

GOD – FRIEND TO SINNERS

Genesis 18:1-15

INTRODUCTION

John 14:23 – “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him.”

READ Gen 18:1-15

Proposition: Two Perfections of God

I. Immanence

II. Transcendence (Omnipotence and Omniscience)

- from two key phrases - one in v.8 and one in v.14

So That: We will understand that the promises of God are wrapped around His perfections and His attributes.

1st Perfection of God...

I. Immanence of God

Gen 18:1-8

Point – We find ourselves once again on *holy ground*. We find an encounter between man and the Triune God, a “theophany.”

Proof –

“¹**Now the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day.**”

“¹**Now the LORD appeared to him**” – similar to 17:1

God had appeared to Abraham as a smoking furnace and a burning torch. He had appeared to him as the Angel of the Lord, but never before as a man in this way.

“**Mamre**” – was an Amorite on friendly terms with Abraham (14:13) → one of Abraham’s “**allies**” (along with **Eshcol** and **Aner**)

“oaks of Mamre” – a large grove near Hebron which Mamre allowed Abraham to use for shade/camping.

- one of four locations, along with Shechem, Bethel, and Mount Moriah where Abraham built an **Altar** (13:8 – Hebron/Mamre)

“tent door” – reminds us Abraham’s time in the Promised Land was not characterized by palaces and temples, but by tents and altars

- I saw Bedouin camps when in Israel

“heat of the day” – noon/early afternoon

- this was a time of rest in hot climate

“^{2a}And when he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, three men were standing opposite him;”

18:1, 13, 17f tells us the identity of the One – preincarnate Christ.
19:1 the other two – angels

- I don’t believe Abraham realized who these are right at the beginning.

It is interesting how God spends so much ink on this display of hospitality

- 1 Tim 3:2
- second greatest commandment

Point – Abraham is a man who demonstrates his faith ... by words and by actions.

3 Qualities of Abraham:

A. Urgency

B. Humility

C. Generosity

So that: We understand what it means to be “a friend of God”

A. Urgency

Point – Abraham serves without hesitation, without delay

Proof – “^{2b}**and when he saw *them*, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the earth,**”

His first action in v. 1 – he did not get up and walk to greet the strangers

“**ran**” (v.2)

“**hurried**” (vv.6 and 7) - same Hebrew root as “**quickly**”

“**ran to the herd**” (v.7) –

The picture we get is a man committed to the task of service at hand without hesitation or second-guessing.

Just as he was “quick to obey” in 17:23, 26 - “the very same day”

- here we see that Abraham is a man of action, not hesitation -
- in any aspect of ministry, God calls us to have a sense of urgency

Application– Give without letting the left hand know what right hand is doing (Matt 6:3).

B. Humility

Point – This is a demonstration of God’s amazing grace to keep us content in our humble place

Abraham demonstrates humility in word and in deed.

Humility in Word

“**bowed himself to the earth**” (2)

“³**and said, ‘My lord, if now I have found favor in your sight, please do not pass your servant by.’”**

“**my lord**” or “O Lord” – yn”doa] – same root word as name of God.

- also used as title of respect for men (**Massoretic pointing** indicates they thought he immediately knew without benefit of New Testament – Heb 13:2)
- NASB was right to ignore Massoretic pointing in this case

Note the **singular** and **plural** in vv. 3-4 – even though Abraham didn't realize who his visitors were, he clearly understood One was in charge

Abraham has come to realize the identity by the time of v.22f
Especially v. 27 – NASB did right in translating
18:3 – my lord
18:27 – the Lord - Adonai - even though same vowel pointing

Heb 13:2 – “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it”
Not just angels, but God Himself in the case of Abraham

“**your servant**” – (v. 3, 5)

“⁴**Please let a little water be brought and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree;**”

“⁵**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.’”**

“**piece of bread**” (5)

- in actuality, he gave bread, meat, curds/butter, and milk – feast

Illustration – unlike the Pharisees with their broad phylacteries praying and fasting for public view and for the approval of men, Abraham was content to let his service speak rather than his speech

Application – we should under promise and over deliver!

- in our workplace, at home, in our school, in our ministry....

Prov 27:2 – “Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips.”

Humility in Deed

“bowed himself to the earth” (2) - show of humility and respect

From the Hebrew word חָשַׁח (*shachah*) - often translated as “worship” as in 22:5

- in fact, when you see “worship” in the Old Testament, more often than not it will be from חָשַׁח (*shachah*).
- This is the first appearance of the Hebrew word.
- Abraham does not yet know the identity of his visitors, but it is interesting that it is first used to describe bowing to God in human form.

“wash your feet” (4)

“rest yourselves” (4)

“refresh yourselves” (5)

“⁶So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah, and said, ‘Quickly, prepare three measures of fine flour, knead it, and make bread cakes.’”

After thoroughly sifting and cleaning the grain, the first step was to reduce it to “meal” or “flour” by rubbing, pounding, or (1) grinding (usually with hands). The “flour” was then mixed with water, (2) kneaded in a wooden basin or kneading trough (usually with feet), made into cakes and (3) baked.

- Earth oven – a hole in the earth in which stones are heated by fire. Dough is then spread in thin layers on the stones after the fire is removed.
- Portable oven – probably made of clay. Inside them a fire is built. When they are hot, thin layers of dough are spread on

the stones lining the bottom of the oven after the ashes are removed.

“⁷Abraham also ran to the herd, and took a tender and choice calf, and gave *it* to the servant; and he hurried to prepare it.”

Grinding and baking were women’s tasks; butchering was done by men.

“⁸And 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.”

“curds and milk” (8)

Made in the same manner the nomadic Bedouin use today. A small amount of sour milk is added to heated milk and poured into a goatskin bag and shaken until the butter/curds separates. It is drained, sits for three days, and is heated again. Butter/curds prepared in this manner keeps well in hot climates.

“placed it before them” (8) – Abraham is both host and waiter

Abraham was a man of means with servants, but did not think it beneath himself to wait upon his visitors.

“Standing by them” (8) while they ate

Abraham was concerned with their well-being and comfort. He put their concern over his own.

Mark 9:35 – “If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all.”

C. Generosity

Point – Generous ... in **Quantity** and **Quality**

Point – **Quantity** of his generosity

Proof – “**three measures**” → “measure” – סֵאָה – *seah* – roughly 2 gallons → 6 gallons – A LOT for 3 men!

This was surplus/extravagance – it was a feast

He also provided bread, meat, curds, and milk (not just “a piece of bread”)

- shows the extent of hospitality/honor bestowed

Point – **Quality** of his generosity

“**a tender and choice calf**” (7) – the best for his visitors

Application - Do you give the Lord your best ... or something less?

Abraham demonstrates real sacrifice and hard work.

So here is the servant and friend of God.

This is family ministry. Husband and wife work together to present the best.

So when does Abraham realize?

In terms of the application for us, it really doesn't matter when we think Abraham understood whom it was he was serving.

Remember what Jesus said in **Matt 25:40**– “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”

Application – **Service to man is service to God when service to man is done in Christ.**

What is the result???

“**as they ate**” → Staggering!

Are these “men” eating out of necessity?

Do they need this sustenance to keep going. No!

Not out of need.

Out of power.

Out of accommodation. ... Intimate Fellowship!

→ Immanence.

The God who ...

→ spoke the universe into existence (1, 2)

→ judged sin in (3, 4)

→ destroyed the world with the Flood (6-8) and

→ dispersed the nations at Babel (11)

→ called Abraham out of Ur and cared for him in Egypt (12)

→ **El Elyon** - who gave victory to Abraham in World War I (14)

→ the God who hears and the God who sees (16)

→ **El Shaddai** – who is able to make good on His promises (17)

That same God ... humbles Himself to eat with His chosen man.

Meal between Abraham and God – shared communal meal – one who is in covenant fellowship with God

• Food → Fellowship (Lord's Supper)

• Marriage supper of the Lamb in **Rev 19:7, 9**

2nd Perfection of God....

II. Transcendence (Omnipotence) of God Gen 18:9-15

Point –

“⁹Then they said to him, ‘Where is Sarah your wife?’ And he said, ‘Behold, in the tent.’ ¹⁰And he said, ‘I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son.’ And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him.”

“I will surely return” – grammatically the infinitive absolute

God wants to drive home the absolute certainty of His promise

“at this time next year” – 4 times in the Old Testament: Gen 18:10,14; 2 Kgs 4:16,17

Very little time has elapsed between God speaking to Abraham in chapter 17, his circumcision, and the coming of the Lord with His angels here at the beginning of chapter 18.

“¹¹Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing. ¹²And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, ‘After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?’”

“Sarah was past childbearing” – ESV captures it more literally –
“The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah.”

“After I have become old” – worn out – postmenopausal

Sarah has erected a 25 year high barrier of unanswered prayer. She is full of doubt. Instead of focusing on the promise of God, she focuses on the powerlessness of her flesh and the age of her husband.

- she was crushed by disappointment and doubts

“¹³And the LORD said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh, saying, “Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?”’”

v. 14 is for Sarah’s benefit, spoken to Abraham as her shepherd, because Abraham was already believing the promise

God ministers to Sarah through her husband, Abraham

Illustration – We have met the chaplain at Banner Gateway Medical Center. He is a believer and a fine man. He was sharing his history with Margie and I – how he left a church because the church was capitulating on feminist women in leadership.

God is clear from the beginning (Genesis) and all the way through Scripture

→ Charge for husbands to shepherd their wives

Application – How sad is it that more often than not the reality that Christian wives are often in the difficult situation where they are more godly and spiritual minded than their husbands. These dear women are put in the difficult situation where they must try to encourage their husbands to godliness while simultaneously trying to submit to their spiritually less mature husbands.

This ought not to be. Men, examine yourself. Are you loving your wife the way Christ loved the church? Are you growing in Christ? How are your quiet times with the Lord? Are you spending daily time in prayer and the Word? Is your wife the one in your family encouraging and challenging you and your children to be more committed to God and His people?

“¹⁴Is anything too difficult for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.”

James Montgomery Boice – *“One of the Great rhetorical questions of the Bible.”*

Henry Morris – *“One of the mountain peaks in all of Scripture.”*

“Is anything too difficult for the LORD?” – surpassing, extraordinary, wonderful – “miracles” in **Exod 3:20**

Psa 111:4 – “He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and merciful.”

Isa 9:6 – “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be

called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

→ El Shaddai!

Luke 1:30-37 - when the angel is giving Mary the good news that she will be the fulfillment of Isaiah 9 - at the end of this eight verse discourse by Mary, she uses the same language describing the birth of the Messiah.

“¹⁵Sarah denied *it* however, saying, ‘I did not laugh’; for she was afraid. And He said, ‘No, but you did laugh.’”

Under the umbrella of the transcendence of God - Omnipotent, we also see God’s Omniscience here

- her secret thoughts have been correctly read.

Sarah lies. She fears and she plays the fool out of fear. God graciously reproves her for her sin.

God’s grace and mercy.

There is rebuke ... directly from God ... the one time God speaks directly to Sarah, **“No, but you did laugh.”**

There is rebuke ... but no punishment.

This is gracious.

Conviction of sin opens the door to cleansing.

By God’s gracious power she who was faithless and fearful, becomes fruitful. She laughed in unbelief. Within the year, God replaces her disbelieving laughter with the laughter of belief: a son named Isaac (“laughter”). *God has the last laugh.*

Gen 21:6

Heb 11:11 – “By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised;”

Application – This is the transforming power of the gospel. It transforms

- pride into praise
- obsession into discipline
- mourning into empathy
- anger into purpose

CONCLUSION