

Visitation 4-15-07

Genesis 18:1-15 (NIV)

¹ The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. ² Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. ³ He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. ⁴ Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. ⁵ Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way--now that you have come to your servant." "Very well," they answered, "do as you say." ⁶ So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs of fine flour and knead it and bake some bread." ⁷ Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. ⁸ He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree. ⁹ "Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him. "There, in the tent," he said. ¹⁰ Then the LORD said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. ¹¹ Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?" ¹³ Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?'" ¹⁴ Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son." ¹⁵ Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh." But he said, "Yes, you did laugh."

We are returning to our study in Genesis. The opening verse actually brings us back to our Easter Sunday message. See if you catch the connection. ¹ The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. No, I'm not referring to how warm it was last Sunday, but to the Lord appearing to man. The gospel writer Mark uses that word "appeared" three times in Mark 16, describing the Lord meeting with Mary Magdalene, the two on the road to Emmaus, and the eleven after his death and resurrection. We looked at His appearing to the disciples as they fished on the lake.

Our passage today begins with the LORD appearing to Abraham. It is my thought from the text that this is about 3 months after the revelation in the last chapter. This first verse is an overview of the chapter, the details of which begin in the next verse. But before we go on, I want to emphasize that it is not a light thing to have a revelation. We are accountable for what we know, for what has been revealed to us by the grace of God. In [1 Kings 11:9](#), God told Solomon that He is angry with him because his heart was turned toward many wives and their idols after having had two revelations of the LORD. Those revelations made him accountable. ([John 15:22](#)) His behavior was all the more evil in God's eyes because he had seen the LORD. (God had appeared to him in two dreams.)

Commented [notes1]: 9 The LORD became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice.
1 Kings 11:9 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 22 If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin.
John 15:22 (NIV)

I think we overvalue sensory experiences. Samuel had a revelation of God in God's word. ²¹ *The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word.* 1 Samuel 3:21 (NIV) It was through the word that God appeared. We would prefer something visual but with Samuel He used audible means. Today, God appears to us in His written word. That doesn't mean that He cannot manifest Himself, but that it is the exception rather than the rule. ¹ *In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.* Hebrew 1:1-2 (NIV) The Son is the Word of God. (John 1:14) The Holy Spirit reminds us of what He said. (John 14:26) That is an appearance of God that is no less serious and meaningful than the appearance to Abraham. We are just as accountable as Solomon to whom the Lord appeared in dreams. He has spoken. We have heard. We are responsible to act on what we have heard. (Luke 12:47-48)

² *Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.* I believe Abraham recognized one of them as Jesus, the Prince of the Countenance, from previous encounters. Abraham's posture is one of reverent worship. His head is on the ground in submission. How do we respond when we know God is speaking to us through His word? Is there a debate? Is there hesitation? Or do we bow low like Abraham and lay our all before Him? (Romans 12:1)

The other two "men" are angelic beings. We will read about what happened to them and their role next week. Abraham spoke to the manifestation of the LORD. ³ *He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by.*

"If I have found favor in your eyes..." He already knew that he had found favor with God. Genesis 15:6 tells us that his belief was credited to him as righteousness. He had found favor with God through a believing trust in God. Because of that belief, God granted him the mercy that would be merited by the cross. I don't think Abraham realized he was looking into the face of the One that would die as the Lamb of God in his place, but he did know this was the LORD and looked to Him to be his salvation. (Genesis 15:1) If the previous covenants God had made with him meant the favor of God, he pleaded for another encounter, for more interaction.

Some people want to dwell in God's manifest presence as much as is humanly possible. Others want to get away from it as fast as they can. When the Spirit of God begins to move on a group, I can see some getting fidgety and soon they head for the door. You know it is because they do not want to surrender the reigns of their life. Most of you are here because, like Abraham, you long for another encounter. (Psalm 130:6) You want the Word of God to speak deep into your hearts and change you. You care so deeply about the needs of others that you long for an opportunity to speak those needs into the ear of the only One that can do something about it. And so we plead, like Abraham, *"If I have found favor in your eyes, do not pass me by."* Like Abraham, you can be certain that He will not walk away, because you are in a covenant relationship with Him. In that encounter you either obtain the assurance

Commented [notes3]: 14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: 26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. John 14:26 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: 47 "That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. 48 But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. Luke 12:47-48 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. Romans 12:1 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: 6 Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. Gen 15:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: 1 After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." Gen 15:1 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning. Psalms 130:6 (NIV)

that your prayer is heard, or the peace that God will walk through the difficulty with you and the one you are praying for. (Psalm 6:9)

Commented [notes10]: 9 The LORD has heard my cry for mercy; the LORD accepts my prayer. Psalms 6:9 (NIV)

Imagine looking back over your life from heaven's perspective and seeing the LORD Himself coming to bring you a blessing, but then pass on by because your heart was so centered on selfishness that you could not hear His voice. (2Chronicles 24:19) In my devotion time last week I saw this verse at the end of the Ten Commandments. *Wherever I cause my name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you.* Exodus 20:24 (NIV) If His name is not honored in your life, He will pass on by. If His name is not honored in this church, He will pass on by. But if we lift up His name, if we exalt Jesus and the wonderful attributes of God above ourselves, then He will not pass us by, but will come to us and bless us! Let us continually pray, "O Lord, cause your name to be honored here and in each of our lives. Do not pass us by." Amen?

Commented [notes11]: 19 Although the LORD sent prophets to the people to bring them back to him, and though they testified against them, they would not listen. 2 Chron 24:19 (NIV)

⁴ Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. ⁵ Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way--now that you have come to your servant." "Very well," they answered, "do as you say." Abraham wanted to honor and bless God. The only way he knew how to do that was like he would bless or honor a man. In ancient Israel, everyone wore sandals, and the dirt from the road would become ground into your feet. One of the most refreshing things one could do was to have their feet washed. We will see this again with the same message of being a servant in John 13.

If you entertained a guest with food, they were obligated to be at peace with you for at least the next day. It was a sign of respect, hospitality, and sometimes it represented a covenant had been sealed. Abraham wanted to make sure he was at peace with God and so insisted on serving them a meal. The LORD and the angels answered in unison, "Very well, do as you say." That would have been eerie. But then, angels are God's servants, doing His will. It would have been strange if they did not voice agreement with the LORD. (Psalm 103:20-21)

Commented [notes12]: 20 Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. 21 Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. Psalms 103:20-21 (NIV)

⁶ So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs of fine flour and knead it and bake some bread." ⁷ Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. ⁸ He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree. He served up veal, yogurt, milk, and fresh-baked bread. Jesus ate fish and bread after his resurrection. (Luke 24:42-23) In New Jerusalem, the heavenly city, there are fruit trees and fish that I suppose we will eat in our glorified bodies. (Revelation 22:1-2)

Commented [notes13]: 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate it in their presence. Luke 24:42-43 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: 1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Rev 22:1-2 (NIV)

I think there is something much deeper here. This is the first time God ate a meal with man. To this culture, dining together was to share your heart. It was an intimate time of relaxation and fellowship. Most of you know God's invitation to us in Revelation 3:20. God wants to come into our hearts and dine with us. This is taking place as a confirmation of God's covenant with Abraham, and it is indicating a deeper fellowship with him. You'll notice that Abraham is watching as an attendant to see if he can serve. The next time God dines with man in Scripture, is in Exodus 24:11. God called the elders of Israel up Mount Sinai and there they ate before God. In that

Commented [notes15]: 20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. Rev 3:20 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: 11 But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank. Ex 24:11 (NIV)

account, God does not eat the covenantal meal, man does. And the final one that we should note is the Last Supper, in which both God and man dine together. (Luke 22:15) This should give us a greater understanding of the richness of the Revelation 3:20 invitation.

The covenant with Abraham is all based on what God does. God is the one dining. The covenant on Sinai is based on man's obedience. Man does the dining. The new covenant of established at the Last Supper is based again on what God will do, but it invites us in as participants. We are now to do what He does, live like He lived, love like He loved and serve like He served. (1John 2:6) God and man both dined together. This is the completion of the covenants, the deepest intimacy. Go over Revelation 3:20 again and see if it means more to you now.

⁹ "Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him. "There, in the tent," he said. ¹⁰ Then the LORD said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." In the last chapter, Abraham was told that Sarah would be the mother of the promised child in one year. (Genesis 17:21) Now the LORD is telling him that the child will be born at that appointed time.

Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. ¹¹ Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?" It sounds to me like the father of faith didn't have the faith to tell his wife what he heard from the LORD last time. Doesn't it seem like she is taken by surprise with this? Abraham must have pondered whether or not to tell her and decided against it, or at least just to wait and see. Now she has overheard it as she eavesdropped from behind the tent entrance.

Her laugh isn't the same as Abraham's laugh. Her laugh is a laugh of unbelief. She is looking at their aging bodies and thinking God can't do it. We know that is the case from the LORD's response to her.

There is one more point the New Testament pulls from this verse, the term Sarah used for Abraham. She called him her *Adon*, or master, or lord. Peter explained that a believing woman's beauty was inward more than outward. ⁵ For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, ⁶ like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear. 1 Peter 3:5-6 (NIV) You are daughters of faith when you focus on inner beauty versus outer beauty. Fear would have you look seductive just in case things don't work out with your husband. Faith has you focused on inner beauty, including the beauty of submission to God's order.

¹³ Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?'" ¹⁴ Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son." God is amazed that we doubt His ability. What He declares comes to pass every time without fail. He says it

Commented [notes17]: 15 And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.
Luke 22:15 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: 6 Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.
1 John 2:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: 21 But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year."
Gen 17:21 (NIV)

and it is. We look at this world created from the words of His mouth and yet we doubt that He can bring the simplest things to pass. (Psalm 33:6)

Commented [notes20]: 6 By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. Psalms 33:6 (NIV)

We need to see that God is more than able to do everything He says. I know I look at my spiritual life, and I wonder if I will ever be transformed into His image. He says in Scripture that that is what He is doing, yet there are times when I doubt. (Romans 8:29) But then I see how far He has taken me, from the depths of error and sin to sharing His word with others and it gives me hope. But that hope is based on personal experience. We should be able to look at the testimonies of others, these true stories in God's word, the creation around us, and say without a bit of doubt, "If God says it, it will come to pass." (Romans 1:20)

Commented [notes21]: 29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. Romans 8:29 (NIV)

Yes, God can have a 90-year-old woman give birth, and He can cause a virgin to conceive as well. Is anything too hard can also be translated "too wonderful" or "too incredible". Is it too hard of a thing for God to save your loved one? Is it too wonderful? Is it too incredible for God to transform your life, or see you through your current difficulties? He asks us, "Is anything too wonderful for the LORD?" What is our answer?

Commented [notes22]: 20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. Romans 1:20 (NIV)

¹⁵ Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh." But he said, "Yes, you did laugh." Sarah didn't laugh out-loud, so she thought she could deny the accusation. It was conviction of sin that caused her to say, "I did not laugh (after all, 'out loud' doesn't need to be said, I'm implying it.") She was trying to justify herself. You know what I mean. We use those technical loopholes to avoid the conviction and to have people think more highly of us than they should. (Romans 12:3) We forget that honesty and humility make us the people we should be and is actually more respected than deceiving people into thinking you are something you really aren't. We might deceive people, but we can never deceive God. (Galatians 6:3) If you haven't figured it out yet, let me tell you a truth to cling to; His opinion is the only one that counts.

Commented [notes23]: For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Romans 12:3 (NIV)

Once again we have the beauty of the Scriptures that doesn't hide the failings of its heroes so that you and I will have hope. We see ourselves in these characters. We identify with their weaknesses. We are challenged by their strengths. They are people just like us, because it is a true story. Now Sarah knows that God sees into the heart. Hagar had declared that God is the God who sees. (Genesis 16:13) Sarah now knows the extent of that seeing. Do you know God sees your every thought?

Commented [notes24]: 3 If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Gal 6:3 (NIV)

The Scriptures sometimes call our bodies a tent. (2Peter 1:13) Is Jesus standing outside your tent today? Does it look like He may just go on His way? You have found favor in His sight, for He sent His one and only Son to die to pay your debt toward God. (1John 2:2) Don't you want to run to Him and ask Him not to pass you by? Wouldn't you love to offer Him something that would refresh Him? You can't wash His feet, or feed Him, or maybe you can. He said that in as much as you did it to the least of these my brothers, you have done it to me. (Matthew 25:40) Isn't that honoring His name? By loving one another we display His character and thereby honor His name. Where His name is honored He will come and bring a blessing.

Commented [notes25]: 13 She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me." Gen 16:13 (NIV)

Commented [notes26]: 13 I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, 2 Peter 1:13 (NIV)

Commented [notes27]: He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. 1 John 2:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes28]: 40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' Matt 25:40 (NIV)