

God Foretells of Isaac

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[0:00] Let's take our Bibles and turn to Genesis 17. We'll begin reading tonight in verse 15.

God also said to Abraham, As for Sarai, your wife, you're no longer to call her Sarai.

Her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations. Kings of peoples will come from her.

Abraham fell face down. He laughed and said to himself, Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of 90?

And Abraham said to God, If only Ishmael might live under your blessing. Then God said, Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac.

[1:03] I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard you.

I will surely bless him. I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of 12 rulers, and I will make him into a great nation.

But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year.

When he had finished speaking with Abraham, God went up from him.

On that very day, Abraham took his son Ishmael, and all those born in his household are bought with his money, every male in his household, and circumcised them as God told him.

Abraham was 99 years old when he was circumcised, and his son Ishmael was 13. Abraham and his son Ishmael were both circumcised on that same day, and every male in Abraham's household, including those born in his household or bought from a foreigner, was circumcised with him.

[2:13] So glad that God is persevering. He has remarkable endurance when it comes to dealing with this sinner.

And it doesn't amaze you, brothers and sisters, that God, maybe some of you for years, has been sticking with you and keeping after you.

When we sin, when we don't believe, when we wander off the path, he comes and gets us. He's such a faithful God. And I am here because God is faithful.

Amen? Amen. Our story is Abraham's story. Or maybe better put, Abraham's story is our story because Abraham's life goes through lots of ups and downs.

It's a real roller coaster. But one thing is steady in his life. The steadfast love of the Lord endures forever. And it meets Abraham again and again.

[3:20] Thirteen years have passed since Abram and Sarai tried to help God out with the matter of Hagar and Ishmael. They weren't sure if Sarai was meant to be the mother of the child they were to bear.

I'm assuming that that's what Abraham thought all along. But year after year passed and still no baby. And so I think Sarai started thinking, well, maybe it was meant for Abraham, but not for me. God didn't mean me. And so it was probably with some sadness that she gave Hagar to Abram and Abram took Hagar.

That was thirteen years ago. And it's interesting. There's been no word on what God thinks of Ishmael. What God thinks of the whole Hagar and Ishmael situation.

But in Genesis 17, God comes again and he clarifies the covenant, the relationship with Abram. And he calls him Abraham.

[4:29] So he's talking to Abraham and he's clearing things up. Some points of confusion, some points of fuzziness. And that's God's way, isn't it?

As we go through the years with him, we learn more and more. And he makes things more and more clear. So I knew I was a sinner when I was converted.

But over the years, God has uncovered more and more of my sin. And I'm convinced I'm a greater sinner now than I ever was then. And I'm sure that you would say the same thing.

I see my sin so much clearer now. Well, that's God at work in your life. But thankfully, it's not just our sin that he uncovers. We see more and more of his love and his grace.

I knew God loved me those years ago. But, oh, God's love is much more precious now. We've been through some waters together. We've been through some deep places together.

[5:31] And so, as he uncovers, our hearts learn to trust him. And as we trust him, the relationship grows closer and closer.

And that's what's going on with Abraham's life. He's learning more and more and more, and he's getting closer and closer to God.

Now, there's some back and forth in today's passage, as we had it read. But it's a conversation, and it's a conversation between these two friends. Abraham is the only Old Testament person to ever be called God's friend.

And so these two friends are having a conversation. And first we're going to see God's miracle.

Then we're going to see Abraham's laughter.

Then we're going to see God's explanation. And then we're going to see Abraham's obedience. So you see there's this back and forth. And it's a dance. And it's the same kind of dance that you are in with the Lord if you're a believer.

[6:34] He speaks to you in his word, and you obey, and you believe, and things become clearer, and you obey more and more. So let's begin.

Let's begin with God's miracle. Look at verse 15. God also said to Abraham, As for Sarai, your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai. Her name will be Sarah.

And I will bless her, and I will surely give you a son by her. And I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations. Kings of people will come from her.

Now, let me ask you. Does that make you smile? Does it even make you chuckle?

Because if it doesn't, you need to sit down for a while and just think about how wonderful this promise is.

[7:30] This is such a wild and delightful miracle. It's an amazing thing. Who's a God like ours?

He's going to give a 90-year-old woman a baby. After years and years and years of barrenness and shame, He's going to turn her life completely around at the age of 90.

Now, think about what God says to Abraham about her. It's quite preposterous, really. That's a big word, but I think it hits the nail on the head.

If you look up the word preposterous in the dictionary, this is what you're going to find. It says, something that is contrary to nature, reason, or common sense.

Isn't this a preposterous miracle then? It's contrary to nature. Sarah is 90 years old. It's contrary to reason.

[8:37] Sarah is 90 years old. It's contrary to common sense. This couple has a combined age of 189 years, and they are going to have a baby.

Do you see how amazing it is? It's preposterous, but it's true. It's going to happen. And God, in His grace, is being absolutely outrageous.

It's staggering. Now, why does God do it like this? Why does He wait until Abraham is 99 and Sarah is 90 when they're both as good as dead? Well, because Abraham is a picture of all who are saved.

He's the father of those who believed. Abraham believed. And what did he believe? Well, Paul gives a commentary on this passage in Romans 4.

And this is what he says. I'm sorry. He believed in a God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were. Against all hope, Abraham and hope believed without weakening in his faith.

[9:47] He faced the fact that his body was as good as dead and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Now, God's promise came to them in the face of death.

Abraham was as good as dead. Their bodies were dead. And yet, he believed. He believed anyways. And that's the heart of the gospel.

At the heart of the gospel is a message of a God who is able to raise the dead to life. And so, all of our hope is in the fact that Jesus died, and not only died, but he rose again for our justification.

Death without resurrection would be meaningless. But God is able to raise the dead. And so, your hope, your hope of forgiveness, your hope of peace, your hope of heaven, all depends upon this

fact that God is able to speak into the tomb, the dead places of our life, and the dead places of Jesus' death, and bring life.

And it would be preposterous if it wasn't God. But since God is able to do all things, he does this. Giving new life is what God does.

[11:09] Now, in creation, he spoke to, the very first words, he spoke to nothing. And nothing did what it was supposed to do.

Nothing obeyed. He called things that are not as though they were. In Sarah's womb, he spoke life when there was nothing but death there.

And in your heart, brother and sister, when you were guilty, and when you were sinful, and when your heart was rocky, and hard, and you were going your own way, you were dead, he spoke new life.

So, God's miracle, it's this amazing thing. It changes Sarah's, Sarah's potential. So, you have preposterous, and you have potential.

It changes who Sarah is, and what she's going to be, and what is she able to do, what she can be. That's what this name change is all about.

[12:09] Now, Sarai means, my princess. That's a sweet name, if you're a husband. I'm sure if, I don't know if Abraham was a romantic man, but that must have been nice.

Every time he said, Sarai, he said, my princess. But God says, no more is Sarai just going to be your princess. She's going to be the princess.

That's what Sarah means, princess. In other words, Sarah's going to be the one great princess. Now, what is the work of a princess?

Well, it's to bear kings, princes. And what will come from Sarah? Nations and kings. So, God's promise is going to take Sarai out of the role of Abraham's princess.

And he's going to expand her role until she is the mother of nations and peoples and kings and finally the mother of the Messiah.

[13:17] So, God's promises change us. When God meets us with his promises and with his purpose to do us good, he doesn't leave us where we are and he doesn't leave us who we are.

He changes us and he changed Abram and he changed Sarai. And that's grace. That's amazing grace and it's the grace that's at work in your life.

It was at work in their life. Now, if you want a third P about this miracle, it would be perseverance perseverance. Because God is so patient with them. They wavered in unbelief in this whole Hagar mess and he kept after them.

He didn't give them what they deserved. When they were down in Egypt, he just kept after them.

This is what he was planning to do and that's what he was going to do and God is persevering.

And that's your God, brother. That's your God, sister. He's persevering. John Calvin has this beautiful quote in his commentaries on this passage where it says, no matter what sort of obstacles we put in God's way, even as unbelievers, he goes right through them and continues to do good to us.

[14:29] And that's what God does. So that's God's miracle. Now we see Abraham's laughter. Abraham's laughter. In a week or so, Lord willing, we're going to see Sarah's laughter.

Her laughter was a laugh of unbelief, but I don't think that's what is going on here at all. The goodness and the grace of God hit Abraham and it just completely bulls him over.

It hits him like a ton of bricks. He's overwhelmed. This is too good to be true. And out of his joy and out of his amazement, he laughs. He knew he was as good as dead.

I mean, sometimes you have to look at the preposterous in the face and when God says, I'm going to move right through that, I'm going to make that mountain into a road, you laugh because it's so good.

He knew he was as good as dead. He knew Sarah's body was as good as dead and yet his faith fought through all that was real and all that was present and all that made sense and he believed.

[15:36] his faith laid hold of a God that was able to do amazing things and possible things. And the result is he overflows with joy.

He's so happy he cannot contain it because God is so good. And so joy erupted from him and he laughs. Now you've seen those commercials where the people from the publisher's clearinghouse sweepstakes, they come to people's houses when they're not expecting them and they have all the balloons and they have that big check that has five million dollars or whatever on it and they

surprise the people.

Now what do the people do? They scream, they laugh, they cry. It's so good. You can't contain yourself. But brother and sister, you've experienced something that's so much better than that. your sins, though they were like scarlet, he's made them as white as snow. And you have peace with God. You've been adopted into God's family.

You're accepted. Your person is accepted. And he says to you, this is my son, this is my daughter with whom I'm well pleased.

[16:56] And it's all for Jesus' sake. sake. But we grow cold to those gospel realities so easily, don't we? But isn't there enough there to set a kingdom laughing?

So good. And so I ask myself, why does Abraham laugh so often? My heart is sad. The sky is gloomy all day.

Well, there's probably lots of reasons, but Paul tells us the reason that at that moment Abraham was filled with joy. He says in Romans 4, he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith.

And so the promise was presented to him, and Abraham's faith whacked strong. It grew strong. And by faith he flung out his hands, he flung them out wide, and God filled them.

And with great power, with great power, he laid hold of God and what God could do. It didn't matter that Sarah was too old to have children.

[18:12] It didn't matter that he was too old to have children. God said it, and that was it. And the result was joy. And so, friends, that's the kind of faith that we should pray for.

God is the kind of faith that flings its arms out, and faith that takes God's promises as the rich, wonderful, good things they are. And so, is there no laughter in your Christianity?

No wonder and amazement at the goodness of God? Well, you don't need new promises. You need fresh faith. The promises are good.

They're true. God doesn't need to speak them again. You need to believe them as they are there on the pages of Scripture. And so, we need to pray, oh God, forgive my unbelief.

Give me repentance. Give me faith. Well, Abraham believed and rejoiced. Now, what did God think of that laughter? Well, again, Paul says he was glorified.

[19:13] Romans 4, he was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had the power to do what he had promised. And so, when Abraham rejoiced at God's promises, God was glorified.

He honored God. Now, if you want to honor God, then believe his promises. Whatever promises in the Scripture, if you want to honor him, believe those promises.

Rejoice in the goodness of God. That's what Abraham did, and he gave glory to God. Now, honoring God, it doesn't start with our actions. It starts with our faith.

It starts with believing in what God has said. And yes, out of faith, we do obey and we do honor. But we can honor and glorify God just by taking those promises and owning them for ourselves.

And that's what Abraham did. He laughed and he glorified God. Now, we've seen the first two parts of this conversation.

[20:17] The second two parts, God's explanation and Abraham's obedience. Now, Abraham is on the ground laughing. He laughs and he falls face down.

In the morning worship, we saw that when God consumed the sacrifice on the altar, they rejoiced and they fell face down. There was joy and there was reverence. So, Abraham is on the ground laughing, amazed at the grace of God, but then a thought hits him.

Thought hits him. What about Ishmael? Ishmael's an active boy. He's rowdy. He's a bit hard to handle sometimes, but he is Abraham's son and Abraham loves him.

So, what's going to happen to him? He says, oh, that Ishmael might live under your blessing. Isn't that what parents cry?

Oh, that Ishmael would live under your blessing. He wants this and he wonders this. And so, that leads to God's explanation. God explains and clarifies. Well, what about Isaac and what about Ishmael?

[21:32] Yes, he will live under my blessing. Ishmael will live under my blessing. He'll be fruitful. Twelve rulers will come from him. A nation will come from him. I'll make him into a great nation.

Do you see how Ishmael is going to be this fleshly counterpart to Israel? How many tribes were in Israel? Twelve. And so, Ishmael is sort of like the fleshly mirror of Israel.

But the blessings for Ishmael will not be eternal. They will not be spiritual. No, the promise, the covenant of love, the seed of the Messiah, all that's wrapped up, the gospel, it's going to come through Isaac.

Now, why Isaac and not Ishmael? What's wrong with Ishmael? Why Isaac? Part of the answer, no doubt, is election.

Election. God is sovereign in the disposition and the giving of His grace. He's sovereign in that.

[22 : 48] No one can earn it. No one can work for it and come to a right where they have merit for it. No, God chooses who He's going to save.

And so, do you ever look at your family and you say, why me, Lord? I'm the same blood. I grew up in the same family. I'm no different than my brother, my sister, my dad, my mom.

But why me? And the final answer is buried in the heart and mind of our sovereign God.

So, I have no doubt that election is playing a part here. In grace, God chooses who He's going to save and leaves others to go their own way.

And both are to the praise of His glory, one to the praise of His grace, and one to the praise of His justice. But I don't think election is the full answer.

[23 : 55] I think in this passage, and in the Bible as it interprets and understands this passage, it more lies in the origin of these two boys.

Where they came from. Now, how was Ishmael conceived? Well, Galatians 4, Paul again commenting on this passage.

As it is written, Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way.

Ishmael was the ordinary product of human power, human effort, human thought. He was the offspring of ordinary human effort and strength.

But God isn't interested in human effort and strength. He's not interested in establishing his covenant in the gospel on the grounds of human effort, human strength, and what we thought was a good idea.

[25 : 03] His salvation will be established on the foundation of divine power. And so he wants to drive every shade of doubt that lurks in every dark corner of Abraham's mind and in our minds where salvation comes from.

That we can bring about salvation in our own strength, in our own effort. And so Ishmael is blessed. He's blessed, but he's not going to carry the covenant of salvation.

No, the promise will go to Isaac. Because how was Isaac conceived? Well, Paul goes on in Galatians 4 and says, his son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way, but his son by the free woman, Sarah, was born as a result of the promise, of a promise.

So how was Isaac conceived? His conception was the result of God's powerful word, God's powerful promise.

God spoke into the death and the depths of who Sarah was and conceived Isaac. Isaac was miraculous.

[26 : 26] And so salvation is God's work. It's the result of his powerful, creative word entering the dead places of human hearts.

And so Isaac was the work of the spirit of God, not ordinary human effort. Now, I wonder, has that truth come home to you?

Or do you think somehow, in some way, salvation, the gospel is finally up to you? So, it's going to be somehow hinging on you.

Well, listen to what Jonathan Edwards says. God has given even fallen men such a gift. He has left nothing for man to do that he may be happy, but only to receive what is given him.

Though he has sinned, yet God requires no amends to be made by him. He requires of him no restoration. If they will receive his son from him, he requires neither money nor price.

[27 : 40] He is to do no penance in order to be forgiven. God offers to save him for nothing. Only if he will receive salvation as it is offered, that is freely given through Christ, through faith in him.

So what can your flesh do in this matter? Nothing. Nothing to do. And that's what is so hard for the ordinary man and woman and young person to understand.

There's nothing to do except to receive Christ. To hold out your empty hands out of this broken heart and say, I can't do anything.

I need you to do it for me. I need Christ. And even that faith, that faith that extends the open hands, that too is a gift of God.

And so from first to last, salvation is by grace alone that God would have the glory. And so what is there to do? Well, you only turn away from what you can do, which is nothing, and you put out your open hands to God and you say, I put all my hope in Christ.

[29:03] So that's God's explanation. It's going to be Isaac. It's not going to be Ishmael. Now the final point, Abraham's obedience.

Abraham's obedience. What does Abraham do? He obeys immediately. He obeys immediately. Now, I want you to imagine this. Kids, do you ever have, do your parents ever do this? Okay, it's time for a family meeting. meeting. You gather all the kids, and there you are, you're all on the couch.

Now, Abraham calls the family meeting that day. Calls in the whole household. He says, well, we need to talk.

Now, I want you to imagine this family meeting, because I'm sure you've never had a family meeting like this one. And he says, first of all, you can't call me Abram anymore. You have to call me Abraham.

[30:03] And Sarai is not Sarai anymore. She's Sarah. They don't wait for the baby to come. They don't wait for God to actually fulfill the promise. They start acting on it immediately.

Immediately, Abraham and Sarah are Abraham and Sarah. The past is in the past. Furthermore, all the men and boys will be circumcised and we're going to do it today.

Abraham didn't ask for opinions. He didn't put it to committee to decide whether this thing is possible and this is a good idea and should we do this and should we wait and let's talk about it.

No, look at verse 23. That very day, Abraham took his son Ishmael and all those born in his household or bought with his money every male in his household and circumcised them as God told him.

Abraham was 99 years old when he was circumcised. So the word of the Lord came and Abraham obeyed.

[31:13] He obeyed that very day. Now, there's a lesson there for all of us. God, God's word calls us to immediate obedience.

immediate obedience. So are you outside of Christ? Are your sins still unforgiven?

You're estranged from God. You're enslaved to your sin. You're separated. You're going your own way. God's word has come to you today. It's come to you at least two times.

And we've said, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. That's an imperative. It's a command.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for your salvation. Now, obey it today. I don't know how many times I've read, I've heard young people's testimonies, and it has this sentence or something like it in it.

[32:28] I knew I should come, but I thought I would come later. Or I thought I would be saved later. And young people, you can take real comfort in that, can't you?

Because you think, oh, I'll do it later. But don't take any comfort in that. Because every day you put it off is another day that you disobey. That thing that you're calling good and taking comfort in is disobedience.

He wants your faith, and he wants your trust, and he wants it today. And furthermore, it's such a foolish and stupid thing to say and to do.

I'll come later. Every day your heart is getting harder. Tomorrow it's not going to be easier to come. It's going to be harder to come.

You know, it's one thing to roll out the dough when it's fresh. Try to do it the next day, and the next day, and the next day.

[33:34] You might be able to manage it, maybe, but it's a lot harder. And every day your heart is getting harder. time is working against you.

And it's foolish, because it's such a waste of time. You're spending your life doing something that you know you're not supposed to do. You're spending your life in something that doesn't please God at all, and that you know you're going to be called into judgment for.

you're just saying I'm going to slave away for now. I'll just keep being a slave. Who in their right mind would say I just want to keep being a slave when the prison door is open?

And Jesus is saying come out and be free. You're saying no. I like the slave ship. I like the oppressive heat. I like the disease, and I like the mortality rate down here.

Why would you keep risking your never dying soul and wasting your time on things that displease God? That's foolish. Doesn't make any sense.

[34 : 46] Your life is a vapor. Why waste it on things that don't matter? And you brother and sister, is there some sin in your life that you're saying that you know you need to give up, but you're just not going to do it yet?

Get rid of it today. You know it's not doing you any good. And maybe there's some good that you know you should be doing.

Well, start doing it. Every command of God is for our good. You're keeping good away from yourself by your disobedience. So, in faith, Abraham obeyed.

So, look again to God's promises. You don't think you can obey? I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. You think there's going to be some danger if you obey?

Well, God is my refuge and my strength. All the promises, every place where we say, I don't think I can do it. I don't know if I can do it. My grace is sufficient for you. My grace is sufficient for you.

[35 : 53] So, look again to God's promises and then obey. That very day, Abraham obeyed.

Abraham proved that he was God's friend when he obeyed.

And Jesus said, if you're my friend, you'll do what I command. And so prove your faith by what you do. May God give us grace to that end.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, your word alone has the truth that we need and your spirit alone has the power unto salvation.

Pray that you, spirit of the living God, would come and move powerfully in dead hearts. I pray that you, spirit of the living God, would come upon our hearts and move us to fresh obedience, move us to fresh faith, help us to lay a hold of the promises of God and make our faith to be strengthened in these days so that we might be full of joy.

And as we are full of joy, no matter the circumstances and the trials and the sorrows and the sadness and the pain that we face, that we would hold on to you. We would go on loving you and obeying you.

[37 : 25] Pray this for Jesus' sake. Amen.