

Genesis 21: 1-7; "And the Lord visited Sarah", Sermon # 60 in the series - "Beginnings", Delivered on February 26th, 2006 by Pastor Paul Rendall in the Morning Worship Service

When you stop to think that it had been 25 years since God had given the promise to Abraham that he would have descendants, he could have thought to himself, "Well it is about time," when Isaac was finally born. But we do not find that either he or Sarah reacted in this way. I believe that they had come to understand that there are reasons for God's delays. God's timing of the fulfillment of His promises to us may seem very late, but it is always perfect because it brings glory to Him and it humbles and amazes us. What is the best way, the righteous way to respond to God's delayed fulfillment of His promises to us? Well let me suggest to you 3 things which will help you to respond in a righteous way.

1st- In seeing promises which have been delayed, come to pass; it is good to remember God's sovereignty. (Verses 1-3)

2nd- In seeing promises which have been delayed, come to pass; it is good to remember our obedience. (Verses 4 and 5)

3rdly- In seeing promises which have been delayed, come to pass; it is good to laugh for joy. (Verses 3, 6, 7))

1st- In seeing promises which have been delayed, come to pass; it is good to remember God's Sovereignty.

Verse 1 says, "And the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as he had spoken." When the Lord is going to do something for us in particular, in accordance with His eternal purpose in Election, He visits us. He visited Sarah and took away her barrenness and gave her conception in her womb. And if it is His purpose to save us from our sins, He visits our souls in a deliberate fashion as well. We do not need to stumble over this. Salvation from sin is never an accidental thing. It is never simply a decisional thing on our part. It is true that we do make a decision when we consciously place our faith in Jesus for salvation, but sometimes we do not understand that we are being led to do this by God's Spirit giving us grace and the Father drawing us in relation to our hearing and believing His Word. It is, first, the deliberate decision of God to visit us. It is His sovereign and eternal purpose at work in time and space in my life in particular. John 6: 44 says, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day." Could Sarah have had this child without God's doing the work of change within Sarah's womb and visiting her? Absolutely not! So neither can we come to saving faith with the Lord visiting us.

He is the One who takes away our blindness and our barrenness. He is the One who turns our heart to look to Him and creates faith where there once was only enmity and hostility toward Himself. It is God who so worked that Sarah conceived and bore to Abraham a son, and it is God who so works that

you and I as sinners can conceive the truth that God has so loved us that He gave us His Son to die so that we might live spiritually and live forever. The physical conception of Sarah is directly linked to her faith it says in Hebrews 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." Just as Sarah received strength to conceive seed, so those who come to saving faith receive strength to "see the kingdom of God" and strength to "enter the kingdom of God." All this happens when the Lord visits us in regenerating power in the New Birth. Christ must be formed in us and born in us just as Isaac, the child of promise, was formed in Sarah's womb. It was God who gave her the ability to do this. So too, it is only God who can give us to power to become His children by the New Birth.

Verse 2 says, "For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him." Abraham and Sarah must have hoped many times that Isaac could have been born sooner. Sometimes we might wish to have been saved and converted when we were younger. We wish that we would have come to Christ sooner than we did. But we must remember God's sovereignty. He us gives us spiritual conception, as believers in Jesus Christ, at a certain and specific time, based upon His sovereign purposes and plans, and not ours. It doesn't mean that we, from the human standpoint could not have believed sooner, or that the free offer of the gospel to believe now is not our responsibility. But we should thank God that He chose us at all. He could have left us to ourselves forever and then where would we be? We should marvel and wonder why He should choose someone as sinful as ourselves. 2 Timothy 1: 8, 9 says, "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel, according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began." His timing is perfect in everything related to our salvation. Do not be ashamed of it or continually lament that you wish that things could have been different. He has called us according to His purpose and grace, not our purpose and wisdom.

2ndly- In seeing God's promises fulfilled it is good to remember our obedience. (Verses 4 and 5)

His purpose is that we be holy and blameless before Him. This is what God has called us to; obedience to His blessed Word. It is to follow the Lord Jesus and to be His disciple by keeping His commandments and living in accordance with His Word. Verse 4 says, "Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him." This was a commandment given to Abraham the Hebrew to keep in connection with the Covenant of Purpose which I spoke to you about in Genesis 17. It is no longer applicable to believers under the New Covenant because Christ fulfilled all the ceremonial laws of the Jews, and circumcision was one of them. Abraham is the father of all the faithful, both Jews and Gentiles, but all the ceremonies related to Abraham as the Father of the Jews have been fulfilled by Christ and

set aside. The ceremony and sign of circumcision is related to what Christ would come to do in the future, and that which He would purchase and apply to the hearts of believers, both Old Testament and New. This was the circumcision of the heart. This circumcision of Christ does relate to our obedience directly. It was Christ's shedding His blood, His bloody sacrifice, which came from His heart obedience to God's commandments, that is pictured so well in circumcision. "The death that he died, He died to sin once for all." When He was raised from the dead "by the glory of the Father," as it says in Romans 6: 4 it was "so that we also should walk in newness of life." And that relates to keeping all the moral commandments of God's word, living by faith in the Son of God. It relates to our putting off the body of the sins of the flesh and our being "buried with Him in baptism." It does not relate to infant baptism but rather believers baptism as a sign of our faith in Christ. If you are a true believer in Jesus Christ, you really ought to be baptized. It is meant to be one of your first acts of obedience to God. Circumcision was a sign and seal of Abraham's faith in what Christ would come to do for him and Isaac, and Abraham circumcised Isaac in obedience to God's explicit command to him as the father of the Hebrew nation. This lineage through Isaac would bring forth the Christ, and from Him would flow all the blessings and benefits of the New Covenant. When Christ came and fulfilled the Law in all its aspects, ceremonial, moral and judicial, the obedience and the sacrifice that He made were rendered on behalf of all God's Elect people. It is applied effectually by God's Spirit in accordance with His eternal purpose, but this does not mean that a commandment is given to circumcise children any longer or baptize infants as a carry over.

The purpose of that commandment is fulfilled in Christ and the carry over is not a ceremony, but a reality; the spiritual circumcision of the heart of believers. We are raised from our death in sins through faith in the working of God who raised Christ from the dead. We are "made alive together with Him." When we come to faith in Jesus, we realize that He has called us to do what He has commanded us. He has called us to an obedience based upon faith in Him. This obedience proceeds from our faith in what He has already done for us, and also faith in what He is presently doing and will do for us. This is what believer's baptism pictures so very well. Infants know nothing about this. God saves infants who die in infancy in the same sovereign way that He does others that He chooses, except that He knows that they cannot use their faculties to believe, because their faculties have not developed that far. They have not come to the place where they can think through matters of sin and righteousness and judgment. They cannot understand even the information of the gospel and salvation in Christ. And so, if they die, if they are to be saved, God saves them by a sovereign application of the blood of Christ. Salvation is, you remember, always based on the Sovereign Mercy of God, not by the works or ceremonies performed over us or others. But in those who can think, obedience, the obedience of faith is the issue for everyone who would be a disciple of Jesus Christ. It was the issue for Abraham, the believer and father of all the faithful. He didn't hedge on this difficult task of circumcising his little

son. Sometimes it is a difficult thing for some believers to think about being baptized. What will others think? Am I really ready? But remember it is a commandment for the believer to obey. It is not meant to be optional. It is meant to be confessional. You are confessing Christ and your faith in Him and your intention to identify with Him and follow Him.

We must ask ourselves what has God called us to, and what He has called us for, by looking into His Word and praying and asking for wisdom. Think of the Apostle Paul when he was converted. He was a great persecutor of the church and then the Lord met him on the road to Damascus in blinding light. And the first that he did, according to his own testimony in Acts 22: 10, was to say, "What shall I do Lord?" And the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do." Look at how sovereign the Lord is in His saving and commissioning Saul with his work. Ananias comes to him, being sent to him by the order of the Lord. And he says to him, "Brother Saul, receive your sight." "And at that same hour," Paul says, "I looked up at him." "Then he said, 'The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of his mouth.'" "For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." And so he did so. What about you? If the promise of salvation through Jesus Christ has been fulfilled to you, and you see that your faith is not in yourself and your works, will you not remember that your obedience is important to God as well as yourself?

So when you come to think about obedience, ask yourself this question. Am I trying to please the Lord? Or am I trying to please myself? You should ask yourself questions related to your obedience. Listen to Ephesians 5 - "Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them." For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord." You must ask yourself if you are guilty of any of these sins in your heart as well as your outward actions. And if you are not, you must ask yourself if you are still trying to be partakers with those who are guilty of such sins by watching them engage in such sins. Remember that the Lord Jesus, whom you are to become more like, was "holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners," it says in Hebrews 7: 26. So you should become like your Savior more and more. You say, "But the Lord Jesus was the friend

of sinners." Yes, indeed, the Lord Jesus was the friend of sinners in that He drew near to them to help them and teach them and to show compassion to them, but sinners were not His regular companions and close friends. That was reserved for His disciples. In fact in 1 Corinthians 15: 33 and 34 it says, "Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits." The NAS says it this way, "Bad company corrupts good morals." "Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame." To be making progress in holiness you cannot be running with wicked men, playing their games, or smiling at their sins. "How blessed is the man that walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night." (Psalm 1: 1) In seeing the promises fulfilled in our lives and God's giving us grace, it is very important to remember our obedience.

And Finally- In seeing the promises fulfilled it is good to laugh for joy.
(Verses 3, 6, and 7)

It says in verse 3 that Abraham called his son's name Isaac, and you should know by now that his name means "laughter." Verse 6 says, "And Sarah said, God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me." Literally, the first part of that verse reads, "God has made laughter for me." And truly this is what should take place in our lives when God fulfill promises to us. I wonder if this is your experience; holy laughter? Sometimes I think that some Christians have never really learned what it is that grace is supposed to produce in their behavior. Yes it does teach us to "live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil age." But when we come to realize that God is doing things in our lives which would be impossible for us to do or to attain to; things which make us into holy people, fruitful in glory and service, then it is good for us to laugh. "When the Lord brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like those who dreamed. Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nations, the Lord has done great things for them. The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad." Well the Lord had done great things for Abraham and Sarah and they laughed for joy. Who would have ever said that Sarah would nurse children? But she did nurse Isaac at 90 years of age. They laughed believingly. For they had the promise fulfilled and could hold Isaac in their arms. If you have believed the promise of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, someday you too shall laugh for joy to see Christ face to face and hold Him in your arms. I know, it seems like a long delay until the fulfillment. But the day will come, and our mouths will be filled with laughter if you believe. May it be so for each of us.