

Title: Is Anything too Hard for the LORD?
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Texts: Genesis 18:9-15, 21:1-7
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Is Anything too Hard for the LORD?

[Proposition: God is able to bring life out of any barrenness, therefore we must repent of our small view of God truly trust in him.]

The passage before us is unusual, because it comes as a story within a story. Chapter 18-19 of Genesis really centered on the rescue of Lot from Sodom and Gomorrah which has come under the judgment of God. As the story unfolds, we have this little episode which is one of the few times we hear from Sarah, Abraham's wife. Not only does it kind of interrupt the larger section concerning Sodom & Gomorrah, but it also ends abruptly—both of those elements designed to leave us wondering about the resolution of the matters at hand until chapter 21.

Unusual as it is, the story is pregnant with a question which stands out boldly from the page, perhaps it stood out to you as we read our Scripture reading. The LORD tells Abraham that Sarah will have a son in a year's time. Sarah is eavesdropping on this conversation, and scoffs to herself. And the LORD then says to Abraham **"Is anything too hard for the LORD?"**

It is a question for which you know the right answer, the Bible answer, but perhaps you struggle to believe. The story of Sarah invites us to reflect on this question,

First, you see:

I. Nothing is too hard for the LORD, because he is the Creator & Sustainer of all things (he possesses infinite power and ability).

The first thing we learned in the beginning of the book of Genesis is that the LORD is the Creator, he made all that is.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

If that were all we knew about God, we would have discovered quite a lot. God is the source of everything that is. Nothing came into being apart from him, but he is the sole independent intellect and originator of all that is. He literally brought life out of absolute barrenness, out of nothing. Before the beginning there was God, and the whole universe is an emphatic answer to the question "Is anything too hard for the LORD?"

But to say God is the Creator implies not only that God is the source, but the sustainer of all things. God exists necessarily, he exists because that is what it means to be God. It is God's nature to exist, and he is absolutely unique in this way. Nothing would exist apart from God's Creative action, but also everything would cease to be if he were to withdraw his sustainer power for a nanosecond. Everything is because of him, and everything goes on being, because of him.

Job 12:10 says:

¹⁰ In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind.

Hebrews 1:2-3 adds that Jesus is the one

through whom also [God] created the world. 3 [Jesus] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

The origin and ongoing existence of everything owes itself to God! No, nothing is too hard for the LORD!

Illustration:

Last Friday, starting about 6 am into the evening I was having heart palpitations, my heart felt like it was pounding through my chest. I went to the ER and they told me pretty much immediately that I had atrial fibrillation (basically the top chambers of my heart just kind of vibrate instead of pumping). Of all the possible heart conditions to have this one is relatively minor and manageable, but when someone tells you something is wrong with your heart it has a way of bringing anxiety and crumbling the illusion of self-sufficiency.

Sunday we came in to worship, and there were a couple of lines in the songs we sang that revealed to me just how little I recognize my absolute dependence on God for every breath and heart beat:

“You give and take away...my heart will choose to say”

“You are my life...”

“My strength to stand, all of my days are in your hand...”

Because our hearts normally work, and there is breath in our lungs, we somehow forget we are absolutely dependent on God in every moment for everything. He is the Creator and Sustainer and that’s one reason we know nothing is too hard for him.

Nothing is too hard for the LORD because he is the Creator and Sustainer, but also...

II. Nothing is too hard for the LORD, because nothing is hidden from the LORD.

This is one of the first things that stands out about God’s conversation with Sarah—he knows what she’s thinking and feeling though she isn’t expressing it aloud. It is a reminder to the reader, and a sign to Sarah of the supernatural power and wisdom of the LORD.

So, notice that:

A. Sarah’s Unbelief isn’t hidden from the LORD.

When Sarah hears the promise of the LORD to Abraham v. 10 “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have son,” she scoffs. But the text emphasizes that the LORD knows what’s in her heart though she isn’t speaking aloud with him. It says she was in the tent, behind [Abraham], and that she laughed “to herself.” Likewise, her internal monologue rattles off her reasons in the remainder of v. 12, and God repeats them back to her in his rhetorical questions through Abraham.

Her attitudes and the thoughts of her heart are not hidden from the LORD. God knows Sarah’s circumstances, but he also knows what’s really residing in her heart—unbelief. His questions to her are rhetorical—a way of showing her that the promise of a son comes from someone with supernatural power.

But the questions are not just about showing supernatural power, but challenging and correcting her unbelief.

B. Sarah denies her unbelief, but God corrects it.

You can see this in v. 15. When she heard the LORD's question, she denied that she scoffed at his promise because she was afraid. But God says, "No, but you did laugh." There are two things to note here, the first is that God is directly confronting Sarah's unbelief and denial. God isn't going to sweep this under the rug.

The second is that, though he confronts her, his statement is not a curse but a correction. Though the LORD's statement is a very direct correction to her denial and unbelief, he isn't angry—but he is direct. He corrects because he wants to lead her from unbelief to belief. God disciplines and corrects those whom he loves (Heb 12:9-11), and we know this correction led Sarah into deeper faith because when the author of Hebrews looks in fact looks back on Sarah he says:

¹¹ By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.

In God's supernatural hands, revealing her unbelief and correcting her leads her into deeper faith in the LORD.

C. Our unbelief is not hidden from God.

Sometimes we are like Sarah and the inner monologue falls into scoffing unbelief, and we think God doesn't notice. We do the same thing Sarah did—reciting our circumstances which we think exempt us from Jesus's requirement that we fight sin and love others, or make us unfit or unable to receive his grace toward us in the Gospel.

While Sarah outrightly denied that she laughed—we are not often as bold. Our way of denying is often by trying to hide our sin and unbelief. We go on pretending that we're fine, fake it 'til you make it. Or perhaps worse, we simply float along through life unengaged with our Spiritual health and what's really going on in our hearts.

Do you know that's just idolatry? We keep it to ourselves because we believe that somewhere deep down if we really try, we have the answer.

By hiding or denying our sin and unbelief we are really saying we believe there are things too hard for the LORD. But in repentance we accept truth that nothing is too hard for Him, and we admit there's a lot that's too hard for me. David says when we keep our sins silent our spiritual bones rot. John says that if we say we have not sinned, we make God a liar! Proverbs 28:13 says:

*¹³ Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper,
but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.*

Illustration:

Once during the Great Awakening, Jonathan Edwards was holding a large prayer meeting. Something like 800 men were there praying with him.

While they were meeting, a woman sent a message asking the men to pray for her husband. The note described a man who had become unloving, prideful, and difficult.

Edwards read the message privately, but then thought perhaps the man was present with them. So, he read the note to the whole gathering. Then he asked if the man who had been described would raise his hand, so that the whole assembly could pray for him. Three hundred men raised their hands.¹

I'm not going to do that, but why go on pretending? Bring your unbelief out into the light!

God is probably not going to show up at your tent to correct you, but he may use someone in your life if you're willing to listen. Do you have people in your life discipling, challenging, and encouraging you? Confess your sins and struggles to God, come talk with the pastors or your assigned Elder, but also find brothers or sisters in Christ who will disciple you, encourage and hold you accountable. Get in a group!

Nothing is too hard for the LORD, because nothing is hidden from the LORD.

III. Nothing is too hard for the Lord, because nothing and no one can constrain or deter his promise.

Even when you believe that God is the Creator and Sustainer and thus can do anything, we still tend to think "Yes God could hypothetically do anything, but given my particular insurmountable circumstances he can't." You can see that this is essentially what Sarah is thinking in v. 11-12. She has reasons that lead her to laugh at God's promise of a son. She's old (v. 11), advanced in years (v. 11), the way of women has ceased to be with [her]-in other words she is post-menopausal (v. 12), for that matter they had not been intimate with each other for a long time or at least infrequently, which is the implication of the phrase "shall I have pleasure" in v. 12.

In Sarah's mind all this a mighty bulwark, and impenetrable barrier. She is thinking of God as if he were a man. For humans, no matter how able and talent, we experience life in some sense like a game of chess. There are many options to begin with, but each choice impacts and limits the next choice. But God doesn't experience such limitations, even when natural processes make something "impossible." He is able to work over, under, around, and through our broken world and through broken and rebellious, to bless his people and advance his will to establish his kingdom.

In other words, the Bible teaches us that nothing and no one gets in God's way. God is Free in the exercise of his sovereign rule and reign as well as his providential care for his people. This is absolutely clear in Scriptures² like Job 42:2 where Job confesses to God and repents:

² *"I know that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.*

¹ Bryan Chapell, *Holiness by Grace*, (Crossway, 2001), p. 80.

² Among others, see also Gen. 45:5-8, 50:20; Ex. 4:11, 21, 14:4, 15:1-18; Deut. 32:39; 1 Kgs. 22:22-23; Psalm 33:10-11, Prov. 16: 1, 9, 33, 19:21; Isa. 46:8-10; Acts 2:23; Eph. 1:11, Rev. 6:2 and cfs.

Mysteriously this includes all suffering and evil. Let me remind you again that even the death of God's own Son is according to God's predetermined plan. Acts 4:27-28).

27 for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

Acts 4:27-28

Jesus was crucified according to “whatever [God's] hand and [God's] plan had predestined to take place.” God wanted it to happen. But when Jesus was crucified, he wasn't crucified by God, but by those who “gathered together against” him. God was not constrained by the wickedness of Pilate, Herod, the Gentiles, & Israel but worked through the cross to fulfill his promise of redemption and forgiveness for all who believe in Jesus! Isn't it amazing how God uses his Almighty power to lift up the lowly and bring grace to us, though we fall short of his glory?

Sarah herself will learn that nothing and no one can constrain or deter his promise in Gen 21:1-3:

The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised. 2 And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. 3 Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac.

And this brings us to the final part of the answer to the LORD's question to Sarah:

IV. Nothing is too hard for the Lord, because he brings life out of barrenness, in unexpected ways.

As we just read in Genesis 21:1-3, God was faithful to his promise and did give Sarah and Abraham a son—God brings life out of barrenness in unexpected ways. Abraham and Sarah's thoughts and plans for how this son would be conceived turned out to not be the way the LORD wanted to fulfill his promise. He does it in an unexpected way.

This becomes a theme Genesis (he uses the younger sons of the Patriarchs, the sufferings of Joseph to protect Israel) but the whole Bible as well. The central event and fulfillment of God's plans in Scripture which finally fully accomplishes the promise to Abraham that all the nations would be blessed through him comes in a radically unexpected way: the cross and resurrection of God's own Son. Jesus, the King of God's Kingdom suffered and died in the place of treasonous unbelieving people like us, to bring us back into God's presence through faith. Right here and now you can be fully forgiven and permanently reconciled to God by turning away from self and sin, to the Savior. How unexpected.

What about the metaphorical barrenness in our lives? We may cry out to God, and even come close to losing heart? If nothing is too hard for him, why doesn't he answer? May I suggest to you, that just as the birth of Isaac came in such an unexpected way, and your salvation was

purchased in a more unexpected way, so the answers to your prayers too may come in surprising ways.

Application & Illustration:

Many of you may know the story of Joni Eareckson Tada³. As a teenager, in 1967 she was paralyzed in a diving accident that left her a quadriplegic. Working through denial and bitterness, to finally beginning to learn to live this way, "...she was encouraged by some friends to have the faith that God could miraculously heal her. After all, "nothing is too hard for God."

"As she explored this faith, she struggled with the difference between faith that God could heal her and faith that God would heal her..." but if you told her then that over the next fifty years, she would become an internationally known

"artist, author of more than twenty-five books (translated into thirty-three languages), and an inspirational speaker whose radio broadcasts are presently aired by some eight hundred stations daily, she may have considered that ***doing that would be a much more difficult accomplishment for God than healing her paralysis.***

If you had told her that in addition, she would have produced a number of albums and videotapes and founded a ministry to and for the disabled that put her in the national and international spotlight as their spokesperson, ***she may have thought that healing was the easy way out for God.*** As it turns out, Joni's faith that she could be transformed was of far more use to God than her faith that she could be healed.

As John Walton writes in his commentary on this passage

"We must be cautious that as we accept by faith that nothing is too hard for God, we do not begin to dictate to him which hard thing he must do. He tends to have things in mind that go far beyond what we are able to ask or even think."

Give him thanks for every breath you take, bring your unbelief and sin out of your heart to be transformed, and trust him to bring life out your barrenness, for **Nothing is too hard for the LORD.**

³ As told by John H. Walton. *Genesis (The NIV Application Commentary)*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), p. 471, Kindle Edition.