

Series: Biblical Heroes and Zeros – week 13

CDOBC – beginning (*Resuming*) on 11/6/11

Title: “An Imperfect Hero”: Sarah (*Abraham’s wife*)

November 13, 2011

Genesis 12-23

OBJECTIVE: To help us realize that we can trust God’s Word and His promises to us.

Announcements

- Welcome / guests – communication cards
- Oikos Class – begins 11/20
- Welcome Class – 11/16
- Operation Christmas Child boxes due today!
- Youth Haven Ranch donation box in lobby

Opening prayer

Many Christians think that if someone is considered a hero of the faith, that they must have made all the right decisions in life...that everything they do must be ‘*above average*’ in the faith category. But this is never true. Nobody would doubt *Moses was a great man of faith*, yet he murdered a man, and was hesitant to say ‘yes’ to God. *King David was a hero of the faith*, yet he committed adultery and murder. *Peter is a hero of the faith*, yet he denied Jesus three times in the night of His betrayal – and at times he was prejudiced against Gentiles.

Sarah is a hero of the faith – and she was imperfect like all the other heroes. The account of Sarah’s life recorded in Scripture helps us see some very important truths for our own life as we strive to live a life pleasing to the Lord.

God’s love is unconditional.

Sarah did not deserve the blessings of God in her life. You and I don't deserve the blessings of God in our life either!

When Sarah sinned God never withdrew His love for Sarah – and He never turned His back on her, but He loved her throughout her entire life.

God's love for you does not depend on your merit – it does not depend on your perfection. He loves you...period. His love for you does not increase or decrease based on your performance. He is love, and He loves you so much that He died for you! The love of God for Sarah throughout her life, reminds us of this truth...that God's love for you is unconditional. There is nothing you can do that will cause God to stop loving you!

Sin always has painful consequences.

In Sarah's life, fear led to three great moral failures. Fear led Abraham and Sarah to sin.

1 Peter 3:6 "...like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear."

This is an important truth for us to grasp...that we often choose to sin when we are afraid. Afraid of what? Most often, we fear what will happen to our relationships if we are obedient to God. We may fear that if we pursue holiness that we will be less happy and experience less pleasure in life.

The first time this is recorded for us is in Genesis 12:10-14
(Read passage).

Abraham and Sarah lied to Pharaoh about their married status (Facebook). This passage gives us an interesting view of Pharaoh's ethics. Since Sarah was a very beautiful woman (65 yrs old), Abraham was afraid that Pharaoh would kill him so he could then take his wife without any guilt! They told Pharaoh (12:11-14) that she was Abraham's sister. This was a lie because she was actually his half-sister. They had the same father, but different mothers. Pharaoh took Sarah into his haram, but before he could be with her, God struck Pharaoh and his household with serious diseases (12:17), and this no doubt caused much anxiety, pain, and maybe even death in his household. As a result, Pharaoh returned Sarah to Abraham, untouched. The second time fear led to sin is recorded for us is in Genesis 16:1ff (**Read passage**). The text doesn't state that fear was the impetus that motivated their sin, but I believe they were fearful that God would not keep His promise to them.

After ten years had passed from the initial promise of a son, and there was still no son as God had promised, Sarah takes the initiative and tries to help God (16:1ff). It was customary at that time in history, if a wife was barren, to offer her maidservant to the husband as a secondary wife, and if the maidservant bore a child, the child would become the adopted child of the first wife. Sarah was barren, and told Abraham that he should sleep with Hagar, Sarah's maidservant, and through this union they would hopefully have a son. A son was born, and he was named Ishmael. God told Hagar that her son would be a "wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers." (16:12)

Ishmael is the patriarch of the Arab people, and Isaac (the son of the promise to Abraham and Sarah) is the son whom God chose to further the Jewish people through. Ishmael's descendants and Isaac's descendants have always lived in hostility and violence toward each other. Sin has painful consequences.

The third time fear led to sin is recorded for us in Genesis 20:2ff. Twenty five years after they first lied about their marital status in Egypt, they lie again telling another king - King Abimelech, that Sarah was his sister (20:2). It's almost an exact repeat of what happened in Egypt. King Abimelech takes Sarah into his haram (this time Sarah is 90 years old!), and God strikes Abimelech with some sort of illness or physical infirmity (20:17), and Sarah is returned to Abraham untouched.

We will often think that our sin doesn't affect others... *'We're two (or in this case three) consenting adults... we're not hurting anyone of forcing anyone else to do something'* is often the reasoning and justification. But sin always comes packed with pain. Sin always brings devastation and death. In Sarah's life, we see this truth clearly as their sin always carried with it painful consequences to themselves, their descendants, or to others.

Living by faith is difficult.

Sarah lived for twenty five years with the scarlet letter of her day – barrenness. 'But God promised them a son' you might say. Shouldn't the promise of God have been enough to sustain her?

“Yes”...but it’s much easier to say the word than it is to live year after year when all you have is words...even if they are words from God. In no way am I saying that the Word of God is not enough to sustain us. It is enough! I’m simply trying to make the case that it’s not easy, and it would help all of us in the church if we are more open about the difficulties that sometimes accompany the life of faith.

Think of your own life and the struggles you face right now:

Parenting issues

A struggling marriage

Unemployment

Debt

Terminal illness

Depression

Loneliness

Aging parents in poor health

Uncertainty about our nation and what the future holds

A family member serving our country in a distant land

God has addressed all of these things in His Word.

His Word should be all we need to sustain us...but it’s difficult.

Hebrews 6:12 “We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.”

I believe this is one of the reasons God has blessed us with the Church...so we can encourage one another to hold onto the promises of God – even when those promises seem distant and

when it seems like they will never be realized in our life. But understand...it is difficult to live a life of faith!

God showers His grace upon us.

Read 18:9-15 — *(Sarah's laughter at God's promise)*

You know where I see God's grace in this passage? Right between vs. 15 and vs. 16.

You would expect that when you lie to God, that you are toast! Sarah lied to God. She even laughed at His promise because by that time, it was laughable that she and Abe would physically be able to...do what's needed to conceive a child! But God directly, yet gently confronts her lie, and moves on. His grace was also shown through their bumbling attempts to fulfill the promise themselves through Hagar. God's grace is seen in His blessing on Ishmael, and in the fact that God didn't rescind His promise to bless the nations through Abraham and Sarah when they sinned!

Do you understand how much grace you have day in and day out?

Eph. 1:7-8 "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8 that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding."

Keep faith, because God does the impossible.

Since God always works according to His timeline, we often get discouraged because we don't see Him work when we ask Him to. We may pray for years without an obvious answer, or

we may think that our situation is hopeless, and we never bring it to God in prayer.

18:14 “Is anything too hard for the LORD?”

Matt. 19:26 (Context is Jesus talking about a rich man entering heaven) “And Jesus having earnestly beheld, said to them, `With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” (*Don't ever stop praying for someone in your Oikos to come to Christ!*)

Luke 1:37 “For nothing is impossible with God.”

How do we know Sarah kept faith?

They had Isaac. To keep faith in the promise God had given them, meant that they had to “act” on that promise. This was not like Mary, who being a virgin, conceived through the Holy Spirit. Sarah conceived the old fashioned way – and this was the manifestation of their faith.

James (2:18 -NASB) said, “You have faith and I have works ; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”

Romans 4:19 “Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead--since he was about a hundred years old--and that Sarah's womb was also dead.”

Hebrews 11:11 “By faith Abraham, even though he was past age--and Sarah herself was barren--was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise.”

Sarah is the only woman in the bible whose age is given at the time of her death...127 years old. (Gen. 23)

Maybe God knows what most of us men have also learned...that we shouldn't mess around with a woman's age! Seriously, most commentators agree that giving her age is a statement of respect and blessing. She was blessed by God to live a full life...a life of many years...a life that was surprisingly fruitful in her later years.

Application

Follow God's leading in your life.

He leads us by His Spirit – and His Spirit always uses the truth of Scripture...He never leads you in a way that is contrary to Scripture.

Pleasure is found in Christ – not sin.

The world wants you to believe the opposite is true...and there is pleasure in sin.

But the initial pleasure always leads to pain...and sin always leads to death.

Christ wants to bless you. He wants you to enjoy deeper levels of pleasure than the flesh can deliver.

Trust in God's Word.

God always keeps His promises.

When God tells us that Jesus is the only way to forgiveness and new life...trust Him.

When Jesus tells you that He came to give you abundant life (John 10:10)...trust Him.

When His Word tells us how we are to live – that we
are to live holy lives...trust Him.
He always keeps His promises.

Close in prayer