

# **BFFs FOREVER**

## Studies in the Life of Abraham

Text

Genesis 18:1-15

Topic

After Abraham and Sarah show hospitality to the Lord,  
He tells them that Sarah will conceive and bear a son

Title

*Womb Service*

Introduction

I'm not revealing anything you don't already know when I tell you that I can be pretty dense.

A few years ago Geno and I were in SoCal at a Peet's Coffee Shop. We just so happened to be talking about movies and, at the time, some new animated feature written and directed by Tim Burton was about to be released.

As we were talking about it, a guy walked in. He overheard us and casually mentioned something about the film. Something along the lines of having just seen the final pre-release copy. We acknowledged him, exchanged a comment or two, but I didn't give it much thought.

It should have been a clue when the barista called him, "Tim." But not to me. Only later did I think it might have been Tim Burton. Then I found a picture of him and, yeah, it was him.

He wasn't trying to hide his identity so much as I just didn't recognize him.

In our text three “men” suddenly appear in the vicinity of Abraham’s tent. It’s pretty clear that Abraham doesn’t immediately recognize them. They are strangers to whom he shows incredible hospitality.

Later in the story one the “men” will reveal Himself to Abraham and Sarah as the Lord. A little later still you find out the other two “men” were really powerful angels who go on to deliver Lot before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The Lord **hid** Himself from Abraham, then He **showed** Himself to Abraham and Sarah. I hope to be able to show you that Jesus loves to hide and then show Himself.

Why? There are lots of reasons the Lord hides, then shows, Himself. We’ll deal with the two in our text in Genesis as I organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Jesus Will Sometimes Hide Himself To Elicit Your Hospitality, and #2 Jesus Will Sometimes Show Himself To Elucidate His Impossibilities.

#1 Jesus Will Sometimes Hide Himself  
To Elicit Your Hospitality  
(v1-8)

Jesus loved to hide Himself in order to elicit a response. I’ll give you an example before His resurrection and one after.

There, resting alone at the well, Jesus engaged a Samaritan woman who had come out to draw water. He kept His identity a secret. He spoke to her in cryptic clues about Himself. Only after He told her some things that no man could have known about her did she understand He was no mere man. She returned to town and told everyone, saying to them, “Could this be the Christ?” Many Samaritans believed in Jesus that day.

After Jesus rose from the dead He suddenly appeared with the two disciples returning from Jerusalem to Emmaus. He hid His true identity from them until they urged Him to stay with them and share a meal. When He was breaking bread their eyes were opened to know Who He was but Jesus vanished from them.

You could make the point that hospitality was involved in both of those stories:

- At the well Jesus asked the Samaritan woman to give Him a drink.
- In Emmaus the Lord hesitated until the two disciples invited Him to eat and stay with them.

Our story in Genesis is one in which Jesus initially hides His identity and Abraham shows He and the other two “men” with Him immense hospitality. In other words, Abraham shows hospitality to strangers and ends up entertaining angels unawares!

That sounds like a Bible verse:

Hebrews 13:2 Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.

Suddenly this showing hospitality is pretty important stuff! Let's follow Abraham as he entertained the Lord and two angels unawares.

Genesis 18:1 Then the Lord appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day.

Genesis 18:2 So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him...

It was “the Lord” and angels but to Abraham they appeared as “men.”

Genesis 18:2 ...and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground,

Abraham was looking to serve, and he was ready to do so. Everything behind him, so to speak, in his tent, in his household, was in order.

Let's realize something. When we use the word ‘hospitality’ in our study today, we're not strictly talking about entertaining folks. We're not talking about having full pantries and spotless homes. There's nothing wrong with that! But ‘entertaining’ isn't always done with real spiritual hospitality. And hospitality can exist even when you have very little to share.

For our purposes we're using 'hospitality' in the sense that we are willing to share what God has provided us, whether it be spiritual or material, in order to minister to a person in such a way that it refreshes their heart (v5).

I can do that with much, but I can also do it with little. I can do it by giving something to someone - something material like food, clothing or shelter. But I can also do it by giving someone 'Someone' spiritual - by sharing the Gospel of Jesus, or by praying with them, or by laying hands on them, or by weeping with them.

Genesis 18:3 and said, "My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant.

Genesis 18:4 Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree.

Genesis 18:5 And I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts. After that you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to your servant." They said, "Do as you have said."

I'm not interested in footwashing but I will tell you something I think is fantastic. On Japan Airlines, just before you're going to land, the stewardesses bring you a hot, moist towel to put on your face. Man! It's like going to a spa at 30,000 feet.

It must have brought Jesus immense joy to have Abraham offer to wash His feet when Abraham thought Him a total stranger. Some four centuries or so later Jesus' own disciples, knowing who He was, would refuse to wash one another's feet. Jesus then stooped to do it to teach them what it truly means to be a servant.

Again notice that the great lesson of servanthood was in the context of withheld hospitality!

Abraham twice refers to himself as their "servant" and he lived it. He didn't just serve. He wasn't on the clock. This wasn't his week on the schedule. He was a servant through-and-through.

Genesis 18:6 So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes."

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Genesis 18:7 And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, and he hastened to prepare it.

Genesis 18:8 So he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate.

Abraham promised them a “morsel of bread.” He delivered far more than he had promised!

Part of showing the mercy of hospitality is sacrificing *more* than the “morsel.” I’ve found, too, that when folks give more than the “morsel,” it becomes the new minimum standard. The next time hospitality is elicited they have an opportunity to give *more* than the “morsel” again.

Abraham literally entertained Jesus and angels. We may entertain angels unawares. But what is perhaps even more amazing than actually entertaining Jesus or angels is the biblical fact that the way you treat others is seen by Jesus as exactly how you would and therefore do treat Him.

In the famous passage at the end of Matthew twenty-five Jesus talked about the treatment of those who were hungry, thirsty, naked, strangers, sick and in prison. It’s the passage where the Lord divides nonbelievers from believers at His Second Coming.

- To those who fail to show mercy and hospitality Jesus will say, “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”
- To those who show mercy and hospitality Jesus will say, “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

On what does Jesus base His judgment and invite some into the Kingdom of Heaven on earth while others go to Hades?

Matthew 25:40 And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'

Matthew 25:45 Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'

“You did it to Me.” “You did not do it to Me.” Jesus considers your behavior towards others as if you were dealing directly with Him.

There are many exhortations in the New Testament to practice hospitality. How, exactly, we do this is left open-ended. Albert Barnes writes,

To what extent this is to be done, is one of those questions which are to be left to every man's conscience and views of duty. No rule can be given on the subject. Many men have not the means to be extensively hospitable; and many are not placed in situations that require it. No rules could be given that should be applicable to all cases; and hence, the Bible has left the general direction, has furnished examples where it was exercised, has recommended it to mankind, and then has left every man to act on the rule, as he will answer it to God...

Jesus, in a very real sense, hides Himself in **every** such encounter to elicit the mercy of showing hospitality. The way you treat others, the mercy you either show or withhold, reveals the character of your love for Jesus.

## #2 Jesus Will Sometimes Show Himself To Elucidate His Impossibilities (v9-15)

The Lord was on a mission to announce the birth of Isaac. He showed Himself to Abraham and Sarah and gave them the good news.

Genesis 18:9 Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" So he said, "Here, in the tent."

Genesis 18:10 And He said, "I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son." (Sarah was listening in the tent door which was behind him.)

“According to the time of life” refers to a normal 9-month pregnancy. It would be a miracle for a ninety-nine year old man and an eighty-nine year old woman to conceive, but the pregnancy would otherwise be natural in every sense.

Genesis 18:11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing.

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To remove any doubt about the miraculous nature of the conception we are told that Sarah had already gone through the change of life. What the Lord was declaring was therefore physically impossible. He would bring a child from a dead womb.

Genesis 18:12 Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?"

Abraham had laughed when the Lord had told him in chapter seventeen that Sarah would get pregnant. Now Sarah laughed.

*Jesus was cracking them up with His promises! Have the Lord's promises ever cracked you up? Or are we always so rigid that there's no room to see that the Lord has a sense of humor?*

Genesis 18:13 And the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?'

Genesis 18:14 Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son."

Genesis 18:15 But Sarah denied it, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh!"

Commentators are generally hard on Sarah for both laughing in her heart and then denying it. Let's cut her some slack. Just short of her ninetieth birthday she's told that she will get pregnant and deliver a son. I don't know about you, but I'd initially crack-up, too.

Besides, she's in the Hall of Faith, and in Hebrews 11:11 we read,

Hebrews 11:11 By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.

She got busted and her first response was to deny it. Okay, that's not the most spiritual thing to do, but it was a very unique situation.

For the Lord's part He doesn't really rebuke her. He doesn't withdraw His promise. If and when we are faithless in the face of His promises, He remains faithful!

“Is anything too hard for the Lord?” The answer, of course, is “No.” It doesn’t mean that all the things we want the Lord to do will come to pass. The context is that God had promised something and, even though it was humanly impossible, it was not too hard for Him.

If you are a believer, you have already experienced God doing what is humanly impossible. He has acted in human history in order to save you for eternity. Salvation is humanly impossible; the forgiveness of your sins is humanly impossible. But what is impossible for you is possible for God. Jesus came as a man, God in human flesh, so that whosoever will believe in Him would not perish but have everlasting life.

What other promises of God’s are you secretly laughing at? What other promises of God have you abandoned because they seem impossible?

The Lord wants to show Himself to you and elucidate the impossible. Whether you are young or old, strong or infirm, and even when you present yourself to be somewhat faithless, Jesus remains faithful to bring to pass the impossible.

Adam Clarke, in his commentary, writes,

It was to correct Sarah’s unbelief, and to strengthen her faith, that God spoke these most important words; words which state that where human wisdom, prudence, and energy fall, and where nature herself ceases to be an agent, through lack of energy to act, or laws to direct and regulate energy, there also God has full sway, and by his own omnific power works all things after the counsel of his own will. Is there an effect to be produced? God can produce it as well without as with means. He produced nature, the whole system of causes and effects, when in the whole compass of his own eternity there was neither means nor being. He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast. How great and wonderful is God!

You know that saying, “I’m not laughing at you, I’m laughing with you”? Abraham and now Sarah were laughing at Jesus but the Lord would graciously change their hearts to be laughing with Him.

Their laughter of fear would give way to peels of joy at the birth of Isaac - whose name means *laughter*.



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The Lord is probably trying to show Himself to you in some area of your life that seems, for one reason or another, impossible. Laugh *with* Him, not at Him, as He does what only He can.

Then go out and treat others with merciful hospitality, knowing that the way you treat them is received by Jesus as if you were doing it directly to Him.

