

NOON BIBLE STUDY: GENESIS 18

GENESIS 18:1-8 - ABRAHAM'S VISITORS

ABRAHAM IS ACTUALLY HELD UP IN THIS RECORD AS A MODEL OF HOSPITALITY. HE WELCOMES "STRANGERS" AND GOES ABOVE AND BEYOND TO SHOW LOVE TOWARDS THEM. THE WRITER OF HEBREWS WILL SPEAK TO US IN THE NEW TESTAMENT WITH AN ALLUSION TO THIS EVENT:

HEBREWS 13:2 - DO NOT NEGLECT TO SHOW HOSPITALITY TO STRANGERS, FOR BY THIS SOME HAVE ENTERTAINED ANGELS WITHOUT KNOWING IT.

THAT'S KIND OF COOL MOTIVATION.

ABRAHAM SERVES AND HONORS THESE VISITORS. IT'S INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT ABRAHAM IS NOT ABOVE SERVING HIS GUESTS. WHILE HE DOES ASK SARAH TO MAKE THE CAKES AND HIS SERVANT TO PREPARE THE MEAT, IT IS ABRAHAM WHO GETS THE CURDS AND MILK AND THE CALF AND ALSO WHO SERVES THE MEN. WHY IS IT WORTH NOTING THESE ACTIONS? BECAUSE ABRAHAM IS MODELING WHAT A MAN OF FAITH LOOKS LIKE.

MANY, COMING FROM A PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY NOT BASED ON SCRIPTURE'S VIEW OF THE ROLES FOR MEN AND WOMEN ELEVATE MEN TO SUCH A HIGH STATUS THAT NO "REAL MAN" WOULD BE SEEING SERVING, PREPARING FOOD, AND WELCOMING GUEST INTO THEIR HOME. HOWEVER, BIBLICAL MANHOOD DOES NOT PAINT THIS PICTURE AT ALL. IN FACT, TO BE AN ELDER, MEN ONLY QUALIFY IF THEY ARE THE FOLLOWING:

1 TIMOTHY 3:2-3 - AN OVERSEER, THEN, MUST BE ABOVE REPROACH, THE HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE, TEMPERATE, PRUDENT, RESPECTABLE, HOSPITABLE, ABLE TO TEACH, 3 NOT ADDICTED TO WINE OR PUGNACIOUS, BUT GENTLE, PEACEABLE, FREE FROM THE LOVE OF MONEY.

THIS ISN'T TALKING ABOUT THE WIFE OF AN ELDER, BUT THE ELDER HIMSELF. JESUS, THE IDEAL "MAN", WASHES HIS DISCIPLES FEET SERVES THEM AND DECLARED:

MATTHEW 20:25-28 NLT - ...YOU KNOW THAT THE RULERS OF THIS WORLD LORD IT OVER THEIR PEOPLE, AND OFFICIALS FLAUNT THEIR AUTHORITY OVER THOSE UNDER THEM. 26 BUT AMONG YOU IT WILL BE DIFFERENT. WHOEVER WANTS TO BE A LEADER AMONG YOU MUST BE YOUR SERVANT, 27 AND WHOEVER WANTS TO BE FIRST AMONG YOU MUST BECOME YOUR SLAVE. 28 FOR EVEN THE SON OF MAN CAME NOT TO BE SERVED BUT TO SERVE OTHERS AND TO GIVE HIS LIFE AS A RANSOM FOR MANY."

ABRAHAM IS A STRONG MAN, A WARRIOR, A PATRIARCH OF A LARGE FAMILY AND AN OVERSEER OF A LARGE CARAVAN. AND HE IS A SERVANT! MEEKNESS (BEING GENTLE AND HUMBLE) IS NOT A WEAKNESS! THE IRONY OF THIS IS THAT FOR MOST MEN WHO LONG FOR RESPECT AND ARE GIVING AUTHORITY OVER THEIR HOMES BY GOD THINK THAT RESPECT AND AUTHORITY COME BY DEMANDING IT AND CLAIMING IT - BUT IN GOD'S PERSPECTIVE, RESPECT, AUTHORITY AND LEADERSHIP IS NOT GAINED BY LORDSHIP, BUT IN SERVICE.

IF THERE IS ANY DOUBT ABOUT THIS, CONSIDER WHEN JESUS GOT ON HIS KNEES AND WASHED THE FEET OF HIS DISCIPLES, THE JOB TYPICALLY RESERVED FOR THE LOWLIEST SERVANT. HERE HE WAS THE MASTER AND LORD WASHING THE FEET OF HIS DISCIPLES. AND YET DO YOU THINK THAT AS JESUS WASHED THEIR FEET, THERE WAS ANY DOUBT IN THE MINDS OF THE MEN GATHERED IN THAT ROOM WHO WAS THE LEADER OF THE GROUP?

MEN OF GOD SHOULD ASPIRE TO THIS. WOMEN OF GOD SHOULD ENCOURAGE THIS. OUR SONS SHOULD BE TAUGHT THIS AND OUR DAUGHTERS SHOULD KEEP AN EYE ON MEN WHO LIVE LIKE THIS.

GENESIS 18:9-11 - A PROMISE TO SARAH

AS WE DISCUSSED IN GENESIS 16, THE PRESSURE OF THE PROMISE OF GOD WAS WRONGLY RESTING IN SARAH'S SHOULDERS. WE OBSERVED THE FOLLOWING IN LIGHT OF SARAH'S PLAN TO HAVE ABRAHAM CONCEIVE A CHILD WITH HAGAR:

"PERHAPS SARAI WAS MOTIVATED BY FEELING BAD THAT SHE COULDN'T BE THE WIFE/MOTHER ABRAM NEEDED OR WANTED. PERHAPS SHE FELT LIKE HER BARRENNESS WAS THE REASON GOD'S PROMISE HADN'T COME TO PASS YET - LIKE IT WAS HER FAULT. MAYBE SHE EVEN MADE COMMENTS ABOUT THAT TO ABRAM. MAYBE ABRAM HAD MADE COMMENTS TO HER ABOUT THAT. CLEARLY ABRAM WAS NOT THE REASON THEY COULDN'T HAVE CHILDREN BECAUSE HE HAS NO PROBLEM THROUGH HAGAR. IT'S INTERESTING TO CONSIDER THE EMOTIONAL MOTIVATION FOR SARAI'S IDEA.

"THE MORE CLEARLY GOD'S PROMISES WERE SPELT OUT TO ABRAM, THE MORE CLEARLY SARAI SAW HERSELF AS A FAILURE...EACH PASSING YEAR DIMINISHED HER HOPES OF BECOMING A MOTHER AND OF GIVING TO ABRAM THE SON OF THE PROMISE. SHE SAW NO ANSWER TO HER PRAYERS AND MAY EASILY HAVE COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT SHE HAD FOR SOME REASON FORFEITED THE LORD'S FAVOR. IF SO, SHE WAS WRONG. THE VERY (OPPOSITE) WAS TRUE, BUT REASON, IN CONFLICT WITH FAITH, FOR THE TIME BEING WON THE DAY" (JOYCE BALDWIN, "THE MESSAGE OF GENESIS 12-50", PAGE 57)

AND SO NOW THE LORD SENDS 3 "MEN" (ANGELS) TO SARAH TO BRING THE NEWS SHE HAS BEEN WAITING FOR FOR ALMOST 25 YEARS. ONE OF THE MEN TELLS ABRAHAM (AFTER THEIR MEAL) THAT SARAH WOULD HAVE A SON BY THIS TIME NEXT YEAR! WHAT AN AMAZING PROMISE THAT IS FINALLY COMING TO PASS. IF THERE IS ANY DOUBT ABOUT THIS GREAT MOMENT, THE TEXT REMINDS US:

GENESIS 18:11 (NIV) - ABRAHAM AND SARAH WERE ALREADY VERY OLD, AND SARAH WAS PAST THE AGE OF CHILDBEARING.

WE ALL REMEMBER THAT SARAH WAS ACTUALLY BARREN (UNABLE TO HAVE CHILDREN) - AND SO NOW, EVEN IF SHE WAS NOT BARREN, SHE WAS OLD, AND BEYOND THE TIME WHEN HER BODY WAS ABLE TO HAVE CHILDREN. CAN YOU IMAGINE HOW SARAH MUST HAVE FELT TO FINALLY HEAR THIS NEWS!? THE TEXT TELL US WHAT SHE WAS THINKING.

GENESIS 18:12-15 - SARAH'S LAUGHTER

SARAH, LISTENING TO THE CONVERSATION ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE TENT RESPONDS TO THIS NEWS WITH LAUGHTER, AND LYING. WHEN CONFRONTED BY THE LORD (THROUGH A MESSAGE TO ABRAHAM), SHE ACTUALLY DENIES LAUGHING. SHE GETS CAUGHT (GOD KNOWS OUR HEARTS AND OUR THOUGHTS REMEMBER...) AND YET THE LORD WILL PROVE HIS WORD TRUE, REGARDLESS OF HER RESPONSE.

THE LORD TOLD ABRAHAM TO NAME HIS SON ISAAC (GENESIS 17:19) WHICH IS DERIVED FROM THE HEBREW WORD FOR LAUGHTER. THIS WAS TO REMIND ABRAHAM, EVERY TIME HE CALLED FOR HIS SON ABOUT HOW CRAZY IT IS THAT GOD WAS FAITHFUL TO HIS WORD TO THIS OLD MAN. FOR SARAH, THAT SAME NAME WILL REMIND HER OF HER DISBELIEF, AND HOPEFULLY AWAKEN HER TO HER NEED TO TRUST THE WORD OF THE LORD.

THERE IS A LITTLE BIT OF CONTRAST BETWEEN ABRAHAM AND SARAH IN THIS CRITICAL MOMENT. WE KNOW THAT ABRAHAM HAD LAUGHED IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER WHEN GOD TOLD HIM THAT ABRAHAM'S SON WOULD BE OF HIS OWN BIOLOGY AND THROUGH SARAH. BUT IT APPEARED THIS HIS LAUGH WAS NOT A REJECTION OF GOD'S PROMISE BY A LIGHT HEARTED - "I CANNOT BELIEVE THIS..." KIND OF RESPONSE. THE PROMISE OF GOD JUST SEEMS TOO WILD AT THIS POINT IN ABRAHAM'S LIFE - AND YET HE DOES NOT DOUBT WHAT THE LORD SAID HE WILL DO (NO MATTER HOW CRAZY IT SOUNDS!).

YET SARAH'S LAUGHTER SEEMS TO BE LAUGHTER FUELED BY DISBELIEF. SHE SEEMS TO LET OUT THE LAUGHTER FROM A HEART, NOT LIGHT, BUT HARD - HARDENED BY THE YEARS OF WAITING, YEARS OF SHAME, YEARS OF UNFULFILLED HOPES. PROVERBS 13:12 TELL US THAT "HOPE DEFERRED MAKES THE HEART SICK, BUT DESIRE FULFILLED IS A TREE OF LIFE." SARAH IS ON THE "SICK HEART" SIDE OF THE PROVERB.

BUT WHAT SHE MISSES IS THAT THIS PROMISE, AS ABSURD AS IT SOUNDS AND HOW LITTLE IT ALL MAKES SENSE AFTER THESE 24 YEARS - IS A PROMISE FROM THE LORD, THE MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH. SHE LACKS THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD THAT HER HUSBAND HAS, WHICH ALLOWS HIM TO REMAIN HOPEFUL DESPITE THE CIRCUMSTANCES.

THE LORD SAYS TO ABRAHAM "IS ANYTHING TOO DIFFICULT FOR THE LORD". IF THERE WAS ANY PHRASE TO MEMORIZE, MAKE CALLIGRAPHY OF, MAKE INTO A BUMPER STICKER AND POST ON SOCIAL MEDIA - IT'S THAT! IN FACT THIS IS A COMMON PHRASE IN SCRIPTURE, AND EVEN FROM THE MOUTH OF JESUS:

MATTHEW 19:26 - AND LOOKING AT THEM JESUS SAID TO THEM, "WITH PEOPLE THIS IS IMPOSSIBLE, BUT WITH GOD ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE."

MARK 14:36 - AND HE WAS SAYING, "ABBA! FATHER! ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE FOR YOU:

AND TO MARY, THE ANGEL SAID: FOR NOTHING WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE WITH GOD. (LUKE 1:37)"

OH IF WE COULD ONLY BE MORE LIKE ABRAHAM THAN SARAH IN A MOMENT LIKE THIS! WE SERVE THE GOD OF POSSIBLE IMPOSSIBILITIES! IS ANYTHING TOO DIFFICULT FOR THE LORD? UNIVERSES APPEAR THROUGH SPOKEN WORDS. OLD BARREN WOMEN HAVE CHILDREN. SEAS STAND UP ON TOP OF THEMSELVES AND DRY PATHWAYS APPEAR. WATER COMES FROM ROCKS. THE SUN STANDS STILL AT HIS COMMAND. GIANTS ARE SLAIN WITH SLINGSHOTS. ANGELS FIGHT BATTLES. HUNGRY LION'S MOUTHS ARE SHUT. FIERY FURNACES ARE FOUND TO BE FUTILE. GREAT FISH SWALLOW AND SPIT PEOPLE OUT. VIRGIN TEENAGERS BEAR SONS. BREAD AND FISH FEED THOUGHTS. DEAD PEOPLE RISE AGAIN. SHADOWS PASSING BY BRING HEALING TO THE SICK.

WHAT IMPOSSIBLE THING IS IN YOUR LIFE THAT YOU HAVE LAUGHED AT THE POSSIBILITY OF GOD'S INVOLVEMENT. YOUR SIN? YOUR SPOUSE? YOUR CHILDREN? YOUR JOB? YOUR HEALTH? YOUR CHURCH? HAVE YOU ALREADY DECLARE WHAT WILL BE OR DO YOU STILL BELIEVE THAT GOD CAN DO GREAT THINGS?! OH THAT WE COULD LAUGH LIKE ABRAHAM AT THE POSSIBILITY OF IMPOSSIBLE THINGS BEING DONE AND NOT LAUGH LIKE SARAH IN DISBELIEF THAT OUR GOD CAN DO "WHATEVER HE PLEASES." (PSALM 115:3)

GOD MAY NOT DO THE IMPOSSIBLE EVERY TIME WE ASK, BUT THAT DOES NOT MEAN HE *CANNOT* DO THE IMPOSSIBLE. THOSE ARE TWO VERY DIFFERENT THINGS. OUR JOB IS TO KEEP THE FAITH - AND OUR FAITH IS ROOTED IN THE LORD - THE ONE FOR WHOM THERE IS NOTHING, NOTHING, NOTHING, NO THING...THAT IS TOO DIFFICULT FOR HIM.