

Abraham Entertaining Angels Unawares

Abram

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Bible Text: Genesis 18:1-8
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The Scripture reading comes to us from Genesis 18. Genesis 18. The first eight verses serve as our text for this evening, and because of the length, we won't be re-reading those so pay particular attention to them. Genesis 18.

1 And the LORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; 2 And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, 3 And said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant: 4 Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree: 5 And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do, as thou hast said. 6 And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth. 7 And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetcht a calf tender and good, and gave it unto a young man; and he hasted to dress it. 8 And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat. 9 And they said unto him, Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent. 10 And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him. 11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. 12 Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also? 13 And the LORD said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? 14 Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son. 15 Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh. 16 And the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way. 17 And the LORD said, Shall I hide from

Abraham that thing which I do; 18 Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? 19 For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him. 20 And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; 21 I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know. 22 And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the LORD.

We stop in our reading of the Scriptures at that point.

Genesis 18, the first eight verses, serve as our text for tonight. This is, I believe, the 12th sermon in this series on Abraham and the content of this passage of Scripture serves very very well for an applicatory sermon. Applicatory is, as the word says, an effort to apply the significance of the sacrament. The sacrament is that God gave us to be able to partake of the death of Jesus Christ. Well, just as there are three parts in the proper examination of ourselves and the three parts of the principle parts of the doctrine of holy baptism and the three parts that we have of the Heidelberg Catechism, that third part, that applicatory part is to apply that truth that's given to us. Now we know that the third part of the Heidelberg Catechism is that of gratitude, so how can we thank the Lord for what he has given to us in the sacrament. A part of our examination of ourselves points in this direction, that a part of our examination was that we love each other, brothers and sisters in Christ, and that we not just love in word, say we love them, but we love in deed.

Well, that's that which this passage of Scripture highlights and we've entitled this passage "Entertaining Angels Unawares." The appropriateness of that as our title is because it comes to us out of the word of God as it's found in the book of Hebrews 13. First verse, "Let brotherly love continue." The second verse, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." Then it continues and this is appropriate for later in the sermon so let's read it now, Hebrews 13:3, "Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body."

Abraham entertained angels unawares. He lifted up his eyes and he saw three men approaching and then standing before him. The Bible says that upon seeing them, Abraham ran to meet them. He did not want them to walk past and pass him by. He specifically was conscious of that possibility. "If now I have found favor in thy sight, pass not away. Don't keep going on your path. Come in. Stop." He did not wait for them to approach him. "Let's see if they'll come up and talk to me before I talk to them." He ran to meet them in order to talk with them. In fact, he admits that he would have been grieved if they had passed on without his stopping them to talk with him.

Notice this too, Abraham is wealthy. Abraham is rich. Abraham is a man of position. His wealth gave him importance. "Well, if some strangers go by, I'm important. They should address me." But quite the reverse is true. Abraham saw them as being of greater importance than he is so when he came up to them, the very first thing he did was, verse 2, "bowed himself toward the ground." He didn't just bow his head, to bow yourself to the ground is that he got on his knees. He wanted them to realize that he thought them more important than himself and he speaks of his obligation to them. "If I have found favor in thy sight. I don't deserve favor. I don't deserve your favoring me with conversation or with your presence, but if I have found favor in thy sight, if it's your pleasure to give that favor to me." Then he's begging, he's asking, he's pleading, "I pray thee." Then twice he refers to himself as their servant. "You're more important. I am your slave. I am in your service." Then the image of the entrance of Jesus and the disciples in the Upper Room comes to our minds because he immediately says, "Let me bring some water so that I can wash your dirty feet. You've been walking. Let me refresh you by washing your feet. I will be that of a servant."

He continues in that same attitude by looking at what he was going to give to them as being of little significance. He speaks of a little water and he speaks of a morsel of bread. Just let me give you, we had morsels, maybe rather nice sized morsels but we had morsels. Who is going to give them a morsel? No, "Take three measures of flour and let me get a fatted calf and butter and milk." He gave the best that he had and that was of no little significance given the wealth that was his and he set it before those strangers but he did it belittling himself.

Then concern about their time, not his time, their time, he went about this hastening. Hastening, that's given to us there for a purpose, to imply, "Your time is very important. I will hurry to do what I can for you."

Then he serves them. He's the waiter and the picture that you get at the end of verse 8 is that they're in the shadow and the shade of this tree, not out in the hot sun, and he's hovering around. He's not eating with them. "Let's sit down and have a meal together." No, "Here's a meal for you and I am going to serve you." And he's like one of those waiters or waitresses that won't go away so that you can talk. He's going to hover over them to make sure that every one of their needs are met. He's going to anticipate what they need before they ask.

That's what Abraham did. We're taught from commentaries but also from other books that describe the history of the world at that day, that it was very customary in the patriarchal period for you to do this. This was an expected activity to host any stranger. Not just for a meal but for a night too. They didn't have hotels. They didn't have tents that they could lightly carry. They were to host them. Now part of the reason was a bit selfish in that customary period because that's how they learned what was going on in the other parts of the world, other parts of their country. "What's going on in the cities that you came from? What's the news?" They would keep up-to-date on the news by hosting strangers.

Now while that's customary, what Abraham did and the manner in which he did it excelled. It excelled just like every child of God should excel over against that of an unbeliever in doing the same things that they would do. They may outwardly appear to be doing the same thing but the calling and the responsibility of a child of God is to do it out of mercy. Mercy. Out of deep-seated pity. Abraham's mercy excelled because the power of his hospitality was mercy. It was pity.

It is the nature not only of us today but it's the nature of every child and daughter of Adam to be very self-centered and very selfish. Philippians 2 addresses that powerfully. Paul says, "Fulfill my joy, ye saints at Philippi. Be of the same mind. Be of one accord. Be of one mind. Have the same love. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory but rather in humility and lowliness of mind, esteem others better than themselves. Not select which ones I'm going to esteem better than myself because they are better than me in my worldly estimation, but I will esteem all the others better than myself. Look not every man on his own things. You may look on them but don't look only on one's own things but every man also on the things of the others." Think what's going on in their life? What should I be praying for them? What do I know to be their needs? Their hurts? Their crosses?

That attitude is what the Spirit of Christ in a child of God works. He works not only a love for him but a brotherly and sisterly love for one another. Those who have received gracious regeneration, those who have received merciful justification, those who are the constant object of God's gracious sanctification are going to live out a sanctified life graciously, mercifully. They have received what they don't deserve. We receive always what we do not deserve and never forgetting that more than any others in all the world, we who esteem grace, we who speak of grace more than anything and rightly so because that's what the word says, the doctrines of grace is the way some have correctly summarized the Canons of Dort, the doctrines of grace, the teachings about God's giving undeserved love, that we would then show that one to another and to others.

That's the significance of this event. The Spirit uses this very powerfully to apply that word which we read out of Hebrews 13, "Be not forgetful," and what an interesting way to speak of entertaining strangers. By the way, the word that's translated "hospitality," you'll find hospitable and hospitality in the King James version, that Greek word is literally phileo, love, xenia, stranger. Hospitality means love of stranger. You're not, then, literally being hospitable when you host family, host friends. That's not literal hospitality. Hospitality is when you host, love strangers.

Now immediately we all become very cautious. Today in this day and age, just strangers? When some coming to the door asking for gas and Sue doesn't like it when I go with them to the gas station and I understand, strangers? That could be dangerous. But instead of letting the culture of today dictate how we conduct ourselves, we still must let the Scriptures dictate how we conduct ourselves. Now we don't do it without caution, we don't do it carelessly, but still, let's listen. God more than once reminded the children of Israel that they were strangers in the land of Egypt as the reason for why they should conduct themselves well toward strangers. Deuteronomy 10:18-19, "He doth execute the

judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment. Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt."

Deuteronomy 31:12, "Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law." Men, women, your children and your strangers, you're going to have strangers passing through, gather them. They're not excused from your gathering to hear the word. Gather them with you. Exodus 22:21, the same thing.

Do you remember the three older friends that came to visit Job and they were all of the mind and Job was too, that bad things happen to you because you sinned. Now that's what confounded Job. Why did he lose everything in one day when he was not able to identify anything that he did that was bad? So Job ended up charging God falsely but he had this presupposition, "These bad things happened because he did bad." The three friends, the three older friends, were of the same mind and they constantly in their exchange with Job kept trying to point out things that he might have done wrong which was the occasion for God bringing this bad thing to happen to him. Eliphaz in chapter 22 says this to Job, "Thou hast stripped the naked of their clothing. Thou hast not given water to the weary to drink, and thou hast withholden bread from the hungry." And the irony of it is who was hosting these three men? Job, but they wanted to charge him with that kind of a sin.

Now that's part of the Old Testament law, right, so just like the other ceremonial? No, it's not a part of the ceremonial laws and it's not a part of the civil laws. The apostles show that those Old Testament commandments about entertaining strangers remain true in the new dispensation. Romans 12, "Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality," verse 13. 1 Peter 4:9, "Use hospitality one to another without grudging." Hebrews 13, we read verse 3, listen to verse 16, "But to do good and to communicate," literally to serve, "forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

Do you remember Jesus' parable about the judgment day in Matthew 25? Very interesting when he speaks to the goats and then to the sheep. If we didn't have this and if we weren't familiar with it and we had to make a list of what the king would say the goats didn't do that the sheep did, I believe, I guess I'm going to judge you by me, that very few of us would list the things that Jesus did. "I was an hungered," he says to the sheep, "and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you took me in. Naked and you clothed me. Sick and you visited me. I was in prison and ye came unto me." And to the goats, "You didn't." That's the criteria that Jesus has the king use for what's to be approved in the kingdom and Jesus shows further in that this powerful truth, "Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it to me." Angels unawares? Jesus unawares? You do it to me when you do it to the least, the one you would consider the least of his brethren.

Again, if we had to write James 1:27, I don't know if we would write what James was inspired to write, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." We probably would say that but would we say to visit the fatherless and the widows?

This remains our calling. It demonstrates that we are not focused just on ourselves but also on others, and what it condemns is that natural self-centeredness. Jesus when he wanted to talk about what it meant to be his disciple, listed three things. The third was follow him. The first was to be my disciple, deny self. Deny yourself. When we deny ourselves, then we're ready to take up the crosses that he gives to us. When we deny ourselves, then we're interested in him and others that he has bought with his blood.

God calls us through this concept of what happened with Abraham and these strangers to work to strive to walk in all new obedience, specifically with generosity, cordiality and with friendliness, inviting not just family and friends to our homes and tables but even strangers. The list of such that God would have us show that kind of mercy to are those in the body who are identified as not just strangers but the fatherless and the widows.

Yesterday and Friday night, I was made conscious of a need in the church, that there are members who can be easily forgotten because they're single. God did not bring them a mate. Singles must be included in the organic life of the church in a conscious way. Now speaking about myself, that's not something that I'm readily conscious of, not like I am now after yesterday. It's good that we don't identify our Bible studies as Mr. and Mrs. because then they would have their own group. No, they're as important as all the other members and belong in any and every Bible study that there is, and when we gather out and we have in our arms a little one or one grabbing our skirts, it is so easy to talk about marriage, husbands, children, and they can't speak. They're not a part of that because we're talking about things that are not real for them. They are to be included. They are a part of the body. Maybe they're a less numbered part of the body, not one of the fingers and toes, but they are a part of the body and so the divorced for legitimate reasons and all the others are to be included in our prayers, in our hospitality, in our concern, in our conversations, and into our homes.

We're not likely to entertain angels but we sure are likely to entertain Jesus. When you do it to the least of these, you do it to me. So now read again what Abraham did and emulate his example and strive with greater zeal to be careful that we never forget that this attitude must be evidenced in our homes.

Here's another part of that. It's very easy sometimes because they come and then they go, to be very gracious and sweet in our conversation to those who come to visit us but then to turn around and the attitude that we have towards those that are in the home with us all the time, we would.... Have you ever observed or ever done, you've just had some strong words and tensions and then the phone rings, "Hello!" You can do it. You can control yourself. We can do it. We can do it here too. And again, the heart of Abraham's conduct was not that he did it just like everybody else all around him, they all wanted to hear the

news, they wanted to hear strangers, but he did it because he was the object of undeserved grace and mercy and love and that's what we give and must give to each other.

Ephesians speaks of not provoking our children to wrath. Well, it's not just we can provoke a husband or a wife or children or parents to wrath when we're just as great when we're with our friends, but when we get home, we can't talk. We can talk with our buddies but we can't talk to dad and mom. Nothing to say. We can be gracious but not gracious. The ability to be gracious to others begins by being gracious in the home.

Finally this, God encouraged, greatly encouraged Abraham and us when he showed that the attitude that Abraham had received God's blessing. These heavenly guests that came to him, just think of how honored you would be if some important dignitary would be able to come to your home and you would host them for a meal. God, he learned quickly and Sarah too, this is Jehovah, this is God or Jesus Christ in this Old Testament form right there with them. What an honor. But again, we can host Jesus. We touch Jesus when we give to the hungry and to the needy, to the stranger, to the imprisoned.

Abraham was cheered by God at this visit. He not only had God visiting him but God gave him the wonderful news, "Abraham, you're going to have a child." And he repeated it on this occasion. The way in which God spoke about Abraham in verses 17, 18 and 19, God treated him as a friend and he communicated to him about what he was going to do to Sodom and Gomorrah. They communicated. God and Abraham communicated. What a privilege was Abraham. He received a blessing for that and God cured, began the work of curing Sarah of her unbelief. She learned those beautiful and powerful words that every one of us have to know, "With God nothing is impossible." And her faith was encouraged that she would conceive a son in her old age. The joy that she expresses at being able to give a child suck, to nurse an infant, she would be able to do that, something that she undoubtedly craved for years and then ceased expecting or wanting or realizing that it could happen. God gave that to her so that in Hebrews 11:11, "Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised." She got the promise now, this visit gave her that promise, and that promise encouraged her to exercise the faith to believe it and in the way of her believing it, God says by faith she conceived.

Incentive for us to be hospitable is the realization that we're entertaining Jesus. Jesus proclaims that his heart goes out to those that are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. He knew what it was to be despised, rejected and forsaken. To have compassion on the friendless, yes, it's true some today don't want to have friends, but to have compassion on the friendless is true hospitality.

Now when Jesus says that in that final reckoning such hospitality is to be viewed more highly than those who said, "I prophesied in your name and I cast out devils in your name," but hospitality is to be valued highly, that does not mean that Jesus is ranking hospitality as a work that earns for us our way to the kingdom of heaven. That can't be the meaning. It cannot. But rather he's teaching this, that the love that's manifested in

those deeds of giving food to the hungry, compassion to the wayward, that love that's manifested in that evidences the work of Jesus in us. We know what Jesus did for us and we're emulating it, reflecting it, evidencing it, and that conduct by Abraham represents covenant, God's love for even us and that loving friendship which God gives to his people, and that kind of a communion between God and his people, that's what enables us to conduct ourselves with one another.

He died. You ate. He's a part of you. We were hosted at his table. May we show that we know what it is to be so graced. Amen.

We pray, Father, that thy word, that that which we heard was thy word and only thy word, but now may the Lord Jesus be the real instructor, taking that word, putting it in our understanding. May we seek to see whether that which we heard is so as the Bereans did, and may it become a part of our mind, our earnest resolution, our earnest resolve, and of our life more and more to show that we know what it is to be loved by thee. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Genesis 18:1-8
ABRAHAM ENTERTAINING ANGELS UNAWARES

- I. Interesting event.
 - A. Abraham was sitting in his tent door when he saw three wayfarers passing near him (1,2a).
 - 1. He “ran” toward them. He did not wait to be approached, but stopped them; he would have been grieved if they passed by.
 - 2. Then he, a prince, sees them as of greater importance than himself: “bowed himself toward the ground” humbled himself.
 - a. He is obliged to them: “if I have found favor in thy sight,” “I pray thee,” “thy servant” (two times), “wash your feet.”
 - b. And he belittles his gifts to them: “little water,” “a morsel (fragment, bit) of bread” (fine flour, fatted calf, butter).
 - B. It definitely was the custom of that day to receive strangers, giving them the best and serving them first.
 - 1. Sin always separates and divides, closing the heart to others, but the Spirit of Christ opens it wide in brotherly love.
 - 2. This is the fruit of God’s merciful work of regeneration and justification, evidencing the experience of God’s mercy.
- II. The significance of this event is found in the Spirit using it as an powerful example of hospitality (Hebrews 13:2).
 - A. God commanded hospitality to the stranger, as that given to family (Ex. 22:21; Deut. 10:18,19; 31:12).
 - 1. The apostles show that this principle of the O.T. law continues into the New: Rom. 12:13; I Peter 4:9; Heb. 13:16).
 - 2. Jesus commends hospitality in the judgment day (Matt. 25:35,36,42,43) and shows that it touches Him (Matt. 25:40,45).
 - B. This remains our calling, though our circumstances have changed.
- III. God rewards those who reflect Him and He delights in compassion to the stranger, fatherless and widow.
 - A. The day that these heavenly guests visited was a day of rich blessing for Abraham and Sarah.
 - B. Incentive for real hospitality is the realization that that we are entertaining Jesus Christ Himself.
 - C. Jesus does not mean that hospitality is a work which earned one’s way into the kingdom of heaven, but that the love manifested in hospitality evidences the work of Jesus in one.