

## The Hall of Faith: Sarah

Hebrews 11:11

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, February 19

Good morning, everyone. Can you guys hear me okay? Before we get started on our sermon this morning, I just want to ask you a question that's kind of been on my heart a little bit. And that is how is your prayer life? Specifically, how is your prayer life for other churches? The reason I asked that is I've had an opportunity this past week or so to visit with several pastors in the community, and I want to tell you, you've got some shepherds in British Columbia. There are some soldiers of the cross; you probably don't even know who they are. They're just men who are shepherding small congregations, and as I've talked to them, I've realized very clearly these men can't make it without prayer. And they can't make it without you praying for them, you lifting their names up to the Lord, and bringing them to Him for mercy. And so I want to point out that in our bulletins, we often have the church of the month; this month, it's a church in Toronto, Grace Fellowship Church there. We've often had other ones in this area, immediate Fraser Valley, but that's to bring them to your mind so you will lift them up to the Lord and ask Him for help in their ministry. Oftentimes, we have a tendency to complain about churches, and sometimes in our minds, for good reason. There are a lot of churches that probably would do a good service to the community if they just shut down. That's true. But there's a lot of them that are standing firm, and we want to lift them up to Christ. And so I'll encourage you to do that as you see these names in the bulletin.

Also, in a couple of weeks, we're going to have a pastor swap with a local church in the in the community that's doing a great job. That's Prairie Chapel. They're in between Abbotsford and Chilliwack in the farmland. Their pastor, Mike Chalmers, is also a Master's grad, he'll be coming here, and I'll be going there, and you'll get to hear about his ministry. But just an encouragement and a reminder to you to lift these people up in prayer. I've joked to Pastor Mike, that for a long time, I couldn't find Prairie Chapel, it's in the middle of nowhere. Now I go there, and I can't find a spot in the parking lot. The Lord has really done a work there and we're encouraged for them. And we want to bring them to Him in prayer.

And with that said, this morning, we are continuing our study of the book of Hebrews, which is a very unique book in the Bible, because it does something that few books do in the Scriptures, and that is to explain the Old Testament in light of Christ. That's the theme of the book. It shows us how we are to look at all the customs and rituals and ceremonies of the Jews in light of what Jesus did for us on the cross. And after describing that doctrinally, in the first few chapters, the author comes to chapter 11, where he begins to apply it. And He does this by saying if you want all these things that Christ has given you in chapters 1 through 10, this is how you get it, you have to believe like the people in the Old Testament did. If you want this great gift of salvation, where Jesus takes the place of the offerings and sacrifices for you, and He takes the place of the temple and tabernacle, and the priesthood and the Levites, and all of that, here's what you need to do, you need to put your faith in Him. Just like Abel, and

Enoch, and Noah did, and Moses, and David, and Samuel, and all these people we've talked about, and this morning, we come to a very unusual person in the list and that's Sarah, Abraham's wife. She's unusual because she's the first woman in the chapter. She's the first lady who's mentioned in this passage, which makes her so special. And in order to introduce her to you and say a little bit about her life, I want you to turn in your Bibles to the book of Genesis, because it talks about Sarah there. So if you've turned to Hebrews 11, just mark that in your Bibles, and we'll go there in a moment. But turn to Genesis 11. Because here's where it tells you about this amazing woman of God. In chapter 11:27, it says,

Now these are the records of the generations of Terah. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran; and Haran became the father of Lot. Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans. Abram and Nahor took wives for themselves. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milca and Iscah. Sarai was barren; she had no child.

Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan. And they went as far as Haran and settled there. The days of Terah were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran.

Now the Lord said Abram,

“Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

So Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Abram took his Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, in the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan.

We'll stop the reading there. As you read that, I just want to point out that this is your introduction to Abraham and Sarah and the Bible, and it's pretty short. It doesn't say a lot, like we talked about last time, because in Genesis 11, it tells you where she was from, and that was Ur of the Chaldeans. And it tells you who her husband was, it was Abraham, or Abram at this part in the story. And it tells you who her father-in-law was, it was Terah, and that's it. Other than that, you don't read a lot about Sarah here. Because apparently, Sarah and her family were not the most important thing in the story, her faith was. Because the Lord told them to go, and they went; they obeyed immediately without hesitation.

And just to say a few words about this, if you remember the timeline for this, in Genesis one and two, the Lord creates the world, and when He does that, He made mankind into two genders, male and female. Then in Genesis three, they fall into sin. And from that point forward, you don't hear very much about women in the Bible until you come to this passage. I don't know if you've thought about that before, but the Scripture is pretty silent about them until it comes to Sarah. It talks about a few women in there, but not many. That could be because when sin entered the world, it caused men to push women to the sidelines and bully them out of the picture; that may be the reason. Or it could just be that the book of Genesis is summarizing things, and simply focusing on the male descendants of Adam. But whatever the case that changes when you come to chapter 11, because it mentions this woman, it says a lot about her. You really find out a lot of information about Sarah. You find out a lot about Eve. There's this period of silence. And when you get to Sarah, you get all kinds of more details, because verse 28, says that she came from the land of Ur, which is an ancient city located 600 miles to the east of Israel in modern day Iraq. It's a part of the world known as the Persian Gulf. We don't know a lot about Ur today, but judging by the archaeological ruins, we know it was a cultured place. There's a lot of ancient buildings there that show it had a sophisticated form of government that was built around the worship of several things, like the sun and moon and planets and stars and that sort of thing. Which is helpful because it shows you the kind of woman Sarah was, she was a city girl. Like her husband, Abraham, she didn't come from the middle of nowhere. She grew up in a very urban environment. Like I told you last time, when you read the story of Abraham and Sarah, you get the impression that they might have been country bumpkins because they spent their entire life in tents just roaming around the countryside, but the passage makes it clear it wasn't like that. They started off life in a city.

And it also says she was married. Verse 29, if you look in your Bibles, it says her husband's name was Abraham, a man who we find out later who was very wealthy, he had a lot of money. Genesis 13:2 says Abraham was very rich in livestock, silver and gold, which means Sarah didn't live in poverty. Even though she stayed in tents most of her life and roamed around place to place with Abraham, it wasn't done in a beggarly fashion; she did it in the lap of luxury. She had all the money and jewels and clothes she would want. She had all the world at her fingertips, except for one thing, and one thing only. And this is the kicker, and that is that verse 30 says she was barren. She couldn't have a son. And that one statement seems so subtle, but it needs to put flashing lights in your mind because it means that Sarah was failing in the one major task that women were expected to do at this time. And that is that she could not produce an heir for her husband, so that his wealth and treasures could stay within the family and not pass on to a stranger. In fact, this was so important to the ancient people that if you were a husband and your wife could not bear you a son, you would simply divorce her, set her aside, and find someone who would. This was even made harder by the fact that in the ancient mind, if you couldn't do that either, there was one explanation and that is that you were cursed. You had done something really bad. Today we live in an age when we know that's not the case because we know bareness might be the result of illness or genetics or something like that, but back then they didn't know that. The science hadn't come about, been invented, so they just thought it happened because you were an evil person. Which shows you why the next statement is so powerful here, because chapter 12 says that the Lord said to Abraham,

“Go forth from your country, and I will make you into a great nation.” In other words, “Go forth, and I will give you a son.” “Go forth, and I will give your wife a son, in order to make this nation out of you.” Which probably would have shocked Sarah because she'd been barren for quite a while; we find out later she was 65 years old. So she had been trying for years and years at this point and failed. But now the Lord says, “Not anymore. I'm God. And where you failed at this, I will succeed.”

It also says in this passage, the Lord says, “I will bless you.” Which is one thing Sarah hadn't felt in a long time. She didn't feel blessed. She felt cursed. Everywhere she went in the tents, people would probably whisper behind her back. “Did you know she's barren?” And they would be saying about her every time she turned around. “Did you hear she can't have a child? I wonder what she did wrong. I wonder what the problem is. Won't be long before Abraham divorces her now.” Now the Lord says I'm going to change that too, so that verse three says all the families of the earth will be blessed through them, which is a reference to the Messiah. Because through Abraham's bloodline, the Saviour of the world would come: the Lord Jesus Christ.

All that to say, this is quite a promise, isn't it? I mean, this is quite a covenant to make with these people because the Lord offered Sarah everything she wanted, but it all started with the word “go.” The Lord told Abraham and Sarah to follow me, and that's what they did, because they had faith. Now turn to the book of Hebrews with me because all that is background for what it says in Hebrews chapter 11:11 because when you turn there with all that in your mind, this is what the author says about Sarah. In verse 11, it says, “By faith even Sarah herself received the ability to conceive.” And that means a Sarah didn't receive the ability to have a child through her strength, she did it through God. And she didn't find the ability to have a baby through her own power, she did it through His because she trusted him. It happened simply because she believed the promises of God. And it says that she did it beyond the proper time of life, which means that Sarah didn't have a baby until she turned 90, as we find out later. Even though the promise came earlier when she was 65, the Lord made her wait 25 years before it was fulfilled, which is a long time to wait for a baby. Can you imagine waiting a quarter of a century? But that didn't matter, because it happened because it says she considered Him faithful who had promised. And that means that Sarah was able to undergo all of this because she knew God was reliable, and if He said He would do it, He would do it. Because she believed He was worthy. Because Sarah's life is a reminder in this passage that you can trust God, even when He doesn't always answer your prayers right away. Amen? And you can believe in Him even when He doesn't give you what you want at this moment because you know He'll do it someday. You just have to wait on Him.

We all know what this is like. I mean, sometimes the Lord makes us wait for years before you have a child. And sometimes He makes us hold off for ages in order to start a family or do something that we really want, which is painful, isn't it? I mean, it's hard, because it makes you wonder, what are you up to God? Why are you doing this to me? Don't you even care? And the answer is, yes, He cares. He cares very much. But the reality is that He is God and not you. And He sets the timeline for these things; we don't. So that when you pray, it's not all about you. And when you worship, it's not all about you. And

when you call out to Him, it's not all about you. It's about the Lord and what He wants to do because He's on the throne. And when I think about this, I'm reminded of one what one pastor told me when He said that God does not operate like a microwave. And He doesn't let you send your prayers up to Him and hit the one-minute button and then *ding* they come out just like you want. Sometimes it takes time to answer them. I mean, when you look in the Scriptures, you find it's very common to see people wait on the Lord. Abraham waited 25 years for his son. Joseph waited 13 years in prison. Moses waited 40 years before he was able to go back to Egypt. David waited 30 years before he became king. It's just waiting, waiting, waiting, waiting, waiting. Jonah waited three days and three nights in the belly of a whale. That's one of my favorite one. But the reality is even when you have to wait, you know, it's worth it because of our great God.

That's what we're going to talk about this morning with three lessons from Sarah's life of faith. So if you're taking notes this morning, this is our outline for today. But in several parts of the Bible, we're gonna look at three lessons from Sarah's life of faith. And since the passage in Hebrews is so short, we're gonna get a lot of these from the book of Genesis because it says a lot about Sarah there, but the first lesson we learn is that she had faith in spite of her flaws.

The first lesson we see from Sarah's life of faith is that she had faith in spite of her flaws, which means she had faith even though at times, it seems like she didn't. Because when you study Sarah's life, you find those moments when she made some really big mistakes, just like everybody else. Anybody here not make mistakes? If God wrote out your life, over the course of 25 years, would anybody not have any sin that would be mentioned? I mean, Sarah's life was no different from yours or mine.

And to set the stage for this, if you look back in verse 11, you can tell this verse starts off with a phrase that's very familiar to you in the hall of faith. And that is a phrase "by faith." It's repeated more than 20 times in order to serve as an introduction to all these people, because every time a new name appears, it says "by faith." So verse four says, "By faith Abel." And then it tells you a little bit about Abel; gives you some details of his life. And then verse five says, "By faith Enoch," and it tells you about Enoch's life. Then verse seven says, "By faith Noah," and it talks about Noah. Verse eight says, "By faith Abraham," and then it does the same thing in verse 11 with Sarah, in order to tell you this is the next person in the list. This is the next great addition to the Hall of Faith. And the name Sarah means princess. You can imagine that name might have gone to her head a little bit. The Bible says that the Lord later changed it from Sarai or my princess to Sarah, which just means princess in order to demonstrate that she would become one of the leading figures in the history of Israel. Like her husband, Abraham, she would be one of the key family members that would start the Jewish people. She's a very colourful person in the Bible, because her name appears more than 50 times. And when you do a survey of what it says, you find that not only she called Princess here, but she's also called a mother. Because Genesis 17:16 says she will be a mother of nations, and kings will come forth from her. Because before her and Abraham that there were no Jews to speak of, they didn't exist, but after them, there would be there would be tons of them. And he would be considered the patriarch or the father, and she would be

considered the matriarch or the mother. The Jews actually have a tradition which says that they have four mothers in their history; they are Sarah, the wife of Abraham; there was Rebecca, the wife of Isaac; and then there was Leah and Rachel; the wives of Jacob, but they believe Sarah was the greatest because she came at the head of the list.

As I just showed you, Genesis 11:28, says that she came from Ur of the Chaldeans, which was a pagan place at the time, it was a purely Gentile city, which shows you that this is what Sarah was like when God called her. She was a Gentile; she wasn't Jewish. Despite what some of the Jews claimed, she didn't come from a special group of people. She came from a race that nobody cared about. And I might add, she lived that way for some time because the Bible says that Abraham was 75 years old when the Lord called him. And Sarah was 10 years younger than him, which means that she had been raised in a Chaldean lifestyle for 65 years. So at this stage, she would have talked like a Chaldean, walked like a Chaldean and acted like one. And she would have worn Chaldean clothes, and eaten Chaldean food, and worshipped Chaldean gods, until the Lord called her out of it. We talked about this last week, but a lot of people ask the question, "Well, why did God call Sarah and Abraham here?" Well, the answer is why'd He call you? Why'd He call me? You're Canadian; I'm American. We have South African, Dutch, people from everywhere here, why did any of them get saved? The sovereign choice of God, same way with these two people.

One important fact to remember about her is coming out of that lifestyle, a lot of her former habits didn't leave right away. She was converted, she was called, she was saved and all those things, but she didn't shed all of the Chaldean customs immediately. She still struggled with some of them. Because if you turn in your Bibles to Genesis 16, you can see an example of one of these former habits of her old lifestyle kind of sticking with her. Because in Genesis 16, it tells this story about Sarah. It's pretty surprising. It says,

Now Sarai, Abram's wife had born him no children, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, "Now behold, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Please go into my maid; perhaps I will obtain children through her." And Abraham listened to the voice of Sarai. After Abram had lived 10 years in the land of Canaan, Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife. He went into Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight. And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done me be upon you. I gave my maid into your arms, but when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her sight. May the LORD judge between you and me." But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your maid is in your power; do to her what is good in your sight." So Sarai treated her harshly, and she fled from her presence.

Now, just to explain what you read here, verse one gives you the setting for this, when it says that now Sarai, Abram's wife, had born him no children. That means that her situation had not changed from

Genesis 12 to Genesis 16. Because even after the promise was given, she was still barren. And even after the Lord had said, “Go forth from your country, and I will make you a great nation,” it still hadn't happened yet. Which shows you why she acted this way here because Sarah was getting impatient and desperate at this point. Verse three also says it happened 10 years after the events we just described, and 10 years after they entered the land of Canaan, which would have made her say, “What's going on, Lord? Why don't You care? I'm just waiting for this. You told me You would give me a baby. It hasn't happened. What do I have to show for it? Nothing.” So she decided to take matters into her own hands because the thinking was that if I can't give Abraham a child, maybe someone else can.

So verse one says she turned to her maid, Hagar for that reason. Now the way that story is worded, makes it sound like she didn't give it a lot of forethought to the decision, she probably didn't look around her home and take a survey to find who would be the best surrogate parent, she just found whoever was available. And it was this person who was her maid. Now the word maid in Hebrew is *sipha* which could be translated maid or servant; but another way to translate it is slave. Because that's what Hagar was. As an Egyptian, she was someone Abraham and Sarah purchased when they were traveling through the land of Egypt in chapter 12. And Sarah's logic was simple here, because she said to herself, “Since she is my slave, I can make her do what I want. And since I own her, I can just tell her to go be with my husband if I want to, and she has to do it.” because that was the Chaldean way of thinking. So this is where her old culture is just going to bear on her life still, because they said, if you have a slave, you possess them body and soul, because they were nothing more than a human tool for your benefit. For you to love or hate, feed or kill, whatever you want; they're not a person, they're a thing. And that's how Sarah treated this woman. In her mind, Hagar didn't have a choice in the matter. She just told her to do this, and she obeyed. Which is wrong, by the way.

Because the Lord does not approve of the practice of polygamy, or concubines. Genesis 2:24 tells us God's plan for marriage is that a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh: that's two people, not three. That's one man, one woman joined together in holy matrimony, not four or five or six, which was practiced in the Garden of Eden by Adam and Eve, they did the right thing in their marriage, but it was abandoned later on in Genesis 4:19 when it says Lamech had two wives, Adah and Zillah. And here you see Abraham, abandoning it as well. Even though he didn't marry Hagar, he did be with her for the purpose of having a son, which made her his concubine or legal consort. Which didn't turn out too well, in the end, does it? I mean, if you look in verse five, it says after Abraham slept with Hagar, and she got pregnant, Sarah tells him, “May the wrong done me be upon you.” In other words, “It's your fault this is happening to me, not mine. And you're the one to blame for my misery, so I'm going to vent my frustration on you,” because that's what sin does, doesn't it?

It makes you blame other people for your problems. Because you look at this thing and you say, “I want it.” And I want this child, I want this baby, I want more money, I want a bigger house, I want everything I think I'm entitled to. I, I, I, me, me, me, I'm the king of the castle. And when you get it, what happens?

You're miserable. Because sin promises you things it can't deliver on; it doesn't satisfy. And so you go around the house pointing fingers at everyone and telling them it's your fault I'm depressed. Because you say if you would have just done what I wanted, everything would be fine. And the reality in this story is that's not true because Abraham did what Sarah wanted. He gave into her every whim, but it only made her more upset.

In fact, Sarah's sin gets so bad here that the verse says that she treated Hagar harshly, so that she fled, which was tantamount to almost killing her because they lived in a desert. And so if you run away from the household like this, you're gonna die of hunger or dehydration or something almost instantly. But at this point, Sarah didn't care anymore. She just wanted what she wanted. And that's all she thought about. And it's not until the Angel of the Lord steps in to talk to Hagar and sends her back, that He rescues the situation.

Which leads to another flaw that Sarah had. And that is that she laughed at God. We're just looking at a few of her flaws here to get a picture of the kind of person that she was, but another flaw she had is that she scoffed at Him when He made a promise. And this one isn't found in Chapter 16, but you see it a few chapters later in Genesis 18. If you want to flip over there, because it talks about the time that three men visit Abraham, in order to tell him about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. And before they do that, they have a conversation with him that Sarah overhears. And she responds very poorly to it. And just to give you the timeline for this, Genesis 17:17 says Abraham was 100 at this time, and Sarah was 90. So this is 15 years after the previous event, and 25 years after the promise in chapter 12, which shows you that Sarah didn't act like this all the time. Just to put this in perspective, these are brief moments in her life, because for the most part she was a godly woman, and she responded well to the Lord. But these are just some glimpses of times when she didn't.

Twenty-five years have gone by now what have Abraham and Sarah been doing? They've been waiting. A quarter of a century has passed and what have they been up to? They've been looking forward to the day when God would give them a son bouncing here, there and everywhere in the promised land, and it hasn't happened yet. They find themselves in the same predicament. They're still childless. That explains what happens in chapter 18. If you look in verse one, it says,

Now the LORD appeared to him [Abraham] by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day. When he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, three men were standing opposite him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth.

And if you look down in verse nine,

Then they said to him, [after some conversation] "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "There, in the tent." He said, "I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah



your wife will have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing. Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?” And the LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, when I’m so old?’ Is anything too difficult for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.” Sarah denied it however, saying, “I did not laugh”; for she was afraid. And He said, “No, but you did laugh.”

Now, when you read this, your first thought, at least my first thought was, what is some of this talking about? It's very interesting because in verse one, it says the Lord appeared to Abraham to tell him these things. And verse two says three men did. Now what does that mean? Why does it say the Lord appeared to Abraham in one verse and three men did in another? And to be honest, there's a little bit of a mystery here and some debate as to what's going on. But one explanation that's out there, I think, is probably a good one is that this is a Christophany, or an appearance of Christ, where Jesus leaves His place in heaven for a moment in order to come down to the earth and reveal Himself to Abraham in His pre-incarnate state. Because if you look in your Bibles, chapter 19:1 says that two of these men were angels, but it doesn't identify the third there. Because earlier in chapter 18, it tells us that the Lord departed. When it says that in 18:33, it sounds like that could have been the Son of God departing. Because when you read this passage, there's a lot of back and forth between Abraham and these men. And he keeps saying that they say something, and then the Lord says something. And they tell us one thing, and the Lord tells us something else, which implies that in those moments, one of those people who was talking to them was God. And one way to explain that is to say that this is the second member of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, before He appears in his state in the New Testament. But whatever the case, this passage is very rich here and makes you stop and think.

There's more going on here than meets the eye. And if you notice, these three figures are very natural in the way they act. They don't try to spook Abraham. They talk like men and walk like men. In verses four through eight, they even eat with him; they share a meal. He gives them water to wash their feet, and bread and curds, and milk to drink. And as they do that, verse nine says one of the things they want to talk to him about is Sarah, because they say, “Where is Sarah, your wife?” And as they continue to inquire about her, the Lord says, again, “I will return to you this time next year, and behold, Sarah will have a son.” Now that's important, because this is one of the first times the Lord ever gives Abraham and Sarah a timeline for the birth of the baby. He does it earlier in chapter 17, but this is one of the moments when He tells them when the child will come. The rest of the time, for 25 years, they have no idea. They're just roaming and roaming and roaming the promised land with no indication as to when the promise will be fulfilled. And as they do that here in chapter 18, but how does Sarah respond? Verse 12 says she laughs because she thinks it's kind of a joke at this point. Because after all these years of waiting, it looks like she's kind of losing it. She doesn't believe anymore. The word “laughs” is a Hebrew word that means to taunt or jeer at something. Which could mean she laughs out of belief, because she's so excited that about their words that she just can't help it; she giggles. But the problem

with that view is that the messengers rebuke her in verse 13 and remind her that she shouldn't have done that. They say, "Why did you laugh?" So a better way to take that is probably that she laughed out of unbelief almost as a form of mockery. Because she didn't take the word of God seriously, at this point. You can tell why she does that on a human level because verse 11 says Abraham and Sarah were old. Not just one of them, but both of them. It also says that they were advanced in age, which means they weren't spring chickens anymore; they were in their twilight years. And it says Sarah was past the point of childbearing, so she sneered at God when He said.

Because when you look at the life of Sarah, bringing some of this together at this point, one thing you notice is that sometimes our faith fluctuates, doesn't it? We're going to talk about the things she does well in a moment, but sometimes our trust in God goes back and forth through high points and low points, good times, and bad times, mountaintops and valleys. If you've been a Christian for any period of time, you know what this is like. Because we've all had seasons when we felt like we could do anything for God, and I mean anything, bring it on. Trials and tribulations, bring it on. Sickness, death and disease, bring it on. Sharing Christ with the lost, bring it on. Planting a church right in the midst of COVID when the whole world goes upside down, and you live in a place where everything is shut down, bring it on. We're not afraid. We're more than conquerors. There's other times when it's just the opposite, right? Waiting for a baby, can't do that. Too scared. Raising a family; can't do that. Too scared. Going to work, being a good witness, being salt and light to the world. I can't do that. I'm terrified. I don't think God is big enough. But it happens because this is what the believing life is like. It goes up and down sometimes like a roller coaster. Sarah's life is a testimony that when your faith goes down, you don't have to leave it there. And when it hits rock bottom, you don't have to wallow in it. Instead, you can pick yourself back up again and carry on if you just call out to the Lord. Sarah messed up here. This was the wrong way to respond to the promises of God, but she didn't stay there. Her story has a good ending too. We'll see that in a moment.

One commentator said this about Sarah. He said, "Let's be honest: there are times in the biblical account when Sarah comes off as a bit of a shrew. She was the wife of the great patriarch Abraham, so we tend to think of her with a degree of dignity and honor. But reading the biblical account of her life, it is impossible not to notice that she sometimes behaved badly.

She could throw fits and tantrums. She knew how to be manipulative. And she was even known to get mean. At one time or another, she exemplified almost every trait associated with the typical caricature of a churlish woman. She could be impatient, temperamental, conniving, cantankerous, cruel, flighty, pouty, jealous, erratic, unreasonable, a whiner, a complainer, or a nag. By no means was she always the perfect model of godly grace, but...Fortunately, there was much more to Sarah than that." She had important strengths as well as weaknesses. But the greatest legacy of her life was how she stayed with God through it all, and never let Him go, amen?

And that brings us to another lesson we learn from her life of faith, and that is that her faith produced some amazing virtues. A second lesson we learn from this godly woman's life is that even though her

faith had flaws, it produced some amazing virtue as well, which means she had some endearing qualities. Don't beat up on Sarah. She's in the hall of faith for a reason. For one example, one virtue Sarah had is that she stuck by Abraham's side throughout all his journeys in the Promised Land. Can you imagine that? Can you imagine being this man's wife?

“What are we doing today, Abraham?” “We're gonna walk.” “Where?” “Don't know.” Next day, same conversation, right? 25 years, like a rolling stone here, there and everywhere, which would be hard for a city girl. Remember, Sarah didn't grow up like that she came from land of her, which was a settled place. But she went through all of that because she trusted God. And she even trusted God when her husband asked her to do some very odd things. If you want to look back in chapter 12, it gives us a very unusual story about Abraham and Sarah. And as you turn there, it's important to remember the setting for this, because we're going back in time a little bit here. Because in Genesis 12, is when the Lord had just given Abraham and Sarah the promise. And He said to them, “Go forth from your country, and I will make a great nation out of you.” And not only that, but once they left and entered the land of Canaan, verse seven, says the Lord told them “To your descendants, I will give this land.” In other words, this whole area you're walking around, that's going to be yours someday. Which sounds nice, but there was a problem. Because verse 10, says there was a famine in the land. Now, if you put yourself in their shoes for a moment, the Lord told Abraham, “I will give you all of this.” And the first time they see it, it looks like a dump. Or maybe a more accurate way to say that it just looks like a barren place. There's no rain, which doesn't sound very encouraging does it? “Thanks a lot, God. You gave me a barren wasteland.” So what does Abraham do? He leaves. We don't know what's going on in his mind at the time, but in verse 10, he heads for Egypt. He could be doing that because he didn't believe the promise or could be he's just trying to find food. And as he does that, he does something very, very bad because he gives his wife to another man. If you look in verse 10, it tells a story this way. It says,

Now there was a famine in the land; so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. And it came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Saria his wife, “See now, I know that you're a beautiful woman; and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife’; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you.” It came about when Abram came into Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. Pharaoh's officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. Therefore he treated Abram well for her sake, and gave him sheep and oxen and donkeys and male and female servants and female donkeys and camels.

But the Lord struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. Then Pharaoh called Abram and said, “What is this you've done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, ‘She is my sister,’ so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife, take her and go.”

We'll stop the reading there. This is an interesting story in light of what we just said about Sarah because when you read this story, one thing you find very clearly is Sarah wasn't the only one who sinned from time to time; Abraham did too. This was all a mistake on the part of Abraham because he lies about who she was in order to save his own skin because verse 11 says she was beautiful. We didn't say much about this before, but when you're studying the person of Sarah, it tells us she was a very attractive lady. Which doesn't sound like a big deal today, but it was back then. Because this was a time when men in power often stole beautiful women and murdered their husbands. It's very common, especially if you're Pharaoh. Who's gonna stop you? So this is what Abraham decides to do when he's leaving the famine in Canaan and going to Egypt to find food, he chooses to hide Sarah's identity and have her do the same because he says, "Please say that you're my sister." Now, some people have wondered if Sarah did the right thing here by going along with this, but the reality is that we're never really told that she did go along with it. She didn't have a choice. She never talks in the passage. Because in her day and age, women were not allowed to speak to men in public or even say no to their husbands if they disagreed with something. They just had to obey. That was the culture and the way of things, which is why verse 13 says Abraham makes a request of her. Verse 15 says Pharaoh's officials take her away. And then if you look in verse 19, Pharaoh confronts Abraham and says, "Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife?" Which makes it look like Sarah was just an innocent victim to all this. If you remember, it's kind of reminiscent of Hagar. Remember the story with Hagar? Hagar doesn't say anything either. She just complied; she just obeys because she didn't have a choice. But the point is that even so when you read on in the Bible, one thing you find is that Sarah still loved her husband after all this. From what we could tell, she forgives him because she doesn't let it destroy the relationship. Because she had faith. She trusted in God even when Abraham failed her here. In fact, the one thing about the passage that's so amazing is that who rescue Sarah in the story? Verse 17 says God did. The Lord struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarah, Abraham's wife. It makes you wonder what would have happened if He didn't do that?

But Sarah responded to this very well. It couldn't have been easy, because how could you forgive a man who did this? And how could you learn to trust him again after he acted this way? I don't know, but Sarah found a way, which is a wonderful encouragement today. Because just ask the wives in here, how many of you are married to a sinful husband? Don't put your hand up. I was hoping my wife would teach Sunday school today, but she put both her hands up. I mean, how many of you have had to forgive a man who did something wrong? I mean, everyone has. No man is perfect. If you're looking for the perfect husband, young ladies, I hate to break it to you, but he doesn't exist. Mr. Right is a myth. The best of men are men at best. But Sarah is a good reminder that even when your husbands fail, you can forgive him, because you don't have to let it consume you with bitterness. Now, having said that, please understand me. I'm not excusing what Abraham did here. There's no excuse for this. What he did was wrong. You can't say that enough. And I'm not saying a wife should return to an abusive husband, or someone who physically threatens her, because I don't think that's the intention of this passage either. I

mention this because many of you know, we just sent out an email recently as an elder board in order to address this issue, because it came up in the news through a Christianity Today article, some of you have read and were asking some questions about. So we felt like we needed to talk about it. And in the email, we said we do encourage people to reconcile their marriage whenever possible, but we do not ever want to send someone back into a home that's not safe. Because there's a balance here. And that's that yes, a wife needs to forgive her husband. And yes, she needs to let it go when he repents and covered in love, but at the same time, she has to be wise about it, and she shouldn't put herself in jeopardy if he's hurting her. This story is not in the Bible to tell you that women are supposed to be doormats. It's just telling you how Sarah responded to a very awful situation. This is as bad as it gets, but she persevered because she was a godly woman.

Which leads to another virtue Sarah had, and that is that she was humble. Not only did she forgive her husband this way and stay by his side, but she could also admit when she was wrong about something, especially when it came to the promises of God. If you look over in Genesis 21, you see the birth of Isaac described here. If you remember, we just talked about how Sarah at one time laughed at the promises of God, and she did that as a form of mockery. But if you look in Genesis 21, you see a different version of her. And in fact, this is important because this is what everything's built up to so far. And this is what all the waiting and waiting and waiting was about, because this is when the child arrives. And everything Abraham and Sarah were expecting comes to bear, and Genesis 21 says this, it says,

Then the LORD took note of Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as he had promised. So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac. Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me." And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have born him a son in his old age."

And I don't know about you, but I've always found this story very touching, because it shows you the humanity of Sarah. Because it says that Isaac's birth made her laugh again. After all those years of sorrow and just waiting and misery, he brought a smile to her face, not in a scornful way, like we talked about earlier, or a disdainful way; but a sincere way, because she looked at the baby and then she looked at herself, and she said, "Huh, who would have thought of that?" And she stared at the child in her arms, and she stared at her old body, and she chuckled to herself and said, "The only one who could do this is God, who else would have thought of it?" Because again, this happened when she was 90 years old. And the idea is that after all that time, she still remained humble. Because she could admit her mistakes, and laugh at them in a sense, because she knew that God knew what He was doing all along. This passage

makes several important statements, because verse one says the Lord took note of Sarah and did for her as He promised. If you notice, it doesn't say the Lord took note of Abraham, although He did do that. And it doesn't say He did it for the patriarch's sake, although that's true. It says that He did it for her because even though Abraham tried to forget, or tried to push off the fact that Sarah was his wife at times, the Lord never did that. He always remembered her. And it says in verse two, that it happened at the appointed time. And that means the Lord gave the child exactly when He wanted, not a second sooner or later. Sarah probably wondered about that, waiting all those years. Is this the right time? God says it always the right time. His timing is always perfect.

Verse three, says Abraham called his name Isaac, which shows you that he knew who the child was, this was the child of the promise, he would fulfill all of the Lord's covenant to him. So as a result, verse six says that Sarah laughed. She says, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me." Because she was so happy. And this reminds you of the saying, "the same sun that melts the wax, hardens the clay," you've heard that before. And the same circumstances that make some people bitter, make other people better. Because some people would have gone through what Sarah did and been mad, right? And some people would have waited years for a child like this. And when the child came, they would have looked at God and said, "It's about time. Why did you do that to me?" Not her. She had stopped trying to get her own way by now, and she come to the place where she realized that God is God, and I'm not so I'm going to submit to His will, because it's better than mine anyway. I think that so many times we get frustrated in life because we forget this. Because we don't want to submit to God, we want to be God. And we don't want to put our will under His will, we want to take His place instead. And what I mean is that we want to have all our life planned out in the beginning and we say that by the time I turn 40 I want to have the perfect job with the perfect husband or perfect wife with 2.3 children. And if I don't get it, I'm gonna get mad because I think I deserve it. Truth is that you don't. You're not the one calling the shots. You're not the one in heaven, ruling everything. He is. And you have to remember that because having a baby is not about your will. And starting a family is not about your will, and having your dreams come true is not about your will, and having everything perfect is not about your timing and your control, and your this, or your that. It's about His. He is sovereign. If anybody's life teaches that in the Bible, it's Sarah's. First Chronicles 29:11, says,

Yours, O LORD is the greatness and the power and the glory, and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth, Yours is the dominion, O Lord, and You exalt Yourself as head over all. Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone.

Which brings us to one more lesson that we learn from Sarah's life of faith. Just to review these other ones, the first one is that she had faith in spite of her flaws. Secondly, she had faith along with her virtues. And the third one, we will make this one pretty short for the sake of time, but the third thing we learn from her life of faith is that she was saved like everyone else in the Hall of Faith.

A third lesson we learn from her life of faith is that she was saved like everyone else in Hebrews 11, which means that even though she was a woman, her salvation happened the same way as everybody else that we've talked about. Because she was not inferior to them. She was their equal. I know you say that in 21st century, and everybody says, "Well, yeah, that's pretty obvious, but it wasn't obvious in the first century." At this time, the men thought the women were lesser than them." One rabbi at this time, taught his disciples to pray, "Lord, thank You that You've not made me a Gentile, a slave or a woman." Because that's what he thought about women back then, he thought they were like Gentiles and slaves, which were the lowest people on Earth in their minds. And so in order to confront this issue, the author of Hebrews places Sarah's name right alongside the men's. And if you turn back there for just a moment, and you look in Hebrews 11, you can just see this in the way it's written here. Because just as soon as it mentions Abraham's name in verse eight, it says this, it says, "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out." And then if you look in verse 11, "By faith even Sarah herself, received the ability to conceive." Then in verse 13, if you want to read that verse, it says, "All these died in faith, without receiving the promises." And as you read that, it's interesting, because if you notice, it doesn't say in verse eight that by faith Abraham, when he was called went, and then down in verse 11, but Sarah was saved another way. It just says they're saved the same way through the same means. And that's by faith. Faith for Abraham; faith for Sarah. Grace for the man; grace for the woman. Sarah is not a second-class citizen in the kingdom of God; she's on the same level as her husband. And then it says down in verse 13, I just read this to you that all these died in faith, which means that all these including Sarah; she's not left out here. In fact, the way this is worded makes it sound like everything from verses 13 through 16 relates to her just along with everyone else. So that she's on the same par as Abel, and Enoch, and Noah, and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and David and Moses and Gideon.

And when you come to verse 13, that may sound strange when you read it. But the reason this is worded this way, from verses 13 through 16, is because this is what's known as an interlude, or a pause in the action of the passage, because this is where the author takes a moment to summarize all he's said, so far in the Hall of Faith. And the first thing he points out is that all these people passed away without receiving the promises. For example, you can take the life of Sarah for a moment and see that the Lord promised her husband that He would make him into a great nation. But when she died, how many children does she have of the promise? She had one child. It's not much of a great nation, is it? Isaac. That was it. One little boy. And the Lord also promised her husband the land of Canaan, but when they died, how did that turn out? Same way. They didn't own the land. Who owned the land? Everybody else. Amorites, Hittites, other peoples. He promised her that He would make her husband's name great. He

didn't do that yet. He promised her that He would make Abraham a blessing. He didn't do that yet. He promised that He would bless the families of the earth through Him. That didn't happen. But it says it was okay because Sarah welcomed it from a distance. Which means that even though she couldn't see these things in her lifetime, she could look at them down the road through the eyes of faith and put her peace in God because He would fulfill it one day.

The passage also says she confessed this as a stranger in exile on the earth. It says all these died in faith without receiving the promises but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed they were strangers and exiles on the earth, which means that she did this in the mindset of a visitor or a guest. Because Sarah had never owned land the whole time she was in Canaan. She and Abraham never purchased any territory. Everywhere she went with Abraham, they lived in tents, so the way it worked is they would walk all day, stop, set up camp, and spend the night. Then the next day, they would walk all day, stop, setup camp, and spend the night. Then the next day they would walk all day, stop, set up camp, spend the night over and over and over again. They were constantly in motion; their life was like a rolling stone. But verse 14 says they did that because they were seeking a country of their own. And verse 16 says, "But as it is, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them." And that means the real reason Sarah could put up with all of that, is that she had her eyes fixed on heaven anyway. Not the things of this world. She wasn't interested in all the dust and heat and sand of the Promised Land; she had her mind on eternity.

In fact, I told you last time, we don't know a lot about what Abraham and Sarah thought about heaven at this point, because the Bible doesn't say. It's pretty quiet on that subject in Genesis. But this is one of the times when the author of Hebrews, by the inspiration of the Spirit, takes you behind the scenes into their mindset to show you that even though they didn't say a lot about that subject, they still thought about it, because they knew heaven was the place where God was. So that's where they wanted to be. And it was their faith that kept them pointed in that direction.

And again, I'm not going to say a lot about this because this is an interlude where the author's repeating certain things that we've already talked about, so I don't want to be redundant here. But I think there's an important lesson that we can draw from this. And that is that look, if you feel uncomfortable in the world today, there's a reason for that. And that is because you're a stranger in exile like Abraham and Sarah. If things feel awkward for you, it's a reminder that it's supposed to be that way. You're supposed to be awkward because you don't belong down here. You guys know what this is like. But things are so weird right now, aren't they? Can anybody say amen to that? I mean, this world has become so awkward for a Christian. Go to work, it feels awkward. Talk to your family, feels awkward. Turn on the radio, you wonder, "Am I the weird one?" Because things are so sinful. The wickedness is becoming more and



more overt. If you don't believe me, just go into a coffee shop in downtown Chilliwack. And tell me what's in the window, you'll see an LGBTQ sticker there. In a coffee shop, I just want coffee. I don't want to know your thoughts on those things. Go to Walmart and what's in the parking lot? Rainbow crosswalk, I just want to buy groceries. And when that happens, what this passage is telling you is that that's okay, we can make it through it because we don't put all our hopes down here. It grieves us. We want to reach out to these people, share Christ with them, but we understand that all this awkwardness is a means to an end to take us someplace else. It's placed here to remind you that this world is not your home, you need to hold it with a loose hand.

In my studies this week, I came across the story of the time a rich man took the Methodist preacher John Wesley, throughout all his estates and houses and land, and then he asked him well, what would you think? To which John Wesley replied, "I think you're gonna have a hard time giving it up someday." Because you can't take it with you when you die. They don't have a U-Haul following a hearse. It's the same way here. This is what Sarah learned to do. Even though she was rich and beautiful and intelligent, even though she was cultured and refined and had all a lot of things going for, and she was the kind of woman that a man like Pharaoh would want to be with, it didn't distract her from this. Because she knew that what are your looks going to do for you on Judgement Day? Nothing. And what's your beauty and intelligence, how is it going to help you when you stand before God? It won't. So you have to turn to something else. Sarah didn't chase the world; she forsook the world. And that's why her name is put here in the Hall of Faith. And it's a good example, for us to follow today.

Next week, we're going to wrap this section up on Abraham and Sarah by looking at one more scene from their life. And that is the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, where the Lord called him to give up his greatest worldly treasure, and that was his son. And he did it. The amazing thing about that passage is that he obeyed, and it makes you wonder why. Why would you do that? And we'll talk about that next time but for now, let's close in a word of prayer.

Heavenly Father, we hear these stories of these people, and I think I speak for everyone in the room when I say that we're really not worthy to even consider their lives. Our faith is so small compared to them. The things that we do for You and the sacrifices we make are nothing compared to what they had done, they had done. So Lord, we are challenged this morning and we're convicted and humbled at the faith of your servant Sarah. Lord, thank You for teaching us these things. Thank You for showing us so much about her life in the Bible, the goods and the bads, the positive things she did and the negative things. It's all a reminder to us, that our life needs to be lived for You, every day, every step of the way.

Father, we pray for those who were here this morning that are struggling with maybe some of the things Sarah struggled with, whether it could be not having a child, or having some of their dreams not met, or whatever those things are, Lord, that they would remember that you are God on the throne, and You're the one who controls all things. Father, may we submit ourselves to Your sovereign will, Lord for those who hear her story, and they're convicted because they say, "Man, my life is too worldly. I'm too caught up in the things of the world. I'm not thinking about heaven enough." Lord, would You draw them out of their sin?

In all these things, Father, we thank You for the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who died for our sins and was crucified so that we can be forgiven of the mistakes we made, and our life can be turned around. Thank You that He's made a way for heaven for us and made a perfect way through the cross. In all these things we pray that He would be glorified. Would you go with us now Father, as we go to our care groups. As we discuss these things, may our minds be open to new truths from the Word. We pray this in Christ's name, Amen.