Holy Hospitality:

Meeting with God

 Genesis 18:1-15

INTRODUCTION

Due to our air conditioning woes, for the next few weeks we must meet for services in the fellowship hall. Fellowship and worship are required to come together. That’s what happens in today’s passage of scripture. Abraham and Sarah have a moment of holy hospitality. God comes for a visit, they share a meal, and even laugh. And their relationship with the Almighty is strengthened. This passage is not only a moment in history, but it is also glaringly easy to see application points for the Christian today. We have the opportunity to reflect on those moments when we’ve met with God, those opportunities we are given for holy hospitality. And even though we too might react like Sarah with unbelief, we experience God and come to know Him in new, deeper ways.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Genesis, chapter 18. This morning we will begin reading in verse one. Because today’s message is in narrative form, you may remain seated.

*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.*

Please write this down.

WHERE DID YOU SEE GOD?

Look back with me at all the times the LORD communicated with Abraham. In Genesis 12, God first spoke to him. Again in Genesis 13, with an audible voice God speaks. In chapter 14 the communication takes place with a vision. But in Genesis 17 and 18, the Bible says the LORD appeared to Abraham. Abraham saw God with his own eyes, or at least in an image that a human could withstand.

But in this chapter, something different happens. Chapter 18 is what scholars call a theophany, or a visible manifestation of God to a person or people. Not a vision or dream like God’s other appearances. A theophany is tangible. As we will see in a moment, these three men ate and walked with Abraham.

Now, if this is a theophany of God, singular, why did three men appear to Abraham in this theophany? Although there are many explanations of this theophany, the one that makes sense to me is that one of the guests was Christ and the other two were angels. This seems to agree with what we will read in Genesis 19 in two weeks.

But this also agrees with the Doctrine of God. The Bible says in Exodus 33:20 that no one can look upon God and live. However, the Word of God, Jesus Christ, became flesh and dwelled among us. So in this instance, I believe this was Christ appearing with two of his angels to Abraham and Sarah. It just makes sense that this was an Old Testament preview of this New Testament reality.

Now this theophany took place under the shade of the Oak Trees of Mamre. Throughout human history, oak trees have been prized and revered by ancient people. The Druids considered them to have spiritual qualities. The Greeks saw them as a symbol of Zeus; the Norse men a symbol of Thor. (<https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/oak>) In the land of Canaan, the oak was also a spiritually important tree. It was hard and sturdy enough to resist the teeth of grazing animals that reduced other plants to stubble. And unlike NC, where we have an abundance of tall trees, in the barren landscape of Canaan an oak tree stood out and could be seen for miles, almost calling the weary traveler to rest in their shade. This led the Canaanites to worship the oak trees. They even tried to get Abraham’s descendants to worship them. <https://blog.israelbiblicalstudies.com/holy-land-studies/two-biblical-trees/>

These particular oak trees of Mamre are special to Abraham. Not because they worshipped the trees, but because this is where Abraham and his family met with God. They were at these oaks when God appeared in a vision to Abraham after the Egypt fiasco. Abraham built an altar there to the LORD (Genesis 13). This is where Abraham was when he found out about Lot’s kidnapping (Genesis 14). And now it is the place where Abraham experiences God in person.

APPLICATION

This morning, let me ask you a question. Where are the oak trees in your life? Those places where you sat with God, where you experienced his salvation, or where God took you to a new level of growth in your relationship with Him? For my wife Becky, it is Fripp Island in SC. This is where she saw other teens following Christ in discipleship in such a way that she committed her life to Christ. For me, it is the old sanctuary at Brushy Creek, where I came to know Christ and where God called me to ministry. I also think back to a literal oak tree in Leesburg Florida, where God spoke to me one night right outside a local Baptist Church. I also think about FOB Diamondback in Mosul, where the LORD gave me peace that surpasses all understanding after my first KIA, which gave me the strength to minister through years of war.

This morning, allow your mind to go back to those special places. Remember what the LORD said to you, what He did for you. Folks, this is your testimony. Write it down! Be encouraged and be challenged by His words to you. If you don’t have those special places, one or two things are true. You have allowed your relationship with God to grow so stagnant you’ve can’t remember those important times in your walk with the LORD. Or you don’t have a testimony, which means you don’t know the LORD. If that is the case, let this fellowship hall become a part of your testimony. Let this be the place you come to meet God! Pray right now to and ask God to meet with you and save you, to make you truly a Christian.

But a word of advice. Don’t worship that special place you met with God. The location can become sacred instead of the relationship if we are not careful. Instead, worship the God who spoke to you, not the place where he spoke. Let’s keep reading.

*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 the finest 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.*

Write this question down.

WHEN HAVE YOU EATEN WITH GOD?

If you have ever spent time in the Middle East, you understand their emphasis on hospitality. It is standard operating procedure to be cordial and accommodating for guests. But Abraham and Sarah went above and beyond for God. Notice the personal emphasis they put on this meal. Who prepared it? The servants of this wealthy couple, or the old man and his wife? Some Jewish scholars even suspect that it had been only three days since Abraham’s circumcision. If that is true, Abraham is running around injured in order to have this meal with the LORD. He is not delegating these tasks. He sees this as an opportunity to meet with the One who has provided for him the past 25 years, and the One who has promised him a future and a hope.

Folks, can you imagine eating a meal with God? Not going to Mi Casitas and breaking bread, but inviting the LORD into your home and offering him the best meal your family could afford? That’s what Abraham and Sarah are doing in this situation. They are going out of their way to eat with their Savior!

APPLICATION

Yes, we have those opportunities to eat with the LORD. Listen to what Jesus said to the Church at Laodicea in Revelation 3:20,

*“0 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 that person, and they with me.”*

The original language of this text indicates this as not a quick snack, but a leisurely meal that lasts for a while. Food is only part of the event; the fellowship is what’s most important. This is where Jesus wants us, in the place of fellowship with Him. Folks, don’t see your quiet time as just a spiritual discipline. See it as a spiritual meal with your Savior, a conversation with the One who has plans for you, to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you a future and hope. Just as Christ called to Sardis, just as Christ called to Zaccheus, he is knocking on your door today. Have that meal with the Lord!

Well, how do I meet with God like this and share in a spiritual meal? I am glad you asked. Take out your worship guide. Follow the instructions we give you with these Bible Study questions. This is your guide to a quiet time. That is why it’s called a worship guide! We are guiding you to worship.

There is also another opportunity to “eat with God.” Listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 23:35

*34 “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me…* 37 *“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’*

Ladies and gentlemen, every time we help a brother or a sister in Christ in need, it is as if we are doing this not for them, but for Jesus! Will some people take advantage of our generosity? Of course! But in the big scheme of things, it doesn’t matter as much because we are doing this for Jesus, not them. The next time you help a Christian in need, remember, you are eating a meal with Jesus!

And there is a third way we have a meal with the LORD. As a church, every time we gather for Communion, we are eating a meal with God Himself. Just like the disciples, it is as if we are gathering in the Upper Room and listening to Jesus connect the Old Covenant with the New. We see Him hold up the bread and cup and tell us, do this in remembrance of me!

The unique Old Testament opportunity for Abraham can be a frequent opportunity for the Christian today. Without letting it become something we take for granted, let us take advantage of these amazing opportunities to eat a meal with our Savior!

Verse nine.

*9 “Where is your wife Sarah?” they asked him.*

*“There, in the tent,” he said. 10 Then one of them 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 very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. 12 So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, “After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?”*

Write down today’s final question

WHY DO YOU LAUGH AT GOD?

The promise proclaimed to Abraham in chapter 17 is given to Abraham and Sarah once again in chapter 18. Just like us, they needed to hear from the Lord many times before they understood and even believed completely.

Yes, that’s right. Abraham and Sarah, lauded in the New Testament as titans of the faith, seemed to struggle believing. Laughter, which for them is a mixture of excitement and disbelief, seems to be the pattern of their lives.

APPLICATION

Are we laughing at God this morning? When God promises to meet with us, have a spiritual meal with us, to change our minds, our hearts, and our ways, and lead us to believe in Him and trust Him, do we believe this completely, or do we think that this is just too good to be true? Folks, this is no Ponzi scheme. This is a promise from God. Don’t laugh off this good news. God wants to meet with you, change the direction of your life, and give you the miracle of salvation promised from Genesis to Revelation. He also wants to relate this salvation to every area of your life. This meeting with God, this meal with God, is to take place every day and in every way. Don’t laugh, believe today!

How did God react to Sarah’s laughter?

*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.”*

CONCLUSION

God reacted to Sarah’s laughter by turning to face her for the first time. Up to now she has been at the entrance of the tent which was behind the LORD. She didn’t know God was paying attention to her, even reading her thoughts. And God kindly rebukes Sarah for her unbelief, as a Father would do with his children. God is calling Sarah on her…stuff.

God is doing the same thing to us this morning. He is calling us on our laughter, our unbelief. Today’s invitation is a literal come to Jesus moment. The Savior is waiting outside the door of your life. He wants to come in and have a meal with you. He is telling us,

“*Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*” (Isaiah 1:18).