

The Barren Woman Gives Birth ***The Promise Fulfilled***

Genesis 21:1-7

Sunday, May 5th, 2024

I. Living Words

Thomas Aquinas commented that while men can only speak or communicate with words (i.e., with mere signs), God can communicate with _____. He speaks to us with *living words*. He creates things, and He makes them speak so that they communicate to us something beyond themselves. We see this in marriage, for instance. God created marriage, and through marriage God speaks to us about Christ and the Church. He doesn't just use words to speak about Christ and the Church, but through the thing *marriage*, He tells us about a 'great mystery', the relationship between Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:32).

In this chapter, we come to one of these 'living words'. It is the living word of *the barren woman giving birth*. The barren Sarah gives birth to the promised son, Isaac. Through this *thing*, God speaks to us about a great mystery; He speaks to us about our *salvation*.

II. The Text — Gen. 21:1-7

1 And the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken. 2 For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. 3 And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him—whom Sarah bore to him—Isaac. 4 Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. 5 Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. 6 And Sarah said, "God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me." 7 She also said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne him a son in his old age."

III. The Barren Woman Gives Birth

We could call this *living word*—the barren woman giving birth—a biblical trope; it is a recurrent theme in the story God is telling. In fact, so prevalent is this theme that the psalmist in Psalm 113, makes this out to be one of the chief mercies of God: "He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children. Praise the LORD!" (Psa. 113:9). Who is the Lord? The Lord is the One who makes the barren woman a mother—who opens up the womb, and grant her the joyful gift of children. The Lord delights to do this. And He takes this work that He does and He communicates to us something beyond it. The Lord tells us, This is what I do and this is what my *salvation* looks like. This is what it looks like for the Lord to fulfill His promise to His people: it looks like the barren woman giving birth.

We see this in the way Scripture speaks of our salvation. It is a new _____ (Jn. 3:5). Paul speaks of his ministry as a giving birth (Gal. 4:19). The earth itself groans as a woman in birth longing for God's salvation (Rom. 8:22). Jesus speaks of His passion with the image of a woman giving birth (Jn. 16:21). The general resurrection is described as the barren earth giving birth to the dead (Isa. 26:19). Sarah giving birth to Isaac is a great mystery, and it speaks of God's salvation of His people. *See also Isa. 54:1-6.*

IV. The Mystery of Salvation

As we meditate upon this living word of Sarah giving birth to Isaac, what do we learn about God's salvific work in His people, and finally of this world?

First. Salvation is a renewal of the _____ order of things. Barrenness is an evil, not caused directly by sin, but it is a result of living in a fallen world. Women are designed to bring life into the world, and when they can't do this, something is wrong. The barren Sarah, the barren Rebekah, the barren Rachel—these women testify to us that things are not as they ought to be. Nature has stopped functioning properly. But when God restores fruitfulness, what is He doing? He is not doing something new, but He is *making her new*. He is not contravening nature, but *restoring* it. By restoring Sarah's body so that it functions how it ought to, the Lord is renewing the original work He made at the beginning—the work upon which He looked and proclaimed: It is *very good*. By God fulfilling His promise to Sarah, to Abraham, God is *renewing the natural order of things*, and when the Lord unfolds His promise of salvation, this is what He is doing. His salvation is renewing the natural order of things so that what was designed to be fruitful, but has since the Fall become dysfunctional, corrupt, and barren—God is in the business of making new.

Second. Salvation is _____ our reach, humanly speaking. Sarah's barrenness before this renewal speaks to us about our own inability apart from God, for Abraham and Sarah were incapable of making a child of their own. Similarly, God lets us feel our impotence. He teaches us by this that man lives not by his own power, but by the renewing power of God. A barren woman does not make herself fruitful again. A dead man does not raise himself from the grave. A sinner does not turn his own life around. You can turn over a new leaf, but you cannot get yourself a new nature. You need God's _____ presence.

Third. The salvation God is unfolding in our lives and in this world is _____. It was a miracle of God that Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a child—but notice that she had to still do the bearing. She had to bear the child; then she had to give birth to the child. And there is nothing easy about pregnancy or about labor. This teaches us that God's salvation being worked out in our lives is going to mean effort and labor and striving. We don't do it in our own strength, but if God's power is in fact working within us then that means _____ are working. See *Phil. 2:12-13; 3:14; Matt. 11:12; 2 Pet. 1:5-7*.

Fourth. The end result of salvation is _____ unspeakable. The baby is born and that brings unspeakable joy. In the end, it is all worth it. Sarah conceived and bore to Abraham *Isaac*. And Isaac means _____. Sarah said, "God has made me *laugh* ('tzecoq'), and all who hear will *laugh* ('yitzacaq') with me" (Gen. 21:6; see also Psa. 113:9; Jn. 16:21; Heb. 12:2). So also is it with God's salvation. All the pain, all the hardship, all the striving and trials by fire—in the end, it is all worth it. This is what Paul says, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." See *2 Cor. 4:16-18*.

V. Conclusion