

Introduction: One of the best things about The Bible is that everyone we meet in its pages is a real person. It is full of people just like us. Even the best people are less than perfect. Many of them are unsure of their standing with God, nervous in relationships, doubting God's Word to them when its fulfillment is delayed, defensive, and desiring to be good and do good but also trapped by unhealthy desires. *** Those who dig deeply into what The Bible reveals about God and people find NO human heroes. But the good news is that every book in The Bible points to the one and ONLY true hero: The Messiah Savior, Jesus Christ! *** Today we reconnect with Abraham and Sarah after Yahweh gave the covenant of circumcision. Three 'men' meet Abraham and tell him Sarah will finally give birth to a son within a year. Last week we saw Abraham's faith in Yahweh was growing strong. But this morning we heard that by this time Sarah was beyond hoping to be a mother. She laughs derisively at Yahweh's Word to her husband. She may have done this to avoid further disappointment. But, when she is called out for her lack of faith, out of fear, she lies. *** Two thousand years later, a rich man asked Jesus how to inherit eternal life. After hearing Jesus' four-fold call, he found he could not walk away from his great riches, even though he knew it would cost him his life. *** These people had imperfections in their thinking, attitudes and actions. Left to themselves they were helpless. And today, every one of us struggles with the same issues they had, or other closely related issues. But, after waiting twenty five years, Abraham and Sarah received the son Yahweh had promised them. And, Jesus told His disciples that God can do the impossible to save people. *** So, let's learn from flawed people about the great grace of God Almighty.

I. Yahweh brings delight to Abraham and Sarah in their old age. (*Genesis 18:1-15; Genesis 21:1-7*)

A. Sarah laughs after Yahweh tells Abraham she will have a son at 'the time of life'. (*Genesis 18:1-15*)

1. Yahweh was seen by Abraham by the trees of Mamre while he was seated outside his tent in the heat of the day. (*Verse 1*)
Mamre: Mamre means strength.

Time: Unlike the vague 'breath of the day' in Eden, this is literally the heat of the day – mid-afternoon.

2. Behold three men! And having seen them, he bowed to the ground before them, pleading with his Lord not to pass by His servant until he showed them hospitality. (*Verses 2-5*)
Three men: Everything indicates these were not three ordinary men. Bowing the face to the ground is an act of worship. He pleads with a singular Lord while addressing all three. After Sarah's nervous laughter Yahweh speaks. This may be an early foreshadowing of the truth of The Trinity.

Hospitality: This paragraph teaches us about ancient near-eastern hospitality. Abraham implores his visitors to stay, and has water brought to wash their feet; then, he invites them to lean on the tree while he brings bread to sustain their heart.

3. Abraham then serves them a proper feast. (*Verses 6-8*)

Food service for guests: He hurried to Sarah in the tent, asking her to make cakes from flour. Then he ran to the herd to take a tender calf for a servant to prepare. He finished the feast by bringing butter and milk to give to them. Then, while they eat, he stands near them under the tree. By all of this, Abraham showed himself to be a fitting host.

4. They asked where Sarah was, and he says at 'the time of life', behold, to Sarah a son. (*Verses 9-10a*)

Word about son: The spokesman of the three gives a word that he will certainly return to Sarah and she will have a son.

Spring: 'The time of life (reviving)' is a figure of speech for spring, when plants that appear dead come to life. He says He will surely bring life from Sarah's barren body at age ninety. (*Genesis 17:17*)

God can bring life from barrenness

5. Sarah was eavesdropping, and had ceased from 'the way of women', so she laughed mockingly and said, 'shall we have pleasure (*eden*) when we are worn out?' (*Verses 10b-12*)

Human reaction: Sarah's response is a natural human defense mechanism. After a lifetime of disappointment, it is hard to believe a guaranteed word from God that our deepest desire will be met. We don't want to be hurt again.

6. Now Yahweh Himself speaks to Abraham, asking him if anything is too wonderful to receive from Him, and repeats His word to them. (*Verses 13-14*)

Wonderful: He uses the word used of the miracle at the Red Sea (*Exodus 15:11*), the prophecy of resurrection (*Isaiah 25*), and how life will be when the remnant is resettled (*Zechariah 8:1-13*). Let us be honest about our insecurities to receive the wonders Yahweh brings out of barren circumstances.

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7. Sarah denies her doubtful laughter, but Yahweh calls her on it. (*Verse 15*)

Denial: Let us not be too harsh towards Sarah. How many times have we denied our sinful attitude or action, knowing full well we are not fooling God?

B. After Sarah bore a son for her centenarian husband she said, 'God has made me laugh'. (*Genesis 21:1-7*)

1. Then Yahweh visited Sarah and did to her as He had spoken, and she conceived and bore to Abraham a son at the time which God had spoken to him. (*Verses 1-2*)

Word-deed: Everything that God speaks will be done according to His timing. If we are feeling dry because we are tired of waiting, we must remind ourselves God brings wonderful life from what seems barren.

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2. Abraham called the name of his son, borne by Sarah, Isaac (Laughter). (*Verse 3*)

Name: He recalls his encounter with the 'three men' of Yahweh in the previous year, and Sarah's derisive self-protecting laughter. But with Yahweh's good word fulfilled, they have genuine laughter.

3. At age one hundred, Abraham circumcised his son Isaac on the eighth day, as Yahweh had previously commanded him. (*Verses 4-5*)
Covenant: When Abraham was ninety-nine years old, Yahweh gave him the covenant of circumcision, saying Abraham would be the father of many nations, and He would be his God, and would give him the land in which he was living. (*Genesis 17*)
Delay: Abraham had waited twenty five years to have a son by Sarah. He was seventy-five years old when Yahweh gave him the seven-fold word. (*Genesis 12:1-5*)
4. Sarah said God had made her laugh, and all hearing will laugh for me: who would have known Sarah would nurse children, for I have borne a son in old age. (*Verses 6-7*)
Nurse: What a testimony to the miracle working wonder of The Three-in-One God: a barren woman, who was no longer in 'the way of women', gives birth to a son at the age of ninety!

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II. Jesus declares salvation from men is impossible, but all is possible from God. (*Mark 10:20-27*)

- A. Jesus tells His disciples it is hard for those having riches to enter God's Kingdom. (*Verses 20-23*)
 1. The man who asked Jesus about inheriting eternal life called Him Teacher and said he had been observing six commandments from his youth. (*Verse 20*)
Omission: However, these six commandments did not include other gods, idols or covetousness.
 2. But, Jesus loved him and told him he lacked one thing: Go; sell whatever you have; give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and, coming, follow, Me. (*Verse 21*)
Four-fold call: There were four steps in the 'one thing Jesus asked: first, he had to respond by going; next, he needed to repent by selling his possessions; then, he needed faith to give the proceeds of his sale to the poor in return for a future reward; and, finally, he had to follow Jesus to become like Him.
 3. After becoming sad at the word, he went away having been grieved, because he was having many possessions. (*Verse 22*)
Possessions: Sadly, his possessions possessed him so he walked away from eternal life, depressed because he could not bring himself to let go of them. He broke the commandment about idolatry.
 4. After looking around, Jesus was saying to His disciples, how with difficulty, those having riches will enter into The Kingdom of God. (*Verse 23*)
God-'mammon': Wealth and riches of this world are one of the biggest idols that keep people from experiencing all the blessings God gives to His children who are citizens in His Kingdom. May we examine ourselves to know whether we are loyal to God or to 'mammon'. And may we let go of 'mammon' to give ourselves to God.
- B. His disciples were astonished and amazed at His words. (*Verses 24-27*)
 1. The disciples were being astonished at His words. (*Verse 24a*)
Radical: Jesus' words were so contrary to their understanding that for some time they were amazed and fearful of what Jesus was teaching them.
 2. But, after repeating His answer, He spoke of how difficult it is to enter The Kingdom of God: easier it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for rich people to enter The Kingdom of God. (*Verses 24b-25*)
Literal: We must not reduce the extremely radical point Jesus is making. Thursday's *Our Daily Bread* article gave two misguided interpretations. One is about a gate into the city that required all the cargo be unloaded from the camel before it could pass through. The other is the word for camel should be translated as rope. Each of these implies people can be saved by their own extreme effort. The context shows Jesus is teaching salvation by our effort is literally impossible!
 3. They were exceedingly amazed, saying to themselves, who then is being able to be saved? (*Verse 26*)
Human question: This is a human question. We want to do something to earn salvation. (*Verse 17*)
 4. Having looked to them, Jesus says: From men it is impossible, but not from God; because all things are possible from The God! (*Verse 27*)
God's all-powerful grace: The grace of God toward people, given IN Jesus is powerful enough to save any sinner who turns from himself and comes to The One God in humble obedient faith.
Bottom line: May we realize, and repent of, our imperfections that keep us from being right with God. And, may we be willing to lay all we are, and all we have, down in faithful obedience to God. Then, because of His great power and love, we will receive His promises, His salvation, and His life of joy.

God does the impossible to save people

Conclusion: In spite of Sarah's defensive doubts about Yahweh's ability to give her a child when she was ninety years old, she did conceive and give Abraham a son when he was one hundred years old. They named him 'Laughter' because God made her laugh at her failure of faith. And, as a man possessed by his riches walked away from life in Jesus, He declared to His disciples that while it is impossible for men to save themselves, ALL things are possible with God in His Grace.

God can bring life from barrenness