

“Father Abraham drops the ball” Genesis 37:28

Proposition: Just as God used the Ishmaelites to achieve his saving purposes for Israel, so also He can use our mistakes as dads for good if we trust Him.

A small boy was heard to have said “Fathers day is just like Mother’s day, only you don’t spend as much on the gift.”

Mark Twain said “When I as a boy of 14 my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in 7 years.”

Here are a few quotes that most fathers say at some time.

“The world according to dad.”

“This is going to hurt me more than it hurts you.”

“Quiet. I’m still watching the rugby.”

“Don’t forget to check the oil.”

“Bring back all the change.”

“How should I know, ask your mother.”

“When I was your age I walked 5 miles to and from school each day and it was uphill both ways.”

“You are going and you will have fun.”

“Why? Because I said so.”

“Just wait until you have kids.”

“I was not asleep; I was just resting my eyes.”

Maybe you have heard one or two of those phrases in your home.

Family I find myself this father’s day really wanting to encourage the dads. You see I am proud that NZ was the first country to give woman the vote. I am proud that we have ladies in every level of leadership and government. Its good. It’s a normal outworking of Christ in a nation but in this day and age I am saddened by the rough wrap men get.

I find that most young adults when they go to counselling get asked, what was the relationship with your dad like? The implication in our society is that if you have a problem its probably your dads fault.

I shared at the men's breakfast a couple of months ago that if you watch TV ads and programs, in most cases them men are the foolish dumb members of the family who behave like children and the wives and the daughters are typically held up as the sensible, wise ones.

Men in our day and age are taught to be more sensitive, get in touch with their feelings and in many ways become more woman like. It really concerns me. Neither men or woman are perfect, we are equal in Gods eyes and yet men don't get to many messages affirming them in our society today.

And so I wanted to be one of those voices this morning pushing back against the trends and saying it's OK to be a man. God chose your gender and He doesn't make mistakes. Where the world seems to want to blame men for most of life's social problems I find in genesis a verse that sets us blokes free from the worlds' condemnation. It's an obscure verse and I want to put it in context men, so that you and I who are fathers and grandfathers and great grandfathers get the message.

We probably all know the story of Father Abraham, claimed as the father of the Jewish faith, the Christian faith and the Islamic faith. We have probably all sung that song at some stage "father Abraham had many sons, many sons had father Abraham, I am one of them and so are you so lets' just praise the Lord, left foot, right arm etc... remember that one?

Father Abraham was a great man, but he stuffed up, he dropped the ball several times in his life and yet God forgave him and blessed him. That is a message we dad's need to hear today I believe.

You recall I am sure the story, how God promised him a great nation of descendants and yet at the age of 75 with a barren wife Sarah, he believed God but ... not sure. At 85 still no promised son and so Sarah basically says Abe, you had better give God a hand, see my servant Hagar (an Egyptian) sleep with her and have your descendant through her. So Abraham, a real man of faith, stumbles at this point and does so. He stops trusting God to come though on the promise, crickey Sarah is barren, he has his gold card and he's starting to get shaky with age. A child is born called Ishmael who was to become the Father of the Arab nations and Abraham loved him.

When Abe was 99 and Sarah 89 she miraculously conceives Isaac and the promised son is born. These two boys grow up in conflict with each other just as the Jews and the Arabs have forever been in conflict since and Sarah tells Abe to send Hagar and Ishmael away. It breaks this dad's heart to do so, he loves both boys and he prays that Ishmael too would be blessed and father a nation.

Isaac effectively becomes the father of the Jewish nation and after him his son Jacob. Jacob has 12 sons that were to be the patriarchs of the 12 tribes of Israel and his second to last son Joseph was clearly his favourite. Joseph as you recall was given a coat of many colours and large sleeves. Workers in that day were given cloaks without sleeves so they could work the land and the animals. Supervisors and managers were given cloaks with sleeves to store their lunch and important papers in. Joseph had a colourful bosses cloak from dad and his brothers the labourers cloak.

It was just the last straw in making the boys jealous and so one day when Joseph, daddies boy came out to check on them in the fields they devised a plan to throw him in a pit where he would die of thirst slowly. They planned to then kill an animal and cover his bosses cloak in blood and lie to dad about what happened to the favoured son.

As they sat by the pit eating lunch as the little brat suffered in the heat in the hole without water, one of the brothers, Judah had a brainwave. He saw a caravan of Midianite traders and thought crickey, rather than us kill little bro, why don't we make a few bucks and his blood can be on their hands. These Midianite traders could easily have taken him back to their land as a slave but notice what happens in our text today.

Genesis 37:28 (NIV)

28 So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels^[a] of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

You know what happens in Egypt, he starts of as Potiphar's slave, gets strongly thrown into prison, through his gift of interpreting dreams gets appointed to Pharaohs court and gets promoted within that court until he becomes the prime minister of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh himself.

Meanwhile back in the promised land there is famine, as there was in Egypt and Jacobs sons and their families were now facing starvation. Things are

really, really desperate. And so the whole Jewish nation, about 70 people in total at this stage make their way down to Egypt. As they begged for food before the Prime minister they didn't know that it was Joseph their little brother that they were kneeling before. And so the 12 tribes of Israel, the whole ethnic nation of Jews were saved by Joseph.

But dad's please notice this. Who did God use to get Joseph in the right place, the right country to save his family and effectively the nation of Israel?

The Ishmaelites, who were ...? The descendants of Ishmael, who was the product of Father Abraham's big stuff up.

Abraham, struggled to trust God for the promised Isaac, he mucked up, he dropped the ball and Ishmael was born, Ishmael was the product of Abraham's sin, of his faithlessness at that time.

Dad's, in this world that is so critical of men, of us dad's, in this world where if you have a problem it's often assumed that it is your fathers fault, what do we learn? We learn that God is in the habit of taking our mistakes, our broken pieces, our stuff ups and if we just put him first and trust Him, he takes those mistakes and uses them in time to bless us and others.

Romans 8:28 (NIV)

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who^[a] have been called according to his purpose.

I don't know about you men, but I know my story. I know how easy I thought being a dad was, how much I dreamed of it and yet in reality it was really hard. There was a time when my daughter got all hormonal and she seemed to have changed personality overnight, it was like someone stole my high achieving, polite beautiful girl and put a hyper emotional alien in front of me. In that season I didn't always respond to her the way a father should.

My oldest son was such a lot of work and had lots of problems. And it took me years to learn how to let the Holy Spirit control my words to him and bless him consistently.

My youngest son often missed out on dad time because so much energy was needed to manage the older brother and so I have been tempted to feel guilty.

Did I make mistakes? Did I create some Ishmaels' particularly with my words? I know I did. But dad's this I believe, I believe wholeheartedly. God and my children have forgiven me for those mistakes, and He is a good, good God. He is so good that if I would just put him first, if I would just trust those kids into

His hands then he will take my Ishmael's and yours and in time use them to bless us and our families.

He is a good, good God.

The world condemns us, maybe many of your children are caught up in the evil culture of our age and they still blame you, its dad's fault, if dad hadn't worked so hard, if dad hadn't remarried, if dad had given me more time and more cuddles. Men, don't buy into that. My bible tells me that Our Heavenly Father is good, and he can use even our greatest mistakes to bless us and our families if we just give them to him and trust him. If we turn from them and lean on Him. He is a good, good God.

Joseph said something very similar at the end of this event. He said

To his family he said

Genesis 50:20

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

Don't carry guilt, join me in giving our Ishmaels to God and in trusting God to work those things for our good.