



ABRAHAM: The Perfect Timing of God's Impossible Promise"

Genesis 16-21
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Would someone who heard the sermon be willing to share what stood out from each point:

- Listening to God involves listening to others as it aligns to God's Word
- Accepting God's timing involves spares others heartaches and spreads God's glory
- Seeing God's concern for others through His covenant to some

Within these chapters of Genesis there is one verse that will guide our thoughts going forward. IT comes at a time when Abraham 100 years old and Sarah 90 years old have just she will give birth in one years' time. They both laugh at this impossibility but God responds in Genesis 18:13-14, The Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' 14 Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son."

*When we think of the question, "is anything too hard for God" it is helpful to filter how we apply it by saying, "Of what God has promised to do that seems impossible to us, is any of that too hard for God?" Nothing is too hard for God but God isn't aiming to do everything. Have you ever felt this? What is something you desire for God to do but he has never promised to do it?

*Him not doing it is not evidence of His lack of power but rather evidence of His sovereign good purposes. Even those seem impossible, like having an aged woman birth a child and this child being the source of innumerable descendants. God's mission to create a covenant people for himself seems impossible. Missions many times seems too hard even for God. Can you think of a particular missionary effort that seems impossible?

*Read a bit about how 19th century missionary Henry Martyn dealt with how hard missionary activity was: (this is taken from a resource from <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/is-anything-too-hard-for-god>)

Henry Martyn was born February 18, 1781 (206 years ago) in England. His father was well-to-do and sent his son to a fine grammar school—as they called them in those days—and then to Cambridge in 1797, when he was 16. Four years later he took highest honors in mathematics, and the year after that first prize in Latin prose composition.

He had turned his back on God as a youth, but during these days of academic achievement he became disillusioned with his dream. "I obtained my highest wishes, but was surprised to find that I had grasped only a shadow." The death of his father, the prayers of his sister, the counsel of a godly minister and the *Life and Diary of David Brainerd* brought him to his knees in submission to God. And in 1802, at the age of 21, he resolved to forsake a life of academic prestige and become a missionary. He became the assistant of Charles Simeon, the great evangelical preacher at Trinity Church in Cambridge, until his departure to India on July 17, 1805. His ministry was to be a chaplain with the

East India Company. He arrived in Calcutta May 16, 1806 and the first day ashore found William Carey.

Martyn was an evangelical Anglican; Carey was a Baptist. And there was some tension over the use of liturgy. But Carey wrote that year, “A young clergyman, Mr. Martyn, is lately arrived, who is possessed of a truly missionary spirit...We take sweet counsel together, and go to the house of God as friends.”

Alongside his chaplain’s duties Martyn’s main work became translation. Carey had focused on Sanskrit and related languages of the Hindu world. Martyn decided to work in Arabic, Persian and Hindustani, the three major languages of the Muslim world. Within two years, by March, 1808, he had translated part of the Book of Common Prayer, a commentary on the parables, and the entire New Testament into Hindustani.

He was then assigned to supervise the Persian version of the New Testament. It was not so well received as the other, and his health gave way in the process. So he decided to return to England for recovery, but to go by land through Persia in the hope of revising his translation on the way.

He became so sick with tuberculosis that he could barely press on. He died among strangers in the city of Tocat in Asiatic Turkey, October 16, 1812. He was 31 years old.

What you can’t see in this overview of Martyn’s life is the inner fights and plunges of spirit that make his achievement so real and so helpful to real people. I’m persuaded that the reason David Brainerd’s *Life and Diary* and Henry Martyn’s *Journal and Letters* have had such an abiding and deep power for the cause of missions is that they portray the life of the missionary (which we all look up to) as a life of constant warfare in the soul, not a life of uninterrupted calm. Listen to him on the boat on the way to India:

I found it hard (NOTE the word “hard”—our text is a relevant missionary text!) to realize divine things. I was more tired with desires after the world, than for two years past...The sea-sickness, and the smell of the ship, made me feel very miserable, and the prospect of leaving all the comforts and communion of saints in England, to go forth to an unknown land, to endure such illness and misery with ungodly men for so many months, weighed heavy on my spirits. My heart was almost ready to break. (*Journal and Letters*, p. 212)

On top of this there is a love story to tell. Martyn loved Lydia Grenfell. He didn’t feel right taking her along to India at first without going before her and proving his own reliance on God alone. But two months after he arrived in India on July 30, 1806 he wrote and proposed and asked her to come.

He waited 15 months for the reply. His journal entry on October 24, 1807 reads:

An unhappy day; received at last a letter from Lydia, in which she refuses to come, because her mother will not consent to it. Grief and disappointment threw my soul into confusion at first; but gradually, as my disorder subsided, my eyes were opened, and reason resumed its office. I could not but agree with her, that it would not be for the glory of God, nor could we expect his blessing, if she acted in disobedience to her mother. (p. 395)

He took up his pen and wrote that same day:

My dear Lydia,

Though my heart is bursting with grief and disappointment, I write not to blame you. The rectitude of all your conduct secures you from censure...Alas my rebellious heart—what a tempest agitates me! I knew not that I had made so little progress in a spirit of resignation to the Divine will. (p. 395f).

For five years he held out hope that things might change. A steady stream of letters covered the thousands of miles between India and England. “My dear Lydia” became “My dearest Lydia.” The last known letter written two months before his death (August 28, 1812) was addressed to her. It closed:

Soon we shall have occasion for pen and ink no more; but I trust I shall shortly see thee face to face. Love to all the saints.

Believe me to be yours ever,
most faithfully and affectionately,

H. Martyn (p. 466)

It was hard. But was anything too hard for God?

at every turn in Scripture the point is: God intends to create a covenant people for himself against impossible human odds. So it's not surprising this truth served the great missionary Henry Martyn. It served him in three ways: in his quest for holiness, in his ministry to the hardhearted, and in his dying.

Ten days after arriving in India he wrote,

Why cannot I be like Fletcher and Brainerd and those great men of modern times? *Is anything too hard for the Lord?* Cannot my stupid stony heart be made to flame with love and zeal? (p.333)

In other words, Martyn fought the fight for holiness with the truth that nothing was too hard for God, not even his own sanctification. This is our only hope.

Second, how did Martyn fight for the conversion of the hardhearted? On the boat on the way to India he would lead worship services for the ship's passengers and crew. There was one man in particular called B. that opposed him constantly. Martyn wrote,

Heard that B. generally began to swear after divine service, at my keeping them so long. I have scarcely seen one more determinately set against holiness. *Yet even this man may be the first to melt, when God puts forth his hand.* (p. 218)

That was Martyn's hope in the face of stony hearts.

Then near the end of his life, again on the boat, this time sailing for Persia, he said,

As for the Asiatics, they are in language, customs, and religion, as far removed from us, as if they were inhabitants of another planet. I speak a little Arabic sometimes to the sailors; but their contempt of the gospel, and attachment to their own superstition, make their conversion appear impossible. *How stupendous that power, which can make these people followers of the Lamb*, when they so nearly resemble Satan in pride and wickedness! (p. 435)

In other words, Martyn took his hope and courage and persevering strength from the truth of [Genesis 18:14](#), Nothing is too hard for God! “How stupendous that power, which can make these people the followers of the Lamb!” He can raise up from stones children to Abraham ([Matthew 3:9](#)).

Finally, in his last illness, as he struggled to complete his translation he wrote,

If I live to complete the Persian New Testament, my life after that will be of less importance. But whether life or death be mine, may Christ be magnified in me! If he has work for me to do, I cannot die.

In other words, because nothing is too hard for God, you are immortal until the work he has for you to do is done.

***Holy and good things that are too hard for us to accomplish, are they too hard for God?**

1) Your personal holiness, your progressive sanctification

Philippians 2:12-13 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Yes or No?

2) Those hardhearted to the gospel, your unbelieving friends and neighbors

Acts 9:19b-22 For some days he [Saul] was with the disciples at Damascus. 20 And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.” 21 And all who heard him were amazed and said, “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?” 22 But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

Yes or No?

3) Enduring with faith as you face your own Death

Philippians 3:8-10 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Yes or No?