Genesis 18:12–18 — Sarah's Laugh, the Friend of God, and the Blessing of All Nations

Bible Study · Genesis 18

Sarah's Laugh — Unbelief, Denial, and the Rebuke

Genesis 18:12–15 gives us the second mention of laughter in scripture — but unlike Abraham's laugh of joy in chapter 17, Sarah's is a laugh of unbelief. She had heard from within the tent that she should bear a son, and she laughed within herself, saying: after I am waxed old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also? She was looking at the resources of nature. When the arrangement with Hagar had been made earlier, Abraham was still capable of fathering children — the proof of it was Ishmael. But she knew she could not conceive, so that had to be the way God would bring forth the heir. When that failed, she saw that both of them were past the resources of nature. Abraham had faith and rejoiced. She laughed in unbelief.

The Lord did not address her directly. He said to Abraham: wherefore did Sarah laugh? There is an order of responsibility in the human family that God has made, and so the head is asked about it. Abraham had not even heard the laugh — she had laughed in her heart — yet the Lord had heard it and knew both the laugh and its content. She then denied: I laughed not, for she was afraid. And He said, Nay, but thou didst laugh. There was no arguing with that. God had the last word — as He will with every soul. The man at the wedding feast without a garment was speechless. Here, there was nothing further to say. The rebuke was direct and gracious. One can be thankful for such a direct rebuke; not everyone who laughs at God's word receives one.

There is a contrast worth drawing between Sarah and Hannah. Both desired a son. But Hannah's exercise was spiritual throughout — she could not go up and do something about the evil at Shiloh, but she could pray, and she vowed to give the child to the Lord. She was not thinking of her own pleasure but of what was needed. Here Sarah, eavesdropping from within the tent, mentions pleasure. Not that the joy of motherhood is wrong — it is a right and good thing. But the heart's orientation was inward rather than upward, and faith was what was lacking.

Is Anything Too Hard for the Lord? — A Question That Points to the Incarnation

Verse 14: is anything too hard for the Lord? In its context, where the question before us is the heir through whom all the promises to Abraham would flow, this question points toward the Incarnation. Sarah's conceiving Isaac was above nature — supernatural, a divine action on their bodies with no natural cause. But the Incarnation was more than supernatural: it was the stupendous power of God put forth to unite manhood and Godhood in one person. The Virgin was entirely passive: be it unto me according to thy word. The overshadowing power of the Highest came upon her, and that was outside of nature entirely.

Is anything too hard for the Lord? The answer is no — but there is a harder thing and an easier thing. Giving birth to Isaac was the easy part. The hard part was the moral question — what to do about sin, how sin could be removed from before God. That question found its answer at the cross, when the one in whom all the promises centred gave himself, and in doing so displayed God's hatred of sin, His holiness, and His love all at once. Sarah's laugh, her denial, and the blunt rebuke are all a little picture of what must happen when any soul stands before God without a covering. God will have the last word.

Shall I Hide from Abraham the Thing Which I Do? — The Friendship of God

Verses 17–18 contain one of the most remarkable statements in Genesis: shall I hide from Abraham the thing which I do? Abraham is called the friend of God, and friends tell each other things the public is not privy to. A fool utters all his mind to everyone; a friend speaks privately what belongs between friends. And here the Lord is going to do something — bring judgment down on Sodom — and He does not want to hide it from His friend. The Lord Jesus said in John 15:15: henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth, but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

The question tests us. If some of these things are hidden from us — if we do not enter into the mind of God about what He is going to do — why is that? The world is coming under judgment. The friend of God knows this and can enter into it. But if we are seeking to get a foot into the world, we are not acting as friends of the Lord Jesus. It is not surprising if things are hidden from those who are half-engaged with the thing under judgment. The friendship of the world does not give insight into what is coming — the world does not know what is coming. Men's hearts fail them for fear. But Noah was warned ahead of time; the men of his generation knew not until the flood came. Abraham was warned ahead of time; the men of Sodom knew not until the fire fell. So it shall be when the Lord comes in judgment: sudden destruction will come on those who are saying peace and safety, while the saints have been warned.

Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do? — Genesis 18:17

All the Nations of the Earth Shall Be Blessed in Him — Galatians 3 and the Millennium

Verse 18 — Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him — has millennial scope. It has not been realized yet. The blessing of all nations comes through Christ, the great seed of Abraham, as Galatians 3:7–8 teaches: they which are of faith, the same are the

children of Abraham, and the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.

But the form that blessing takes now and in the millennium is different. Now, we are counted seed of Abraham because we are one with Christ — united to Him who is the great seed. The middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile is down; there is neither Jew nor Greek, but all are one in Christ. This is the character of the present period. In the millennium, the church will have been caught up; there will again be Jew and Gentile, and the distinction will be maintained. The Gentile believers in the millennium will not be one with Christ and so will not be seed of Abraham — they will receive blessing through Israel, through the literal seed of Abraham who will then be in the full enjoyment of the covenants. The blessing for the nations comes immediately through Israel. As Psalm 72:17 says of the Messiah: his name shall be continued as long as the sun, and men shall be blessed in him, and all nations shall call him blessed.

Isaac is a faint reflection of the Lord Jesus as the heir of everything that Abraham had. When Abraham gave gifts to his sons by Keturah and sent them away, all that he had he gave to Isaac. The real heirship centred in the child of promise. And so it is with the Lord Jesus: the kingdoms of this world are not yet become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. He has the title. He will yet have the possession.

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