

[God & Abraham]

:: genesis 18 ::

We're going to take a couple of weeks to look at a few of the Christophany passages.

'Christophany' is an unusual word, but it simply means a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament. At His birth, Jesus received His human body, but He is an eternal member of the Trinity, meaning that He existed in the time of the Old Testament. And, from time to time, He would come and do stuff on the earth. Which is pretty cool.

Now, you may have also heard the term 'Theophany', in regard to these passages but, if we get technical, there can be a difference between the two.

A 'Theophany' is an appearance of God, but not necessarily of Christ. So, when God appeared to Moses and spoke to him as a burning bush would be a Theophany but not a Christophany. You now have 3 seminary credits attached to your accounts.

But when do we see a Christophany? Sometimes it's hard to tell if the character we're dealing with in the Old Testament is Jesus Christ or not. When you see the phrase, "Angel of the Lord" there's a chance that it is Jesus, but it's not always Jesus.

Hopefully by studying a few of these stories we'll be able to get a better handle on when we're encountering Jesus in the Old Testament and when we're not.

One of the easiest Christophanies to identify is in Genesis 18, where Jesus meets with Abraham and Abraham intercedes for the city of Sodom.

There are 2 lessons I want us to draw on this morning. The first is to learn more of who God is. In this chapter we see a lot of God's heart, His activity and His attributes.

The second lesson we learn from Abraham himself, who is a very encouraging example to us of how we should love and serve the Lord.

So beginning in verse 1 of Genesis 18, we read:

Genesis 18.1 - Then the Lord appeared to [Abraham] by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day.

God appears to Abraham as he was sitting in his tent door in the heat of the day. The word for 'Lord' is the word Jehovah, so immediately we know this is Jesus and not just an angel.

Now, we really need to grab hold of this idea that our lives are all about the opportunities God gives us. Throughout today God is going to present each of us with opportunities. Whether it's opportunities to pray, to serve, to worship, to witness, to teach, to encourage or exhort, to submit, to give or to receive, God brings us opportunities.

And, as we see here, they can happen at any time. Sometimes they happen at more expected or official times, and sometimes they happen when you're sitting on your couch in the middle of the summer heat. We need to become spiritual opportunists, who are watching for chances to serve the Lord.

Let's see what Abraham did.

Genesis 18.2-5 - So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, and said, "My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant. Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. 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."

Abraham is a great example of hospitality. In fact, looking back we would say that he has a great gift for giving and hospitality.

However, he's an example to all of us, that we need to be more hospitable, more compassionate, more engaged with the people around us. The study on the Gifts on Sunday mornings really put this in perspective. Yes, some of us will have the *GIFT* of hospitality and others will not, but *ALL* of us are called to be hospitable, compassionate servants to the people around us.

Bottom line, it's easy to sit on our porches and say, "yep, there's something going on over there." But if we want lives that are meaningful and dynamic, we're going to be men who are looking for God's opportunities and taking them when they come along.

This is what Abraham did when Jesus appeared to him.

Genesis 18.6-8 - So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes." And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, and he hastened to prepare it. 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 went above and beyond. He gave his best. He had the heart of a servant and he saw to this stuff himself. He was humble. These are issues that we need to evaluate ourselves on. What kind of humility am I displaying? Am I a servant in my home or at my job or in my church? Do I give my best to the Lord or am I offering something less? We need to deal with these questions personally.

The other interesting thing we see here is that these guys ate.

From our reading of the passage, we know these travelers are Jesus and the 2 angels who go and rescue Lot from Sodom in chapter 19. They are immortal, from heaven, yet they ate. This interaction was not just a vision or a dream, but a real afternoon that Jesus shared with Abraham, talking with him and eating with him, just spending time together.

And really we need to remind ourselves that God wants to spend time with us. We have our own biases and leanings and understandings, but at the end of the day God has revealed Himself as a Person who desires to spend time with His people in a personal relationship. That is how we are to approach God.

Genesis 18.9-12 - Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" So he said, "Here, in the tent." 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.) Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?"

So they're eating this meal and Jesus is speaking to Abraham and He starts talking to him about his wife. Jesus reveals His omniscient knowledge here in these verses and then starts talking about the future.

Two things.

First, God knows your situation right now. He knows where you're at in life. He knows your struggles and your fears. He knows the decisions you're facing and the relationships you have. And He cares about those things. He's mindful of them.

Psalm 139.17-18a - How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand;

Our God is mindful of us and our lives right now. This is a very encouraging thought.

But second, God made promises to Abraham. They were specific and definite and were in addition to many other promises He had already made.

If we don't see God as active in our lives then there is some sort of disconnect. Because the God we see revealed in the Bible and in our lives as Christians is dynamic and active and powerful. To every man here God has made promises.

One promise that parallels our passage is that Jesus has promised to return one day. We look forward to that day and we should focus on that day so that the rest of life is put into proper perspective.

But God also promised to give Abraham and Sarah fruit. The fruit of the womb.

Spiritually speaking, Jesus has made this promise to us as well. God is love. He has placed His Holy Spirit into the hearts of His people, and the fruit of the Spirit is agape love, which is manifest through the different gifts and characteristics which are listed in the Bible.

God has promised to give us a work to do. He's promised to give us relationships in which we can serve Him. These are promises God has made to each of us.

On top of that, God desires to speak to each person specifically about their calling and their personal relationship with Him. This is how Jesus revealed Himself in Genesis 18, in Luke 18, in 1918, in 2018!

So if we're ever feeling stagnant, if we're feeling far from God, there are a couple of different reasons why that might be the case. One could be that we're not taking the opportunities to spend time with God that we should. Another is sin. Another is complacency, where we're ignoring the opportunities God gives us to draw near to Him.

Whatever the case may be, the answer is to go to God's word and discover the revealed Jesus, who has set before us a plan for life and a power for living.

Genesis 18.13-15 - And the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?' 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." But Sarah denied it, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh!"

This is a cool passage because we see a very complete revelation of God's character. We've seen Him desiring personal relationship. We've seen His promises to return and to give new life. We will see His long-suffering and His revelation, and here we see that He calls us out on sin.

So, first of all, Jesus addresses Abraham and Sarah's doubt. "Is anything too hard for the Lord?"

We need to answer this question ourselves because we are people who get caught up. We get worried. We doubt. And many times we start thinking that what needs doing must be done by **us**, not God. As we learned in our Battle Ready studies, that type of living doesn't lead to spiritual victory. Instead, we need to trust in the Lord, to discipline ourselves to deny doubt and to expect God's faithfulness.

Second, Jesus gave them an opportunity to make it right. He gives them that opportunity to say, "You know, Lord, You're right. I *did* laugh. I *did* doubt. Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!" He gives opportunity for repentance.

But Abe and Sarah don't make that choice. Instead Sarah says, "I didn't laugh." And what does Jesus say? "No, but you **DID** laugh!"

Ouch. The Lord called out their sin. Yet He did it with grace and mercy.

In other stories when something like this happens, regular angels aren't as forgiving as this. Think of Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist. Angels don't give this kind of patient mercy.

Jesus shows Himself as the God of mercy here to Sarah, who defiantly denied her doubt. But, that doesn't mean that Jesus just overlooks it. He called it out.

We need to be people who repent. People who deal with sin when it is discovered in our lives. We each need to do real, personal business with God. Our God is forgiving. He is gracious. He is love. But He cannot overlook sin. He will convict us of it and then we must repent of it.

Genesis 18.16-19 - Then the men rose from there and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on the way. And the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have known him, in order that he may command his children

and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him."

This is really great.

First, we see that indeed God loves to reveal. That's how He has always been. Not a God who shrouds Himself in strange ritual or puts great distance between Himself and man. Instead we see that He wants to show Abraham His plan.

Don't let people tell you that God is far off from man and that we must approach Him through mysticism or ritual or anything else. He goes out of His way to reveal Himself to us, if we're willing to sit with Him and listen to Him speak.

Second, we see that Jesus gives us some practical application. His plan for us is to live our lives and lead our families and raise our children in the way of the Lord. The way of the Lord is to love Him, to do righteousness and justice and to follow His word. This is the simple directive that we can apply to our day-to-day lives in order to please the Lord and experience His plan.

But Jesus continues His revelation to Abraham in verse 20:

Genesis 18.20-22 - And the Lord said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know." Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the Lord.

Jesus also gave Abraham a clear revelation of His judgement of sin. The same is true for all of us here this morning, which is why we, who have received forgiveness, must go and tell people about Christ's love and salvation. God must judge sin. But the people of earth can be saved. We are the messengers, we are people who can intercede as Abraham does for Sodom.

Look in verse 23:

Genesis 18.23-26 - And Abraham came near and said, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it? Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" So the Lord said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes."

Abraham then whittles down the number from 50 to 10. Each time the Lord says, "Yes, for the sake of 45, or 40 or 30 or 20 or 10 righteous, I will not destroy Sodom."

Two more insights we see in these verses.

First, we see in this dialog that Jesus is long-suffering. He endures the intercession of Abraham, who is asking for 50 and then 45 and then 40 and on and on. God is long-suffering. He doesn't want the people of earth to perish, because He is merciful, but He must judge sin, so men and women must repent, because God is just.

So in this section, in this Christophany we see Jesus is long-suffering, He is just, He is merciful, He is friendly, He is a God who makes promises and who reveals Himself and His plan to us. This is our God. This is our Savior. A King who comes down to us and spends time with us so that He can give us more than we could ever imagine in our lives.

What a precious revelation this chapter is.

But second, we learn about our part in our relationship with the Lord. Verse 23 says that Abraham came near and spoke to the Lord.

What are you facing today? What decision? What trial? What opportunity?

We've seen that God is active. He is loving. He is willing to show us His plan and to give us His wisdom. He desires to use us and therefore places us in situations where we can love and serve Him.

What we must do is draw near to God. Follow the example of Abraham. Spend time with the Lord. Spend time in the Word today and in prayer. Take 5 minutes to examine your life, your habits, your attitudes. Deal with sin and repent. Cling to God and seek His wisdom and His kingdom. Be a man who serves those around you. Be a man who trusts God. Be a man who sees God in this life He's given you and watch for the opportunities He will bring to glorify Himself through your life.