

Hebrews 11 – “By Faith” - Heb. 11:11 – “Faith-Empowered”

Introduction

Mothers Day. What a precious gift to be a mother; and to be given the trust of children; and to make home for a family. Who can describe what the word “mother” involves? From the wonder, the sorrows, through the stresses to the joys, there sweeps such an incredible range of experiences and emotions, that it seems that there is not space enough to contain all that is held in each mother’s heart, and all that pours out from it towards others. Moms, we honour you today.

Sarah is an amazing story for Mother’s Day. She became a mother of a nation; and, in a way, shares with Abraham the faith that we are all called to have in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Peter calls Sarah the kind of woman whom all women should aspire to be like.

May her story encourage and stir you to be daughters of hers in the sense that you receive and grow the same faith that she had.

To everyone listening today, this is especially for moms; but I trust that there will be enough in this message for everyone to draw from.

Let’s get into the message about Sarah by reading a few texts from Scripture.

Readings:

Genesis 12:1, 2 “1 The LORD had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. 2 I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing’”;

Genesis 17:19 “When Abraham was 99: “God said, ‘Yes, your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him”;

Genesis 18:9-15 A short while later, God appeared to Abraham at his tent. “9 ‘Where is your wife Sarah?’ they asked him. ‘There, in the tent,’ he said. 10 Then the LORD said, ‘I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.’ Now Sarah

was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. 11 Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. 12 So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, 'After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?' 13 Then the LORD said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh and say, "Will I really have a child, now that I am old?" 14 Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son.' 15 Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, 'I did not laugh.' But he said, 'Yes, you did laugh.'"

Hebrews 11:11 "By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised" (ESV).

1. Enabled.. to have your own faith. "By faith <Sarah> was given power"

a. A faith worthy of Heb. 11. God was making Abraham the father of those who believe. Those who are brought into fellowship with God, do so by faith in Jesus Christ who made that fellowship possible. That faith was worked by God into Abraham, so that those who believe like he did share his faith; **in this way he is the father of us all (Romans 4:16 [Fraser's paraphrase]).**

But God was not content with Abraham being the father of faith; God worked in Sarah a faith just as great. The Apostle Peter said that Sarah was a holy and hope-filled character – worthy of every woman's emulation (1 Peter 3:5, 6). Can **you** hope for a faith of Hebrews 11?

b. God may allow impossibles in our lives. God trained Sarah's faith by bringing her into promises that she was powerless to fulfil. (i) She was barren;

(ii) Then she was passed the age of child-bearing (Heb. 11:11).

What's the point? God was allowing that unfortunate condition, but giving her a faith of her own – such a faith that she could be included in the list of witnesses to God's faithfulness in Hebrews 11.

A special work in a person: God may withhold something...

My own mother gave up a career for 4 children. A testimony of hers which I read in my adult years was that while raising four children she missed the stimulation of her career. “Not stimulating enough?!”

Yet, one thing I remember about my Mom: God grew her faith!

> “By faith <Sarah> was given power...”. Our theme is “By faith”. Is not God working in you to put your name after those two words, as He did with Sarah? So insert your name: “By faith <.....> was given power...”. Do you see God giving you your own faith?

2. Empowered “*beyond belief!*”: “She received power to conceive”

“6 And Sarah said, ‘God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me.’ 7 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.’” - What happened to Sarah was “beyond belief”!

a. A Hebrews 11 faith. God gave Sarah [i] Power to conceive; and [ii] a name for that powerful event: Call him “Isaac” (17:19; 17:17 & 18:12) – Isaac means “laughter” – laughing, to a better faith!

Faith is not yours or mine to work up. It is something God teaches us. God taught Sarah faith by allowing the doubling up of the impossibles in her life.

[i] She was barren, and [ii] He waited till she was too old to have a child. Before she was ready for the power to conceive, He was working in her the power to believe – Her relationship with Him was greater than gold.

You see, you can laugh in two ways: By doubt & mockery; or by faith. a[i]. The laughter of the sceptic. A sceptic who has already judged God out of life might look at the story of Sarah giving birth beyond the age of childbearing as ludicrous. That kind of laugh blurts out “That’s impossible!” G. K. Chesterton has written brilliantly about this in his history of human kind, called “*The Everlasting Man*,” and in his walk to faith in the book, “*Orthodoxy*.” He said it was the scepticism of the atheists that showed him the way to faith. And part of his story is about how to laugh by faith. His point: The laughter of the atheist

leads to despair.

a[iii]. The laughter God loves to work with. Sarah's laugh was not that God could not do it. Her struggle was that she had already ruled out that God would fulfil His promises through her. But God challenged her laughter not to create an unpleasant situation, but to compel her to think again: "Is anything too hard for the LORD?"

You see, God was not saying, "Don't laugh," If He did, wouldn't the name Isaac have been sarcastic? But, no, God was looking forward to laughing mothers, around Sarah, when Isaac was born. And what a laugh it was – it was the laughter of God.

> You see, the laugh of faith is this, "Look at what God has done!" "Only God could have done this!" – The laugh of the power of God. Practically, for some of you might be wish to laugh with Sarah, "Where is God for me?" "I feel that I am in the end of the queue. Why would God take any notice of me?" "What can God do with me? It seems that God has taken notice of everyone else but me." "Surely I'm too far gone for God to do anything through me?" These laughs (or sighs) God loves to work with. "Is anything too hard for the LORD?"

b. "Beyond belief" faith. Faith beyond belief is about faith not giving up until it sees God fulfil the joy He promised. Faith beyond belief is crossing the line into its witness that God proved Himself faithful after all. It is when faith is no longer necessary, because the God's work has been accomplished. It is like a marathon runner crossing the line with the exultation that she finished the race against all personal misgivings. She did it, and laughs to herself, at her "disbelief". It is the "I told you so" laugh of faith: When you stand before the Lord, and share in His glory, the laugh of faith will be the reward of trusting God through all of your impossibles. It is when you say to the Lord, who saw you through it all, "Wow, I knew I could trust You" – "You gave me the faith to believe when all I saw was what was going wrong; You empowered my faith in You when all I experienced was what I was not." Jesus said: "Blessed are you who weep now; you will laugh!" Lk 6:21.

Can you see God calling you into that kind of faith in Him?

But, the question then arises, how do we live now, in the meantime?

3. Entrusted with a Proleptic Lifestyle: “She considered Him faithful”.

a. Faith is God “believing into” you. “She considered Him faithful” was His doing in her. We say, these days, “It takes one to know one.” Those who are faith-filled know God as faithful. Are you someone God believes in? What can God entrust you with?

You’ve heard a young lad say, “I want a girl to treat me right.” Can you see his eyes go big when he hears his mom say, “If you want a girl to treat you right, then be the kind of guy that the girl you want to treat **you** loves the way you treat **her**”? God worked in Sarah the faith that could recognize Him as faithful. We need to trust God for this in our lives.

This text points to this: We can imagine Sarah coming round to this: “If I want God to entrust me with Isaac then I’m going to have to trust Him to count on me being someone worthy of that trust.” That’s proleptic! Proleptic living is about living now in view of what’s coming. That’s what the writer to the Hebrews was driving home to his hearers and readers. Jesus endured all that he faced because of the joy that was set before him (12:2). We have a joy ahead of us in Jesus Christ that enables us to trust Christ is get us through everything.

>Sarah considered God faithful, and lived that faith out as a trust.

b. Proleptic living lives a life that “is not” as though it were.

Living so heavenly minded that you are earthly good.

Paul puts it this way: The God of Abraham [and Sarah] is “the God who gives life where there is death, and calls things that are not as though they were” (Romans 14:17). God was teaching Sarah proleptic living: Long before children came, Sarah had learned to make home a place to which people could be entrusted. And God honoured that trust with a personal visit in Gen 18.

Can you imagine the talk the next day? “Who was it who came by yesterday, and enjoyed the best you had to offer?” “God!”

Sarah lived a proleptic lifestyle. There was more to her than what she didn’t have. There was more to her than what she was not.

Sarah made home a place into which Isaac could be entrusted.

> Do you get it's full force?

It's about living **now** as if you're bringing **then** into **the present**.

It's working here on earth as it is ordered in Heaven.

It's living the future into the present. It's working out the citizenship of the future glory into the present in such a way that when you get to glory you're at home in it because you've been at home in it all along.

Wouldn't you like to get to glory and carry on with Jesus where you left off, as though you'd never been apart? That's proleptic living!

Application. Be the kind of person through whom God makes history by your trust in Him during those times when you feel you "are not" and when you "have not". You and I are not defined by what we have not and are not. Neither are we defined by what have, nor by what others think we are.

God is working in us to be the kind of people who love God for Himself not because of what He has given us, nor because of what we wish Him to make of us.

Faith gives the heart a contentment, a peace in God – It's **His** gift to us. Let us, then, worship God for who He is, and for His worth, when we do not get what seems so normal or worthy of receiving.

Let us trust Him. Only He knows what He is bringing about in who we are not, and accomplishing through us what we do not have.

And the key to all of it is this: You love Him for who He is to you, and you worship Him as if He is all you have. Ultimately, that it.