

# Is anything too hard for the Lord?

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning. I'm Hong Park and one of the elders of the church and today we are continuing with our series on journeying in faith. Thank you Joanna for reading the passage for us. Shall we just pray? Father we gather around your word today and help us remember your wondrous deeds. Help us to understand and to proclaim the truth of your words faithfully. Speak to us from your word Lord in the name of Jesus we ask. Now all of us have encountered people who make promises to us.

Some promise to pay us back at a certain time frame. Some promise to return our calls. Others promise electricity to your kampong. Jonathan Swift wrote promises are made to be broken and Abraham Lincoln was quoted to have said we must not promise what we ought not lest we be called to perform what we cannot. Sometimes we know that the person who made the promise will probably not fulfill them because we know their character. But occasionally you hear this said of someone. You can trust him.

Whatever he says he will do. He has never failed me. Whatever promises whether promises are fulfilled depends very much on the person making it. In today's passage we will meet two old people confronted with a promise. What happens when faith confronts the facts of life? Will the promise maker come true for them? Let's dive in. A question is asked of Abraham in verse 9. Where is your wife Sarah?

Now where is Sarah indeed? In our passage she is hiding in the tent. But where is she in her life journey at this stage? Where is Sarah now? We first meet Sarah in Genesis 11 when Tara, her father-in-law, relocates the family. At the age of 65, she left Haran in obedience to the Lord who has made a promise to bless her husband Abraham and to make him into a great nation and through whom all the families of the earth will be blessed. Now she was a beautiful woman and this led to a shameful episode where she ended up in Pharaoh's house in Pharaoh's harem telling a half-lie at Abraham's behest that she was his sister.

What emotional trauma she must have gone through. After Egypt, they eventually settled at their present location near the great trees of Mamre. By then, Abraham had become a very wealthy man and yet they remained childless. Hearing from God that Abraham's heir would be from his own flesh and blood, she made a decision which she would deeply regret of asking Abraham to father a son through Hagar, her slave.

[ 3 : 19 ] For 13 years, they thought the promised blessings of God would come through Ishmael. Then about three months before today's passage, one day out of the blue, her husband made every male in their household, they got them all circumcised. It would be unimaginable that Sarah did not ask Abraham why. She then hears from Abraham that God says Ishmael is not the one. The covenant of blessing of which circumcision was the sign will be through a son, Isaac, of which she was to bear. Yes, she, Sarah.

And what's more, the due date was one year from then. What was Sarah to make of this? She wasn't jumping for joy. She was perplexed. Firstly, Abraham was 99. Now, in those times, people lived long lives.

Abraham's father, Tara lived 205 years and had his youngest son at 70. So I think we cannot equate our present-day experience of what an elderly person can or cannot do to people living in that era.

But even so, from Abraham's incredulous reaction to the announcement which we heard of last Sunday, it must have been unheard of even then for a hundred-year-old man to father a child. What about Sarah? She was 89. Verse 11 states that Sarah was past the age of childbearing. A more literal translation reads, In other words, Sarah had stopped menstruating.

[ 5 : 16 ] She was not just advanced in age. She was post-menopausal. Romans 4.19 says, Let's take our eyes off Sarah and Abraham for one moment.

Where are we in our life journey? What is keeping you awake at night? What is testing your faith in the power of God?

Perhaps you are agonising over an unbelieving child or one who is wandering away from the faith. Are you calling out to God to help you with a besetting sin?

Perhaps you are looking for direction. Should I apply for this job or that one? Are you considering full-time ministry? Are you considering bailing out on an abusive relationship?

Have you lost your job in this terrible pandemic? Are you anxious whether you can fulfil the demands of your new job? Has your business nose-dived with the repeated MCOs imposed?

[ 6 : 47 ] Is online school demotivating you? Are you feeling depressed by the isolation, the lack of social contact and movement restrictions? Has a friend or even you contracted the COVID virus?

Are you undergoing treatment for a potentially terminal illness? Or a debilitating illness? Or perhaps you are caring for a family member with a disability?

Maybe dementia perhaps? Are you praying to get pregnant like Sarah? Or are you at the point of giving up? And so you ask, Sarah is in a humanly impossible situation.

And Abraham, I'm sure he had his moments of doubt. Can Sarah really believe what Abraham told her? Into Abraham's dilemma, three unexpected visitors shows up for a fellowship meal.

The narrator tells us in verse 1 that Yahweh appears to Abraham. Now this is the third time the Lord has appeared to Abraham. And this time in a visible form.

[ 8 : 18 ] Abraham looks up and he sees three men. It becomes clear later on that it was Yahweh and two angels. Now the religions note that in the Old Testament, when Yahweh appears in any form to be seen by human beings, he takes on the human form.

Now something in the manner of this man must have set them apart as very important people. You remember that, you see, even though Abraham was already an elder statesman, rich, powerful, he greeted them most respectfully.

He hurried towards them and humbly bowed down to the ground before them. Now scholars are divided as to whether Abraham recognised Yahweh at the onset.

But I would think Abraham soon recognised the Lord for two reasons. In verse 3, Abraham says, If I have found favour in your eyes, my Lord, do not pass your servant by.

Now the word Lord in the Hebrew, as the ESV study Bible helps fully points out, is Adonai, a masculine noun used exclusively for God.

[ 9 : 33 ] And also in verse 9, when the visitor displayed knowledge of his wife and even of her new name given by Yahweh, Abraham was not taken by surprise, despite there being no record of Abraham ever mentioning his wife to them beforehand.

And so in verse 3, Abraham says, If I have found favour or grace in your eyes, my Lord, do not pass your servant by. Please stay for a while.

Let me provide water that you may all wash your feet and then rest under this tree. And since you have come to your servant, please let me get you something to eat so that you can be refreshed before you go on your way.

Very well, they answered. Do as you say. So off Abraham goes. The meal for which Abraham describes as a little something was actually very lavish.

The amount of finest flour used was 16 kg, which, when I checked, can make at least 30 loaves of bread. 30 loaves for three men.

[ 10 : 41 ] Along with that was the tenderest veal, curd and milk. Now, many have commented on the generous hospitality exhibited by Abraham as something for us to emulate.

The writer of the book of Hebrews wrote, Then when we extend hospitality to strangers, we may be entertaining angels unknowingly. Unknowingly. Jesus says that when we invite a stranger who is a Christian into our home, we are in effect inviting Jesus himself in.

And as his guests dined, Abraham stood near them under a tree, attentive, like an alert waiter. It's quite an idyllic scene.

Actually, God does not need food. But the fellowship meal is, as the writer pointed out, a concession by God to Abraham's ignorance. Yahweh draws near to his servant in fellowship.

He knew Abraham and Sarah needed his reassurance at this time. He makes a deliberate stop on his way to Sodom to meet and speak into their lives.

[ 11 : 52 ] In Isaiah 41.8, God calls Abraham his friend. Now, life is difficult, isn't it? If it is not this thing, it is something else.

Perhaps some of the difficulties I listed earlier on may have resonated with you. The first thing we can take away from today's passage is this. God loves to draw near to his people.

He loves to be in fellowship with you. In fact, we are more privileged than Abraham on this side of the cross. For disciples who abide in Jesus, who have found favor or grace in his eyes, this is what Jesus said in John 14.23.

Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. God no longer comes just for a meal and then leave.

He moves in and makes his home with you. Whether you are feeling good, or whether you are facing good or difficult times, know this.

[ 13 : 01 ] The Lord Jesus is with you. He knows what you are going through, and he cares. He understands and he loves. He walks with you. And as he promised in Psalm 23, he is our good shepherd, to be present with us and to comfort us as we walk through our darkest valleys.

Yes, even the valley of the shadow of death. Having experienced human suffering, human limitations, betrayal, forsakenness on the cross, and death, he is able to empathize with us.

He knows how weak and afraid we can be. And we can approach him with confidence and find mercy and grace to help us in our time of need.

He bears our griefs and carries our sorrows. He is our closest friend. I hope that is our common experience. But are there among us those for whom Jesus is in danger of becoming a forgotten friend?

A friend whose voice has been ignored? A friend with whom you have not spoken for days, even months? Have you forgotten that he has moved in even?

[ 14 : 23 ] Today is a good day to reconnect with the one who loves you, to hear the kind and gentle voice of the good shepherd. The Lord asked Abraham, Where is your wife Sarah?

This was Yahweh gently turning the focus on Sarah. He already knew where she was. There in the tent, Abraham answered. Now Sarah's ears pricked up when the man spoke her name.

Sarah had been hiding behind the tent flap, eavesdropping on the conversation, which perhaps as a woman of those times, she was socially not allowed to participate in.

The Lord repeats the promise he made to Abraham within the hearing of Sarah. Sarah, I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah, your wife, will have a son.

Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, After I am worn out and my Lord is old, will I now have this pleasure? She did better than Abraham, who laughed so hard he fell on his face when he heard the promise of Isaac back in Genesis 17.

[ 15 : 36 ] And even though Sarah was hidden and laughed discreetly, Yahweh the Lord, from whom nothing is hidden, heard. He said to Abraham, Why is Sarah laughing?

And why did Sarah laugh and say, Will I really have a child now that I am old? Is anything too hard for the Lord? And then he repeats his promise a third time, I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son.

Is anything too hard for the Lord? It can also be translated, Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? Too impossible? Too supernatural for the Lord?

It is a rhetoric question to challenge Sarah and Abraham's faith. It challenges our faith. Indeed, it is a statement that has challenged the faith of every generation of believers.

Is anything too hard for the Lord? The Lord is saying to Sarah, You really do not yet realize who I am and what I can do.

[ 16 : 49 ] I know you are old and worn out. Turn your eyes from yourself and turn your eyes upon me. Look at who I am. The one speaking to you is the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

I created out of nothing. Do you think anything will be too hard for me to fulfill when I already said, I will do it? Being caught up, Sarah was afraid.

And so she lied and said, I did not laugh. But he said, Yes, you did laugh. And the conversation ends. We are not told how Sarah processed the gentle rebuke of the Lord.

But we marvel at God's grace to Sarah and Abraham. We are told in Hebrews 11 that Sarah eventually had faith. Hebrews 11, 11 says this, And by faith, even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was unable to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise.

One year later, we are told in Genesis 21, Sarah laughs again, this time with joyful laughter rather than incredulous laughter. The son of promise, Isaac, he laughs, was born to Sarah and Abraham just as the Lord had promised.

[18:17] Sarah had lifted her eyes from what was impossible and put her faith in the Lord who is faithful and with whom nothing is too hard.

We must not go away from this passage thinking that the Lord who can do anything will do everything exactly the way we want Him to. Verse 14 does not even remotely suggest that if we have enough faith, think positively enough, if we declare and claim loudly enough, that God will bow His will to you and do as you demand.

That is not the lesson of this passage. That is a false teaching that has no support in the Bible. Instead, the lesson from the passage today is that nothing, nothing will stop God from keeping any promise He makes.

Isaac's birth is just the first of hard and impossible things the Lord does in the long march to reverse the effects of sin in the world.

From Isaac, God will make for Himself a chosen people, Israel, from whom will come one who will destroy the works of Satan. He is the chosen one through whom Abraham's descendants will truly become God's blessings to the nations.

[19:41] God will not let anything stop Him from redeeming a people who will spend eternity with Him. And as we read about God's dealing with the nation of Israel, whether through her success or her failures or the obedience or rebellion of her people, the redemptive plan keeps moving forward.

Two thousand years after Abraham, a daughter of Abraham would receive a visit from an angel. The announcement of yet another impossible pregnancy.

Mary was not post-menopausal like Sarah, but was a virgin. And she too wondered, how can this be? She was told similarly in the ESV in Luke 1.37, for nothing will be impossible with God.

The identity of the child was even more astounding. The angel said, the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

Therefore, the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God. God again does something impossible. The virgin will be with child.

[20:59] A fulfillment of the promise made through the prophet Isaiah 600 years before. Isaiah, sorry, Isaac was Abraham's beloved son and Jesus is God's beloved son who will save the people from their sins.

At his birth, the angels called him Savior, Savior, Messiah. In his ministry on earth, Jesus did many impossible, miraculous things to alleviate the suffering of people who came to him.

At the same time, this served as signs to his identity. When confronted with the difficulty of a seemingly good young man to gain salvation, his disciples asked, who then can be saved?

Jesus looked at them and said, with men, this is impossible, but with God, all things are possible. You know, in Jesus, God does the hardest thing that he had to do to redeem you.

Imagine, a holy, transcendent, all-powerful, limitless God becoming a helpless baby, living our human lives with all its limitations, temptations, and sorrows, surrounded by sin and corruption, and eventually allowing himself to be murdered by his own creatures.

[22:31] Imagine further, the holy God who has never and cannot sin, taking upon himself the sin of all mankind, and the punishment that human sin deserved.

By becoming our substitute, spiritually dead humans like you and me, by grace through faith, can be made spiritually alive, justified and accepted, called into a familiar relationship with him.

God creates a new humanity in Christ. Nothing is too hard for him when it comes to fulfilling his promise to save. But how are we to process the question, is anything too hard for the Lord when it comes to other challenges in life?

How do we apply it? Surely, if nothing is too hard for the Lord, then he can certainly change all the circumstances we face. Yes, indeed, one day he will change all his people's sad circumstances.

But that is not the promise for today. That is a promise for a future day when Jesus comes again, when all wrongs in life will be put right for the righteous.

[23:53] Does that mean that the fact that nothing too hard for the Lord is not relevant for today? Of course, it is still relevant. We are asked, just like Sarah, to turn our eyes to God, to what He has done and what He can do and what He will do.

He is still the God of the hard things, God of the impossible. But, we must let God be God and we can do this in three ways.

Firstly, we must call on God to do what seems hard, what seems impossible. Tell Him your desires. Bring your requests to Him. Requests, not demands.

If you want healing, tell Him. If you want to escape from danger, tell Him. If you want God to bring relief to a person or a situation, tell Him.

If you cannot bring your difficult circumstances and challenges to God for relief, then who can you bring them to? You are only following the examples of people calling out to God for help in the Psalms, of people bringing their needs to Jesus in the Gospels, of obeying the instructions of James to pray for healing for the sick.

[ 25 : 12 ] In your eyes, is He still the God for whom nothing is too hard? After that, we are to leave the answers to God.

Let God be God. We trust Him for the best things. He is not our servant. We are His servants. He is sovereign, all-knowing, all-powerful.

Above all, He has demonstrated His great love for us in Jesus Christ. He is not a hard or stingy God. He is loving, patient, kind, good, gentle, faithful, and generous.

Paul writes in Romans 8, 32, He who did not spare His own son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also along with Him graciously give us all things?

God may indeed change your circumstances for you when you call out to Him. You get the email confirming your new job. The doctor is amazed at your miraculous response to the chemotherapy.

[ 26 : 22 ] The ultrasound confirms your pregnancy after years of barrenness. Your son finally rededicates his life to Christ after many years lost in spiritual wilderness.

Conversely, God may not change your circumstances because that is not His will for that given moment. There may be other things more important to Him for you.

remember Jesus, our Lord, who prayed in Gethsemane? Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me.

Yet, not what I will, but what you will. And God's will was not to take the cup of suffering away, but for Jesus to go to the cross, suffer, die, and rise again for the redemption of mankind.

That was the hard thing God does. Paul also did not have the thorn in his flesh removed because God wanted him to remember that His grace was more than sufficient for Paul.

[ 27 : 34 ] And the apostles taught us that God uses the trials of life to make us mature and whole in Christ. Paul tells us in Romans 8, 28-29, In all things, God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.

For those God foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. That is God's purpose for you. That is the good He meant that is to conform you to the image of His Son. And He will use all the things we face, whether good or bad, pleasant or difficult, to work together to achieve that end that we become like Christ.

Perhaps the hard thing that God will do for you is to help you grow spiritually through your difficult circumstances. Let God be God.

Finally, we let God be God by holding on to the promises that He has made. Some of them you have heard earlier on in the sermon, such as the promise to be with you, to walk to life with you, both in the good and the bad times.

[ 28 : 52 ] He promises to supply our needs. And here are some other examples. I have listed the Bible references in the outline for you to explore further. He promises forgiveness for sins when we confess and He will purify us from all unrighteousness.

He promises life, that whoever believes in Jesus will live even though they die, that whoever lives by believing in Jesus will never ever die.

They have crossed from death to life. He assures us all who comes to Him, He will never drive away. God promises that the work He has started in you, He will carry on to completion for the day of Christ where we will participate in His glory.

Now, aren't these promises made to you as precious as the promise made to Sarah? If you are not a Christian today, but you are earnestly seeking, will you trust a God who says nothing is impossible for Him to reach you to?

Ask Him to remove every obstacle that is standing in your way to faith in Jesus. That is a prayer He will love to say yes to.

[ 30 : 09 ] And so, friends, as we walk our journey of faith, let us remember that God is near and He has made His home in us. He is here.

Point to have fellowship with us. Hear Him speak to us through His Word as we read it, as we meditate on it, as we hear it, as we study it, as we hear His still small voice reminding us of them. In His presence, as we spend, be in His presence as we spend time with Him in our private devotions, our public worship, in our prayers. Put our faith in the one who never goes back on His Word.

Let us look and wait with anticipation the promised new heaven and earth that awaits us when and where He will put all things right at His coming. Let us trust Him to sustain our faith as He leads us in His own perfect way through every hardship this world can throw at us.

The promise keeping God of Sarah and Abraham asks us today, is anything too hard for the Lord? Let's pray.

[ 31 : 27 ] O promise keeping Father, we thank You for doing the hard thing to save us. Keep our eyes upon You to trust You as we face life's challenges, knowing that You walk with us, You comfort us and strengthen us and You give us what is best for us.

We know that as we look at the cross and we know You will not withhold any good thing from us. Enable us to believe and to learn to be contented.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus. Amen.