

The God Who Restores Failures

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- [0 : 00] But we're going to turn now to God's Word and to Genesis, and Willie is continuing his series in Genesis. We have plenty of Bibles, church Bibles, visitor Bibles just in the side and at the back.
- So if you don't have a Bible with you, please do grab one. And we'll be turning to Genesis 16, Genesis chapter 16. And we're reading the whole chapter there, so starting from verse 1 of Genesis 16.
- Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar.
- And Sarah said to Abram, Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Go into my servant. It may be that I shall obtain children by her.
- And Abram listened to the voice of Sarah. So after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarah, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram, her husband, as a wife.
- [1 : 18] And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. And Sarah said to Abram, May the wrong done to me be on you.
- I gave my servant to your embrace. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the Lord judge between you and me.
- But Abram said to Sarah, Behold, your servant is in your power. Do to her as you please. Then Sarah dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her.
- The angel of the Lord found her by the spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. And he said, Hagar, servant of Sarah, where have you come from, and where are you going?
- She said, I am fleeing from my mistress Sarah. The angel of the Lord said to her, Return to your mistress and submit to her. The angel of the Lord also said to her, I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude.
- [2 : 29] And the angel of the Lord said to her, Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has listened to your affliction.
- He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him. And he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen. So she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her.
- You are a God of seeing. For she said, Truly here I have seen him who looks after me. Therefore the well was called Be-Lehau-Roi.
- It lies between Kedesh and Bered. And Hagar bore Abram a son. And Abram called the name of a son whom Hagar bore Ishmael.
- Abram was 86 years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram. Amen. May God bless his word to us.

[3 : 35] Well do turn with me if you would to the passage that we read together in Genesis chapter 16. And as you're doing that let me just say for those who weren't at the prayer meeting on Wednesday that our special offering for Easter for the new educational fund has brought in from the congregation over 80,000 pounds.

And that is a great effort together. So well done. It's also a great encouragement I think to all who are involved in getting we hope a new school going here as a measure of the support right across the congregation.

And do please keep that in your prayer. Be praying for those who have got lots of work to do between now and August to get all of that off the ground. But we give thanks to God for all that he's done through generous hearts in the fellowship together.

Genesis chapter 16 then. My mentor William Still used to say often that the biggest hindrances to God's work in the world is not the evil of his enemies but is the sins of his saints.

The failures of the church. And sadly church history is ample testimony to that. And yet despite the manifold failures of God's people the gospel has not been silenced.

[5 : 03] The church has not died. And God's grace still abounds in the world. The covenant God will not abandon his promise and his purpose.

Last week in Genesis 15 we saw that our God is a God who reassures the fearful faithful. But here in chapter 16 we see that he is also the God who restores the faithful's failures.

And what a very great comfort that is or ought to be to all of us. Abram is the great example in the Bible of faithful obedience.

But despite that faith we see him here again felled by gracious great failure. And that means that this is a chapter full of stark warnings for Christians today.

As Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 10. These things are written for us so that any who thinks he is standing firm take heed lest he fall. But it's also a wonderful reminder isn't it to those who have fallen that our God that Abraham's God not only rebukes but restores.

[6 : 18] The chapter here unfolds in four movements. And first of all in verses 1 to the first part of verse 4 we see why we fail as believers.

It shows us the perennial root of sin. And that is failure to trust that the gospel promise alone is enough to bring us all the blessing, all the fulfillment, all the joy that we ever need.

The pain of waiting and the power of wanting so often lead us to doubt God's promises and to take action into our own hands in disobedience to God's clear commands.

And these verses are an example of exactly that. Verse 1 lays out the problem. Sarai had borne Abram no children. Back in chapter 11 verse 30 we were told that Sarah was barren, that she had no child.

And here we are well over 10 years later. Verse 3 says they've been in the land for 10 years. So well over 10 years later she's still childless. Now don't minimize the human pain in those words.

[7 : 36] Even for a godly believing woman as Sarah was. Knowing children are God's gift and not our right doesn't diminish the agony, does it, of those who long for a child.

And perhaps I should say that in the church as we are at the moment, awash with babies, that can be very hard, can't it, for some who are among us?

And we need to remember that. So there's real human pain in those words. But you see in Sarah's case, there's far more at stake. Because here is a couple who, unlike any other, and unlike any of us, had a unique promise from God.

They had a sworn oath from God that they would have a son of their own. That the heir of promise would be their own son. That's what God said to Abram in chapter 15 verse 4.

And yet here we are 10 years on from the great call of God, and there's absolutely no sign of this reality. So faith says, well, God has promised.

[8 : 43] But sight says, well, God doesn't seem to see that time is robbing me of any possibility of having a child. God seems to be deaf to my prayers.

Can God really deliver this that he's promised? Is it even real, or am I just deluded? Well, if God is real, he doesn't seem to be listening.

He's not answering. Does he even care? And that, you see, is Sarah's perplexing misery here. Verse 2, she knows God is sovereign.

It's the Lord who has prevented me from having children, she says. And yet there's a disconnect, isn't there, between that theological knowledge and her controlling emotions and actions.

She stops living by trusting God. And you see, when you do that, irrationality takes over. Look at verse 2.

[9 : 42] She thinks that she herself can do the very thing that God has prevented. But that's absurd, isn't it? But you see, that's what we do when we stop trusting God's true promises.

Because what we're doing is substituting in our minds a God of our own imagining. We can only know the true God through his revelation of himself to us.

And that comes to us in his word. In his true covenant promise. But you see, if we stop trusting in his revelation, inevitably we'll have false ideas about God.

And we may think that we're still seeking what God wants. We may still think we're seeking the same goal of his kingdom. But in reality, you see, we've actually lost the plot. We may still want what God has promised.

But we've lost interest in the God of promise. And that, you see, is the very essence of sin. And instead of serving God for his sake, we start to want God as our servant to give us what we desire, our way.

[10 : 53] And that, you see, is the perennial root of all failures in spiritual life. When we stop trusting God's true revelation of himself to us, we lose sight of reality about God.

And inevitably, then we lose touch with reality about how we are to live for God. Look at verse 2. Sarah turns to her own very human solution.

We'll have a surrogate child. That's something that's quite acceptable in the culture around in that day. But it's something absolutely at odds with God's purpose for them. Abraham and Sarah knew very well that God's promise involved both of them as a married couple.

They knew that God had ordained monogamy as a one-flesh union from the beginning. Moses' first readers knew that very well. They knew that this was a violation, clearly, of God's law.

And the mention of the slave being an Egyptian, well, goodness, that's another red flag, isn't it, to Moses' readers? They know that Sarah is vital to God's purpose.

[12 : 04] God's gone to great lengths, hasn't he, to protect her already. Remember the fiasco back in chapter 12, again involving Egypt when Abraham nearly lost her. But see, this is what happens when human reason starts to trump divine revelation.

It's very subtle. You tell yourself you're not rejecting God. You're just helping God to achieve what you know that he wants for you. Your happiness. And you can convince yourself, can't you, that the end justifies the means.

I know this is what God wants. And so do you, Abraham. So, I'll get children this way. See, notice that Sarah knows that she is supposed to be the mother.

She doesn't say to Abraham, well, just forget me, Abraham. You go off with another wife. She says, I'll get what God has said that we will both have, but we'll do it this way. And notice the pattern that follows in verse 2.

Abraham listened. He defers to Sarah. And in verse 3, Sarah takes the initiative in action. She gives Hagar to Abraham.

[13 : 12] And the consequence? Hagar conceived. That's a result. Vindication, you see. We were right all along.

It's so easy to think that, isn't it? When we've allowed our reason to trump God's revelation. So when God says, no, sex is for one man and one woman in lifelong marriage.

But we say to us, well, what God's really interested is just a loving relationship. So we find one with someone of the opposite sex or of someone of the same sex.

And we find fulfillment, it seems, and joy. You see, I've got now what God really wanted me to have. I was right to ignore those words that he literally said.

Or when God says, literally, don't yoke yourself with an unbeliever. Because you'll never be able to be one with them in spirit.

[14 : 15] And you've thought, well, yes, but God's so good. Surely he'll work this out. He'll use me to bring my partner to faith, won't he? And you've got into that relationship or into that marriage even.

It seems so blissful. It's easy to think, isn't it? That it was a good thing that we took a mature view of God's words. Stopped being so legalistic, so literal about God's words.

It's so easy to deceive ourselves, to blind ourselves to the truth. And the truth is that we've stopped believing and trusting God.

And disbelief has led to disobedience to God. And in the end, that always, always leads to disaster.

You can't miss, can you, the clear hints that Moses is dropping to us here in the narrative. Verse 2, he listened to the voice of his wife. And verse 3, she took and she gave to her husband.

[15 : 20] Where have we read that before? It's right out of Genesis chapter 3, isn't it? And just like Adam, the son of God. Well, so here Abraham, the man of God, the friend of God, is as culpable as his wife in abdicating the responsibility that God has given to him as a spiritual leader in his home.

And he joins her in sin. It's a perennial pattern, isn't it? It's the same sin. Again and again. And by the way, it is a warning, isn't it, to married men?

That we are responsible to God in our families. We mustn't abdicate that. We mustn't do that. It'll lead into all kinds of disasters. But it's a perennial pattern, whether it's Genesis 3, or Genesis 6, or Genesis 11, or here.

And many other places. A perennial pattern, because sin is so pervasive, even in true believers. And the serpent is so persuasive.

And whether it's the pain of waiting, or the power of wanting, even good things that God has promised us as men and women. But we take matters into our own hands.

[16 : 40] And we stop really believing. And therefore, we stop really obeying God's word and his ways. And we just turn to the ways that everybody else thinks are fine. And we act the way that everybody else says is fine.

And we seek satisfaction. And we seek liberation. We seek our identity and our love, our way. And we think we're just helping God. And we often think it works.

And it looks that way here, doesn't it? Verse 4. And he went into Hagar, and she conceived. Well, you see, that's why we fail and fall.

It's a perennial root of disbelief in God's promise and disobedience to his commands. But what happens when we do?

The rest of verses 4 through to verse 6 show us the predictable results of the failure to trust God. It doesn't take long, does it, for things to be seen for what they really are.

[17 : 45] And that is a disaster all around. And it's so predictable. The writer, in fact, is making that point by the very structure of the story.

It just repeats the first four verses pattern exactly. Started in verse 1 with Sarah's problem. Now in verse 4, far from her problem being solved, it's magnified.

She's held in open contempt by her servant. So again, verse 5, she has words with her husband. Sarah said to Abraham, just like verse 2. And again, Abraham, verse 6, defers to Sarah.

It's in your hands. And again, Sarah takes the initiative, and she deals harshly with Hagar. And the consequence? Well, Hagar flees.

So it's not, as verse 4 seemed, a solution, a son conceived. But rather, we've got a son confiscated. Do you see the irony?

[18 : 44] See, when A leads to B, leads to C, leads to D in disobedience to God, then always A leads to B, leads to C, leads to D in disaster for man.

And it's totally predictable because God is the covenant God. He's the sovereign Lord who gives in grace, yes, but also who commands obedience.

And we'll see that next time, explicitly drummed home to Abraham in the very next chapter, where God says in verse 1 of chapter 17, Walk before me and be blameless, that I may bless you with covenant blessings.

But disobedience to God's sovereign commands always leads to disaster, because we're made for obedience. And God's moral laws are as immutable as the natural laws that He's built into this world.

You and I can't defy gravity. If you think you can, you're in for a rude shock. But neither can we defy God's commands for human life without disaster. If only our world understood that, if only our government understood that, we would have so much less chaos in society and in the world, wouldn't we?

[20 : 00] But believers can forget that so easily as well. And we can't afford to, you see, because these things are so predictable.

If we disobey God's commands, if we rupture our relationship with Him, we come into conflict with Him, then always it leads to conflict in our relationships with one another, to conflict, to arguments, to blame, accusations, and misery and hurt all round.

These are the predictable results of our spiritual failures, both immediately and also often with long-lasting consequences. The immediate consequences here were the rupture of this family.

Derek Kibner says each of the three characters displays the untruth that is part of sin. In false pride, that's Hagar. False blame, Sarai.

And false neutrality. Abram. Hagar despises Sarah with contempt. It's a very strong word, that. It's the word that's translated cursed or dishonor in chapter 12, verse 3.

[21 : 11] It implies that she becomes a real enemy. And Sarah feels very aggrieved. And in turn, she blames Abram. It's all your fault. Amazing self-deception, isn't it?

Sarah's self-righteousness or apparent surprise at the outcome of this. As if instituting an adulterous sexual union is simply just a mechanical thing with no emotional involvement, no deep feelings involved, never mind any spiritual consequences.

We can think like that, can't we? People say that. Oh, it's just sex. That is utter delusion. It's never just sex.

That kind of adulterous situation always, always causes pain and heartache and misery.

Even if, as in this case, it's all apparently open and consensual. The 20th century philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, the existentialist philosopher, and his partner, Simone de Beauvoir, who was a feminist activist, they had a famously open relationship because she rejected bourgeois attitudes to marriage and family and so on.

[22 : 37] And he had multiple affairs. But the truth was, she became bitterly, bitterly unhappy. She was obsessively jealous with all his sexual conquests. Well, hello?

Is that a surprise? So Sarah is bitter and miserable. And Abraham, again, just abdicates responsibility.

Verse 6, it's up to you. She's in your hands. You do as you please. And then Sarah's reprisals, well, they cause Hagar to feel, well, I'm just not going to put up with this. That uppity old woman is not fit to be my mistress.

I'm off. I'm going back to Egypt where I came from and where I belong. It's grim, isn't it? It's like a soap opera. But actually, it's just like real life too, isn't it?

Because sin breeds sin. Predictably. Always. Read James chapter 1. Always. Always.

[23 : 40] When we think we know better than God how to achieve happiness and satisfaction and security. Well. That's what happens.

But as William still says, God never subverts his own laws to accomplish his will. And nor does he ask us to.

Nor does he allow us to. The immediate consequences were a disaster here. The rupture of a family. And so, likewise, were the long-term sequelae.

If you just read on in Genesis and in the rest of the Bible, you'll see the lasting consequences in terms of the sheer enmity of the races that had resulted from all of this. Ishmael's line are enemies to God's people for generations.

In fact, many would say that we're still seeing the results of that today. Because Ishmael is claimed as the father of the Arabs.

[24 : 40] Indeed, especially those who claim allegiance to Islam. Who are implacably opposed still to both the physical and the spiritual descendants of Isaac. Let's think about that.

Well, Sarah and Abraham thought they were being very wise in verse 3. But the testimony of God's word and the evidence of history and our own experience.

It exposes that as just utter folly, doesn't it? Hasn't God made foolish the wisdom of the world? Sarah loses her maid.

Hagar loses her home. And Abraham loses his relationship with both his wife and with Hagar. And loses the son. But this whole thing is all supposed to be about.

Why is this story here? Well, it's a clear warning, isn't it? First, to Moses' own heroes. To the Israelites who were on the brink of the promised land.

[25 : 52] And they were constantly, weren't they, thinking of a better way than God's long and slow way to blessing. The better way is to take the Egyptian option. Let's go back to Egypt, they said.

Repeatedly. Oh, there's prosperity in Egypt. There's fertility in Egypt. Far better than this barren desert that God's leading us through. Telling us to wait and wait and wait for this future that we still see no hope of.

Moses is saying, no. Remember Abraham. When he sought the Egyptian option. When he sought the reasonable, acceptable way of the world around.

When he sought Egyptian prosperity back in chapter 12. Instead of God's provision in the land. Or here, where he sought Egyptian fertility.

Instead of the faithfulness to trust God and wait for his time. Led to disaster for Abraham. And that's what it will do for you. He's saying to his people.

[26 : 50] Remember your own history. Remember how you rebelled and refused to trust God. You lost out for a whole generation. Sent back to the desert. It's a warning for Moses' people.

And it's a warning to us. Paul says these things are written for our instruction. And we need to take heed. Lest we fall. Just because sin is pervasive.

Even in our believing hearts. And the serpent is so persuasive. He's cunning. He's eager to frustrate. To destroy all the seed of the womb.

And all the people of faith. And you see, once we've stepped out. Of the path of obedience. Into distrust. Into disobedience. That is a moving escalator.

We can't get off. It's a predictable, guaranteed escalator. Of misery and conflict. And damage. Damage to ourselves. Cause damage to others. All sorts of ways.

[27 : 53] To cause damage. And, of course, dishonor. And damage above all. To the kingdom purposes of God. This is a real warning to us, isn't it? Don't get on that escalator.

Christians. Disobedience. And that's the perennial root. And that's the predictable result. Of our spiritual failures.

Six short verses. But when we think about it in our own story. That is our story. A lot of the time, isn't it? Disobedience.

Disobedience. And damage. And disasters. And disasters. And disasters. But what a blessing that the chapter doesn't end here. Because these verses are all about us, aren't they?

And all about the mess that we tend to make. There's no encouragement in that. But there is encouragement in the real subject of this story. Who is the Lord himself. And in verses 7 to 12, he steps in.

[28 : 57] And he shows himself to be the patient restorer. From sin and disaster. Notice there's no word of Abraham here. As they're riding out in search for here.

There's no heroics here. Like there was in chapter 14. When he went out riding after Lot. That's only the Lord himself. He's the one. Who heads out into the desert.

Into the wilderness. To search for the lost Hagar. There's echoes there, aren't there? The story's much later.

So verse 7. The angel of the Lord finds her by a spring. By this well near sure. Well on the way to Egypt. She's fleeing back to her former life. And notice that God begins by confronting Hagar.

And it's that that brings the restitution of this whole situation. Remember each of these three have been involved in sin. Each of them had tried to deny it.

[30 : 00] To blame others. To dismiss it. Each of them had tried to play the victim. In order to excuse themselves. And that's just such human behavior, isn't it?

We try to justify ourselves. We say, well maybe I've done something wrong. But it's not nearly as bad as what he's done. Or what she's done. We play the victim.

And of course today. Victimhood is the way to power, isn't it? But the Lord won't allow that. He says to Hagar, no, no, no. Never mind them.

What about you? He puts Hagar right on the spot. He forces her to confess her own wrong. The Lord says, and by the way, this is the Lord. The angel of the Lord.

Verse 13 is quite clear. It's the Lord himself who is speaking to her. Verse 8. Where have you come from? And where are you going? He says. Well, I'm fleeing.

[30 : 55] I've had enough of the hypocrisy. Of that so-called household of faith. I'm leaving. Well, says the Lord. You must go back and submit.

You can't run away from the mess of your sin. And fleeing to Egypt. Fleeing away from the household of faith. Can never be the answer to your problems.

And can never be the answer to believers problems today either. Easy to want to do that, isn't it? Especially if you've been sinned against by somebody in the church.

It's very tempting to just condemn them all as hypocrites. In order to justify yourself. You should abandon the church altogether. And no, says God.

No. They've got no excuse. But neither have you. And you see, the patient restorer won't allow us to pretend. That sin can just be airbrushed away.

[31 : 53] No. He meets us in grace. Yes. But grace says. Turn around. Go back. Now that's a message that is anathema to so many today, isn't it?

Our government today would want to convict. The Lord God of conversion therapy. But God says. You must turn around and go back. You must repent.

Because it is only as you do that. That you'll find restoration. And that's always God's command. When we're running away from the consequences of sin.

From the mess of sin. But notice that God's commands are also always full of his promise. Look at verses 10 and 11. God promises Hagar a future.

She's not going back to mistreatment and death. No, she will have a son. And she'll have a future. It's amazing, isn't it? To see God's mercy and grace to Hagar and these promises to her.

[32 : 56] Despite the fact that Ishmael's line will be an affliction to God's people for generations. There's a gracious echo here to her of the promise that God gave to Abraham about the true heir, Isaac, who is still to come.

So even out of something that ought never to have been. And even out of the mess, the failure of this unhappy chapter. God's grace works blessing and generosity for human beings.

Even if it's going to make things harder for God's own purposes. Even if his grace makes more problems for him.

He's a God who brings beauty out of ashes for those who cry to him for help. Because verse 11, the Lord has listened to your affliction. Again, William still says, no one can read the Bible with open eyes without seeing the growing odds which God allows against himself.

And yet that's how God loves to work. That is grace. Where sin abounds, grace super abounds. But it's not cheap grace, is it?

[34 : 13] Look, the consequences of sin can't be buried. They can't be undone. And verse 12 reminds us of that. But look, because this blessing of Ishmael is a mixed blessing. There'll be strife between him and his brothers.

And between their progeny to come. And that also has to be faced up to by Hagar and by Abram and Sarah, as we'll see. And often it is a mark, isn't it, of true repentance that we have to learn to submit.

To accept that we can't turn the clock back. We can't undo the past. We can't make everything right. And God tells us we have to be realistic.

We have to face the future with realism by his grace. And that involves sacrifice. Because not all relationships can be restored.

Put back right as we might wish them to be. Not all former things can be put back the way they once were. And part of restoration through repentance is learning to accept that we may well have to live with scars.

[35 : 22] Even if the wounds have been cleansed by the grace of God. And Hagar has to accept that she has to learn to go back God's way.

She has to humble herself. As indeed will Abram and Sarah. And they did. Surely. That's surely the implication of verse 15. Where Abraham names the child Ishmael.

Just as the angel had told Hagar. He's submitting to that. So Hagar's obedience and submission.

And her penitent return. Has clearly rebuked and humbled Abraham and Sarah too. It's brought about their repentance and restoration. Rather wonderful, isn't it?

To see how God was so patient. Indeed so deliberate and provocative in the way he taught them their lesson. We don't know how long Hagar was away.

[36 : 22] You can only imagine, can't we? The words in the tent between Abraham and Sarah. Or perhaps the silences. The dirty looks. The regret. The hurt.

And then all of a sudden back comes Hagar with her story. The Lord has met me. The Lord has spoken to me. The Lord had heard my affliction.

The Lord's shown himself to me. And he sent me back with gracious promises to cling on to. And here I am, ma'am. In obedience to the Lord.

I submit to you again. Because I've trusted in his word to me. What did Sarah think, do you think? You catch the irony?

The God that Sarah thought didn't hear. And couldn't see. And maybe was dead and impotent. That she couldn't trust. But he's shown to be alive.

[37 : 22] He's shown to be all seeing and all hearing. And so powerful and utterly to be trusted by this slave girl that she had abused and wronged and chased away into the desert.

The Lord really knows how to humble the bride, doesn't he? Those are the kind of lessons you really do remember. From the patient restorer.

From the God of all grace. But that brings us to one final thing. Because God does want us to remember the true nature of his restoring grace.

And so he gives in verses 13 to 16 a permanent reminder to Abraham and to all after him. A reminder both of perpetual failures and the need for restoration.

But also of God's grace and his faithfulness in providing restoration from sin. You see how these last three verses are all concerned with names and the significance of names.

[38 : 23] The footnotes in the Bible are helpful. They explain some of them. First of all, there's the well in verse 14. Whose name is a reminder that God is not distant and God is not dead and blind.

But no, he is the Lord, the living one who sees us and everything about us. And then there's the boy in verse 15. Ishmael, whose name means God hears.

He's not deaf to our cries and prayers. He hears it all. Powerful, permanent reminders of that incident forever, aren't they? Because every time they ever saw or even heard of that well, it would be a reminder, wouldn't it, of what they had sinfully forgotten.

That God does see, that God is alive, that God can be trusted. And every time they'd see little Ishmael running around in the camp, they'd be reminded of his name and the same thing.

God does hear. He's the God who hears and who answers. What a great comfort in those names. And at the same time, a great rebuke.

[39 : 29] Because each time they saw or heard of these things, it would be a living reminder, wouldn't it, of failure, of distrust, and of the consequences of that failure and disobedience.

But they are nonetheless, aren't they, monuments, living monuments to God and his grace. Not to pretend grace that minimizes and tries to forget about sin, but real grace, restoring grace, amazing grace.

A grace that super abounds and envelopes even terrible sin. And I think that's how God wants us. To view the milestones and the monuments that litter our own lives in that way.

Yes, to remind us of our failures and of their consequences. And to warn us from ever going these ways again. But above all, surely, to point us to the grace of the great restorer.

And to remind us that even in the mess we get ourselves into, and sometimes it is an awful mess, isn't it? Even there, he is the God who sees, who hears, who is alive, who is alive, and who will restore, if we'll heed his command and turn around and submit.

[40 : 54] Repent and grasp his promises. And trust them again. He's still the same God who meets people in a mess, by springs, in dry places.

That's his pattern. He loves to do it. He can do it. Don't doubt that. Don't ever think that you're in too much of a mess for God.

Don't ever think that others could be in so much of a mess that it's beyond God's possibility to restore them. A family where there's a complete chaotic mess of multiple children from multiple different fathers.

Or surrogate children. Or homosexual couples. Or messy, acrimonious relationships and divorce cases. Or whatever it may be. If God did it here with Abraham, with Sarai, with Hagar.

If he did it with another woman at a well in the desert in a dry place. Do you remember in John's Gospel, chapter 4? A woman who'd had five husbands and multiple adulterous partners.

[42 : 01] If God can restore disastrous messes like this chapter and even use it for his blessing to the whole world.

He can restore your mess and my mess. Our family messes. Our marital messes. Our psychological, emotional messes.

All our mess. Do you doubt that? Friends, if you doubt that, you look at the permanent reminder that God has placed in history, a living monument forever to his restoring grace for us.

It's the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Forever there was a more crushing, humbling reminder of our failures, of our mess, of our sin.

It's there, isn't it? Behold the man upon the cross. My sins upon his shoulder. But what a permanent reminder that is.

[43 : 04] What a monument to the grace of God the powerful and patient restorer. To the depth of the Father's love for us.

Because it was there that this God, El Roy, the God who reveals himself to be seen by sinful human beings, it's there that he was seen by the eyes of the whole wide world as the God who restores the failures.

All of them. For all of those who have faith in him. Do you need today a God who restores failures?

Well, friend, he is alive. And he's the God who sees. And he's the God who hears those who cry to him. He's the God who knows it all.

You cannot run away from him. But you can run to him. And like Hagar, you can trust him to restore you to walk with him again in his gracious way.

[44 : 17] The God who restores failures. Let's pray. Perverse and foolish.

Oft I strayed. But in his love he sought me. And on his shoulder gently laid. And home rejoicing brought me. Lord, what a mess we make when we doubt you, when we ignore you, when we go our own way.

And how we need you, our great redeemer and restorer, to rescue us, to help us, Lord, to trust you. To know you as the great shepherd of your sheep.

Help us to find true comfort in your rod of gracious rebuke and in your staff of commanding leadership. So we may know that healing and restoring grace that flows from the cross of our Savior, the King of love, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Hear us. And help us, Lord. For your Son Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Amen.