

## **“Sarah, Mrs. Abraham: A Complicated Woman”**

Date: July 2, 2017

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: Genesis 11:29-30; 16:1-16; Genesis 12:1-3, 10-20

Occasion: Sermon series, people of the Bible

Themes: Trust, grace,

Sarah, the woman whom God promised would give birth to a nation, but who would at times rush God's plans. People are complicated, you know. We're taking a look at various people in the Bible this summer, and today we meet the wife of Abraham, Sarah.

And I have to tell you, I am so excited to be doing this series. Because I think for a lot of us we have this image of who the people of the Bible were. We imagine them to be saints who walked around with a halo around their head and that they were perfect people.

But they weren't. They were people just like you and me, who had an experience with God and their story has inspired others. But they weren't perfect. Sarah certainly wasn't. She was the mother of the nation of Israel, but she had her issues.

When we first meet Sarai, her name before God gave her a new one, she is living in the land of Ur of the Chaldeans, located in modern-day Iraq. We are told that she is Abram's wife, and we also learn that she is childless because she is unable to conceive.

When Sarai's father-in-law, Terah, takes the family on the move, she and Abram end up in the city of Haran. And it is there that the Lord appears to her husband and tells him to go to Canaan, and promises to make him into a great nation. God made a promise to Abram and his wife. How cool is that? It is awesome!

The writer of the book of Hebrews tells us, "It was by faith Abraham obeyed God's call to go to another place which God had

promised to give him. He left his own country, not knowing where he was to go.” (11:3NCV) Think about this: God talks to Abraham. That’s pretty cool. God tells him what to do. That’s really cool. And God makes a promise to Abraham and his wife. That is amazingly cool.

Abraham does what God wants him to do, and Sarai goes along with him. They are obedient to God. And yet, you will probably not find Abram or Sarai’s name listed in the book of “Who’s Who in Purity and Sainthood.” Would you like to know why?

I’ll tell you. Abram was a liar and the couple together act deceitfully. Have you forgotten this part of the story? Let me tell you. Shortly after the first visit from God, a famine in the land of Canaan sends the couple and their family down to Egypt. And it is here that we read an interesting detail about Sarai:

She was exceptionally beautiful. She was a knockout. She was so beautiful, in fact, that Abram fears the Egyptians will kill him to get to her. So, in order to save his neck, he lets the word out that Sarai isn’t his wife, but his sister. And Sarai goes along with it. I’m telling you, this is a complicated couple.

And then, not long after, he does it again! Abraham moved south to the Negev and lived for a while between Kadesh and Shur, and then he moved on to Gerar. While living there as a foreigner, Abraham introduces Sarah by saying, “She is my sister.” So, King Abimelech of Gerar sent for Sarah and had her brought to him at the palace. Guess what! It wasn’t to play video games.

Twice Abram and Sarai trade integrity for security. God had spoken to them. God had made promise with them. Did they trust the promises of God? Hardly. Can you build a nation on that kind of faith?

Evidently, as it turns out, you can. God took what was good in Abram and Sarai; God forgave what was bad, and then used them to change history. You see, here's the thing. Our imperfect, doubting faith cannot prevent God from keeping his promises. What Abram and Sarai did was not right. But God used them anyway.

That means there's hope for people like you and me. When we doubt God, when we make bad choices, when we trade integrity for security, God can still use us for good and holy purposes. God did with Abram and Sarai; God can do it with you and me. Amen?

So, after Abram and Sarai had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai starts to get a little impatient with God's promise. She still hasn't gotten pregnant. If she's going to be the mother of a great nation, babies had better start coming.

Sarai decides to take matters into her own hands. Perhaps she thinks, "Maybe God needs me to take care of this one." She convinces Abram that time is running out, "Face it Abe – you ain't getting any younger either!" Sarai then commands her maid, Hagar, to go into Abrams tent and lie with him.

Hagar goes in a maid; she comes out a mom. And the problems begin. Abram and Sarai now have an heir, but it isn't the heir God intended. They have gone outside of God's plan, and soon things begin to unravel.

The Bible is so refreshingly honest. It doesn't sugar-coat the story; it tells it plain and honest. Sarah didn't trust God. Have you ever felt that way - God wasn't acting fast enough for you? You've got a problem and you know God will help you, but the answer doesn't seem to be coming fast enough. *So what can I do to help you God?*

Waiting and trusting are not easy. We can become impatient people. But the invitation is there, always, to wait upon the Lord. Poor Sarah couldn't wait. She rushed things and took matters into her own hands. And, she made a mess of things.

Hagar becomes haughty and Sarai is jealous. The two women are testy with each other, understandably so. And Abram is caught in the middle. He just wants to wash his hands of the whole affair, but he was one of the primary players; he couldn't walk away.

My friends, if you ever need a reminder of God's grace, forgiveness and love, you will find it in Sarah's story. She didn't trust God. She made a mess of things. And yet, and still God was able to use her.

If you ever wonder how God could use *you* to change the world, just look at this couple. They made a lot of bad choices. But Abram also made one for his family, that changed everything. Romans 4:3 tells us, "He trusted God to set him right instead of trying to be right on his own."

Because of this, God offers grace to both Sarai and Abram, in spite of their faults, and bad choices. This story gives us a glimpse of what happens when we seek to go our own way instead of God's way. Sarai is left contempt and bitter. Abram is weary and consenting. Hagar is abused. And her son, Ishmael is left to die.

But here's the thing – we all have Sarai moments – times when we want life to go *our* way instead of God's way. We all have moments when we ask God to scoot over so we can sit in the driver's seat. This should make us love God even more.

For we know that during such times God protected us from our own selves. God knew all the mistakes we would make, and had a back-up plan before we even knew we needed one. In Jesus Christ, you and I are already loved, forgiven and chosen – even before we mess up. This is the work of the cross: God’s love provides grace.

No matter how much we foul up, God’s plan of salvation is never thwarted, and God’s grace is never threatened.

Sarah’s story doesn’t end here. She does conceive at the age of 99, God bless her. Sarah even survives God’s test of when Abraham is asked to sacrifice his only son, Issac. Pity poor Sarah when father and son go up the mountain; imagine her joy when they return. And Sarah does become the mother of the nation of Israel.

Not because of her goodness and faithfulness, but in spite of her faults and failings, because that is how our God works. God uses what is imperfect to complete God’s perfect plan. God uses people like Sarah, you and me. Amen.

Let us pray:

“Lord, we need help trusting you with all of our heart (Proverbs 3:5-7). It’s so easy to lean on our own understanding. Forgive us when we fail to put our whole trust in you. Humble us and give us a heart that fears you. Thank you for your grace and love that predates all of our mistakes. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.”

This sermon borrows heavily from the book “Ten Women of the Bible,” written by Max Lucado. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2016; pp. 1-11.