

# Faith in God's Power and Plan

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, I found this children's book online the other day. It's on the next slide. And it's called, My Dad Can Do Anything, which I thought was kind of nice. You know, the kids would think their dad is so big and strong, as the picture indicates, that he can do anything.

And so I showed it to my kids and thought, this is true of me, isn't it? One went, nah, and the other one went, hilarious, Dad. And then they said, oh, hang on, you're just after a sermon illustration, aren't you?

Which was true. So apparently I really can't do anything, including fool them. There are limits to what dads can do. But today we'll be reminded that there is one dad, or rather a heavenly father, who can do anything.

In the words of our chapter today, nothing is too hard for the Lord. And we need to be reminded of this from time to time, don't we? Because sometimes God's promises to us can seem too hard to believe, too impossible to be true.

Now, certainly for Sarah, Abraham's wife, the promise of having a child in her old age was just simply too hard to believe. How can God possibly do that?

[ 1 : 11 ] And so our writer's first point today is that nothing is too hard for the Lord. His power and plan will keep his promises.

And his purpose in that is to encourage both Sarah and us to keep trusting in God, in his power and plan. So at point one in your outlines and verse one in your Bibles.

The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby.

When he saw them, he hurried or literally ran from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. He said, if I have found favor in your eyes, my Lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. And let me get something to eat or literally a piece of bread so you can be refreshed and then you can go on your way.

[ 2 : 12 ] Now that you've come to your servant. And very well, they answered, do as you say. Now, the phrase in verse one, the Lord appeared to Abraham marks a new section, which really runs into almost the end of chapter 19.

They will leave that for next week. And here we see that Abraham is at the entrance of his tent, which is the coolest place to be in the shade. With the breeze in the heat of the day.

And he sees these three men appear. One of them is the angel of the Lord who speaks and acts as God himself. And in chapter 19, verse one, we're told that the other two were normal angels.

But it seems Abraham immediately recognizes them as special, as being from God. Because despite being 99 years old and it being the middle of the day, the heat of the day, he, what's he do? Hurries or literally runs to meet them and then bows down low to the ground. 99 bowing down. My back had hurt and I'm not 99. It seems as though he recognizes who they are.

[ 3 : 19 ] And while he offers them something to eat in verse five, or literally a piece of bread. Notice what he actually then prepares for them in verse six. So in verse six, he quickly ran again into the tent.

Quick, he said to Sarah, get three sears of the finest flour. Now, three sears is a footnote there, which tells us that it's 16 kilos of flour. And that's a bit more than a piece of bread, isn't it?

It's not any old flour. Verse five, it's the finest flour. And then he, verse seven, ran, he's still running around, to the herd, selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to his servant who hurried to prepare it.

And he also brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared and placed it before them. Now, a whole calf is a lot of meat, even for three men who may love meat.

And it's not just a lot of meat, it's quality meat, it's choice, tender. In other words, Abraham recognizes these men are from God and so rightly serves them with his best, doesn't he?

[ 4 : 26 ] And I wonder if this is a little reminder for us that, you know, do we recognize God for who he is and so serve him with our best? And do we seek to live his way to the best of our ability, even when it's hard, even when we suffer?

Or give him the best of what we can, even when it costs? Or do the best to meet with his people every week we can at church, even when it's a real effort?

I know many of you do, which is terrific. But you see, Abraham recognizes these men are from God and instead of laughing as he did last week, he rightly serves them with his best. But it seems Sarah has not yet come to the same position as her husband.

And so they deliberately bring Sarah into the picture. Have a look at verse 9. Come down to verse 9. Almost out of the blue, these men ask, where is your wife, Sarah?

They're in the tent, he said. Then one of them said, I will surely return to you about this time next year. And Sarah, your wife, will have a son. Now that promise in verse 10 there is almost exactly what God said to Abraham last week in chapter 17, verse 21.

[ 5 : 39 ] And so repeating this promise here is not for Abraham. God's already done that. Rather, repeating the promise here is for Sarah. You see, it seems they deliberately ask about Sarah to make sure she's listening.

You know how when someone mentions your name, your ears prick up and then suddenly, well, you have that expression, your all ears. Well, it seems that's what they're doing here. To make sure Sarah is listening and hears this promise about a child.

Because it seems that Sarah either hasn't heard it recently or more likely still does not believe. It's too hard to believe. Do you see verse 10, the rest of verse 10? Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him.

Abraham and Sarah were already very old and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, after I'm worn out and my Lord, my husband is old, will I now have this pleasure?

In other words, this promise is too hard to believe. Abraham is 99 years old. Sarah is 89 years old. Their bodies are worn out, she says.

[ 6 : 47 ] I mean, can you imagine having a child yourself now? I mean, I'm not calling you 89 or 99 just for the record. But for me, it's scary.

I'm not with either. And although they lived longer back then, clearly, even for them, this is ridiculous. This is too hard to believe. And so to help her believe, to help her trust, God responds in verse 13.

Then the Lord said to Abraham, why did Sarah laugh and say, will I really have a child now that I am old? Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son.

Do you hear what God says? Nothing is too hard for the Lord. His promises might seem sometimes too hard to believe, too impossible to come true, even laughable.

But nothing is impossible for God. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. And you notice in verse 14 as well that this child will come at the appointed time.

[ 7 : 58 ] Do you notice those words? You see, God always had an appointed time for this child to be born. In other words, he always had a plan. But it was in his timing, not ours or Sarah's or Abraham's.

You see, God wants Sarah to know that he has both the power, nothing is too hard for the Lord, and a plan at the appointed time to keep his promises so that she might keep trusting in him.

And it's the same for us, is it not? As I said at the start, some of God's promises to us can also seem too hard to believe. For example, the promise of Jesus returning in a blaze of glory and us living forever in a new world, a new creation, ruling the world with Christ.

It's laughable to non-Christians. And even for some Christians, too hard to believe. Especially when we see in this world, Christians not ruling, but being oppressed, persecuted, ridiculed.

Or when we suffer, it's sometimes hard to believe God's promise to work for our good. We can think, how can God possibly do any good from this terrible situation I'm in?

[ 9 : 15 ] Or when our prayers seem to go unanswered, it's sometimes hard to believe that God always hears our prayers. We can think, either he's ignoring me, or this one's just too hard for him. Or God's promise to save people using our prayers, our words, our lives. It can sometimes be too hard to believe, because we either mess up when we're trying to speak the gospel, you know, get tongue-tied.

Or when we do speak the gospel, nothing happens. Our family and friends still don't believe. Or the people are just so hardened that it's just inconceivable they'd possibly ever believe. Whatever promise it is, when God's promises seem too hard to believe, remember that nothing is too hard for the Lord. He will keep his promises to us, but at his appointed time, not ours. In other words, God has the power and a plan to keep his promises, and so we can keep trusting in him. And not just keep trusting in him, but also keep living righteous lives for him.

[ 10 : 27 ] Righteous lives that just means living rightly, God's way. And this was especially important for both Abraham and Sarah to do. Because, you see, God would use their righteousness to accomplish his other promise of bringing blessing to the nations.

Point 2, verse 16. When the men got up to leave, they looked down towards Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way.

Then the Lord God said, almost to him, he's talking to himself at this point, Shall I hide from Abraham what I'm about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and here's the promise from chapter 12, All nations on earth will be blessed through him.

Why? Well, for I have chosen him so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is literally righteous and justice, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.

And then God then speaks to Abraham, The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me.

[ 11 : 44 ] If not, I will know it. Now, in verse 21 there, God already knows what Sodom and Gomorrah are like. It's not as though he has to literally go and check it out for himself.

And next week we will know it too. Rather, the language of coming down to see is really the language of coming down to judge. And the last time God used this language was with the Tower of Babel, if you might remember.

It's on the next slide. It's from that verse from Genesis 11. God uses this language of coming down to see. And when he did, what did he do? He judged them by confusing their languages and scattering the people.

And so coming down to see is really God coming down to judge Sodom and Gomorrah. But he deliberately tells Abraham about it. Why? Well, because God's promise to bless the nations involves Abraham and his descendants, Israel.

And in particular, God's plan to bring this blessing to the nations involves using the righteousness of Abraham and Israel. See verse 18 again.

[ 12 : 53 ] See if you can follow the logic. Verse 18, he says, Abraham will become a great nation. That's Israel. All nations will be blessed through him. How? Well, verse 19, for or because God chose him by grace, that in response, Abraham might teach his children and his household, his descendants, to keep the way of the Lord, doing literally, the Hebrew says, righteousness and justice.

Why? Verse 19, so that God can bring about his promised blessing of salvation to the nations. You see the logic? God is going to use the righteousness of Abraham and the nation of Israel after him to bring the blessing of salvation to the nations.

How on earth is that supposed to work? Well, we get a glimpse of what God says later on in Exodus 19. The next slide. He says to Israel later on, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you know, that is, be righteous, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples. And he says, for all the earth is mine, and then you shall be for me a kingdom of priests to the earth. A holy nation that will stand out among the other nations.

These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel. You see, as Israel obeyed God, as they kept his ways, lived righteous lives, like loving one another, being faithful to one another, then they would stand out as a holy nation compared to the nations around them.

[ 14 : 26 ] They would stand out like a city on a hill stands out, or a light in a dark place stands out. And as light attracts others, so they would attract people from the nations to them to see what makes them different.

And in the process, they would come to meet their God. And in this way, they'd act like a whole kingdom of priests for God, you know, praying for people from the nations, speaking to these people from the nations about God, that these people might trust in God and receive the blessing of salvation.

That's how God's evangelistic plan was to work. That's how he'd keep his promise of blessing all nations through Abraham. That's why it was so important for him to teach his children to live rightly. I remember at one time we were camping and some of the children at nighttime were busting to go to the toilet. You know, that's the word they all use, busting. And so I gave one of the kids a torch and they were to light the way for the others.

And by doing so, that one child saved the others from darkness and led them to the blessing of a toilet, if you like. And when you're busting, a toilet is a blessing, okay? The point is God was to use Israel whose righteousness was to shine like a light, leading others from the nations out of darkness of judgment to the blessing of salvation.

[ 15 : 51 ] And so here God starts to show Abraham his evangelistic plan. He tells Abraham that he's about to judge Sodom so that Abraham might be provoked to plead or pray for Sodom, like a priest might pray for people.

And as he does, God shows Abraham that while his judgment is just, he's also very willing to graciously save the wicked because of the righteous.

Have a look at verse 23. Then Abraham approached God and said, Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? What if there are 50 righteous people in the city?

Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of 50 righteous people in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to kill the righteous with the wicked, treat the righteous and the wicked alike.

Far be it from you. Will not the judge of all the earth do right or what is just? Here we learn two things, or rather Abraham learns two things.

[ 16 : 53 ] First, God's judgment is just because God says, If I find 50 righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.

God will not, you see, treat the righteous and the wicked the same. The judge of all the world is just. And we'll come back to that next week. But the second thing he learns is that God will graciously save the wicked from judgment because of the righteous.

Did you notice? Abraham is not asking to pluck the righteous out of the city and then judge the rest of the city. No, he's saying, Can you spare the whole city, even the wicked, for the sake of the righteous?

And God says, Yes. In other words, God is willing to use righteous people to save those who are not. And so Abraham continues in verse 27.

Then Abraham spoke up again, Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, what if the number of the righteous is five less than 50? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five people?

[ 18 : 01 ] If I find 45 there, he said, I will not destroy it. And once more, he spoke to him, what if only 40 are found there? And God said, For the sake of 40, I will not do it.

Abraham said, May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only 30 can be found? God answered, I will not do it if I find 30 there. And Abraham said, Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only 20 can be found there?

But God said, For the sake of 20, I will not destroy it. And then Abraham said again, May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only 10 can be found there? God answered, For the sake of 10, I will not destroy it.

And the Lord finished speaking with Abraham. He left and Abraham returned home. I remember going to Fiji as part of a university course. It was a good university course. And in Fiji, you have to haggle for everything, even a bottle of water.

And in fact, in places in Australia, you have to do that. So if you go to the good guys, they expect you to negotiate the price. I love a bargain, so I'm more than happy to negotiate. But Michelle often finds another place to be when I do.

[ 19 : 06 ] And it sounds like that's what Abraham's doing here with God, doesn't it? Negotiating with him for the salvation of both Sodom and the righteous. But God allows it because he's making a point.

He is happy to graciously save those who deserve judgment for the sake of the righteous. And to put it differently, God is keen to act graciously to save others through those who are righteous. And Abraham needed to learn this principle because it was him and his nation of Israel who were to be God's righteous people. And God was to work through them to graciously save the wicked from the nations.

Of course, the wicked would still need to repent and trust in God's word, which we'll see next week. They don't. In fact, we'll see next week that there are sadly not even 10 righteous people in Sodom. And so the city is destroyed. And yet God still uses Abraham to graciously save some. Lot and his two daughters who were all living in the city.

[ 20 : 11 ] In fact, if we skip ahead over the page, left hand column there, chapter 19, verse 29. So just turn over the page, left hand column there, about middle of the page, chapter 19, verse 29.

Here we read, In other words, Lot is saved because of, not Lot, but Abraham.

You see, God must sadly judge Sodom, but he uses it as an opportunity to teach Abraham, not only is his judgment just, but that he will use the righteous to save the wicked, just as he uses Abraham to save Lot, who is not all that righteous at this point.

And so to put the whole chapter together in verses 1 to 15, God deliberately reminds Sarah that nothing is too hard for him, that he has a power, he has the power and a plan to keep his promise of a child.

And he does that so that Abraham and Sarah might not only trust him, but live righteous lives for him and teach their children and their descendants to live righteous lives.

[ 21 : 33 ] Because it's through the righteous lives of Israel that God would bring blessing to the nations, you see. Now, of course, Abraham's nation of Israel didn't live in righteousness and justice, did they?

They didn't keep God's ways. They didn't keep God's ways. They didn't keep God's ways. But because nothing is too hard for God, even a chosen nation who refuses to listen to him, he still keeps his plan to bring blessing through his righteous people.

And then in the end, it kind of goes from Israel all the way down to one righteous person. You know who that is, don't you? It's Jesus. So on the next slide, we read from 1 Peter chapter 3, Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous one for us, the unrighteous, to bring you to God, to save you.

You see, Jesus is the righteous person. He always kept God's ways, so he didn't have to pay for his own sins. Therefore, he was free to pay for our sins. God saves us through this righteous person, you see.

And once more, as Hebrews says, Jesus now ever lives to pray or intercede for us, that God might complete his blessing of salvation by bringing us home to heaven. And so through this righteous person, God graciously offers the blessing of salvation to all people, even people here in Melbourne, to graciously save us from the judgment we deserve and to bring us home to heaven, if we believe in him.

[ 23 : 12 ] And so do you believe in Jesus? Do you trust that God can save you from judgment and bring you to heaven through him? Do you believe in Jesus?

And if you don't, then you really need to, because the blessing of salvation comes only through him. He was the only righteous person. And if you do believe in Jesus, then not only do you have the blessing of salvation, but God now counts you righteous, like Abraham, like Jesus.

He gives us Christ's righteousness so that we, you know, become his people. And now God can use us as well, like he was going to use Israel to save others.

And so in terms of application for us this morning, then firstly, we had to recognize God for who he is and serve him with our best, just like Abraham did.

Did you remember? Secondly, we had to remember nothing is too hard for the Lord. His power and plan will keep his promises to us, but at his appointed time. So we can keep trusting him.

[ 24 : 21 ] So we can keep trusting him, even when his promises seem too hard to believe. And thirdly, we are to keep living for him righteous lives, because God will use our lives, our words, our prayers to save others.

We heard a bit about this from our second reading on the next slide. So we heard from 1 Timothy 2, that we had to pray for all people. Why?

Because God desires all people to be saved. See, God uses our prayers to save others. And so do keep praying for those who don't know Christ.

Even if you've been praying for a particular non-Christian relative for years, keep praying for them, for nothing is too hard for the Lord, but it is at his appointed time.

But we're not only to pray, we're also to live righteous lives. So as Jesus says on the next slide, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds, your righteous lives, and glorify your Father in heaven.

[ 25 : 30 ] Or as he puts it on the next slide in Colossians, or Paul says, be wise in the way you act towards outsiders. Make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.

Being wise in the way we act really means to be Christ-like, Christ-like, because in Colossians, wisdom is found in Christ. We are to act Christ-like, and Paul assumes that will provoke questions, because he then goes on to say, give an answer, but do it graciously or gently, a season with salt that is appropriately tasteful to the situation.

The point is, we are to live Christianly or righteously, because God can use our lives to provoke conversations about Christ. Christ. There's a guy in my Bible study group, who gets an Uber driver, and you've heard about Uber drivers, like a taxi driver, to Bible study each Thursday night, because he can't drive.

And when the driver was asking him where he was going, he just lives an open Christian life, and so he said, oh, I'm just going to Bible study. The driver said, Bible what? And so, that was a question, so he took the opportunity to explain.

And over the course of the last couple of weeks, he's had the opportunity to share the gospel with this taxi driver. In fact, this taxi driver or Uber driver is a Muslim, and he came to drop this guy from my Bible study group to last Wednesday night's talk by Andrew Moody on biblical spirituality.

[ 27 : 03 ] And the driver decided to stay, and he listened intently. Now, only God knows where this will lead, and he often uses us just to move people on one step.

We don't always get to see the conversion, but the point is, all this started from just this guy living an open, authentic Christian life, living righteously. And that led to conversations and the gospel. Of course, with us, with very westernized friends and family, often this journey is much slower, because people in our culture are not as open to talking about religious things as people from other cultures like this Uber driver.

But if we live righteously, they do notice. There's another guy from our 1030 congregation who works in the city, and one of his colleagues, his marriage broke down, and so he approached this guy from our church, because he knew he was a Christian.

And he also saw this guy from our church, practicing what he preached, you know, being generous, being kind, and so on. And so his colleague approached him for advice, and in the course, they got to share the gospel.

[ 28 : 11 ] And the last I heard, this guy is going to prayer groups. Others I know of, they have non-Christian grandchildren, and yet when something goes wrong at school or university, they know granddad and grandma, they believe in God, they practice what they preach, they're kind, and they go to their grandparents, and talk to them, and in the process, hear the gospel, and on it goes.

Now I realize all this stuff can be scary, and one of the promises I said we sometimes find too hard to believe, is God will actually use us, and our prayers, and our lives to save others, because we often mess it up, or get tongue-tied when we try and speak, and when we do speak, that things don't always change, our friends and family don't always get converted.

But remember, nothing is too hard for the Lord. His power and plan will accomplish his promises in his time, including using our lives, and prayers, and words to save others.

And so do keep trusting in his promises, and do keep living righteous lives. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for this reminder this morning, that nothing is too hard for you, that you have the power, and a plan to keep your promises, and so that we can trust in them.

But we also thank you for the reminder, that you use the righteousness of your people, to save others. And so please help us not only to trust you, but to keep living for you, that others may see our good deeds, and glorify you, our Father in heaven.

[ 29 : 51 ] We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.