



“He Laughs”

Genesis 17-18

Sooke Baptist Church

Sunday, November 13, 2022, 10am
also on YouTube & Facebook Live Stream



03:00

Coffee/Question:

“Laughter is carbonated holiness.”

Agree? Disagree? Explain.

Recap:

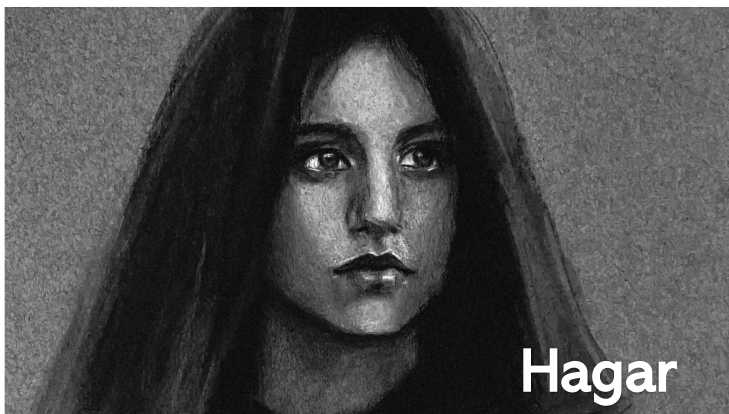
Abram and Sarai moved to Canaan when they were 75 and 65 – Genesis 12:4. After Abram and Lot separated, God appeared to Abram and entered into a covenant with him, whose details are recorded in Genesis 15.

It was a covenant whose terms rested entirely upon God.

In that covenant, God promised Abram that he would have descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, which meant that Abram and Sarai, who were still childless at that point, would have a son in their old age.

God further promised that he would give the land of Canaan to Abram and his descendants, but this transference.... would not happen until the fourth generation, because the sin of the Amorites, the people who were living in the land at that time... had not yet reached its full measure.

After this, ten years go by... and still, Abram and Sarai were childless. In Genesis 16, at a point of desperation Sarai took matters into her own hands. Sarai had an Egyptian maidservant, that more than likely she obtained as a gift from Pharaoh after the fiasco that Abram got them into. You can read about that in Genesis 12.



Hagar, at this point, was probably in her late teens or early 20's. Sarai convinced herself that she would help God out... by giving her maidservant, Hagar, to Abram as his second wife... with the hope that Hagar would become pregnant and bear a child that Abram could claim as his own.

Hagar had no say in Sarai's plan. Nor did it seem that Abram was consulted. What Sarai did was wrong on some many levels... and it resulted in great heartache and produced lasting conflict that has endured to our day.

Once Hagar conceived, Sarai realized just how bad her plan had been... and it was then she directed her frustration at Abram. Abram in turn, tried to deflect Sarai's anger of himself and onto Hagar, saying to Sarai, "Your servant is in your hands. Do with her whatever you think is best."

What Sarai did was mistreat Hagar so badly that Hagar ran away.



It was beyond dangerous for a woman to travel alone in those days. The fact that Hagar did so tells us just how desperate her circumstances were, that she would risk rape and death, rather than stay another day with Sarai and Abram.

For Abram and Sarai, this was a dark moment in their lives.

As Hagar trudged along the road to Egypt, she had an encounter with God, who assured her that she was both seen and heard.

God commanded Hagar to go back to Sarai.

He also told her that she would give birth to a boy and that she was to name him Ishmael, which meant “God hears.”

This encounter with God was so profound that Hagar, in addition to immediately obeying God, also named the LORD – “The God who sees me.”



In chapter 17, thirteen years have gone by.

At the age of 99, God again appeared to Abram and restated the terms of the covenant he had made with him more than 20 years earlier in Genesis 15.

As the LORD spoke with Abram, he changed his name to Abraham, which meant “father of many nations,” because the time had come... for the child to be born.

In the earlier covenant of Genesis 15, all the terms had rested upon God. But here in Genesis 17, God required Abraham and all male descendants to be circumcised and to bear in their physical bodies, the mark of the covenant.

This is what we studied a month ago on Sunday, October 16. My notes are on the church website if you weren't here and wish to review them.

Today we pick up the story in the middle of chapter 17.

Look at 17:15-16.

As the LORD had done with Abraham, so he did with Sarai – he changed her name which was an act of astounding grace in light of the Hagar tragedy.

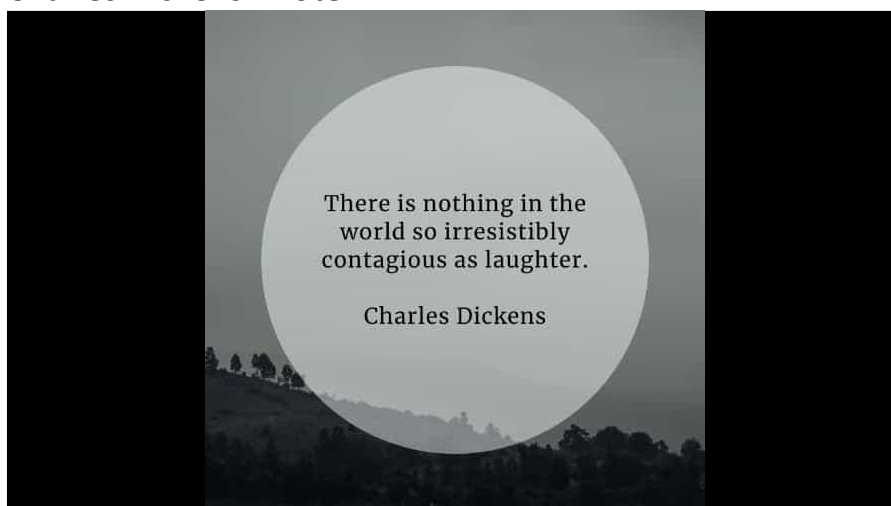
The LORD again assured Abraham that Sarah would have a child from her own body; that she would be the mother of nations; and that kings of many peoples would come from her.

As we read this narrative and remember the events that had preceded it, we are reminded that the grace of God is never earned, nor credited to a person on the basis of their worthiness.

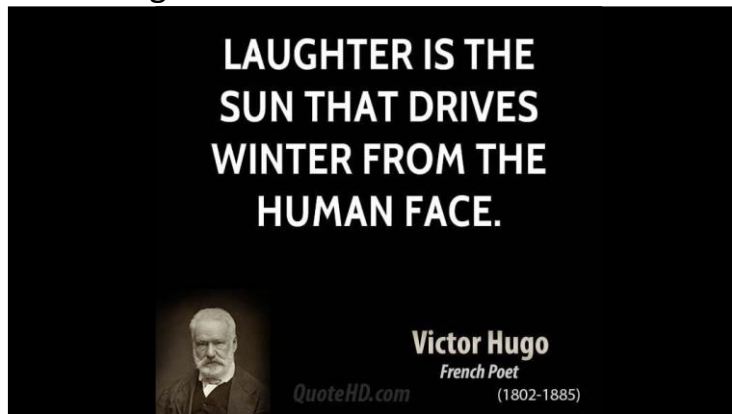
Look at Abraham's response - **17:17.**

Abraham fell facedown and laughed.

Charles Dickens wrote...



Victor Hugo wrote...



The question we must ask, is in what way did Abraham laugh?
Was his laughter the kind of laughter we read of in our call to worship?
Was it a laughter that delighted in the goodness of God?

“When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter...”

Psalm 126

The Scripture tells us what Abraham was thinking at that moment:
“Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?”

Do these questions reveal his laughter to be of doubt?

What are we to make of his request to God in the very next verse?

Look at 17:18

Abraham loved his son Ishmael.

Was he subtly suggesting to God, “I already have a son. Why not make Ishmael the son of blessing?”

What we do know with certainty... is that God quickly responded to Abraham’s suggestion/question.

Look at 17:19a.

Yes!Yes, what?

Look at 17:20.

Yes, I will bless Ishmael.

But... look back at v.19.... Yes, but.... your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac.

Ishmael was not the child of promise.

Ishmael was not the one through whom all nations would be blessed.

Do you know why?

John Piper explains – Ishmael was not the son of promise because his birth was humanly possible.

The future which God had foretold of a descendant who would bless the nations, would not come about because of Abram and Sarai's own ingenuity.

The son of promise would be born because of God's sovereign grace.

The son of promise would require God to do the impossible.

God would have to supernaturally intervene in the body of Sarah, to bring her dead womb to life, and then further enable her body to nourish the child when he was born.

The child who would be born to Sarah and Abraham was to be called "Isaac," which means, "he laughs."

Look at 17:21.

For 24 years Abraham and Sarah had held onto God's promise that a child would be born to them.

But they never knew when.

Now, for the first time, God spoke to Abraham a date.

The promised son would be born "by this time next year."

When he finished speaking with Abraham, the Scripture says in v.22, that God went up from him.

Was Abraham's laughter, one of delight or one of skepticism?

Look at 17:17 – Abraham fell facedown.

This is a response of worship, one of submission.

Look at 17:23-27.

This is a response of obedience and trust.

Now look with me at Romans 4:17-24.

Romans 4:17-18

As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

Who... did Abraham believe in; who... do we believe in?

v.17 – the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.

How did Abraham believe?

Romans 4:17-18

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Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

v.18 – against all hope, in hope he believed.

Did Abraham laugh because his faith was weak?

Romans 4:19-21

Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

v.19 – Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact...
What fact did Abraham face?

Romans 4:19-21

Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

v.19b – that his body was as good as dead – since he was about a hundred years old – and that Sarah's womb was also dead.

What was happening in the heart of Abraham as he lay facedown before the LORD?

Romans 4:19-21

Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

v.20 – he was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God.

v.21 – he was fully persuaded that God had the power to do what he had promised.

Although the text in Genesis 17 doesn’t say this, the Spirit of God through Paul said to the Roman believers...

Romans 4:22-24

This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.” The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

v.22 – this is why Abraham was credited with righteousness.

This is true of all... who believe in God.
Believe what?

Romans 4:22-24

This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.” The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us **who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.**

v.24 – believe in him who raised Jesus from the dead.

Righteousness is credited, not earned, but freely given to all who believe in the God of the impossible – the God who raises the dead.

This was Abraham.

But what about Sarah?

A very short time after the events of Genesis 17, the LORD again appeared to Abraham – **look at 18:1-2.**

We will discover in Genesis 19 who the two men with the LORD were – they were angels.

The part that we want to focus on today... begins with the question, which the LORD asked in **18:9.**



“Where is your wife Sarah?”

I’m uncertain if this was a question of location – where is Sarah in your camp? Or whether this was a question of her response to the promise God had made a short time ago regarding her giving birth to a son within the year.

Abraham answered as if it were a question of location - **18:9b.**



Sarah was unseen to the visitors, but she heard everything being said.

Look at 18:10.

We know this appearing of God happened shortly after God appeared to Abraham in Genesis 17... because the stated time frame hasn't changed – “about this time next year your wife Sarah will have a son.”

Now look at 18:11.

These details were well known to both Abraham and Sarah.

But they are restated to impress upon the reader the sheer human impossibility of the things that were about to happen.

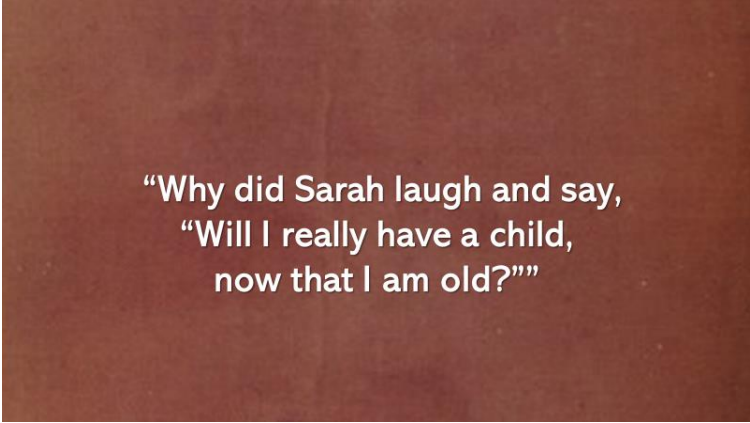
- Abraham and Sarah were very old.
- Sarah was past the age of child-bearing.

Look at Sarah's response - **18:12.**

Was her laughter one of delight in God, a response of worship, or was it one of skepticism?

The response of the LORD answers this question.

Look at 18:13 – the LORD asked...



“Why did Sarah laugh and say,
“Will I really have a child,
now that I am old?””

This response by God emphasized to Sarah, what she and Abraham had learned of God thirteen years earlier – the LORD sees and he hears all things – not just the words one speaks, but also one’s thoughts.

I love it that even when God confronts doubt within his people, he does so, not to shame or belittle, but to grow one’s confidence in him.

This is why he had returned so quickly to the camp of Abraham and Sarah.

Look at the incredible question, that was directed at both Abraham and Sarah. The question asked by the LORD in verse 14 is not really a question, but a statement of who he is.



Is there anything God cannot do?

God had led Abraham and Sarah to Canaan.

He had rescued them from the Egypt fiasco.

He had guided the decision of who got what land when Abram and Lot separated.

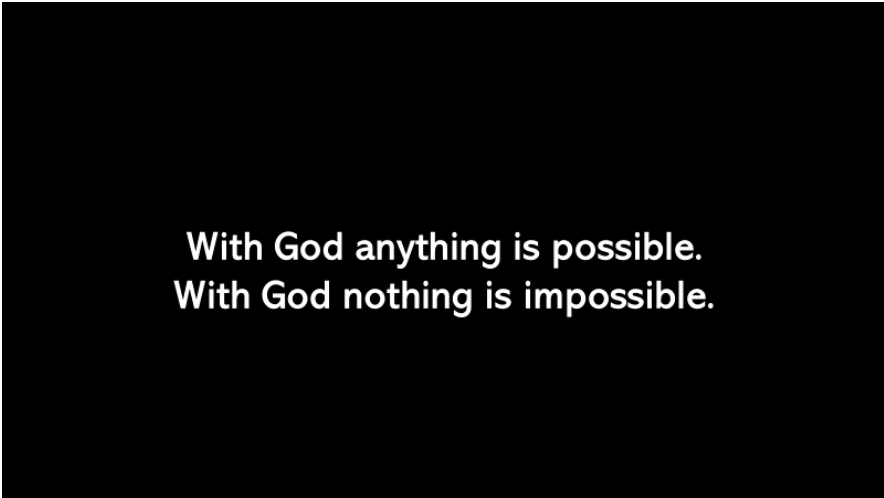
He had given Abram success when he went to rescue Lot from the five kings who had taken him captive.

There was instance after instance where God had done great things for them.

But we need to think on an even greater scale.
Is anything too hard for the LORD?
Think back to the first chapter of the book of Genesis.

God spoke, let there be... and there was light.
God spoke, let there be... and the sky separated from the ocean.
God spoke, let there be... and there was dry ground.
God spoke, let there be... and the land produced vegetation, seed-bearing plants and trees that bear fruit of all kinds.
God spoke, let there be...and the sun, the moon and the stars appeared.
God spoke, let there be... and the waters teemed with living creatures, as did the sky with creatures that had the capacity to be fruitful and to increase in number
God spoke, let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds... livestock, creatures that move along the ground and wild animals... and it was so.

If God can speak the universe and all living things into existence, then for him to enable an old woman beyond the age of childbearing, to conceive and bear a child, was not an impossible thing.



**With God anything is possible.
With God nothing is impossible.**

It was not just Sarah and Abraham who needed reminding of this truth.
So do we.

For the second time that particular day, God graciously impressed upon the hearts of this couple... **look at 18:14b** – you will have a child within a year.

This passage teaches us that living by faith... the pursuing a long obedience in the same direction will have its ebbs and flows.

Were it not for the sustaining grace of Jesus that upholds us, and for Jesus' ongoing, constant prayers to the Father on our behalf, who of us would still be found faithful?

This passage teaches us...

Our hope is not in the strength of our faith, but in the strength of the One we trust in.

We believe in the God who does impossible things.

We trust the God who raises the dead!

Our LORD will never let us go, and no one can snatch out of his hand.

Our salvation from start to finish is of the LORD.

The Spirit of God would have us meditate upon the truth of Philippians 1:6.

He would have this truth seep into our heart and mind.

Philippians 1:6

He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

This certainty is not an excuse for us to be careless in our walk of faith, or to let doubt move in and make its residence in our heart.

Rather this Scripture assures us of the LORD's faithfulness.

He will finish in us what he began.

And so, in the word of Hebrews 12:1-2, “we throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. We run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus... so that we will not grow weary and lose heart.”

If you have been born of the Spirit, if you truly are a daughter or a son of God, then the LORD, as a good Father, will not walk away from you, just as he did not walk away from Sarah.

He will confront you as he did Sarah, if confronting is what you need. And even when we try to wiggle out of his convicting word, even if we were to lie to him, as Sarah did, as he did not let her go, nor will he let us go.

He is committed to finish in us what he began.

What we will see when Isaac was born is that Sarah’s laughter which had been a laughter of doubt, was transformed into a laughter of sheer delight in the goodness of God.

This is who the LORD is.

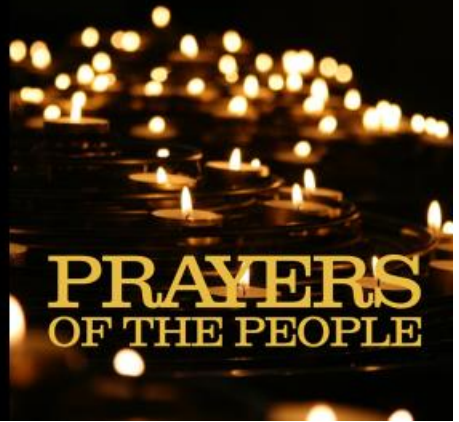
This is how he faithfully works in the lives of his own.

This is how he will finish in us what he began.

For deacons to serve SBC.

“God, we ask that you would reveal to your church the names of those to whom this ministry can be entrusted.

We further ask that you would confirm your call in the hearts of those to be chosen.”



We ask on behalf of the Colombia Team

- protect their hearts, minds and bodies
- give them the ability to listen and speak
- grant them boldness and favor

We ask on behalf of El Redil Caldas

- that the church would be built up and encouraged by this visit

We ask on behalf of the people of Caldas

- that you would open hearts and minds to see Jesus and trust in him



We ask you to bless the children.

- may the recipients of these gifts grasp how good and generous you are
- may those who share the gospel with the recipients of these gifts do so in the strength of the Holy Spirit
- may you open hearts to trust in Jesus

