

A NAME FOR EVERY NEED: EL ROI

Sermon written by Martha-Jean Fitch

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TEXT: Genesis 16:1-16, Psalm 139:1-16

Will you join me in prayer:

Spirit of the Living God – fall afresh on us this day. Open our eyes to see You and our hearts to hear You. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of ALL of our hearts be pleasing to You, O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer. AMEN

As we begin – I would like you to turn to your neighbor on either side of you and tell them what nickname you have – or maybe one you had growing up – and quickly how you got that name. Who called you that? And did you like that name? And be sure everyone around you gets a chance to answer. Ok – go!

Now, if we had the time, it would be great to hear all your answers. Nicknames can be just plain silly – or they can be very descriptive, and you can learn a lot about a person (for good or for ill) by the names they are called. I know when I was in fourth grade, for a short time I was

called four-eyes – and I bet you can figure out what happened that year to, jut by that name. I got glasses. And by the way, I hated that name!

Think about names – and what they mean or allude to. For example, if you heard someone called “Einstein” – you’d know they were pretty smart, right? Or at least thought they were smart! What about the name Scrooge? He or she is very miserly or self-centered. Right? How about Chatterbox? A talkative person. Or Debbie Downer? Have you ever met her? She is someone who is always depressed or negative. And how about Nervous Nellie? She’s always nervous or anxious in life. Names do matter. And they can be very descriptive – and let you know something about that person and their character. Those names can be an accurate description of a person OR maybe a mean-spirited judgement on someone. But names matter – for good or for ill.

Now if names matter among people – who may or may not represent who they are – the concept of the names of God – ought to be that much more valuable and important to know. As we look at the names of God, we can know the true character of God – and how He

relates to His people. Since God wants to be in intimate relationship with each of us – God has a multitude of names - each connected to every need that we have in life. And once we know those names, we can come to better understand God’s power and promise for us in life.

Last week, we discovered the name “Elohim” – our Creator God. God, who created everything out of nothing – giving order and beauty out of chaos. God created us and walks with us in relationship. He is our Creator and Sustainer.

Today we come to find out that God sees and loves us very much. Even when we feel that no one sees or understands – we can know that God sees and hears us and cares for us in our every need. We discover that this name of God is found in a very difficult circumstance and from a most unlikely woman.

Let’s hear her story – as found in the book of Genesis, the 16th chapter. I invite you to get your Bibles out, if you have them with you. As we go to read the story of Hagar – it will help if I give you a little background information. Her story actually begins with Abram and Sarai – whose names were later changed to Abraham and Sarah.

Abraham loves God and obeys His commands. So, God blesses Him and promises that He will multiply his descendants – and they will be as numerous as the stars in the sky. So, Abram and Sarai waited – and waited and waited for God to make good on His promises. By the time our story begins in chapter 16, Abram and Sarai are very old, in their 80's. When will the promised child ever come?

So, let's see what Sarai does when she was got tired of waiting and wanted to help God hurry up the process. Let's look at Genesis 16:1 -

¹Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had not been able to bear children for him.

But she had an Egyptian servant named Hagar. ²So Sarai said to Abram,

"The LORD has prevented me from having children. Go and sleep with my servant. Perhaps I can have children through her." And Abram

agreed with Sarai's proposal. ³So Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian servant and gave her to Abram as a wife.

Now this seems really incredible to us – but this was a common practice of the time. A married woman who couldn't have a child – especially a male child – was often shunned. It was required then that a female

servant was given to the husband to produce an heir. And then that child born to the servant would be considered the child of the wife.

⁴ So Abram had sexual relations with Hagar, and she became pregnant.

But when Hagar knew she was pregnant, she began to treat her mistress,

Sarai, with contempt. ⁵ Then Sarai said to Abram, “This is all your fault!

I put my servant into your arms, but now that she’s pregnant she treats me with contempt. The LORD will show who’s wrong—you or me!”

⁶ Abram replied, “Look, she is your servant, so deal with her as you see fit.” Then Sarai treated Hagar so harshly that she finally ran away.

Now notice if you will – when Abram and Sarai speak of Hagar – they never use her name. They speak of her as “my servant” or “your servant”. She is really nameless – just a means to an end. They don’t really see her or care – and Sarai makes her life miserable. So, Hagar finally runs away. And interestingly, Hagar’s name actually means “flight”! She’s running – running from people who just use her. People who don’t really even see her or know her or care.

But then – someone shows up, that does care. Look at verse 7. It says, *“The angel of the Lord found Hagar.”* Now who is this angel?

Not all Biblical scholars agree on this – but many, as I do, believe that when we read the phrase, “the angel of the Lord” – not just an angel – this is none other than the pre-incarnate Jesus – the Lord Himself. And notice how God addresses her. Not as “Sarai’s servant” but rather He calls her by name.

⁷ The angel of the LORD found Hagar beside a spring of water in the wilderness, along the road to Shur. ⁸ The angel said to her, “Hagar, Sarai’s servant, where have you come from, and where are you going?” ⁸ I’m running away from my mistress, Sarai,” she replied.

⁹ The angel of the LORD said to her, “Return to your mistress, and submit to her authority.” ¹⁰ Then he added, “I will give you more descendants than you can count.” ¹¹ And the angel also said, “You are now pregnant and will give birth to a son. You are to name him Ishmael (which means ‘God hears’), for the LORD has heard your cry of distress.

Hagar was suffering. She had been used – and no one seemed to care – or even take notice of her. She cried out and no one seemed to hear. So, she ran! But the Lord saw her – and He heard her cries – and He cared.

So, God tells her to go back and face her problems – and assures her that He has a plan for her life – and the life of her son. And then to name her son Ishmael – for He said, *“I, the Lord, have heard you.”*

So how does Hagar respond? Look at verse 13: ¹³ *Thereafter, Hagar used another name to refer to the LORD, who had spoken to her. She said, “You are the God who sees me.” She also said, “Have I truly seen the One who sees me?”* ¹⁴ *So that well was named Beer-lahai-roi (which means “well of the Living One who sees me”). It can still be found between Kadesh and Bered.* ¹⁵ *So Hagar gave Abram a son, and Abram named him Ishmael.* ¹⁶ *Abram was eighty-six years old when Ishmael was born.”*

In Hebrew, the name that Hagar gives God is “El Roi” – meaning “The God who sees me.” El Roi! Now what’s so amazing about this? Hagar is the only person in the Bible to actually name God!

Now there is so much more to tell you about Hagar – and how God watched over her and heard her cries – and provided for her. Of how her son Ishmael was born and goes on to be a great warrior and the father of

a great nation. I encourage you to read Genesis 21, when you are able, to hear the end of the story, if you will.

But for now – I hope you will realize how wonderful the God is named El Roi.

Just like God saw Hagar – God also sees you and me. He sees what you are going through and whatever difficulties you are facing – your fears and worries – your hurts and pain – and He wants to offer you peace and comfort today.

Scripture tells us that God knows our names – just like God knew the name of Hagar. He knows all of His precious children, His sheep – by name; and I believe He calls us the name we prefer – not those nicknames that we have hated that tear us down. In Isaiah, we hear that our names are “engraved” on the palm of his hand. It is etched there, never to be erased. He sees your name and cherishes you – His beloved child. You are not overlooked or ignored or unnoticed. He is El Roi – and He sees you.

And the amazing thing is that God has seen us – our entire lives – even from when we were being formed in our mother’s wombs – and He continues to keep a watchful eye on us.

Psalm 121 tells us that God... will not let you stumble;
the One who watches over you will not slumber.

⁴Indeed, he who watches over Israel
never slumbers or sleeps.

⁵The LORD himself watches over you!

The LORD stands beside you as your protective shade.

⁶The sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon at night.

⁷The LORD keeps you from all harm
and watches over your life.

⁸The LORD keeps watch over you as you come and go,
both now and forever!

Oh, how good it is to know God is there! God is El Roi – watching over us and taking care of us! We can trust God – to be there and to help us and give us the strength we need in whatever situation we

find ourselves. Jesus says that not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without our Father knowing it. And the very hairs on our head are all numbered! So, we don't have to be afraid; for we are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows! (Matthew 10:29-31)

There is a story about a man who lost his wife, leaving him to be both mother & father to a six-year-old son. After her funeral, the father and son came home, both feeling so alone & grieved by their loss. That night as they prepared for bed, the boy sked, "Daddy, may I sleep in your room tonight, too?"

But neither one could seem to go to sleep. They both tossed and turned until late in the night. Finally, the little boy asked, "Daddy, are you looking at me? Because if you are, I think I can go to sleep." And the father answered, "Yes son, I'm looking at you."

The little boy started at last to settle down and finally fell asleep. After he was asleep, the father got out of bed, walked over to the window and pulled back the curtain. He looked up into the starry sky and said, "Father, are you looking at me? Because if you are, I think I can rest & be at peace."

I don't know where you are today – what struggle you may be facing or what burden you are carrying. But I can assure you, without a doubt, that there is One that does: El Roi. Turn to Him – rest in Him – know He will watch over you and carry you through – always.

PRAYER & INVITATION