

Is Anything too hard for the Lord?

Genesis 18:1-15

Sunday November 14th Jonathan Skinner

1. The Lord meets with his people – ‘The Lord Appeared to Abraham’ (1)

Abraham is the father of faith; he is the friend of God; he is the root of the line of faith. The way the Lord deals with Abraham is illustrative of the way he deals with all of us.

Abraham was a humble tent dweller, who had dire needs in his family and who saw no immediate answer to his prayers. Abraham was sitting at the door of his tent. When he looked up he saw three men standing nearby. How long they had been there we don't know. They may have been there quite a while. As soon as Abraham sees them he runs from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bows down low on the ground before one of them. Abraham recognised this One; he knew it was the Lord. Verse 10 indicates that this One can create life; this is none other than the Lord God. Later in this chapter he pleads with this One for Sodom; he knows he is not only the creator, but also the judge and destroyer. This is none other than the Lord himself.

The Son of God appears in human form in various instances in the OT, including in the Garden of Eden, before Abraham, wrestling with Jacob, standing before Joshua and as one shining in the furnace with the three friends of Daniel.

If a king or some royal person should come and visit you in your home, if your house was selected, it would be a great honour. The Lord visits Abraham's tent. What is enshrined here and set up as an all-important practical principle is this: the Lord visits and comes close to his people. However humble we are, whatever our problems, he comes and stands nearby.

In the NT sense, for believers he does this by his Spirit, which is the Spirit of Jesus. He visits the tent of our bodies; he comes into our presence. He knows our needs; he has answers for our needs. We learn here that the Lord is gracious and comes close to us, wherever we are, whatever our situation. He stands by in the heat of the day. He sees and he is present.

2. The Lord desires us to invite him to come close and have fellowship with us – ‘Abraham looked up ...

hurried ... bowed ... He said, “let me get you something to eat ... and rest” (2-5)

Note that Abraham is not initially conscious of the Lord, for that he has to look up. He may have been cast down, reflecting, brooding over the fact that Sarah was childless. He may have been looking down at the earth. It is only as he looks up that he realises that the Lord is close. This is a true picture of our experience.

If we are believers the Lord is with us by his Spirit, but we are often so taken up with other thoughts that we don't fully realise it. Jesus told us that he will never leave or forsake us; he would be with us always, to the very end of the age. The NT tells us that we have Christ in us, the hope of glory. This is a spiritual reality. Too often we are not consciously aware of his closeness; we are too often distracted, looking down. Like Abraham we need to look up.

But the Lord does not barge into the believer's conscious presence. He did not push his way into Abraham's tent, and he did not take his food. He waited until he was invited. The principle is the same in the NT. Turn to Revelation 3:20. There we are invited to eat with the Lord, to have increased fellowship with him, to turn from our luke-warmness and know his presence as a reality. Jesus says '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.'

3. We are to serve the Lord - Abraham serves his Lord (6-8)

At once Abraham begins to serve the Lord. He honours him with his best, the curds, the milk and a choice tender calf. The Lord should have our best time, our best resources, our best skills, our best money, our first fruits. Too often we are tempted to give him the dregs, what is left over from our own consumption. In doing so we miss a great blessing! In what ways do we wait on the Lord? Do we spend time with him? Do we listen to him? Do we serve his people? Jesus said if we do something to serve the least of his disciples we are doing it to him. And he said that if we fail to serve the least of his disciples we fail to do it to him.

4. The Lord brings a word of blessing to his us (9-15) – ‘Is anything too hard for the Lord’ (14)

When the Lord is invited into Abraham's life the Lord speaks a word of blessing to Abraham. This is a biblical principle. It is only when the living Word, Jesus himself, abides and rests in our hearts that we can clearly hear him speak. The Lord is very gracious here. If you read the promise of a child here there is nothing that is new; it is only a reiteration of what has already been said, and several times at that. What can we learn from this? The Lord is exceedingly patient with us. He comes again and again in spite of sin and doubt, and even knowing that Sarah will laugh in unbelief. How often the Lord has to teach us the same lessons again and again, in spite of our unbelief! Do you feel the Lord has given up on you because of your faithlessness? It is not so. He comes to us again and again. He stands near, waiting for us to look up. For her to conceive at her age was impossible. But look at verse 14: 'Is anything too hard for the Lord.' The answer is no. Sarah will conceive in her old age. What is your 'impossible' situation? For God it is not impossible. He can break in. He can heal. He can change. He can bless. Do not laugh in unbelief. When we invite the Lord in to the innermost

parts of our life we invite him to speak and to speak a word of profound blessing to us. And then he turns impossibility to possibility.

The words 'Is anything too hard for the Lord' are used elsewhere in Scripture. Turn to Luke 1:34-37. What was true of Sarah became true of Mary and Elizabeth. But this is true in another way too. To get the full meaning of all this we need to look at not only the 'impossible' conception and birth of Jesus, but what that leads to. There is another kind of conception and birth that is impossible without God's creative act and word. Read Matthew 19:26. Look particularly at verse 26. For a rich man to be saved is humanly impossible. Why? Because people who are well off tend to be self-sufficient, self-reliant and proud. They are hardened to the gospel in a way that makes it impossible for them to believe. Let's not dilute this. So how can they be humbled and turn and believe? Indeed, we must push this further, it is impossible for anyone to get to heaven, for anyone even to believe and repent. Everyone is born spiritually dead, under Satan's fist, separated from God, cut off from him and under his wrath and curse. Read Ephesians 2:1.

Just as Sarah's womb was as good as dead and no new life could issue from it, so human beings are utterly and completely spiritually dead. Now, remember that Abraham stands at the head of the stream of faith; he is the father of faith, the one from whom will come the people of God. It is therefore infinitely significant that his wife is barren. Abraham cannot bring into being even one person of the people of Israel, the people of God. It is impossible. Here is sterility, barrenness, deadness. This is the same throughout history for individual people: they are spiritually sterile, barren and dead. They can't believe; they can't repent; they can't trust; they can't fill themselves with new life. They are dead. The diagnosis cannot be more serious, and the prognosis cannot be darker! The situation is impossible. How can new spiritual life possibly be conceived? How can new life possibly enter our hearts? How can we possibly be spiritually reborn if all this is so utterly impossible? How can death be brought to life? How can God raise up a spiritually live nation?

Read Ezekiel 37:1-14 The Spirit of God brings new life now and fits us for heaven later; he creates a living spiritual nation. That's what this passage pictures and predicts. So how does this work out individually? Read John 3:1-8. Sarah's dead womb was enabled to conceive and give birth. The dead in Ezekiel's vision were given supernatural life through God's Spirit. The Spirit overshadowed Mary and she supernaturally conceived and gave birth to the Son of God. The One who is 'the Life' entered Mary. And now, by his Spirit, he can enter us and live within our bodies. Lord, help us to look up, to believe (John 3:16) and to receive him (John 1:12), and so turn from death to life.

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