through other members and their families – through people who at times have so totally hurt our feelings that maybe we’ve even considered leaving our church. God used all those people to tell us what Jesus has done for us. To baptize us. To give us communion. To hear our confession and tell us we are forgiven.

Every time we heard that gospel, every time we came to communion, every time we remembered our baptism God the Holy Spirit showed us Jesus. He reached into our hearts and turned us back to the manger and to the cross and to the empty tomb. We saw Jesus living a perfect life in our place. We saw Jesus dying to pay for all the times that we were responsible for hurting others. We saw Jesus rising and saying that all that sin is forgiven and promising us a new and better life to come with him.

That promise is ours today. We will live with Christ. We will see him and the Father and the Holy Spirit. When we die, we’ll see God in heaven while we wait for the resurrection. When Christ returns, these bodies will be glorified. We will see God with these physical eyes. Because we won’t have any sin anymore, we’ll be able to look straight at him. And we will live forever with him and with all the angels of heaven and with all the saints on earth in a perfect fellowship. Never again will we hurt anyone. Never again will anyone hurt us.

Until that day comes, God calls us to live a life that shows that we do see Christ by faith. Daily, God calls us to drown the sinner inside and to trust him. To show an attitude of love and forgiveness for the people around us – whether they deserve it or not. To submit to those authorities God has placed over us because we trust in God who runs our lives. To testify with our lives about Christ in hopes that God will give us the chance to share with our lips what he has done for us. In that way, we will help others see Jesus. Our words, our actions, our attitudes will reflect the love that we have experienced. My friends, reflect that love! Amen.