

Hebrews

I. **Hebrews 11:11-16** . . . By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. [12] Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore. [13] All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. [14] For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. [15] And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. [16] But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

II. Prayer

III. Examples of Faith

A. **Hebrews 11:11-12** . . . By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. [12] Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

1. The first three people of faith presented to us in **Hebrews 11** were Abel, Enoch, and Noah. Their stories only tell of their living by faith and persevering in faith. In other words, their stories only tell of them living obediently and therefore righteously before God.
2. The next group of people presented in **Hebrews 11** have stories that include not only their strengths, but also their weakness.
 - a. Their stories show their life of persistent faith leading to an overall bent toward righteousness and also their times of unbelief leading to occasions of unrighteousness and sin.
 - b. Now I believe it is important to understand that we should never find comfort in knowing others are prone to unbelief and sin – just like us.

- c. However, we ought to be encouraged by these stories as we see that occasions of unbelief – leading to sin – do not mean all is lost in living a life of faith.
 - d. These stories make it abundantly clear that we can recover from occasions of unbelief and foolish rebellion against God. We can repent of despising God by selfishly going our own way. We can confess our sin, and we can return to pressing on in the life of faith so that at the end of our lives it can be said of us, “We lived by faith, and in so doing, pleased God.”
3. Sarah is one of those who had several recorded times of unbelief mixed in with her life of faith. One of the more obvious times in relation to having a child to carry on the family line was the time she laughed when the Angel of God told Abraham that a year from the time of their conversation, Sarah would conceive and bear a son. And why was she laughing? **Unbelief!** Unbelief in God who was promising to do what she believed was impossible.
4. Yet in spite of these times of unbelief, Sarah is held up before us as an example of living by faith. This means we can learn from Sarah’s life. So I want to point out three examples of Sarah’s faith that speak to us and which we can emulate – if we will.
- a. **First**, Sarah was willing to change her mind and go from unbelief to faith in what God said – in spite of the fact that what God was promising was understood – not just by her but by many at that time – to be humanly impossible.
 - (1) The point here is that Sarah came to her senses. She went from laughing in unbelief to trusting in God and then validating her faith by living according to God’s word. She went from trusting God where trust seemed reasonable to **also** trusting God where trust seemed unreasonable from the human perspective.
 - (2) Maybe you are like Sarah – trusting God where trust seems reasonable but withholding trust in those areas or in specific situations where you feel trust is unreasonable.
What can you do to move from unbelief to faith?
 - (a) First, you can choose to get honest about your unbelief – labeling it for what it is and being honest about what it does to you and your relationship with God.
 - i) Pure and simple, unbelief turns us against God so that we think and act contrary to God’s will and word.

- ii) My point here is that unbelief is not harmless – it is an evil like cancer. And just as unresisted, unchallenged cancer leads to death, so unbelief leads to sin. And just as the only hope of going on with life requires the removal of cancer from the body, so the only hope of going on with God in living by faith requires the removal of unbelief.
 - (b) Generally speaking, unbelief comes from a low view of God that sees God as inferior in character, unable in ability, and uncaring in attitude. So my second suggestion for moving from unbelief to faith is to ponder and meditate on the goodness, the faithfulness and the love of God. Search the scriptures to see these attributes of God. Read about those who lived by faith and consider the outcome of their lives. Read about those who lived according to unbelief and consider what it cost them. Talk to other Christians who have chosen faith where you are choosing unbelief. In other words, feed your faith by feeding an exalted view of God.
 - (c) My third suggestion for moving from unbelief to faith is to decide that from this day forward you will trust God rather than question God in a suspicious way.
 - (d) Finally, repent of unbelief. Confess it as sin. Make right the wrong you have done in distrusting God and living in unbelief. Then proceed to move forward in faith.
- b. Return to learning from Sarah – the **second** thing about Sarah’s faith that we can and should emulate is that Sarah was a supportive member of her marriage in pursuing a life of faith in obedience to God. She did not hinder – either by her attitude, her words, or by her behavior – what God was asking she and Abraham to do. It is true, she made some bad choices along the way. But overall, she was a true helpmate to Abraham by joining him in living by faith so that the two walked together in living according to God’s will and word.
- (1) Whether you are married or single, if you are a Christian, you belong to some group. All of us belong to the body of Christ, and some of us belong to a spouse.

- (2) Sarah's life of faith teaches us the importance of doing our part in living by faith and encouraging a life of faith in those around us – for this is how the will of God gets accomplished in the home and the church.
 - (3) If you are allowing unbelief to fester in your life – be it a small amount or in a big way, choose to become like Sarah and put that unbelief out so that you become a supportive member in living by faith in your home and in our church.
- c. The **third** thing about Sarah's faith that we can and should emulate is that Sarah persevered in living by faith. She continued trusting in God and living according to God's will over a period of many years when nothing of what God had promised was being fulfilled.
- (1) Let me give you some numbers so you can see the endurance and tenaciousness of Sarah's faith.
 - (a) Abraham was **75** years old when God first called him to leave his family and travel to the land of Promise. In calling him, God implied Abraham would have at least one son.
 - (b) Right after Abraham freed Lot from the kings who invaded Sodom and took Lot captive, God promised Abraham that he would have a son – yet none came.
 - (c) Some time later, and we don't know how long, Sarah asked Abraham to have a son through her servant, Hagar. By the time Ishmael was born, Abraham was **86** years old. That is **11** years after God first promised Abraham and Sarah – not Abraham and Hagar – an inheritance and an heir.
 - (d) By the time Isaac was finally born, Abraham was **100** years old. That is **14** years after Ishmael was born.
 - (2) Do the math. There were **11** years between God's first promise of an heir and Ishmael's birth. Then another **14** years passed before Sarah gave birth to Isaac. Add that up and we see that in spite of Sarah's occasions of distrust, she persevered in her faith without seeing God's promise fulfilled for **25** years.
 - (a) How did she remain faithful so long? She trusted God and counted Him good. In other words, she lived each day by faith in God rather than by hope in the imminent fulfillment of the promise. You see, her

faith in God, himself, made the timing of the fulfillment of God's promise inconsequential to her living by faith.

- (b) Which brings us back to us and our faith in God. We can be like Sarah in this regard if we will trust in God, himself, so that the troubles and hardships and disappointments and suffering and losses of this life remain inconsequential to living by faith – day in and day out for the rest of our lives.
- d. Before moving on to **verses 13-16 of Hebrews 11**, let me restate these three lessons from Sarah:
 - (1) Sarah was willing to change her mind and go from unbelief to faith in what God said – in spite of the fact that what God was promising was generally understood to be humanly impossible.
 - (2) Sarah was a supportive member in her marriage in pursuing a life of faith. And we will be like Sarah if we will be a supportive member of the Church in living by faith, and if married, a supportive member in our home.
 - (3) Sarah continued trusting in God and living according to God's will and word over a period of many years when nothing of what God had promised was being fulfilled.

B. Hebrews 11:13-16 . . . All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. [14] For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. [15] And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. [16] But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

- 1. The essence of the message in these four verses is that the life of faith is a heavenly and eternal minded life, not an earthly and transitory minded life. And the result is that God is not ashamed (*delighted, honored, proud*) to be called the God of those who by faith live according to this mindset.
- 2. What does this message mean for us today?
 - a. Though the life of faith is lived in the here and now and requires us to be ever mindful of how we are living right now,

we live the life of faith for God – not ourselves, and for future glory – not for immediate financial gain or earthly fame or creature comforts or release from trouble or freedom from suffering or healing from sickness.

- b. I want to say those two things again, but a bit differently.
 - (1) We live this life of faith for God because at the very least we revere God and at our best we love God, and because we have confidence in God – confidence in His goodness and faithfulness and love and righteousness and holiness and truthfulness.
 - (2) We live this life of faith for the glory of God because we want His name to be hallowed throughout the earth.
 - (a) To live for the pleasures or riches or comforts gained in this life is to live for our own pleasure and glory. Such a life is a life of unbelief.
 - (b) Now there is no question that we will receive rewards for living by faith. But even here, the rewards the people of faith seek are the eternal rewards – those rewards which can never be taken from us because they are eternal rather than temporal.
- 3. When our mind and heart are set more on earthly and temporal things than on eternal things, we are prone to distrust God. With an earthly mindset we easily distrust God when facing things pertaining to this life that seem really important to us – especially when facing loss or when it appears God is not acting quick enough or not acting at all.
 - a. Is it not true that when we are earthly minded we are easily moved to distrust God when we have lost a loved one or a job?
 - b. Do we not easily distrust God when we are seriously sick and no healing is in sight – or when someone we love is seriously sick?
 - c. Do we not easily distrust God when our marriage is persistently unhappy and getting progressively worse?
 - d. Do we not easily distrust God when a particular conflict is painful and seemingly unresolvable?
 - e. Do we not easily distrust God when a fast-moving situation looks to be turning into a disaster or when we long for a disaster's damage to be repaired yet it remains unchanged?

- f. Do we not easily distrust God when we just want relief from something that is causing us pain – be it physical or emotional?
 - g. And Do we not easily distrust God when we don't have as much as most of the people around us?
- 4. What I am trying to help us understand is that life is full of reasons and temptations to distrust God, to forsake obedience and to chart our own course in rebellion against God's prescribed course for us. However, we make life all the harder when we allow our mind to get consumed with earthly and transitory things – for such a mindset opens the door to unbelief by minimizing or pushing out heavenly and eternal thinking.

IV. Conclusion

- A. Let us learn from Sarah. Though she laughed in unbelief and failed in other ways, she overcame her unbelief and moved more and more in the direction of trusting God and living by faith so as to fulfill God's will for her.
- B. If you see distrust of God in your life, you can, like Sarah, throw it out and replace it with faith – the kind of faith that brings you into willing and cheerful obedience to the will and word of God.