

Genesis 18:1–15 And the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. ² He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth ³ and said, “O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. ⁴ Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, ⁵ while I bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.” So they said, “Do as you have said.” ⁶ And Abraham went quickly into the tent to Sarah and said, “Quick! Three seahs of fine flour! Knead it, and make cakes.” ⁷ And Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to a young man, who prepared it quickly. ⁸ Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them. And he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

⁹ They said to him, “Where is Sarah your wife?” And he said, “She is in the tent.” ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?” ¹³ The Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ ¹⁴ 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.” ¹⁵ But Sarah denied it, saying, “I did not laugh,” for she was afraid. He said, “No, but you did laugh.”

Announcements:

1. Baby Dedication: May 9th Email: Maegan
2. Baptism: May 16th email: me
3. Download our App / Giving

Genesis 18:1-15 | Sarah's Laughter

In today's text we get this wonderful rhetorical question that God himself poses saying; “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” It is a question about limits, and it is a response to laughter. Those two are related as we'll see. But to begin with, we need to consider. Is anything too hard for the Lord? Who is it that we're talking about?

Part of the reason we're spending time in Genesis, is because we as a society have become estranged from the fundamentals of our own existence. And most fundamental in our existence is that we are finite creatures created by an infinite God. For us there are things that are too hard, for God there are not.

So I want you to open your heart as best you can and consider, what is something you really need, that is too hard for you? And before you start thinking of Space-x or something, I want you to start thinking relationally. How is it that we begin to hope in God for things that are too hard for us. 1) We practice trust by being open to surprises. 2) We own our limits before a limitless God.

1. Open to Surprises

Genesis 18:1-2 And the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. ² He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth

In this strange scene the Lord appears to Abraham in the form of three men. Or perhaps it is better seen as two men or angelic beings, appearing alongside the Lord. The particulars of this are mysterious to delve into, but the point is that the revelation of God to Abraham is profoundly explicit at this stage.

Abraham's original call from the Lord was to set out from his homeland to a place that God had not even revealed to him yet. It is only hearing, no seeing, and it is incredibly vague. It is more like a hunch than a call in some respect. But in this scene we see the nature of God's revelation become more and more explicit. His call has been fleshed out in details and his engagement with the Lord is intimate. The call of God is progressive.

Many of us won't move until we hear the ending of what God has called us too, but God works in our moving. Just start, he is with you. That is one of the lessons of Abraham's story.

Abraham responds to these three men in dramatic fashion. He runs out to greet them, he bows down before them. He is open to the interruption of these strangers.

Genesis 18:3-4 and said, "O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. ⁴ Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, ⁵ while I bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, ...

He greets the strangers with incredible hospitality. It is a midday interruption but Abraham is thrilled to meet the unexpected blessing of their presence. He positions himself as a servant before them. He calls Sarah to make cakes of bread, and he runs and has a servant slaughter a calf, and another young man gather milk and curds, He prepares a feast for them. Then he stands by while they eat to be of immediate service.

You don't have to know much about ancient near-eastern cuisine to know what's described here is more than a "little water" and a "morsel" of food. There is no inconvenience it is a thrill of a glorious interruption! **The life of faith moves forward despite uncertainty and it is open to respond generously to serendipity.** And listen to the clarity that Abraham receives from these unexpected visitors.

Genesis 18:9-10 They said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "She is in the tent." ¹⁰ 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.

That life vision concerning which Abraham and his wife are most deeply invested, is laid out in its most clear terms by the word of God in fellowship over a meal. Talking as among friends. But many of us miss this serendipity, and Sarah almost did, something as small as a tent flap can prevent it.

2. Own our Limits, before limitless God

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

But Sarah listening from the other side of the tent laughs at the promise. It is a laughter to herself, and she questions it explicitly stating, that she is worn out and so is Abraham and they might experience pleasure? It is a sensual description of what would take place. She is thinking in a very limited frame. Abraham has likely shared this promise from the Lord with her before but she is gridlocked in her doubt. I'm sure there was tension in the relationship because of it. I think there is a helpful diagnostic in this quote from Edwin Friedman in *Failure of Nerve*, he says:

"when any relationship system is imaginatively gridlocked, it cannot get free simply through more thinking about the problem. Conceptually stuck systems cannot become unstuck simply by trying harder. For a fundamental reorientation to occur, a spirit of adventure that optimizes serendipity and enables new perceptions beyond the control of our thinking processes must happen first. This is equally true regarding families, institutions, whole nations, and entire civilizations."

The Lord will not let Sarah remain gridlocked. Is anything too hard for him?

Genesis 18:13 The Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?'"

I want us to take some time to understand Sarah's laughter, as I think you will find this very helpful in your own life. Laughter is ambiguous. It can be derisive at someone else's expense. It can be wondrous at a joyful surprise. It can be cynical at a foolish insight. There are all sorts of subtleties in laughter. Part of what laughter is about is exploring limits. Ricky Gervais describes comedy as puppies wrestling with each other. They are play fighting and

when they see someone really get hurt they back off, but in order for it to be fun it has to be right up against that limit. Comedy in a sense plays a role of bringing definition to social boundaries.

Think of a court jester. They are very unlike the king and the rest of the court. They are beyond the norms of social relations and as such make themselves the butt of the joke by being outside the boundary and by doing so they are also serving to uphold the boundary. But what happens when a culture no longer views its boundaries as worth maintaining? The joke begins to shift from a mockery of what is outside the bounds to what is inside the bounds.

Think of the Joker. If you're a white dude and want an Oscar, find a joker part. Notice where the joker stands, he doesn't poke fun at the margin, he pokes fun at the whole society. The joker sees everything as absurd, it is a totalizing of absurdity. This is an inversion of the joke, he isn't the butt of the joke he is merely the beholder of the joke and the joke is society.

Laughter shows us something profound, it shows us the boundaries of our world and where we think we stand in relation to them. We can see that there is a proper laughter that establishes a proper boundary as well as improper laughter, that misaligns a boundary.

And here we find Sarah's laughter, a laughter of cynicism meant to take down a proper boundary. Her reason is perhaps obvious, but she misunderstands who she is dealing with when she is dealing with the Lord. She thinks that what she knows of her physicality and her age, provides a real limit on God's ability to deliver on his promise. You see she places herself within the boundary of acceptability and places God outside in the range of the absurd. But listen to the correction of her laugh that God put's forth.

Genesis 18:14 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."

Is anything too hard for the Lord. You see he responds to her by questioning her understanding of his limits. He has no limits. Nothing is too hard or too wonderful for him. All things are his. Do you see this reframing of her mind. How would your life be different if you thought nothing was too hard for the Lord? And the Lord restates the promise particularity to Sarah once again.

And now for one of my favorite lines from God in all of scripture because it sounds so petty.

Genesis 18:15 But Sarah denied it, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. He said, "No, but you did laugh."

Sarah tries to skirt around her laughter but God won't let her. You see she must acknowledge in truth the absurdity of her current position before the reality of God. **She must own her limits before a limitless God.** But look at that

time next year God provided her a child, and his name was Isaac, Son of Laughter;

Genesis 21:6-7 And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me." ⁷ And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

Her point of cynicism and ridicule becomes precisely her point of praise. Her boundary has been reestablished. She looks on in wonder at what the Lord does. God has given her laughter.