

Who Does God Save?
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Genesis 16:1-10
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Intro: A few years ago Man of Steel, a new movie about Superman came out. It was a grittier take on the character and that's not all bad but people started noticing a curious issue... Superman is fighting another alien, doesn't matter why, in the big city. They're throwing each other into buildings and such, as is their way in this particular genre, and over time you start to realize- nobody is getting saved! I mean, of course the world, writ large, is getting saved and needs superman to win. But for the people in the big city Metropolis... it's kind of a wash. (I was actually watching and becoming a bit dismayed at one point when suddenly they shifted the camera and showed a whole other side of the city still in tact- skyscrapers standing tall etc. I was like "Phew! Ok good, its not all gone yet." Aaaand next thing you know they're throwing each other into that and a few minutes later it's all a bunch of rubble too!)

It may seem obvious but it turns out- we want our heroes to be- heroic! We want our saviors- to save! We want them to care about the world, but also the person on the 35th floor of skyscraper #6. We don't just want them to defeat evil, but also to preserve good. To remember the nameless and protect the weak.

In the Bible, God is the hero. Some of us have grown up in Church and heard about "heroes of the Faith" ("It's Abraham, David, and Moses..."), and that's true in many ways. But ultimately God is the hero of the story and today in this passage we are so relieved to see that *God a hero who is heroic, he is a savior who saves. He names the nameless, he visits and protects the outcast and needy in this Egyptian servant and slave girl, Hagar.* Our passage today explores the question: **Who does God save?** Who does he visit? Who does God save? ...Our text gives us a few answers, look with me in verse 1.

Scene/Point 1 (v1-4a): So the first thing that leaps out at us in this passage is that Hagar is a "female Egyptian servant". Now we need to be brave and just ask it- *Is Hagar a slave? Is the Bible condoning slavery here? What on Earth is going on?!*

Apologetic Moment: Well sadly I don't have time to get into that in detail this morning. So here's the main point: The word May trip is up but "slavery" in the ancient near east was not equivalent with the "slavery" we think of in this country before the Civil War. It still wasn't ideal! You'd rather be the master than the slave for sure, but the slavery mentioned here is more akin to "indentured servanthood". **Hagar is a slave but she isn't purely property. That's why verse 3 says that Hagar was given to Abram as a wife.** It's also why later in His Law, God would lay out the rights of enslaved people, foreigners, and sojourners. And why, with the Jubilee year every seven years in Israel, all Hebrew slaves... would go free. It's a fascinating topic, though that's all we can say for now.

Hagar may be better off than we first thought, but she's still at the receiving end of a sketchy plot. Look in verse 2... The source of Hagar's misfortune is Sarai and Abram's doubt. In the previous chapter God promised Abram (and not for the first time!) descendants as numerous as the stars. Yet, at 86 years old, with Sarah not far behind, there's not one child to show for it. Imagine the despondency. So, Sarai hatches a plan- "enough waiting around for a God who may or may not be interested in his past promises, let's get you hitched to Hagar so she can have a kid for us. She'll enjoy the status bump and we can get on with the "descendants more numerous than the sand on the seashore" bit!" Sarai locates her barrenness in God's providence, which in some contexts might be a good thing, but her behavior the rest of this story shows that it's more an observation out of bitterness. This is something to note: **the hurt we see in this passage is the result of still deeper hurt.** *Victims often become so at the hand of prior victims. In other words, "hurt people hurt people".* It doesn't make it okay, but it does make it more human. This is at least part of what Jesus gets at in the New Testament when we are told to pray for our enemies- in praying for them, we inevitably remember they're also human. Sarai and Abram sin because their actions are wrongly motivated from the outset. They are acting out of hurt and doubt. *They are still valued, but Hagar is on the receiving end of their sins and, in this, we see our first answer to the question: **God saves the Victims.***

Application: I don't have to tell you that this is a big issue for us today. Because, in some contexts, the term "victim" has become highly political. I'm not going to Wade into all that this morning. But I do want to give us a guiding principle and here it is: God saves victims. This isn't biblically controversial! God is on the side of the child trafficked into sex slavery, not the enslaver. God **wants** the little, unwanted fetus in the womb of the poor woman. In Christianity, *might doesn't make right!*

And so we need to line up, to the best of our understanding, on the side of victims and the people who have been sinned against. It's a divine demand because God saves the victims. But, they aren't the only ones. Look back in verse 4...

Scene /Point 2 (v4b-8): Hagar is put into a bad situation, *but the texts shows us that she didn't get all her baggage there. Turns out she's bringing some of her own.* Verse 4 reads "And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress". Hagar becomes pregnant pretty quickly after marrying Abram and begins to pridefully lord it over Sarai. This is a cruel blow. Hagar was one of Sarai's closest servants and, presumably confidants. She knows how deeply Sarai and Abram have wanted a child. Yet, she immediately weaponizes the news of her pregnancy against her mistress-

The best that can be said about Hagar's conduct is that she returns evil for evil, which is still missing the mark. She sees herself as preparing to come into a primary position in the family- the only woman who could actually give him what he wants- and she twists that rhetorical knife into Sarai day in and day out. **Hagar- put into a bad situation by the sins of**

others- is matching them with her own bitterness and pride. *In reaching out to Hagar, it turns out, God isn't just saving a victim- He's also saving a sinner.* We know from the surrounding chapters of God's continued faithfulness to Sarai and Abram, but we see here that every player in this drama has their own set of sins, including Hagar. **God saves the victims. He also saves the guilty.** He saves the victimizers!

Application: All of us, if we're being honest, see this in our own lives. Forget divine standards, do we even live up to our own? Have you ever been frustrated with your inability to really live the golden rule? Ever nauseated by your own "Me-first!" disposition?

*Friends, the message of God is so so good precisely because it offers **actual** help to who we **actually** are! God's love for Hagar is so large that he not only intervenes to save her from others, but also from herself! **God saves the victims and God saves the guilty.***

Scene/Point 3 (v7-14): The story continues and Hagar is on the move. She's on the way back to Egypt, which also means Egypt's gods. **Then the angel shows up-**

with promises of renewal and blessing. He names her son "Ishmael- God hears" so that Hagar the slave girl can proclaim in verse 13: **"You are a God of seeing!"** and "Truly, here have I seen **him who looks after me**"!

Conclusion: *So, God saves the victims. He saves the guilty.* Those who are hurt and those who do the hurting. What we're left with is this: Who does God save? **God saves the broken and makes them whole again.** He takes people who are hurt- *and teaches them to heal.* He takes people who think they're strong- *and makes them strong enough to be weak.* He takes the cross-*and turns it into a crown.*

God is a hero who's actually heroic. He's a savior who really does save. *He makes broken people whole again.* He did it for an abandoned slave girl in the desert 3,000 years ago, and he can do it for us here today, *So, let's pray and ask him to make us, broken as we are, whole again.*

Let us pray.