

Genesis Ch18v1-15 - Ordinary People, Extraordinary God

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Date: 19 February 2023

Preacher: Jonny Grant

[0 : 00] on on Genesis 18, we're following along in our studies through Genesis.

Thank you, just waiting for a drink. Thank you. Thank you.

In the heat of the day, Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them, and he bowed low to the ground. He said, if I found favour in your eyes, my Lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree.

Let me get you something to eat so you can be refreshed, and then go on your way, now that you have come to your servant. Very well, they answered.

[1 : 56] Do as you say. So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. Quick, he said. Get sixteen kilograms of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread.

Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice tender calf, gave it to his servant who hurried to prepare it. He then brought some curds and milk and set these before them.

While they ate, he stood near them under a tree. Where is your wife, Sarah? They asked him. There, in the tent, he said.

Then one of them said, I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah, your wife, will have a son. Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent which was behind him.

Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought. After I am worn out and my Lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?

[3 : 07] Then the Lord said to Abraham, why did Sarah laugh and say, will I really have a child now that I am old?

Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son.

Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, I didn't laugh. But he said, yes, you did laugh. Well, let's pray.

Father, we thank you for giving to us your words in our language that we can read, and that by your Spirit's help we can understand.

We pray that from this short text, you would teach us about yourself, and how we should live in response.

[4 : 16] May not one of us leave this building without being changed and transformed by you today. And we pray this for your glory and for our good.

Amen. Well, Sunday mornings, well, usually Sunday mornings anyway, I know it's an afternoon, can be a bit frantic, especially for me.

It usually ends with me sitting in the car, beeping the horn. Eventually, Kirsty makes her way to the car, and the conversations begin.

What took you so long? And it's only then that I realised, well, somebody had to unload and load the dishwasher. Somebody had to get the sandwiches prepared for afternoon tea.

Someone had to bring my Bible, which I had left on the stairs yet again. Just because Kirsty isn't running in a hurry, doesn't mean to say nothing is happening.

[5 : 23] Well, it appears that God is not in a hurry. And that doesn't mean that nothing is happening. God had promised to Abraham that he was going to be a blessing to the world.

And God confirmed it by his covenant. So by the time we turn to chapter 18, we expect to find Abraham as a great nation, blessing the world.

We expect to see him on his world preaching tour, entitled Five Steps to a Blessed Life, filling the stadiums, signing books.

But that's not where we find Abraham. We actually find him all by himself under a tree.

Look at verse 1. The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day.

[6 : 26] It seems that when it comes to God's promises, God isn't in much of a hurry. But that doesn't mean to say that nothing is happening.

So let's encourage ourselves that as we look at this text this afternoon, not to rush. Let's take our time, slow down, and see what God is teaching us.

The first thing that I want us to see is the ordinary ways in which God's people serve. The ordinary ways in which God's people serve.

God hasn't forgotten his plan of redemption. In fact, it's through the ordinary, everyday acts of service that God is doing his work.

Now, before we see this, we need to get to grips with our three friends. We're introduced to them at the beginning of verse 2. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing by.

[7 : 33] Now, this isn't the Trinity. Some people say it is, but it's not. As we read through the text, it seems that one of them is the Lord, while the other two are angels, God's messengers.

And we can see this if you go to the very end of the chapter. Chapter 18, verse 33. We read that when the Lord had finished speaking with Abraham, he left and Abraham returned home.

And then into chapter 19, the two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening. So there we have our three visitors who've been encountering and speaking to Abraham the Lord and two angels.

Now, while we at this stage know their identity, it's not immediately clear to Abraham who they are.

But let's get back to the main point.

Abraham may be waiting at his tent, sits shading from the sun, waiting for God to fulfil his purpose.

But that doesn't mean he's just twiddling his thumbs, doing nothing.

[8 : 43] No, Abraham gets serving. First, notice the attitude of Abraham. Look at his attitude, verse 2.

Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

Now, bowing low is a posture of humility. It's bowing down as if to say, at your service, your master. How can I be of help?

Now, that's not always the way I respond when my doorbell goes, especially if I'm sitting down treating myself to some me time.

For goodness sake, will you go and ring somebody else's house? Leave me alone. No, the assumed heart attitude of God's people should be one of humility.

[9 : 46] At your service, how can I be of help? So that's his attitude. But now look at his action.

Verse 3. He said, If I have found favour in your eyes, my Lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be bought and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree.

Let me get you something to eat so you can be fresh and then go on your way now that you have come to your servant. All of a sudden, there's a flurry of activity.

There's no Lidl's bakery, no chicken van to go to. Sarah, quick! There's people for dinner. Get the fire stoked up. Get the bread on. I'll go and get the steaks.

A couple of hours later, our three friends are smiling, aren't they? What a meal! Verse 8. He then brought them some curds, that's some cheese and milk, and a calf that had been prepared, and set these before them.

[10 : 55] And while they ate, he stood near them under a tree. You see, the attitude of humility leads to an action of service.

Abraham assumes the role of a servant because when we're waiting for God, that's what God's people do. Now, serving isn't particularly glamorous.

It has the habit of interrupting me time and family schedules and weekend plans. But yet, this is what God's people do. We get on with serving.

That's our daily diet. Of course, humble hospitality may only be one way to serve, but it's a great way to serve.

God has given you a home. It's not yours, by the way, and neither is mine. It's a gift from God, and he has filled your house, no doubt, with frying pans and pots and all sorts of cooking utensils.

[12:02] So start using them. Open up our homes for the sake of the kingdom to serve those around us who need encouragement and support.

When you say, I'm not a very good baker. Well, I get that. But that doesn't hinder what we can do. Turn with me, please, to 1 Peter chapter 4 in the New Testament.

1 Peter chapter 4. If you've got a page number, help me out, please. 1, 2, 2, 0.

1, 2, 2, 0. 1 Peter chapter 4. He's actually just spoken about hospitality.

But then he reminds us, starting in verse 10, 1 Peter chapter 4, verse 10. Each of you, doesn't matter who we are, should use whatever gift you have received, we all have gifts, to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms or its multicoloured form.

[13:27] So we become conduits of grace to one another as we serve. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God.

as we have our tea and sandwiches later, what a great opportunity to speak words of encouragement to each other. If anyone serves, they should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen. Let's go back to Genesis. You see, the ordinary slog of serving others mightn't get you any awards, but it does lead to the praise and glory of God through our very simple acts of speaking and serving.

So God mightn't be in a hurry as far as we're concerned, but he will fulfil his plan of redemption. In the meantime, as we wait for God to do his work, we get serving.

It's what God's people do. So, the way in which God's people serve. Second, the ordinary people that God uses in his purposes.

[14:58] The ordinary people God uses in his purposes. Our three friends may be licking their lips after steak and milk and cheese, but it seems that they're much more than just hungry travellers.

They know more about Abraham and Sarah than they first let on. Look at verse 9. Where is your wife Sarah?

They asked him. There in the tent, he said. Then one of them said, I will surely return to you about this time next year and Sarah, your wife, will have a son.

Now, through our studies in Genesis, promises of children to Abraham and Sarah are not new. But it seems God wants to remind them again that his plan of redemption is still on track.

In fact, God is going to use a struggling servant like Sarah. first of all, notice the weakness of Sarah.

[16:04] Notice her weakness. Look at the rest of verse 10. Now, Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent which was behind him. Abraham and Sarah were already very old and Sarah was past the age of childbearing.

Sarah's biological clock, we could say, has already talked. The promise seems misplaced. Surely, he doesn't really mean what he's saying.

Why is it that God insists that old Sarah is going to have a son? Well, because God wants us to see that redemption comes through weakness.

Sarah may be done in and worn out, but she is going to have a son. You see, weakness is not a barrier to God. They're the kind of people God uses in his plans and in his purposes.

It's the way in which God works. But it's not just her weakness. Notice the doubting of Sarah.

[17:17] The doubting of Sarah, verse 11. Abraham and Sarah were already very old and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, after I'm worn out and my Lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?

You see, we wouldn't describe Sarah as a woman of confident faith. We wouldn't invite Sarah to come and speak at a conference on faith-building exercises.

Me? Have a son? You've got to be joking. I have as much chance of getting pregnant as a dead camel winning a race.

Me? It can't happen. It possibly couldn't happen. Well, the year will pass and as we'll see in chapter 21, Sarah does have a son.

You see, it seems that God is not restricted by weak, doubting servants. God never writes people off and neither should we.

[18:28] Older women like Sarah have a vital role in God's work and in God's purposes. Essel and Vera were two old sisters.

Essel was never married. Vera was married but she didn't ever have children. They were both timid. They were shy.

They were quite reserved. Yet for 25 years they faithfully prayed and supported my dad while he was a pastor in Waterford. They held no title or any particular special role but yet they attended every meeting as they were able.

They prayed for his children. rags like me. Encouraged my mum and gave when there were needs. To the world they were just weak and frail. They were nothing and nobodies. Yet in the hands of God they were the backbone you might say of a local church.

[19 : 36] You see the church always needs people like Ethel and Vera. He needs people like us. Of course it's not just older women that God uses.

When it comes to God's work and God's purposes, age, whether you're young or old, gender, male or female, whatever your ability, whether you feel strong or struggling, it's not an issue for God. In fact God uses the weak and doubting, the suffering, the sinful, the broken. Why is it that God insists in doing his work like this?

Well to show us that his plan of redemption will not be accomplished by my strength or your strength, not our faith but his faithfulness.

It's like he delights in gathering nobodies and nothings and using us so that we might wonder, at God's amazing grace that he would work through me.

[20 : 43] The ordinary servant of God may be nothing in the eyes of the world but yet God uses weak servants to accomplish his purposes.

So God might be much of a hurry but he will fulfil his plan of redemption. In the meantime we get on serving and we marvel at the fact that God by his grace can use people like us.

So the ordinary ways in which God's people serve, the ordinary people God uses in his purposes and then third, the extraordinary ways in which God works.

God will be able to build a nation and a people who in turn are going to be a blessing to the world seems to be too big to be true.

And when we factor into all of it that the very foundation of it all starts with an old Abraham and a worn out Sarah, it just seems utterly impossible, doesn't it?

[21 : 55] yet look how God responds to our questioning doubts. Verse 13, Then the Lord said to Abraham, Why did Sarah laugh and say, Will I really have a child now that I'm old?

Is anything too hard for the Lord? Well, the answer should be a resounding no. Nothing is too hard for the Lord.

You see, we're dealing here with God Almighty, the one who spoke the universe into existence. Out of nothing, he brought this world into being.

And if God is that all powerful life-giving source, then he can give life to all as he pleases. End of verse 14, I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son.

Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, no, I didn't laugh. But he said, yes, you did laugh.

[23 : 13] Now, like Sarah, we too might laugh at the impossibility of it all. When we think of God's promises to us, how could this ever happen?

man? Well, don't laugh at what God promises to do. First, notice with me the plan of redemption in this story, the plan of redemption.

God's plan of redemption is going to come through the family of Abraham, and as we follow the storyline of the Bible, God's promise is fulfilled in the most extraordinary of ways.

Go with me, please, to Luke's Gospel, chapter 1. Luke's Gospel, chapter 1. And verse 31.

An angel has appeared to Mary, a young teenage girl, and this is what the angel said, verse 31.

[24 : 38] You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus, the Saviour, the Messiah. Well, look at Mary's response, verse 34.

How will this be? Mary asked the angel, since I am a virgin. That's impossible. These things don't happen.

Mary understood her biology. Virgins can't be pregnant. Verse 35. The angel answered, the Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, and the Holy One born will be called the Son of God.

verse 37. For no word from God will ever fail. Mary, nothing is too hard for God.

Nothing. You see, God takes and uses a weak teenage virgin from the back end of nowhere, and says, you're going to have a son, and by the way, the child that you bear is going to be God's promised Messiah, the one who is going to bring the blessing of redemption to the world.

[26 : 00] Why does God make seemingly impossible promises and fulfill them through weak, humble servants? Because God wants us to see that his plan of redemption is a work of God.

It's not something we do by ourselves, it's something that God does, and it's not too hard for him either. Verse 37, for no word from God will ever fail.

What God says he will do, he will do. Now this is how God continues to work out his redemption in the lives of people like you and me.

Jump forward with me, please, to chapter 18 of Luke's Gospel, chapter 18, and see here the possibility of redemption.

Luke chapter 18. In this account, a wealthy man comes to Jesus wanting to know what he has to do to earn God's redemption.

[27 : 12] salvation. And it soon becomes very clear to him that there is nothing he can do to earn his salvation. Look at what Jesus says to this wealthy man.

Luke 18, verse 24. Jesus looked at him and said, how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.

Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God. The point is simple and clear.

Just as it's impossible for a camel to fit through the eye of a needle, so it's impossible for us by our own efforts to enter into the kingdom of God.

it can't happen. It's just not possible. It's like old women having children or virgins getting pregnant. That sort of thing can't happen.

[28 : 15] Verse 26. Those who heard this asked, well then who can be saved? What can God do in the lives of people to save them?

Verse 27. Jesus replied, what is impossible with man is possible with God.

What is impossible with man is possible with God. You see, we can never save ourselves and we can never save anybody else.

But what's impossible for us is what God does. This is what he delights in doing. How is it possible? Because God, in his redemption plan, sent his son, Jesus, who came to us in humility and weakness, who bowed before us to say, I am at your service.

And he served us in the most humbling of ways, by giving his life for us, by dying on a cross, taking all our failures on himself, so that he might secure our redemption forever.

[29 : 34] Now you might be thinking, well, my life is a mess. I've failed too many times. I've broken too many promises. There's no way that God can save me.

Or maybe you're thinking, I've got a friend, I've got a family member, maybe it's your mother or your father, your son, or your daughter, and you're thinking, no way, it's impossible, God can't save them.

Well, don't laugh at what God can do. Is anything too hard for the Lord? What is impossible for man is possible with God.

redemption might not happen according to our timing, but that doesn't mean we sit back and do nothing and twiddle our thumbs.

We get on with the ordinary, everyday, humble acts of service. We faithfully pray. We obediently share the gospel.

[30 : 47] We open up our homes and invite people in. We get alongside people who are struggling. We use the gifts that God has given us to be conduits of his amazing grace.

God's not in a hurry, but that doesn't mean nothing is happening. Don't limit and don't laugh at what God can do through humble, weak servants like you and I.

God is fulfilling his purpose and his plan. And God will do it. And he uses people like us as we step out in service for him.

Let's pray. Father, we confess that we are such a rushing, busy people, going from one thing to another, never slowing down.

Father, help us that we would slow down and see the ways in which we can serve, the things that we can do to show your grace to others.

[32 : 21] Father, thank you for your plan of redemption. Thank you for your son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Thank you that nothing when it comes to salvation is impossible for you, that you have accomplished it all, and you are continuing your work through people like us.

Thank you for that. So help us to go encouraged and blessed today. In Jesus' name. Amen.

