

“By faith even Sarah herself” Hebrews chapter 11 verse 11

The writer of the book of Hebrews might be stretching a point when he includes Sarah, Abraham's wife, in this list of faith filled people. If we check back in the book of Genesis, we don't find her exactly rushing to believe.

When Abraham hosts three heavenly visitors, who tell him that he and Sarah, in their old age, will have a son, her reaction is to laugh. “After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I have delight?” she says, indicating that she feels that perhaps neither she nor Abraham would even be up to doing what they would need to do to conceive.

But the being who is visiting them asks a searching question. “Why did Sarah laugh? ... Is anything impossible for the Lord?” Sarah, in fear, denies laughing. “Yes, you did laugh” replies the visitor.

That's something we might like to remember when we are faced with what seem to be impossible situations. Nothing is beyond God's ability to find a way through and out of, and to strengthen our faith and cause us to grow in the process.

But we mustn't be too hard on Sarah. Clearly she was not without faith, because the letter to the Hebrews tells us that she “considered that the one who promised was faithful” and so she was able to conceive. She gave birth to a son and they named him, with a touch of irony, Isaac, meaning “he laughs”, a living reminder of Sarah's scepticism.

The birth of Isaac is tremendously significant. He is Abraham and Sarah's only child, yet from him is to come all the tribes of Israel, and he is to be the object of the greatest test of Abraham's faith.

Life is confusing at times, isn't it? Sometimes we feel that we have no idea what is going on. Perhaps we have a sense of where God wants to take us and what he wants us to do, but we can see no possible way to get there, and so we try to find all kinds of natural ways to bring about what we believe God has promised us.

But this is not the only time in the bible that a heavenly being has announced the birth of a child. Much, much later in the gospel of Luke we read of an angel appearing to a young woman in the Galilean town of Nazareth and declaring that she would become pregnant with a son. “How can this be,” she asks, “since I have not had sexual relations with a man?”

The angel explains to her that her child will be conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and concludes “For nothing will be impossible with God.” And just as the miraculous conception of Isaac paved the way for the billions of God's chosen people, Israel, so the conception of Jesus ushered into the world the means of the salvation of multitudes.

What God wills, even if it is humanly impossible, he carries out in our lives too, and all the more when we respond as Mary did, “May it be done to me according to your word.”

Prayer

Father, thank you that you will always do what you say you will do, even if it seems impossible to us. You have a plan and purpose for my life, and you have a plan and a purpose for this troubled world. I make myself available to be a vessel of your will, so that your name might be glorified in me. In Jesus name, amen.

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