

## Written Copy: Genesis 18:10-14 “Is Anything Too Difficult?”

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday @ Pentecost – Proper 11

Sunday, July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022

### Text: Genesis 18:1-14

<sup>10</sup> The LORD said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. <sup>11</sup> Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. <sup>12</sup> So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?" <sup>13</sup> The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?'" <sup>14</sup> Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son."

### Exegetical Statement (the text's context)

The LORD, who has repeatedly promised Abraham that he would be the father of many nations, that all nations of the world would be blessed by his descendant, and that he and Sarah would produce the son of promise, stops by personally to reaffirm this promise and provide a date for fulfillment. At first Abraham believes he is being visited by three human travelers. Yet he extends hospitality beyond the cultural norm providing more than bread, but a sumptuous feast of veal and curds and milk. Then he stands by in the posture of a waiter while they eat. The LORD then reveals personally what he has promised not just to Abraham's ears but to Sarah's too. He reveals He is the LORD because He knows Sarah's new name recently given by Him. He also knows the doubt and laughter that is in Sarah's mind. Still He meets that doubt by providing additional details not given before, that this would all come about a year from now. He gently chides her and provides food for contemplation for them both: "Is anything too hard for the LORD? She will have a son this time next year."

### Focus Statement:

Truly nothing is impossible for our God. The greatest miracle was worked by God the Son who in Jesus Christ God became human so He could perform the impossible, reconcile all men from being enemies of their Creator to open the door to redemption, forgiveness and eternal life. He gives that gift to us as He miraculously works through the words of the Gospel, which in the hands of the Holy Spirit has the power to change hearts, lives, and eternal destinies of all who hear and believe and trust with the faith of Abraham. That is a miracle that is impossible for all people, but is not too hard for our saving God

### Function Statement:

#### Why it's important to know:

As a matter of stated belief we know nothing is impossible for God. But in a practical sense we wall off certain things as never able to happen. We put Him in a box when it comes to things that require a miracle. Sometimes that's because we've prayed for the impossible and it has not come about.

#### What the hearer should do as a result:

Hold fast to the promise that nothing is too hard for God. And when my requests are not answered as I desire its not due to impossibility, but according to the love and care of the God who desires a relationship of faith and trust now that will be consummated in eternity.

### Subject Sentence: Jesus' salvation shows nothing's impossible for God

## **Introduction**

Our Old Testament Lesson today brought to my attention this important theological question: Is Anything Too Difficult For the LORD. That's the question put to me, and so I'm now putting it to you: Is anything too hard or too difficult for the LORD to handle, for Him to take care of, for Him to overcome? I'll bet if I put that question to each one of you, you would give me a nice children's message answer: "No! There is nothing too difficult for the LORD!" And that is the correct answer on paper. But what about if we start looking at how that answer appears to play out in our lives? You may say and confess nothing is too difficult for Him, but are there things and areas that you, perhaps without realizing it, have walled off in your mind as being impossible, or at least beyond what He is prepared to do for you.

As many of you know I've been dealing with an open wound on the big toe of my right foot for going on four years now. I know that's how long it's been because I looked back in my Calendar to see when I scheduled the first appointment with my Podiatrist: August 2018. Since that time I've been in and out of this offloading shoe that I'm currently wearing. I've had custom orthotic inserts made for my shoes. I've come close to having the wound almost healed to the point that it's only a small little sliver, only to have it bust back open when I was not gradual enough in returning to my regular shoe, or maybe the orthotic was not good enough, or maybe I wasn't off my feet enough with my leg elevated, or maybe...this is just one of those things that is too hard for God. Or even worse, maybe this is something that He doesn't care enough about to fix for me.

Now like you, in the forefront of my mind, I know those last two statements are not true. I know nothing is impossible for Him, and I know that He loves me and cares for me. Nonetheless I had to come to terms about how this has been reflected in my prayer life. Ever since this sore appeared I should've been lifting up prayers for healing to the LORD early and often. And in the beginning, I was. But then my prayers on the subject became less frequent, even though my concern over the slowness of healing remained and grew stronger. I had to ask myself why haven't I been lifting this prayer request up? As I thought more about it, most of the times I have prayed about it were because others mentioned me and my health as part of our Wednesday Bible Study prayers. Have I, in some way, so resigned myself to this condition that I see it as being beyond God's power to heal or that He just doesn't care?

How about you? Are there situations or problems in your life that you've resigned yourself to, and therefore have stopped praying about, because in some part of your mind you've walled them off as being beyond God's ability to heal, or He is lacking in desire to make it happen? Are there things you've walled off as being too difficult for God? And if there aren't in your personal life, then maybe in the lives of others; things such as sickness, substance abuse problems, character flaws and other issues. And how about in the world? How about the resurgence of COVID-19, the War in the Ukraine, the gun violence and rising nature of intolerance for our fellow man? Have you in some way that you would never confess to anyone else regarded these as being beyond God's help? What about the biggest one of all, can God really love me and forgive me for all that I have done?

## **God Comes to Assure Abraham and Sarah**

Abraham and Sarah know what it's like to have doubts about what God is willing and able to do. God called Abraham to faith in Him and called him to leave his home in what is now Iraq, and travel to a land he had never been to before. He was to live in the land as a sojourner, a temporary visitor. Yet God had promised him that one day His descendants, the number of which would be greater than the stars in the sky, would possess this land as their very own. A great promise to Abraham's ears. The only problem was he had not even one descendant, not even one child. The LORD kept promising this, and Abraham and Sarah kept getting older and older, and no children.

Now it wasn't as if Abraham didn't believe these promises of God, because he certainly did. **Genesis 15:5-6** <sup>5</sup> **And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."** <sup>6</sup> **And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.** Even though he had yet no children born to him, and that his age and the age of his wife made having children an impossibility, Abraham still believed the LORD's promise by the gift of faith given to him by the LORD God Himself. Abraham believed what had been promised, not according to what his eyes saw, but simply because it was the LORD God who promised it. He was considered righteous because of that faith, considered to be in right standing, with all of his sins forgiven. That's the same thing that happens to you and I when we trust the promises of God.

Now God didn't make good on this promise right away. Abraham and Sarah would have to wait 25 years for this promise to be fulfilled. But it wasn't as if He left them hanging. The LORD kept coming to them and reiterating His promise. He made several covenants with Abraham, solemn oaths regarding His relationship with Abraham and his future descendants, and one descendant in particular, through whom the whole world would be blessed. And when the time was right, God came to deliver the final promise to Abraham in person.

It happened when what looked like three normal travelers show up outside of Abraham's camp. He doesn't see them walking up from a distance. However it's the heat of the day and Abraham could've been napping. He looks up and there they are. As was the custom of the time they were waiting for the master of the house to invite them into his camp. And Abraham, when he finally sees they are there, jumps up and runs to them, enthusiastically inviting them to come rest, wash up, and regain their strength with what he calls "a morsel of bread". But what follows is an extravagant meal of not just bread, but tender veal and curds and milk.

Abraham goes far beyond the normal standards for hospitality towards strangers on the road. This does speak to a godly characteristic of Abraham. But might it also suggest that he in some way recognizes these men are special, that they are more than men? Instead of joining them and sitting and eating, he stands by in waiting, in the position of a host or waiter that is making sure they have everything they need. Regardless of what Abraham may suspect about these travelers one of them lets the cat out of the bag as to who they really are.

**Genesis 18:9-10** <sup>9</sup> They said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "She is in the tent." <sup>10</sup> The LORD said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him.

Although these are strangers to Abraham they know the name of Abraham's wife. They address her not by the name she was born with, Sarai, but the new name God had recently given her, Sarah, when He told Abraham she would be the mother of many nations. Then as our text tells us, it is revealed to Abraham that one of these visitors is the LORD God in human form, in other words the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ. He shows Himself to be the LORD God because He has knowledge that no traveler should have about Abraham and Sarah. He knows the promise that has been given about a son. And He's come in person to reveal, finally, when He will fulfill that promise: a year from now.

**Genesis 18:11-12** <sup>11</sup> Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. <sup>12</sup> So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?"

Despite the knowledge this stranger possesses, this promise is a little too much for Sarah to completely buy into. She's thinking, "C'mon man! Don't you know I'm no longer ovulating? There are no eggs being produced to be fertilized. And my husband's way too old to be accomplishing that. Me, have a child now? That's a laugh." And we can't judge Sarah too hard on this. In her place you and I would react the same way. In fact we might do more than just think that reply, we might say it.

And how about Abraham? When the LORD came to give Sarai a new name Abraham struggled with doubt too. **Genesis 17:16-17** <sup>16</sup> **I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.** <sup>17</sup> **Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"** Abraham is saying, "I know you are the LORD God, that you are my LORD God, creator of all things, my light and my salvation, who can protect me from all evil. But can this really come true?"

**Genesis 18:13-14** <sup>13</sup> **The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?'"** <sup>14</sup> **Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son."**

The LORD shows Himself to be who He claims to be. He knows not just what has been said but what Sarah was thinking to herself, even though He is sitting with His back to her. And then comes the statement of faith that Abraham, Sarah, and you and I are called to consider: "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" How about a couple who are 100 years old where according to even modern medicine childbirth is impossible? The answer is not only is it not too hard, but it's also a done deal. It's such a sure thing that the LORD sets the date it will happen, a year from now.

## **Why God Made and Kept That Particular Promise**

The LORD made a promise that a barren couple would indeed have a child and fulfilled that promise in a miraculous way. But there are plenty of couples today who are younger, who desire and pray for a child, yet they remain childless. Why are their prayers not answered? Maybe we should start with why this one was. The LORD provided this miraculous birth not because He loved Abraham and Sarah and wanted them to be happy and enjoy raising a son, although this is certainly true. He did it because this son born miraculously to them was part of a bigger plan that stretched back to the Fall of Adam and Eve. It was all part of the promise of the descendant of Eve who would crush Satan's head.

It foreshadowed another miraculous birth to come, this one by a woman who was a virgin. The LORD fulfilled this miracle as part of His plan of salvation for all mankind, His plan to send us the Savior, who is Christ the Lord. In Mary's womb God the Son took on flesh and joined Himself with humanity, doing something that would be impossible for anyone else, but not too difficult for the LORD. This special child would grow to become the only man who would never sin, something impossible for anyone else, except Jesus Christ who is the God in human form. He would grow to accomplish the greatest miracle of all, something that is beyond difficult, in fact impossible for anyone else except Him. Only Jesus, could take on the sins of the world and die to forgive them all. Only in Jesus could God Himself suffer death and save all humanity from eternal hell. Only Jesus could and did earn for us eternal life.

And how does that saving work come to you? Through simple words that are the Gospel Message. And the work they do within mankind is impossible for anyone else to accomplish, except for the Holy Spirit who empowers these words to accomplish another miracle that only God can do, conversion. That's the Spirit's work of giving unbelievers a new heart and new mind that no longer focuses exclusively on pleasing itself, but desires to live to please God and praise Him for the grace and love He pours into their lives.

### **Why All Things Are Possible, Yet Not All Are Accomplished**

All things are indeed possible with God, yet not all impossible requests are fulfilled. Why is that? God loves you, and I, and all those who make prayerful requests for the impossible to happen. But that love does not mean we will always get what we request. In fact it means that a miracle which God could certainly do may not be done out of love for you and for others. God had a higher purpose in bringing Isaac into the world, a purpose beyond Abraham and Sarah's happiness on earth. His purpose was so they could enjoy a greater happiness and joy forever in eternal life, through the coming of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And that is the same purpose that is behind His work your life and mine.

It's not that God doesn't want us to be happy. He does. But He doesn't want our happiness and joy now to ever serve to take away our eternal happiness to come. While God has shown and continues to show His love for you in many and various ways, the clearest demonstration of that love, and His willingness to do the impossible, can be seen in your faith in Christ. It can be seen in His work to bring you to faith and keep you in faith. It's not something you could ever accomplish on your own. The Holy Spirit Himself brought that faith to bear in your heart. And He is at work in miraculous ways through the means of grace to keep you in faith, means that appear to be nothing special like water, bread, and wine, but through the miraculous work of the Spirit have life changing power. He works to make not just your life better now, but to carry you through all the troubles that seem unanswered by Him unto eternal life to come.

## **Conclusion**

So where does that leave me and the saga of the wound on my big toe. Could God miraculously heal it? Yes! Will He? That remains to be seen. I have recently found out that in that toe my bone is infected. The treatment options given me are amputation of the big toe, or hyperbaric oxygen treatment. The only way the hyperbaric treatment is an option is if my insurance will pay for it. So I did some renewed praying, and the answer is I start hyperbaric treatment tomorrow morning. Could this be the means the LORD chooses to heal my big toe? Perhaps. I know He could. But even if He chooses not to, I still know this: He loves me more than anyone else in the world. And He has performed the greatest miracle on my behalf sending His only Son to die to take away my sin and give to me eternal life. And the same is true for you. In many ways God's will and plan regarding our daily lives remains a mystery until after the fact, if even then. Much of who God is and what He does is unknown to us. He is far greater than we could ever know. But we are to hold on to this by faith alone, that His desire is for us to have a relationship with Him now that stretches into eternity. And all that He allows and does is aimed at fulfilling that. Nothing is too impossible for our LORD, especially when it come to our life with Him now, and our eternal salvation. Amen.