

Have you ever thought about what it is that makes us laugh?

- We laugh at puns and word plays.



Microwaves.

- We laugh at funny stories.



The story is told that Walter took his wife Ethel to the state fair every year, and every time he would say to her, "Ethel, you know that I'd love to go for a ride in that helicopter."

But Ethel would always reply, "I know that Walter, but that helicopter ride is 50 dollars, and 50 dollars is 50 dollars."

When Walter was 87 years old, he said to Ethel, "Ethel, if don't ride that helicopter this year, I may never get another chance."

Once again Ethel replied, "Walter, you know that helicopter ride is 50 dollars, and 50 dollars is 50 dollars."

The helicopter pilot happened to overhear their conversation and said, "Listen folks, I'll make a deal with you. I'll take both of you for a ride; and if both of you can stay quiet for the entire ride and not say a word, I won't charge you! But if you say just one word, it's 50 dollars."

Walter and Ethel agreed and up they went in the helicopter.

The pilot did his most death-defying moves and tricks over and over again, but not a word was said by either Walter or Ethel.

When they finally landed, the pilot turned to Walter and said, "Wow! I've got to hand it to you. I did everything I could to get you to scream or shout, but you didn't. I'm really impressed!"

Walter replied, "Well to be honest I almost said something when Ethel fell out, but, you know, 50 dollars is 50 dollars!"

We laugh at situations when the unexpected happens.



Lunch at Dona Emma's.

We also laugh when we are nervous...



... or when we are overtired...



Sometime laughter is cruel... when it mocks another person because of their appearance or because of something they did or said or wore.



But we also... laugh... and cry... and sometimes do both at the same time... at moments of sheer joy... like at a wedding... or the birth of a child... or a significant anniversary... or when a long season of waiting comes to an end.

This is the kind of laughter... that of joy... that I believe visited the home of Sarah and Abraham in Genesis 21.

Let's read today's passage.



v.1 – Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said...

While we know this to be true... it is important to say it... Genesis 21:1 is not the only time the Bible identifies God as being gracious.

After rescuing Israel from Egypt... and after entering into covenant with the nation... after giving to them his law and commandments... the people made an idol which they worshiped when Moses was delayed in coming down from Mount Sinai.

When he saw what had happened, in anger, Moses threw the two tablets which God himself had written upon... to the ground, breaking them into pieces.

After the sin of the nation had been dealt with and the idol ground into powder and scattered, the LORD told Moses to chisel out two new tablets like the first ones... and to meet him on top of Mount Sinai.

There God came down in the cloud and proclaimed his name to Moses...

Exodus 34:6
The LORD, the LORD,
the compassionate and gracious God,
slow to anger,
abounding in love and faithfulness,
maintaining love to thousands,
and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.
Yet he does not
leave the guilty unpunished...

The context of this statement is remarkable.

The nation of Israel had just committed spiritual treason and grievous moral unfaithfulness.

And yet... God declared to Moses.... that he is the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God.

The LORD was gracious not because Israel was deserving.

He was gracious... because he had entered into a covenant with the nation to be their Rescuer... and not just their Rescuer, but ultimately, through them and their descendants... to be the Rescuer of all nations.

This is who the LORD is.

Psalm 103:8, 10
The LORD is compassionate and gracious...
He does not treat us as our sins deserve or
repay us according to our iniquities.

The Bible tells the story of God's relentless pursuit after... a hard-hearted and rebellious humanity... across the long centuries. But why does God do so?

Because he is compassionate and gracious.
Because he loves the world of humanity.
Because it is the glory of God to save sinners.

v.1b – ...and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised.

What had the LORD promised Sarah and her husband Abraham?
He had said in Genesis 18:14...

Genesis 18:14

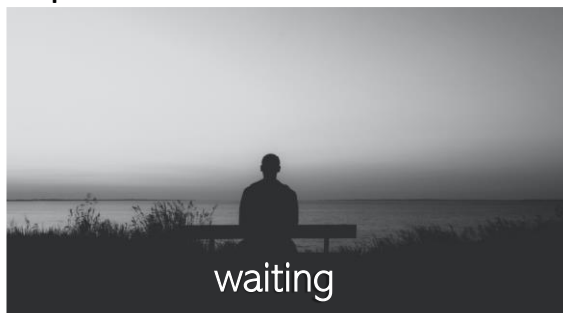
“I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son.”

The LORD always does what he says he will do.

But this passage in Genesis 21 does remind us, and inform us... that with every promise made by God.... there is always a timeline.



Sarah, as we know from our study in the book of Genesis... hadn't just waited a year; she had waited 25 years... and during those 25 years she had aged... she had gone through menopause... and with that change, what God had promised, in her mind... went from being possible to impossible.



Are you waiting on God for something?

Has it happened to you yet... that your mind and heart toys with the thought that what you are waiting for will never happen ... or that God has forgotten about you or doesn't care?

In such times, and they will visit us... this is the truth that God would speak into our hearts and minds, to strengthen our resolve and to give us hope...



The triune God uses the passing of minutes and hours and days and weeks and years and decades ... to bring about at the moment he determines is best... the things he has purposed to do.

In this regard...



For in the waiting, while it may seem to you and I... that nothing is happening... in the waiting... God is actively at work.

But at what?

- To make known his wisdom and beauty and power.
- To build his church.
- Both to renovate and to forge... the characters of those he has saved.

This is what God had been doing in Sarah... and Abraham... all those long, long years of waiting.
He was forging in them a godly character.

This also is what God is doing in each one of us who follows Jesus.
The One who justifies, also sanctifies and ultimately will redeem the body, soul and spirit of every one of his own.

After 25 years of waiting... for Sarah and Abraham... there came a moment, when the waiting ended... a moment when Sarah became pregnant... a moment when she gave birth to a son... just as God had promised.

A year before this happened the LORD had appeared to Abraham.
This was when the LORD changed Abram's name... to Abraham... because God said, **"I have made you a father of many nations."**

This was when the LORD changed Sarai's name... to Sarah... because God said, **"She will be the mother of nations.... and from her will come kings of peoples."**

This was when the LORD told Abraham to name the son to be born...

**"... you will call him
Isaac."**

Genesis 17:19

The name Isaac means ...

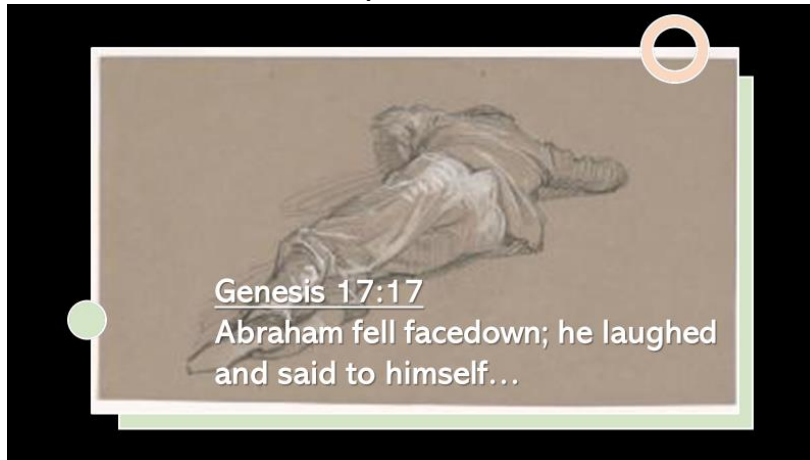
“... you will call him
‘he laughs.’”

Genesis 17:19

Who is the... “he” ... referring to?

Is it referring to Abraham?

Because when God spoke to Abraham in Genesis 17...



“Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old?

Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?”

Or could it be that the “he” being referred to... is the LORD?

I think we find the answer in what Sarah said in Genesis 21:6.



Isn't this an incredible phrase?



The same God who had caused Sarah to wait... 25 years...
...until ... becoming pregnant became an impossibility...

...the same God who permitted disappointment, doubt, questioning,
and possibly anger to visit her heart and mind...

... was the same God who carried her... and protected her... and finally
brought her waiting to an end...

The One who had made Sarah wait... in his fullness of time... brought
her dead womb to life, and enlivened her physical body that she might
conceive, carry and give birth ... and look at what Sarah added in verse 7
... nurse a child.

It was the LORD... who brought his laughter...to her heart...

Sarah didn't have the Scriptures.

But the LORD who was faithfully present with her is the same in every
generation and forever – he never changes.

As Psalm 34:17-18 says...

Psalm 34:17-18

**The righteous cry out
and the LORD hears them;
he delivers them
from all their troubles.**

**The LORD is close
to the brokenhearted
and saves those
who are crushed in spirit.**

It is the LORD, as Jesus promised in John 16:20, referencing the prophet Isaiah... who turns the sorrow and grief of his people... into joy.

**Isaiah 51:11,
Gladness and joy will overtake
[those the LORD has rescued]
and sorrow and sighing
will flee away.**

Scott Hubbard writes,

“Believing that God will turn our tears into shouts of joy does not mean that we no longer grieve. But it does mean that we cling to the LORD through the pain, and let every calamity crash us into his arms.

The LORD would have his own learn to lament to him, rather than curse his name.”

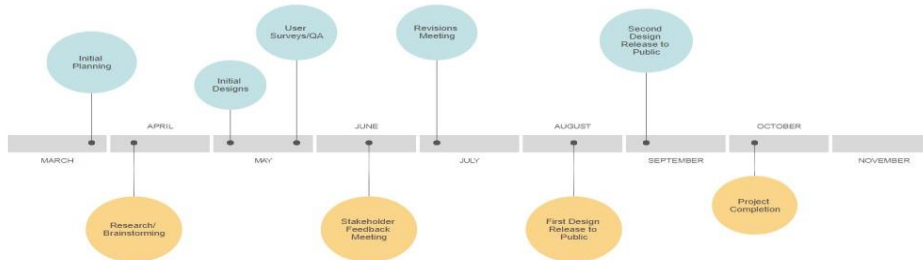
Scott Hubbard

“In such times, when God is silent, when no answer comes, and he takes us far beyond what we thought was possible to endure, this we know by faith: as we wait for God, a moment will come, as it did for Sarah and Abraham, when sorrow and sighing will flee away; when gladness and joy will overtake us; when the Lord will bring his laughter to us.”

Scott Hubbard

This promise...that sorrow and sighing will flee away... and gladness and joy will overtake... is certain.

What is uncertain... is the LORD's timeline... of when.

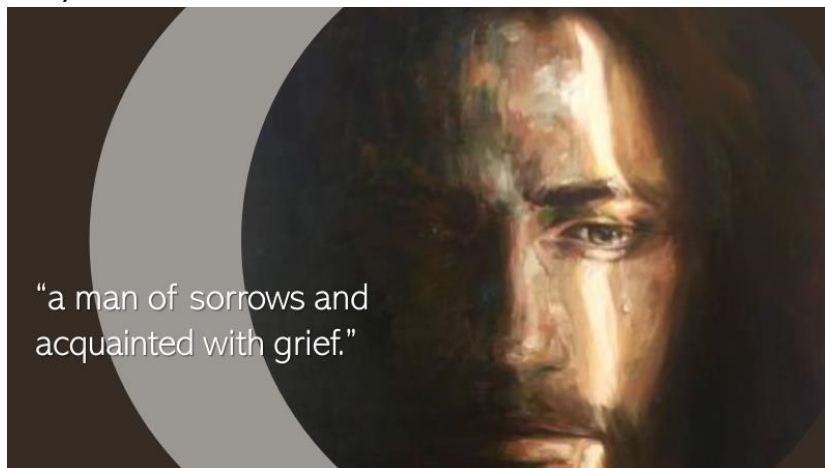


In the wisdom of God, who does all things well, he often leads his people into a long obedience... in the same direction... where they learn to trust him, in the difficult times, and yes, even in the darkest of times.

Since the cross, by the power of the Spirit who births a new nature in all who trust in Jesus, the same Holy Spirit is actively transforming every follower of Jesus... into his likeness.

Because the passage for today... speaks of laughter, I want to remind you of who Jesus is.

Yes, it was said of him that he was...



This description might cause a person to think that Jesus was joyless... and heavily burdened by relentless troubles.

It is true, that in the garden of Gethsemane... and on the cross Jesus was crushed.

But we must remember... that like his Father, whom he made known.. Jesus was a man of joy.

Isaac Adams wrote...

**“Jesus served,
not as a slave,
but as a son.”**

Isaac Adams

The Spirit of the triune God did not lead Jesus each day ... with his arm twisted behind him, or with chains on his hands and feet, or a collar on his neck or a firm grip on his ear twisting it to gain compliance.

It is true as Hebrews 12:2 says ...that as a Son... Jesus endured the cross. But do you know why Jesus did so?



Because of “the joy set before him.”

The joy set before Jesus was the salvation of the fallen sons and daughters of Adam and Eve.

The joy set before him was the defeat of sin, death and the devil.
The joy set before him was the joy of new creation.
The joy set before him was the glory of the triune God who brings sinners into fellowship with himself.

As the LORD brought laughter to Sarah, we hear the words of Jesus spoken to all of his followers in John 15:11.

This is his will for you and me.

This is what he will bring into our lives at the Father's fullness of time.



Jesus gives to his own, his joy.

The joy of Him for whom nothing is impossible.

The joy of Him who has overcome.

The joy of Him who will return and make all things new.

In this present time, the gift of Jesus' laughter is a glimpse into glory; it is as Isaac Adams says, "the sound of heaven's joy made audible."