

# Act 4: The One Who Saw

By *Jake Wilkinson*

Pain itself can be a very lonely place, can't it? Sometimes it feels like when we're in pain, like there is nobody else in the world that could possibly imagine what I'm going through. I'm going to write something on a little piece of paper here, or I have written something on this piece of paper, and I want you all to read it at the same time. Are you ready? [laughter] You can't see it? Who said that? Come here. [laughter] Can you read loudly what it says? [pause] It's the first one.

I can't read.

You can't read. It says... [laughter] Well, this is fun. [pause] Okay, now say it louder.

I feel unseen. Okay. All right. [applause] Thank you. Thank you. [pause] She loves math, though, evidently. Thanks, dude. Appreciate it. It's, why could she read that and you couldn't? What's that? She was closer. Evidently, the closer you are to somebody, the more you can actually understand about them.

I heard someone say something this morning. It says, "The more I know about people, the less I want to be around them." (Laughter) Love you, buddy. (Laughter) And it's true. A lot of times the closer we are to people, the more actually we go, "Oh, well, you're not actually the person I had imagined you to be." And there's some shadows in there.

Here's the thing is that... When we're close to people, I think that those things come out, but I also believe that it's when we're close to people that those things can start to heal. You can't see someone's pain from a distance, but pain often creates a distance because it creates in us something that naturally should not be there.

If we have a brief recap of where we've been over the last few weeks, is that we're going over the life of Abraham, or Abram. He hasn't actually been renamed yet. We'll get there. The life of Abram where at first God calls him to leave his home to truly live, and so Abram steps out of his home, doesn't fully understand everything, but he goes. When God calls, he goes to actually live.

There's a famine that arises in the land and Abram kind of has a little bit of a panic moment, goes down to Egypt and there he gets some food and he also lies about his wife to the king that's there. All these plagues descend upon Egypt. He and his family leave and they take a bunch of Egyptian things with them, cattle, donkeys, servants, and maid servants. We're gonna remember that one because that's what we're gonna talk about today.

And then last week, Pastor David talked about the fact that God's promise seizes through a lot of even our mistakes, but God makes a promise with us and it's called a covenant where God actually does the thing for us because he actually understood that you'd make a mistake in the process and that you can't actually complete what you promised to complete, he's still gonna keep his promises with us. God's faithful to his ability to do things but not always ours and he still makes a way through us.

Right now we're in Genesis chapter 16 and what was God's—God's promise to Abram. Anybody remember? Give him all the land. That was one. There was an original one. He wanted something really bad. A father of many nations. He actually wanted children.

Okay, so this is one of God's main promises. His main one with Abram is to give him children. Now Abram is 85 years old. They left home about 10 years ago and Sarah is 75 years old at this time. Ladies, if you are 75 or older... (Laughter) Any volunteers? (Laughter) That was hard enough when it happened, right? 75. Not only is it not possible, but who would want to go through that? We've been through, we've crossed that barrier, we've gone past that age, and yet here we are, and wouldn't you get a little bit impatient with God and His promise?

It's easy to relate, actually, with Abraham and Sarah here. And unfortunately, well, those of you that are familiar with the story know what's coming next, is they get a little bit impatient. And to help us a little bit with this, if you haven't heard the story, it's not good. There was laws at that time. If your wife or your spouse hasn't produced a child within three years, then she was responsible for making a way for that to happen, however that was supposed to be.

So what do they do? They follow the customs and the rules of what they knew how to follow. And she goes, okay, here's my Egyptian slave girl. Take this girl, go into the tent, and she'll have the kids for us. And they're following the law of the day, and they actually missed the heart of God.

I'm going to read from chapter 16 just a few verses here. It says, "So Abram had sexual relations with Hagar." That was the Egyptian slave girl. And she became pregnant. But when Hagar knew she was pregnant, she began to treat her mistress, Sarah, with contempt. And then Sarah said to Abraham, "This is all your fault." That's my favorite part. My wife is here today, so love you, honey. I put my servant into your arms, but now she's pregnant and she treats me with contempt. And the Lord will show who's wrong, you or me. I think the Lord has a sense of humor too. I don't know if it's with this story, but we find it funny.

Abraham replied, "Look, she is your servant, so deal with her as you see fit." And then Sarah treated Hagar so harshly that she finally ran away.

This is actually pointing back to the Garden of Eden. The very first story of when a thing called sin enters into humanity, and the finger-pointing begins and relationship breaks down. And while it... Let's ask a question. Is life fair for Hagar, the Egyptian slave?

Think about her life for a moment. They're born into captivity, into slavery, servanthood. And this vagabond people come in there, lie about his wife, these plagues come down, and you're given away, you're taken away from your family and everything you've known, and now you're a vagabond with them, and then you have to sleep with this 85-year-old old man, and you become pregnant by him. That's in the Bible.

And what we love to do is we love to sugarcoat this. We love to go, "Well, okay, there's other things." And there are historical things going on that helped such as that was accustomed of their time. But in reality, this is really, really messy. It's bad. And then Hagar is treated so poorly. She gets a little proud. Doesn't she? She finally has a sense of meaning, becomes a little proud, and then she's treated so harshly that she actually has to run away.

Why did this happen? According to the Bible, everything that has ever happened that is bad, that's hurt, that causes pain in life, is the result of something called sin. And if you watch the intro video today, I'm stealing their definition right off of it. And it says, "Sin is to act on our own desires and urges for our own benefit at the expense of other people."

John Mark Comer has his new podcast. It's called Practicing the Way. And he talks about the four levels of sin and actually what happens, or levels of brokenness within relationship and within ourselves.

And the first level of that, he calls it gross sins. And that doesn't mean disgusting, but it can. It means that they're big. You know how you get your paycheck and it says the gross, your gross wages on there? Okay,

that's the type of, it's not disgusting. Well, in some of the cases, maybe it is. Yeah. But what I'm saying is that it's the major sins. Paul calls this the sins of the flesh. There's a sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, strife, jealousy, fits of rage, rivalries and division, drunkenness, orgies and everything like these. And he says, if you practice these things and if you live in this way, you actually won't inherit the kingdom of God.

And what we've typically done, is that we said, okay, well, that means we're not going to heaven if we do those things. We're missing the point, actually, is that you actually, you will live in hell if you live this way. And it will be in this life. And you will miss the peace that he's trying to offer you in the kingdom that is here right now. And he says, if you act like that, you're gonna miss the whole point of life. Because these things promise something and they'll never deliver.

These are the things that we love. We love stories, like dramatic stories of these come to Jesus moments where we give this up. We give these things up and we turn to Jesus. And these are the first things to go. I have one of those stories. I've shared my story here. When we give up drugs or addiction and we think, Thank God it's over. The battle is over. But what we realize is that it's actually just beginning. These are the first things to leave.

And the second thing is this. It's a conscious or acceptable sin. It's this thing that we consciously do. We know that it's wrong, but we kind of do it anyway 'cause we like it. It's the willful desire to do something, even though we know it's probably not the best for us.

Anybody else love Oreos at midnight? That's not a sin? Remind me of that in the morning, when I feel like garbage after I've eaten a half a pack of it, okay? Moderate, sure, sure, right? Again, it doesn't make you—this is not making you an evil person, this is breaking your life. You understand? We've got this idea on sin that it's this judgmental, guilty thing, and we have to break away from that a little bit and realize that it's a sort of death that happens to us. And God wants to save us from that. He did something to save us from that.

But a lot of times this comes out and we laugh about, you know, Oreos. What this comes out, a lot of times in our churches, as gossip or anger or blasting people we've never met over the internet—nobody here does that, thank the Lord. Watching things that we shouldn't, whatever it is, we may do them outside the church, but we're still, it's like we don't want to talk about those things, but we still willfully let me do them. Make sense?

Now, these are kind of the second layer. Those are the things that leave. It's like, "I know it's wrong, but I still love it." And then we're going to get to a third layer. We're going to get to this thing called unconscious, and these are our shadow things. These are hidden mostly to our own eyes. This is where it gets scary, right?

These are things we aren't always aware of, but sometimes they pop up. Do you ever have this feeling like you need to help somebody, and you know you should help them, and then you don't do it? Okay, that's an example of an unconscious or an unaware, a shadow sent. It's this idea often it comes in inaction instead of action. It actually comes in the form of—or it comes in the form of doing the right thing in the wrong way for the wrong motive.

I once met a young man, and I still love this young man, but he was gonna be a doctor because he was tired of people ordering him around and wanted to do that. It was my turn. And that was his purpose, not to be a healing force in the world and to try to help people get better, right? And this is particularly dangerous for people in church, by the way. This particular one, these things can slip in and we don't even know that they're there. A white knuckle grip on our ministry.

This is, by the way, I struggle with this one a lot right now with all of you. And I recognize it on a weekly basis when I go, "I'm scared. I'm scared of losing it." We have this awesome church here. And I realize that sometimes I do this. And that leads us to that. It comes across sometimes in a defensive, negative,

condescending or self-centered conversation or jealousy. This is an unhealed trauma in our lives that often pops up. We have them.

And then the fourth layer is another level, and it's called our attachments. I've talked at some length about this in our previous talks of, Tim Keller would call it, an idolatry of the heart. Something that has taken place, it's a good thing that has become ultimate. And this can be anything from our marriages to church or ministry, our emotional well-being, our friendships, our career, outdoor recreation. Not pointing fingers.

And I think ultimately, and we can take the story into consideration, in this story, it's the children. It's what a wonderful gift they are, and yet they become this ultimate thing. And here's the thing about ultimate things. When you put your hope and your desire and your ultimate thing and you're attached to this thing more than anything else, it will actually end up not becoming a source of happiness, but a source of anxiety, fear, and even despair.

This is why I am so confident that we actually have to have a relationship with a divine being, and I do believe his name is Jesus, is because that relationship, nobody can take away from you. It is the thing that centers you, that gives you peace in life, because everything else can be taken away from us, everything. And if you're attached to that thing, you're gonna do whatever it takes to hold onto it with our white knuckle grip on it, right? It's a good thing that actually causes us sometimes deep-seated unhappiness.

We see this play out in the story. If we look at our list here, we see gross sins, owning another human being, sexual exploitation, and abuse and mistreatment. We see that all in the story, right? And then if you look at conscious sins, Sarah knows that there's... It's wrong to mistreat this girl and she does it anyway. Abraham is kind of a coward and doesn't take responsibility where he should.

And then we look at unconscious and let's look at Hagar for a moment. She's almost innocent in this story. But she becomes proud. Why? Because there's this wound in her from being insignificant her whole life and now she's found significance and she has to make somebody else feel smaller than they are. And you guys realize that this is what happens in our lives and sometimes we don't notice it.

And if we look at attachments, Sarah's identity is tied to her fertility and it's not there. Someone else threatens that and shows she has to make them pay. Abraham's need for legacy makes him miss God's promise. If we want to use this word sin or whatever word we put in there.

And if we aren't safe to have our wounds heal, I will say that they won't. You have to have a space to do that. And if we put our ultimate hope in something else other than God, I do believe it will end up with a broken relationship. And the first thing is a broken relationship between us and God, us with each other, and even us with ourselves. It will break.

And it's because of these things that we often hear. You ever hear this? You ever hear, "Well, I don't go to church because there's a bunch of hypocrites." It's full of a bunch of hypocrites. You ever hear that? It's not true. There's plenty of seats here for hypocrites. (audience laughing)

I'm serious. Who do you think is gonna walk through those doors? This is a hospital for those who know that they're spiritually sick. That includes the one speaking to you, by the way. And an acknowledgement of that. And some of those things I'm not even aware of, and sometimes we bleed on each other, don't we? And sometimes it's hard, and there's a necessity for something that we have here, and something I've never really been a part of on this magnitude, is a grace-filled church. Who it's okay to even admit your hypocrisy, admit that sometimes I don't even see how I am and this is coming out in a way and I have to go apologize and it's okay. It's a safe place to do that.

Could you imagine if our church took the next step in that? That healing. Expecting people to walk in here and not have issues, severe issues sometimes that hurt other people is like expecting to work at a hospital, expecting nobody sick to come in and all healthy people to come in there. It's not gonna happen. We all have wounds, we all have things that we're dealing with, we all have idols and things that we're holding onto with our white knuckles, and I will tell you something that Jesus wants to free you from that. He wants to heal you from that. And he wants to give you a space to do that. And I do believe that that's the church.

So coming back to our story here, Hagar runs away from Sarai in Abram, and God finds her in the wilderness. And they start interacting. He goes, "What's going on?" He finds her by the spring and she explains the situation and she's being mistreated. And then God gives her a promise and he says, "I'm going to actually give you a child. I'm going to give you a nation. I'm going to actually give you the thing that you've been wanting your whole life."

In fact, we can fast forward in the story, five chapters later, I think, in Genesis 21, where her son is about to die and she tosses him to the side by this tree, and they're going to die of thirst. This is what's going to happen. She's sent away this time. She's not just running away. And there's this amazing connection there. I like to... I'm a Bible nerd sometimes. And what I do, I don't like Hebrew, which is what the Old Testament is written in. I like Greek and there's a Greek version of the Old Testament.

And it says this moment that God opened Hagar's eyes and she saw a well of living water. And there's this moment, can you think of a time where Jesus has this comment to a lady, if you're familiar with the New Testament, there's this scene where this lady who keeps going from man to man to man, seeking the love that she wishes she could have. And he goes, if you knew who it was, was asking you, you would ask me for a drink of water here today. And I would give you living water. He's actually making this connection with Hagar. It's this thing, and God, coming back to our Genesis 16 thing, God says, I see you and I'm with you. And he says, "Your son," "your son's name is Ishmael, which means God hears."

And this is what he says. Hagar used another name to refer to the Lord who had spoken to her, and she said, "You are the God who sees me." She also said, "Have I truly seen the one who sees me?" In my attempt to translate the Greek, it says, "For face to face, I saw you, the one who actually knew my experience." Nobody else did. Everybody else sent. They didn't want anything to do with her. They even attacked her and she felt completely alone, alone in her pain. No one to deal with it. And yet there is a God who shows up and says, actually, I know exactly what you're going through. And I see you.

And if you've ever been in that place where you feel like there is nobody who could possibly understand what you're going through. There actually is. Do you ever have that though? Do you ever see people, I've watched this, people come up and say, "Oh, I'm so sorry. You're experiencing some tragedy." They go, "I'm so sorry." And that feeling rises up in you of like, "You actually have no idea what I'm going through."

On the other hand, when somebody comes up to you who has been through exactly what you've gone through. And they put your arm around you and they say, "I'm with you." That's a totally different experience. You feel seen, you feel heard, and you have a connection there that you didn't have with anybody else. When somebody understands your pain on that level, and that's what—that's what God is saying, is that I actually understand your pain on that level.

This is the difference, why Christianity, to me, in following Jesus is the thing is that God came down here in flesh and he goes, "Oh, people talk behind your back? They've done it to me too." You've been treated unfairly? Yeah, I get it. You've been exhausted and overwhelmed and nobody's appreciated you, and nobody actually sees what you're actually doing? I've been there. You've been betrayed by your best friend, and the very people that were supposed to be celebrating you were there killing you. And in your deepest pain, I want

to say something that Jesus sees you. He's the God who saw you. No matter where you're at, no matter what pain you've gone through, He actually has experienced it, and He's with you in that moment.

I think healing, if you remember my little note, healing actually requires closeness. It requires connection. And I do believe that that's what God has planned for his church. And often, it ends up the opposite, because we don't actually acknowledge our own unhealed wounds, stuff that's going on within us.

But as we heal, you ever feel like, "Well, I don't know if I can be use of anybody else because I'm not totally healed yet?" You ever feel like that? I feel like that. You feel like that? I feel like that sometimes too, and I just want to remind us how people change. They're not usually told to change, but they're inspired by you changing, and you stick close to them. When we're healed and we're close to people and we're connected and we hear these stories, how much more do I want to change? Am I inspired to get closer to a God who loves me, He wants to set me free from the garbage of this world.

That's what our church is for. It's to meet with the one who saw you and to meet with others who may even see you and to not feel alone anymore in this world. Wouldn't that be a good place to live? This is what Abraham and Sarah should have been and that's what our church will be. It's a place of grace, but it's also a place that can see pain and want healing and we're gonna actually do that together.

While healing is complicated, there's many facets to it and I'm not claiming that it's an easy fix or that it's just saying our prayers. What I am saying this is that it begins with being seen and not feeling alone and connecting with the one who saw you. I am sure that that is the beginning of all healing and including in my life is connecting with the one who sees us and connecting with each other.

Let's pray together.

Jesus, thank you for seeing us no matter where we're at, no matter what pain we've gone through. Thank you for being there with us. Thank you for examples of really early on in our belief in our faith journey, we see that things got really messy, really fast. Thank you that you saw her. Thank you that you see us. And thank you that we can be together and we can even admit those things that we don't wanna admit to each other and we don't even want to admit to ourselves because we're safe with you, we're safe with grace and we're safe with each other in this place. That is the hope, Lord. Keep healing us, keep moving us forward. We pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen.