

Genesis 18:1-15 Nothing is Too Hard for God 2/4/18

And the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. ² He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth ³ and said, “O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. ⁴ Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, ⁵ while I bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.” So they said, “Do as you have said.”⁶ And Abraham went quickly into the tent to Sarah and said, “Quick! Three seahs of fine flour! Knead it, and make cakes.” ⁷ And Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to a young man, who prepared it quickly. ⁸ Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them. And he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

⁹ They said to him, “Where is Sarah your wife?” And he said, “She is in the tent.” ¹⁰ The LORD said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. ¹¹ Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?” ¹³ 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.” ¹⁵ But Sarah denied it, saying, “I did not laugh,” for she was afraid. He said, “No, but you did laugh.”

(Pastor prays)

Regardless of how long we live or where we are from or how confident we may appear, we all sometimes have doubts. We doubt our ability for a task, our acceptance of a crowd, our happiness in the future. We doubt if we are pretty enough or if we are good enough. We doubt God’s call and some here even doubt God’s love.

Maybe you are one who doubts your salvation, and the thing about doubt is that it’s paralyzing and confusing. When you doubt, it’s hard even to move forward. It’s hard to believe you are loved or to return love to another. Doubt is a cancer to your soul and a roadblock to your usefulness.

In the text this morning, we meet a couple that has been chosen by God to receive His love and grace, and in spite of all the various ways He has blessed them, they doubt. And I'm guessing on this cold, wet Sunday morning, you as a man, have doubted like Abraham does or you as a woman have doubted like Sarah does. I think the story speaks to God's kindness even in our doubts.

Lets' play a little catch-up with Abraham and Sarah. When we left them in Chapter 15, God had promised Abram that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars but they both were already old and Sarah wasn't pregnant. In chapter 16, they are tired of waiting, and Sarah and Abraham tried to shortcut the process by using another woman, Hagar, to have a child. It ended in disaster. In chapter 17, the Lord appears to Abram again, promising a child and establishing His covenant and changing Abram's name to Abraham.

Once again God tells Abraham that Sarah is going to have a son. Abraham fell on his face and laughed. "I'm 100 years old! She is 90! Just let Hagar's son Ishmael be the answer." And God said: no, we do things MY way. And now we see another kindness of the Lord to His people. It is the kindness of the Lord that leads to repentance and grace.

God Is Gracious to Us Even in Our Doubt

I want you to see the several pictures of grace.

There is Grace in Interruption

In interruption and inconveniences. Let me show you what I mean.

You see Abraham in verse 1; he is a lot like many of us. When you get to a certain age, if you sit down and get real still, you doze off. *And the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day.* He is sitting in the Middle East heat when the sun is at its highest. He's sitting close to the opening of his tent, maybe he can catch a little breeze there. It's nap time and he is semi-retired. Its 100 degrees outside and a visitor shows up in verse 2. Now we know it is the Lord because Moses tells us, but Abraham doesn't know that yet, and I think there is plenty to learn from all that happens between verse 1 and 8.

God Works on HIS time, not ours

This is terribly inconvenient and maybe a little annoying.

An unannounced visitor. Have you ever had anyone show up at your house unannounced and it's a wreck and you are just taking it easy? We need to let every inconvenience, breakdown, traffic jam, phone call or unexpected change be a reminder to you that *God* is in charge and *you* are not.

He works in his time frame, not ours. Notice Abraham's attitude. He ran (remember 100 degrees, 100-year-old man). He showed an urgency. He bowed down showing humility and verses 3-5 show great hospitality: *and said, "O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. 4 Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, 5 while I bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said."* And great generosity, *And Abraham went quickly into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quick! Three seahs of fine flour! Knead it, and make cakes."* ⁷*And Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to a young man, who prepared it quickly. 8 Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them.* A lot of people think that the writer of Hebrews had this in mind when he said, in Hebrews 13:2, *Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.* God works in HIS time, not ours.

Interruptions Remind Us of Our Condition

Back in verse 1, the Lord visits Abraham in the hottest part of the day. This stands in contrast with how God originally visited His people. The Bible says before the fall, God visited with Adam in the cool of the day. The fact that we are inconvenienced, interrupted and frustrated reminds us that we are a sinful fallen people living in a broken world and we need Jesus Christ the Redeemer and Savior to make us right with God. Every setback, frustration, flat tire, every sleepless night or delayed flight is a constant reminder of our need for what Jesus has done for us at the cross. There is grace in interruptions and inconvenience

There is Grace in Confrontation

Let's set it up because we find out around verse 9 that this visit isn't really about Abraham, it's about Sarah.

Verse 9 is the first indicator that this is not an average visitor. *9 They said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "She is in the tent."* They say to him, "Where is Sarah, your wife?" How did they know he had a wife and how did they know her name? Now in verse 10, Abraham is realizing that this is the Lord. Meanwhile, inside the tent flap, Sarah is listening, maybe eavesdropping, and what happens next is for her.

The LORD said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him.

Now the Lord has revealed himself because He alone can faithfully promise life out of barrenness and decay and hopelessness. Now the promise to Abram in Chapters 15 and 17, has escalated to an exact time. God makes a promise that demands faith but notice what we are told and how everything is stacked against Sarai having a child. Verse 11 tells us that she is old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased. She's already been through all those hot flashes and mood swings. She's been through "the change."

In verse 12, she laughs, like Abraham did in Chapter 17. Maybe she laughed in disbelief or maybe it was because it was so far out. Maybe it was a defense mechanism because of the pain of being old and waiting so long. Verse 12 says she laughed to herself. This is a reminder to us of the Lord. Remember what the writer of Hebrews said in Hebrews 4:13, *And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*

And in our story, the Lord confronts. Verse 13, *The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' And in verse 15, she denies because she is afraid to believe it. And in the midst of a difficult and probably humiliating event, God gives one of the most Gospel-driven reminders found anywhere in the Bible.*

Let's start in verse 12 and read through v. 14. *So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?"* ¹³ *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."*

Is anything too hard for the Lord? Part of the purpose of you being faced with an impossibility is to magnify God and remind us that *we* aren't *Him*. The writer of Hebrews tells us that Sarah soon quit doubting and by grace believed. Hebrews 11:11, *By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.*

That question in verse 14 is spoken for Sarah's benefit. Sarah is like some of you. She had been looking at her circumstances rather than looking to God. She had to get her eyes off her unbelief and onto the bigness of God. What about you? Is there anything too hard for the Lord? It's one of the greatest rhetorical questions of the Bible.

Is there anyone too lost that Christ can't save? Is there any sin that His blood doesn't cover? Is there any abuse too brutal that God can't heal and get you through? Is there any adultery too scandalous that God can't forgive and repair? Is there any life too depressed that God can't gently pull out of that hole? Is there any hatred too hard that He can't soften and remove? Is there any sadness too deep that He can dive down and get you? Is there any marriage too far gone? Is there any addiction too strong? Stronger than God? I'm asking you for a personal response. Is there any amount of human suffering that can't be absorbed at the cross of Jesus Christ?

The cross is the centerpiece of history and the dividing line of grace. The cross of Jesus is the ultimate answer to the question, "Is there anything too hard for God?" Through the Cross, though your sins be as scarlet, they will be white as snow. I'm hoping today that, by God's grace, you have been confronted with your own doubt and will this morning bring it to Christ.

For, Christians, you have doubted God. If you want to come forward, as a believer, in a physical act that represents a spiritual reality and just kneel here and pray and seek the Lord's grace and mercy, maybe confess, someone can pray with you. Let's at least start the road out of these doubts.

For those of you who are uncertain where you are, let me tell you this: God has created you for His glory. Your sin is keeping you from fulfilling that purpose. Jesus Christ lived perfectly, which you and I can't. He died on the cross in place of sinners, taking God's judgment for sin. God raised him from the dead. I am asking you to trust God and believe. That means you turn away from the old sin and trust the Cross of Jesus Christ.

(Pastor prays)