

18JULY10 Text: Gen. 18:10-14 ***“The LORD said, ‘I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.’ And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, ‘After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?’ The LORD said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh and say, “Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?” Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.”***”

We worry about a number of things. Is too much salt in my diet causing my high blood pressure? Do I eat too many saturated fats that are building up plaque in my blood stream and causing heart disease? Will this or that new ingredient be shown at a later date to cause cancer? With all the restrictions and warnings about this or that related to our health, food and drink items to avoid, doctors tell us that a good belly laugh really does an individual a world of good. Something as simple and readily available as laughter can rouse us from a time of depression, release endorphins into our system to counteract bottled up tension and reduce high levels of job-related stress.

Laughter is a good gift that God has given to people, but even something like laughter can cause an individual harm. How can laughter be something harmful? Laughter can be harmful when a person is

LAUGHING AT GOD’S PROMISES

The mocking laughter of the unbeliever and the doubting, disbelieving laughter of God’s own children are two types of laughter that will cause an individual a great deal of harm. Our Old Testament lesson this morning encourages us to stop LAUGHING AT GOD’S PROMISES!

You and I probably would have laughed too...laughed in disbelief like Sarah in our text this morning. She was 90 years old and SHE would have a child??? Yet this was the clear message that the LORD and His two angels had brought to Abraham. As Sarah eavesdropped behind the doorway of their tent, she laughed to herself at the thought that she would give birth to a child in her advanced years. Sarah was caught LAUGHING AT GOD’S PROMISES, for our text tells us that the LORD said to Abraham, *‘Why did Sarah laugh and say, “Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?” Is anything too hard for the LORD?’*

The sad truth of the matter is that God’s people have often been guilty of LAUGHING AT

GOD'S PROMISES. Oh, maybe they didn't come right out and snicker like Sarah, but their doubt and unbelief were evident nonetheless. Do you remember Judah's wicked king Ahaz? He and Jerusalem were threatened by war from two neighboring kingdoms. God wanted to assure Ahaz that victory would be his if he only would trust the LORD. God even said to Ahaz, *"Ask a sign for yourself from the Lord you God; make it deep as Sheol or high as heaven."* But Ahaz said, *"I will not test the Lord"* (Is. 7:11,12) What Ahaz was really saying was, *"I will not trust the Lord."* Ahaz was guilty of LAUGHING AT GOD'S PROMISES.

There are many other people in the Bible that we could point to, who reacted to God's promises with doubt and unbelief. The truth of the matter is that each of us has been in the past or is guilty now of LAUGHING AT GOD'S PROMISES. This is really what we are doing when we don't believe when God speaks to us in His Word. When we don't believe the promises that God gives us in His Word, we are really saying that the things He assures us He will do are "too hard" for him to do...that He is "all talk" and "no action." When Sarah laughed to herself, standing just inside the tent, that was exactly how she felt: what God had promised was too difficult for Him to do...it was impossible for her to conceive. I am glad that Mary did not laugh in the angel Gabriel's face when he brought to the startling message that she was going to give birth to the Savior, God's own Son. Yes, the angel reminded Mary, *"nothing will be impossible with God."* Mary's simple response was one of truth: *"Behold, be it done to me according to your word"...*and it was!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, God promises us that each time His Word is preached or taught or shared it never returns to Him empty...it always accomplishes the purpose for which He sends it. When I as a pastor think that my sermon was wasted or if you a VBS teacher thinks that your VBS lessons were wasted or if we think that our moment of sharing God's Word or our heartfelt prayers were wasted, we too are guilty of laughing at God's promises. We are thinking to ourselves, *"it's too hard for You, O Lord, to bring about a change"* and we really don't believe that where God's Word is, there He is to create and sustain faith by His Holy Spirit. And yet God's mercy and grace are so abundant and so wonderful that He does not stop giving to us even though we are so often guilty of LAUGHING AT GOD'S PROMISES. He gives to us again and again so that we might finally learn the lesson of trusting His words of promise to us.

We have a hard time learning this lesson and so often we worry about tomorrow and we fret about his or that situation. We forget God's wonderful promise that He causes all things... ALL THINGS...to work together for our good. And yet we toss and turn and lose sleep over this or that problem this is on our mind. Other times we spend many of our waking hours anxiously

constructing situations in our heads about what might happen and yet we only spend a minute or a moment in prayer or in meditation on God's words of promise. At such times as these, we are guilty of LAUGHING AT GOD'S PROMISES...promises of His abundant care and constant provision. When we worry, we are in effect saying to God, *"It's too hard for You, O Lord, to take care of me and to give me what I need and what You deem best. Instead, I'll try to take care of it..."* And yet God still opens up the windows of heaven again and again, showering down blessing after blessing on top of our heads. He gives us the sparrow and lovely flowers of the field as constant object lessons and daily reminders of His tender mercy and loving care that will never fail us. Yes, the amazing thing in our text today from our Old Testament lesson is that even though Sarah was caught LAUGHING AT GOD'S PROMISES, God still blessed Sarah with a child He had promised. Yes, a son was born to Abraham and Sarah in their old age just as God had promised, a child who was named *"Isaac,"* which means "laughter," a constant reminder of God's grace to keep His promises. So too in our own lives, I find it truly amazing that as an act of God's grace, we too, who are so often guilty of LAUGHING AT GOD'S PROMISES--no matter what those promises might be and no matter where in Holy Scripture they are found-- that we are (in spite of our laughter) still recipients of God's blessing. God blesses and blesses and blesses again so that might learn to trust His promises instead of laughing at them.

There is a danger in LAUGHING AT GOD'S PROMISES. Consider for a moment when we tell someone something that is true and their response is one of laughter. It's often very difficult, in such cases, to tell whether someone is laughing in disbelief or laughing at us, that is, mocking us. In the same way, when God gives a promise to His people in His Word, it is also difficult to distinguish between the disbelieving laughter of God's own children doubting God's promises or the mocking laughter of the unbeliever disregarding God's promises.

For the unbeliever who laughs at God's promises, he or she can become confirmed in their unbelief, as their heart hardens against God's Spirit that would lead them to faith in Jesus Christ and the promises of forgiveness, eternal life and salvation that flow from Him. Such mocking laughter is heard from the lips of Festus in the book of Acts (26) who scornfully said in reply to St. Paul's testimony about Jesus, *"Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad!"* Such mocking laughter is heard from the crowds that gathered that gathered through the years that Noah built the ark. Such mocking laughter is heard from those gathered at the foot of the cross when our Lord was crucified.

And here's the danger in the life of the believer caught LAUGHING AT GOD'S PROMISES: each time we dismiss God's promises and doubt His ability to come to our aid,

each time we **distrust** the **trustworthy** word of our Lord, there is a hardening that occurs in our hearts too. Our faith is diminished and we distance ourselves from God. What begins as disbelieving LAUGHTER AT GOD'S PROMISES can quickly degenerate into the coarse, unbelieving laughter of those who do not know God. Such is the doubt and unbelief that Satan places before us: God does not love me, God won't forgive me, God could care less about me and my needs and all the rest. Yet, God in His mercy and grace still comes to us again and again in His Word. He assures us of His love for us in Christ Jesus, who came in complete and perfect fulfillment all the promises God made throughout the whole Old Testament, beginning with our first parents and the Fall in the Garden of Eden and running on from A to Z, from Adam and Abraham to Zephaniah and Zechariah . There was indeed one born of a woman, that One in whose birth all the nations of the world would be blessed, as God had promised Abraham. We know that One as Jesus Christ our Savior. All that we deserved for LAUGHING AT GOD'S PROMISES, our Savior has borne for us on the cross. He calls out to us from God's Word again today and every day and He says to us, "*believe Me; trust My Word.*"

My God grant His Holy Spirit to each of us so that we are no longer found guilty of LAUGHING AT GOD'S PROMISES but instead, trust His Word each day. Amen.

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