

TO TEACH THAT God WILL keep his promise, but for her peace and joy He wants Sarah to be *sure* he will.

SO THAT for their own peace in Him, those listening would be sure that God will keep the promises He has made to us in Christ.

PRAY

Genesis 18:1-15

1. Intro – His promise is like a train

As a kid I loved train travel. Tamworth station felt like a castle.

Then there was buying the ticket. That little brass thing you scooped your change from. The man with his big trolley.

Waiting on the platform. The tell-tale “toot!”. Straining your neck up the line towards Armidale. Is that it?

Then the finding of the seats. The whistle. The lurch. Waving to the cars at the level crossing. And then the siren call of the buffet car!

But something I liked most was the peace. Dad wasn't stressed about traffic, mum wasn't stressed about getting lost. You just got on the train and then you got off again. Simple. Well, simple for a kid with his family.

But what if you were about 14 years old and had to travel from Tamworth to Sydney, for a camp, in the holidays, **ON YOUR OWN**. No family to get off with at the right stop.

“You’ll be OK” says Dad. “The train goes all the way to Central Station in Sydney, and terminates.”

“It terminates??” What if it terminates before I get off? Will I get terminated?”

“No, it stops. It doesn’t go any further. That’s the end of the line. It terminates.”

“Oh. But how will I know when to get off?” I ask.

“The train won’t be moving anymore. There will be no-one left on the train. When that happens, you get off too. Just stay on the train until it stops for good.”

“Right. But what if it doesn’t stop?” You get the idea. I’m a little worried about not the my relative at the other end.

So Dad gives me a map. He's marked each stop.

“When you come to each station, mark it on the map. Werris Creek.....Broadmeadow...Hornsby. When you get to Strathfield you’re almost there. It stops in Central. Then you can get off.”

Imagine me on the train, pencil in hand, marking off the stops. Then it happens. I sit for an age. I am the last one off. I check that there's no more actual train track left.

“Hey, I made it!”

There was no chance I was going to miss the stop was there. If I simply stayed on the train I would get to Central. So why did my dad give me a map? Because He wanted me to be confident I’d get there. He didn’t want me to worry for the whole trip. He knew I’d get there, but he wanted me to be *sure*. The

map wasn't so I'd get there, it was so I would have peace about getting there.

Well friends, Abraham's on a train too. It's the train of God's promises to him. Big family, their own land, and the whole world blessed through that family. And that train won't terminate until God keeps each of those promises. Abraham's a passenger on that train isn't he. He doesn't drive it. He doesn't make it go.

God does, and God will get it to where it's going.

Sarah is deeply tied to the promises too. God's put her on that train with her husband. No matter how our two passengers feel about the trip, that train is gonna get there. But God wants them both to enjoy the ride. He wants them to feel that growing anticipation. To say "We're old and we've never been able to have kids. But we're going to have a little baby!" That's what God wants for them. He wants them to be sure and have joy. To have peace in Him and his promises.

And today's passage focuses right in on Sarah. Her fears, her doubts, and what God, in his kindness, does for her. And He comes right to her front door to do it.

2. He drops in for tea

It's a typical day in the land of Canaan. Much of Abraham's work's been done for the day, it's stinking hot, it's time for siesta, and I'm at point 2. "The Lord drops in for tea". Well, it's a

typical day up to that point. Abraham starts as he senses something just near the tent. He's failed to notice these three men approaching. They just seem to have appeared. He's up in a flash. Bowing low, he does his best to get them to stay and enjoy his hospitality.

“My lord, if I have found favor with you, please do not go on past your servant. 4 Let a little water be brought, that you may wash your feet and rest yourselves under the tree. 5 I will bring a bit of bread so that you may strengthen yourselves. This is why you have passed your servant's way. Later, you can continue on.”

Friends, Abraham's not a man who needs to grovel and cringe before other men. He's the head of a huge household, hundreds of fighting men, herds of thousands, respected by kings. He's been visited several times before by God himself. The God who'd “I will make your name great!” No, he doesn't need to grovel to these men. He knows he's already been treated with honour from God himself. Honour he doesn't deserve. And how has that changed him? It's made him humble hasn't it. On the one hand, he's doesn't need to puff himself up in front of anyone. On the other hand, he's doesn't need to grovel. He's not grovelling. Instead, he's become so confident

in God's approval, he can now just serve these travellers with nothing to prove.

And serve he does.

He's got no idea who he's really serving, but he shows how thrilled he is by their visit. Look at him spring into action.

V6 So Abraham **hurried** into the tent and said to Sarah, "**Quick!** Knead three measures of fine flour and make bread." 7 Abraham **ran** to the herd and got a **tender, choice calf**. He gave it to a young man, who **hurried** to prepare it. 8 Then Abraham took curds and milk, as well as the calf that he had prepared, and set them before the men. He **served** them as they ate under the tree.

He could have asked one of his servants to do all that. But instead this stately man bustles around for his guests. And the 'bit of bread' he promised them? It's a feast. One he himself serves and then stands aside. It's no wonder the writer of Hebrews says be like Abraham and show hospitality or literally "stranger love". And Abraham's about to find out just how strange these men were who dropped in for tea and got a feast.

3. He wants Sarah to be sure

So why *are* they here? Let's find out. I'm at Point 3. "He wants Sarah to be sure."

So it's after lunch and straight down business

V9 "Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him.

Wife? How did they know he had a wife? Well, I guess they could have assumed it. Most men of Abraham's age did. But how did the strangers know her name? And that name? She'd only been given the new name "Sarah" a few months before? And it was God who gave her that name.

And why were they asking? They would have known it's not proper for her to socialise with unknown men.

Abraham plays a straight bat.

"She's there, in the tent,"

Of course, they already know where she is: it's the Lord God and His angels. But there's a reason they ask out loud.

I think they're saying,

"Sarah, we know you can hear us back there in the tent."

"Sarah, we want you to hear what we're saying."

"Sarah, we're saying it to Abraham but it's really for you."

And what *do* they want Sarah to hear? The Lord says

V10 “I will certainly come back to you in about a year’s time, and your wife Sarah will have a son!”

Now when I first read that I thought it was odd. There’s no new information in this promise. Over the previous few decades, the Lord adds something more specific about the child with each new appearance. “You will have big family that will become a nation. You will have a son from your own body. You will have this son with Sarah, and you will call him Isaac, and he will be born this time next year!”

And now God appears again, and adds no extra details. So why would He appear again so soon, just to repeat himself. Why? Because, if we continue in v10

“Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent behind him.”

And that’s God’s plan I believe. She’s sitting directly behind Him. She’d have been listening to visitors anyway. But when she hears “Where is your wife Sarah?” her ears really prick up.

“I will certainly come back to you in about a year’s time, and your wife Sarah will have a son!”

She hears it with her own ears. From this man who had known her new name. The one the Lord himself gave her.

What an occasion for joy. To hear a second time “Only one more year to wait.” The very thing she’d longed for, even from childhood. It was about to be hers. The child promised would become a child of her own. A son.

An occasion for joy. An occasion for laughter.

But life’s been teaching Sarah a valuable lesson. Be a realist, girl, not a dreamer. Remember the facts. The facts we’re reminded of for the sixth time in the story. Facts that seem to mock both Sarah and the promise.

V11 Abraham and Sarah were old and getting on in years. Sarah had passed the age of childbearing.

Oh, Sarah laughs alright. But it’s not from joy. And she doesn’t find it funny exactly. And it’s not scorn. It’s bitter disappointment.

It’s not easy to escape *that* feeling once it’s decade after decade of being let down. Hopes raised, only to fade. Promises made, promises not kept, it seems. Promises which now pierce her heart every time she hears of a newborn baby.

“What a joke!” she thinks. “Me with a baby. Worn out me and my old husband. A baby, the one delight I’ve longed for.” Now

as readers we know the story don't we? Or we might be able to guess what happens – she does indeed have a son. But poor Sarah. This is her life. She's inside the story, living it out. We can skip ahead a few chapters, but she can't. All she's got is the promise her husband's told her about...and twenty four years of waiting....so far. And she's passed menopause. You can understand, can't you, why she'd laugh to herself. And it's only to herself. She doesn't throw back the flap and laugh in the visitor's face. But just a sad, hopeless little snort. It says "When I look at myself, I just can't believe what this man's saying, even if he did know my name. I will not clutch anymore straws. I'm done."

This is such a sad and unnecessary scene. Especially to those of us who know how it turns out. Sarah could have been saved from all this misery, this desolation.

Imagine the joy she could have had over the past 24 years if she would only take God at his word. If only she had believed what He had told her.

Well, it's still not too late. Of course, the baby will be born whether Sarah believes God or not. The train of God's promises *will* reach its destination. But now, just months before it will happen, it's like Sarah's at Strathfield station and God takes one more chance to show her the map. To show her

she's one station away from a kept promise. One more stop....then a little baby.

And how does he do it? How does he take Sarah's finger and trace the track all the way to that last stop? Kids you'll see that as one of your sheets. Abraham and Sarah on a train bound for that big station called "God keeps his promises".

How does he do it.

Well, he simply tells her he's heard her thoughts and knows she doesn't believe him

V13 "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Can I really have a baby when I'm old? Is anything impossible for the LORD?'"

It's as if he's saying "Sarah, don't you know yet who you're dealing with? Think back over the past 24 years. You've been protected and blessed again and again despite yourselves. Do you think it was coincidence? It was *me*. I keep on appearing to your husband. And now I've just told you "I" will come back again. I know your thoughts. When will you stop fighting me and just receive the joy I'm trying to give you?"

And so, he patiently says for a third time...

“At the appointed time I will come back to you, and in about a year she will have a son.”

They're words that should have made her heart sing. Instead, she's been focussing on how she can't pull this off. And so, she robs herself of the joy.

And she knows she's busted.

Does this gentle rebuke from God finally break down her stubborn defences? We're not told. Though what we *are* told is this. When the promise is finally kept, the child is named “Isaac” as God instructed. It means “He laughs”. And as Sarah nurses that promised child she declares “God has made *me* laugh”. She has discovered joy in her God and the promise he had *kept*.

But perhaps now she finally understands something else. That God had intended her to have this joy all along. Deep joy in Him and His promise. Joy because she knows He will keep His promise. And even joy while she *waits* for Him to keep his promise. *Knowing* He would keep His promise. Being at peace about His promise. And all that time so *excited* about the day when he *would* keep His promise.

4. God wants you to be sure 998 – (800)

And guess what my brothers and sisters. God wants that same deep peace, and excited anticipation for you and me as well.

So, I've called my last point "God wants *you* to be sure."

"But sure, of what?"

I hope that's what you're asking.

We read it before from Romans.

"If God is for us, who is against us?"

"If God is for us, who is against us?"

Friends, God has promised he's *for* you.

If you, in your soul are poor and needy, weak and wounded, sick and sore God is *for* you.

If all you've got to bring Jesus is your need of Him.

If you've realised that you can't make yourself worthy of Him God is *for* you.

If you're simply a wretched sinner deserving God wrath.

But all you have is empty hands God is *for* you.

If you've seen how foolish it is to keep rebelling.

If you delight now to find refuge in Him.

Friends if you have found refuge in the Lord Jesus, then God is *for* you.

My friends, in Jesus, God has given us a refuge from the horrors of our own hearts, the eternal death we deserve, and the horrors of life in a broken world.

In Jesus, God is for us. And he wants you to be sure of that promise. He wants you to be sure for your own peace and joy.

He doesn't want you to be like poor Sarah. She missed so much of that didn't she. She looked at herself and her situation and simply wouldn't believe Him. Don't do the same. Don't look at yourself and think "God could never be for me! Look at me. I'm not good enough" Or "God could never be for me. Look at how terrible my life is." Friends, with Jesus as your refuge God's said he's for you.

Now friends, you *can* take him at his word on this one, or not. You might be someone who's put their trust in Jesus as your Lord and Saviour. Your sins are forgiven. And as wonderful as that is, you still might not be convinced God is *really* for you. You believe he's forgiven you, but how does he feel about you? (if I can say it like that).

"Sure, he's *promised* he's for me. But is that really *true*?"

Friends, if you can't take Him at his word, when the storms of life come, you're gonna be tossed one way and the other. If you don't believe he's *really* for you, you'll start to wonder if those

storms actually show what you suspect is God's true heart for you. Dark, stormy and disappointed. Or you'll resent Him for it. Or any number of other things which, will rob you of His peace and joy. Yes, he will keep his promise you will be saved in Jesus, but your life here will be one of anxiety, rather than peace.

Or you *can* take him at his word. If you do, the storms will come, but in them you'll have the peace, the joy, the comfort. You'll know that even through *this* He's for you. Friends, I also hope you think about your own coming death. As you do, you'll have His peace and joy even in this, the thought of going *home*. Home to your promise keeping God.

Friends, our Lord and God knows we find it hard to believe he's *for* us. Sarah found it hard, we find it hard. That's why he tells us over and over again. He told Abraham and Sarah over and over again didn't he?

And in Sarah's story he does it again for us today.

Friends, God *will* keep the promise that he's *for* us, but for our peace and joy, He wants us to be *sure*.

In Jesus, you are also on a train headed for a station called "God keeps his promises". Today he's promised "*If God is for us, who is against us?*".

It's like a station you can joyfully mark off on your map on the way to that sure and wonderful destination.