

FAITH COUNTING ALL THINGS POSSIBLE

"Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised" (Hebrews 11:11).

Hagar was the bonds slave or personal property of Sarah, the wife of Abraham. Abraham had been promised a son, but there was no visible evidence of this promise being fulfilled as Sarah was restrained by Jehovah from child-bearing. Desirous that her husband should no longer be deprived of the realization of that promise through her apparently permanent sterility, Sarah made the proposal to Abraham that he have a child or children by Hagar. Abraham made the mistake of following Sarah's suggestion.

When Hagar was about to bear Abraham a son, Sarah became increasingly jealous and bitter. Sarah finally made it so unpleasant for Hagar that she had to flee from Abraham's camp and take refuge in the wilderness. Near the edge of the wilderness, just before she cut herself off from the land of her adoption, Hagar sat down to rest by a fountain of water. Doubtless she was pale from grief and the tears of bitter sorrow ran down her cheeks. She felt sorry for herself and probably for her folly also. She had left a comfortable home and knew not which way to turn. There wasn't anyone with whom she could converse, which made matters far worse, for, when anything is wrong with us, we like to have someone with whom to talk, preferably a good friend.

While all alone without any advice, help or hope, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared unto Hagar. The angel gently asked Hagar from whence she came and where she was wanting to go. Hagar answered the first of these two questions openly and frankly, but she did not answer the second. Addressing her in kind, tender and affectionate terms, the angel said unto her, "Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands." That was about the last thing she had thought of doing, but the angel assured her that it was the only thing for her to do. Sarah was still her mistress.

God's call for submission was accompanied by the promise of blessing to her child. There was no promise that Hagar's son would be a blessing in the world. The angel said that he would be "a wild man." His descendants, the Arabs, have never been tamed. The angel's promise to Hagar, that her son would rise to great power and honor, instantly inspired her with wonder, love and praise.

I. The Story.

Thirteen years elapsed after Abraham in impatient unbelief "hearkened to the voice of Sarah." He had to live those years in the consciousness that his attempt to help God out was not in accordance with God's plan. At the close of this interval the Lord appeared to Abraham again. God always acts at the right time and the best time.

When Abraham was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared unto him and said, "I am the Almighty God." None except the omnipotent One could meet Abraham's need at that time. Ninety-nine years of age and his body dead, Sarah barren and long past the age of child-bearing — how could they hope to have a son? But, with God all things are possible. Why? He is El Shaddai, the All-Sufficient One.

One day a heavenly guest came to the home of Abraham and said, "Where is Sarah thy wife?" Abraham knew who his guest was. The promise of a son was then repeated. Sarah received the promise of a son with utter astonishment. She could not accept the possibility of it. She ridiculed the idea that she would experience the joys of motherhood. It was the laugh of doubt that magnified the natural and denied the

supernatural. She laughed in unbelief. While her laughter was within herself, it was heard by and known to the One before Whom all things are open. The Lord, who looketh on the heart, knows the thoughts of all of us as He knew those of Sarah. From Him secrets cannot be hidden. God was quick to challenge the laughter of Sarah. She then turned from doubt to faith and was given power to bear a son. The Bible says: "The Lord visited Sarah, as he had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken." Nature within here was dead, but God was not dead. In the end she relied upon the veracity of God and rested upon His promise.

II. The Significance.

The Significance of Sarah's experience is told in our text. It was an experience of faith.

1. By faith Sarah also.

In none of the other illustrations of the functioning of faith is the word "also" used. Its use here is striking. It adds Sarah's testimony of faith to Abraham's testimony of faith. But it does more than that. It shows the individuality of faith. No husband can have faith for his wife. No wife can exercise faith for her husband. The word "also" corrects any erroneous idea that anyone might have had that women were not granted the blessings and privileges of grace. Even though she was a woman, Sarah exercised the same faith as had Abraham. God called for the individual faith of both Abraham and Sarah. Abraham had functioning faith. Sarah did not depend on her husband's faith.

2. By faith Sarah herself.

This expression is very significant. In none of the other illustrations of the functioning of faith is the distinctive pronoun used. We do not read "By faith Abel himself" or "By faith Enoch himself" but we do read "By faith Sarah herself." Here again individual emphasis is given to faith. Sarah had faith as well as Abraham and Sarah had faith for herself. She not only believed that God could give Abraham power to beget but that God could give her power to bear. Abraham did not do all of the believing. Sarah, who more than once was the victim of doubt, became the blessed possessor of faith. "By faith Sarah herself."

3. By faith Sarah past age.

This is the third significant expression of our text. Sarah's faith was in the face of natural impossibility. It was faith in God's promise and power to do what is beyond human expectation and natural hope. Her faith functioned in the worldless realm outside of nature's power. It gave substance to the things hoped for.

Sarah was past age and Abraham was "as good as dead," but their God was neither old nor dead.

4. By faith Sarah judged God faithful.

Sarah's faith was based on God's faithfulness. It could not be based on natural expectation or scientific judgment. There was not anything natural on which she

could base her hope. Her faith functioned in the realm of the hoped for, the invisible, the impossible. Her faith looked beyond man to God: "Because she judged him faithful who had promised." When Sarah believed that the Promiser was able to be the Performer, and rested upon His veracity and faithfulness, by the grace and power of God the humanly impossible became the divinely possible.

III. The Sequel.

Although her barrenness, old age and unbelief were impediments of her faith, Sarah exercised faith in God and "received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised." It was not through the faith of her husband only that she received the blessing, but by her own genuine faith she received strength and a son.

1. Sarah helped her husband.

"Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable" (Hebrews 11:12). By faith Sarah became a partner with Abraham in copartnership with God. Previously she had hurt her husband by her lack of faith, and had brought problems into the home. Now she helped her husband and happiness was brought into the home.

What a lesson there is here for husbands and wives! Faith can heal hurts in a home that no doctor and no preacher can ever heal.

2. Sarah honored God.

Sarah honored God through faith: "Because she judged him faithful who had promised." Her faith went beyond the promise. While her mind dwelt upon the thing, her heart was at rest in God, and difficulties no longer disturbed her. Sarah looked beyond the promise to the Promiser. She knew that God could be depended upon, that He was able, willing and sure to perform His promise.

If Sarah trusted God for "things hoped for" and "things not seen", what woman is there who can doubt God's promises? Sarah had a great God who could work beyond the natural.

3. Sarah enriched the world.

By faith Sarah made a great contribution to the world. In and through the life and work of Isaac, her son, all the nations of the earth have been blessed in many ways.

4. Sarah bore witness for God.

By faith Sarah bore witness for God and took her place in the company of those who were illustrious for faith, as is indicated by the fact that her name is included in this list of the heroes of faith.

Sarah's feat of faith brings a much needed message to this faithless world. It is a message the world needs, a message homes need, and a message that hearts

need. It tells us that faith turned Sarah from a hurt to a help, from a doubter to a witness bearer, from human helplessness to divine strengthening. It tells us that by faith Sarah overcame the world -- its wisdom and standards and expectations -- and received blessings from God and gave enrichment to the lives of many people.

If this is faith -- in functioning and feat -- how much faith have we?