

Sarah's Kamikaze Faith

How Faith Trumps Doubt

Introduction

This is week 6 of our Sermon Series – Kamikaze hearts for God – How faith and action take us to the edge. In the first week Jim gave us a definition of faith from Tony Evans:

Faith is acting like it is so
even when it's not so
in order that it might be so
just because God said so.

This week I want to give you another definition of faith – this one from John MacArthur

Faith is seeing the invisible
Hearing the inaudible
Touching the intangible
Accomplishing the impossible

The past 5 weeks we have looked at some exemplary Old Testament saints who lived that kind of faith. But I wonder, how many of us hear about these saints and find ourselves saying – “That’s not me. I don’t have that kind of faith.” Very early in my Christian walk, I shared the gospel with my aunt and I was surprised at her response. “I’m not good enough to become a Christian.” Perhaps that’s the response of some of us to this sermon series. I ...

- Don’t have faith to trust God with my giving like Abel OR
- My life is so messed up – don’t think that I could please God like Enoch OR
- Don’t have the patience and courage of Noah to risk reputation to follow God OR
- Don’t have enough faith for the journey as Abraham OR

I find myself there at times. Last week I talked about the journey God has our business on. We are now 4 years into that journey and God has been faithful to supply all our needs. But from a business perspective, we remain fragile. Every day I send a prayer letter out to over 90 people who very graciously have agreed to pray for our business. A little over a week ago I wrote in the letter about our finances– “We aren’t going to make it again this month” One of you graciously helped me to see that I wasn’t practicing what I was preaching. Based on all projections and all human possibilities – we aren’t going to match income to expenses again this month. A kamikaze heart can say that – but if you are basing your life on God – to predict that He will not come through is not faith. And that is what I was doing.

So if like me, you find yourself not living up to the standard of faith exemplified in our series then the next three weeks of the series are for us –

We are going to look at

- How faith trumps sin in the life of Rahab – May 20
- How faith trumps fear in the life of Moses’ mother – Mother’s Day May 13
- How faith trumps doubt in the life of Sarah – this week

Doubt is a normal part of the Christian faith – look at the disciples after the resurrection and right before Jesus' ascension. They were standing on the Mount of Olives - standing in the presence of the risen Christ – having been through good Friday and Easter – and Matthew records :

and some doubted.¹

Don't you find that amazing? But that is where most of us live. Today we are going to look at the life of Sarah and ask God to teach us a little more about faith and the role doubt plays in our lives.

Let's Pray

Sarah – who was she

Scripture Hebrews 11:11

People of God – Hear the Word of God

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.

We first hear of Sarah as Abraham's wife – and we are told that she was barren. She couldn't have children. And that sets the stage for the powerful drama of faith that was to unfold in her and Abraham's life. In those days, to be infertile was a sign of God's disfavor. It was a major source of scorn and derision. We are told that she left with Abraham when he was called to leave his family and set out – not knowing where he was going. That had to be as hard for her as it was for Abraham.

We are also told of some of her failures – failures of Abraham that she took part in. Out of fear and doubt, twice Abraham (Genesis 12 and 20) asked her to lie and travel as his sister rather than his wife to protect himself. He was not treating Sarah as the treasured vessel of God's goodness to him. On her part, rather than pushing back and appealing to God's promises of protection - she wrongfully submitted to Abraham. God's word never condones a wife's participation in a husband's wrong behavior. Never!

In both cases, in spite of her doubting God's provision of protection, God mightily came to the defense of Sarah and her honor – God stepped in and did Abraham's job of defending his wife's honor.

We spoke last week about how God promised descendants to Abraham — a son. And from the beginning the promise was not just to Abraham – from the beginning the promise was to both Abraham and Sarah - who was barren. But, when the promise looked completely impossible to be fulfilled, Abraham and Sarah took things into their own hands – Sarah initiating because she was doubting God's ability to fulfill the promise through her body. And of course we know the disastrous results of trying to fulfill God's promise with our own strength – the resulting child Ishmael becomes the father of the Arab people – and the enmity that existed between the

¹ Matthew 28:17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

descendants of Ishmael and the descendants of Isaac – is still affecting us today. Our sin – no matter how private always affects more than we expect.

But Sarah's doubt journey continues. I love the scene (Gen 18), when God appears to Abraham and tells him that the promised son is coming within the year. He's 99. Sarah pushing 90. Sarah is listening from the tent. When she hears about the promised son – she laughs to herself – doubting that the promise of God could be fulfilled in her doubly barren body. This is a laughable promise. And Sarah doubts God's provision again.

But God doesn't leave her outside his counsel but again – God takes the initiative with Sarah to defend her honor and to make sure that she knows that she is integral to the promise – He confronts her about her laugh – and she denies it. "I did not laugh."

God, not one to mince words replied "No, but you did laugh." And then God challenges her doubts and says:

"Is anything too difficult for the Lord?"

So how did Sarah make the Hall of Faith

So, with such a history of doubt, how did Sarah make the cut for the Hall of Faith?

Not all scholars think she did make the cut and as a result our passage today is somewhat controversial. Some scholars who I trust and rely on call the passage "dubious" and "questionable." In fact the authors of the NIV find the text so questionable – that they write Abraham into the text – even though his name doesn't appear in the Greek.

The problem comes because what our text says Sarah accomplished is normally attributed to a man. Literally the Greek says that "By faith Sarah "deposited sperm." [I decided against a visual on that one.] So you can see the problem.

I however find it difficult to attribute Sarah's insertion into the text in a male dominated culture as a transcription error. "I'm writing about Abraham and oops I wrote in Sarah instead."

Rather I think this is another example of God coming to Sarah's side and honoring her. In rare cases, there is some precedent for the phrase being used for a woman who is "founding a lineage" which is what Sarah did.

But – we are still left to understand why God honored her faith. To understand how this happened we have to again look at our definition of faith and get some perspective on doubt. Let's look at doubt for a few minutes and see if we can gain a clearer perspective on it.

There are two common misconceptions about doubt; first that doubt is the same as unbelief; second that doubt is a problem only in the arena of faith and not in area of knowledge.

Let's look at the first misconception – that doubt is the same as unbelief. Our word for doubt comes from a Latin word which has as its root a word that means two. To believe is to be "in one mind" about accepting something as true; to disbelieve is to be in one mind about rejecting it. To doubt is to waver between the two – to believe and disbelieve at the same time – to be "in

two minds.” Doubt is not the opposite of faith, nor is it the same as unbelief. Doubt is the state of mind in suspension between faith and unbelief.

The second misconception is that doubt is unique to questions of faith and doesn't affect other areas of knowledge.²

A couple years ago there was an article in the Courant – a geology professor from UConn was proudly telling his readers about how he helps poor ignorant freshmen come to true knowledge. He contended that all real knowledge only comes from the rational scientific approach – all other forms of “so called” knowledge – tradition / intuition / faith / all were unreliable and could not bring certainty. I began an email dialogue with him – attempting to discuss classical epistemology – or the study of knowledge – how we come to know truth – I was attempting to dialogue about how different kinds of knowledge were used to bring us to truth and how all knowledge is based on unproven assumptions – even scientific. After a number of exchanges, he finally gave up trying to defend his position, saying that he didn't really understand epistemology but that he had consulted some scholars in the field and they agreed with him.

Our culture promotes the idea that only scientific and rational thought processes bring us to certainty. And doubt comes into play only in the arena of faith. This is just not true. In fact doubting cherished assumptions in science has led to many scientific breakthroughs.

Francis Bacon – who was the father of the modern scientific method says this:

“If a man will begin with certainties, he shall end in doubts: but if he will be content to begin with doubts, he shall end in certainties.”

So doubt is not something unique to issues of faith – it is common to all forms of knowledge. And we all experience all kinds of doubts.

I said that we don't understand how Sarah got into the Hall of Faith because we have a wrong understanding of doubt and the role it plays in faith.

Let's look at a video clip of an example of faith – the setting is Indiana Jones search for the Holy Grail – the cup used by Jesus at the last supper. His father (played by Sean Connery) is dying. It was thought that the cup had healing powers and Jones is desperate to find it. He has been following a book that has clues as to its whereabouts – and the book has proven reliable so far on the journey. But he has come to a new crisis:

Indiana's father is shot just at the end of their quest. With his father dying, Indiana's search for the Grail takes on new intensity, because the cup is said to bring healing to those who drink from it.

With his father groaning in the background, Indiana walks ahead, following an ancient book that gives clues to guide him through a maze of obstacles to the place where the Grail is hidden. He comes to the brink of a chasm deeper than the eye can see. There is no visible way for him to cross the chasm.

Indiana is faced with the impossible. All he sees is the sheer cliff edge and the vast gulf beneath him. Then, as he studies his guidebook, his face relaxes in realization, and he says, "It's a leap of faith."

² I am indebted to Os Guinness for these insights taken from his book *In Two Minds*

With his father whispering, "You must believe, boy, you must believe," Indiana looks straight ahead, gathers his courage, and slowly raises one foot into the empty air in front of him.

With a thud, his foot lands on solid ground. The camera pans to show Indiana standing on a narrow rock bridge, deceptively carved to match the exact outline of the ravine beneath it.

Overcome with relief, he quickly crosses the chasm and discovers the Grail on the other side.

The clip gives us some good analogies of faith

- The father encouraging his son to believe – Our Father is on a mission to grow our faith – encouraging us to kamikaze faith
- Jones is trusting what it says in a book – that has proven reliable in the past – even when it makes no sense now – Our learning to trust in God's Word
- Stepping out on to the unknown as did Abraham
- And the tension that comes when there is not certainty – there was doubt in Jones face. But in his desperation to save his father he was willing to step out and take action in spite of his doubts

Faith filled actions are not prohibited by the presence of doubts. Doubts can be present even while exercising kamikaze faith. In fact, in Sarah's case, it was her doubt and her lying to God that resulted in God's challenge

"Is anything too difficult for the Lord?"

And this became a turning point for Sarah – because from that point forward we begin to see a different Sarah. We see a woman who learns rightful submission to her husband. When Abraham was allowing Hagar to bring mockery into their family, Sarah forcefully defends God's promises to a cowardly Abraham. And God honors that by telling Abraham to listen to her – that she was in the right.

"Isn't it the moment of most profound doubt that gives birth to new certainties?"

Vaclav Havel

I think that's what happened to Sarah. The light bulb came on and she realized who was responsible for what:

It was God's job to give her the ability to conceive – to found the lineage of the descendants who would out number the stars in the sky. It was her job to consider Him faithful who had promised. Irrespective of her past doubts. The fulfillment of the promise was not dependent upon how many times she had doubted in the past but what mattered was her present dependence upon Him.

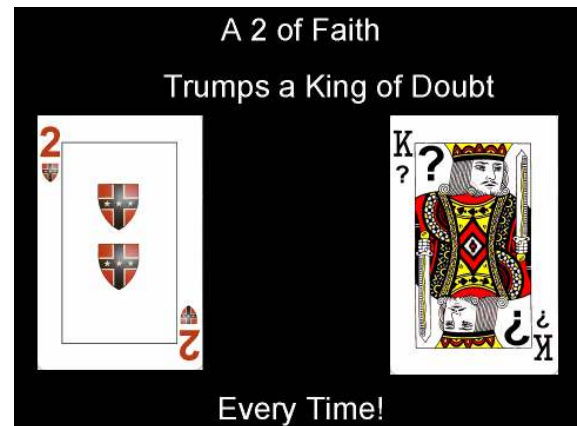
Faith is like stepping out on ice pond – If you want to walk on water, it only takes enough faith to get us onto the ice – then it is the ice's job to hold us. It is not our job to hold us up. Sarah's job was to have just enough faith to step onto the ice / to step onto the promise – it was God's job to fulfill the promise. Now a quarter inch of ice will not hold anyone. But six inches of ice will hold a Mac truck. No matter how much faith you have in a quarter inch of ice, it won't hold you. But no matter how little faith or how much you doubt you have in 6 inches of ice, if you have

enough faith to step out on it – even if you are doubting the whole time you are on the ice – it will hold you. You see its the object of our faith that matters.

Doubt creates problems and will affect how well we enjoy the journey – but a two of faith trumps a king of doubt – Every time!

Can We make the Hall of Faith?

What can we learn from our sister Sarah? We are all in the same boat – we all experience doubts. Doubt doesn't disqualify us from exercising kamikaze faith. It can prevent us from acting in faith – but it doesn't disqualify us. We don't have to be doubt free to experience God's faithfulness. God is never-the-less on a mission to grow our faith and to free us from our doubts – because our doubts cause all kinds of unnecessary anxiety and worries.



But what is required of us is not a doubt free existence but faith filled action in spite of doubts. Doubt can only be removed by action. We can't think our way out of doubt. As we move out onto God – putting our full weight on him, we will learn in more and more circumstances that He is faithful who has promised. And then as we act – we build a history with God.

Have you ever read a financial statement of a corporation? At the end of glowing reports, they usually put in something like:

This report contains forward-looking statements that are subject to a number of risks and uncertainties. Past performance is not necessarily indicative of future results.

God's call in our life contains forward-looking statements – He speaks of things that are not as though they were - we call them promises. And these promises are subject to a number of risks and uncertainties. Sarah was barren and it was past the time of childbearing. She had a history of doubting God. But with God, His past performance is indicative of future results. He who has promised is faithful. Our job is to step out onto Him. To put our full weight on him – even with our doubts – and like Sarah – with God we can do the impossible.