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February 7, 2021

GENESIS 20

Series: Understanding Your Roots

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we look at the snow and it is beautiful. It's hard to say that when we rake it off the Barn roof or we have to drive through it and I can be challenging. But it is really pretty to see the majesty of your creation. So thank you. We thank you for who you are, and especially who you are in our individual lives. So Lord, I ask for a special blessing on me today that as I share you would empower me with memory so I can remember the things that you've shared with me that you want me to share today. I pray for the receptivity on the parts of those who are listening, that you would soften the hearts, that the seed planted would grow significantly in the hearts of people today. We're grateful for who you are, what you're doing in our lives. Lord, our hearts are open now. Please teach us. In Jesus' name, amen.

Did you know (I didn't know this before this week) that there are only three people in the Bible that are said to have integrity. Now there are lots of people who had integrity in the Bible, don't get me wrong. But only three people the word 'integrity' is used to describe them. One of them is Job. Remember the dialogue between the three friends in Job about whether his suffering was because of his sin. But no, he was a man of integrity and he was suffering. That was one example.

A second example is David, the man King David in the Old Testament. I love those stories of David. He was a man of integrity, often challenged. Even when he sinned he responded with integrity to that sin and to the repentance involved in that process. David was a great guy to do that. In fact I want to share with you as we're going forward the integrity psalm that he wrote. This is a psalm, Psalm 15. If we're going to define integrity we could go to Webster and we could find the definition there. We could go to Google and they have good ideas about what integrity is. But this is the Bible. Let's see what the Bible has to say about integrity. It says in Psalm 15 – *Lord, who may dwell in your sacred tent? Who may live on your holy mountain? The one whose walk is blameless, who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from their heart; whose tongue utters no slander, who does no wrong to a neighbor, and casts no slur on others; who despises a vile person but honors those who fear the Lord; who keeps an oath even when it hurts, and does not change their mind; who lends money to the poor without interest; who does not accept a bribe against the innocent. Whoever does these things will never be shaken.* So there's David speaking about integrity. I love what he says there. It's just a reminder of the practical things we can do and say as we are practicing integrity in our lives.

But today we're going to focus on the third guy. The interesting thing about this third guy is he's not a believer. He's a pagan king with integrity. And that's the story in Genesis 20. What makes the story even more interesting is here we have a pagan king with integrity (it says right in the

passage he has integrity) and he's facing off with a guy who believes in God who doesn't have integrity. Isn't that interesting? A guy who believes in God (Abraham) who doesn't have integrity facing off with a king who does have integrity. It's just a really interesting story. Let's go into the story in Genesis 20 and see what God has to say in this passage for us.

It says – *From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negeb and lived between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar.* Now he's down in southern Israel or below, right on the edge of Israel in the south and he is down there with all of his flocks. Remember he's got a lot of animals. We've already read that he has 318 fighting men that have been born into his household. So this guy's got a lot of animals, a lot of people that are part of his entourage. So he's nomadic; he goes down in this southern area and now he decides to go over to Gerar.

Now why is he going over to that area? Well likely because he needs more feed for his animals and so on. So he's going over there to Rome for a little bit. He's going over into this pagan place. This is Philistine territory he's going to work. He's going into this place where he's going to be faced with this pagan area and he's going to be doing that because work is driving him there. So we're going to talk today about going to work in a pagan place. Practical for many of you as you go to work each week.

He says – *Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister."* You've got to be saying to yourself, "Didn't we already do this story?" No. This is a second story. He already did this previously when he was in Egypt. He said to the king, "Oh she is my sister." Now we're going to see here that Abraham has a problem. A problem with his own integrity. He's lying at this point and he has this problem with integrity at work. It seems when he finds himself in these other places where he's got to face off at work he doesn't have the integrity he needs to face those things, so he lies and he says she's my sister. Why does he do that? Because he's thinking if they know she's my wife and she's so beautiful, they're going to take her and kill me. So we're going to protect me here and we're going to have her be my sister. So what happens here is the same thing that happened down in Egypt.

And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. So Sarah is in the harem. This is such a bizarre situation that they're involved in. So that's the backdrop. That's what's happening in the story.

Now God is going to work in the individuals in the story, particularly King Abimelech. *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."* Sometimes God doesn't mince any words. He's very clear. *You are a dead man.*

Now the interesting thing in this passage is what God does is He inflicts Abimelech with some kind of a physical problem. That's what he's going to do. I suspect it's impotence. The reason I say that is because he's also going to take all of the ability to have children for every woman in the community. They're barren. All the women are going to be barren now. I suspect that the men have similar problem going on. And you're going to see later he's going to get healed, but he's got a problem. Basically He's saying you're a dead man. In other words you're dead

sexually, but your whole community is in danger here because of what you've done. You have taken a man's wife. So this is a pretty abrupt statement.

You can imagine Abimelech has no idea what's going on. So this is what he says in verse 4. *Now Abimelech had not approached her. So he said, "Lord, will you kill an innocent people?"* See it's not just about him being killed, it seems to be the whole people that are being affected. *"Will you kill an innocent people? Did he (that is Abraham) 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."* I'm sincere. I'm genuine. I've not done anything wrong. I've done just what our culture does. This is what we do. It's interesting that even in a non-believer, even today, adultery is wrong. It's a violation of someone else and their marriage. And he knows that. He's not even a believer and he knows that. He says – *"In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this."* I am innocent. I didn't do anything wrong. I didn't know what was going on. I'm sincere, is what he's saying about this.

Notice verse 6 – *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."* So what God does is He prevents the procreation process and He says, "I prevented you from doing that."

Interesting to me... Let's start right at the beginning. Don't you find it fascinating that here we have God speaking to a pagan king. Just right off the bat you've got to say, "Wow, isn't it interesting God speaks to people who are not believers." I think that's very important, especially as you think about your workplace. Because I know some of you work in pagan workplaces. And you would say I don't know if God is even in this place, as Abraham is going to say in a little bit. But yet I want you to know that God is working in the lives of people behind the scenes. He's working in people's hearts and lives and people come to Jesus Christ in the midst of very difficult and challenging situations.

When you're at work, there are people there who don't know Jesus yet who may come in contact with Jesus because you're the signpost pointing the way to Jesus Christ. God is working in people's lives. And there are a lot of people who want to do the right thing. Oh I know there are some people who are bent on doing the wrong thing. But here's a pagan king, he wants to do what's right. There's a lot of people at work who want to do what's right. I believe that God leads people toward Himself through a process many times. And one of those paths, people want to do what's right, they want to do the right thing, and that leads them closer to God and they come to a place where they realize Jesus, He's the right thing. That's what I need in my life.

There are some people that are trying to do the right thing and they realize I can't. I need a Savior to save me. That's basically how some people come to Christ. They want to do what's right and that's why they're so attracted to Jesus Christ. I think there are other people who come to Christ because they're spiritually minded. They're spiritually minded people. You know maybe they're new-age people. I like talking to people who are new age people because they're already spiritual. You don't have to convince them that there is a spiritual side of us. So just sharing with them the truth of Jesus Christ, they go, "Oh wow. Is that what this is?" So they're easily moved to that place where they come to Jesus Christ.

God works in the lives of non-believers. In this case it's pretty dramatic. God comes in and speaks to Abimelech through a dream.

Now maybe you've heard the testimony of Kelly Fox. She's probably online with her family right now. Her testimony is fascinating. I'm going to tell her testimony. If she were here today I would have her tell it. But her testimony is just fascinating because God came and revealed Himself to her in a rather dramatic way.

Here's what happened. Kelly was preparing to be a Buddhist. She had done all the study work and everything she wanted to become a Buddhist. They have a practice that's like our Christian baptism where you're kind of welcomed into the church through baptism. The baptism kind of unites you. It's a statement about that you're committing yourself to Christ. It's something going on inside of you. It's just a reflection of that. Well in the Buddhist faith they have what they call a refuge meeting. Where you come and you're entering into Buddhism. The lama who's there says to all of the people that are becoming Buddhist now, "I want you to get into your lotus position now and I want you to consider whether this is really what you want to do before you make this commitment to do this."

So Kelly, like the others there, was getting into her lotus position and she's just meditating on this. All of a sudden Jesus appeared to her, sitting across from her in a lotus position facing her. Not as a glorified Jesus, but as Kelly describes it He's emaciated and weak, kind of like a mirror of what Kelly is experiencing in her own heart, emaciated and weak. She's kind of looking at a mirror, but Jesus Christ is the one who's there and coming to her in who she is. Coming to her like Kelly. When she sees Jesus she feels this light inside of her chest, she feels this fullness and warmth inside, and she knows something is very powerful going on in her. And then Jesus says these words to her. "I will be with you now and ongoing." He says those words to her. And at that moment she realized she didn't want to be a Buddhist. She got up and walked out of there.

Now that is an amazing story to me. Amazing, I suppose, because I don't hear that kind of story of people coming to Christ that often. But the point is just like God spoke to her in a way that she needed in order to touch her so that she could come to Jesus, God is speaking to Abimelech to prevent him from further sin. God is working in the lives of people around you at work who are determined to do something right. They want to do what's right. All we have to do is point them in the direction of what is right and then God often comes in and does something in their lives so that they see Jesus Christ is the answer for them.

Wow. It's just amazing to me. God is speaking in the life of a non-believer here. He says – "*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 here's what you need to do, return the man's wife, for he is a prophet.*" Whoa. As soon as I read that I go whoa, that must have been embarrassing for God to say, "This guy here, this guy that's representing, he's my prophet." You know what a prophet is? A prophet is someone who represents God to the people. He's my prophet. That's what He's saying. A prophet? I can imagine God saying, "Well I don't know...he's imperfect right now. He's got a problem. We're working on him in his life." But He doesn't do that. He doesn't apologize for him at all. He says he's a prophet.

So that he will pray for you. I think this is part of Abraham's lesson that he's going to learn. That God is doing this work inside of Abraham. He's going to say, Abraham. you think God isn't here, but I'm going to have you praying for this king in a minute. We're going to come back to that because he's going to do that in a little bit. *And you shall live. But if you do not return her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours.* In other words the whole community is going to die.

Wow. So now we have the scene set in Genesis 20. We've got the picture. We've got Abimelech ready to go. And Abraham is somewhere else in this story. So we're going to turn the page now. For me this is pretty dramatic. I know some people like to watch reality TV. I think just reading the Bible is pretty exciting.

Here we come into that place where you're going, "I wonder what's going to happen next when Abimelech goes and talks to Abraham. I can hardly wait to see what the story is going to be like." Well let's turn the page and let's see what he says.

So Abimelech rose early in the morning. Remember it was the nighttime he had this dream. He gets up early in the morning *and calls all his servants and told them all these things.* First he gets all of his buddies, all the people of his kingdom and he says, "Guys, you've got to understand this. This is what's wrong with us, guys. I want you to understand why we can't do what we'd like to do here. Here's what's happening." *And the men were very much afraid.* They're afraid. They're afraid because King Abimelech is saying God has talked to me and this is what's going on. So they're all scared to death.

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." It's like you're talking to a kid. You shouldn't do that. That's not the right thing to do. That's like what he's saying to him. Oh what an interesting story that is unfolding here as he's trying to correct Abraham. Because Abraham should be just doing the right thing. He should have integrity. And the king is saying, "What do you have against me? Why aren't you just doing what you're supposed to be doing? Are you trying to harm me here?"

He goes on. *And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What did you see, that you did this thing?"* It reminds me when a mom comes and sees her four-year-old has taken the scissors and cut her hair. "What are you thinking? What are you doing here?" Like the teenager who leaves the burner on the stove on and walks out of the kitchen. Mom goes, "What are you thinking?" It seems like that is what Abimelech is saying. What is going on in your head?

Now the beautiful thing in the passage is that we're going to get inside of his skull here. We're going to get into his brain, his heart. Abraham is just going to be honest and he's going to tell us what he's thinking. I think he gives us insight into why people lie. He gives insight into why people sacrifice their integrity, especially at work. Watch this. Let's see what Abraham has to say when we kind of lift the lid here and see what's inside of his heart.

It says – *Abraham said, "I did it because I thought..."* Well let's just stop there because that's the problem. I did it because I thought. He didn't say I did it because I prayed. Not because I

read the Bible and this is what I thought I should do. He said – *I did it because I thought*. I think that sometimes our thinking gets us into these places we start saying things to ourselves. We weave a story about how life is and we end up getting into a place we shouldn't get to.

He says – “I thought (but here's what he thought) *there is no fear of God at all in this place.*” You must be thinking about your own work, right? You look at work and you're going there is no fear of God in this place at all. That's what he says. “There's no fear of God at all in this place, *and they will kill me because of my wife. Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father though not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife.*”

Do you see what he's saying? She actually is my sister. I didn't lie. I told the truth. She is my sister. That's what he's saying. How many of you would say that's a lie? He told the truth. But you guys don't think it's a lie? Online, what do you think? Is he lying?

Okay. Well alright. We're going to do a lie detector test here. Joanne Miller and I wrote this book several years ago. It's a parenting book and in this parenting book our goal was to help parents deal with lying in their children. So we created a ten question lie detector test in order to determine what lying is. So as you teach your children you would know how to do that. I'm going to read the story, the little paragraph, and you're going to tell me is this a lie or not a lie. What do you think?

Mom, hearing a car drive into the driveway calls to her two children. “Dad's home. Please come to the table to eat.” After a minute or so a knock on the door reveals that the car belongs to a friend from church who was stopping by. Amy, age six, turns to mom and said, “Daddy isn't home. You lied.”

How many of you would say Mom was lying? She said something that wasn't true. Was she lying? I suspect you're saying no since none of you are raising your hand. Why? Because we know that lying includes a piece which is the intent to deceive. Right? There was no intent to deceive there. Mom was just wrong. She's not lying. She's just wrong. Right? Would you agree with that?

Let's take another one. I'm not going to do ten of them, but I'm going to do three of them. I want you to understand what lying is here. Dad plays with his three-year-old daughter as they look at a picture book of different animals. Joy has just figured out how to get a fun reaction from Dad and he, enjoying, the interaction with his daughter, plays up the game.

“What's that?” as he points to the chicken.

“It's a cow,” says Joy.

“No, it's a chicken,” Dad says playfully as they both laugh together. Dad continues by pointing to a rabbit. “What's this?”

“It's a cow,” says Joy, waiting eagerly for Dad's playfully shocked response.

“No, it's a rabbit,” says Dad, as they continue to have fun together.

Is Joy lying? How many would say Joy is lying? She's saying something that's not true. But we would say it's not lying. Why? Because there's no intent to deceive. They're playing. They're teasing. Now we have to be careful with playing with the truth because we can find ourselves in

trouble quickly if we're teasing and playing. It's not wrong, but we have to be careful with playing with the truth. But in this case it's not a lie.

One more. Thirteen-year-old Carissa answers the phone and says, "Hi Pastor Andrews."

Mom quietly says, "Tell him I'm not home."

Carissa turns to her mom and whispers, "That's lying. I'm not going to tell him that."

Mom replies, "Okay. I'll go outside and then you can tell him I'm not home right now."

Carissa plays along with Mom's plan and tells the pastor, "Mom stepped out for a little while," but only after Mom leaves the house.

Is Carissa lying? How many would say Carissa is lying. What are you guys? Some of you guys aren't voting? Okay. Carissa is lying. And here's why. She's saying something that's true, but she's using the truth in a way that's deceptive. So even a half-truth or a partial truth is a lie because of the intent to deceive.

Now that's exactly what's happening in this passage with Abraham. He's sharing a piece of the truth, but his intent is to deceive. Don't be confused to think that if you're sharing a piece of the truth and your intent is to deceive that it's not a lie. It's a lack of integrity. It's lying. And that's what's happening here.

Now it goes further. And you just got to see this is really where the problem is. It's so nice that Abraham is honest and he really tells us what's going on. Because here's where we see the heart problem inside of him. He says this: "*And when God caused me to wander from my father's house, I said to her, 'This is the kindness you must do me: at every place to which we come, say of me, 'He is my brother.'"*" In other words, let's have this plan that we develop so that to protect me from getting killed we're always going to tell people that you are my sister.

Whoa. I'm convinced that people don't wander into sin. They don't just accidentally fall into sin. That is part of a process and in their minds things happen that lead them to sin. That's exactly what's taking place here.

Now notice in Abraham's life he's basically saying this: There's no godly people at my job, so I don't have to have integrity then. God can't be there with all the people with the foul language and the way they treat people and they're all out for the money and whatever. God can't be there. So I don't have to play by the same rules I do when I go to church. As if somehow there's integrity we have when we're with other people that we don't have when we're at work. No. God's saying we've got a problem here. God's stepping into this situation and He has this confrontation now that is Abimelech with Abraham.

See integrity is so important and we have integrity everywhere we go. I was going to try to just say this to you, but the quote is so good that I'm going to read it to you. "When I'm afraid, I must do right. When I'm not afraid, I must do right. When my emotions try to lead me the wrong way, I must have integrity. I must do right. When my emotions are doing fine, I must do right. When I'm among the heathen, I must do right. When I'm not among the heathen, I must do right. When I'm among committed Christians, I must do right. And when I'm among Christians who can hardly tell apart right from wrong, I must do right. When the cost seems high, I must do

right. When people like it, I must do right. When people don't like it, I must do right. That's integrity. If your integrity is only in your mind, someone will talk you out of it. But if integrity is in your heart, then with God's help you can keep it no matter what."

I think Abraham needed that message. And God is trying to teach him something very important.

So now we have the confrontation. What is Abimelech going to do? Well let's go on to the next page and let's see what happens in the story. *Then Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male 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."* Why is he doing that? Well I don't think it's because he valued Abraham that much. But he valued Abraham as God. God had spoken to Abimelech and it's changing the way he operates, what he's thinking about people, and what he's thinking about life. So he says to Abraham just choose any place you want to live. Maybe it's because I know that you're a prophet of God (even though you messed up this time) and I want to receive the blessing because you're here.

I want you to know if you're a Christian working in that workplace where you're at, that place is blessed because you're there. So King Abimelech is saying you can be wherever you want. It's like where does an 800-pound gorilla sit? Wherever he wants! And that's what he's saying. You can take your pick of any of the land. You can stick around here.

He says to Sarah, "Behold, I have given your brother..." I think this is tongue and cheek. I'm giving your "brother" so to speak. You're telling me it's your brother. Yeah. "I'm giving him a thousand pieces of silver. It is a sign of your innocence in the eyes of all who are with you, and before everyone you are vindicated."

Look at this next verse, verse 17. *Then Abraham prayed to God.* I want you to know if you've sinned in your life, if you've messed up, if you haven't had integrity... You know it's really sad when we see someone who doesn't have integrity, especially a Christian leader who doesn't have integrity. I want you to see that God still works in that person and can work through them. Now maybe you can't preach to that person anymore because you don't have the integrity. Maybe you can't witness to them because you've lost that privilege. But you can always pray for someone. I think this is part of God's work in Abraham's life to say I want you to know there are people here at work that you can pray for. There are people here at work that are sensitive to me and that I'm working in their lives that you don't know anything about. Abraham, you need to be praying for people here at work, not trying to get around these things.

So here's what he does. *Abraham prayed to God and God healed Abimelech.* So obviously this is some kind of a physical problem Abimelech has. That's why I made the suggestion I did. *And also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children. For the Lord had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.*

Well I just find that story interesting. I was tickled to read it this week. But especially to come away with it with a conviction of having integrity in every area of my life.

But there's one more application I want to share with you today from this passage that's very important. Because there's a lot of people in life who want to do what's right. They are sincere and they have integrity. They make choices to do what's right, even hard choices to do what's right. But there's a very clear message in this passage. That here was a guy who was sincere, he had integrity, he wanted to do what's right, but that wasn't enough. Do you see that? God had to come into his life and say just being sincere isn't good enough. There's some people who think that sincerity is all that's important. They'll say it doesn't really make any difference what you believe as long as you're sincere about it. Well it's very clearly in this passage that that didn't take place. Sincerity is important. It's valuable. And having integrity in your life will prevent you from further sin, as God does in this guy's life. He prevented him from further sin.

If you have integrity, whether you're a believer or not a believer, that's good. It's a good thing to have integrity. But it's not enough for you to have a personal relationship with God. It's not enough. You've got to have more than that. You've got to have the truth. And that's what happens when God speaks into his life He gives him, "Kudos to you, you have integrity. I'm going to give you some truth that will help you to do the right thing." He needed truth.

That's why in John 14:6 Jesus says – *I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father with integrity and with sincerity and with good intentions and by doing the good things they think. That's not how you come to the Father. You come to the Father through me.* Jesus Christ is the truth. So keep in mind that as we talk about integrity you want to have that. That's a valuable thing. But also keep in mind that the most important thing is the truth. It's that truth that comes into our lives when we have that integrity that allows us to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and to do the things that God would have us to do so we can represent Him in our world.

I trust that God will use this in your life as you take this into your marketplace, into your environment so that you can represent Jesus Christ wherever you are. Because sometimes we're in a pagan world and we need to just plant the flag for Jesus Christ. How you do that? You have to be wise in how you do that.

I remember one of my mentors, his name is Giff Claiborne. He's about ninety years old now. I talked to him just a few weeks ago. But I remember when I was just a young pastor in my twenties and he was mentoring me in his church and teaching me all kinds of valuable things. I just learned a lot. One time we went out to a restaurant like a Denny's. We were sitting there in one place and there was another group of rowdy guys over here talking and they were saying things that were vulgar, just all these kinds of words, using God's name in vain. All of a sudden this guy sitting across from says, "Praise the Lord!"

I'm going, "Whoa. What did you do that for?"

"Praise Jesus! Hallelujah!" I mean he's making these comments.

I'm going, "What are you doing?"

He says, "I'm just reclaiming the territory for the Lord."

I say, "Wow, what an amazing thing." I don't know if I could have the courage in a Denny's to yell "praise the Lord!" But these guys have all the courage in the world to let all of the words coming out of their mouths. So I just love Giff Clayborn. He's a great guy and he just plants the flag for Jesus.

How can you plant the flag for the Lord? People want that. Well some people don't want it. But those who are moving with integrity or are more spiritual, they're looking for truth. We have it. We are the signposts saying that's the way to go. Go to Jesus. He's the truth. He's the way. He's the life. We want to share that message with others. I trust that God will take this into your life, you'll use it this week.

If you've never accepted Jesus Christ as the truth, you can do that today. Pray and ask Jesus to come into your heart, recognizing that you are a sinner, knowing that you need a Savior. Ask Christ come into your life and then He will guide you. Not only to give your life to Him, but He will guide you in the truth of God's word as you continue on in your life.

Stand with me and let's pray together as we continue to worship. Use this time as we sing this song to allow God to speak to you and to plant something in your heart that you'll take away as you go out today.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, thank you again for who you are, what you do, and for the greatness we see in your word and all the truth that we see there. Thank you that you make it come alive for us, that the scriptures are living and active, and that they are applicable to our lives, even to our hearts. So Lord, teach us now. Grow us. Show us what it means to follow you. In Jesus' name, amen.