

Abraham, My Friend: 06 Your Prayer Is Heard

by Ron Bailey

This sermon emphasizes the importance of prayer in overcoming frustration and childlessness, and encourages listeners to be honest with God in prayer and trust him to change circumstances in his own time and way.

Duration: 12:01

Scripture: Genesis 11:30, Matthew 6:33, Luke 1:6, Luke 1:45

Topics: "Abraham"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of laying hold of God in prayer, being honest and expressing our true feelings to Him. He encourages listeners to trust God with their deepest desires and to expect His fulfillment. The speaker also highlights the story of Sarah, who experienced the unquenchable hunger of barrenness, and how her longing led her to make a short-term compromise with lasting repercussions. Despite their struggles, Sarah and her husband Zechariah remained faithful to God's commandments and ordinances. The sermon concludes by emphasizing the power of prayer and the importance of maintaining a close relationship with God.

Transcript

Well, hello again. You're listening to a Bible Base podcast, and I'm your host, Ron Bailey. These 60 or so meditations on the life of Abraham were first published on the sermon index.net website, where you can still find the original text versions.

The aim of the series is to discover the way in which Abraham became a praying man and a friend of God. Number six, your prayer was heard. The story of Abraham's family begins with a little list of sons and daughters, which comes to an abrupt stop, but Sarai was barren.

She had no child. Genesis 11 verse 30. Perhaps it's something to do with the wonder of the inspired scripture, but as I read the words 40 centuries later, I can still feel the pain.

She lives in the bosom of her family, in relative prosperity. She is a handsome woman with a loving husband. What more could she want? But Sarai was barren.

She had no child. The book of Proverbs has lots of lists, too. It lists four unquenchable hungers, things which can never be satisfied and never put off.

Four hungers that know no rest, no respite. The grave, the barren womb, the parched earth, the raging fire. Proverbs 30.

The insistence of these four hungers submits to no reason. In Sarai, this unsatisfied longing was to learn to a short-term compromise whose repercussions are with us 40 centuries later, but that's farther into our story. Sarai's hunger led her to the conclusion that something must be done, not realising, as Oswald Chambers has said, that despair is ever the gateway of faith.

It seems to me that frustration is always a call to prayer, never to action. Achievements motivated by frustration always carry bitter seeds. My soul, says Psalm 62, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is from him.

The relatively new Hebrew word, frustration, did not appear in Hebrew until the mid-seventies and in fact, before it was absorbed into the language, people who spoke only Hebrew were never frustrated. They may have been angry or disappointed, and they may have experienced a sense of turmoil in certain situations, but the acute feeling that we call frustration was unknown to them until the word for it was translated from the English language. Sometimes it's good to force ourselves to use a different word, if possible a Bible word.

If we were not allowed to use the word frustration and had to use another in its place, we might make an interesting discovery. Frustration always has a solution as long as someone else will do something. I am frustrated and it's his fault.

If I force myself to use the word angry or disappointed, it opens up another solution. I am the problem. Christians have an alternative spelling for disappointment, they just change that D to an H. Frustration is usually just a sign that God is not allowing me to be God and I am discovering that I don't like the idea.

There are a surprising number of stories in the Bible relating to childlessness. When God introduced himself to Moses, he called himself the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Did you notice that each one of these men had a wife who was barren? Was this part of the pain that caused them to seek God? We subsequently read that the sons of both Rebekah and Rachel were born in direct answer to prayer, Genesis 25, 21 and 30 verse 22.

But what if Sarai, I'll call her Sarah from now on, did she pray? Did Abraham? And when you have prayed, what do you do then? There's a wonderful illustration of answered prayer in Luke's Gospel. The issue was the same, childlessness. Zechariah and Elizabeth have the greatest marriage testimony in Scripture and they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless, Luke chapter 1 verse 6. This would be exceptional if it referred to one person, but this verse plainly says both.

Their walk together would have begun when they were young folk in the hills in Judea. Their marriage would have been accompanied by prayer for children and Elizabeth would have breathed her silent amens. As the early years passed, well-meaning friends would have offered their condolences, don't worry dear, it'll be all right, you wait and see.

And they did wait, and the years passed, and more years passed. Through all these years of heartache, and it had other painful connotations in their culture, they maintained their walk in the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless. They never became hard and critical, never became bitter, just kept on

walking in the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless.

What an amazing pair. At some point in their long wait, Zechariah had prayed. Of course, he had prayed often, but there was one particular time he prayed.

How do I know? Because of Gabriel's word to him. But the angel said to him, do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer is heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. Luke chapter 1 verse 13.

This is a reference to a single prayer that was heard sometime in the past. I have no doubt that Zechariah knew exactly which prayer Gabriel was referring to. I suppose that at some point he had poured out his heart to God.

He had known it was different, that somehow he had got through. Perhaps he returned and kept the secret in his heart, and the years passed, and more years passed, and the memory grew dim, and they both were well advanced in years, says Luke chapter 1 verse 7. The last hopes faded, and still he walked in the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless. When God hears prayer, he doesn't always change things immediately, but change they will, in his way and in his time.

Sometimes, as we pray, we know our prayer is heard. To continue to pray when we know the prayer has been heard would be pointless. Worse, we could conceivably pray ourselves from faith back into unbelief.

There's no longer a need to pray when the prayer is heard. Now all that's needed is patient waiting upon God. This was Elijah's pattern.

He prayed once, but sent his servant seven times, and while the servant was toing and froing, Elijah was waiting upon God, his face between his knees. So what are your secret sorrows? From the outside all looks well, and all your peers are impressed, but deep within you have those continuing hungers. Child of God, lay hold of God in prayer.

Let the tears flow. Be honest. Tell him how you feel.

God cannot change the person you are pretending to be, but when you know he has heard, stop pestering him. Thank him. Trust it all into his hands, and hold it before him in expectation.

David's simple testimony was, this poor man cried out, and the Lord heard him. Psalm 34. It was from the pain and joy of her experience that Elizabeth was able to bring a unique encouragement to a young woman who had just begun to carry an amazing promise.

These are the words of Elizabeth to Mary. Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord. Luke chapter 1 verse 45.

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