

IS ANYTHING TOO HARD FOR THE LORD?

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Scripture: Genesis 18: 1-15

Now the Lord appeared to him (i.e. Abraham) by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day. When he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, three men were standing opposite him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth, and said, "My Lord, if now I have found favor in Your sight, please do not pass Your servant by. Please let a little water be brought and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree; and I will bring a piece of bread, that you may refresh yourselves; after that you may go on, since you have visited your servant." And they said, "So do, as you have said." So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Quickly, prepare three measures of fine flour, knead it and make bread cakes."

Abraham also ran to the herd, and took a tender and choice calf and gave it to the servant, and he hurried to prepare it. He took curds and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and placed it before them, and he was standing by them under the tree as they ate.

Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "There, in the tent." He said, "I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing. Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" And the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?' Is anything too difficult for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son." Sarah denied it however, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh."

Would you pray with me?

Almighty God, as we look at this chapter, this verse from Your word, would You touch us with Your Spirit that we may be able to understand what You are saying to us through these words, through this narrative of Abraham and Sarah. We ask this in Your name, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Many of you have heard this narrative. You know this account of Abraham and Sarah, and them waiting for this child of promise; then time going on and both of them getting old. Then suddenly this visitation; and God appears to them and says to them, "Next year, at the appointed time, you will have a child." Given their situation and circumstance, Sarah just laughs and says, "How is that even possible! I'm past the age of childbearing, and Abraham is old. How is it going to be possible?" and she laughed. She laughed at a statement that was made, and then God responds with this particular statement. He says, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying 'Shall I indeed bear a child when I am so old?' Is anything too difficult for the Lord?"

Let us focus on this particular line in this passage: Is anything too difficult for the Lord? The danger of a verse like this is that we can take the verse and apply it in various situations that we face, expecting that God, for whom nothing is difficult, can then change our own situation or circumstance to the way we want it. Often when we do this, we are setting ourselves up for a huge disappointment that often leaves us disillusioned with God, angry with God. We stop asking Him for anything. Our prayer life suffers and we just go through the motions saying, "Okay, I'm a Christian. I'm going to go to church on Sundays. I will sing the songs, I will pray. But really, God let me down, because at one point I asked Him for something that He could do as I believe that there was nothing that was difficult for Him. And He didn't come through for me."

So, when we come to a verse like this, it is fraught with potential on the one hand, but problems on the other as well. What kind of potential? It has the potential to help us to understand what kind of a God He is, and who God is, and how Him being who He is applies to our situations. But fraught with problems as well, because we can take Him and who He is and say, "Well, if this is who You are, then You can bring a change into my situation." So, how then should we approach a situation like this?

Firstly, I think we need to answer this question that God poses: Is there anything too difficult for the Lord? "Why do we have to answer it?" You may say, "Of course I believe it." Do you really believe that there is nothing that God cannot do? Do you believe that in totality? In your understanding of God, can God do anything? Can He heal diseases? Can He stop the corona virus? Can He heal a relationship? Can He forgive a sin?

Why do I ask this? Because sometimes, we have a very truncated idea of who God is, or a truncated view of God, and it colors our understanding of what God can do. He is God, but He doesn't heal anymore because I haven't seen that. He is God but heaven and hell are not real. Heaven maybe, but hell? I don't know. He is God but He really doesn't care about me or He wouldn't be allowing me to go through what I am going through. He put me in this world, and now I've got to fend for myself. I know He is God, but I've got to take care of myself.

All these views only point to our understanding of what God does and what He is capable of doing. But the question is – Is there anything that's too difficult for the Lord, for the God of the Bible? And if we believe the God of the Bible, we know that the answer is an emphatic 'NO'. The question that is being posed to us is related only to what God can do, not how and what He has done in my life and in your life, which has colored our understanding of the answer to this question.

If we believe in the God of the bible, then we know that there's nothing that is too difficult for Him. He spoke and the world came into existence. He placed a canopy of stars over us just for our enjoyment. He's given us rivers and oceans and mountains and birds that come and talk to us during this time, asking for food and being very friendly. He breathed into us. He has power over life and death. "Lazarus, come forth!" and Lazarus comes forth. "Be healed!" and healing happened. "Pick up your bed and walk!" and he picks up his bed and walks. "Be still" to the waves and the storms on the sea, and they are still. He is God and He

can do anything. That is the God of the bible. "Is there anything too difficult for me?" No, there isn't. Without a shadow of a doubt, He can do all things. He can do anything.

The second question we need to answer is this: If He can do all things, will He do this thing that I am asking for? If God is able to do all things, then will He use that ability to do this thing that I desperately need in my life. and each one of us today, right now, have something, some particular need that we have been knocking on heaven's door and saying, "Lord, I need You to do something in my life. You are omnipotent God." So, the second question is this: God, who can do anything, is He able then to do something in my life, or is He willing to do that?

To answer that question, let's go back to the context of this particular statement. "Is there anything too difficult for me?" He asked Abraham in verse 14. Is anything too difficult for the Lord? What is the context? God is telling Abraham and Sarah that they will bear a son. He makes this statement in light of the fact that till now, it hasn't happened. And right now, there's a sense of cynicism that this is not going to happen. How can it happen, in this particular time and state that we are in?

What's the context for God? The context for God in making this statement is a promise that He made to Abraham. This promise to Abraham that He will have a child is found in chapter 12. God says, "I will make you a great nation," and for that to happen, Abraham needs to have a son, for nations to be birthed down the future. Then in chapter 15, He says that the child will come from Abraham. For Abraham and Sarah, Hagar fulfilled that kind of thought. The child comes from Abraham? Okay, so maybe now Sarah is not involved. Hagar happens; Ishmael happens. But then God says again in chapter 17, that God will establish His covenant through Isaac whom Sarah will bear.

For God, this statement was about keeping a promise He had made to Abraham. Given God's power and ability, there was nothing too hard for God to make it happen. That's the context through which God made this statement: Is there anything too difficult for me? No. I can fulfil that promise Abraham, for you.

But what was Abraham's context in listening to this particular statement? For him, he was old. He was too old to father a child it seemed, and Sarah was way past the age of child-bearing, or so it seemed. This was his context. How can this be? remember Mary asked the same question: How can this be seeing that I know not a man? How can this be? She wasn't married and she was a virgin. Sarah was in that similar kind of predicament, where she looked at herself and Abraham and said, "Hey, how can this be?" and she laughed. But viewed in God's context, and what God was saying was, "I made you a promise, and however impossible it may seem from a worldly, biological context, I am God, and I can do all things."

So, the question: Is there anything too difficult for the Lord? No. There is nothing. And God will apply that statement to fulfil the promises that He makes to His children.

How then can we apply this statement to our lives? Or can we? Can we apply such a statement to our lives, because as I said earlier, there is a danger in using scripture out of

context and thinking that God will honor His word just because He can honor it. Because God can do anything, and just because we are His children, doesn't mean that He will do everything that we ask Him to do.

So how do we understand statements like this? We need to see the context of God's power, His omnipotence through His omniscience and His wisdom, for He knows all things and He is all wise. As we try and apply a verse like that to our situations, we must understand it within these two frameworks. We accept it as a cardinal principle of our faith. What is that principle?

- That God is all powerful and He can do anything
- Allow God to use it judiciously in our contexts.

As we look at that and try to wrap our minds around them, how do we take this principle? We take this principle and say: This is part of my belief system. This is the kind of God I believe in. He is all powerful, and in spite of being all powerful, God is also omniscient and knows everything about me, much more than I know of myself. Therefore, His omnipotence is tempered (if I can use that word) by His omniscience, that He allows His power to be used within the context of His all-knowing wisdom, because He wants the very, very best for me. So then, I allow God to be God in my life and in my context, and trust Him to judiciously use His power under His wisdom to bring out the very best for me and do the very best for me that I know He will.

When we look at a statement like this, there's a very general way that we are able to look at it, and there's a specific way that we can look at it. Generally, we can take these verses, and they inform us about who God is and what He does, and what He does for everybody universally. But there are also verses in scripture that are meant to be very particular to the situation and circumstance that God is talking to and into, and we should not take those verses out of context and apply it to our lives.

What would be general statements that we can take and apply to our lives without any problem? Let me give you a couple.

Romans 10:13 *Whosoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*

The principle here is God can save all people, whosoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Now again, remember context is important. Context is always important when you take scripture or you try to understand scripture. Even this particular verse starts with 'whosoever'. Anybody who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. One needs to understand what saved means and what context Paul is talking about. He is talking about salvation, because when we look at it in verse 1, he says, "My heart's desire and my prayer for them is for their salvation." Then he says in verse 13, "Whosoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." And then he begins to unpack how they can be saved before quoting this particular scripture from Joel.

Someone who reads this verse and then decides to take God as His word, but takes it out of context, is in great danger. Because you could say – whosoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Let me try jumping out of this 11th floor place and call upon God and

know that He will save me, because it says so. Unless God decides to move supernaturally, gravity is going to win that particular argument. We have to remember that even in a general statement about who God is, that we look at it in context.

You may think I'm stretching things a little here, but let me remind you how Satan came to Jesus with temptations. He came to Jesus with verses that he was taking out of context. What did he say? Throw yourself down, for it is written that "He will command His angels concerning You to protect You, and on their hands, they will bear You up so that You will not dash Your foot against a stone." Throw Yourself down – it is written in the word, isn't it? Or turn these stones into bread. You can. You're hungry, do it. And Jesus quotes scripture right back in context to win this particular battle.

1 John 1:9 *If we confess our sins, then He is faithful and just and will forgive you your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness.*

Again the principle: God can forgive any sin. So we take these verses that have meaning for you and for me which are particular to us; they are general but they apply to each one of us.

John 10:10 *I came that you may have life and have it with abundance.*

An abundant life! He can give us abundant life because that is His word. But what is abundant life? Again, we look back into context. What's the context? Jesus is saying, "the thief comes to kill, to steal, and to destroy, but I have come that you will have life, and have it in abundance. I'm not like the thief. I give you abundant life. my abundant life is not based on things that are killed or stolen or dead." He says, "I don't steal your joy or your peace. I don't destroy your hopes or relationships. I don't kill your dreams. No, I give them to you in abundance. I fill your life with joy and peace. I nurture your hopes and bless your relationships and I fulfil your dreams." That's the abundant life as opposed to the kind of life that Satan would try and give you, and these are things that are killed, stolen or destroyed. The abundant life is something that is available to you and to me as well.

At a general level, we take these verses and we apply them and we appropriate them in our lives. But there's a second area of specificity – there are verses that can be directed to us, where God is saying, "This particular verse or these verses, I want you to act on them because I want to do something through you." We look at this particular chapter with Abraham and Sarah – going to give you a son. With Mary and Joseph – the Holy Spirit is going to come upon you and this child that is born of you, will be called the Son of God. Those specific verses where God continues to take His word and he brings it to our hearts and says, "This particular word, I want to apply it in a particular context that I have, so I want you to trust this word in something that I want to do in and through you."

So, in a general way, to take the words of God in the Bible, in a specific way as well. Let me give you an illustration. Some years ago, I was preparing to visit some of our other churches in another part of the country. As I set out, the car was almost rolling away from our home, and one of our church members came running. He stopped me and I rolled down the window and he said, "Pastor, I just wanted to tell you this, if you see somebody who has lost their hearing, pray for him." That was a strange thing for somebody to tell me, so I said, "Alright, thank you," and I filed it away and carried on.

This was one of those longer trips, about fourteen days, and I had been visiting about 5 or 6 different churches. I was tired at the end of it. I had one more church to visit. I remember driving to the church which was about an hour and a half away from the main city. It was a small church. The person who was going to translate asked me which scripture I was going to preach from, and I told him. As the Pastor was introducing me, I felt the Lord saying, "Don't preach from that!" it was very clear, God saying, "Don't preach from that." I said, "Lord, I'm tired. I don't have another sermon or another verse. There's nothing. If you don't want me to preach from it, then you've got to give me a sermon." After the Pastor's introduction, I picked up my bible, walked up to the podium, and opened it. It was Mark chapter 10:46-52, the whole passage of Bartimaeus.

Now, at that point, I had never preached on this passage before. When I told the congregation to turn to Mark 10:46, the translator nearly fell down, because I had just told him I was preaching from another passage of scripture. He looked at me in amazement, but I was just trusting God. God moved through me, and it was one of the good sermons that I had preached. I was happy, and was ready to close, when I heard God say, "Remember that word that you were told before you came?" I said, "Lord, about the person who has lost their hearing?" and He said "Yes." For the second time that evening, my heart sank. I said, "Lord, You want me to ask that question now? I'm done. I'm ready to go home." I really had a bad attitude that day. I was so tired.

There was an insistence it was the word of scripture. "What do you want Me to do for you?" and from Bartimaeus, "I want to regain my sight." So I asked the question. I said, "Is there anybody here who has lost their hearing in the last two weeks?" The translator translated it, and suddenly there was a buzz all around. I looked at amazement because the Pastor jumped up and was looking at this old lady who had been sitting quite placidly. The translator said that she had lost her hearing about 10 days ago. I said that we would pray for her. So I placed my hands on her ears and prayed, "In the name of Jesus, I command you to hear again." Just that. I didn't know what else to say. I was watching her eyes – it was like a light bulb lit up. Suddenly she was looking around and the Pastor asked if she could hear. And she said yes, I can.

The specificity of a passage of scripture! God uses those kinds of specific passages of scripture to get His church to believe and trust that he is still at work. There are times when He can do incredible things, and He chooses to do them. We may not understand why He doesn't do it all the time in the situations that we face, but God is at work both in a general manner and in a specific manner as we look at various verses found in His Holy Book.

So, as we wind up with this statement: Is there anything too hard for the Lord? the answer is NO! With that knowledge, you can ask Him for anything. Now you are wondering that I just said..... But yes, you can ask Him for anything. Why? Because He is your Father and you can go to your Father with whatever you want, and talk to Him and tell Him exactly what you need in your life. But having done that, I also want to say – Don't filter your requests according to your finite lenses. Tell Him exactly what you want from Him. Then, secondly, having done that, trust His omniscience; trust that He knows more about you, your situation, your circumstance than you know, and that He will do the very, very best for you. Beloved, God wants the very best for you.

You know, I set this platform up. When I say I set it up, I don't do anything. I show up and I stand here behind this platform. Sheila does everything. She puts the platform together, the lights, the camera, all of it. I don't bother at all. Do you know why? Because I know that she wants the very best for me, because she loves me. I don't bother about it, because I know that ultimately, all that she is doing is to make sure that the very best is brought out. Multiply that with infinity, and that's how God looks at you. He wants the very best for you. He can do anything, but He will do, knowing all things, what is best for you. So bring before Him the things that are troubling you, hurting you, breaking you, making you anxious, fearful, then trust His wisdom to know what's best for you, the best way to help you, steer you through. Just leave it to Him.

So tell Him! Tell Him that you need a spouse even though you may be thinking it's too late now. Tell Him that you want a baby even though your biological clock may be ticking. Tell Him that you want a job or a role even though you've retired. Tell Him that you want Him to forgive you for some indiscretion that happened a long time ago, that you've considered unforgiveable. Tell Him that you want Him to restore a relationship that you've thought is done and dusted, that turned sour a long time ago. Tell Him that you want Him to heal a disease that you have carried as an appendage to you all of these years. Tell Him that you want Him to free you from a habit that is sapping the life out of you. And remember, God's strength is always tempered by His wisdom as He gives us what's best – the very, very best for you and for me.

Shall we pray?

O Father, we come to you, Lord. we come to you as we are. We come to you with our various situations and maybe there are some who have listened today who are upset with you, who are angry, disillusioned because scripture was used in their lives, or they used it inappropriately or out of context. And they've just gone away from You. Lord, bring them back.

Or maybe we've stopped looking at scripture and saying it can affect my life, it can be applied to my life. Help us to begin to stop applying it. Lord, maybe we've stopped listening to you and doing things Lord, as You use Your word to touch others. Maybe today there are many needs among all those who are listening, Lord, who are crying out to you and saying, "I need a touch from you, Almighty God. Would You gather them in Your loving arms. Gather us, hold us close and let us know that You will bring the weight of heaven to bear on our situations and circumstances. Lord, in Your infinite wisdom, we will do the best, the very best, so that we will find our purposes and find fulfilment in them. So touch everyone who is listening. in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.