

# Promise Keeping God

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[0:00] Amen. Let's open our Bibles to Genesis 21. Genesis 21, the first seven verses.

Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said, And the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age at the very time God had promised him.

Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him as God commanded him.

Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. Sarah said, God has brought me laughter and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.

And she added, who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have born him a son in his old age.

[1:05] We all like to know where we came from. We all like to hear stories of our origins or our ancestors. How they got where they were and what their story is.

We like those sorts of things because they tell us something about ourselves, don't they? They tell us how we got to be the way we are or where we are. My grandmother was a young teenage girl and she was on a date with a young some boy.

And she was sitting at a local restaurant across from her date when a handsome young man walked up and sat down right beside her and started hitting on her.

And the other boy, you know, started to say, you know, what are you doing? And my grandpa, who was that handsome young man, more or less said, beat it.

And that's the first time they met. I don't know if it was love at first sight or not, but faint heart, never one fair maiden. I'm not sure what the lesson I'm supposed to learn from that story is.

[2:19] But it's an important origin story to me because it tells me something about who I am. And I wouldn't be who I am if my grandpa wasn't the kind of guy that he was.

And for some reason, it makes me really happy because just his sheer audacity of what he did. It puts a smile on my face. Now, that origin story doesn't mean very much to you because it's not your origin story.

But tonight in Genesis 21, we do have an origin story that should interest you. It should interest you because it is our origin story. The beginning of the people of God.

It was Israel's origin story, as Moses first wrote Genesis. And through Jesus Christ, it's become our origin story. It's become something of our past.

Through faith in Jesus Christ, we have been grafted into God's people. We were once wild olive shoots, you know, living far away. And God clipped us and put us into God's people through Jesus Christ.

[3:25] And so this was Israel's story, but this is our story. And Lord willing, it's an origin story that will do more than just put a smile on your face. It will make you rejoice at God's miraculous faithfulness of what he did.

And it is more than an origin story. It is sort of like a baby picture as well. Because you get to see the birth of God's people as they come, as God starts to fulfill his plan and his purposes to create a people and a nation, beginning with Abraham and now with Isaac.

And you get to see what they look like right from the very beginning. And you know, when you're looking at your baby pictures, you can see maybe just some features or characteristics that you could tell that was you.

That's your nose. Those are your ears. Maybe they're not all what they're going to be. Thank goodness they're not all what they're going to be, but they are yours. You can tell that they belong to you.

And that's what we get here in Genesis 21. So we see both the origins of God's people, but we also get to see the characteristics, the traits that mark them right from the very beginning.

[4:35] And then what marked them all through their growth and development from the very beginning. And so first we see the origins of God's people. Where did we come from?

Where did we get our start? You get the answer here. And it's more or less, simply put, in faithfulness, God did the impossible. That's our first point.

In faithfulness, God did the impossible. Look with me again at the first two verses. Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah. The ESV says he visited her.

He visited Sarah. As he said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age at the very time that God had promised him. So after years and years of waiting, after chapters and chapters of stories, remember this has been promised for some time now and it's been building and developing. We finally get it.

[5:39] We finally get God's answer. Everything has been leading up to this point. And just like that, it's over. Two verses. So imagine that you were somewhere in Iowa.

And you saw a sign. It said, Wyatt, 600 miles. And you said to yourself, I've never been to Wyatt. I think I'll go. And so you start driving to Wyatt. And then you see another sign, Wyatt, 500 miles. And then 400 miles. And then 200 miles. And then 100 miles. And then 30 miles. And then you see a sign, thanks for visiting Wyatt. That's, you blink and you miss it.

Now God did that for a very good purpose here. He's did something miraculous. And he did it quietly. Everything's been leading up to this point.

And then blink and you'll miss it. But in a few words, so quietly, God is miraculously faithful to what he had promised. There was a little town of Bethlehem that had something like that happen to it once, didn't it?

[6:44] So quietly, so quietly, the Christ child enters in. No one was waiting. With bated breath. The whole world wasn't watching. And yet he came.

God does this so that we'll stop and think. We'll stop and take a close look. He wants us to think about what he's done. So what did God do?

Well, two times in verses 1 and 2, it says that God did what he had promised. He did what he had promised. Moses, the author, wants the people of God to see that we were born out of the faithfulness of God.

We exist because God keeps his promises. God kept his promise to Abraham. God did what he said.

And he did it exactly when he said. Remember, a year earlier he had said, I will surely return to you. At this time next year, and Sarah, your wife, will have a son.

[7:55] And so it's a year later. And that's why I think we probably should translate it. God visited Sarah. Because the Lord now is returning. He visited Sarah.

And Sarah has a son. God did exactly what he said. Exactly when he said. But more than that, in faithfulness, God did the impossible.

So not only are we born out of God's faithfulness, out of his promise keeping, but we're born out of God's miraculous power. He does the impossible. Now, how old was Sarah?

How old was Sarah when she delivered Isaac? Do you remember? Remember? She's maybe 90, 91. She was 90 when God said a year from now.

So she's probably about 91. Chapter 18 says she was old. And if that wasn't enough, she's well advanced in years. So Sarah is no spring chicken.

[8:55] She's no summer chicken. She's the fall. She's in the winter of her life. She's old. She's well advanced. 1811 says she was past the age of childbearing.

Literally, the way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. That's a nice way of saying that normal reproductive processes had stopped.

Sarah's womb is dead. In chapter 18, she laughs and says, after I'm worn out, will I now have this pleasure of giving Abraham a son, of having a child?

It says, now Sarah was barren. She could not have children. This is what the Bible is saying about Sarah. Do you get the picture?

What were the chances of Sarah getting pregnant? Was it one in a hundred? It was zero in a hundred. It wasn't one in a million.

[9:52] It wasn't just a long shot. It wasn't a freak occurrence. It was zero in a million. Her pregnancy is not a long shot. It's an impossible shot.

But what God has promised, He now puts forth His hand of power and He does it. He goes into the dead womb of Sarah and brings life. Only God could have done it.

That is what this has been building up to. And the author has been very careful to make us notice, this isn't a natural birth. This is an impossible birth that only God could have done.

And so the whole history of redemption, the creation of God's people from first to last, Genesis 21 is teaching us that it is God faithfully doing what we can't do.

What we can't do. Not in human power. Not in human ingenuity or creative thinking. We can't do it. Only God could have done it. And Genesis 21 is teaching us that God's people exist.

[10:52] You exist. You are sitting here. We as a body exist. The greater church exists. The Israel of God exists because of the miraculous faithfulness of God. This isn't just a mark of our beginning.

This is the mark of our whole existence. So think about it. God's miraculous faithfulness. It's the hallmark of all of salvation.

It's something that defines all of salvation, all of our history. Think about it. When did Jesus come?

Galatians 4.4 Remember, it says, at the right time.

In the fullness of time. God had a time in His mind, in plan, and at that right time, Jesus came. Isaac came just when God said He would.

And Jesus came just as God promised. How did Jesus come? Well, He came from Mary, the virgin's womb. It was biologically impossible for Isaac to be born.

[11:58] It was biologically impossible for Jesus Christ to be born, and yet He was, because God had promised. Christ's birth was the result of God's miraculous faithfulness.

And so we get a picture of what the Messiah is going to be like in this, in Genesis 21. But we see more than that. This is how God's people are always born.

This is how they always come into existence. So think about your brother, sister. Think about where you were. What was your condition when God came to you?

You were dead in your trespasses and sin. You were as dead as Sarah's womb. You could do nothing to produce life. Nothing to produce life.

Salvation was impossible for you, but what we couldn't do, God did for us through Christ. So think about it. He promised salvation, and He brought it to us.

[13:05] Think about it. All of your sin. If we want to think about the impossibility of salvation, we have to think about the greatness of our sin.

All of your sin, brother and sister, paid for. All of your sin forgiven. You never could have brought that about. You never could have worked hard enough.

You could have never been repentant and sorry and sad enough to bring that about. So think about all of your sin. Sins of your youth. Sins of being a five-year-old and disobeying your mom and dad.

And how many times did you do that? Do you remember all the times? Sins of your youth. Sins of the present. Sins of your old age. David says, my sins have overtaken me and I cannot see.

They're more than the hairs of my head. Our sins were too many and they were too great. Every sin against an infinite God deserving infinite wrath, an infinite slight against Him because He is holy, holy, holy.

[14:06] And our sins were too many and they were too great. We could never pay them back. Forgiveness was impossible for us because we deserved infinite wrath and you can't pay that off unless you're an infinite person.

And so what was impossible for men was only possible for God. And that's what He did in Jesus Christ. Christ paid for all of your sin, brother or sister.

And so all of your sins were forgiven. And all of God's law was obeyed for us. Think about the greatness of God's law. Love Him with all of your heart and mind and soul and strength.

That's the first commandment. Have any of us done that? Every single minute. Every single day. That is what obedience looks like.

That is what it means to obey God's law. To love Him like that. It's not good enough to have good intentions. That is what is required. That is what God calls us to. And the greatness of God's law shows us that we could never have obeyed it in and of ourselves as fallen human beings.

[15:12] And yet, what we could not do, God did for us. What human wisdom, my thinking, your thinking, smartest man in the world's thinking, human ingenuity, human strength, it could never

have availed.

And yet, what was impossible for us, God did. He brought salvation. And so my unbelieving friend, this should make you pause.

you are in the middle of an ocean. You are shipwrecked. And you can't make it to shore.

It's impossible. It's impossible. And now God is holding out salvation to you. We've just talked about how impossible salvation is.

It's impossible because our sins, your sins, are too great. And it's impossible because the law is too demanding. And yet, here God is now holding out Jesus Christ to you as a Savior.

[16:18] And so, the gospel call is to stop trying to swim to shore because you're too far away and to cling to Jesus Christ or grab a hold of Him. You're saying, I can do it.

I can do it. I can manage this. I can do it. But you can't. It's impossible. And every Christian has done that and has come to that point.

We've quit trying to swim and we've rested ourselves in Christ. We said, this is too hard for me. I believe that you can save me. And so, we came to Him and He was faithful.

He said, I'll receive any and all who come to me. And He was faithful and He accepted us. He's been faithful for years. And so, trust Him.

He's not going to stop being faithful now. Trust Him. Trust Him. So, brothers and sisters, God in faithfulness has done the impossible for us.

[17:20] Now, the question is, how do you respond to that? How do you respond to miraculous faithfulness? Abraham and Sarah show us.

They show you how we are to respond. How do you respond to God's miraculous faithfulness? You obey His commands. That's what you get in verses 3 and 4.

You see, Abraham obeyed exactly what the Lord had said. God said, name him Isaac. And Abraham named him Isaac. He said, on the eighth day, circumcise him. And Abraham, on the eighth day, circumcised Isaac.

God's faithfulness did not make Abraham complacent. It made him diligent to obey his every command. And so, children, children, let me talk to you for a minute.

What does it mean to obey? What is obedience? What is obedience? Obedience for you. The Lord wants children to obey their parents in everything.

[18:25] This is right. He gives you good promises for doing that. But what does it mean to obey? Well, obedience is doing what mom or dad says all the way, right away, with a happy heart.

Obedience is doing what mom or dad says all the way, right away, with a happy heart. That's what God wants from you, but that's hard, isn't it?

That's hard. That's not just hard. That's impossible because you haven't done that. And if you were honest, a lot of times you don't want to do that, do you? You don't want to obey like that.

You want to do your own thing and that's why you need Jesus to be your Savior. That's why you need Jesus to be your Savior. But guess what? When God gives you a new heart, obedience is not just something that you have to do.

It's something that you want to do. It's something that you want to do. And that's what Abraham did. He received God's mercy and he obeyed. He received God's faithfulness.

[19:30] God's miraculous faithfulness moved on his behalf and Abraham responded with obedience. And that is the pattern of the whole Bible. That's the pattern of God's people wherever you see them in Scripture.

So God saves the Israelites from Egypt and he gives them the law. He said, I rescued you. Now you obey. Or Paul is preaching to the Romans and he gives them 11 chapters of gospel.

This is what God has done for you. This is what you have in Jesus Christ. This is what is the glory of the gospel. And in 12.1 he says, Now in view of God's mercy, in view of all that, all of his faithful, miraculous faithfulness and mercy to you, offer your bodies as living sacrifices.

mercy leads to sacrifice on our behalf. So brothers and sisters, what area of obedience do you need to work on?

What duty are you left leaving undone? What command do you need to put your mind to obeying?

What command do you need to put your heart and set your heart to it and say, I need to obey?

[20:51] God saved you for obedience. You're his work, his, his, his workmanship, his creation, his piece of heart in Jesus Christ.

He, he created you in Christ Jesus to do good works. He saved you for obedience. And if you're careless, brothers and sisters, listen, if you're careless in your obedience, you aren't following in your father Abraham's footsteps.

He was careful to obey. And I just pray, and I have been praying, that the spirit would show you and open your eyes and your heart to see what area you need to set your heart to diligently obeying. What command do you need to set your heart on obeying? Abraham responded with obedience. obedience. And Sarah, she responded with joy.

She rejoiced. And I think joy is the main thrust of this passage. It's where it ends up. It's what God wants us to take away from as we just read through this.

[22:01] It's where this passage ends. And joy and laughter fill this passage. Now, you can see it when you remember what does the name Isaac mean.

If you look in the bottom of your Bibles, probably most of you, it has a little letter next to Isaac. And if you go down, you can see that Isaac means he laughs.

He laughs. So, Abraham gave the name he laughs to the son Sarah bore him. And when he laughs was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him.

And in verse 6, Sarah said, God has brought me laughter. He's brought me laughter. And everyone who hears about this will laugh with me. So, God's miraculous faithfulness, it brought joy, overflowing joy to Sarah's heart.

Once, remember, she laughed in unbelief. And now she laughs. She's tickled pink and she's delighted with God's miraculous faithfulness for her.

[23:14] She laughs and prays. He's brought her great overflowing joy. And it is overflowing. You notice it wasn't just for her to enjoy. Look at the second half of verse 6.

She says, everyone who hears about this will laugh with me. This wasn't just a laughter for Sarah's heart, a joy for Sarah's heart. Anyone who heard about it would laugh.

And so brothers and sisters, you have heard about what God has done for Sarah. What is the response that you should have just to thinking about his miraculous faithfulness and goodness and the wonder and the joy and the delight and the amazing reality that she was 91 and he gave her a baby?

It should make you laugh. It should make you rejoice. grace. Who would have thought it? That's what she says. Who would have thought it?

Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah will nurse children? No one could have imagined that. No one could have in their wildest imaginings and dreams have said, oh, Sarah, I bet she'll have a child.

[24:19] She'll nurse a baby. And yet, look what God has done. God does things like that. So God brought laughter to Sarah. And we can only understand the delight and the joy and the sweetness of that laughter if we think about and remember what she was living through for so many years.

The sadness and the shame, the disappointment, the emptiness, and it was all gone. And in its place, joy.

God turns our ashes into joy. joy. So overflowing joy. It follows God wherever he goes. Remember I said this is a baby picture.

We can see the marks of God's people. We can see the marks of God at work all throughout history because wherever he goes and wherever he acts in miraculous faithfulness, the result is joy.

It's rejoicing. It's laughter. And so this is what marks and characterizes the people of God. And this is what should mark and characterize you as you think about how God has been so faithful to you.

[25:33] Whenever God works in miraculous faithfulness, God's people respond with overflowing joy. So Sarah's joy was just the beginning of the joy of God's people. It was the pebble that started the avalanche.

So think about joy's progress. Just come with me on this little trip through history, through biblical history, and think about joy's progress.

God saves Israel out of Egypt, out of the bonds of slavery for 400 years. Hard slavery. And now they're at the Red Sea with the Pharaoh and his army under the water, and they're standing there and they're free.

Freedom. Nothing any of them had ever experienced before. Now they're free. And they rejoiced in the Lord. But you know what? The best is still yet to come. Still yet to come.

So he brought them back from captivity. And they were saying, pinch me, I'm dreaming. We were like ones who dreamed. Psalm 126 says, our mouths were filled with laughter and our tongues with songs of joy.

[26 : 38] The Lord has done great things for us and we are filled with joy. They were amazed at God's faithfulness and bringing them back out of Babylon, out of captivity, back to the land.

But you know what? The best was yet to come. It was yet to come. And now Mary is found to be with child. And she visits Elizabeth.

And she sang, my soul glorifies the Lord. My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior. And part of that joy, how that song ends up is this, the Lord has helped his servant Israel.

remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he had said to our fathers. Part of the joy of Mary's heart and thinking about the coming Messiah was that this is what God had promised to Abraham.

And now here he is. God is being faithful. And so the joy that started in Sarah's heart has now filled the nation's heart. And it's filled Mary's heart with praise.

[27 : 51] But the best was yet to come. And we know that along with joy, there came a sword to Mary's heart.

Do you remember? A sword to her heart. Mary watched as her son, son of promise. The son that had filled her with such joy was now hung on a tree and mocked in front of a whole nation.

And Mary watched as Jesus died. And it seemed like the death of joy, didn't it? God's kingdom.

What was going to happen to it now?

All that wonderful things, all the wonderful things that Jesus had done, all the wonderful things that Jesus had said and promised, and now it seemed it was all gone. the kingdom had withered on the vine, and it seemed like would anyone ever smile again?

You remember the Lord's disciples in that room, closed up, afraid to go out. You think anyone was smiling or joking?

[29 : 02] Joy seemed to be dead, but he arose on the third day just as God said. God did the miraculous and faithfulness. God then he ascended and ten days later Pentecost and three thousand people were added to the new Israel of God and so now God's kingdom is growing and acts as they ate together and they were glad and with sincere hearts they praised God.

And then the gospel came to the Gentiles and when the apostles heard it they said God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life?

You see, it's the same sort of who would have thought that? Who would have thought this? Who could have seen this? Who would have thought Abraham will have a son? Who would have thought that the Gentiles would come and have repentance unto life?

Do you hear their amazement? Who would have thought it? But do you see God's plan unfolding? And do you see God's people's joy growing? God promised Abraham nations and now the nations are coming and brothers and sisters the gospel has come to you we have heard the joyful sound Jesus saves and we believe and are filled with inexpressible joy who would have thought it?

We could have never done this we could have never planned this or created this or made this the church it or my own soul come to life never in our wildest dreams could we have thought of something this good and yet that's what God has done salvation full and free can it be and it is but that's what God has promised but brothers and sisters the best is yet to come the joy hasn't reached its full crescendo because the joy that started in Sarah's heart with the birth of Isaac in the beginnings of God's people will not be completed until joy fills the whole earth and then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and there was no longer any sea and

[31 : 23] I saw the holy city the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying now the dwelling of God is with men and he will live with them they will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God and what will the full presence of God bring he will wipe every tear from their eyes and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things have passed has passed away brothers and sisters the best is yet to come God in miraculous faithfulness is going to bring that about so now we experience joy in part we rejoice in the Lord who has loved us we rejoice in the Lord who keeps all of his good promises to us but we are still here aren't we we're still here we're still part of the old earth and we're still living in this old order and we

have seen death and we have sighed as sorrows have come like sea billows too much to even handle we sigh to be away from this world and so now your joy is mixed with sorrow there's gall in the wine there's shadow in every day and we have felt the curse upon us we have felt death creeping upon us haven't we when you're young you don't think it will happen but then you start to realize that you are going to drag yourself to the end the death creeping toward us or we've known loneliness loneliness misunderstanding emptiness sorrow concern the way the way of trouble upon us and we have felt all of that as keenly as Sarah felt her barrenness we have felt that but look what God did look what

God did for Sarah he brought me laughter and look what God will do for us no more tears no more sign they don't belong in that world they have no part they can't enter in there's no place for them the ransom that the Lord will return everlasting joy will crown their heads gladness and joy will overtake them and sorrow and sign will flee away you'll look for sorrow you'll look for sign you'll look for tears and it will be gone so brothers and sisters keep on that is going to happen to you you are going to be there when the sorrows and the sign and the tears are all taken away and you will be there because God will do the impossible to be faithful isn't that good as you keep I want you to keep on keep pressing on and as you keep pressing on just realize that God is willing to do the impossible he'll turn heaven and earth over in order to be faithful so Genesis 21 it's the beginning it's the unfolding it's the beginning of the unfolding of redemption story it's our origin story it's where the people of God are getting started and they're starting to grow and so now we are in the middle we don't know how close we are to the end but we're not there yet we're in the middle but the best is yet to come and you will be there and God is faithful and at the right time time at the right time God will do exactly what he promised so keep on keep believing and rejoice as you do so let's take our hymnals and turn to hymn 502 hymn 502 heavenly father I do thank you for your miraculous faithfulness on behalf of your people thank you thank you that you do everything that you say and I pray that that would encourage us then to mine your word for promises that we can hang our lives on and live upon thank you that every promise is yes and amen in Jesus Christ and you will do what you say and so I pray that we would then rejoice that you have done such wonderful and amazing things for us and saving us and giving us new life in Jesus Christ for setting us on this path for giving us good things good works to do and I pray that then we would put our hand to them and do them with all of our might because you are so good to us

I pray Lord that your faithfulness would uphold us that it would encourage us and that we would go away from here rejoicing at what kind of God you are thank you for your grace your mercy your miraculous faithfulness to Sarah thank you that you do such things as that thank you that you did a greater miracle in my own heart in our hearts from bringing us from death to life for washing all of our sins away and I pray that those who are lost who have no righteous standing before you and who are out there in the middle of the ocean trying to swim to shore I pray that you would open their eyes and show them the impossible situation that they are in and then show them Jesus Christ the one who can save them I pray this for your great name's sake amen