

Baptist Women in Ministry urged: ‘Dare to be brave’

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DALLAS—In times of rising hostility, exclusivity and hate that bring divisions, Christians should strive to understand how God hears and sees people whom others neglect, speakers urged Baptist Women in Ministry.

“Dare to be Brave” was the theme and the challenge of the group’s annual gathering, held at Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas prior to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship general assembly.

When confronted with antagonism, followers of Christ should emulate the way God responds to injustice, said Raquel Contreras, director and publisher for the Baptist Spanish Publishing House.

God cares for outcasts

The story of Hagar in Genesis 16 reveals God’s care for outcasts, Contreras said.

Hagar bore a son for Abram at the insistence of Sarai and then was rejected by both of them.

Although Hagar was obeying the command of her mistress, Contreras confessed she grew up seeing it as the story of a slave who had done something wrong and deserved God’s punishment.

“I grew up believing God was always seeing what we did, and he did that to then judge us,” Contreras said.

But Genesis does not talk about God seeing Hagar to judge her, she noted.

Instead, the story says God saw Hagar even when Sarai mistreated her and Abram ignored her, she observed.

It is easy to ignore the humanity of a slave, even when modern readers first encounter Hagar's story, Contreras said. But the complexity of the conflict can be seen when one considers Sarai and Hagar came from distinct backgrounds, she added.

Sarai "forgot, even though Hagar was a slave, she had her own personality," Contreras said. "Hagar had her own position in the world."

'The God who sees me'

Genesis 16 says the conflict with Sarai lead Hagar to run away to the desert, but even though everyone else had pushed her out, God still met Hagar where she was.

"In the midst of all, God heard and saw" Hagar, Contreras said.

Hagar gives God the name "El Roi," meaning "the God who sees me," she said, a testimony to God's concern for outcasts.

"She was a servant, an outcast, and she is still able to give God a name," Contreras said.

Just as God saw and heard Hagar, Christ's church must hear and see the one who have been cast away, Contreras insisted.

Even when divisions emerge, the focus of the church must remain on the one who has promised complete redemption, she said.

When Hagar felt lost and desperate, God saw her and heard her, and then God gave her the promise of many descendants through her son Ishmael, Contreras noted.

The church must announce that hope and live in light of it, she said.

“Be brave,” Contreras urged. “God is with us.”