

A Child is Born

Grace Fellowship | Carlton Weathers | Genesis 21

If you take your Bible and turn to Genesis chapter 21. This morning's sermon entitled, "A Child is Born." Genesis chapter 21.

God's people have always been a waiting people. Waiting is just a fact of the world in which we live. The time and the age that we are—are in now, and that began at the very beginning. After the fall of man, God made a promise that He would send one who would crush the head of the serpent. Would bring a fatal blow to the enemy once and for all. That's over 6,000 years ago now. In some sense, everyone has been waiting all the time.

And we struggle to wait for just a few days, don't we? I mean, if you find out that something major is going to happen in your life, it's like, well, let's fast forward. Can we go to sleep faster? You know, I remember as a kid, as you're waiting on your birthday or some big event, I often thought if I'll go to bed earlier, it'll get here quicker. We struggle to wait for just a few days.

In some ways, our families are always waiting. I think about—uh, this week as we've had yet another baby born into our congregation. You know, Jameson and Carrie have been waiting. They've been waiting almost as much as Chris and Christy have been waiting. It just can't get here quick enough.

In Genesis 21, we find Abraham and Sarah have been waiting 25 years. Waiting. And this is what the scripture says:

"The Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as He had promised. And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Abraham was 100 years old when his son Isaac was born to him. And Sarah said, 'God has made laughter for me. Everyone who hears will laugh over me.' 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.'"

This is the word of God.

This passage is one of those passages that you just can't read past quickly. The writer, Moses, writes it in such a way as to slow the reader down. He uses some mnemonic device here of repetitiveness. Did you hear it when I was reading? God said and God promised. She bore and she bore him. All of this repetition was meant to make the—you know, you've ever been reading and an author writes something kind of similar two times, you go, "Wait,

what's wrong with me? Am I reading that twice?" He's getting us to slow down and see the importance of this passage.

Why is this passage so important, you might ask? Well, first of all, it's because it teaches us that God's word is true. God's word is true. In the first verse, look what it says: "The Lord visited Sarah as He had said. The Lord did to Sarah as He had promised."

Genesis 11, verse 30, back at the beginning of the story introducing Abram at the time, Abraham, to us in the genealogy, it comes down to the end and Moses writes, "Sarah was barren." That's the way she was introduced to the world. Sarai is barren. She can't have children. She's—she's not able to do the one thing that secures for their family a lineage, a future. She can't do it. She can't have children. And this is the way she's introduced. And then immediately after that, in Genesis 12, verse 2, God makes a promise to Abram. God says, "I'm going to make you a great nation. I'm going to make you a great nation. I'm not just going to give you a child, I'm going to give you a great nation."

And in Gen—and if God says something one time... I sometimes hear people say, "Well, you know, it's only in the Bible like one time or three times," and I want to say, "How many times does God have to say something?" It doesn't need repeating. But because of us, God often repeats. So we will get the point. We're thick-headed people, aren't we?

Genesis 12:2, Genesis 15:4. God comes to Abram again. And Abram gets into this long discussion about, "I don't have a child yet. I—the heir, the heir is my servant." God says, "This is not your heir. You will have a son by Sarah. You will have a son." Genesis 15:4, Genesis 17:4. God repeats the promise again to them. He says again, "You will have a child, Abram." This is the passage where He changes Abram's name to Abraham and says, "Not only will you have a nation, but you will have a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful. I will make you into nations and kings shall come from you." I mean, God, it just keeps laying on layer after layer of this promise over the years. He continues to say it again and again and yet again.

In Genesis 17:16, He does it again. He says of Sarah, "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." God repeats this promise again and again and again to His people, Abraham and Sarah. In verse 19, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son and you shall call his name Isaac."

This promise, this word of God is true. In Genesis 18, verse 10, the—Moses records it this way: "The Lord said, 'I will surely return to you about this time next year and Sarah your wife shall have a son.'" Again and again and again, God repeated this wonderful promise of a child over and over and over.

I mean, if we think about it, it's like it started out pretty broad, right? I mean, not to trivialize, but to maybe put it in our—our minds a little bit. It's like back in the 20s if Babe

Ruth was getting ready for a season of baseball, one of the greatest hitters of all time, and he looked at a teammate and said, "Hey, this year I'm going to hit a home run." "Okay, you're going to hit a home run. That's great." And then they started playing in the season and he said, "Uh, hey, I'm not just going to hit a home run, I'm going to hit a home run on this day. On this day I'm going to hit a home run." "You're going to hit a home run that day? Yeah, I'm going to hit a home run that day." And then they get to that day and they get into the game and he's about to walk up to the plate and he looks at that same teammate and winks and says, "Watch this." And he walks to the plate and he goes... and the next pitch goes right where he pointed.

He made a promise before the season started. And then he telescoped that promise down to an exact pitch. And he hit it over the fence. God does the same thing in the Abraham story. God says, "You're going to have a child, a nation. You're going to have a nation, a son by Sarah. You're going to have a... Sarah's going to have you a child this time next year. And you're going to name him Isaac."

God's word is true. That's not up for debate. My question to you this morning is: Do you truly by faith believe that His word is true? The question is not about God's reliability; the question is: Do you believe Him, church? Not have you believed in Him, not—not yet, I mean, I believed in Him when I was 5 or 8 or 12, but do you believe Him now?

A promise from God is true because a promise from God is powerful. In itself, it works the outcome that it promises. You know, when we speak, we speak about what we want to do. We speak and say things like, "I hope I can." Even when we promise our children... children, how many, don't tell on your parents right now, but how many times have your parents said, "I promise we will," and then something outside of their control because your parents, I know, would never tell you something and then not do it on their own... something providentially prevents it and it doesn't happen. Listen, you can try your best to keep your promise and your word, and you should, but you and I can't do it perfectly. But what I'm telling you, what the Bible teaches us, is that when God says it, it's done.

God's not saying in Genesis 12, "You're probably going to have. It's likely you will get a son." When God said it, it was as good as done. A promise from God is powerful. If God tells you, then it's true. And it can't be moved. It can't change. He can't change. Part of the reason that we as parents fail to keep our promises is providential hindrance and part of it is that we get upset or angry and we change our minds and take our word back. Aren't you glad God doesn't do that?

He certainly had the opportunity with Abraham and Sarah, did He not? I mean, He tells them in Genesis 12 and then by Genesis—uh, 16, they're working their own plans. They're having children. Then we get to Genesis 20 and what are they doing? They're lying to Abimelech and putting the promise at jeopardy. They had—God had every reason to say, "You've done enough and I'm not going to give you what I promised." But God's promises

don't rely on your character. God's promises don't rely on your faith. God's promises rely on His sure and steady unchanging nature. When God says it, it's true.

God's promises are powerful and they're not just powerful, but God's promise is fulfilled perfectly. Perfectly. It—it is amazing to me as you read back over these chapters that God not only did what He said, but He did exactly what He said He would do. He did exactly what He promised He would do. God's word is power—God's promises are powerful, God's promises are fully, perfectly true, God's promises are miraculous.

Look at the passage with me. "The Lord visited Sarah." You notice that? He visited Sarah. And He did to Sarah. He had said that He would return to—return to her and then she would conceive a child or a son and have a son named Isaac. And God is doing exactly what He says. In 21 it says the Lord visited. He came to her. Why is that necessary? Well, because we've already been told that the way of women has ceased with Sarah. She's no longer having the menstrual cycle necessary to naturally have a child. She's 90 years old. She's an older woman by any definition. Not only is she an older woman, but her husband's an old man. And that's not me disrespecting Abraham, that's what the Bible says about him. He was an old man.

And God had to come and visit them because it wasn't possible for them to have children naturally on their own. It wasn't possible anymore. The hope of the womb had dried up. It had died. It had gone away. And her joy, her laughter, had been stolen away in that reality. But then God showed up. He visited Sarah. He did to Sarah what He had promised He would do. And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age.

God's promises are often brought to pass by miracles. And listen, church, we better be glad that that's true. God came to a dead womb and made life happen. And God came to your dead heart and breathed life into it. God's promise to Abraham and Sarah did not come by natural means, though they were doing the thing that was natural. They were together as husband and wife. There was a—there was an interchange between them. This is not God's son, this is Abraham's son. God made Abraham able to produce and God made Sarah able to receive and God made them conceive. In a dead womb, He brought life. A miraculous fulfillment to His word. 25 years had passed and yet from the first moment, it was true when God said it. It was powerfully done. It was perfectly exact. And it was miraculous in its coming.

That's what we need to know from this passage about God's word. Secondly, we need to see the two responses to God's word. The two responses to God's... There's two responses in this passage. The first response is the response of obedience. The response of obedience. When God says, we should do. When God says, we should do. And what do I mean by that? Look at verse 3: "Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac."

In other words, God had said you're going to have a son and his name will be Isaac. And so Sarah bore him a son and he named him... what? Ralph? Jimmy? Abraham the second? No. He named him Isaac. Not because it was the trendy name of the day, but because God said name him Isaac and Abraham obeyed God's word. He named him Isaac.

It's not just in the naming of the son in which Abraham is—is being faithfully obedient, but—but it's also in the circumcision. In verse 4 we have—not the first, but the first recording of a circumcision in the scripture on the eighth day. Now that's significant because there had been time passed between Genesis 17 when God told Abraham, "You shall circumcise your son on the eighth day. Everyone in your household shall circumcise their son on the eighth day. This is the mark, this is the setting apart of the covenant. This is My covenant with you: that you circumcise your son on the eighth day. If you don't do that, then your son is cut off."

So—so we're to believe, and so what did Abraham do at that time? Well, he obeyed. He took all the men of his household and he circumcised all the men of his household. But that recording of the first circumcisions... as far as we're told, we're not told that that was on the eighth day of their life. But in our passage, it says he did circumcise Isaac on the eighth day. Now surely there had been men born into his home circumcised on the eighth day over and over again. But when the Bible tells us something for the first time, it carries with it significant meaning. Why would it record Isaac first? Because he's the child of the promise. It records his circumcision on the eighth day first because it's marking Isaac as not just any other son; he is the son. All the hope of Abraham's future offspring rides on Isaac. And Isaac is set apart on the eighth day in obedience to God's word. Not the seventh day, not the ninth day, the eighth day. Why? Because Isaac is not of the old creation, Isaac is of the new creation. He's set apart. He's set apart.

Here, uh, we see in our passage obedience. God's word is true and the first response to that true word is: obey.

But the second response follows obedience and it's just as vital. Because you can obey and be a Grinch. You can. I—I gotta—a little bit of time, I'm saving myself a little time just to make this aside. Christian, don't be a Grinch. We should be the happiest people in all the earth. Not frivolously happy, right? Because some of us are facing a lot of sadness in our life. But we should be deeply, joyfully happy and satisfied in Jesus. Don't be a Grinch. It's not impressive. It doesn't make you more faithful.

So you can obey and be a Grinch, but that—that's not really pleasing to God. The second response to the faithful word of God is: joyful worship. Abraham obeyed and Sarah joyfully worshipped God. Look at the text, verse 6. Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me." God had turned this woman's years of tears into pure joy.

Ladies, ladies, think with me. You—many of you have held a newborn that you just gave birth to. And some of you hope to do that one day. Can you imagine Sarah, 90 years old,

holding this promised boy and looking into his face and the joy and the—and the laughter? She had laughed before, hadn't she? In Genesis 18, when God outside the tent was telling Abraham, and He said, "Where—where is Sarah?" "Well, she's in the tent." And the Bible records for us that she laughed within herself at the promise that she would have a child. She laughed about it and then the angel called her out on it, right? He didn't let it slide. We talked about—we talked about it; he didn't let it slide. He said you laughed. She said I didn't laugh. He said, "Oh, but you did laugh. Yes, you did laugh."

Abraham laughed and Sarah laughed in Genesis 18 in an incredulous kind of laughing. We said it wasn't that they didn't have any faith, it was that they had a little faith that said, "I don't know how You can do this. I don't know how this will ever be true." The angel reassured her that with God, all things are possible. All things are possible. And now in Genesis 21, the thing that was possible had become reality. And she laughed again. Except this time, it was not a laugh of, "How can this be?" It was a laugh of, "It is! It's true!"

Joyful worship. And it's not just that she's laughing joyfully herself. God gave her laughter. But notice what it says in verse 7—I mean at the end of verse 6. "Everyone who hears will laugh," not at me. They will laugh over me. They will laugh with me. Can you imagine the shepherds of Abraham out in the field tending the flocks by night, and the word comes to them: "Sarah! Sarah has had a son! Come and see this son!" Oh, they—I imagine they—they came with great joy. All of the maids in the camp started to hear the chatter that Sarah was in labor, and then that Sarah had had a child. And not only had she had a child, she had had a son just as God had promised. And they must have come running to peer in to gather around and to celebrate and laugh over her with great joyful worship—not of Sarah, but of the God whose word is true.

God's word had come true to the camp of Abraham. And when it came true to the camp of Abraham, what I want to tell you by the authority of God is it came true for you and for me. Because this near fulfillment, this historical reality that a son was born to Abraham is the shadow of another birth. Jesus, in John chapter 8, talking to the religious leaders of his day, said, "Abraham... Abraham saw My day and rejoiced."

Now we don't know the exact moment that that was true. It was probably true again and again is my point. Like, in the significant moments recorded for us in scripture in Abraham's life, he saw a shadow pointing forward to something bigger. He didn't see it fully, he didn't see it fully, but he saw it partly. And he laughed. He rejoiced. He obediently worshipped over what would come in the future. And Sarah right along with him.

This—this drama, this picture, this historical reality was pointing to something bigger than itself. But once again, God's people would have to wait. Generation after generation passed. Will this be the time when the promised offspring that delivers us from our sin to God will come? And generation after generation passed, waiting on a promise. God spoke to them in various times through various ways with various men that God was going to

deliver the great offspring of Abraham. He was coming. But many, many, many years pass and one after another generation passes and it's not fulfilled.

And beyond that, at the close of God's speaking in the Old Covenant, there's 400 years where God says nothing to the people of Israel. They sit in utter darkness. No word. No communication from God. And yet, because they had seen what happened back with their father Abraham and the promise that was delivered to him, they must have had still the faithful members of Israel's camp... still must have had a hope. A hope that in the future, God will do it again.

And then the pages of the New Covenant open for us. And listen to this: In Luke chapter 1, verse 26, in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. He came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one. The Lord is with you."

As the Lord had visited her mother Sarah, God was going to visit the young virgin Mary. "Oh favored one, the Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God and behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus." God's word in that moment through the angel was true, it was powerful, it was exact, and it was miraculous. Just like the word to Sarah and Abraham was true, it was powerful, it was exact, and it was miraculous.

The Lord was with, or visited, Sarah, and the Lord is going to visit Mary. "You're going to have a son," both women are told. "And you shall name his name Isaac," the son of laughter, of—we see now rejoicing, celebration of God. And to Mary, "You will name Him Jesus." Why? Because God will save His people through this promised Son.

Mary even asks the question that was in the mouth of Sarah. "How will this be? How will this be? Not because I'm an old woman who is having normal relations with her old husband, so that it is improbable and most likely not possible, but it's human, in it—it's orderly and it's natural in that way, God miraculously providing the conception but they were involved in the activity." But God heightens in Jesus for us a birth that has nothing to do with this natural order. Mary had been with no man and yet she conceived. She didn't have Abraham's son or Joseph's son, she had God's Son in her womb. "How will this be, since I'm a virgin?"

And we find in the mouth of the angel the same thing that was said in our story in Abraham. In verse 37 of Luke chapter 1, "For nothing will be impossible with God." You see the parallels. This is the shadow pointing to the reality. The Old Covenant picture and shadow of the historical event of the birth of Isaac to Abraham and Sarah is fulfilled in full color with Mary who bore our Savior, Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

But I can't stop there. I—I—I want to just drive it home with this. She went and visited Elizabeth, and Elizabeth had a son also, a miraculous birth. And when she came, the son in Elizabeth's womb, John the Baptist, was filled with the Holy Spirit and jumped for joy and began to worship his Savior in the womb of Mary. And listen to what is said by Elizabeth in Luke chapter 1, verse 44: "For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy."

"Oh, the people, Sarah said, people are going to laugh over me." Well, they're not just going to laugh over you, Sarah, they're going to laugh over Mary. They're going to laugh just like that over Mary. They're going to celebrate the birth of this Son. And then she goes on and says, "And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." The same thing that Sarah did. She believed God. She trusted God. And she had a son. Mary believed God's promise and she's also going to have a son.

How will Mary respond? I would—I would say in joyful laughter. "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in the God of my—my Savior. For He has looked on a humble estate of His servant, for behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done a great thing for me, and holy is His name. And His mercy is for those who fear Him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm. He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the mighty from their thrones, exalted those of humble estate. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty. He has helped His servant Israel in remembrance of His mercy as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to all of his offspring."

She joyfully worships. She—God had given Mary laughter over this promised Messiah, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is the savior of His people. Isaac held in himself a promise that he couldn't fulfill, but Jesus was the reality of that promise fulfilled. And so when we celebrate, we don't celebrate Him separated from the history of His birth. We celebrate Him through that birth.

The question is not: Can God do it? The question is not: Will what God promised happen? The only right thing to do when God makes a promise is to believe it. Because His word is true. It's powerful. It's exact. It's miraculous. And we should obey in joyful worship.

Let us worship the promised Son, Jesus Christ, this season and every season of our life. He who is mighty has done a great thing. Let's pray together. Our Father in heaven...