

YOU LAUGH, BUT JUST YOU WATCH!**Genesis 18:1-15****(Read Genesis 18:1-15)**

INTRO: When my brother Phil, was at Messiah College he had some friends who were on the basketball team who were able to get Converse Sneakers at a discount price. Nowadays I think they call the style Chuck Taylors, but to us they were just Converse back then. His little brothers, that is Kent, Steve, and myself, made sure we availed ourselves of these bargains because where else would you get good sneakers for the unheard of price of \$5 which was almost \$4 less than we could get them at the store? And then he had the bargain of the century – the team had gotten a truckload of brightly colored Cons and they were a mere \$2 a pair!!! My brothers and I snatched these treasures up. I was working on a farm so I bought two pairs while the boys who only mowed lawns each bought one pair. I bought a pair of bright orange and a pair of deep purple sneaks. We were the picture of style as we played basketball on the driveway and in gym class.

I still had those orange sneakers when I went to Navajo Mission in 1975 and they helped break a big burglary case. Let me explain: One night there were several buildings broken into on the main mission compound by unknown perpetrators – well actually we suspected a particular family that was known for their thievery. The burglary was obvious when our Mission Secretary, Anna Marie Hoover, went into the office and found the doors open and various items missing including, as I recall, a radio and a typewriter. My room in the Boys Dorm had also been broken into and items, including my orange sneakers, were gone. I was ticked! We called the sheriff and while we waited for Deputies to arrive (the county seat of Aztec is about 45 miles away) my brother Steve and I went to the Blanco Trading Post two miles from the mission on the main road to wait for them there. We were telling the Jake, the trader, and his family of our travails when, who should walk into the Post but one of the boys from that thieving family we suspected, and he was wearing some very familiar looking orange sneakers. Jake, his sons, and my brother and I corralled the boys and kept them until the deputies arrived. They soon confessed their guilt and showed us where they had stashed the loot in the sagebrush across the dirt road from the mission. As I recall, everything was recovered.

Orange sneakers don't lie. Well, at least, they are pretty obvious. You know what else can't lie? Any thing or any person before an all-knowing God. Sarah denied that she had laughed at the thought of becoming a mother after her womb had dried up, but she and the Lord both knew better. But don't come down too hard on her, every one of us would be just as incredulous at such a bizarre prediction had we been in a similar situation. And not only that, Abraham had also laughed about a similar claim. We'll look at that in a bit as we talk about how, all too often, and even as we claim such great faith, we react with great unbelief as we consider what God can actually do. God's response could easily be, "you laugh, but just you watch."

You see, even the most faithful of us can and will falter when . . .

We go through the motions of belief and the resulting obedience

- Abraham and Sarah were the picture of Middle Eastern hospitality at its best. They did everything right with every protocol handled with perfection.
- When a car would drive past their semi-remote farmhouse, Kathy's mother would, almost creepily peek out through the curtains, and ask "Who's out?". Not many vehicles went by and she was curious. But she wasn't curious enough to go out and flag them down and invite them in for a major meal. Not so for Abraham. He saw strangers in the distance and he went **TO** them and invited them to stop for refreshment. This is the kind of hospitality found in many cultures of the world. Even if an enemy is in your home, you treat them like royalty and with the best food and drink. Abraham obviously realized almost immediately that this was not a stranger or an enemy. It seems he knew right away it was the Lord in some manly form along with two attendants, who, as you read on for the next chapter and a half, are actually angels.
- The pressure was on. In his heart of hearts Abraham knew who his Guest actually was and he wanted the best for the Lord. You see, he was not only his Lord, but his friend. James is referencing several places in the Old Testament when he says "*Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,*" and he was called *God's friend*. James 2:23. One of those places is from the prophet Isaiah where he records, *But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend, I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you.* Isaiah 41:8-9. Last week my friend Ilam was here –

as you well know, and I wanted to make his stay here at least as comfortable as he did for me when I was there in his home in Kenya. Why? Because he's my friend. We turn it up a notch for our friends.

- So this was all playing in the background as the main Guest confidently proclaims that in one year's time Sarah would give birth to a son. Abraham was getting with the program and, in any case we don't have his reaction, but we do know that Sarah, his wife, who was listening through the tent walls, snickered with incredulity, and thought something like, "Ha! I'm old. Menopause was years ago. Babies from this body are a loooong faded dream."
- And the Guest called her on it. He heard her laugh and asked, "Why did Sarah laugh?" And she lied and spoke up and said "I did not laugh!". But laughs and lies are as obvious as bright orange Converse sneakers to a God who never misses a thing. That's the way it is, not just for Sarah, but for us too . . .

When it gets down to brass tacks, our disbelief is revealed all too often

- Abraham was a paragon of righteousness and faith, and yet he still laughed. Yes, in the previous chapter we see that Abraham had a bit of a chortle when God brought up that he and Sarah would have a son. Listen, *God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her."* Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?" Genesis 17:15-17.
- Here was the man who was told by God to pack up and leave his ancestral hometown of Ur and to go to place God would show him. We looked at this two weeks ago. There was no AAA Trip-Tick or GPS – just GO and I'll let you know when to stop. And remember that little dialogue we had then that went like this:

God: "Abram, go from your country and everything and everybody you know and go a land I will show you"

And remember Abram's response?

Abram: "Okay."

That was the kind of man of faith Abraham was.

- Until it came to something that seemed too difficult for even God to do. Then, we giggle at God's suggestion that he can and will ask as he pleases and when he pleases. Aren't we all like that from time to time? We say things like, "That disease is terminal, healing is not possible." Or, "That person is beyond redemption." We give up because, well, at least it seems, that God has given up. We act like God is powerless. We act as if God is subject to his creation rather than the opposite. I'm in the midst of Jon Meacham's biography of Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson, you might remember, famously took two Bibles and cut and pasted them into his own version devoid of anything he didn't think natural. He essentially felt that if he couldn't conceive it, it was not believable. As a result the divine was gone from his Bible and, as a result, his belief system. He wrote this to his friend, John Adams, "*In extracting the pure principles which he taught (he is referring to Jesus of Nazareth), we should have to strip off the artificial vestments in which they have been muffled by priests, who have travestied them into various forms, as instruments of riches and power to themselves.*" He essentially believed in no higher power. He thought that the New Testament was a church hierarchy power grab. Well, one way or the other, Mr. Jefferson knows otherwise now.
- While, we don't go to such an extent, it sometimes seem that way as we smile at the simple faith of a child or the naïve faith of someone who actually believes God can and will do what he promises. Well, here's the answer for such weak faith, and it's right here in our text in verse 14 . . .

NOTHING IS TOO DIFFICULT FOR GOD!

- Actually its here in the form or a question: Is anything too hard for the Lord? Genesis 18:14a The answer is obvious. It's not up for debate. God does what he wants, when he wants and it's always good.
- Abraham already knew that – but he needed to be reminded. Sarah knew it too, but she needed to be reminded. One year later she was a mama and she knew, through tears of joy that God was having the last laugh.
- Nothing is too difficult for God! We know that, right? Really? Too often we act otherwise when we give up on a person who needs Jesus or we think we will never be healed, or will we ever have a baby? We act like God is powerless when we believe naysayers who predict the end of the Church because of sin and wickedness in the world. We don't get to even think that. Jesus assured us of this when he replied that Peter's confession

of him as the Messiah was the very foundation of the Church and that *the gates of Hades will not overcome it*. Matthew 16:18b.

- Let's not act like defeated unbelievers who cower when the world laughs at our faith in a God who can do anything. Let's respond lovingly and with confidence, "you laugh, but just you watch." Amen.