

## 2.11.18

### O. INTRO:

Laughter can mean many things.

Joy

Hatred

Mocking

Approval

Humor

Confusion

Guilt

Embarrassment

It can also mean that God is closing the gap on faith.

**Gen. 17:5 No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.**

**Gen. 17:15 God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. 16 I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her." 17 Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?"**

This is not quite what we would expect from a man of Abraham's reputation when he received a word from God...."He fell facedown and laughed."

Falling facedown...I can understand that part...shocking news.

But the laughing part...

Abraham was a man of faith.

However, he was a MAN of faith.

His faith, like everyone's was a journey...he was closing the gap throughout his life.

I love to watch "Peppa Pig" cartoons with my grandkids

Its the only cartoon that they get tired of before I do.

I especially love how when something funny happens to the family of pigs they all lay down on their backs and laugh together...it always makes me laugh.

But it is hard to picture this great father of the faith, Abraham...laughing at a solemn word from God...but he did.

And yet it was not left out of the biblical record in order to "protect" Abraham's reputation.

But the point of leaving it in was not to indicate he was a man without faith but rather that he was a man whose faith was still growing...and that this word from God...was taking him beyond his current level of faith.

Later when Sarah responded to God's promise with laughter, God questioned her "Why did Sarah laugh?"...it was a rebuke for her lack of faith.

She was afraid when God challenged her so she denied it "I didn't laugh."

**Sara, you do know this is God you are talking to right...he can see you.**

We can't read too much into that except it may indicate (and other things point this way as well) that Sarah did not believe God at that moment, while Abraham believed...yet was struggling to get his mind around it.

Scriptures indicate that Sarah eventually came to have faith in God...but it was certainly a faltering one as was Abraham's.

So think of it this way, Sara's was a laugh with an exclamation mark "HA!"...No way!

Abraham's was a laugh with a question mark "Ha?"...Really?

Think of someone standing on the sideline watching some great endeavor and mocking those who are in the middle of the effort..."Ha!" you guys are crazy!  
-That's an exclamation mark laugh.

But then perhaps you are in the middle of great endeavor, you are told you are going to be

a part of the seeming impossible...so you laugh "Ha, your kidding right?"

Then you realize, no, its not a joke...so you embark on the great project wondering "I don't know how this is going to happen."

-That is a question mark laugh.

In any event, one clear purpose of the author in including the note about Abraham's laughter can be seen in the fact that the Hebrew expression "he laughed" (*wayyishaq*) foreshadows the name "Isaac" (which means "he will laugh")(yishaq ). (they have the same root)

Abraham "laughed" when told "Isaac" (named "he will laugh") would be born.

Then throughout the remainder of the narratives "laughter" becomes a thread that ties them together.

All who heard of Isaac's birth would laugh (21:6) (amazed/joyful)

The son of Hagar(a child born as a result of a lack of faith) laughed at Isaac (mocked, 21:9)(He was jealous, insecure...he did not like his role in God's plan)

Finally, Isaac's own failure to trust in God (26:7) was uncovered when the Philistine king saw him "laughing" (*mesaheq* 26:8b; NIV, "caressing") being intimate with Rebekah.

In this case the "laughing" that exposed his deceit was tied to his inability to trust God with his own personal safety and future...so he lied.

So for the author, both the power of God and the limitations of human faith are seen in this very human thing called "laughter."

It begins with Abram laughing at the very thing his name change to Abraham marked, "You will be the father of many nations."

We are closing the gap on faith during this winter season...today we continue in Hebrews 11

**Heb. 11:11 And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. 12 And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.**

Some think the translation should be "He (Abraham), together with Sarah was enabled to bear children because of their faith in God's faithfulness."

The Greek construction of this verse is difficult to translate.

Bottom line...they both were beyond child producing and bearing age...and both put their imperfect faith in God's perfect faithfulness.

### **I. Many believe that miracles are impossible.**

Even though many of those who don't believe in miracles will pray for one when things get desperate for them.

The reasoning behind disbelief in miracles is not reason...it is faith.

Those who have faith, that miracles are not possible...they cannot have knowledge of this...they can only believe it to be true...that miracles are impossible.

So those who believe in miracles, have faith.

Those who disbelieve, also have faith.

The argument goes like this..."The universe is a closed system, there is no God who can or will intervene in natural processes. This is a scientific fact. So since it is a scientific fact that the universe is a closed system, miracles are impossible."

This is like saying "Miracles are impossible, because I believe miracles are impossible."

Science is not capable of proving miracles are impossible...it is beyond the scope of science to do so...they can believe...they cannot know, or prove.

God most often operates within the normal cause and effect of the natural universe he has made.

However on occasion, for his purposes, God has chosen to act in ways that are "super natural"

The prefix "super" means "above or beyond."

So supernatural means...outside of the way things normally happen.

Some believe that miracles happen so frequently that they really should not use the term supernatural when referring to them.

Because if a miracle happens everyday...then they would become the "natural."

But biblically a miracle is an intervention of God in the natural order with a specific purpose in mind.

God may lead you, bless you, provide for you...this is his presence and grace in your life...but I would probably not call a close parking place on a bitter cold day a miracle.

Even if you prayed for one...call it "provision" or "providence" or just say "thank you" and remember this day when you have to walk a long way because there are no close places.

But in the life of Abraham and Sara, God superseded the normal process for giving birth to a child.

They were both past normal child-bearing age, but God intervened and Sarah was able to bear a child.

Why did God do this?

She bore a son because God willed and caused it.

She bore a child because they believed God when he said he would give a son.

**These two facts: God's faithfulness and Abraham/Sarah's faith...are not in opposition; they are in collaboration.**

Of course, Abraham's faith could have been misplaced. He could have thought God promised a son, but he didn't.

If so, then no amount of faith would have brought him a son.

Some have been taught to believe...that enough faith will always bring their desired results.

So life becomes a sort of competition...whoever has the "winning" faith will get from God whatever they want.

This leads, ultimately to a lack of real faith as well as a tragic lack of spiritual resiliency.

This focus on "my faith" rather than on God's glory...means they trust self, they are focused on selfishness and they will finally be disappointed when they experience failure of this self-faith.

But in reality, Abraham had faith in what God had actually promised.

Faith must be based on fact...on what God has actually said.

**It is common to trust your own feelings or internal leadings and call this faith.**

However, if these subjective thoughts or feelings are not from God...it is self-faith, not faith in God.

You can easily become convinced that God has spoken about something...when he has not.

Good intentions do not make up for bad actions.

Be careful.

There are several reasons for caution in regards to "internal, subjective leadings of faith."

**1. You are sinful still.**

-It is faith to believe God can clearly speak; it is arrogant to believe you can always hear clearly.

-His transmission is flawless, our reception is broken.

-All humans are prone to the "self-serving bias".

-It makes us believe we are better than average drivers, more moral than others, more clever, and just generally special people.

-So of course, if I believe God is speaking...good luck convincing me otherwise.

"The stronger the feeling, the more convinced you are."

\*But do not confuse strong feelings of faith with actual facts of faith...they are not the same.

-What this means is that you will be prone to believe yourself over and above others when you are convinced God has spoken to you.

**2. You are not Abraham...**you didn't make it in the Bible...he did.

-Sure God can speak, but it is going to be, for the most part...in black and white...its written down in the Bible.

-He will never contradict in his subjective speaking to you what he has clearly said in his objective word to you.

\*Never...if you believe you have direction that contradicts what is clear in scripture...you are mistaken...this is very important.

The gap in your faith will only widen, if you do not get this.

**3. Navel gazing is a poor approach to life navigation**

-The old sailors navigated by the stars...why?

-They were fixed points of reference...they don't move around in the sky.

-Naval gazing is a figure of speech that denotes navigating by looking entirely inward, subjective feelings. (Naval not as in "navy" but as in bellybutton)

-The problem is, these subjective feelings are not fixed points of reference...they shift and change.

-Most often, when we are navigating by our own subjective feelings versus the objective truth of God and the counsel of others...we will hear exactly what we want to hear.

"Oh God, do you want me to be healthy and successful?" (I think I hear a "yes")

"Oh God, am I right about this and they are wrong?" (Again, a "yes")

Christy dated a guy before we met whose mom had heard from God that he was to marry her.

Now, knowing Christy as I do...the mom was right to want that for her son...she was just wrong, fortunately for me, that God agreed with her about that.

We want what we want...and we are all prone to turn what we want into what we ought...and to then believe "God is leading me."

When you read the black and white truth of God...what you will see is "trust God, love people"...and it will often be difficult and rarely exciting...but it will always be good.

God's actually leading will often be to risk, sacrifice, move out of our comfort zones, out of our fixed ways of thinking...it will often be to listen closely and humbly to others.

It will also often be to endure, to walk humbly in the normal day to dayness of life with God.

**It will also often be...**don't take yourself so seriously, and don't trust yourself so much.

**Okay, but isn't God still God...if Abraham and Sarah got their miracle, where is mine?**

Miracles are signs of God's faithfulness, more than they are signs of our faith.

By faith Abraham/Sarah considered God faithful...their faith was in God's faithfulness not in themselves.

**All physical miracles have expiration dates stamped on them.**

A physical healing does not last forever.

Provision of a car, a spouse, a child, a job, a sum of money—even if given in ways that clearly demonstrate God's intervention—they do not last.

Abraham is now dead as is his promised son...but the purpose of the miracle...is not dead...it was finally fulfilled in Jesus.

That is the one promise with no expiration date marked on it...the ultimate "seed" of Abraham, the final fulfillment of the promise is Jesus.

Your life is to be about Jesus...if God intervenes in special ways...you can be sure it is point you and others to Jesus.



God loved Abraham and Sarah, but he did not provide a miracle son simply for that reason.

This son was a sign that would speak of God's greatness and his faithfulness through the ages...he was the firstborn who would finally lead to Jesus.

If you read of what God did for Abraham and immediately wonder, "what great thing will he do for me?" you are missing the point.

When you read of what God did, marvel at God.

**Beyond that, reflect on the great thing God has already done for you.**

It was through the lineage of Abraham that God brought Jesus the Messiah into the world and into your life.

**He can do no greater thing for you than what he has already done.**

Sure, he will probably do other fantastic things as well...live with expectancy...but none will be greater than what he has already done in the giving of his Son.

**Let's return to the theme from last week: Plunging and plodding with God.**

Abraham had faith in the faithfulness of God. He believed that God would keep the promise he had made.

What was the content of the promise?

It was that Abraham would be the father of a nation with descendants so numerous they would be virtually uncountable.

The promise was epic in nature, but the fulfillment of the promise was very mundane: a baby had to be born.

Sarah, an older woman, had to become pregnant and bear a child.

She was old and had to carry a child, as a nomad's wife...a full 9 months.

She didn't have a nice bed, no access to medical care...no AC, fridge, or Walgreens.

The promise was epic...the actual living of the miracle...you can be sure...felt very normal.

**The supernatural...when it does occur...is embedded in the natural world you live in.**

When Jesus multiplied the fish and the bread and fed the multitudes by way of a miracle...what the people ate from that supernatural provision...was fish and bread.

It tasted like fish and bread and digested into energy and waste just like fish and bread.

Epic provision...normal experience of that provision.

**The plunge of faith is always preceded by and followed by...many days of the plodding of faith**

**Don't miss what God is actually doing in your life because you have some other idea of how God should be doing things in your life.**

**CONCLUSION:**

Abraham laughed, but yet he had faith in the faithfulness of God.

He laughed, but he moved forward.

What kind of laugh does this statement evoke from you...if you really took it as a direct word to you?

**Prov. 3:5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.**

**\*Straight paths does not equal "easy" road**

\*It has moral connotations...the "right way"...his way.

How would you laugh...would it be a question or exclamation mark laugh?

A laugh of happiness, expectancy, even hopeful uncertainty....really, God you will do that?

A laugh of disbelief, cynicism...yeah, like that's going to happen, hasn't yet!

But what if we personalized it even more.

**Trust the Lord in your heart and mind...now give your time, talents, and treasure in ways that reveal and honor him...push yourself.**

"Ha! I don't have enough time, or talent, or enough money to give!"

Or

"Ha? Really, if I give in faith, then God will provide, he will show himself more fully in my life?"

Jesus said it didn't take much faith...a mustard seed...but it does require moving out on the faith you currently have...little though it may be.

Trust in the Lord in your heart and mind...now be completely ethical at work, and school...what needs to happen there?

Trust him with your passions, your sexuality, your illness, your fear, your anxiety...what needs to happen in these areas.

**We are all closing the gap.**

So what will that look like to follow God with a laugh, because we are closing the gap...but a laugh that is..."really? Okay, here we go."

**Last Sunday the chill factor was -4 and Mo brought a friend over to jump in my pond. (I guess they are still friends)**

He grew up in a warmer climate in another country and he thought it was odd to jump in pond on a winter day...but he was interested in trying.

He walked up to the pond and reached out his foot and tested the waters..."Bad idea" I thought to myself.

No way he's going to jump...he stood, and stood...to my surprise he jumped.

**Its okay to put your foot in, to feel hesitant...to pause...but in the end, if you will see God prove himself faithful...you must actually jump...you must do something with your faith.**

**Its going to look like many different things in all of our lives...but the bottom line.**

Will we trust him in our heart (longings) and our minds (understanding)...such that we take a step of faith.

We will choose to not "lean on"...put our full weight, or most of our weight on our own "understanding."

Faith is not about throwing away reason or common sense...it is about coupling faith and reason together.

When God says one thing about how life actually works...and our own understanding of that is different...who will we trust?

**Think practical, actionable here...this is not theory...this is real world.**

What does it look like to "consider him faithful?"

**Can you think of a place in your heart, mind, relationships, checkbook, calendar, workplace, classroom, home...where you need to "consider him faithful"**

Do you give from your income in faith or leaning on your own understanding?

I know personally of many stories of people who tithed without knowing how they could...and God provided in direct ways.

How will you every see that with your eyes, if you do not act in faith?

The same is true of people who gave away their time, when they believed they did not have it to give.

Or gave forgiveness, or became open and honest, or shared their faith, or...**you fill in the blank.**

To close the gap on your faith you will have to take an actual step of faith...if you wait until you see with your eyes before you move...that is not faith, that is sight.

**Closing the gap on faith will be a lifelong journey...but it will take a "next step"**

**What if what is next for you is to BELIEVE that this day, week, month, year of plodding is**

**the next step of faith...this day is full of God...though it seems simply to be full of the mundane.**

Will you learn to laugh at plodding with God with a question mark? "Wow, really...this is next? Okay, let's go."

But if your heart has turned into a hard exclamation mark...cynical, unbelieving..will you repent?

Will you trust him again?

Perhaps what hardened you was not an experience of the unfaithfulness of God...but rather the fruit of wrong expectations and understanding of him.

He has never promised you a trouble free life...he has promised you a God-filled life, if you will abide in him.

He has not promised you a heaven on earth existence...he has promised a life-long reversal of the curse in your life as you learn to value him over all else.

He has not promised you a miracle a minute...he has promised you the experience of the one miracle that all others pointed to...Jesus, the one through whom you can have relationship with God.

**You can pray like the man Jesus spoke with..."I believe, help my unbelief."**

That is a legit prayer...it is not full of "kick down the door confidence"...but it is honest

You can hear the "Ha, really, dare I believe? I do want to."

This prayer did not receive a rebuke from Jesus..."Have more faith, come on!"

It received an answer...Jesus showed the man his power.

**Time to come forward or pray with others:**

1. Not closer to God up here
2. External movement to mark internal movement
3. Don't make rash commitment...come asking for a "free heart"