

Too Good to Be True? Not If God Is In It!

Genesis 18:1-15; 21:1-7; June 18, 2017

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Prayer: Miraculous, wonderful God, come to us now. Pour out your grace and love. Shower us with the power of your Holy Spirit, so that we may become people of miracles- people filled with the laughter of hope. Amen.

Abraham and Sarah Longed for a Child

Old Abraham was sitting at the entrance of his and Sarah's tent at the hottest time of the day. He was in the midst of prayer and meditation, quiet time alone with God. He and Sarah were childless. God had promised that they would be the parents of offspring more numerous than the stars. But Abraham was now 100 and Sarah was 90. Her child-bearing years were far behind her. Day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, they had tried and tried, waited and waited, *longing* for a child. But there was no Father's Day for Abraham, no Mother's Day for Sarah.

In Abraham's culture and time, a man's pride was in the number of sons he had. Psalm 127:3-5 reflects his culture's value of sons:

Sons are indeed a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. The sons a man has when he is young are like arrows in a soldier's hand. Happy is the man who has many such arrows. He will never be defeated when he meets his enemies in the place of judgment.

So how was Abraham feeling? Was he having one of those low moments when you feel that your life is meaningless because your hopes and dreams haven't been realized? Was he feeling despondent and worthless?

After a while Abraham looked up to see three strangers standing near him. Something about these visitors told Abraham that they were not ordinary men.

Through the eyes of our Christian faith, we wonder, “Are these three visitors the Holy Trinity?” Abraham, extending the middle-eastern custom of providing hospitality to visitors, ran to them, bowed down and encouraged them to stay. He suggested that he could rustle up some morsels of bread to relieve their hunger, and water so that they could wash and cool their dusty feet.

The three strangers accepted his offer, and the feast that Abraham presented was anything but modest: it was cakes, milk, curds and a freshly prepared calf. Then the strangers brought good news. One of them said, “I’m coming back about this time next year, and when I return, you and your wife Sarah will have a son.”

And just as *Abraham* had laughed upon first hearing this message from God a year earlier, *Sarah* laughed from inside the tent, where she was listening in on Abraham’s conversation with the three visitors. It seemed too good to be true.

But *God* said, “*Why* did Sarah *laugh*? Is *anything* too hard for the Lord?”

We Long for Goodness In Our Lives

How do you respond when you receive shocking news from God? Does it seem unbelievable, too good to be true? Have you ever caught yourself saying, “I’ll *believe* it when I *see* it?”

Consider this scenario: You’re a twenty-first century youth. Your parents and teachers encourage you by telling you that *someday*, after you have graduated from elementary school, you’ll go to high school. And after you graduate from high school you’ll go to college or university or into an apprenticeship.

And after you graduate from those programs, you’ll have a marketable skill. You’ll get a permanent job so that you’ll be able to support yourself and live independently. You *want* to believe it, but it seems too good to be true, so far away, maybe unattainable in the present job market. Will it really *happen*?

Or your doctors tell you that your newborn baby has a major health problem and will need an organ transplant in order to survive. That's what happened to the parents of an Ontario boy named Hayden Knight. When he was three weeks old, he suffered kidney failure. His parents were told that he was born with only a portion of one kidney. He would need a kidney transplant in order to survive. When he was seven months old, he was put on dialysis. The doctors held out hope for Hayden's survival. In time, surely a kidney would become available for Hayden. But Hayden's parents wondered, "Is this just a pipe dream? It seems too good to be true. Will it really happen for *our* son?"

Or you're the parent of a child or children diagnosed with the developmental disorder of autism. Your child has difficulty focusing and seems unresponsive to your countless attempts to communicate with him. What a *challenge* it is to care for your child. You love your child dearly, but you feel frustrated at your seemingly fruitless attempts to reach her.

You're physically, mentally and emotionally exhausted from your efforts. You're losing sleep at night. Your marriage is suffering due to the stress and worry. You stew about what the future will hold for your child. Will he *ever* be able to communicate effectively and live a happy, productive, meaningful life? You need help. *Lots* of it. You join the Ontario Autism Coalition, which tells you that *someday* there's going to be more help and long-term funding for children and youths like yours, struggling to cope with autism.

When will that someday be? The promise seems out of reach & impossible. You've heard that 17,000 of the 40,000 Ontario children and youths diagnosed with autism are waiting for provincially funded autism services. Those wait lists for therapy are sometimes four years long. And maybe your child will be too old to qualify for the funding once it finally becomes available. You'd *like* to believe that services for autistic children will improve, but it seems too good to be true.

How many times have *you* asked God for something which you think would *really* bless your life and bring you joy and fulfillment?

“Come on God, just *trust* me with this thing. Just give me the chance to try it.” You *know* that God always wants what’s best for you, but sometimes you don’t believe it. You’re feeling tempted to give up, but you keep waiting and wondering if that good thing will ever come to pass. God’s promises often seem improbable.

God Blesses Abraham and Sarah with a Son

This was Abraham’s and Sarah’s story, so *desperately* wanting to have a child together, a son, and become dad and mom to that little one. Then God answered their prayer, fulfilling the promise God had made to them... when Abraham was *100* and Sarah was *90*.

Have you ever thought about what you’d like to do if you get to live to 100 years of age? How’d you like to try on *parenting*? How’d you like to become a father or mother for the first time? Which one of you will get up in the night to rock and sing to the crying baby, change the baby’s diapers, feed the hungry baby? Which one of you will take the baby to the doctor, administer the medicine in the apple sauce, and stay up all night soothing the child when it is sick?

Old Sarah and Abraham didn’t worry about those things. Instead they laughed for joy at God’s wondrous gift of their precious son, and named him Isaac, meaning “laughter.” That little child was the beginning of the fulfillment of God’s promise that Abraham and Sarah would become the ancestors of many nations of people.

God Blesses Us with Good Things

Is *anything* too hard for God? No way! *Jesus* knew that when he told his disciples, “With *God all* things are possible” (Matt. 19:26).

God wants *good* things for us and delights in *blessing* us. *Believe* it! We all know that God doesn't always answer our prayers immediately or in the way we think God should. We'd like to have God all figured out, make God fit into our tidy, controllable, predictable box. But God is Holy Mystery and Infinite Wisdom whose brilliant mind is unknowable to us. God in God's wisdom has a long-range plan and infinite patience, waiting for salvation to unfold and take its course.

We live in God's grace as we trust in God's goodness and promises.

Imagine the laughter of hope fulfilled when the parents of Hayden Knight heard that a kidney had been donated so that their son could live without dialysis? When he was three years old, Hayden had a kidney transplant at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children, and now lives a normal life. The nephrology and transplant team at Sick Kids told Hayden and his parents about Camp Kivita, a camp for kids who've had transplants, as well as those living with organ failure. This camp provides for the unique health care needs of these children. That's 14-year-old Hayden in the picture, climbing the rock wall and swimming at Camp Kivita, which he will attend again this year, for the fifth time.

Is *anything* too hard for God?

Imagine the laughter of hope fulfilled for the parents of 40,000 Ontario children and youths diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, when the Ontario government announced the details last week about the new autism program that will fully roll out next year. Under the plan, all children, regardless of age, the severity of their autism symptoms, or whether they have co-existing conditions, can receive provincially funded therapy, until they are 18.

Is *anything* too hard for God?

Prior to the beginning of the Olympic Games in Australia in 2000, a decision was made to take the Olympic torch under water in far northern Queensland. Ordinarily this would be an impossible task since water extinguishes fire. Many people *laughed* at the idea. But with the development of a special fuel, it worked *perfectly* and the flame stayed alight under water.

The probability of old Sarah and Abraham having a child seemed just as amazing. Yet we, over the course of our lifetimes, have witnessed *many* more unusual and improbable examples of change than our ancestors ever imagined. Scientists constantly discover new information which challenges our thinking.

Today's story of Abraham, Sarah and God's gracious intervention calls us to suspend our doubt and risk newness in the ways that we live our faith. Let us laugh together with them in the joy of God's promise fulfilled in the gift of a little child.

God is good *all* the time. Is *anything* too difficult for God? No, nothing!

Amen.