

Promises Kept – *Genesis 21:1-7*

Introduction – In *Mary Poppins*, the lovable character, Uncle Albert, welcomes Bert and the children, and all who will laugh with him; to laugh and be lifted up, above the ground. We laugh at silly jokes with the surprise twists, the unexpected pun, the curveball. Laughter is hard to control when it comes upon you. Laughter is contagious as well. And laughter is the precious name of the promised son, Isaac. His name is precious for it is the gospel, it is the trajectory, the eschatology, of the people of God. Sarah had laughed in cynical unbelief. Now Sarah laughs with exuberant joy at the unexpected. Sarah's laughter is contagious; "*all who hear will laugh with me.*" Consider this passage of promises kept and laughter forevermore.

God Does What God Promises (vv1-2) – Just as He promised, God visited Sarah, and she conceived and bore Abraham a son. Three times Moses writes that this was done just as God had said He would. Paul says that God cannot lie (Titus 1:2, Heb 6:18) and that all His promises are "Yes" and "Amen" in Christ (2 Cor 1:20). God's Word is full of promises and they are words that are for us while we are waiting, as this couple did – for decades. Read God's Word for it is the place where we meditate on His promises. His Word is the power by which we wait patiently on the Lord with faith (Psalm 40:1, 25:5, 27:14). Jesus said He will build His church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail (Matt 16:18). His Word tells us to be content because He promises "*I will never leave you nor forsake you*" (Heb 13:5-6). His Word is full of promises that help us wait for their fulfillment. More on that in a minute.

Faith and Obedience (vv3-4) – With the promise in their arms, the laughter of God, obedience is rendered with gladness. Abraham obeys God and names his son Isaac. Abraham obeys God and circumcises his son on the eighth day. When we see God's daily mercies, we are better encouraged to obey His ways (Psalm 119:34). The more we understand Who God is and what He has done, the more we find ourselves obeying Him gladly. Grumpy saints are saints who don't understand what they have been saved from and the glory they are being fitted for.

The Laughter of God in the Greater Isaac – The ultimate promise is found in the giving of His Son, Jesus, God in the flesh, choosing to be born in humility, to die in scandalous shame, and to be raised from the dead by the laughter of God (Psalm 2:1-4). The laughter prophesied was the power of God raising Jesus and making a mockery of the principalities and powers (Col 2:15). And it is in this passage in shadows. Isaac and Jesus are sons promised by God. The mothers are both visited by God. Both are named by God. Both sons are miraculous births. And of course, Isaac is the promised seed of Abraham through whom eventually came the True Promised Seed that would be the blessing to all nations.

Laughter: The Transforming Grace of God (vv5-7) – Abraham had laughed over the notion that Sarah would have a son (Gen 17:17-19). Sarah had laughed in the tent and got caught in her cynicism (Gen 18:10-15). It took 25 years to see the promise come to pass. During that time his name is Abram, "exalted father," and later Abraham, "father of a multitude." His name is a joke. But the joke is on them – and us (Gal 3:26, 29, Rev 7:9-10).

However, "bring on the joke, even the joke on us" we might say. For this laughter lifts us out of hopelessness. We are called to believe in things we cannot yet see and cannot fathom how they will come about. Abraham and Sarah were too old (v5, 7). But God teaches us they shunned the hopelessness (Rom 4:19-21, Heb 11:8-12).

A Mature Faith is Grown Through Patient Faithfulness – There are a couple of ways to look at this word, "faith." There is faith, the size of a mustard seed, which can throw a mountain into the sea. The point there is that the size of one's faith is not important, it is the object of that faith. Simple faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world and your Savior is all that is necessary to be saved (Rom 10:9-10). But then there is faith that is tested so that we mature (James 1:2-3). We are to count it all joy (aka "laugh") at the trials because our faith will only grow because of them. Consider what kind of faith those years of waiting through many trials Abraham went through. What kind of faith did that build into Abraham? (Spoiler Alert) – Will Abraham trust God when called on to offer up his son on an altar?

What are your trials right now and are those trials increasing your joy or your grumbling? God will continue to reveal to us how we act like atheists instead of children who know their Father's exhaustive sovereignty. As God completes the good work He has begun in you, there will always be trials, testing your faith in the sovereign goodness of God when you cannot make any sense of what is going on.

Eschatological Laughter – “*and all who hear will laugh with me.*” Sarah is referring to her specific circumstances in time and space. But good Bible readers know this is also pointing to the joy of the people of God through the coming of the Greater Isaac. Laughter is contagious and the joy of the gospel is spreading over all the earth. In the days when we cannot see it, we are to believe the promises, and so do not tether your faith on current news stories but on the Word which is true. The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord. The kingdoms of this earth have become the kingdoms of our Lord. The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, like a peck of leaven, like a small stone that grows into a mountain. Jesus will reign at the right hand of God until all His enemies have been made a footstool and then He will return. The gates of Hades will not prevail. Jesus saw Satan fall like lightning. And He will turn to His faithful at the resurrection with glorious laughter and say, “*well done, good and faithful servant...enter into the **joy** of your Lord.*”

The Laughter of Eternity – If Isaac is laughter and the Greater Isaac is the God-man of laughter, and laughter comes because of unexpected turns in a story that surprise and delight us, then there is an eternity of laughter on the way. “*When the LORD brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, And our tongue with singing*” Psalm 126. Today’s uncertainties are real. You cannot see your tomorrow. The trials, sufferings, persecutions, and setbacks are hard, heavy, and long. We wait and we wait, and we wait – it seems – “How long, O Lord?” But there is a pun in it all, there is surprising glory around the corner you cannot see, you cannot fathom. And when it comes, you will laugh. “*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*” (Rom 8:18).

Jesus knew it was coming and so He set His face like flint to Jerusalem. God instructs us to do the same, to follow Him and the great cloud of witnesses, like Abraham and Sarah, to run the race, see Jesus and the joy that was set before Him (Heb 12:1-2). He was looking through the cross and looking at the joy before Him. He laughed as He crossed the finish line. So will the world He purchased. So will you if you will run the race of faith.

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