

ST. ANDREW'S, BLACKROCK & BRAY - 16TH AUGUST 2020

ABRAHAM: THE BIRTH OF ISAAC (GENESIS 21:1-7)

Welcome and Announcements

"Hello and welcome to this transcript from St. Andrew's Church. Today we are continuing our sermon series looking at life of Abraham. When he and Sarah are first promised the birth of their son Isaac they say, 'that's impossible!' But, by the end they see the fullness of the power and faithfulness of God, and learn that nothing is too hard for the LORD. I pray that this message will give you hope and encourage you to trust in Jesus today." - Rev. Andrew Gill

Call to Worship - Psalm 67 (NTL)

May God be merciful and bless us.

May his face smile with favour on us.

*May your ways be known throughout the earth,
your saving power among people everywhere.*

May the nations praise you, O God.

Yes, may all the nations praise you.

*Let the whole world sing for joy,
because you govern the nations with justice
and guide the people of the whole world.*

Opening Prayer

Lord God, you are indeed God! You are our faithful God who keeps his covenant for a thousand generations and lavishes his unfailing love on those who love him and obey his commands.

Holy God, righteous and merciful, cleanse our minds and free our consciences from the things that divide us from you. We have shut our eyes to your glory, our minds to your truth, and our hearts to your Spirit.

Rescue us from our sins, and guide us in the way we should go. Help us to love you and enable us to offer you true worship and joyful service. Amen.

Reading - Genesis 21:1-7 (NRSV)

The Lord dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as he had promised. Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

Now Sarah said, 'God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.' And she said, 'Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.'

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

Sermon - Abraham; The Birth of Isaac

Do you ever find parts of the Bible difficult to believe? Sometimes we read about a miracle, or a promise, or an aspect of God's character, and we say to ourselves, 'that's impossible!' Everyone who lives by faith will face doubts at some stage, and when we do it can be comforting for us to know that even people in the Bible sometimes found it difficult to believe things in the Bible!

Today we are continuing our series looking at life of Abraham. In today's episode he, and his wife Sarah, are told something so wonderful that their initial response was to say, 'that's impossible!' But by the end they had seen the fullness of the power and faithfulness of God and had learned that nothing is too hard for the Lord.

The story of Abraham begins with God making him promises of land, family, and blessings. Right from the start these promises seemed impossible. Abraham and Sarah have always been unable to have children, and now they are too old, but still they have faith so they obeyed God's command to move to a new home. Twenty-four years go by and Abraham has had plenty of adventures (probably more than he was expecting during his retirement years) but a family with Sarah has not been one of them. Then in Genesis 17, God appears to Abraham to confirm the covenant, and he says, "I will bless Sarah 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." (v.16)

And Abraham... laughs. The idea of a 100 year old man and 90 year old woman starting a family is so ridiculous and impossible to him, that he just breaks out in the laughter of disbelief.

Then a little while later in Genesis 18 again God says to him, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.” (V.10) Sarah hears this, and now it’s her turn to laugh. In verse 11 we read, ‘Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, “After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?”’

Their reaction is completely understandable, after all this time how was God going to do what he says. It seemed so impossible to them that they just laughed at the promise. We can do this in our own way too. We look at the promises of the Bible from a human point of view and dismiss them like a bad joke. We look at our problems and say to our selves ‘God can’t help me’, or we look and ourselves, and say, ‘God won’t help me’. But God is faithful, nothing is too hard for him, and he can turn the laughter of doubt into the laughter of joy.

Genesis 21:1, ‘Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised.’ At 90 Sarah gives birth to son! God kept his promise to her and did exactly what he said he would do. She has now received, and holds in her arms, the promise that she doubted. They named the child Isaac, which means ‘he laughs’, because God had turned their laughter of disbelief into laughter of joy. Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.” (V.6)

Romans 15:4 says that the Old Testament ‘give us hope and encouragement as we wait patiently for God’s promises to be fulfilled.’ There are times in life when our faith begins to waiver, and we find in difficult to believe the truth of the Bible and trust in God.

But this story reminds us that the Lord our God is a faithful God, and he has good plans for our future and he will keep all his promises. We have a reason to hope today, because after the waiting comes celebration. If we persevere in our faith in Jesus Christ then one day we too will hold in our arms all that God has promised to give us, and the voice of our doubts and fears will be silenced by the laughter of joy.

This story reminds us that God is a faithful God, but more than that it shows us that God is a powerful God. The main point here is not just that God does what he says, but that he can do what we think is impossible. Giving birth in your 90's is not just unlikely or improbable, it is, humanly speaking, impossible. Not only is Sarah well past the natural age of being able to get pregnant, but she was never able to get pregnant. The first thing we learn about her in the Bible is that she was infertile and had no children. In the primitive society that they lived in this meant the end of the family line, and was practically the equivalent of death. The birth of Isaac to an elderly infertile couple demonstration the supreme unlimited power of God! Impossible means nothing to God, he has the power to do what he has promised, even to bring life out of death.

The life Abraham marks the beginning of God's great rescue plan for this world, and right at the start we get a glimpse of what the fullness of that salvation will look like. It's so important that we understand that this story is not just about God turning tears into laughter, but about turning death into life. God's mission is ultimately not about making sad people happy, or even about making bad people good, but about making dead people alive! What we see in part here, we still in fullness in the resurrection of Christ.

When they rolled the stone over the grave where Jesus' dead body lay, everybody thought that was the end. Jesus had predicted his death, and he told his disciples that on the third day he would rise again. But nobody believed him. Of course they didn't, it was impossible. But impossible means nothing to God, he has the power to do what he has promised, and on the third day God raised Jesus to life just as he had said.

So when the Bible promises us that all who believe in Jesus Christ will live even though they die, then we can laugh with joy because we know that God will do what he has said. Impossible means nothing to God, he has the power to do whatever he has promised, even bring life out of death.

Prayer

Faithful God,

You turn our mourning into laughter.

*We praise you that nothing is impossible for you,
and that you have the power to do what you have promised.*

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you died and rose again.

We believe, help us overcome our unbelief.

God of hope, fill us with all joy and peace

as we trust in you,

so that our hearts overflow with hope

by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen