

Genesis Chapter 18 – “Hospitality at a Divine level”

Then the LORD appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, 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!” ¹⁶ Then the men rose from there and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on the way. ¹⁷ And the LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, ¹⁸ since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? ¹⁹ For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.” ²⁰ And the LORD said, “Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, ²¹ I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know.” ²² Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD. ²³ And Abraham came near and said, “Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴ Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare *it* for the fifty righteous that were in it? ²⁵ Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” ²⁶ So the LORD said, “If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.” ²⁷ Then Abraham answered and said, “Indeed now, I who *am but* dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: ²⁸ Suppose there were five less than the fifty righteous; would You destroy all of the city for *lack of five*?” So He said, “If I find there forty-five, I will not destroy *it*.” ²⁹ And he spoke to Him yet again and said, “Suppose there should be forty found there?” So He said, “I will not do *it* for the sake of forty.” ³⁰ Then he said, “Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Suppose thirty should be found there?” So He said, “I will not do *it* if I find thirty there.” ³¹ And he said, “Indeed now, I have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: Suppose twenty should be found there?” So He said, “I will not destroy *it* for the sake of twenty.” ³² Then he said, “Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak but once more: Suppose ten should be found there?” And He said, “I will not destroy *it* for the sake of ten.” ³³ So the LORD went His way as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.

Introduction

Last week in Genesis chapter 17 we discovered a number of things.

1. God clearly defined his covenant with Abraham.

2. God changed the name of Abram to Abraham and his wife Sarai to Sarah. Abraham's new name means "Father of many nations" and the meaning of Sarah's name did not change, just the spelling. However it was significant that God changed her name a little to signify the importance of the relationship.

We also learnt from revelation Chapter 2: v. 17 that one day, if we believe in Jesus and His work on the cross to forgive our sins, we will get a new name from God. It will be deep and personal, because it cost the poured out blood of His precious Son Jesus Christ.

3. God instructed Abraham about the terms of the covenant from his side. Abraham had to make sure that all the male children in his family and household, including servants and strangers were circumcised.
4. We discovered that circumcision was a sign that God desired an intimate relationship with his covenant people.
5. We also learnt from the scriptures that this covenant was going to be everlasting.

This means that it is still in force today between God and the Jewish nation.

We now move on to chapter 18. The time difference between these two chapters is a matter of weeks. Perhaps long enough for the wounds of circumcision to heal.

Chapter 18 can be neatly divided into two sections. In v.1-15 we have Abraham entertaining the Lord and two Angels. In v. 16-33 we have a very intimate conversation between Abraham and God about Sodom.

1. Abraham entertaining the Lord and two Angels. – v. 1-15.

Abraham was relaxing at the hottest time of the day. It was probably about 12 noon. Everybody was resting from the heat. Normally you didn't get visitors at this time.

However suddenly Abraham noticed three men, standing by him. Abraham immediately offered hospitality to his visitors. Initially Abraham offered his visitors an opportunity to wash their feet and have a snack of bread. They agreed to this offer.

However when Abraham got into his tent and met Sarah, the idea of a snack turned into a large feast. (Banquet)

It is clear by the Hebrew text that translates v. 3 as "My Lord" that at some early point Abraham recognized that one of his visitors was God Himself.

Actually it was Jesus, God in human form. Theologically an appearance of Jesus in the Old Testament is called a "Theophany".

In the Hebrew language there is a word that can only mean God. It is the Hebrew word "Ado nay" as opposed to the Hebrew word "Ado nai" which can be a word used as a polite respect for an important person.

This would account for Abraham making a real effort to provide amazing hospitality for these three men.

We are only told about the important part of the conversation that went on over this lovely meal.

The important announcement by Jesus was that Sarah was going to have a son very soon. At the time of this announcement Sarah was listening behind the tent door. She heard every word.

Immediately Sarah laughed. There are actually 7 Hebrew words for laugh and this is the laugh of “unbelief”. It was not necessarily disrespectful, however Sarah did not believe the words of the mystery guest.

Jesus said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, saying, shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?”

Jesus replied with the words “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” Jesus then promised that Sarah would have a Son at the appointed time.”

Sarah was afraid so she denied that she did actually laugh, but Jesus insisted that she did laugh.

It says in Hebrews 13: v.2 “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained Angels.”

I am sure that some people who prepared the food didn’t realize that they were entertaining Jesus and two Angels, but I am sure that with the experience Abraham had had of communicating with God that he was well aware of his guests that day.

I would like to draw out two important things that the passage flags up and apply them now, rather than wait for the end.

1. It is God’s desire to be close to us as it is our desire to be close to Him. God could have sent his Angels to communicate with Abraham but He came Himself in the person of Jesus. In Isaiah 41: v. 8 Abraham is called a “Friend of God”. This is also repeated in 2 Chronicles 20: v. 7.

S.G. De Graff puts it this way: “There was the Lord, the God of heaven and earth, eating at the table of His servant. So Abraham really is God’s friend. The Lord is not distant but loves to be near His people. He is the sociable God; He is awesome but not stuffy; He is Lord who draws near.”

We now move to the New Testament and to John 1: v. 14.

“The word became flesh and dwelt among us...” Yes God became a man for our benefit. He wanted to be our friend but He couldn’t because of our sin. However Jesus died on a cross for our sins so that we could be become friends of God and not enemies of God.

Then we turn to John Chapter 14: v. 15-21. (Read in N.K.J.)

¹⁵ “If you love Me, keep My commandments. ¹⁶ And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ “A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. ²⁰ At that day you will know that I *am* in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. ²¹ He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.”

So now, for every Christian, God can be really close to YOU and HE CAN be a friend through the person of HIS Holy Spirit.

This is truly amazing and awesome.

Andrew Bonar once said to his congregation at the Lord’s Supper, (Communion) “Jesus is walking today among the 7 golden candlesticks, and He will stop here, at our Communion table, to see if any of you want anything from Him.”

That is the friendship of the Lord. However when we draw close to God, expect him to challenge you in some way.

This moves me on to my second point.

2. God will do what He has promised, even though it may seem impossible to us.

The statement “Is anything too hard for the Lord” needs careful examination.

I say this because we can't apply this verse to every situation in our lives.

This statement is tied to a promise. We must understand this phrase as it connects to the context of the situation. There are some incredible promises in the Bible for every believer and however impossible they might seem to us, we can believe them and look forward to receiving them.

We will look at them in a moment. However the important thing here is that we DO NOT take this verse and claim that because God CAN do anything, that He must do it for US. Yes God can heal people, but if God hasn't promised to do that for us personally then we can't use this text to claim healing. It is the same for every blessing that you desire from God.

The Blessing that you desire from God must be tied to a promise that God makes for all believers. If you meet the conditions God will certainly pour out the blessing to you. Many Christians want the blessing without meeting the conditions, and then they become disappointed because God does not meet their expectations.

However there are promises in the Bible for EVERY believer. These promises are incredible too.

Ephesians 1: 7 in the New Living translation it says;

⁷ He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins.

In the New King James it says;

“In Him we have redemption, through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.”

Illustration

Some Christians try to punish themselves for their sins, as opposed to standing on the promises of forgiveness.

The story is told of a time, many years ago when a father and his daughter were walking through the grass on the Canadian prairie. In the distance they saw a huge fire coming towards them. It was soon going to burn them to death. The father knew that there was only one way of escape. They had to quickly build a fire right where they stood and burn a large patch of the grass.

When the large fire drew near them, they could stand on the section that had already burned.

When the flames did approach them the girl was terrified, but her father assured her with these words; “The flames can't get to us. We are standing where the fire has already been.”

So it is with forgiven people. When the judgement of God comes, they are safe, because the fire of God has already been.

If you have sincerely put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sin, then you are truly forgiven indeed. This is God's promise to YOU.

“Hallelujah”

There are two other promises that I will briefly mention.

The first is John 11: v. 25-26 – Quote in N.K.J.

²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. ²⁶ And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

This is a promise that we can’t fully understand but we will truly appreciate when the time comes.

The second is John 6: v. 37 – Quote in N.K.J.

³⁷ All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.

Is anything too hard for the Lord? – The answer is NO, concerning the things that He has promised us.

We now move on to the second half of the chapter – v. 16-33.

2. Abraham very concerned for Sodom – v. 16-33.

After the very big meal and fellowship with Jesus and the two Angels, Abraham went with them to send them on their way.

The Lord revealed to Abraham that the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was very serious. The two Angels went off in the direction of Sodom and Gomorrah and Abraham and the Lord were left in conversation.

It is clear that Abraham knew what was likely to happen. He probably feared for Lot and his family.

Abraham said to the Lord “Would you also destroy the righteous with the wicked?” This was a very good question to ask.

Then Abraham proceeded to get more specific. He said “Suppose there were 50 righteous within the city; would you also destroy the place and not spare it for the 50 righteous that were in it?” Abraham concluded his statement “shall not the judge of all the earth do right?”

In v. 26 God replied that He would spare the city for the sake of the 50 righteous people.

Abraham then proceeded to reduce the amount of righteous people in the city right down to the number 10. God replied that for the sake of 10 people He would not destroy the city. Maybe Lot and his family amounted to 10 people, we don’t really know. It is possible.

We are told in v. 33 that the Lord went on His way and Abraham returned to his place.

Q. What can we make of this very personal and intimate discussion between the Lord and Abraham?

1. God was stirring up Abraham to pray for Sodom & Gomorrah.

There is no doubt about it that the Lord was not revealing information about the sin of Sodom to Abraham for no reason at all. It appears that this information was a means to stir up Abraham to pray for Sodom.

Let me give you an example from another part of the Bible. Turn with me to Exodus Chapter 32. V. 1-14 (Read in the N.K.J.)

Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for *as for* this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." ² And Aaron said to them, "Break off the golden earrings which *are* in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring *them* to me." ³ So all the people broke off the golden earrings which *were* in their ears, and brought *them* to Aaron. ⁴ And he received *the gold* from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, "This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" ⁵ So when Aaron saw *it*, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow *is* a feast to the LORD." ⁶ Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. ⁷ And the LORD said to Moses, "Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted *themselves*. ⁸ They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!'" ⁹ And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it *is* a stiff-necked people! ¹⁰ Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation." ¹¹ Then Moses pleaded with the LORD his God, and said: "LORD, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? ¹² Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, 'He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people. ¹³ Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit *it* forever.'" ¹⁴ So the LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people.

The actions intended by God stirred up Moses to pray and cry for mercy for his people.

This is very similar to what was happening in the passage with Abraham. God was pointing out His intentions and Abraham was challenged to pray for Sodom and presumably for Lot and his family.

So it is with us. We may not get personal visitations from the Lord which cause us to pray for people. However there are times when the Holy Spirit actually stirs us up to pray for people. If that does happen, then we need to get on our knees and pray for that person. We never know what danger they are in and how our prayers can rescue them from their situation.

2. The presence of the Righteous matters to God.

There is an implication here in v. 16-33 that is very important. The implication here is that "the presence of God's people benefits the wicked in this age."

It is clear from the passage that God would hold off or postpone judgement upon Sodom for the sake of 10 people.

God has not changed and I am sure that He would like to destroy a few places in this world today where people are truly sinning against Him. However in God's mercy He holds back His wrath for the sake of the righteous.

Living a godly life in Christ Jesus matters. It holds back the wrath of God for this moment of time.

It is clear from the book of Revelation that one day the Lord is going to pour His wrath out upon this earth and upon the people living on this earth. In order for God to be consistent to His word, believers in Christ must be removed from this earth in order for that to happen.

In other words God will remove His people from this earth before He pours out His wrath in judgement. Christians call this removal from the earth, the "Rapture".

Sadly not many Christians believe this theology today, but I do. The reason that I do is based upon the teaching of the whole Bible and that includes these verses that we have studied today.

So we have learnt two important things in this passage.

God sometimes stirs us up to pray and "PRAY" we MUST.

Our Holy lives in Christ Jesus are important. We are the reason God's mercy extends to others, until the time comes for God's wrath to be poured out upon this world.

Now we are going to do something very important, we are going to PRAY.