

were not being faithful to the Lord. we are going to close with the hymn; God is working His purpose out and the last verse begins; All we can do is nothing worth, unless God blesses the deed. Let us trust the Lord to fulfil His work through us. Amen.

God is working his purpose out as year succeeds to year;  
God is working His purpose out, and the time is drawing near;  
Nearer and nearer draws the time, the time that shall surely be,  
When the earth shall be filled with the glory of God,  
As the waters cover the sea.

From utmost East to utmost West, where'er man's foot hath trod,  
By the mouth of many messengers goes forth the voice of God;  
Give ear to Me, ye continents, ye isles, give ear to Me,  
That the earth may be filled with the glory of God,  
As the waters cover the sea.

March we forth in the strength of God with the banner of Christ  
unfurled,  
That the light of the glorious gospel of truth may shine throughout  
the world:  
Fight we the fight with sorrow and sin, to set their captives free,  
That the earth may be filled with the glory of God,  
As the waters cover the sea.

All we can do is nothing worth, unless God blesses the deed;  
Vainly we hope for the harvest-tide till God gives life to the seed;  
Yet nearer and nearer draws the time, the time that shall surely be,  
When the earth shall be filled with the glory of God,  
As the waters cover the sea.

**Thought for Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> February 2021**  
**Pastor Gordon Hamilton**

**Read Genesis 16:1-16** Last Sunday I said near the end of my sermon; 'Abram took the Lord at his word.' But as we have seen over previous chapters there were times when Abram did things his own way, or was willing to do things his own way when pushed by other people. As we have read, here in chapter 16, it is Sarai who is giving up on ever having children of her own, and she says to Abram, verse 2; '*The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her.*' We see no resistance from Abram. We know that when Abram died (chapter 25) he had several concubines, and had several children through them (25:6) but we presume these were all born after Hagar gave birth to Ishmael, and at that point Abram was 86 years old. The difficulty here is that with Ishmael being Abram's first born, albeit to a woman who was not his wife but his wife's maidservant, it brought enmity between Sarai and Hagar, the implications which have been felt ever since, not only in that country but in the world, as Islam see their inheritance coming from Abram, through Ishmael, whereas the Jews, and subsequently Christians see our inheritance coming from Abram but through Isaac, Matthew 1:2 and Luke 3:34. One man's misdemeanour has caused such division who so many years. Maybe this should remind each one of us to be aware that our actions can have profound ramifications. And yet, as we read last week in Hebrews 11, God counted Abram as faithful. Abram was not perfect, Abram made mistakes, some we may think were so big that how could God continue to use him, and yet God uses sinners and God forgives sinners. Let's be honest if Abram had refused to sleep with Hagar, it is possible, that God would have fulfilled his promise of a son with Sarai sooner. Oh, that huge two letter word in the English language, 'IF,' if only Abram hadn't

slept with Hagar the world would have been a vastly different place. You may think you're not an Abram, you may think that God can't use you, whereas God has used you throughout your life, and let's be honest we have all made mistakes. I pray that things I have done have not had such a detrimental effect on this world as Abram sleeping with Hagar has had. On my mother's side, her mother was born in London, her parents died when she was young and so she was farmed off to live with an aunt in Swansea, and there she married the boy next door. On my father's side, his father came from Pulborough, a farm labourer who bettered himself becoming a steamroller driver, helping to lay the roads around Crawley, where my dad's mum lived. My mum's mother died in childbirth and so my mother was brought up by an aunt who lived in Horsham, and with my dad's father being killed in the first world war, my dad and his mum moved from Crawley to Horsham, and my parents met. If one of those situations hadn't happened, then I wouldn't be here now, but they did. Were they the plans God had laid out on a huge map, or did God use how we decided to lead our lives? I believe God knows the final outcome but as I am sure you would have heard me say before, God gives us free will. He will guide us, he will prompt us, whether we follow his leading is up to us, and at times there may be a price we have to pay for going our own way. Abram slept with Hagar, she ends up pregnant and gives birth to a son. Everyone should be happy, but no, it just causes division, (v4) *'He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress.'* And the Lord blesses Hagar after she has run away from Abram's family. God sends her back to Abram and Sarai with these words (vb9-10); *'Go back to your mistress and submit to her. I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count.'* A similar blessing to the one given to Abram (15:5); *'Look up at the sky and count the stars – if indeed you can count them.'* Then he said to him, *'So shall your*

*offspring be.'* And of course this was repeated in 22:17; *'I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore.'* In verse 11 the angel of the Lord gave Hagar a second message; *'You are now pregnant and you will give birth to a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard of your misery. He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility towards all his brothers.'* It could be said that even his descendants would have hostility towards his brothers descendants, because that is the way it appears at times between Muslims, Jews and Christians. All three religions, plus others suffer discrimination because some people continue to want to destroy those who disagree with what each believes. Too often we can try and do, what we believe is, God's will, without seeking His will. The Lord never told Abram to sleep with Hagar, nor did the Lord tell Sarai to tell Abram to sleep with Hagar. God's timing is always right, sadly us human beings are all too often, impatient, we want things to happen, now! The Lord made Abram a promise, and the Lord always keeps his promises, it is just that His timing is quite often not our timing. I understand that Abram and Sarai weren't a young couple like Joseph and Mary in the New Testament, but if the Lord has promised that you would have children, you don't have to push the door that isn't open, just to get what you want, if the Lord makes a promise, He will keep that promise. Abram's promise is back in chapter 15 verse 4; *'a son coming from your own body will be your heir.'* The Lord didn't promise a child, he was specific, the Lord promised a son. The sad part of this whole story is that 15:6 tells us; *'Abram believed the Lord, and he credited to him as righteousness.'* Abram believed the Lord and then went and decided to bring about what the Lord had said by his own means. We have read in Hebrews 11 that Abraham lived by faith. For me, his actions in chapter 16