

Cast Away To Be Found: Hagar's Gift To All

She was used, discarded, and cast away - an unwanted slave girl. Young, afraid and newly pregnant with no place to call home. No one wanted her. No one thought she mattered enough to protect her, to fight for her. Yes, of all the people who have lived on this Earth, Hagar understood rejection more than most. She found herself without favor in the eyes of her master Sarai, her husband Abraham and even perhaps, in the eyes of her God. After all, she was the bond woman who Paul would later say should be "cast out," because her child should not be heir with the free (*Galatians 4*). It is this deep pain, rejection and desperation that gives Hagar a voice to speak to the world. And what she has to say is a very welcome gift to us all. It is an announcement of who God is.

We pick up with Hagar's story in *Genesis 16:6*. She flees from the face of Sarai who has dealt harshly with her. In many ways Hagar lives out the meaning of her name - flight. She fled Egypt. Now she flees Sarai. Hagar is the epitome of a woman "out of place." An icon for any who feel more out-of-place than in-place or who feel more outside-the-norm than inside.

In verse 7, we read that "*the angel of the Lord found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness.*" Maybe for everyone else in Hagar's life, her being out-of-sight and out-of-mind was satisfying. But not with God. God is a finder. God is a seeker. Hagar's flight marked the beginning of God's pursuit.

In verse 8, God addresses Hagar by name. He salutes her as Sarai's maid. In this salutation, we learn that God knew Hagar. He did not need an introduction, resume, or letter of reference to understand to whom he was talking. This was his child. He understood her backstory, ancestry and present predicament.

Yet God asks Hagar questions. "*Whence camest thou? And whither wilt thou go?*" God did not ask Hagar questions so He would learn information. He knew all that. God asked Hagar questions to get her talking. To allow her to level her complaint. To facilitate lament. To get her to spill it.

In verse 9, God gives Hagar direction: "*Return to thy mistress.*" Yet His guidance is not without promise. In verse 10, he promises Hagar a vast lineage. God is a leader. He guides with promise. God reverses Hagar's namesake experience of flight and instead of fleeing home for an uncertain future, she returns home with a certain future.

Hagar's story reaches the pinnacle in verse 11. God turns his attention to the child in her womb. After all, this was the source of the problem. The consequence of faithless, rash, human scheming. And He names it. God names the mistake: "*...and thou shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the Lord hath heard thy affliction.*" Ishmael means "I hear." God wanted this child to remind Hagar and all humanity that He is a God who hears. Every time Hagar would call after her son "Ishmael! Come eat!" or "Ishmael! Go fetch water." or "Ishmael. I love you." She would remember God hears. Ishmael would remember God hears. Sarai and Abraham would remember – God hears.

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And so, Hagar offers us this caricature of God:

- God seeks and finds us.
- God knows us.
- God wants to hear from us.
- God directs us with promise.
- God hears.

All of this moved Hagar to the core. In verse 13 Hagar responds - *“And she called the name of the Lord...Thou God [that] seest me.”* Hagar named God out of her experience. Hagar teaches the world that God sees and that God hears. Hagar, perhaps more than any other, has the credentials to name God as such. After all, Hagar was a castaway, a vagabond. She was unwanted by everyone. Everyone that is, except the One who sees and hears each of us...including Hagar.