

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF VILLA RICA, PCA
Mother Of Nations

Mother's Day Sunday Villa Rica May 11, 2003
 Gen. 17: 15- 21 cf. Gen. 18:1-15

Text Hebrews 11: 11 - **By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered him faithful who had promised.**

One of God's greatest gifts to you and me was our mother. Human life comes through a mother. Mother love is one of the strongest forces in the world. When a mother's love is sanctified by faith it can make her the vessel of both physical life and spiritual life. That is the testimony of Augustine, the well-known saint of the 4th century. Before his conversion he had lived a life of wanton debauchery. But his mother's prayers would not let him go. She pleaded with God for his soul, weeping many buckets of tears. At the time of his conversion he told the Lord, ***"If I am thy child, O God, it is because thou didst give me such a mother."*** In his memoirs, which we know as "The Confession of St. Augustine" he tells of her weeping more tears for his soul than other mothers at the deaths of their children. He writes... ***"For she, by that faith and spirit which she had from Thee, discerned the death wherein I lay, and Thou heardest her, O Lord; Thou heardest her, and despisedst not her tears, when streaming down, they watered the ground under her eyes in every place where she prayed"***

Oh! The power of a mother's prayers! Augustine won't be the only man in heaven who came more by the strength of a mother's prayers than any other means. There will be many, yea thousands, yea millions, who will have the same testimony as Augustine. We must surely praise God for the love, advice and prayers of Christian mothers.

Sarah is the first woman in the Bible who is said to have had faith. I am not saying that there were no women of faith before Sarah. There must have been some before the Flood. But she is the first woman recognized as a woman of faith. She is listed in Hebrews along with her husband Abraham as a heroine of faith. She heads the list of women in God's honor roll. For that reason she is a classic example in the Bible of a Christian wife and mother.

I. Sarah's Faith Struggle

A. The first thing to be noticed about Sarah's faith is the obstacle she had to overcome to believe God's promise. I am not a woman so I can never exactly put myself in a woman's shoes and have a woman's perspective. For example, I don't know what it meant for Sarah to know she was barren. We know that in her time it was a part of a woman's self esteem to be able to bear children -- the more the better.

But Sarah was childless. At the time she and Abraham packed up to leave Haran and by faith go to the land of Canaan she was 65 years old, and she had never had a baby. Can you put yourself in her shoes and realize how difficult it would be for her to believe that she was ever going to have a baby? Even if she had had children it would be hard to believe she was going to have another

one when you get to be 65 years old. But she had never had the first child. She had lived all of her life and had never been pregnant. Some women conceive and then miscarry. At least if you conceive and then miscarry there might be some hope that there will be a next time that could result in a child being born. But to have never been pregnant in all the years of her marriage, that was her situation.

B. Our text says that she received ability to conceive even beyond the proper time of life. That means she had already gone through the change of life that women go through. The promise that Abraham was going to have a son, and to believe that she was going to be the mother of that son was her great obstacle to faith.

Perhaps then you can appreciate why Sarah, wanting to believe the promise of God, thought to herself that maybe the promise would be fulfilled through a surrogate mother. We are hearing a lot about that today with the procedure of artificial insemination. Women are bearing children for other women who are barren through the use of this procedure. But Sarah had the idea that she could have a son using Hagar as a surrogate mother. Hagar was her slave maid. She was her property. Why not let Abraham father a child by Hagar and that would give them an offspring. So she talked Abraham into doing that. This tells us how strongly both of them felt about having the heir that God had promised, and it seemed at the time to be a way to make it happen. And so they executed this plan and Hagar had a son, whom she named Ishmael.

It is interesting at this point to observe that the prophecy about Ishmael was that he would be a wild donkey of a man, His hand would be against everyone, and everyone's hand against him; and he will live to the east of all his brothers (Genesis 16:11-12).

The Arabs claim lineal descent from Abraham and many seem to have inherited the traits of their father Ishmael. (Komeni, Kadafy, Osama Ben Ladan)

But God did not approve Ishmael as the promised

Heir. Sarah was to be the mother of the Heir. And when Abraham was ninety-nine and his wife Sarah eighty-nine God appeared again to Abraham and told him that He was making a Covenant with him. He told him he would be a father of a multitude of nations. He changed his name from Abram to Abraham and he also changed the name of his wife Sari to Sarah.

If it was hard to believe at sixty-five that you will be a mother after never having been a mother think how much harder it would be when you are eighty-nine. In fact it tells us that even Abraham laughed and that later Sarah laughed when the Lord told them this was going to happen. Sarah denied that she laughed, but the Lord told her, "No, but you did laugh." Perhaps it was the Lord's knowledge of her laugh that strengthened her faith to believe it really was going to happen. It must have been

a laugh of incredulity. On the face of it, humanly speaking, it was impossible, for as she laughed she said, "**Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so Old?**" (Gen. 18:13).

Faith is never easy. Faith has to believe in spite of difficulties, in spite of circumstances. God's Word had promised it and that settled it, but let us not minimize the struggle against unbelief.

C. The strength of her faith was that she considered him faithful who had promised. She was not depending on any strength or power from within herself. She knew that there was nothing in her

that could create a baby. The power for that was the God who had promised that it would happen. So she steadfastly held to the promise and trusted in Him to bring it to pass. The Word of God says, **those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired they will walk and not become weary.** (Isa. 40:31)

She focused on the Lord and obtained strength and power to conceive according to the promise.

The son of Abraham and Sarah began the family of God, the nation of Israel, now known as the Jewish people. God told Abraham that he would be a father of nations and Sarah that she would be a mother of nations. Just how does that all work out? In what way has that promise been fulfilled?

II. The Apostle Paul Tells Us That The Promise To Abraham Is Being Fulfilled By The Gospel Of Jesus Christ Being Preached And Believed In All Nations

A. The plan of God has been unfolding for many generations. Abraham and Sarah had a miracle baby named Isaac. Then Isaac and Rebekah had twin sons named Jacob and Esau, and then the covenant promise was established in Jacob who became Israel. His twelve sons became the children of Israel, one of whom was Judah. And of the tribe of Judah sprang the promised Messiah Jesus the Christ. In Jesus Christ the covenant is enlarged to all the nations of the earth.

The Prophet Isaiah shed much light on this truth. In chapter 54:1-3 we read, **"Shout for joy, O barren one, you who have borne no child; Break forth into joyful shouting and cry aloud, you who have not travailed; For the sons of the desolate one will be more numerous Than the sons of the married woman,"** says the LORD. **"Enlarge the place of your tent; Stretch out the curtains of your dwellings, spare not; Lengthen your cords And strengthen your pegs. "For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left. And your descendants will possess nations And will resettle the desolate cities.**

Paul explained in Galatians how the Gentiles have been brought into the Israel of God: **Gal. 3:26-29 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.**

This covenant family is not limited by bloodlines or by geographical boundaries. It is a family that encircles the globe that crosses racial, cultural, language and color lines. What a fantastic fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham and Sarah.

Sarah was barren, just like the Gentile nation out of which she came, until God performed a miracle. She had never been in labor. She had never given her husband a son. This is a picture of man without the Gospel, without the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. The world was in

darkness, lost, without hope, without God. Then God in his great love and infinite wisdom called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldeans to be a man of faith. He established a covenant with him. He gave him exceedingly great and wonderful promises. These promises are being marvelously fulfilled. Out of the aged loins of Abraham by his barren wife Sarah came an heir. Out of that heir came a spiritual posterity. Out of that posterity came a Redeemer, the Seed promised long before to Abraham. Out of that Redeemer comes a multitude, which no man can number, more numerous than the stars above and the sand by the seashore.

This multitude is not one nation, but many. It is a company comprised of Africans and Asians, Europeans and Egyptians, North Americans and South Americans, black and white, red and yellow. The book of Revelation tells us that the Redeemed include a vast multitude that no one can count, from every nation, tribe, people and language. (Rev. 7: 9) .

B. The Church of God is the Mother of Nations. Her seed transforms desolate cities into living cities. God tells her not to be afraid, that her guilt and shame is all removed. He tells her, You will not suffer shame... you will forget the shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood. For your Maker is your husband -- the Lord Almighty is his name -- the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer...I will have compassion on you, says the Lord your Redeemer. Isa. 54: 4-8).

He says that his covenant with his church is like the Covenant he made with Noah after the flood -- that he would never again let the waters cover the earth with a flood, so now I have sworn not to be angry with you, never to rebuke you again.

In a very real sense Sarah is the mother of nations. The offspring from that one son Isaac is fabulous already and it is still increasing every year. The children of Abraham and Sarah are both physical and spiritual. The sand by the seashore might speak of the merely human, while the stars of the heavens can speak of the spiritual offspring. All who are born of God, all who have a like faith, can trace their ancestry back to Abraham and Sarah and Isaac and Israel. The Church after the flood got its start from this Godly pair. God promised that they would number in the millions and billions their offspring. See what their beginning faith has become today. The investment of Abraham and Sarah in God's promise has multiplied beyond calculation.

C. Every child of God is a member of the family of God.

Every child of God can trace his faith back to Abraham and Sarah. Sarah is the mother of a multitude of nations. The fruits of faith continue to multiply even after death. Believing in Christ, investing faith in Him brings you and me into the Kingdom of God. It also bestows upon us the same opportunity to have stock in the Kingdom, as did Abraham and Sarah. **The smallest one shall become a clan, and the least one a mighty nation. The Lord, will hasten it in its time.** Isa.60: 22

God promises great success to evangelistic and missionary efforts of the Church. God is our Father but the Church is our Mother. We are born of water and the Word in the womb of the Church. The tears of praying saints is the travail that the Church goes through to bring her sons and daughters to birth. In the bosom of the church we are nourished and comforted.

On this Mother's Day let us honor not only our human mother who gave us physical birth but also our spiritual mother who brought us to spiritual birth. The Church traced back to Abraham and Sarah is the Bride of Christ and she is God's vessel of life to nurse and nurture all of His children. Let us be like Monica who travailed in prayer until Christ was formed in her son Augustine and like the apostle Paul who travailed in labor pains until Christ was formed in others to whom he preached the gospel.

Let your faith sow, plant and water the Word of God so that the nations may come. Let us pray for the salvation of all of those who yet sit in darkness. One day you will see how your stock in the kingdom has greatly increased. Your faith like a tiny mustard seed will become a mighty tree and a host of people will rise up to call you blessed. Have the faith of Sarah, who by faith received ability to conceive even beyond the proper time of life, because she considered him faithful who had promised.

Our God is like the mother who never ceases to love her child. He is like Monica who never stopped praying for her son Augustine. Once you are in the bosom of the Church you are nurtured and cared for and loved. You are embraced in the arms of the Almighty who will never let you go, no never, never, never let you go!

Hymn #708 "O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go"

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF VILLA RICA
519 MAIN STREET
VILLA RICA, GA. 30180
770-459-5276**

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