

# Sarah—Faith Receives Strength

Hebrews 11:11-12

*Halifax: 3 September 2023*

## **Introduction:**

Today we are continuing our sermon series in the book of Hebrews.

- This wonderful letter is written to Hebrew Christians who were under pressure from their people because of their faith in Jesus Christ
  - At this point, none of these had been killed, but they were outcasts, and many had lost their jobs and place within society. Many had suffered rejection from their own families.
- What is wonderful about this letter to them is the way our glorious Saviour is presented.
  - The intent is to show them what an excellent Saviour He is so they will realise how foolish it would be to pull back from full-throttled service to Him, and what solid grounds they have for trusting in Him alone for their salvation.
  - All of the ceremonies they had in the time of the shadows when there were priests at a temple, daily sacrifices, feast days, prophecies, and circumcision have been fulfilled by the Son of God who Himself became an eternal priest in the true tabernacle in heaven, and who ever lives to make intercession for us. He Himself became the sacrifice that takes away our sin.
  - There is every reason to trust in Him. He is the Saviour that God has sent to save His people from their sins—and He has gloriously fulfilled all that is required.
    - Now He is calling the nations to also come to His salvation, full and free, that they might be forgiven, justified, and reconciled to God.
- After setting forth the perfections of Jesus our Saviour, this letter began to urge those who read it to have faith in this Savior.
  - We are in that part of the letter. More specifically, we are in chapter 11, where the writer of this letter shows us what faith can do for those who have it.
  - He shows us what faith actually did in the lives of real people who are just like us—except that they lived long ago.
  - We have seen that it was faith in God that brought God into their lives for blessing.
    - It is faith that made them understand that God made the world—that we and all that we have is in His hands, and it causes us to live as those who know that He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.
    - It was faith that made Abel and his offering acceptable to God. He trusted in the Lord to make him righteous, just as we must do. Otherwise, we will not be acceptable to God like Cain, Abel's brother.
    - It was faith that caused Enoch to walk with God and then, one day, to be swept up to glory without dying so that he might be with God forever. If we believe, we too will be called up to glory at God's appointed time and made immortal.

- It was faith that caused Noah to pay attention to God’s warning when God told him that He was going to destroy the earth with a flood because of all the wickedness that had grown up in it, but that if Noah would build an ark, he and his family would be spared. Noah believed, built the ark, and was saved along with his household.
- It was also faith that caused Abraham to leave his home and his idols to go to the place that God would show him—even though he did not know where it was. He believed that God would bless him and give him an inheritance, just as He had promised. He believed so strongly that even though he lived a long life and never got this inheritance, he was persuaded that God would at last bring him to the glorious city that He was establishing for the faithful.
- Today, we come to verse 11 and 12 where we find out what faith in our LORD did for Abraham’s wife Sarah: It gave her strength to do what was impossible—to bring forth nations, one of which would bring forth the Son who would save the world.
  - Let’s look at how faith—wonderful faith in God—gave her strength to bring forth God’s church and the Saviour of it.

Our text is Hebrews 11:11-12. Please listen while I read it to you. Hebrews 11:11-12, God’s holy and infallible word.

**Hebrews 11:11-12: By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. <sup>12</sup> Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born *as many* as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.**

Thanks be to God for His precious Word.

**I. Let’s begin by looking at how faith gave Sarah strength to do what would have been completely impossible for her.**

**A. What was that impossible thing?**

- It was that God had chosen her to bring forth a son who would bring forth the nation who would bring forth the Son who would bring God’s salvation to the nations.
  1. How could a sinful human being do such a thing?
    - Sarah knew, as you must surely know, that we humans have offended God by our sin—that’s the reason we have hardship in the world and eventually die.
      - God cannot let our rejection of Him as God stand on the record without bringing appropriate punishment for it.
      - An appropriate punishment is eternity in hell.
        - Do you believe that? Whether you do or not, it is true. God says so.
    - Sarah knew that she was a sinner just like we are. How could she possibly bring forth a son who would save the world?
      - Of course, the answer is that she most certainly could not do that.
      - She had neither the moral goodness nor the strength to do it.

- It is impossible for any human being to bring forth such a son by their own strength.
2. God drew attention to how impossible it was for Sarah to do this.
- For a woman who is part of this sinful fallen human race to bring forth a Saviour for it was outrageously impossible,
    - but because we are all spiritually dull, we might not realise that.
  - Therefore, God made it also physically impossible for her to bring forth a child.
    - He made Sarah barren until she was well beyond the age to conceive a child.
    - In this way, God made it clear that bringing forth a son who would save the nations from sin and restore us to Him was His doing.
      - Not only was it spiritually impossible for Sarah to do this—now it was also physically impossible for her to bring forth even an ordinary son.
      - If it was going to be done, it would have to be God that did it.
- B. And so it was that when all hope seemed to be lost, God appeared to Abraham and Sarah.
1. In fact, there are two appearings to Abraham that are spoken of in our text.
- a. The first appearing was in chapter 17 where the Lord promised to make Abraham the father of many nations through his wife Sarai.
- When God changed Sarai’s name to Sarah, and said, Gen 17:16: **“I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her,”** we are told that v. 17: **Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, “Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?”**
- b. The second appearing is in chapter 18.
- This time, the LORD appears with two angels, though all three have taken on the appearance of men.
    - The one who is said to be the LORD is what we call a preincarnate appearance of Jesus—an appearance of Him before He was conceived with an eternal human body and soul.
  - When He and His companions came this second time, Abraham immediately received them with warm eastern hospitality, insisting that they dine with him.
    - The LORD accepted the invitation, so Abraham put his household to work preparing a meal for them.
  - Once again, God’s purpose in this appearing was to assure Abraham and Sarah that despite the delay, His promise to bring forth a son by Sarah was as sure as ever.
    - He even announces that it will be within a year’s time.
      - **Gen 18:9-10: Then they said to him, “Where is Sarah your wife?” So he said, “Here, in the tent.”** <sup>10</sup> **And He said, “I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son.”**

- This time, Sarah was listening to the conversation, and she heard this about her having a son.
    - End of v. 10: **Sarah was listening in the tent door which *was* behind him.**
2. Sarah responded to this news with laughter—much like Abraham did.
- a. Gen 18:11-12 give this report:
    - **Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; *and* Sarah had passed the age of childbearing.** <sup>12</sup> **Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, “After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?”**
    - Note well that she did not laugh out loud where anyone could hear it. She laughed within herself.
      - It’s not surprising. She knew that both she and Abraham were too old to have a child. It was beyond the ability of them both.
  - b. The LORD calls her out for her laughing.
    - In Gen 18:13, it says: **And the LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Shall I surely bear *a child*, since I am old?’ ”**
      - It is pretty intimidating to have someone present who can read your thoughts when they can’t even see you.
      - We need to remember that the LORD always knows our thoughts, just as if we were speaking out loud.
        - He sees our faithless thoughts as well as our believing thoughts.
  - c. But after calling her out for laughing, He says something that completely changes the picture—something that completely changes her perception.
    - Verse 14: **“Is anything too hard for the LORD?”**
      - Sarah’s eyes had been on her body and Abraham’s body.
    - But when the LORD said, **“Is anything too hard for the LORD?”**,
      - it turned her eyes to Him, and she had an entirely different perspective.
      - Of course, it was certainly *not* too hard for Him!
        - Sarah is embarrassed for her laughter. She had been foolish. She is afraid because she has been disrespectful to the LORD.
        - She had forgotten who God is. That is an offense against Him.
          - Does that ever happen to any of you?
  - d. Sarah denies her laughter. She does it because of her fear.
    - Gen 19:15 says: **But Sarah denied *it*, saying, “I did not laugh,” for she was afraid.**
      - It is not actually a lie—in one way—because she only laughed within herself.
    - The LORD calls her out on this as well.
      - He says, **“No, but you did laugh!”**
      - To Him, it is all the same as if she spoke out loud.

- He knows our words before they even reach our tongues to speak.
3. The good thing about all of this is that now Sarah believes the promise—
- The LORD has done a great work in Sarah so that now she believes.
  - This is actually something that happens to us as believers all the time.
    - At first, we lose sight of God and focus on the problems and on our own strength and ability, and we think we are in an impossible situation.
    - But then God comes and reveals Himself to us, and says, “Is anything too hard for the LORD?” and of course we know that nothing is.
      - He shows us how foolish we had been and restores our faith in Him again.
        - It’s pretty special to have the light come back when you have been in the darkness of discouragement and despondency.

TRANS> But there is something striking here in our text.

- Something that might be overlooked even once you see it—it is striking.
- C. It says that by believing, Sarah received strength to conceive.
- **Heb 11:11: “By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.”**
    - Faith gave her strength!
1. This must not be misunderstood.
- It does not mean that we can willy-nilly believe things into existence... that we can visualise world peace or imagine riches and that that unleashes some kind of power that gives these things to us or that brings them into existence.
    - No, God had already promised a son who would save the world to Sarah. She did not come up with it and just believe it until it happened.
    - Her belief consisted in trusting God to do what He said because He is God.
  - Neither does it mean that believing was itself what gave her strength.
    - It is not just a psychological change in which she realises that she is capable of doing a lot more than she thought she could.
    - It is true that sometimes your confidence is weak until you come to realise that you can actually do something you did not think you could do.
      - But this is not that. Sarah could no more bring the promised nation with the promised saviour to the nations into the world than she could have a child when she was barren and past the age to conceive a child.
    - What it means is that God waited to give Sarah strength to conceive until Sarah (and Abraham) believed His promise.
      - Once she believed, then God gave her strength to conceive.
2. It is God’s normal way to wait until we believe to give us His promised blessings.
- That’s why it is so special when Jesus tells us that He will bless our infant children—to bring them to Him and He will bless them.

- But when we are capable of consciously understanding and believing, He wants us to realise that the blessing comes from His hand.
  - We are dull and often we do not see His hand at all when we receive His blessings.
  - If He were to do things before we believe, we would think the thing just happened.
- By doing it this way, He reveals His goodness and power to us better.
  - He does it this way so we can know Him better and trust Him more, and so that we can thank Him—which we cannot do if don't see that He is the one that strengthened us or that gave us a blessing
- You can see in Hebrews how Sarah was brought to focus on the character of God through receiving strength by faith.
  - She came to see that God is faithful.
  - Look at the end of verse 11, **“and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.”**
    - God wants us to see more and more how faithful He is, how true to His promises. How mighty He is.
    - His goal is not just to get us into a better place, but to bring us to know Him and to discern His hand graciously at work in us and in the world.
      - He waits for us to perceive Him.
      - He waits to fulfil His promises until He knows that we will know that it is from Him.

D. Now let's take a look at what God did for Sarah when she believed.

- **Heb 11:11: says that she received strength to conceive... when she was past the age.**
    - It appears that this was more than a miraculous birth.
      - In other words, the miracle was not that an old woman miraculously had a baby because she believed.
1. It appears that God made Abraham and Sarah youthful again.
    - a. They were not tired old decrepit parents with a baby—hobbling around with a cane and fumbling with the diaper as they wash it with arthritic hands.
      - They were restored to have bodies that were, say, like they were when they were thirty.
      - They had a baby just as any couple with a thirty-year-old woman a forty-year-old man might.
    - b. There are two things that demonstrate that this is how it was.
      - 1) First, that Sarah was given a young body is shown by the fact that once again, Abraham is afraid that kings will want to take Sarah into their harem.
        - He had been afraid when he went to Egypt, and sure enough, the Pharaoh wanted Sarah (he was not deluded), but that was before she was too old to have children.

- She was not so desirable when she was ninety.
  - But after she believed and received strength to conceive (but before Isaac is born), Abraham takes her to King Abimelech's territory, and once again is correct in supposing that Abimelech will want to have her as his wife.
  - Her youthful beauty and vigour had been restored.
- 2) We can see this with Abraham too—in this—that before they received strength to conceive a son, he is said to have a body that is as good as dead,
- but afterward, he was able to have more sons by his wife Keturah.
  - His youthful vigour and fertility had been restored to him.
- That is what God did for them personally. Their youth was restored.
2. But look at what God did, as a result of their faith, for the whole world!
- Hebrews 11:12 speaks of this: **“Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born *as many as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.*”**
- a. He brought forth the many nations He promised to Abraham!
- 1) First, He brought these nations forth to him physically.
- As promised, He established the nation later called Israel, the nation by which He brought forth Christ our Saviour.
  - The other children Abraham had also grew over the years to become great people or great nations.
- 2) But not He only brought forth many nations to Abraham physically, but even more, He has brought forth nations spiritually.
- He brought forth Christ, and now it has been 2000 years, and Jesus is still busy gathering spiritual descendants to Abraham from all the nations.
  - Even in this congregation, we have people from China, Korea, Ukraine, India, Brazil, Russia, Scotland, the Netherlands, the United States, and even Ontario.
- b. Talk about doing the impossible!
- This is grand thing—that God should save a vast multitude from nations that were sunk in the darkness.
  - Sarah received strength by faith to do this—to be the spiritual mother of these nations, and Abraham received strength by faith to be the spiritual father of all these nations.

## II. How should you respond to all of this?

- A. First of all, you should believe so that you who are also without strength may be saved.
1. That is the essence of the true religion.

- We are sinners and because we are, there is no way for us to save ourselves.
  - We are as impotent as Abraham and Sarah were until God strengthened them.
2. They were not the ones who saved the world, but they were the ones who brought forth the one who is the Saviour of the world.
    - His is the only way of salvation, and you will not receive it without faith.
    - If you either ignore your need of it—ignore the fact that you are sinner who needs to be restored to God, or if you try to be saved by some other method than Jesus crucified for sinners, you will utterly fail and you will perish in your sin.
    - Just as Abraham and Sarah looked to the LORD to bring forth nations for God and the one son who would save the world,
      - so you must look to the LORD to do what is otherwise impossible—to save you from your sin.
- B. Second, is that you should give thanks and praise to God for what He has done.
1. Praise Him for being so faithful to do what He has promised in saving the nations.
    - Praise Him for His power and His grace that brings salvation to the world.
  2. It is because of the finished work of Christ that we gather each Lord's Day to worship Him, to praise Him, to hear His word, and to break bread at His Table.
    - The grand thing in our text is to see that God brought forth from an ordinary woman the Son who saved us.
    - She believed, so she received strength to conceive a child, and God brought salvation to the world.
      - Let us marvel and let us embrace it and then let us give thanks and praise to our God.
      - Our whole life should be lived as an expression of thanksgiving to God, and we should be eager to sing praise to Him.

TRANS> That is the main lesson from our text.

- But there is also a moral lesson for us.
- C. Third, you need to have faith so that you can receive strength to do what God wants even though what He wants may seem impossible to you.
1. Think about this. Are you prevented from making progress because of unbelief?
    - I am not talking about whether you are a true believer or not.
    - I am talking about living the holy life that God has called you to live.
  2. Are you stuck in a rut? Do you have sin in your life that you have made peace with because it seems impossible to get rid of?
    - Have you decided that there is nothing you can do about your lust? about your selfishness? about your covetousness? about your worry and fear? about your pride? about your drinking or drug use? about your anger? about your lack of zeal for the Lord—your lack of love for Him and His kingdom? about your lack of concern for your neighbour? Perhaps you do not honour your parents.



Perhaps you have an empty prayer life. Perhaps you have no heart to win the lost.

- You are spiritually barren, and you are tired of it all and ready to die.

3. But let me remind you about Sarah.

- God had made the promise that she would bring forth a son to save the world, but she had no ability to do that.

- So instead of concluding that it was impossible, she concluded that God is faithful and that He will do what He has promised.

- By faith, Sarah received strength.

- By faith, so will you—to do the impossible.

- Don't settle for mediocrity—or even less.

- God can take your old, tired walk and make it fresh and vigorous and fruitful again.