



TALKS FOR GROWING CHRISTIANS TRANSCRIPT

Talk Genesis 18:1-15: The Lord Appears to Abraham Again

Lesson 38

"Then the LORD appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre,^[a] as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. 2 So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, 3 and said, "My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant. 4 Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. 5 And I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts. After that you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to your servant." They said, "Do as you have said." 6 So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes." 7 And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, and he hastened to prepare it. 8 So he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate. 9 Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" So he said, "Here, in the tent." 10 And He said, "I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son." (Sarah was listening in the tent door which was behind him.) 11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. 12 Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" 13 And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?' 14 Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son." 15 But Sarah denied it, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh!"

Background Notes

When Abraham was 75 years old and Sarah was 65 years old, they moved to the land of Canaan. God promised Abraham at that time that he would become a great nation and all the families of the earth would be blessed through him (Genesis 12). But Abraham and Sarah did not have any children, and so they tried to help God out (Genesis 16). They had Sarah's maidservant Hagar become a concubine to Abram. The plan worked all too well and Ishmael, a son, was born. But even though this arrangement was practiced in the culture at that time, it certainly was not right in God's sight. Ever since that time, there has been friction between the Arabs, the descendents of Ishmael, and the Jews, the descendents of Isaac. In fact, the bloodshed in the Middle East is evidence of that friction even to this day.

Now we come to Genesis 18. Abraham was now 99 years old, and Sarah was 89, but the promised son was still not born. It was at this point that the Lord appeared to Abraham once again. One day three men showed up at Abraham's tent. Abraham and Sarah were staying by the oaks (or terebinth trees) of Mamre, which is near Hebron, about

20 miles south of Jerusalem. With typical Bedouin hospitality, Abraham urged the travelers to stay for a meal, and it wasn't long before Abraham realized that these were not ordinary men. In fact, two of them were angels, taking on the appearance of men, and the third was the Lord Himself taking on the appearance of a man. And by the way, this was not a manifestation of the trinity. It was two angels taking on the appearance of men, and the Lord Himself taking on the appearance of a man. When God takes on the appearance of a man we call this a "theophany." So here we have a theophany; the Lord appearing as a man.

In Hebrews 13:1-2, we read: *"Let brotherly love continue. 2 Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly [without realizing it] entertained angels."* The writer to the Hebrews was probably thinking of this Old Testament event when he wrote this verse. Have you ever entertained angels without knowing it? Careful now, if you say yes, you just contradicted yourself -- because the verse says without knowing it, so if you said yes, something is wrong! Seriously speaking, any of us who have been Christians for any length of time would have to say there were some times in our lives where angels were probably involved. Hebrews 1:14 says that *"Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?"*

When my mother was in her late eighties, the state of New Jersey finally convinced her to give up her driver's license. However, we're convinced that in the last few years that she was driving, the Lord sent out extra guardian angels whenever she got behind the wheel!

Doctrinal Points

1. The life of faith is not 100% doubt free.

In Hebrews 11, that great chapter on faith, we read (v11), *By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.*

Now compare that with what we have here in Genesis 18:12-15: *"Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, 'After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?' 13 And the LORD said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?' 14 Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.'" 15 But Sarah denied it, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh!"*

It certainly doesn't sound like Sarah had a lot of faith, does it? Sarah was behind the tent partition listening as the Lord spoke to Abraham, and she laughed when the Lord said she would have a son. That was a laugh of unbelief. In fact, her unbelief led to fear, which led to lying, as we see in verse 15. So does Hebrews 11 contradict Genesis 18? No! The answer is that Sarah changed. Yes, she doubted in Genesis 18, but her overall life was characterized by faith rather than doubt.

Abraham was known for his faith. He is the father of the faithful. But Abraham was not 100% doubt-free. Abraham had lapses in faith. In a time of famine, he went down to Egypt because he didn't trust God to provide for his needs (Genesis 12). He lied about his wife because of lack of faith that the Lord could protect him. We will see that he did the same thing again in the land of the Philistines in Genesis 20. But here's the point: Abraham wasn't 100% doubt-free, but he lived a life that was characterized overall by faith.

Now I find that encouraging, don't you? The fact that Hebrews 11 commended both Abraham and Sarah for their faith, when we know that they were not 100% doubt-free, should be very encouraging to us. Is there any Christian who has never had any doubts in the Christian life? I am so glad that the Lord looks at the overall pattern of our lives, and a life of faith does not have to be 100% doubt free.

2. Is anything too hard for the Lord?

This doctrinal point comes right from verse 14, "*Is anything too hard for the LORD?*"

Verse 11 says, "*Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing*" Naturally speaking, it was impossible for Abraham and Sarah to have a son -- but they did! Is anything too hard for the Lord? The Hebrew word translated "hard" here, can also be translated "extraordinary" or "marvelous" or "wonderful." In fact, it is the same word that we have in the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 9:6 "His name shall be called Wonderful." So is **anything** too hard or wonderful for the Lord to accomplish?

Maybe someone here this morning is not a Christian, and you think that there is no way that God can save you because of your terrible sins, either now or in the past -- sins that no one knows about. Guess what? God **can** save you! Nothing is too hard or wonderful for the Lord to do. Commit your life to the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, and you will be saved today.

Maybe someone here thinks that there is nothing that can be done to turn your marriage around, or turn your family in the right direction. Guess what? God can do it! Nothing is too hard or too wonderful for the Lord to do. God can help you break bad habits. God can give you the strength to cope with your job. Even now you may doubt the Lord, just as Sarah doubted. The Lord's word to us is the same as it was to Sarah: Is **anything** too hard for the Lord?

Practical Application: Do we pass the hospitality test?

Suppose Abraham had not shown hospitality to the three men who came to his tent by the oaks of Mamre. I think one of reasons why the Lord and the angels appeared to Abraham as ordinary travelers is that it was a test. The Lord came appearing as a man, and I believe He would have passed by if Abraham hadn't invited them to stay. I think that this was a test of hospitality for Abraham. Now let's suppose that Abraham had just let the three travelers keep going. He would have missed out on a personal visit from the Lord! This is why the writer drew on this event in Hebrews 13, to exhort us to let brotherly love continue, and to not to forget strangers. When we show hospitality to people, God will bless us.

Hospitality is not just an Old Testament cultural habit. Romans 12:13 it says that Christians are to be hospitable: "*distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.*" 1 Timothy 3:2 says "*a bishop then must be ...hospitable...*" In Titus 1:8, we read that spiritual leaders are to be "*hospitable.*" 1 Peter 4:9 is says that we are to "*be hospitable to one another without grumbling.*"

Do we pass the hospitality test?

As I was growing up, my parents were always inviting people over to our house for a meal. They certainly passed the hospitality test! I recall one Sunday dinner when we were scheduled to have a family birthday dinner -- just the family. A man showed up at church that morning, a complete stranger, and he was invited to share in our birthday celebration. He came and he enjoyed Christian fellowship that he hadn't experienced for some time. Like Abraham, my parents passed the hospitality test. Let's ask ourselves -- Do **we** pass the hospitality test?