

Sermon: A Promise is a Promise. Genesis 18:1-15 Hebrews 11:11 (ESV)

Reference: Genesis 11:27-30 Portions adapted from "Sarah: The Princess And The Promise", by Rik Wadge & "Laughing at God's Promises" by Bradford Robinson @ SErmonCentral.Com

In the 1994 movie, "It could happen to you" – supposedly inspired by an actual event – Nicholas Cage plays the part of a New York cop who walks into a little café for a cup of coffee. When he's ready to leave, he reaches back and realizes he's misplaced his wallet. To the struggling young waitress played by Bridget Fonda who figures she's just been stiffed for the bill, the cop pulls a lottery ticket from his pocket with the promise that if he wins he'll split the money with her, 50/50.

As luck would have it, he does win. Even though he is under no legal obligation, and against the advice of his friends, the cop keeps his promise and the waitress in the corner café gets a \$2 million dollar tip. Throughout the movie, to those people who think he's crazy, the cop repeats over and over, "***a promise is a promise.***" The value he placed on his word was far greater than the value he placed on his lottery winnings.

In today's society very little value is placed on one's word, one's promise. Years ago a handshake was all that was needed to finish a deal, to seal a contract between two people. Today even though someone signs an insurance waiver promising that they will in no way hold you or your business liable for something... as soon as that person changes their mind you may find yourself or your company in the midst of a lawsuit.

Though today we place little credence in what a person promises, for God, ALWAYS, a promise is a promise. When we come to God even with just a small piece of our faith... with holes shot through it... with tears staining its fabric... God understands and remains faithful to the promises He has made to us, His children. A Great example of God's faithfulness can be found in the story of Abraham's wife, Sarah.

We first met her as Sarai, the wife of Abram in Genesis chapter 11's list of the sons of Terah. Significantly that section then concludes with a final comment on her alone: *Sarai was barren; she had no child.* (11:27-30).

As we learned last week, the name Sarai means "princess." Thus, from the very beginning we are introduced to her as a barren princess. I have a feeling that all through her life private smirks and quiet comments followed after her: Sarai, was the "Barren Princess" married to Abram, the "Exalted Father;" a couple who had lived together for over 89 years without a child between them.

It can be absolutely devastating for a young woman when the doctor tells her she'll never have children and the guilt and self-condemnation that one feels can be difficult to overcome.

In the Promised Land, Abram had over 318 men employed full-time in his shepherding operations, so we can guess that there were probably at least that many women nearby and children with them as well. As the boss' wife, Sarah would be the most honored woman in camp but always with the sad distinction of being childless. While she kept up a brave act, there are enough hints from scripture that Sarah long carried these feelings of being barren deep inside, where no one else could see, where no one else could go, except God.

So, Sarah's laugh here in chapter 18, was not from happiness. It is an expression of her pain. "Oh, sure, now after all these years, I'm going to have some joy?" It was a sarcastic chuckle coming from deep within her soul, she may not have made a sound but God still heard her.

The pain of the disappointment in Sarah was so deep, she did not even want to entertain the thought anymore. Years ago she was elated at the prospect of having a child, but years and years of hoping and praying had worn this lady down. Part of it was the sheer impossibility of it even happening now. Many women know what it takes to physically birth a baby. How would you like to do it at 90 years old?

By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.

Hebrews 11:11 (English Standard Version)

Most of the time our Bible focuses on Abraham's struggles with faith, but we need to realize today, as the book of Hebrews finally reminds us, also of the years of disappointment this woman of faith experienced.

The day finally came when God fulfilled His promise. When Isaac was born Sarah said, "*God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me*" (Gen. 21:6). This time it will be joyous laughter, altogether a different kind of laugh from the one we are thinking about now. In fact, this joyous release in laughter was so central to the birth of her son that she named him "Isaac" which means laughter.

I share Sarah's story with you today because it's nicely framed by Mother's Day, but also for other women as well as men, because our stories are probably not very different. **God is also faithful with us. But if you think because of that, your life will come quick and easy, think again.**

Why doesn't God bring everything about quick and easy – especially for His people of faith?

Because God uses the journey to prepare us not only for our ultimate destination, but also for the work He would have us do now. God sometimes needs to drag us through hard experiences that can knock off our rough edges and develop His character in us.

Our journey of faith is more about who we are becoming than it is about where we are going. Most Christians are just trying to get to a place called heaven when they die. But God is trying to get you ready to do the work He would have you doing right here right now. Heaven is not the goal but rather the reward for a life lived in faith.

Let's pick up Sarah's story now 25 years after God's first promise as He is finally bringing her, with the birth of this child, to the point of emotional healing.

At the opening of Genesis chapter 18, Sarah is now 89 years old, when three strangers suddenly appear in camp. It doesn't say how, but Abraham apparently recognizes them as angelic visitors and hastens to set a meal before them. During the after meal conversation, the Angel of the Lord casually asks after Sarah to be told that she was in the tent. He knew where she was all along, this was just to get her attention. Yes Sarah was in the tent, out of sight but not out of the conversation, in fact she was hiding right behind the tent flap listening carefully. Many times Abraham had told her of his conversations with God, perhaps for the first time she would get to hear from God directly – for herself.

The LORD said, "*I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.*" Sarah laughed to herself, saying, 'After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?' The Lord said to Abraham, '*Why did Sarah laugh, and say, "Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?"*' **Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?** At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son.' (vs. 12-15).

God finishes the conversation not only repeating His promise of a son for Sarah within a year's time, but also posing a rhetorical question directly to her as she hides in the darkness behind the tent flap. This question wasn't for Sarah alone, but for all of us who struggle with faith: **"Is anything too hard for the LORD?"**

Sarah laughed, still God lovingly answered her disbelief behind the laugh, but why did Sarah then attempt to lie about her laughter, her doubts?

It was probably just knee jerk fear or embarrassment, in a similar situation I would have done the same... not wanting to show God my broken faith.

By Abraham's response, Sarah had quickly figured out that these visitors were special, but she thinks of herself alone with her thoughts ... safely hidden in the tent ... only to realize that even while God sat out there by the luncheon spread He was also still with her in the tent, listening to her innermost thoughts. How surprising it must have been when she realized that the strangers out there were now including her in the conversation.

During this encounter with God Sarah's fears of a failed life were met with God's promise of a son ... God invaded Sarah's hidden battle. God invaded that space where Sarah was afraid to put her hope again in God, of ever having a child. But a promise is a promise and our God is a Promise Keeper!

In Genesis chapter 12, when God had first promised 75 year old Abram that he would become a father of a great nation, don't you know that the 65 year-old "barren Princess" had also heard and taken God's promises to heart.

But by Genesis chapter 15, when God repeated His promises and bound Himself to fulfilling by then cutting a covenant with now 85 year old Abram, 75 year-old Sarai must have concluded that this promise did not include her. So perhaps her husband could have a child by another, by her slave girl Hagar.

Then in Genesis chapter 17, when God again reminds the now 99 year old Abraham of His promised heir, but now also clearly telling him - perhaps for the first time - that this child would be with Sarah ... at that time it had been Abraham who had laughed in disbelief at the thought of old Sarah now having a child.

Ironic laughter was now both of their responses to God's promise. Once perhaps it had been in desperate hope for the improbable, but with the years it had become no hope for the impossible. Impossible!

That's the whole point. This is why God waited so long. God calls us to believe that He can accomplish what is absolutely impossible... for us! Abraham and Sarah have become God's lesson for us that He accomplishes His marvelous, miraculous, incredible, implausible even impossible promises through feeble men and women, just like you and me.

We moan and groan when our faith falters and we refuse to hear the promises of God for our own lives. Do we not believe the promise of God recorded in Romans chapter 8 that ***nothing in the heaven above or in the earth below can ever separate us from the love of God?*** (8:38).

Did we not hear His promise from Hebrews 13, ***"I will never leave you or forsake you"***? Do we believe that God meant that He will continue to love us and refuses to

leave us even when our hearts are broken – when our marriages fail, when our children go away to college, when our best friends walk out the door, or when our company decides to cut back and we're the ones they're letting go?

There are a thousand other ways that life hands us the pink slip of rejection and abandonment. Maybe sometimes you wake up in the middle of the night and ask yourself the question, *"Do I really believe God?"* We struggle and complain and say along side of Sarah, "I'm too old, I'm too tired, I'm too weak, I'm too..."

Is it easy to hear God calling Sarah's name, but not yours?

You say, "God loved them, but how can He love me?"

Yet, through all our fears, through all our worries and through all our weaknesses... God's still right here with us, even in the darkness behind the tent flap, hearing us, and still keeping His promises!

Faith takes time to grow, ask Sarah. She waited her whole life to have that baby boy. She heard God's promises, yet struggled to trust Him...just like us. But God remained faithful. God kept His promise. God isn't going to scratch out His promise, just because you have doubts, fears, or worries!

D.L. Moody once said, *"God never made a promise that was too good to be true."*

Listen to some of God's promises to us:

I will bless you, Gen. 12:2

I will not fail you, Josh. 1:5

I will heal you, 2 Kings 20:5

I will guide you, Ps. 32:8

I will teach you, Ps. 32:8

I will deliver you, Ps. 50:15

I will satisfy you, Ps. 132:15

I will help you, Is. Isa 41:10

I will strengthen you, Isa 41:10

I will uphold you, ; Isa 41:10

I will hold your hand, Isa 42:6

I will forgive you, Jer. 31:34

I will restore you, Jer. 30:17

I will be your God, Eze. 36:28

I will love you, John 14:21

I will save you, Eze. 36:27, 29

Finally, here are a few things you can be assured of when dealing with the promises of God. First, **know that God is faithful** and able to fulfill every promise He has made.

*"For no matter how many promises
God has made, they are all "Yes" in Christ."*

2 Cor 1:20

God has the power to do what He has said He will do!

Second, know that **God is not limited by your limitations**. You may be 90 years old, but God can still use you for His glory. David was too young, but God used him to kill a giant. Moses couldn't speak well, but God used him to lead millions of people out of bondage. Paul was public enemy #1 of the church, but God used him to bring the Good news to the Gentiles. God can do anything, even if that anything is through you.

Finally, know that **nothing is impossible with God**. You may be in an impossible situation right now with no apparent hope of it getting better. But God can do the impossible. It may sound absurd that a 90 year old woman gave birth to a bouncing baby boy, but even more absurd is a God who sent His only begotten Son to seek us out, knowing that He would have to die so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Where are you at in your life today?

What circumstance are you in that is greater than his promise?

Remember at the ripe old age of 90, Sarah finally heard with her own ears that she was going to have a son. No wonder after so many years of waiting, she Laughed. What God promised Sarah was too incredible, too miraculous and too unimaginable.

Yet, Sarah became the mother of a nation. She saw God's promise fulfilled... in Isaac!

Genesis chapter 21 will finally record Sarah laughing again no longer in disbelief but in joy when Isaac was born. In her arms was physical proof that with God a promise is a promise and that she had always been a princess with a promise.

Today in our many circumstances that seem just too big for God, He asks us the same question he once asked a princess named Sarah, **"Is anything too hard for the LORD?"** Let's pray about this

Sermon Prayer:

“Dear Heavenly Father, we thank You for the many precious promises we have in Christ. We thank You that these promises are not limited by our ability but rather, they are assured by Your power and Your faithfulness. Lord there is no greater promise than the promise of Your love and care for us, so much that you sent Your son to seek us out and offer us forgiveness. You have promised that if we come near to You, You will come near to us. For those who are here today, those who are struggling with an issue in their life, let them hear Your promise to them. We thank You for our new life in Christ, and for the hope of every promise we have in Christ. In Jesus name, Amen.