

Mid- Week Meditation for July 29, 2020

Genesis 18:1-15

As you may remember from last week, our Mid-Week Meditation was all about God's covenant with Abraham and Sarah, and God's promise that Abraham's offspring would inherit the land where they now dwell; and also God reassures Abraham and Sarah that in spite of their old age, they will have a son together within one year, and that the son's name will be Isaac. Last week we also talked about how a part of that covenant was that Abraham and all of his offspring were to be circumcised. That brings us up to speed so that we are now ready to dig into the 18th chapter of Genesis. In the first part of this passage, Abraham is sitting outside his tent. And the scripture says that his tent is right near the trees of Mamre. So, that means that he is right outside the city of Hebron, which is in the southern portion of modern-day Israel. In past chapters, we learned that Hebron was in the desert of Negev. Anyway, Abraham is sitting at the door of his tent in the heat of the day when he looks up and he sees three men nearby. Later in this chapter and in the early part of the next chapter, we learn that this is the Lord and two of his Angels. Now we are not told if Abraham recognizes who these three men are right away. But if he doesn't right away, certainly in pretty short order, Abraham realizes that he has encountered the Lord. What we do know is that Abraham goes to great lengths to humble himself before these three visitors, because the scripture says that he bows down before them. And we also know that Abraham identifies himself as a servant to these three mysterious visitors. And we very quickly see that Abraham is very committed to extending to these three visitors a warm and hospitable welcome. My guess is that Abraham knows who he is talking to almost immediately, and that dictates how he welcomes them to his home. Now we, the reader, know that the leader of these three visitors is the Lord. That is what the scripture calls him. Is this pre-incarnated Jesus? We don't know. We just know that the Lord, in some form is standing before Abraham. Abraham says to them, If I have found favor within your eyes, my Lord, then do not pass your servant by, then allow me to give you something to drink, come in and wash your feet and allow me to serve you something to eat so you can be refreshed before you go on your way, as long as you have encounter your Servant Abraham.

I find it interesting that there are a number of parallels here between the servanthood of Abraham and servanthood in the New Testament. In Matthew 25, those sheep who inherited the Kingdom of Heaven served the Lord by bringing him something to drink and something to eat. In as much as you have done it onto the least of these, you have done it onto me as it says in the scripture. It is also the roll of the servant in the New Testament to provide for the washing of feet after a long journey. I also noticed a parallel in the narrative between this narrative, and the Emmaus story where the two disciples ask Jesus to stay with them rather than going on. Just some things to think about.

One difference is that Abraham didn't just break out a slice of bread and a dipper of water. He goes to Sarah and asked her to bake a lot of bread, and goes to his herd and has his servants select a choice calf. And while they eat, he assumed the role of a servant and stood near them, and presumably he nourished himself only later.

I believe that this exemplification of Abraham as God's servant is included here by the author of Genesis in order to contrast Abraham's devotion to the Lord with the wickedness of those whom the Lord will encounter later in Sodom and Gomorrah. But we will get into that whole story about Sodom and Gomorrah in the next lesson.

The conversation shifts quickly from Abraham welcoming the Lord, to the question, "Where is your wife, Sarah?"

And Abraham responds, “there, in the tent.”

Then the Lord said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah, your wife, will have a son.”

So, we learn that, at least part of the Lord’s mission, during this visit to Abraham is to reaffirm the promise that He made in the last chapter about a son for Sarah and Abraham. This time the affirmation includes Sarah to a larger degree than was the case in chapter 17. And it is interesting, Sarah listens to the voice of the Lord, talking about how Sarah is going to bear a child, and Sarah’s reaction is almost exactly like Abraham’s in the last visit, and in the last chapter. In chapter 17 it says that Abraham laughs to himself at the prospect of having a child at the age of 99. And Sarah’s reaction when she hears the Lord talking about a child is the same. The scripture says, “Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him,” and later it says that Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, “After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure.”

This was basically the same reaction that Abraham had. The difference is that Sarah gets caught by the all-knowing Lord that was right before her. So, the Lord asks Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, “Will I really have a child now that I am old?” Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son!

Now Sarah was afraid because she had gotten called out for lying to the Lord who was standing before her. So, the scripture says that in her fear, she lied and said that she didn’t laugh. The Lord said to her, “Yes, you did laugh.”

So, this is a pretty busy passage. But there are several grains of wisdom that I want us to take with us today. First, I would like to challenge you to reflect on the similarities between idea of servanthood here, and in the New Testament.

The second thing is, that the Lord once again calls on Abraham and Sarah to remind them and reaffirm for them the promise of their child to come. We can learn from this part of the story. Abraham and Sarah are still struggling with believing in this promise. And so, their patient and loving God called upon them again in order to help them in their unbelief. Verse 14 contains a question that we can, and should, take with us today. Is anything too hard for the Lord? We can understand Sarah’s hesitancy. Sarah is past the time where it is physically possible for her to bear a child. It just doesn’t add up unless she asks the question, “Is there anything hard for God?”

And the last lesson that I believe we can glean from this portion of Chapter 18, is that truth that God knows us inside and out, and up and down. The scripture says that Sarah laughed to herself and she thought to herself. Yet God knew the thoughts in her heart. I think the Lord pointed out that she had laughed to herself, and that she had lied about it, not to embarrass her or to judge her, but to demonstrate to her and Abraham, the sovereignty of God. If the Lord knew that she had laughed inside her heart, then perhaps the Lord standing right before her, does know that she will bear a son. Certainly, when the Lord took his leave of them, they were left to ponder the question, “Is there anything hard for God?” And then perhaps they were a little more hopeful that this pleasure as Sarah called it was really the truth for their future together.

I am going to leave you with that thought today. And we will pick up with the rest of Chapter 18 next week.

Let us pray...