

Hope In Desolation

A Sermon By Rev. Grant R. Schnarr

"What ails you Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is" (Gen. 21:17).

The story of Hagar and her son's banishment into the wilderness is about desolation. Hagar may have thought that she was secure forever in Abraham's house, that her Son, **Abraham's son**, Ishmael, would become Abraham's heir. But instead Hagar found herself cast out into the wilderness with her son. And as she wandered the dry and parched lands, that one being, which held all her hopes, her dreams, her pride, her future, was dying in her arms, her only son Ishmael.

Hagar's state of complete devastation represents on a higher more spiritual level, states of devastation that we can go through. The Writings say that this story illustrates how we can feel as if we are losing something special to us, those dreams which we've lived for, being a good person, for friendships, for conjugal love, how these dreams can appear to be dying before our eyes and what we can do (AC 2682).

Hagar represents our affection for external truth (AC 2675). It is that part within us that loves knowledge. It is that part within us that loves to figure out how to get along in this world. If we think about it from the Writings we understand why Hagar is from Egypt. Egypt represents scientifics, the intellectual (AC 5373). Of course our affection for external truth is born from our love of the natural sciences.

Hagar has a son, Ishmael. Ishmael here represents spiritual truth (AC 2677). Ishmael represents that truth which is genuine, pure. He represents our ideals, our dreams. Each of us has dreams that we carry with us. Those dreams of wanting to be an angelic being. Maybe we remember the first time we read *Heaven and Hell* or *Conjugal Love* and we saw the beautiful image of what it means to be a good person. And we really wanted to follow that. Maybe we were very little children when we first heard about angels and we wished or prayed to the Lord in innocence and sincerity that we could be an angel some day. That's a dream we had, a goal. Many of us too, at one time or another, when we were very young, sat down in the pew to witness our older brothers' and sisters' weddings or maybe a relative, and we thought to ourselves,

"Wouldn't it be nice. I wish I could have that. I wish I could have conjugal love some day."

But just like Hagar, what happens when we enter the wilderness of life. Things are not so easy. Hagar being ousted out of the home and into the wilderness represents us being ousted out of the innocence of childhood into the real world. Abraham, here, represents the Lord, the Lord sets us out into the wilderness of life with our dreams by our side. And when we get out into that wilderness it doesn't take long to realize that we're not just going to walk into a beautiful world where we effortlessly live those ideals. Life isn't one continuous flower garden. It's a wilderness out there, there's no water around. And the little truth that we **have** begins to run out. The water bag runs dry very quickly. And we find ourselves alone in the wilderness, nowhere to go in our lives. And our ideals, our dreams that we held so close to us, those truths that the Lord has given us, are dying in our arms. We can feel them slipping away from us, resignation. We say to ourselves, "I'm not going to have conjugal love, not after the way I've been living my life. Forget it. I can't do it." Resignation: "I'm not going to be able to be that angel I dreamed about. Are you kidding? I look at my life and the disorders I'm in. I'm not going to make it. This dream is dying before me. My dreams, my visions, are dying."

So what does Hagar do? She lays her son down right there underneath a shrub and walks away. She can't face it. She can't face the loss of this beautiful thing that the Lord has given her, that she dreamed so hard about. Her son, her only son, is dying in her arms. So she lays him down and walks a bow's distance away, sits down under a tree and weeps bitterly. In the same way, when we are faced with the reality of life, we can take our dreams that the Lord has given us, take our dreams of being a good person, the dream of conjugal love, whatever the dream may be, and we can become so distressed that we aren't able to live by this right now, that we put the dream down and walk away. We walk away in resignation. We feel as if something is dying inside. We say, "This beautiful teaching - I can talk about it, but it's not me. I can't do it." So we cast it down and go into various disorders, leave our dreams to live a mundane life without ideals, we work, we have hobbies, we watch television and we idly waste our spiritual life away.

But when we leave our ideals behind something deep inside of us weeps bitterly. Inside of us, something is crying out for the ideal. The hagar within us cries for her son.

Now what happened as Hagar sat there under that tree crying? The Lord came to her and the Lord asked, "What ails you, Hagar?" In the same way, the Lord says to us in those times of desolation and resignation, "What ails you?" And the Lord knows what is wrong with us. He asks the question so that we can face in our lives what is ailing us. What is our problem? Why have we laid our ideals down? He asked Hagar the question so she would look at her life. He asks, "Why have you put down your son? I gave you that son," the Lord said, "I want to make him a great nation." In the same way, the Lord says to us, "I gave you the Writings. I gave you those ideals. I didn't give them to you so that you could put them down to die here in the wilderness. I gave them to you so that you could take care of them and hold them up. I'm going to make of them a great nation if you let Me."

The Lord cares about us. When we were tiny children, dreaming about angels and how wonderful it would be to be an angel, who gave us that vision? The Lord did. When we were a little older, in church watching that wedding, thinking how beautiful it would be to be married and have a good marriage, who gave us that ideal? Who gave us that dream? The Lord did. When we were older and we had that vision from the Writings, about what it means to be a good, useful person to society, a person who cares about people, a person who is productive, who knows the Lord - who gave us that dream? The Lord did. And He's not going to take that away from us. He's not going to kill our child in the wilderness. He's not going to kill our dreams. That would be cruel. Instead, He wants us to go back and pick up those ideals and never let them go.

The Lord said, "Go back. Pick up your child. Lift him up with your hand." And we can see the correspondences here. Pick up the child. Raise him up. Raise up that ideal again. Go back ! It's not too late. Don't be resigned to life. You can pick that ideal up again. You can live by it. And we know what hands represent in the Word - power. Give those gentle dreams some support in your life. Lift them up. The Writings say, at this time, that this raising up represents support (AC 2695, 2698). We support the ideals, to support the genuine truth, and in turn that genuine truth will support us. It is a reciprocal supporting. The more we hold up our dreams, the more our dreams hold us up in our lives.

Many of us, at times, act as if we've given up on life. We act as if we're dead inside. Why do we read the Word, why do we come to church, if we are really spiritually dead? Isn't that a waste of time? It makes us feel bad. That's all it does. But the Lord is saying, "You are not dead. You're sleeping. That child isn't going to die in the wilderness; he's going to be a great nation if you go back and work for it.. Can't you go back and look at that ideal one more time and see if you can't pick it up again?"

At this time we can so easily say to ourselves, "What is going on in me? Why am I different? Why didn't I reach my ideals?" The Lord is pointing out to us in this story that everyone feels that way at one time or another. Everybody occasionally feels as if they've lost it spiritually. We have to feel that way. Why? So we recognize that the Lord has all power, so that we can call out to Him and ask Him for help. Also, we've got to truly want the spiritual part of life, and struggle for it. We have to realize that we know about life, which we have seen from our own natural intelligence, will get us nowhere. We've got to see that everything we need the Lord has, and call on the Lord to help us (See AC 2682).

As soon as Hagar returned and picked up her son, a well appeared before them. This is the truth, the living truth from the Word. The Writings say that this represents the life in the Word, that once we pick up our ideals and care about them again, we will be led and nourished by the living truth of the Lord's Word (AC 2702). It will feed us and especially our dreams, and they will grow strong.

How many of us have gone to the Word in times of trouble and seen that help? It's a miracle - the Lord really does talk to us through the Word. All we have to do is open it up and read it, and the Lord is there. We must go to the Lord's Word, and believe in what He says, fully believe in what He says. That's how we can make that dream grow again, that's how we make that dream become a reality in our lives.

After Hagar gave her son a drink from the well he recovered. And one of the last things we are told in this story is that this boy grew to become an archer, and that God was with him, and that he did indeed become the father of a great nation. That's the promise that the Lord gives us, if we've given up and put down our dreams somewhere, it's never too late to go back and pick up those dreams. We should never give up on life. The Lord never gives up on us. Why should we give up on ourselves?

The Lord is there saying to each of us, "What ails you? I'm going to make that child a great nation. Go, raise him up." And then we will find that our dreams, those dreams that we love with all our heart, will become a reality. They will grow strong and we will find that what the Lord promised us from the very beginning has indeed come true. "What ails you Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad and hold him with your hand, for I will make him a great nation" (Gen. 21:17-18). AMEN

Lessons: Matt. 9:18-26, Gen. 21:1-21, AC 2682:2