



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

The Day God Looked Larger

Genesis 18:22-33

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Introduction

1. True stories in which people wondered what God was doing:
 - a. A 30-year-old mom with a 3-year-old daughter whose husband abandoned her and never returned, despite her expectation that God would bring him back to her.
 - b. An older saint whose friend died after fervent prayers for his recovery (“we need some lessons on prayer!” he told me as we were leaving the deceased’s room in ICU).
 - c. A young preacher who wondered whether the walls he kept running into in his job search might be God’s way of telling him he needed to do something else.
2. Has God ever surprised *you*?
 - a. Have you ever felt frustrated with God? Asked for something repeatedly only to wonder if it would ever happen? Or asked for something only to see the opposite come about?
 - b. Have you ever been angry with God — where frustration eventually leads? Maybe it didn’t go that far. Because the frustration was resolved before it got to that point? Or had you been led to believe that you didn’t dare allow it to get to that point because, as we all “know,” you’re “just not supposed to be angry with God”?
3. Questions like these raise another question: what is the nature of my relationship with God? Is it ever stretched / challenged by life events? Is it honest enough to express puzzlement, dismay, despair, even frustration and anger? Is it growing?

Body

- I. The Setting and Revelation (18:1-21).
 - A. Three “men,” probably looking like Bedouin tribesmen, but later revealed as the LORD and messengers, visit Abraham who apparently viewed them as especially important.¹
 1. Acting as a good host, Abraham prepares a meal for them, then functions as a servant, not an equal (v. 8 - “he stood by them”; see *ESV Study Bible*).
 - B. During the meal, they reveal that a year later, Sarah will have a son.

¹ *ESV Study Bible* note on v. 2: “three men. Abraham’s actions suggest that he viewed the men as exceptionally important. he ran. In the Middle East, an elderly man of some social standing would not normally respond in this way to visitors. bowed himself to the earth. While this may have been a common mode of greeting others (see 19:1), it shows that Abraham regards the visitors as worthy of great respect.”

1. Listening in, Sarah, knowing that “the way of woman has ceased” for her (v. 11), “laughs to herself” (v. 12), and is called out for doing so (v. 15)
 2. The promise was based on the truth that nothing was too hard for the Lord (v. 14); in seeking to understand Sarah, we note that women of her age didn’t typically give birth and that it had been twenty-four years since Genesis 12:4 (see 17:17; 21:5).
- C. After the meal, because of his unique role with regard to “all the nations of the earth” (v. 18), the LORD revealed to Abraham what he was about to do to Sodom² (vv. 16-19) because of its grave sin (vv. 20-21).
- II. Abraham’s Intercession (18:22-33).
- A. When the men move off toward Sodom, Abraham remains before the LORD — and ventures to speak.
1. Try for a moment to think less about him as “the father of the faithful” and “friend of God,” and think of him at that moment as a normal, feeling, human being.
 - a) Do you think the question about his heir was foremost in his thinking?
 - b) Culturally, he was surrounded by “gods” who were capricious and even cruel.
 2. John White’s reading between the lines of this text helps.
 - a) “To us Sodom means nothing — a city lost in remote history. But to Abraham it meant living people, warm of flesh and quick of movement. It meant slaves and their masters, tradesmen, craftsmen, parents, children, merchants, animals, provisions, houses, gardens. It was in Sodom that his relative Lot lived. He knew Sodom. He had met its king. He had personally rescued many of its citizens when disaster in war had overtaken them (Gen 14). God had enabled him to deliver the city from the ravages of defeat, yet now he was proposing to obliterate the city and all its inhabitants.”³
 3. Did what he knew about Sodom outweigh any fear he had of the LORD? Or, had his relationship just developed to the point that he ventured to speak up regardless?
- B. Contrary to the unfortunate word choice I heard as a child, there was no “bargaining” here. There are some daring questions.
1. “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?” (v. 23)
 2. “Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it?” (v. 24)
 3. Then, more boldly: “Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked!” (v. 25a)
 4. Then, the boldest of all: “Far be that from you! *Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?*” (v. 25b)
- C. Think of Abraham’s questions in the context of prayer — for that’s what this was.

² Verse 21 says, “I will go down to see.” Consider this note from the *ESV Study Bible*: “These words reveal that the decision to destroy the cities of the plain was undertaken with careful scrutiny of the evidence. This remark should not be interpreted as indicating limited knowledge on the part of God, any more than do the similar and ironic words in 11:5. All that is implied is God’s direct attention to the matter.”

³ John White, *Daring to Draw Near*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977, 2007), 25.

1. It is “not the ‘Save-Sodom-if-it-be-your-will. Amen’ kind. Whatever else we may say about it, it was a real-issues, facts-and-figures kind of prayer” (White, 26).
2. We do not get the sense that Abraham doubted God would do what he said, but we do sense that he wanted to know what kind of God he served, even as he hoped God might be induced to make a promise.
3. So, he asks what will happen if there are 50 . . . 45 . . . 40 . . . 30 . . . 20 . . . 10.
 - a) Why did he stop at 10? The text does not say.
 - b) Maybe Abraham felt he had pressed things far enough. Or, maybe he had learned what he wanted to learn (compare Job 42:5-6).

III. Outcomes.

- A. In a world of capricious, even cruel gods, what kind of God was Abraham serving?
 1. The answer: the kind of God who would not destroy the grossly sinful Sodom if just six people besides Lot’s family could be found there who were righteous.
 2. The Judge of all the earth *would* do what was just!
 3. For a man promised a child at the age of 99, that was good to know!
- B. What difference did it make? Have you ever wondered why, in the context of Abraham’s story, this episode was selected to be recorded?
 1. The biblical text never explicitly says, but it is interesting to think about later developments in light of Abraham’s questions.
 2. In Genesis 22, “he laughs” (Isaac; see 17:17; 18:13, 15; 21:6) had arrived and was growing up. Then God said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you” (22:2). *And he did! How was that possible?*
 3. Hebrews 11:17-19 gives us a clue.
 - a) On the one hand: “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.”
 - b) On the other: “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac.”
 - c) “He who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son.”
 - d) “He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.”
 4. Where would he have gotten such an idea? We are not told; but we are told that Abraham had an encounter with God that led him to ask whether the God he served would do the right thing. Perhaps there was a connection.

Conclusion

1. White affirms, “You cannot have a relationship with God without standing, at one time or another, precisely where Abraham stood” (White, 27-28).
2. When we ask questions about God in light of life, we may well discover things that will make him look bigger — and increase our faith.

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