

Repeated Sins

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[0:00] I want you to do something for me. Think of a sin that you struggle with. Think of a sin that you struggle with. that you repeatedly go back to.

Those are the sins that cause us the most discouragement. Those are the sins that cause us to ask, where am I going? Am I going anywhere? They make us wonder, can God really use me? Could God really be for me? Have I finally done it? Have I finally sinned away God's mercy? Is his work in my life over? If you can relate to those feelings and those questions, then Genesis 20 can help.

It meets us where we're at in that situation. This passage is about repeated sins. And I hope it sounded familiar as Charlie read it.

Back in Genesis 12, Abraham went down to Egypt and he told everyone that Sarah was his sister. And then Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, took Sarah.

[1:15] And God inflicted the Egyptians with serious diseases. And Pharaoh called Abraham and said, what have you done to me? Why didn't you tell me that she was your wife?

In today's story, what did we see? Abraham went into Gerar. He was afraid. He didn't think God could protect him. And so he said, she is my sister.

And then Abimelech, king of Gerar, took Sarah. And God inflicted Abimelech's people. And Abimelech called Abraham in and he said, what have you done to us?

How have we wronged you? Why did you do this to us? This wasn't the first time that Abraham had sinned in this way of not trusting God and trying to save himself with a lie, with a half-truth told with the purpose of deceiving.

And as a matter of fact, if you look down at verse 13 in our passage, you'll see that this probably wasn't even the second time. This is what Abraham repeatedly did. Look at what it says in verse 13.

[2:22] And when God had me wander from my father's household, I said to her, that's to Sarah, this is how you can show your love to me. Everywhere we go, say of me, he is my brother.

Everywhere we go. This wasn't the first time. Probably wasn't the second time. It wasn't the second time. It was the way Abraham tried to make it through this world safe and sound.

This was a strain of unbelief running through Abraham's life. This was his repeat sin. Now, do you see how this meets us where we are?

Where you are? And that particular sin that I asked you to think about, Abraham had a sin that so easily entangled him.

And you do too, I'm sure. But in the middle of this, in the middle of this repeat sin, God is still working in Abraham's life. God is still pursuing his plans and purposes.

[3:25] He's still working for Abraham's good. And even in the middle of your repeat sins, that's what this passage is showing us, that God is still at work. He's still able to carry out his plans and to do all the good that he says that he's going to do.

And so the lesson that we are to take out of this passage and walk out of here with is that we don't need to lose heart in this battle with these repeat sins.

Why not? Why not lose heart in the face of our repeat sins? Why is God going to continue to do everything that he has said that he's going to do for you?

Brother, sister, we have three reasons tonight. And the first is that God's plan is bigger than your, than my repeat sins. Abraham's repeat sin couldn't stop God from fulfilling all of his promises.

Why? Because God's plan was bigger than Abraham's sin. So what was God's plan? Well, in this context, in the immediate context, it was to give Abraham a son, wasn't it?

[4:33] Abraham was going to have a son, but that was only the beginning, the plan got bigger. It was going to get bigger than that. It's sort of like when you throw a rock into a pond and the first

ripple is only this big, but the next one is bigger.

This plan is going to unfold and get bigger and bigger. So he's initially, he's immediately planning to give Abraham a son. That's part of the plan. But the plan is bigger. He's planning to bring Christ into the world.

Abraham is promised a seed. And at first that is Isaac. But as you look at the whole Bible, you see that God always had in mind a greater son, a greater seed, Jesus Christ, Abraham's greater son. So this was a big plan. It included Isaac and it included Christ, but it's even bigger than that. Do you know who else is called, who else are called Abraham's children in the word of God?

Well, all those who believe on Christ. That's us. That's us. So God's plan was not only to give Abraham Isaac, not only to send Christ, but God is planning to create a whole new humanity of children who share in the faith of their father, Abraham.

[5:55] And so God's plan is not going to be completed until he's remade heaven and earth and filled it with a new humanity who is perfectly conformed to Jesus Christ.

And so that plan, that plan was bigger than Abraham's sin. That plan was bigger than your sin. So God's plan is for you to be fully like his son, perfect in his image, glorious and happy and at peace. And that plan is bigger than your sin. And as a matter of fact, God is able to account for sin in his plan. God knows how to draw a straight line with a crooked stick.

He knows how to use sin to accomplish his purposes. And in this situation, God uses the sin of Abraham to accomplish something. In the next chapter, we're going to see that Abraham and Abimelech come together and they have a treaty.

That was God's way of providing a safe place for Isaac to grow up. Well, the seeds of that treaty and this relationship and that safety that God was planning, it starts in this chapter with this encounter.

[7:09] And so God takes from Abraham's sin and he turns it into something good as a way of accomplishing his plan. And so that's God's way.

He uses Abraham's sin to do good. Why was Christ crucified? It was at the hands of sinful men, the unbelief of the Jews, and they meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.

And so what about your sins? If the greatest evil God can change and turn into the greatest good, what about your sins?

God is able to work all things. We saw this a couple weeks ago. All things together for your good. As part of that, all things, that includes all of your sin.

His plan is to conform you to Christ's image and he uses sin. He works around it. He works through it while he is never responsible for it. So here's an example.

[8:07] Maybe you can think of an example in your life. We all have those examples where we sinned and we learned a valuable lesson in our sin.

Here's an example. Peter fell hard, didn't he? He denied Christ, but Jesus restored him and he said, Peter, you love my sheep. That fall and that restoration, it changed Peter.

At the time, it wasn't good and it was evil what Peter had done, but it changed his ministry. He knew more of the grace of God after that. And you know that too.

It's so easy to condemn other people when you don't see your own sin, but when your sinfulness has been revealed, you learn something about humility and gentleness. And so from that point on, Peter was able to deal gently with those who had fallen because he had done so.

God used Peter's sin to make Peter more Christ-like. So that's what he's doing in all of our lives, in all of God's people and all of his children in their lives.

[9:14] He has purposes and plans for your life. He had purposes and plans for Peter's life and Peter's sin. God used it to further those plans. And even in your sin, God can work those things to accomplish his own plan.

And isn't that a comfort? Not even our sin can stop God from carrying out his plan to do us good. So God's plan is bigger than my repeat sins.

Secondly, God's grace is bigger than my repeat sins. Why shouldn't I lose heart? Because God's grace is bigger than my repeat sins.

Now we see the bigness of God's grace when we ask three questions from this passage. The first question is, what is missing? What is missing? Look at, through the passage, look through it and read it, and there is no word of accusation from God about Abraham's unbelief.

Now I'm not saying that Abraham didn't sin. The whole context is saying that he did sin. But, there's no accusation from God. Abimelech accuses Abraham of sinning and rightly so.

[10:33] Rightly so. But God doesn't accuse. God just keeps on doing him good. And surely, that rings true in your life, doesn't it?

is God always accusing you? Sometimes, well, you never wake up to the full measure of your sinfulness, do you?

Do you ever wake up and God has finally unveiled the great depths of the blackness of your heart? It doesn't happen. Sometimes it feels that way, but that's just God showing you a little bit more of our, of your sinfulness.

God never shows us the full extent of our wickedness because we couldn't handle it. We couldn't handle it. He opens our eyes a little bit at a time as our faith is able to process it.

He is merciful and he is patient even as he corrects us. Even as he says, look at this area of your life. And the whole time he keeps doing us good.

[11:38] And so, we see God's grace and what's missing. God doesn't lower the boom and throw down the gauntlet on Abraham. He doesn't accuse.

Secondly, you see the greatness, the bigness of God's grace when you ask who is innocent and who is guilty? Who is innocent and who is guilty?

Well, look at verse 3. God came to Abimelech in a dream one night and he said to him, you are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken. She is a married woman.

Now, Abimelech had not gone near her and he said, Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation? And then verse 6. And then God said to him in the dream, yes, I know that you did this with a clear conscience and so have kept you from sinning against me.

You've done it with a clear conscience. An innocent nation. So who is innocent in this passage? Abimelech is. He didn't know that Sarah was Abraham's wife.

[12:43] And at least in this matter, he was innocent. His conscience was clear and God said as much. But who is guilty in this passage? Abraham.

Abraham lied. Abraham put Abimelech in the situation to sin. Abraham didn't believe God. And yet, what do we see in this passage?

Abraham. God saves Abraham. God blesses Abraham. Abraham walks out of this situation richer and more blessed than he began it. What is that?

What is it when God doesn't give you what you deserve, but the opposite? That's grace. That's grace.

That's grace greater than sin. It was at work in Abraham's life and brother and sister. It's at work in your life. God's grace is greater than your sin.

[13:44] Then, you see the bigness of God's grace when you ask a third question. What's the context? What's the context of Abraham's sin in this whole chapter?

Well, look at the next chapter with me. Chapter 21. And look at the first two verses. First two verses. Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised.

Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, and at that very time God had promised him. When did God do what he promised?

On the heels of Abraham's sin. On the heels right after Abraham's unbelief. On the heels of Abraham's repeated sin.

God was gracious to Sarah and he did what he promised. What does that say about God to me? That my sin can't keep God from doing what he has promised.

[14:47] God's grace triumphs and trumps my sin. Psalm 103 verses 8-10 summarize this passage so beautifully.

Listen to it as I read Psalm 103 and see if you can see the connections to this passage and the connections even to your own life.

The Lord is compassionate and gracious slow to anger abounding in love. He will not always accuse nor will he harbor his anger forever.

He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. So what do we see in Genesis 20? Brothers or sisters what do you see in your life?

In this passage God is slow to anger and we see God not always accusing and we see him treating Abraham not like his sins deserved.

[15:47] We see him not repaying Abraham according to his iniquity and beloved because of Jesus because of Jesus that is how God treats us.

God is bigger than my repeat sins. heart. sisters don't lose heart. In the face of your repeated sins don't lose heart because God's grace is bigger than your sin.

Now the third reason that I shouldn't lose heart and why my repeat sins can't stop God from doing all that he has promised is that God's sovereignty is bigger than my repeat sins.

God's sovereignty is bigger than my repeat sins. What do I mean by sovereignty? I mean his kingly control of every situation.

God is sovereign in control. He is king. He is lord in every situation. So he is lord wherever he goes.

[16:49] Now we change situations depending on or we change from situation to situation depending on who we're talking to, who we're relating with, and what's the circumstances.

But God is lord and sovereign in every situation. Let me tell you what I mean. So you go, you parents, when you are talking to your children, you are mom or dad, aren't you?

And you tell them what to do. They don't tell you what to do, but you tell them what to do. Now, with your husband or wife, it's not the same situation.

You're not mom or dad anymore, you're husband and wife, and I hope there's not a lot of telling people what to do. So you go to work, and you're either an employer or an employee.

And sometimes you have people under you, and most of the time you have someone over you. So it depends on the situation and the relationship of whether I'm in control and whether I can tell people what to do, that sort of thing.

[17:52] But God is always Lord. He is always Lord. He is always sovereign. In heaven, God is sovereign over angels.

On earth, he is the kingly controller of animals and men. He comes to every situation as Lord.

He's always in control. in every situation. He is always working all things together for his own purposes and his own plans. He's always the kingly controller.

Now, let's put that in this context. Let's put that in the context of your repeat sins. In the context of your repeat sins, he is the kingly controller.

Again, not that he causes your sin, but he still rules over it. And he still puts boundaries on it. And he's still always firmly in control.

[18:54] And you see that in this passage in one glaring detail. It's in verse 6. Look at it with me. God has said, you're as good as dead, Abimelech.

And Abimelech said, Lord, I'm innocent. I didn't know. And then verse 6. Then God said to him in the dream, yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against me.

That is why I did not let you touch her. I've kept you from sinning against me. I did not let you touch her. Who has the king's heart in his hand and is directing it wherever he wants it to go?

Who was using his sovereignty, his status as king of kings, kingly controller, to make sure that Abraham's sin didn't break out of the boundaries that God has put around it and didn't get out of hand.

It was God. God was making sure that Abraham's sin didn't have an effect that he couldn't use, that he couldn't take and work it for good.

[20:07] He took that so Abraham's sin couldn't destroy his plan. God is able to do all that he wants and plans because he is always sovereign and he's always able to control his creatures and make sure that all of their actions fulfill his purposes.

And so in this situation that's what he's doing but Abraham puts the plan into danger. Because guess what? If Abimelech takes Sarah and he sleeps with her and if Sarah gets pregnant then or even later, there's always going to be a doubt who the son was.

There's always going to be this doubt of what's going on here. It could have thrown a huge wrench in God's plan. Abraham's sin almost destroyed God's plan.

But almost doesn't count. God ruled over Abraham's sin and he governed its effects and its outcomes. And brothers and sisters, God supernaturally and sovereignly limits the effects of your sins.

He keeps them in bounds. Just ask yourself, you know that sin that you have in your mind that you go back to, that you struggle with, why haven't you just given full sail to that sin and just floated off and lost?

[21:27] Why hasn't that sin taken you straight into the jaws of hell? Why haven't you walked away in disgust and unbelief? Because God keeps that in check.

His sovereignty is bigger than your sin. Now that's three reasons to take heart, even in the face of your repeat sins. God's plan, God's grace, God's sovereignty are all bigger than your repeat sins. We see it in Genesis 20. So take heart. Now I want to briefly talk about two wrong conclusions and two right applications. As we think about what you see in this chapter and you see about how God's plan and his grace and his sovereignty are able to work all things and he does it for our good and even in the context of our repeat sins.

So two wrong conclusions and two right applications. The first wrong conclusion is this. So this is a conclusion that is incorrect. If God's plan and his grace and sovereignty are bigger than my sin, then I might as well go on sinning.

Wrong. This chapter gives you hope. It doesn't give you license to sin. If you reason from this passage and it works out at the end so that you go on sinning, so that you excuse your sin or you make light of it and say, you know, to keep sinning again and again and saying God's grace will make it all better.

[23:10] You're wrong. It's not what this passage is teaching and that is a wrong conclusion to make. Use your imagination. Think of it. Put yourself into Abraham's position here.

Do you think Abraham, do you really think Abraham was glad that this was all happening? His wife is in the harem of another man.

And do you really think that Abraham's relationship with God was at an all-time high in Genesis 20? Our sin might not end our relationship with God, but it can go a long way to ruining it.

And it can ruin our enjoyment of that relationship. And if you don't care about the joy and the peace that comes from having God smile, then I would really wonder whether you're a believer at all.

If you don't care about those things, that tells you something about your heart. If you make grace a reason to go on sinning, then you really have to ask yourself, who is your God?

[24:29] Who do you really love the most? If you take God's grace and use it as an excuse to go on sinning, that tells me that your God really isn't the God of Genesis 20 who's gracious and sovereign, who's loving and working all things for good, but that sin is.

So who do you really love and worship? God's passage gives you hope. It doesn't give you license. The second wrong application is this. If God's plan and his grace and his sovereignty are bigger than my sin, then I will just wait for God to save me.

Wrong. If you are saying that, well, I might as well go on doing what I'm doing because God has a plan and he's going to work it out. He's sovereign. He'll do what he wants.

He'll eventually save me, right? Wrong. God has a sovereign, gracious plan to save a multitude of people. He is going that way.

He is driving the train in that direction and nothing can stop him. One day he will pull into that station. He's driving the train that way. Are you on it?

[25:46] The way that you get on that train, the way that you make it to the end, to that station where you are perfect, where you are justified, where you are righteous, where you are in heaven, is through Christ.

Every Christian, every person who is on the train, who God is saving, is coming, has come through Christ. They've repented.

They've turned away from their sins. Their sins in general and their sins in particular, the sins that they struggle with. They're saying no to those and saying yes to Jesus. They're clinging to Jesus for life.

They're turning away from their righteousness and their goodness and even their sin and they're clinging to Christ. They are on the train. They are the ones who are going to make it to the end.

You know who is still standing on the platform, not going anywhere? everyone else. Everyone else.

[26:50] Everyone waiting for God to save them. Everyone saying tomorrow, maybe tomorrow, maybe it will happen tomorrow. If you go away saying, I'll wait for God to save me, you're wrong.

God saves those who repent and believe in Jesus Christ. So are you on the train or are you still on the platform? waiting around or are you getting into Christ?

It's two wrong conclusions. Here's two right applications. First, don't despair. Don't despair. In the face of your repeat sins, don't despair.

This is a hard battle we are in. Let me say that again. Because sometimes I don't think we really understand that. This is a hard battle that we are in. It is only through many tribulations that we will make it to the kingdom. You are going to get and you are going to give a lot of wounds.

[28:02] You have to soldier on. There are some sins that are going to be hard to kill. You know that brother or sister, don't you?

There are some sins that are just hard to kill. I knew one lady, when she was saved, she threw her cigarettes out the window of the car, and that was it.

Victory won. Addiction over slavery over victory final. Never had a problem again. Some sins aren't like that, though. They're hard, but don't lose heart.

That's what this passage is teaching us. God is moving. He's always moving forward. This is just part of the story. This is near the beginning of the story of God carrying out, working out his full redemptive plan.

Here's Abraham in this pattern of repeat sins, and God is working through it, and he is accomplishing it. And guess what? Isaac is born in the next chapter. And 2,000 years later, Christ is born, and Christ lives, and he dies, and he saves a huge multitude of sinners.

[29:15] And then here we are. We've come to believe him from nations far away, nations that Abraham never believed, or never knew about, never heard of.

God's plan was moving forward, and no amount of repeat sins was going to stop it. And so, brothers and sisters, don't despair the end. God's plan, God's sovereignty, God's grace, is going to make sure, brother or sister, that one day you will be like Christ.

You have, you bear the likeness of the first man. You will bear the likeness of the second man, the second Adam. You will be like Christ, and your repeat sins will be nothing more than a memory. So don't despair. And that battle that you're in, don't give up. If you give up, you're going to stop fighting. So don't despair. Now the second right application is this, believe God's goodness to kill sin.

Now the first and the second applications, they go together. Don't despair, but believe God's goodness to kill sin. Let me ask you, maybe you're not sure what I mean here.

[30:31] Let me ask you, would Abraham have sinned if he believed that God had a plan and that he was gracious and that he was sovereign and he had a plan for Abraham's life and he was going to do it no matter what?

No. Abraham wouldn't have gone down to Gerar and did what he did. Abraham doubted God's goodness and where did it lead? It led right back to that sin that he always did, that lie that he always told, the same old sin.

Now, if doubting God's goodness brought him back to that repeat sin, then believe God's goodness to kill your sin. So, let's rewind the tape and let's put Abraham there.

He's on the edge of the city. He's on the edge of Gerar. He's ready to go in. He knows his old temptations. He knows that this is the area that he's fallen before.

And so he goes in saying, God loves me. He loves me. He has a plan that heaven nor hell can stop. Sarah will have a child. He has planned this.

[31:42] He has promised it. He is gracious. He is sovereign. He is going to do it. I am going to believe in God's goodness. I'm going to believe in what he promised. And he steps forward into the city.

Would he have fallen then? Well, it would have been harder. Wouldn't have. If he believed, he wouldn't have sinned. Now, believing God's goodness is the first step in killing sin.

It's certainly not the last, but it is the first. It's the beginning. You're going to have to do other things, cutting off right arms and gouging out right eyes and doing what is necessary, but believing in God's goodness is the first step.

So where do you hear about God's goodness? Where does that kind of faith come from? Well, faith comes from hearing. Faith comes from hearing. And where do you hear? You hear in God's word. So brothers and sisters, get into it. Read it. Memorize it. Listen to sermons. Faith comes from hearing, and it's faith in Christ that is the power that kills sin.

[32:49] sin. So think about something for me. Think about that repeat sin. You're going to face a stubborn sin this week.

You will. Will you despair? Or will you believe that what God has shown you in Genesis 20, that he has a plan, that he's gracious, that he is sovereign, and that those things are bigger than your sin? So what will you do this week? Will you despair? Or will you believe? Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of Jesus Christ, your Son, who is everything for us, righteousness and wisdom, holiness, everything that we need, we have in him.

And so I pray that we would go away from here trusting in him, going to him by prayer and faith, seeking self-control, seeking patience, seeking every fruit of the spirit, because they are full and they are complete and they are perfect.

In him, he is full of the spirit and he is full of the spirit to give to us. So I pray that we would by faith lay hold of Jesus Christ and so walk in the spirit and live by the spirit, that we would believe all that your word says about us as we have come to Christ.

[34 : 37] And I pray that those who are outside of Jesus Christ would believe all that the Bible says about them, about their condition and their situation and their danger, but also the hope that is held out for them if they will repent and believe that they too can be saved.

I pray that none here would go away with their hands in their pockets waiting for something to happen. But I pray that you would move them and show them the way forward and bring them and draw them to yourself.

Thank you for your grace. Thank you that your grace is greater far than all our sin and shame. We appreciate it so little. I pray that you would show us the greatness of our sin, but don't leave us there.

Show us the greatness of your mercy in Jesus Christ. All to the end that we would walk faithfully, that we would walk obediently, that we would be careful to do what pleases you.

I pray that as we go on our way, that we would honor you, and that we would obey you. Thank you for meeting with us, and I pray that now as we sing, that you would be pleased with our words, and with our hearts.

[35 : 55] In Jesus' name, amen. Please take your hymnals and turn to 702. Hymn 702, we sing of the marvelous grace of Jesus.

Let's stand as we sing. Thank you.