

Laughter, As God Said

Genesis 21:1-7

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Introduction:

Perhaps the subject today might seem a little unusual, but today I am going to proclaim to you one of the greatest, most comforting, most comprehensive promises that God makes to His people.

- It is a promise that takes care of everything and that can sustain you in the most difficult times—
 - If our society should crash and you and your children were left to die of cold and starvation and there was nothing you could do about it...
 - If you were diagnosed with some dreadful disease that promised you a very slow and painful death...
 - If all of your loved ones were to reject the Lord and to turn against you with bitterness and anger and want nothing to do with you...
 - This promise could give you great hope through it all.

It is a very simple promise from God that is very easy to understand.

- It only belongs to those who belong to Jesus Christ.
- What is this promise for all of God's true people?
 - It is the promise that you shall laugh!

That is it!

- No matter what you may be going through; no matter how bad things may be; God's promise is that if you are in Christ, you will laugh!

You know about laughter...

- There are different kinds of laughter—mocking laughter, cruel laughter, doubting laughter, despairing laughter,
 - but I am talking about the deep rich full laughter that you have when you realise that everything has turned out in a wonderful way.
 - The laughter that comes when you can put it all together and you can see how everything has come together to accomplish something that is far better than you ever dreamed.
- Jesus Himself promises this laughter to all of His people—no matter how bad things get—He promises you that at the end, you will laugh.
 - In Luke 6:21, He says, **“Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.”**
 - God will work it out!
 - God will bring His promises to fulfillment!
 - You know how it is when you get a joke...it is like that.
 - At first, you are puzzled and it makes no sense, but then when you get it, you laugh because now it all makes sense.

- We watched *Cinderella Man*, a movie about the life of James Braddock—
 - He was a boxer who won the world heavyweight championship in 1935 after nearly starving to death during the great depression...
 - The movie shows how he began with a promising career until he injured his hands—and how he is reduced to poverty with his wife and three children, and then comes back to win the championship.
 - But before his troubles began, there is a great piece of foreshadowing where he comes home to his wife with his head hung after a big match and of course she thinks he has lost...
 - But then he informs her that he had actually won and what do you think she does?
 - She laughs! They both laugh.
 - She laughs because what looked like it had turned out all wrong turned out to be a wonderful blessing.

In our Genesis sermon series, we have been following twenty-five years of Abraham's life.

- At age 75, the LORD told him to leave Haran and to go to the land that He would show him.
 - And the LORD promised Abraham, who was childless and who had a barren wife, that He would make him a great nation...
 - All the promises that God gave to him depended upon him having a son.
 - The promised nation would be a nation that was blessed by God and that brought blessing to all the nations of the earth that were separated from God by sin.
 - God promised that He would be God to this nation and that they would be His people.
 - In promising to be their God, He promised that they would live forever because He is not the God of the dead but of the living.
 - In support of that truth, He promised to give Abraham a piece of the earth as an everlasting inheritance.
 - But it all depended upon Abraham having a son because the inheritance was future.
- And we have seen how for 25 years Abraham was in the land but did not inherit any of it as his own...and how he had no son.
 - We have seen how he watched as his barren wife remained barren and went through menopause so that it would be impossible for them to have a son.
 - And we have seen how over the years, God renewed the promise to Abraham that he and his wife Sarah will have a son...
 - And in Gen 17:19, God named this son **Isaac** which means *laughter* in Hebrew.
 - In Genesis 17:19, God said to Abraham, **“Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him.”**
 - Abraham was 99 years old at the time, and the LORD added in Genesis 17:21, **“My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year.”**

- After all these years of barrenness and now in these years of being past the age to bear children, God tells Abraham that laughter will be born in his house!
- Isaac (laughter) will come as it does when Abraham and Sarah see that what seemed so impossible for so long has actually happened!

Today, we come to Genesis 21 where the promise of laughter is fulfilled!

- And as we look at this today, I want you to see that laughter is the ultimate promise of God for all who belong to Jesus Christ!
- This deep rich heartfelt laughter will arise in you when you see that everything God told you is absolutely true—that it is not just a dream—but that it has all come true!

Listen now as I read to you this wonderful passage of fulfilment...

- It is Genesis 21:1-7.
- It is short, but it is very, very, encouraging and powerful.
- Please give me your attention as this is God's holy Word...

Genesis 21:1-7: And the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken. ² For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. ³ And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him—whom Sarah bore to him—Isaac. ⁴ Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight

days old, as God had commanded him. ⁵ Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. ⁶ And Sarah said, "God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me." ⁷ She also said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne *him* a son in his old age."

May the LORD bless the reading of His holy word.

- Let's dig right into what this marvellous passage teaches us...
- Here we see what we can totally expect as God's people!

I. The day will come when God will visit us to totally fulfil what He has promised to us!

A. You see how it says that the LORD visited Sarah!

1. All these 25 years there had been what seemed to be an empty promise.
 - All that God had promised to Abraham and Sarah depended on the birth of a son—and year after year there was no son.
 - But now the day had come that the Lord had actually visited Sarah to do what He had promised.
2. The word *visit* is used in scripture of God coming to act in a situation...
 - It is used of Him visiting people to judge them—as in the second commandment where it says that He visits the iniquity of the fathers upon their children.
 - When the Lord visits those who have long lived in sin, all the while denying Him...they wake up to reality!
 - But visiting is also used of God visiting people to bless them when they have long waited for His promises.

- He comes to act in accord with what He has spoken and then they experience the wonderful reality of His grace.
3. We need to catch the reality—to visualise it—that the day will come when God truly will visit...
 - The day will come when we will see that what He has promised is actually occurring before our eyes.
 - The day will come when God will visit each one of you and will do all that He has said.
 - How arresting it will be when you realise that it is actually happening—either to your extreme terror or to your extreme delight—the reality will sink in that God has come to do what He said He would do.
- B. Notice how the first two verses emphasise that God has acted according to His promise...according to His word.
1. Three times it brings this out...
 - **Gen 21:1-2: And the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.**
 - Things that God had promised that did not seem real or possible come into full expression—just as God had said!
 2. You need to know that this is true about God...
 - You can absolutely count on His promises—you will see them with your own eyes.
 - His word will completely be fulfilled—just as He has spoken.
 - You cannot make up your own promises of what you want to be...
 - You cannot alter what God has said will be...it will be according to His word whether it seems real to you or not—whether you like it or not!
 - You cannot create your own future where there is no hell and no judgment, or where there is nothing at all...
 - Everything will be just as God says.
- C. We have no basis for doubting that God will do what He has spoken.
1. We exist and the world exists because God spoke us into being.
 - I know that people try to come up with other explanations, but they simply don't work.
 - They never answer the biggest question of how it all began...we all have an innate sense, no matter how much we try to deny it, of the eternal power and divine nature of God as the creator and ruler of the world.
 2. But we also see how the LORD has fulfilled His impossible promises again and again in history.
 - a. In the ancient world, He said that He would send a worldwide flood and would spare Noah and He did, just as He said...

- The flood came and world perished, just as the Lord said...
 - God spared Noah and his household in the ark, just as He had said.
 - The day came just as God said it would.
- b. And recently in Genesis 19, we saw how God visited Sodom and Gomorrah, just as He said He would...
- rescuing righteous Lot, just as He said,
 - and raining fire and brimstone on the cities to utterly destroy them, just as He said.
- c. And now in chapter 21, we see how God visited Sarah in her old age and gave her a son, just as He had said.
- Sarah could not believe this promise at first because she was too old to have a child—but God convinced her that it would happen...
 - And now she is holding the child—what was believed came to full fruition!
- d. And in the time of Moses, God visited His people in Egypt, just as He said He would, and delivered them when they were helpless slaves.
- The people turned against Moses at first because things got worse at first—even Moses did not know what to think of it...
 - but as surely as God had spoken it, the day came when they stood on the other side of the Red Sea, completely free.
 - The Lord did the impossible.
- e. And then there was the conquest of the land—it seemed so impossible...
- The people refused to even try at first,
 - The cities of the land were fortified, their men were trained in war, some of them were giants, and they were greater in number than Israel.
 - So the people refused to believe God because they thought it impossible to conquer these people,
 - and God sentenced that generation to 40 years in the wilderness with the promise that the next generation would go in.
 - And under Joshua, the next generation did go in and they saw the LORD fight for them, and they conquered that nations that were greater and mightier than they were—just as God had said.
- f. Many years later, God sent them into exile to discipline them for their sin.
- But when He sent them, He also promised that He would deliver them after seventy years.
 - Such deliverance seemed like an impossible dream, but the Lord did just what He had spoken, the people laughed when they returned.
 - We sang about this laughter in Psalm 126 today.
- g. And all along the way, God continued to promise that from this nation of Israel, a Son would come who would bless all the nations.
- God promised that He would be born of a virgin, and the day came when God visited the virgin Mary and He was born of her.
 - God promised that this Son would be despised and rejected and cut off for the sins of His people, but would rise again for their justification.

- And that is exactly what would happen.
 - Even Jesus' own disciples thought all was lost when Jesus was crucified—all their hopes were crushed...
- h. And all along the way, God promised to Israel that when the Son came, the nations would turn to God.
- This is one of the most remarkable promises of all because it cannot be denied that it was given when it seemed impossible and the evidence that it was fulfilled is all over the world!
 - This promise was first made to Abraham, then to Moses, then to David, then through the great prophets, all when the nations had no interest in God.
 - In fact, the times when the promise was spoken in the strongest terms were the times when the people were the most insignificant and irrelevant in the world. Times when they were oppressed.
 - It was an impossible promise.
 - And things were even worse when Jesus actually came...
 - Even His own people despised Him and rejected Him—
 - And Israel was a lowly rejected people under Roman domination and Jesus did absolutely nothing to change that.
 - Yet, He continued to speak of the nations coming to God through faith in Him—even as He was going to the cross.
 - He seemed almost like a crazy deluded man!
 - But what He said is exactly what happened!
 - The nations came to God just as God said.
 - Here we are right here, most all of us foreigners of other nations, far from Jerusalem, worshipping the God of Israel in Jesus' name.
 - It has happened just as God said.
- i. And the reality today is that though the nations of the west that have been so blessed by the gospel are under God's discipline,
- The worldwide church of Jesus Christ continues to grow at an unprecedented rate.
 - The hardening of the UK, Canada, and America is a fulfillment of God's word that declares that He will blind His people when they do not receive His word with gratitude and that He will turn to other nations that will bring forth fruit.
 - His word continues to be fulfilled before our eyes.
3. And now we are waiting for the future promises of God.
- They are as sure to happen as all of the promises that have already been fulfilled in the past.
- a. The day will truly come when the trumpet will sound and Jesus Christ will come with glory to judge the nations...

- We will experience the reality of that day just as much as Sarah experienced the reality of Isaac's birth when she was too old to have a son.
- b. The day will come when we who are in Christ will be perfected...
 - When sin for us will be a thing of the past—as impossible as that seems!
- c. The day will come when God will establish a new heavens and a new earth, when we will inherit the earth with Jesus our master and when there will be no curse.
 - The day will come when this amazing promise is actually fulfilled, just as God has spoken.
 - We will hold Isaac in our arms!
 - It will be very real!
- d. And at that same time, God's eternal judgment will come upon Satan and all those whose names are not written in the book of life...
 - It will sink in to those without Christ that what they have denied about God is absolutely true—it will be completely real.
 - That is how it will be with all that God has said.

II. It is therefore wise for you to respond to God's promises with obedient faith!

- What does it mean to respond to God's promises with obedient faith?
- A. First, it means that like Abraham, you acknowledge the hand of God when He acts.
 1. You see Abraham's acknowledgement in verse 3...
 - **Gen 21:3: And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him—whom Sarah bore to him—Isaac.**
 - a. Naming his son *Isaac*, which means *laughter*, was an act of obedient faith,
 - because God commanded Abraham to name the son that Sarah would bear Isaac.
 - b. By doing so, Abraham was affirming that God had fulfilled His promise!
 - That this son *Laughter* was no ordinary son, but was the son who would make it possible for Abraham and the whole world to be blessed by God.
 - He was the son through whom laughter would come for the whole world.
 - The seed that would come through Isaac would be salvation in the earth...that the nations would be reconciled to God through Him.
 2. The point is that we should identify things the way that God identifies them.
 - a. God calls the Son that He sent into the world the Saviour of the world.
 - He says that this descendant of Isaac is *Jesus, Jehovah who saves His people from their sins!*
 - God calls Him the *Saviour of the world* and that is what you ought to call Him too—what God said to call Him!
 - b. It is very very foolish for any of us to call Jesus something else!
 - Something other than the Saviour the world—

- Many of the Jews did that—
 - Jesus the Saviour of the world had come and they called Him a blasphemer and a deceiver.
- c. You miss the blessings of God when you do not name them the same way that God does!
 - If God says that those who have faith in Jesus are *justified*, then we need to call them *justified*!
 - If God calls Isaac *laughter*, we should acknowledge that he *is* laughter.
 - If God calls Jesus the Saviour of the world, so should you.
 - You can call evil good and good evil, but you do not change anything— all you do is bring confusion into your life and the life of others!

TRANS> So obedient faith begins with acknowledging God's hand when He acts.

- With calling what He calls blessings, blessings, and what He calls curses, curses.
 - Obedient faith gets in step with God in this way.
 - That is the first thing that obedient faith does.
- B. Secondly, obedient faith submits to God's ordinances in hope.
 - Seeing what God has faithfully done according to His promise thus far, it looks with confidence to what He has promised for the future!
 - 1. You can see in our text how Abraham not only names his son what God has named him, but how he also circumcises his son as God had commanded.
 - Verse 4 says: **Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.**
 - a. You will recall that God gave circumcision as a sign of the covenant between Him and His people that He was their God and that they were His people!
 - It was His way of saying to them, "You really are mine."
 - It was a seal to them that believe and to their children that they were God's people as they went through life.
 - It represented the cleansing that God does that they might be His people, and it pointed them to the cutting off of Christ to cleanse them...
 - that was the cutting off that would bring true cleansing to them.
 - By Jesus being cut off from the land of the living for the transgression of His people,
 - they would be completely pardoned and they would be given a new heart to serve God by the power of the cross.
 - b. So Abraham shows us here that when you receive the fulfillment of one promise, it spurs you on to look for the fulfillment of the next promise!
 - He sees that Isaac has come, and now he looks for the future blessing that is to come through Isaac and so he circumcises him in hope!
 - 2. Baptism is the sign that God has given us now that Jesus has come.

- a. We are no longer waiting for Jesus to be cut off for us—because now He has *been* cut off; and so we come to Him for the cleansing that His death accomplishes for us...
 - We have seen the fulfillment of the one promise, and it leads us to look for the cleansing that comes through His finished work.
 - We look to the cross to be cleansed from our guilt by the imputation of Christ’s righteousness, and to be cleansed from our rebellion by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
 - b. You are to come to be baptised and you are to bring your children to be baptised, saying, “Lord, all of my hope is in your work in me and in my children.”
 - “I come to you with my children as you have commanded to be cleansed through Jesus who is now revealed.”
 - c. Don’t mess around when it comes to submitting to God’s ordinances!
 - He has given them to you for your comfort and encouragement that He really is your God and that you really are His people—that He really does take away all your sin as He promised.
 - And in coming to Him in this way, you give yourself to be His people by His grace—
 - You come with your children to live before Him forever.
3. Do not lose your confidence in God’s promises the way even Moses did for a time.
- a. Do you remember that?
 - Moses had tried to deliver Israel from their bondage in his own way, and it had not gone well for him, so he went off to the back side of the desert.
 - And he had sons, but he did not circumcise them.
 - He had become discouraged because it looked to him as if God had no intention of delivering His people.
 - b. Does it ever look that way to you?
 - You hear of ministers falling into sin, you hear of people turning from Christ and see people you love doing that.
 - Is God really at work in the world, you say?
 - Or maybe you are just having lots of trials, and you start to talk the way Israel did in the wilderness when they said,
 - “We were better off in Egypt. Why should we serve God if this is all that we get out of it?”
 - c. But you must not think like that.
 - The Bible calls that an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.
 - God’s promises are as good as ever, and you are to embrace them...
 - You are to identify with His people wholeheartedly, to receive God’s ordinances with them because you trust in His promises.

- To outwardly and openly profess faith in Jesus!
- Gladly place yourself in His hands as one who is trusting in His promises and looking to Him for the cleansing He promises—just as Abraham did.
 - Keep it ever before you that in the end, you will laugh—that will be the outcome of serving God!

TRANS> And that brings us to the next thing I want you to consider today...

III. The result of a promise-fulfilling God joined with a trusting soul will be laughter!

A. You see how Sarah speaks of this...

1. In verse 6, she tells us that God has made her laugh: “God has made me laugh.”
 - He did it by doing the impossible.
 - When she first heard that she would have a child in old age, she laughed in unbelief...
 - Then God brought her to faith, and that gave her hope...
 - But now she laughs because of experience...
 - She has the joy of receiving the impossible promise in her arms!
2. And she goes on to say, **“and all who hear will laugh with me.”**
 - Did she know how far those words would go?
 - Did she know that there would be billions of people who would hear that God gave Laughter (Isaac—the word is exactly the same here as the name) to Sarah and who would Isaac (laugh) with her?
 - All of this was done to highlight the fact that God would do the impossible, saving His people from their sins.
 - We were beyond rescue, beyond hope, and now we laugh because we are rescued and have a glorious future in the house of God.
 - Indeed, a great multitude that cannot be numbered laughs with Sarah.
3. In verse 7, Sarah makes it very concrete that the impossible has happened...
 - **“Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne him a son in his old age.”**
 - Nobody would have said that—nobody would have expected that.
 - It is an act of divine grace, it is not a thing that is possible with man...and we laugh because God has done it.
 - It is the laughter of living in the reality of God doing the impossible for His people—in giving an impossible Son.

B. This laughter is your heritage in Jesus Christ.

1. You can laugh with the people of God only if you believe that God does the impossible.
 - a. That He really did send His Son to become flesh...
 - That He really was crucified for our sin and raised for our justification.

- That He really does justify all those who come to Him for salvation.
 - That He really will come again and raise us to glory and that when He does, we will be like Him...
 - As impossible as it all seems, God will do all of these things for His people.
- b. But you will not be among His people to laugh with them unless you believe.
- What is impossible for us is not impossible with God.
 - As we have seen, He has shown us that.
 - God has already done impossible things, and if you believe, you can laugh at the wonderful reality of what He has done!
 - What could not be done—what was desperate and hopeless, He has done!
2. But the complete, whole souled laughter is yet to come!
- It will come when God has completed His work and brought His people into the new heavens and the new earth to live with Him forever!
 - We who are blind sinners will see the glory of God!
 - We who have sinned against God, will be fully accepted before Him.
 - We who are wicked will no longer be wicked at all.
 - Oh how we will laugh and laugh when we see what God had done!
 - It will be so outstanding and so real!
 - As the queen of Sheba said when she saw Solomon’s magnificent household, “The half had not been told to me!”
3. This whole-souled, deep laughter is what you have to look forward to as God’s people...
- It is final blessing, final peace, final assurance, wholeness, completeness, deep satisfaction and fulfilment, true and lasting joy and gladness.
 - That is what God has in store for His people in the end...
 - So let the economy crumble so what we slowly die of starvation...
 - Let enemies come and attack us and torture us for our faith...
 - Let our loved ones reject us and cast us away in bitterness...
 - Let our bodies be consumed by a painful wasting disease...
 - We know what the outcome will be...
 - We shall laugh with whole hearted deep laughter!
 - Of course we do not wish for hard things—but should they come, you have hope in Christ’s sure promise...
 - That you who weep now will laugh!
 - God will visit you with laughter in the end.
 - Isaac will come just as God said.