Abraham 10 - Law and Grace

1. He who laughs last, laughs best

In Genesis 21 we now come to the point where Isaac is born. After waiting for so long Abraham and Sarah had finally had a son, just as God promised. In an earlier part of Genesis we can read how Abraham had laughed for joy over the idea of a son to be born and Sarah had laughed with incredulity. Here was a time of rejoicing and true laughter.

Back in chapter 17, God had commanded Abraham to name the child Isaac because his very name meant laughter.

Gen 17:17-19 Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?
18 And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee!
19 And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him.

The essence of humor is incongruity. You expect one thing and then the humor comes from something that is at least slightly out of alignment. That's what makes Dad jokes so precious.

"I thought the dryer was shrinking my clothes. Turns out it was the refrigerator all along."
"I asked my dog what's two minus two. He said nothing."

The idea that a child should be born to someone so old is certainly out of alignment with all expectations.

Gen 21:1-8 And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken.
2 For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.
3 And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac.
4 And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old, as God had commanded him.
5 And Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him.
6 And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me.
7 And she said, Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck? for I have born him a son in his old age.
8 And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned.

Sara correctly pointed out that now the whole world will laugh with her. Abraham had laughed,
Sarah had laughed, but it is God who gets the last laugh. Isn't that the way it is when we see God work? When we are surprised at how God brings things about we actually laugh. There is an illustration about the church going through a time of drought and had been blessed with rain when they held a prayer meeting. Then we laugh when we find out that a child was the only one who had brought an umbrella to the meeting. We then laugh at ourselves a little bit because we realize how we need to have the faith of a child.

Abraham and Sarah might have laughed at the idea of a child in their old age but God got the last laugh by naming the child laughter, which is what the name Isaac means.

2. No laughing matter

We come to a sad and troubling part of the story that is no laughing matter. Isaac was to be weaned and there was a feast made to celebrate the moment.

Gen 21:8 And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned.

All by itself, the weaning of a child might not seem like it is such a big deal that you would want to throw a party: "Hey! Let's celebrate and get all the family over! Little Billy just had some baby cereal!" We don't know exactly how old Isaac might have been, but that is not exactly the issue for having a celebration. The time of weaning represented the change in character of a child and could be three or four years old or even later. Weaning represents the step from being a baby to being a child who has demonstrated his own personhood. It recognizes a serious stage in a child's life and reminds us of that time in Samuel's life.

1Sam 1:24-28 And when she [Hannah, Samuel's mother] had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of the LORD in Shiloh: and the child was young.
25And they slew a bullock, and brought the child to Eli.[Eli had prayed for Hannah earlier, although it was an "unspoken" request]
26And she said, Oh my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the LORD.
27For this child I prayed; and the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of him:
28Therefore also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD. And he [that is, Samuel] worshipped the LORD there.

Although he was very young, Samuel was old enough to be sent off for training and also to worship the Lord.

In Psalm 131 you get the idea that a weaned child is one who has control of his behavior. The very word weaned speaks of maturity and how a someone is treated as morally responsible.

Isaac became the favored son and consistent with this is the fact that at some point after this, Ishmael noticed it and reacted to him.

Gen 21:9-10 And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham 10 - Law and Grace – 2
Abraham, mocking.
10 Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac.

This didn't sit well with Sarah and so the sad time came when she did not want Ishmael, who was about 13 years older than Isaac, to put him in any danger. She complained to Abraham to put Ishmael out. Abraham responded to her, but God confirmed Sarah's demand.

Gen 21:11-12 And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son. 12 And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called.

Don't feel totally sympathetic to Ishmael, though. God took care of him even though the Ishmaelites would be a burden to the Israelites for centuries to come.

Gen 21:13-21 And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed. 14 And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. 15 And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs. 16 And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bowshot: for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept. 17 And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. 18 Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation. 19 And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink. 20 And God was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer. 21 And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran: and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt.

Ishmael evidently maintained a good relationship with Abraham and Isaac because he and Isaac joined together to bury Abraham when he passed.

There had been laughter when Isaac was born, but now there was a time of sobriety. Sobriety is the better word to use here than sadness. In that sense, there is a serious lesson here besides treat your little brother or sister right. The Apostle Paul brought this out in the book of Galatians, which brings us to our next point regarding Law and Grace.

3. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning
Keeping with the theme of laughter, I want to bring out the principle of weeping in the night but rejoicing in the morning.

Ps 30:4-5 Sing unto the LORD, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.
5 For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

Yes, there was weeping that Hagar and Ishmael would experience, but there was something even greater that was going to come of this situation that would be great cause for rejoicing. Paul would use this very situation to describe the difference between Law and Grace. The Galatians were being influenced by teachers that wanted to bring the new believing Gentiles under the power of the law instead of appreciating the nature of grace.

Gal 4:21-31 [Paul wrote to the Galatians who were being persuaded] Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? [There are two different ways the word law is used here. The first is the idea of being under the statutes and ordinances of the Mosaic Law. The second is a reference to the books written by Moses. The Law was not given until the book of Exodus, but Paul points them back to the book of Genesis.]
22 For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman.
23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. [The one born to Hagar the bondwoman was Ishmael. The one born to Sarah the freewoman was Isaac.]
24 Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. [Paul is writing by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, explains the symbolism of this allegory. Hagar and Sara represent two covenants: the covenant of the law with its demands, and the new covenant of grace described in Jeremiah 31]
25 For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. [Hagar stands for the Law that was given on Mt. Sinai to which Jerusalem, the center of Judaism, was now in bondage to since they rejected the grace of God in Christ.]
26 But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. [Here Paul refers to the heavenly New Jerusalem, whose citizens are the true believers who will inhabit it in the Resurrection.]
27 For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband.
28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. [As we have seen in previous studies, Isaac is Abraham's promised seed received by faith. All those who receive Jesus by faith and not by trying to perform enough works according to the law, they are the ones who are saved.]
29 But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit,
even so it is now.

30 Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. [Here is the great principle of weeping yielding to rejoicing, which we will look at in a moment.]

31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.

We are not the children of God because of how good and well behaved we are according to the demands of the law. When we are honest with ourselves, we will never be good enough by anything we do. We want to remember that the only purpose the Law serves is to remind us that we are sinners.

Rom 3:20,23 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

This certainly is great cause for weeping. But then, joy comes in when we discover the grace of God.

Eph 2:8-9 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Why this is a great principle is because we see this pattern all over the Bible. Paul describes it in Hebrews 10.

Heb 10:1-10 For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.

3 But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.

4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.

5 Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me:

6 In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure.

... 9 Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.

10 By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

In vs. 9 we read how God took away the first, that He may establish the second. He took away the sacrifices of the Law because those sacrifices required by the Law were never empowered to take away sin. They only brought remembrance of the need for a sacrifice. The offerings of bulls and of
goats according to the Law could not take away sins. Now, it is not as though God actually took away those sacrifices. There was still a demand for sacrifice, but when Jesus, the perfect sacrifice for sin was offered, there was no need for the blood of any bulls or goats. We see this pattern between

- Genesis with the creation of the Earth and the Revelation with the recreation of the earth.
- The first Adam and Jesus, the second Adam
- Cain and Able
- The kingdom of the world under Nimrod and the kingdom of God in the call of Abraham
- Ishmael and Isaac
- Esau and Jacob
- Mannaseh and Ephraim
- Law and Grace
- The old covenant and the New Covenant
- The Old Testament and the New Testament
- The Tabernacle and The Temple
- King Saul and King David
- Absalom and Solomon

These are just some of the parallels we see in the Bible.

Under the Law, then, there is cause for weeping in the night when we are under the darkness of sin and judgment. Under Grace when we come out from the darkness of sin into the glorious light of God's love, we find freedom. We are no longer under the bondage of sin to obey the lusts of our flesh. We are blessed with the love of God, knowing that we are no longer judged by our sin and sinfulness. This is because Jesus took that judgment on the cross, taking our punishment for sin, bringing us into a new relationship with God. With the new life He gives, we have power over the bondage of temptation to be able to live in service to God. There are those who are so covetous to keep from having to give in to God that they would forfeit all that He is offering to us. They fight to give in to God so they can't be told what to do that they will end up in the eternal darkness of Hell where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth forever. For those who turn to God in repentance there will be rejoicing in the presence of the angels and eternal rejoicing in the glory of heaven.

Sometimes we might give in to sin and we feel the weight of the Law as we experience the judgment of God. We feel the pain and all looks dark. When we turn our hearts to the Lord, we see the dawn of a whole new day and rejoice. The great principle is that we can trade the rags of our self righteousness for the spotless robe of the righteousness of Christ and go from weeping to rejoicing.

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2. No laughing matter Gen 21:8, 1Sam 1:24-28, Gen 21:9-21
3. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning Ps 30:4-5, Gal 4:21-31, Rom 3:20,23, Eph 2:8-9, Heb 10:1-10