

But God

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Preacher: Dr. Daniel Heeringa

[0 : 00] Turn to Genesis chapter 18. Genesis chapter 18. I'm going to stand right here this morning. Because if I don't, I'm going to make a mess. We go back to a special place today.

Our passage brings us back to the Oaks of Mamre. That's a special place. It was there under those oaks that an altar was built.

By Abraham. It was built when he was called Abram. And when he and Lot split and God promised Abram the land as far as he could see it.

God told him to walk it. And being blessed, Abram built an altar to honor the Lord for the paving of his path.

Now he returns to those same oaks. God's doing a new work in his life.

[1 : 07] Refortifying another promise to Abraham and Sarah. And there is much that we can learn from this event. It's in Genesis chapter 18.

Beginning in verse 1 it says this. And the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre. As he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day.

He lifted up his eyes and looked. And behold three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them he ran from the tent door. To meet them and bowed himself to the earth.

And said, O Lord. If I found favor in your sight. Do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought. And wash your feet. And rest yourself under the tree.

While I bring a morsel of bread. That you may refresh yourselves. And after you have passed on. Since you have come to your servant. So they said, do as you've said. And Abram went quickly into the tent to Sarah.

[2 : 04] And said, quick. Three seeds of fine flour. Knead it and make cakes. And Abram ran to the herd and took a calf and tender and good.

And gave it to the young man. To a young man who prepared it quickly. Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared. And set it before them. And he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

They said to him. Where is Sarah your wife? And he said. She's in the tent. The Lord said.

I will surely return to you about this time next year. And Sarah your wife shall have a son. And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him.

Now Abraham and Sarah were old. Advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. So Sarah laughed to herself and said. After I am worn out. And my Lord is old.

[3 : 03] Shall I have pleasure? And the Lord said to Abraham. Why did Sarah laugh and say. Shall I indeed bear a son now that I am old? Is anything too hard for the Lord?

At the appointed time I will return to you. About this time next year. And Sarah shall have a son. But Sarah denied it. Saying. I did not laugh.

For she was afraid. He said no. But you did laugh. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father. Heavenly Father. Heavenly Father. I pray today. That you'll help us.

Not only to gain a better understanding. Of what happened under the oaks. And Mamre. And what happened in the days that followed. God. I pray that you'll help us. To see the relevance.

That it has to our lives today. Dear God. I pray Lord. That you will give us. Encouragement. Where encouragement is needed. And conviction.

[3 : 57] Where conviction is needed. And hope. Where hope is needed. Dear God. And compassion. Where compassion is needed. Allow your sweet Holy Spirit. To speak to us.

Exactly as we need to hear it. Father. Personalize it. Customize it. For us. Oh God. And have your will. And your way. In our midst. I pray. In Jesus name. Amen.

Did you catch it? There's three men that came. And it's not just three men. It is apparently two angels.

And the Lord. Now there's much to learn from this. And the first thing you need to know is this. God comes to us. It's not that we come to him.

He comes to us. I don't know that Abraham recognized what was happening. But when they came. He bowed as they walked up. He bowed all the way to the ground.

[4 : 56] Now a bow in that culture was like a handshake. Normally not much more than a head nod. But this was different. What Abraham did as they walked up was a rare display of honor.

And then he provided water so that they could refresh themselves. He had to know something was up. But he didn't quite know what. And the reason why is because sometimes God shows up unrecognized.

At least at first. Remember it happened after the resurrection. Jesus was mistaken for the gardener in the garden by one who knew him well. Meaning recognizing.

He was not recognized on the road to Emmaus. By those that should have recognized him. Until he ate with them. When Jesus stood on the shore with seven of his disciples.

That he had walked with for over three years. As they fished. They didn't recognize him. Until they made the big catch. By following his directions. But he was there.

[6 : 04] Before the big catch. I believe it was Christ that Joshua saw. When he saw the one standing before him with a sword drawn.

In Joshua chapter 5. Joshua asked him. Are you for us? Or one of our adversaries? And the man answered no. But I am. I love that.

Did you get that? Are you with us? Or our adversaries? And it says the man said no. But I am the commander of the army of the Lord.

Now I have come. And then Joshua recognized immediately. And knelt down before him. I believe it was Christ that was the fourth man in the fiery furnace.

That heated up seven times beyond normal. For Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. For when the king looked in. He saw men no longer bound. But freely walking around.

[7 : 01] And he saw four. And pagans looked in and saw the fourth man. And said that he looked like the son of God. In fact, he was the son of God. The presence of God is often missed.

But I assure you, he comes to us. Revelation chapter 3 verse 20. A familiar passage says, Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I'll come into him and eat with him and he with me.

A very familiar passage that we often use evangelically. But in reality, we speak of those that need Christ. But that's not really what the passage is talking about.

Because if you look at what happens in Revelation chapter 1, 2, and 3. He's addressing the church of Jesus Christ. That's spread out across Asia Minor. In seven different churches.

Representative of that whole region. In one region. And so in reality, who he's talking to is the church. And he is saying he is the one that is pursuing. He is the one that comes to us.

[8 : 05] And sadly, not only do they not recognize him sometimes, but we don't recognize him. Things change in this passage when these visitors are eating and they ask about Sarah.

What in the world? It wasn't long ago that her name was Sarai. And now these strangers, these visitors are asking about Sarah. Abraham and Sarah had to know something was up then.

This is not just where a fair are strangers. They knew who Abraham and Sarah was. So first two of them are angels.

Now, I really want you to understand what angels are. Because there's a lot of misunderstandings and ideas about angels that are not biblical at all.

Naked babies with bird wings are not angels. Pasty face women in white robes do not reflect what the Bible teaches.

[9 : 11] The Bible instead speaks of them as messengers that come to worship God, give guidance from God, or to protect for God.

I heard somebody say one time that the angels are there protecting God. I'm sorry. That's not true. He don't need our protection. But we sure need protection, spiritual protection.

And God sends angels to give that to us. They are spiritual, but they can come in human form. As a matter of fact, the Hebrew writer warns us in Hebrews chapter 13, verse 2, Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

You may not know who you're messing with. And here they're in physical forms like humans, and they can be touched, and they can talk, and they can eat, and they can drink.

But notice in the passage it says that God himself is the one that speaks. We still have a hard time sometimes recognizing that God, when he comes to see us, we sometimes don't listen when he speaks into our lives, and when he gives us guidance, and when he silently walks with us in our valleys.

[10 : 30] But I don't want you to make a mistake today. God comes to us. The second thing is, God wants us to serve him.

I want you to notice the welcome that Abraham gave. He gave them, he wanted them to refresh themselves, and while he brought them what he said would be a morsel of bread, a morsel of bread.

He killed the fatted calf and took about five gallons of flour to make bread. He brought fresh milk and cheese for them to eat.

It was like he was feeding an army because he gave the best that he had. I had the opportunity a couple of times to travel overseas to Southeast Asia and to teach doctrine, theological doctrine, to leaders of the persecuted church.

We met in hiding, and I saw this example carried out. We taught all morning. Lunchtime came, and they ushered us into a small room that had a table there and two chairs and a heated concrete bed that another could sit on.

[12 : 03] Often in their circumstances, in the poverty-riven areas, they had their oven on the opposite side of the wall, and the chute where the smoke would come out went under this concrete base and heated that bed and then came up a chute and went out.

And so what you had in the cold was a heated concrete bed, and they purposely put us in somebody's bedroom so that we would be comfortable, so that we would relax, and encouraged us to make sure that we rest.

And the translator, my co-teacher, and I sat down, and they brought to us a meal that was twice the size of a typical Chinese meal. Typically, they'd have a dish for each person there.

If there were three people eating, there'd be three separate dishes to be shared. Not really a plate, maybe a bowl of rice that you could put things in and eat out of, but then oftentimes you would just eat out of your side.

But for us, the three of us, they brought seven different dishes out. I remember the stew beef that was mixed in with some beans.

[13 : 33] That first day, we ate the stew beef out of the beans, and the next day, they just brought us the stew beef because they knew that's what we wanted. And then one day after that lunch break, when we walked back in, I noticed what they were eating.

The people in that room were eating the, had the water from the rice they had fixed for us. And in that rice, they had boiled some very bland-looking vegetables.

And they were having a rice broth vegetable soup with a steamed bun they called a bowser.

Just a steamed roll. They had done without and sacrificially given their very best to us.

That's all God requires of us is to give our best. Serving leads to intimate fellowship.

[14 : 54] It leads to intimate fellowship with the Lord. That fellowship with the Father and fellowship with His people are stronger. Serving is what makes the church strong.

When we work alongside one another in the kingdom, it makes us strong. If you want to make the most of your church experience and to gain the most that you can out of Pickens First Baptist and put the most that you can back into First Baptist, then you faithfully gather in worship.

We're approaching summer. I will warn you. The devil will distract you along the way. I will always encourage you. Don't miss the extraordinary events of your life.

Take them. Enjoy them. Go. But don't just miss for the ordinary because the devil loves to sidetrack us about the ordinary things.

But you be faithful together, together. Be faithful to grow. Find yourself a small group. Let us help you do that. A small group where you can grow your lives together around God's Word and grow in Him.

[16 : 19] If you're just worshiping in this hour with us, I hope you're blessed because I know that we have spirit-filled worship in this room, and I'm thankful for that.

I'm thankful for those who lead us today. I'm thankful that other churches ask some from our church to come lead them for a special service. That says something, folks, and I'm thankful for that. And I may not do a good job of it, but I promise you I'll preach God's Word each and every time you come to this place.

But if you want to grow in the Lord, you need to venture out and find your small group, a Sunday school class, these small group Bible studies that we do, and make sure that you connect with folks like that.

And then, thirdly, to serve. To go in His name. Find a place for you to serve. And I would love to take time this morning to talk about all the different areas of voluntary service that we have in this building on Sunday morning and the people that get here early and the people that stay late and then the ways of serving and all the mission opportunities that we have.

I'm not going to start listing those things because I'll miss somebody and they'll get mad at me and they'll defeat the whole purpose. Because I don't think we do it for recognition.

[17:41] I think we do it for the Lord. If you want to know what it's like to live for the Lord Jesus, then you worship Him together and you find folks that walk along with you with commonalities in your life and dig deeper in God's Word together and walk through some valleys together and bond together through that and then go out and serve in His name.

Welcome people into the body of Christ. It makes a whole lot of difference when we work alongside one another in the kingdom. It makes us stronger. And remember when we serve others, we're serving the Lord.

He said that Himself. Let's just not miss the opportunity to tell them why we're doing what we're doing and how Christ has changed our lives.

I want you to know this morning that God comes to us and God wants us to serve Him in response. And also I want you to know that God can do anything.

He really can. God can do anything. Some of you are struggling with some stuff today. You've got areas of your life where there's some doubt about exactly how and what God's going to do.

[19:02] And I can't answer that for you. But I can answer this. God can do anything. Abraham is told by one of those men that this time next year they will have a son.

But it was not just one of those men. The Word of God says it was the Lord. It was the human form of the pre-incarnate Christ, I believe.

And so what God is saying to Abraham is, Abraham, it's time. What you've been waiting on for decades, I'm going to fulfill what I said I would do.

And Abraham heard what he had been waiting on. And I really don't think that Abraham was surprised. Because remember, we just looked, I believe last week, at the reiteration of the covenant that had come to Abraham as recorded in Genesis chapter 17.

And I believe it fixed his vision. I believe not only was his skin circumcised, but I believe his heart was circumcised. I believe he knew that God was at work and he was ready to let God do what God wanted to do.

[20:10] And I don't believe he had any doubt in it. But Sarah was sitting in the next tent. And Sarah heard what they said.

And she was not so sure. And in the midst of that, she laughed to herself. The way that Hebrew reads there, it was not a belly laugh, not a loud laugh, just a laugh to herself.

Probably a, huh. Just under her breath. And scripture gives us an insight into what she was thinking when she did it.

And it says that her question was, shall I at my age have such pleasure? And that word pleasure speaks of a rare, exclusive luxury to very few.

Am I at 90? Can I have a child? Shall I indeed bear a child now that I am old?

[21:18] Was the question that she asked. And when she said old there, that literally means worn out. It's kind of like old, shabby clothes. You know, when they get comfortable, you know. When they wore out, you know.

There was a day, young people, when you bought clothes that didn't have holes in them. And they got that way after you wore them too long. I know that sounds strange, but anyway.

To be honest, this is about as shocking as when Gabriel came to Zacharias and while he was well advanced in years and telling them that Elizabeth would bear a son. And she was so shocked that, he was so shocked that he questioned it.

And he was mute until the child was born. I don't believe it's quite as shocking as when Gabriel told a teenage virgin that she was going to bear the son of God.

But I believe it's still a shock. But I want you to understand that God can do anything. We don't always believe that, but he can. And ironically, because we struggle to believe it, get this, because we struggle to believe it, we see less of it.

[22 : 21] Jesus said in Matthew 13, verse 58, excuse me, it says of Jesus in Matthew 13, verse 58, Jesus did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief.

Now, understand something. We don't have the power to limit God. That's not what I'm saying at all, and that's not what Scripture says. But he chooses to work in those that believe. And oh, how we need to see the but gods in our life.

We need to be like Jacob when he recognized God's intervention. In Genesis 31, verse 42, it says, if the God, Jacob said, if the God of my father, the God of Abraham, the fear and the God of Isaac, excuse me, and the fear of Isaac had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed.

We need to be like Joseph who was betrayed by his brothers and was falsely accused and placed in prison and then forgotten. But in the end, saw God's hand upon it the whole time.

And in Genesis 50, verse 20, he said, as for you to his brothers, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good to bring it about that many people shall be kept alive as they are today.

[23 : 43] We need to recognize the protective hand of God as seen in David's life. In 1 Samuel 23, verse 14, and it says, and David remained in the strongholds, in the wilderness, in the hill country of the wilderness of Ziph, and Saul sought him every day, but God did not give him into his hand.

Can you say with the psalmist that you know where your strength is? Psalm 73, verse 26 says, my flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

When the lame man was healed in the temple gate called Beautiful, Peter wanted him to know why he was healed. And he said, and he wanted to know how and why he was healed.

And in Acts 3, verse 16, he said, and his name, by faith in his name, he's talking about the Lord, by faith in his name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know.

And the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all. He is saying, don't you look at me, look at him. It's a but God moment.

[24 : 59] But oh, let me show you the best, best but God in scripture. It's in Ephesians chapter 2. And don't let the extended nature of this passage ever lose the meaning or the weight of it.

I want you to hear this this morning. And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of the flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind.

And we by nature, children of wrath, like the rest of mankind, but God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

By grace you've been saved and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

For by grace you've been saved through faith. This is not of your own doing. It is a gift. It is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one can boast for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared us beforehand, that we should walk in them.

[26 : 42] The same God that did the miraculous for Abraham and Sarah. The same God that did the miraculous on all those occasions that I brought up today is the same God that can do the miraculous for us.

And I want you to understand something today. The greatest miracle is not to bring life. The greatest miracle is not to sustain life.

The greatest miracle is not to lengthen life. The greatest miracle is to give life and life more abundant and life eternal and life sanctified and life justified and life promised to be glorified.

The greatest miracle is life in Christ. And you may say, oh preacher, you don't know what I'm dealing with. You don't know what's going on in my life.

And you know what? You're right. But God does. You say, you don't understand the road that I'm dealing with is really tough.

[27 : 50] And I don't know the answers. You know what? I don't either. But God does. You may not know what's ahead.

And I sure don't. But God does. And He's already there. So rest, my friend. Renew, my friend. Rejoice, my friend. God's in the midst. I pray you have a but God moment in your life because it changes everything.

With every head bowed and every eye closed, I want to ask you something this morning. Has there ever been a time in your life when you have said, Lord, I don't have the answers and there's sin in my life and things that I've done wrong and I need forgiveness and I need cleansing and I need you to change me.

And today I ask you, dear God, to forgive me of my sins. I ask you to come into my life and empower me. I ask that you'll indwell me with the Holy Spirit of God and that you'll give me a life that's more abundant, a life that's more free, a life that's full.

[29 : 18] God, I realize that you made me for yourself and made me to be in relationship with you and so God, today I surrender my life to you. Folks, I don't care what protocol you've been through in your life in the past religiously.

If you've never surrendered your life to the Lord Jesus Christ, that's what needs to happen today. You need to settle that and know that beyond a shadow of a doubt. Maybe you've done that privately but you've never done it publicly.

You've never acknowledged that. How important it is, scripture points to it again and again in the words of Jesus and the examples of Paul that we ought to be bold in our faith toward others. Jesus gave us the example that we ought to be baptized as believers and then commissioned us to do that very thing. And so, if there's never been a time in your life when you've acknowledged your faith in Christ publicly through baptism, I never told anybody really what God's done in your life, I encourage you to come this morning.

Let me guide you in that process. Maybe God's drawing you to this church and you know that God would have you to be a part of this fellowship. We're not perfect and nor are you.

[30 : 28] We'll be great together. Let's just follow God and do what God would have us to do together. together. You come and I'll be happy to guide you in that process.

Most likely, most of who I deal with this morning are people who are struggling. Maybe they have a faith in God but they're struggling in an area of their life and you need to be reminded today that there's a but God in the midst.

He'll answer your woe and He'll deal with your situation and you need to turn that over to Him today. That loved one you're burdened for, that crisis that's in your life, that thing that's wavering, that struggle that you have, turn that over to the Lord today.

Give it to Him. Trust Him with it. God can do anything and He loves when we trust Him and hand it to Him. Lord Jesus, I love you and I thank you for the love that you have for us.

Thank you Lord for the examples that you give us of guys who lived thousands of years ago and how they trusted you and they wavered some and then they trusted again and how you were always so faithful.

[31 : 49] Help us, oh God, to be faithful to you and to trust your faithfulness, God, I pray. In Jesus' precious name, Amen. Amen.