

Heb 11:11-12 The Faith of Sarah

In our verses today the author brings attention to the great power of divine faith; the kind of faith which fuels endurance and perseverance through the most difficult and even seemingly impossible circumstances. And nothing has changed today for us! It is only by such a faith that we also can endure and persevere what comes our way. Today, our example is Sarah, the wife of Abraham. I have 5 things from her example about faith. 1) The obstacles of faith, 2) The effects of faith, 3) The constancy of faith, 4) The foundation of faith; and 5) The fruit of faith.

Before looking at some of the obstacles to faith in the life of Sarah, let's take a moment to think about Sarah herself. Sarah was with her husband, Abraham, back in the Land of Ur when he was called. Now, we don't know when faith came, but we are told that she, like her husband, has faith. V. 11 says, "**By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive.**" In other words, Sarah has the same faith as Abraham. There is no difference in this regard. The Bible teaches that men and women have different roles of authority both in the home and in the church. This goes back to Adam as he was created first and Eve was taken from him and created after him (See 1 Tim. 2:8-15; Eph. 5:22-24). However, concerning "faith" there is no difference, there is no distinction. Both Adam and Eve (and all of us) are created in the image of God. Faith is no respecter among genders/persons. Gal. 3:28 says, "**There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**" This means that Sarah is an example, certainly to women in this world, but also to men, all of us. A person's gender does not affect faith, nor the strength of it.

Also, another observation. Both Abraham and Sarah have faith as a married couple. They are together, united more deeply than any physical relation could be. I think of Zacharias and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus and the new covenant. They are together in faith. I point this out to apply this with us. I know it is not always the case, but it is so encouraging when both husband and wife are knit together in the same faith. When one spouse is not a Christian, the marriage and the family will always be at odds. An application for those who are not married is to always, no matter what the world says, marry a person of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Cor. 6:14).

1. The obstacles of faith. With Sarah there were great obstacles to believing that she would have a child of her own. First, she was barren; she could not have children (Gen. 11:30). I am sure that she and Abraham were always hoping she would have a baby. But she did not. This led to her giving Hagar to Abraham, from whom came Ishmael. In the meantime, Sarah remained barren. The second obstacle to her faith is her age. Eventually, she moved past barrenness to the physical impossibility of having a baby. Gen. 17:17 says she was ninety years old. If you add to these two reasons, a third would have to be reason. In Gen. 18, three men (angels) visit Abraham. They repeat God's promise (Gen. 17:15) and tell him that Sarah will have a son. Well, Sarah is listening from inside the tent. Do you remember what she does? She laughs, saying to herself, "**After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?**"

Here we have an example of God making a promise to Abraham and Sarah and then allowing the time to go so long that there is no physical way for a child to come from them. What obstacles to belief in the promise of God! Yet, through all of these a child will be born and they will name him Isaac, which means "*he laughs.*" It is interesting to me that every time Abraham and Sarah

call his name, they are reminded of God's faithfulness, his "laughing" at the thought of Him EVER breaking a promise. So, what are some things we can learn from this truth?

Application. There are always obstacles to faith. The world questions the validity of such promises, upon which the gospel of Christ is laid. There are questions of authority with the Bible. There are questions of history about the validity of the Bible's truth. There are questions about the virgin birth, the sinlessness of Christ, the miracles he performed, the resurrection, the ascension, etc. When it comes to many of your jobs as Christians, you are often tested in your moral basis, even to the point of losing your job. The kids at school say, "What?!" "*You are a Christian?*" Yet, the Bible says we live by faith in the promise of God. Look back at 11:1-3: **"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible."**

Application: I believe there is always doubting mixed with faith. With Sarah's laughter there was doubting and mistrust. And God rebukes her saying, **"Is there anything too hard for the Lord!"** When God appeared to Moses and promises to deliver Israel from Egypt through him, what does he say, "*I can't speak very well.*" Examples abound. But, to doubt is not unbelief. In fact, I am more weary of those who do not doubt. Even in Sarah's laughter, she still believes. Even in Moses' excuses, he still believes.

Application: Faith, at varying levels, doesn't come immediately. Sarah laughed. But after this her faith becomes more evident. This means we must not give up on ourselves, or on those around us who hear the message. There is often great conflict before faith comes, grows, and is developed in a person's life. Even in this passage with the other woman, Rahab. She is an outright liar. Yet, her faith is highlighted. Time does not allow us today to speak of all the conflicts that come in the life of faith. Therefore, brothers and sisters, press on. Don't fall away.

2. The effects of faith. Faith is powerful. There are many effects. But notice the physical effect of faith in Sarah's life, which is merely a picture of the spiritual vitality of its power. Look at v. 11: **"By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age . . ."** Here we see a physical miracle. In her old age, she is given the power to give birth. Her body was given the ability to do what was impossible. What strength faith gives to this woman! Think about it. She was given a new womb! New estrogen, testosterone, progesterone! All kinds of vitality around her womb, not to mention the rest of her body! Wow! We only see this particular example a few times in the Bible that I can think of. But, the truth for us is that the effects of faith are great and powerful to the working of God's purpose to fulfill his promise..

Jesus says, **"all things are possible for those that believe"** (Mark 9:23). Look over at Heb. 11:32-35: **"And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again**

to a better life . . .” A.W. Pink says, “*What is more glorifying to God than a confident looking unto Him to work in and through us that which mere nature cannot produce.*” Brothers and sisters, I do not know the details of what is in store for us. But, if we believe the promises of God by faith, we will do great things of faith, even if they are not seen by the world. And, we will be given strength to perform what God commands.

I also think of the verses in Isaiah that says, “**He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint**” (Is. 40:29-31). These verses go so well with Paul’s words from 2 Cor. 4: “**Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.**” And, “**But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.**” (2 Cor. 4:7–10).

At the end of the day, “**God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus**” (Phil. 4:19).

3. The constancy of faith. With Sarah she received the promise that a child would come from her womb. She believed. She fell pregnant, still believing. And then the child was actually born. She continues by faith through this entire process. From promise to fulfillment there is a constant faith. Ladies, if you try to put yourself in her place as an old pregnant woman what would possible thoughts be? Miscarriage, birth defects, the thought of a still birth, will my body make it to the end, etc. Times of pregnancy can be the most difficult times for worry and stress and doubting in the life of a mother (Isn’t this true?). Men, we do not speak from experience, but we live in the same house. And we aren’t told of Sarah’s specific thoughts, but we do see a constancy in her faith from promise to fulfillment. (Now, she didn’t receive the ultimate fulfillment of the God’s “city” (v. 10). Verse 13 says “**These all died in faith, not having received the things promised.**” But, throughout her life, there was constancy in faith.

It is the same with us today, with those who have faith. No matter what comes our way, we press on. This is one of the reasons Hebrews is written, to encourage endurance. Look back at 10:32-39: “**But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. For, “Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.”**”

This is a big theme in the Book of Hebrews. “Keep going.” “Be constant in your faith.” And this is what we see with all the examples in Heb. 11. Jesus says, **“those who endure to the end will be saved”** (Mark 13:13). As Christians we endure. And sometimes it may feel like we cannot. But remember Is. 42:3: A **“bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench . . .”** Though small, God will supply the power of faith to endure. And this is what we see with Sarah.

As we take the Lord’s Supper today, I think of Phil. 4:19 which says, **“And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”** Or 2 Pet. 1:3, which says, **“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence . . .”** The object of faith is always the person of Christ, who is the fulfillment of all God’s promises. When we take the bread and the juice today, we are picturing the truth that “without Christ, we can do nothing!” (John 15). We must remember in Heb. 11, they looked forward to the promise. Verse 26 says of Moses, **“He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt.”** Today, we look back to the promise. At the same time, we look forward as they did, to the “heavenly city.” And we take the Lord’s Supper **“*til he comes*”** (1 Cor. 11:26).

4) The foundation of faith. Look at the 2nd part of v. 11 again: **“since she considered him faithful who had promised.”** It wasn’t the promise itself that ultimately motivated her. It was the God behind the promise. Young people, why do you trust your parents? You trust them because they have been faithful to provide for you, to help you, to teach you, etc. And when they ask you to something difficult or to trust them in a decision you may disagree with. What do you do? Hopefully, you obey. But why do you obey. You obey because you know your parents. You know they only have your good in mind. And they are older and wiser.

In the same kind of way, Sarah (though she laughed) trusted God. This is faith. Even when she could not see HOW God’s promise could be fulfilled. She trusted God and his promise. A.W. Pink says, *“She did not look at God’s promises through the mist of interposing obstacles, but she viewed the difficulties and hindrances through the clear light of God’s promises.”* Often, if we will trust God, we must learn to crucify the question of “How.” In Heb. 11 we see great obstacles and great trust. And if we think about to the history of the gospel of Christ, how could we ever believe. The obstacles are abundant. And think about what God does. The Messiah is born from a nobody family from a nowhere town, from a young mother, who is only betrothed. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, the incarnation, the sinless life, the hidden humility, the laying down of his life, the resurrection, the appearances, the ascension, and everything in between. No wonder it takes faith to believe such things. But, our God is faithful. We can trust Him!

5) The fruit of faith. I will only briefly mention the fruit of Sarah’s faith. Look at v. 12: **“Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, (one man and one woman) were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.”** This woman, Sarah, believed God. And though she was barren and old, beyond the age of children, she bore a son, Isaac. He was a miracle son. And, through this son would be born another son, and another, and another, until we come to the fulfillment of all God’s promises, the Son of God, the man Christ Jesus. I think of the first promise in Gen. 3:15:

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

Here we are today. And the kingdom is growing. More and more and more will believe as we go and make disciples. God is fulfilling ALL his promises in the person and work of Christ. And this we celebrate today in the Lord's Supper.