

“IS ANYTHING TOO HARD FOR THE LORD?”

Genesis 18:1-14

Outside the tent, the men were talking. Inside the tent, near the entrance, Sarah was carefully listening. And when she heard one of the visitors tell her husband Abraham, **“I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son,”** Genesis 18:10—when Sarah heard this, she laughed to herself. The Hebrew is literally ‘laughed within,’ that is, a silent laugh. A secret laugh. A laugh meant for no one to hear. Yet, the LORD still heard Sarah’s laughter, and He rebuked her for it. **“Why did Sarah laugh?”** the LORD asked Abraham. Frightened, Sarah lied and said, **“I did not laugh.”** But the LORD replied, **“Yes, you did laugh.”**

Sarah, however, was not the only one to laugh at this remarkable promise of God. Only one chapter earlier in Genesis Abraham had laughed too. According to Genesis 17:15-16, **“God also said to Abraham, ‘As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.’”**

How did Abraham respond to these words of God? He laughed. He **“fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, ‘Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?’”** Genesis 17:17.

So then, how did Sarah’s laughter differ from Abraham’s laughter? If both Sarah and Abraham laughed at the promise of God—the same Hebrew verb for laugh, TSA-CHAQ, is used of each person, why did God reprimand Sarah but not Abraham? Did God fail to hear Abraham’s laughter? Did God favor Abraham over Sarah, the patriarch over the matriarch? No.

The answer is found in the context of the laughter. While Abraham and Sarah both laughed at God’s promise, their reasons for laughing were very different. Abraham **“fell on his face and laughed.”** This does not mean that Abraham was laugh so hard that he lost his balance and toppled over. In antiquity, especially among the Jews, falling on one’s face was a sign of reverence, submission, humility, or fear.

For example, Joshua fell on his face before the Angel of the LORD, Joshua 5:14. David fell on his face before Jonathan, the son of King Saul, 1 Samuel 20:41. At the transfiguration of Jesus, the disciples **“fell facedown to the ground, terrified,”** Matthew 17:6. Even Jesus, when praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, **“fell with His face to the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken**

from Me. Yet not as I will, but as You will,' " Matthew 26:39. A posture of reverence, submission, and humility.

Abraham laughed at God's promise because he was filled with joy. Despite the impossibility of his personal circumstances—advanced age, his body reproductively dead, his wife elderly and barren—Abraham knew that God would fulfill His promises. Consequently, Abraham surrendered himself and his impossibilities to the will and power of Almighty God. In essence, he said: "If God says that I'm going to have a son, then I will have a son." This certainty made Abraham happy, and in his happiness Abraham laughed; apparently a loud, public laugh, unlike the secret, sarcastic laugh of Sarah.

In Romans 4, Paul explained Abraham's ability to laugh despite impossible odds, saying: **"Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.' Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what He had promised,"** Romans 4:18-21.

Sarah also laughed at God's promise, but not because she was full of joy; rather, because she was full of doubt. Given the impossibility of the circumstances, the thought of her conceiving and giving birth to a child was laughable. "Right, God. You've got to be joking, God. That's hilarious, God. Like that will ever happen, God. HA-HA-HA." Am I faulting Sarah? Not at all. Rather, I understand Sarah. I sympathize with Sarah. At times, I've entertained similar doubts as Sarah. At times, I've laughed Sarah's kind of skeptical, sarcastic laugh. Haven't you?

"God, You're telling me that if I place You and Your kingdom first all else will follow? You're telling me that You will force even the worst circumstances to serve my best interests? You're telling me that if You are for me, nothing can be against me? You're telling me that You have the power to save this troubled marriage despite the impossible odds? That's laughable, God. HA-HA-HA."

"Is anything too hard for the LORD?" God asked Abraham. All of us know the answer. The answer is **"NO"** in bold type and capital letters. We answer "no" because the Bible insists the answer is "no". Nothing is too hard for the LORD. Nothing is impossible for God. Psalm 147:5, **"Great is our Lord and mighty in power; His understanding has no limit."** Or Colossians 1:16, speaking of Christ, **"For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him."** Or Hebrews 1:3, **"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word."** All

things, which must of necessity then include our lives, our hopes, our godly undertakings, our marriages, and our eternal salvation.

Our God can do anything. In fact, you and I confess this great truth in almost every worship service. In our traditional liturgy: “ALMIGHTY God our Maker and Redeemer.” In our confession of faith: “I believe in God the Father ALMIGHTY, Maker of heaven and earth.” In our hymns, such as the first hymn we sang this morning, LH #27:4, “He crowns thy life with love when ransomed from the grave. He that redeemed thy soul from hell hath SOVEREIGN POWER to save.”

Yes, we recite, sing, and confess these great truths of God’s power; and then, we leave church, and by the time we reach the stop sign on Highway 12 we are already worrying, fretting, and acting as if there may well be some things in our lives, some things in our congregation, or some things in our families that are simply too hard for God to resolve. Dear Lord, forgive us.

“Is anything too hard for the LORD?” Friends, this is not my question; it is God’s question. He asked this question of Abraham and Sarah. He asks this same question of each one of us; not simply when times are good, peaceful, and pleasurable, but even more so in difficult times and impossible times and times of pain, illness, failure, and loss. **“Is anything too hard for the LORD?”** Well, is it? Consider the following three questions.

The first question: Is any promise too hard for the LORD to fulfill? In 2004, MTV Studios released a movie titled *Napoleon Dynamite*; the misadventures of high schoolers in a small Idaho town. In the movie, a Hispanic student named Pedro runs for student body president, though his odds of winning are very slim. Not only is his use of English limited; his opponent is one of the most popular girls in school: beautiful, talented, a cheerleader, and a member of the Happy Hands Glee Club. On the one occasion both candidates have to address the entire student body, Pedro forgets his speech. He simply stares into the crowded auditorium; and in awkward silence the crowd in the auditorium stares back at Pedro. Finally, in a moment of sweaty desperation, Pedro blurts out: “If you vote for me, all of your wildest dreams will come true.”

That scene reminds me of our current political climate. Multitudes of political candidates making multitudes of promises. “I will do this. I will fix that. I will increase prosperity. I will decrease taxes. I will crush terrorism. I will listen, act, earn your trust, and keep my promises.” All remarkably similar to Pedro’s “if you vote for me, all of your wildest dreams will come true.” Only, the average American laughs at such political pledges—Sarah’s kind of laugh, because the average politician has neither the power nor the inclination to keep his promises.

Is God like this? Does God say, “Vote for Me and all of your wildest dreams will come true”? No. God says something far different and far better: **“Delight yourself in the LORD, and He will give you the desires of your heart,”** Psalm 37:4. God has both the power and the willingness to do what He has promised. And where is this better demonstrated than in the history of Abraham and Sarah?

By the time those three visitors arrived as the **“great trees of Mamre”** in the **“heat of the day,”** Abraham and Sarah had been waiting for their promised son for nearly twenty-five years. Consider their personal circumstances. When Sarah stood at the tent-flap and overheard the words, **“I will surely return to you about this same time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son,”** Genesis 18:10, she was already ninety years old. Abraham was a hundred years old. Ladies, can you imagine giving birth at the age of ninety? Gentlemen, can you imagine changing diapers at the age of one hundred?

Humanly speaking, both Abraham and Sarah were decades beyond the age of childbearing. Along with this, Sarah was barren and unable to have children; as stated in Genesis 16:1, **“Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children.”** So, no wonder Sarah laughed the wrong kind of laugh. No wonder she described herself as **“worn out,”** Genesis 18:12. The Hebrew word translated as “worn out” is also used in the Old Testament to describe old, threadbare garments. Sarah was worn out physically, worn out emotionally, worn out reproductively, and no doubt worn out by waiting for God to fulfill His promise.

Yet, as Abraham and Sarah waited...and waited...and waited, watching their bodies grow older and their situation grow more impossible; each day calling themselves by the names God had given them, names which made no sense under the circumstances—Abraham meaning ‘father of nations;’ and Sarah meaning ‘princess of nations’—what was God teaching them? God was teaching them that nothing is too hard for the LORD.

And so we read in Genesis 21: **“Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what He had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him.”** Do you know what Isaac means? It means “he laughs”. And this time, at the birth of Isaac and the fulfillment of God’s promise, both Abraham and Sarah laughed in the right way and for the right reason; namely, laughing for joy because God kept His promise. Doesn’t He always?

God has made many promises to you too. He has promised to love you eternally and unconditionally. He has promised to bring you safely through this life to His heavenly kingdom. He has promised to bless your Christian marriage. He has promised to empower any godly endeavor you undertake in His name. He has promised to

provide for all your needs. He has promised to forgive all your sins whenever you turn to Him in repentance and faith.

God has made many other good and gracious promises to you as well. And He will keep every single one. And if the account of Abraham and Sarah is not enough to convince you of that, consider this: God promised to send you a Savior, and He did. And that greatest of promises is the proof that God will fulfill every other promise He has made to you. As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 1:20, **“For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ.”**

The second question: Is there any problem too hard for the LORD to solve?

When Sarah was ninety years old, barren, and unable to have children, was that problem too hard for the LORD? No. As God promised, Sarah became pregnant and nine months later was nursing Isaac and changing diapers. When Joseph was sold into Egyptian slavery by his own brothers, was that problem too hard for the LORD? No. God made Joseph a ruler in Egypt, second in power to only Pharaoh himself. When the Israelites were stranded on the shore of the Red Sea with Pharaoh’s army in hot pursuit, was that problem too hard for the LORD? No. God simply parted the sea.

When the Israelites had no food or water in the wilderness, was that problem too hard for the LORD? No. God rained bread from heaven and provided water from a rock. When a teenager named David faced a nine-foot-tall giant named Goliath, was that problem too hard for the LORD? No. God enabled David to defeat the giant with a slingshot and a pebble. And when the entire world was lost and condemned through the fall into sin, was even that problem too hard for the LORD? No. God sent His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to be our Savior. God condemned and punished His own Son instead of condemning and punishing us. How many examples do we need?

No problem is too hard for the LORD to solve: no illness, no debt, no depression, no marriage, no ministry, no terrorism; no crazed, despotic world leader with his itchy finger on the Nuclear Trigger. In Scripture, God Himself tells us this: **“Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor Me,”** Psalm 50:15. “Will,” He said, not “might”. “Will,” He said, not “let me think about it” or “maybe later, if I’m in the mood.”

This is either true or it is not true. God is either God, or He is not God. He may not solve my problem immediately. He may not solve my problem my way. But He will always solve my problem His way. And His way and His timing are always right. Remember, when Abraham and Sarah attempted to solve their problem their way, the result was Ishmael. When they waited for God to solve their problem, the result was Isaac—the child of promise.

And finally, the third question: Is any person too hard for the LORD to save? We fret over this question at times, especially when longing, hoping, and praying

for an unbelieving loved one to come to Christ. At times, we may wonder the same of ourselves when tormented by past failings: “Oh, Lord, look at all the mistakes I made as a parent. Look at the way I treated my spouse. Look at the way I gave in to that same temptation. I’m worthless, hopeless, useless.” But then, didn’t the apostle Paul himself feel this sense of worthlessness at times. Indeed he did. Listen to his words in Romans 7: **“For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.”**

Surely, there are no more personal, heart-wrenching, and heartwarming words in Scripture than those of Paul to Timothy: **“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that He considered me faithful, appointment me to His service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst,”** 1 Timothy 1:12-15.

All of us can say the same. All of us can rejoice that whoever we are and whatever we’ve done—no matter now stubborn, recalcitrant, selfish, rebellious, and sinful—the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses and saves us as we, by God’s grace, trust in Him as our Savior. All of us can say with the hymnist: “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I’m found. Was blind, but now I see.”

So then, what do you think? Is anything too hard for the LORD? Anything at all? Ask Abraham and Sarah. Ask Saul the persecutor, who became Paul the apostle. Ask the thief on the cross, who went from pleading guilty to pleading with Jesus: ‘Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.’ Most of all, ask the Lord Jesus Himself. This is His answer: “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible,” Matthew 19:26.