

## Genesis 18 — Guests

**February 7, 2016**

Good morning CrossWinds. Before we study God's Word, I have a question. Who is the most important person you have had over to your home for a meal? Write his or her name on the top of your notes. Did you have someone rich or powerful eat at your house? Did you have a political candidate over to your home? Did you have a famous athlete over to your home? I know some of you hobnob with impressive people.

No matter who you had over to your house for a meal, this morning we will meet a guy that had an even more impressive lunch date than you did. We are going to study a time Jesus came to lunch, and of all places, it is found in the Old Testament, not the new.

As a church we are studying our way through the book of Genesis. For the last few weeks we have been following the story of Abraham. Today we continue looking at his life in Genesis 18. In this chapter, Abraham has lunch with Jesus. If you are going to have lunch with an impressive figure, it doesn't get any better than this.

Get out your notes and we can jump into our study.

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 have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, while I bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." And Abraham went quickly into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quick! Three seahs of fine flour! Knead it, and make cakes." And Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf,

tender and good, and gave it 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. Genesis 18:1–8 (ESV)

As we pick up the story, Abraham is 100. Sarah, his wife, is 90. They were not spring chickens. They had surprise visitors at the front door of their tent. It was Jesus and his posse of two angels 2,000 years before he took on flesh at Bethlehem. Why do I say one of these guys is Jesus? First, Abraham called him “the Lord.” Some of you have Bibles where the word Lord is capitalized. This is because this is God’s name. It is Yahweh. Second, this guy called “the Lord” displayed God qualities throughout our story. He knew the future. He controlled the future. Third, whenever God showed up in physical form in the Old Testament, it was Jesus showing up before Bethlehem. Jesus made a number of cameo appearances in the Old Testament and was usually called “the angel of the Lord.” He was the one who led Abraham in the sacrifice and rescue of Isaac. He was the one who appeared to Moses in the burning bush. He was in the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night that led the Israelites to the Promised Land. Here Jesus showed up to speak with Abraham

Where did this take place? As we pick up the story we find Abraham living by the oaks of Mamre. He had been there since Genesis 13:8. Mamre means “strength” or “fatness.” This is not fat as in overweight but phat as in good. This was a nice place to live. The land was good. The animals were well fed. Life was good. If you are 100 and living in a town called phatness in your retirement, then you know life is good. You have a great retirement plan.

After finishing his morning chores, Abraham took a little siesta. It was hot. The sun was getting warm. Abraham was on the porch of his tent. He had his

feet up and his head back. His had his arms crossed across his chest. He was taking his morning nap. If you are 100 years old and living in a place called phatness, and taking a nap before lunch, life is good.

Abraham opened one eye and saw three men standing in front of him. I think he recognized at least one as the guy who has appeared to him in the past. It was the Lord. It was Jesus. The nap was over. He sprang out of his chair and runs over to him and bows down. The moral of the story is when Jesus shows up on your doorstep, stop sleeping, get out of your chair and get on your face.

Abraham said, "If I have found favor, do not pass me by." Abraham begged them to come into his house so he could extend a little hospitality. "Pretty please, Jesus. My wife makes a mean gyro sandwich. We can whip one up and serve you lunch. Please come to my house today." What we have was Abraham insisting on showing hospitality. If you showed up on his doorstep, you were treated like royalty.

This needs to be read in contrast to these angels' visit to Sodom in the next chapter. If you were a visitor in Sodom, the only guy that took you into his home was Lot. If it wasn't for Lot, you would sleep in the city square and then the men of the city would gang homosexually rape you at night. That is bad hospitality. Abraham, who was in a relationship with God, showed good hospitality. I want to make an observation and application.

**Application:** *If God has touched my life, I will love serving strangers.*

One of the distinguishing marks of a Christian is you excel in hospitality. To help you understand where I am going with this you need to know there is a difference between hospitality and fellowship.

What is the difference between hospitality and fellowship? Hospitality is doing what Abraham did. Hospitality literally means being a friend of strangers. It is having people over to your home even when you don't know them. Hospitality is one of the essential qualities of church leaders<sup>1</sup>.

For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. Titus 1:7-8 (ESV)

This is not just for church leaders but the entire church is commanded to practice hospitality<sup>2</sup>.

Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. Hebrews 13:2 (NIV)

Hospitality is something all of us, especially church leaders, are commanded to practice. We are to open our homes to love strangers and invite them over for a meal, to go out of our way to show kindness to them, just like Abraham did.

Let me be clear. When you see new people at church, we are commanded by God to do what Abraham did. We are commanded to show hospitality, to love strangers and invite people over to our homes. If we can't invite them over to our homes, we should invite them out for a meal. This is something I want us to work on at CrossWinds.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8

<sup>2</sup> Romans 12:13, 1 Peter 4:9, Hebrews 13:2

In America we are becoming a culture that is less apt to open our homes to people. Studies show we are 45 percent less likely to invite people over to our homes in America than we were 25 years ago. This is not good.

One of the reasons we miss the importance of opening our homes to strangers is many of us confuse hospitality with fellowship. Fellowship means “shared in common.” It means doing life together. We read about it in Acts 2:42, 46. Fellowship is hanging out with other Christians. There is nothing wrong with fellowship. Fellowship — hanging out with other Christians — is important. Fellowship and hospitality are different. One is hanging out with fellow Christians; the other is reaching out and opening our homes to strangers. Fellowship is about people you do know. Hospitality is about people you don’t know. We are commanded to do both. Don’t just hang out with your Christian friends. We are to make sure we practice hospitality to strangers, just like Abraham.

Why is this important? It is the distinguishing feature of our faith. We were strangers and outsiders but God cared for us. God welcomed us into his family when we didn’t belong. God reached outside of his circle and extended lavish friendship and kindness to us that we didn’t deserve. God reached out to us first. He took the initiative. What God has done for us is what we do for others by hospitality. One of the best ways for us to reach our community with the good news of Jesus is to simply to show hospitality, to take the initiative and invite people we don’t know over to our homes and to love them lavishly when they come.

Now Jesus and his angel posse agreed to stay at Abraham's home for dinner. What is the first thing Abraham did? Guys, what is the first thing we do when somebody agrees to come to dinner? Talk to our wives. Unless she is able to whip something together and perform a minor miracle in the kitchen, we are dead meat. This is exactly what happens. In desperation, Abraham ran to Sarah and told her Jesus was coming to dinner. "We need to make lunch and we need to make it fast!"

Ninety-year-old Sarah began working her kitchen miracle. She started kneading bread, and a lot of it. Three seahs of flour is five gallons of dry flour. That is 36 pounds of flour. Sarah was a 90-year-old woman kneading a 50-pound ball of dough during the hottest part of the day in the kitchen with an oven on preheat. Can you picture this? Ninety-year-old Sarah was working up a sweat. There are multiple practical pieces of advice from this.

**Application:** *Good hospitality is hard work.*

Anybody who thinks good hospitality isn't hard work is spending too much time talking to a plastic board at the drive thru.

It was not just Sarah, the 90-year-old lady, that was sweating up a storm as she kneaded a 50-pound ball of dough into bread, but 100-year-old Abraham also had his work cut out. Like most men, he was the grill master of his home. He was in the field squeezing the calves to find the one that was tender. This was a meal of veal. When the meat is veal and it goes from field to plate in less than 90 minutes, you know the meat is tender, fresh and better than anything we can buy in the store. Here is another practical observation.

**Application:** *Good hospitality is costly.*

Slaughtering a calf for a meal is not a cheap proposition. Abraham could have pulled something out of the ice chest in his basement. He could have served leftovers. He didn't. He wanted it to be fresh. He wanted it to be the best. After all, it is not often you have Jesus for lunch.

Abraham and Sarah promised a few morsels of food for Jesus and the angels but they over-provided and gave a lavish meal. Abraham could have given Jesus a paper plate, a spork and a cheese-filled hot dog. Instead, he served a lavish meal that looked something like an all-you-can-eat gyro bar with bread, veal and yogurt on top.

Did that send a message? Yes. Here is another practical application.

**Application:** *The quality of our hospitality matters.*

If we give people a bunch of leftovers or that cheese-filled hot dog, it sends a message. If we give people a great meal, it sends a message. Abraham was having Jesus to lunch. He wanted to send a message with the meal.

A few years ago I visited a friend who is a pastor in the southern part of the United States. I was surprised the way he treated me. Even though he is a pastor of a mega-church, he insisted I stay at his home instead of a hotel. It was after 11 p.m. when his wife asked me what I usually ate for breakfast in the morning. I told her I usually ate oatmeal and egg whites. At the time the egg whites settled better in my stomach than regular eggs. I told her regular eggs weren't a big deal. I would be fine with a regular egg for breakfast. At breakfast

the next morning, to my surprise, she served me egg whites and oatmeal. I was eating my breakfast and feeling terrible. I realized that after putting her three kids to bed, one of which is a special needs child, she went to the food store after midnight to buy me egg whites. In their part of the country, southern hospitality is very important, especially for the pastor's wife. Since I was a guest, she wanted to go out of her way not to just offer hospitality but to offer hospitality in a lavish way that left me feeling honored. In her mind, it wasn't just important that she served me breakfast but was also very important she send me a message by giving me the best.

This may sound weird but all I remember from the trip was the way the woman of the house went out of her way to make me feel welcome. Here is another practical point for us to remember.

**Application:** *Good hospitality leaves a lasting picture of the gospel.*

Great hospitality leaves a lasting impression of undeserved grace in action.

I know what you are thinking. If Jesus was coming over to my house for lunch, I would knead a 50-pound ball of dough for bread. If Jesus was coming over to my house, I would slaughter a cow. The problem is Jesus isn't coming over for dinner. We just invite ordinary people over for a meal. The Bible tells us that when we serve ordinary people, we are serving Jesus.

Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' Matthew 25:37–40 (ESV)

My simple challenge to us as a church is to invite strangers over to our homes like the Bible tells us. Have a good time making their meal a meal to remember where they experience the grace of God through your kindness and your cooking.

The story continues.

They said to him, “Where is Sarah your wife?” And he said, “She is 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, saying, “After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?” The Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, 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.” Genesis 18:9–15 (ESV)

Jesus said, “Where is Sarah?” By the way, this is a rhetorical question. It was not as if Jesus had no idea where Sarah was because she was playing hide-n-seek and Jesus couldn’t find her. Abraham said, “She is in the tent.”

Jesus told Abraham, and the eavesdropping Sarah, that he would return next year and Sarah would have a son. I love how Jesus put it on their calendar. He beamed it right into their appointment books with bluetooth. “Put it on the calendar. You waited forever for a son. He is coming next year.”

Sarah was eavesdropping. This only happens in the Bible. Ladies, none of you would every do this. None of you ever listen in on your husband’s conversations. None of you are interested in anybody’s business other than your own. Isn’t that right? I wanted to just make sure this only happens in the Bible, not in real life.

Now there is a little commentary on Sarah. Not only was she barren her entire life but she had gone through menopause. The change of life was in the rearview mirror. Her body was in the hormonal garbage can. She didn't need baby diapers. She was thinking about wearing her own diapers.

What did Sarah do when Jesus told her she will be pregnant next year? She laughed at Jesus. Note to self. Don't laugh at Jesus when he is eating dinner at your house. It will not go well for you. I want you to notice how Sarah laughed. She didn't laugh openly on the outside. She laughed on the inside. She was a woman that looked pious and godly on the outside, but at that moment, she was a disbelieving woman that mocked Jesus. Can any of you ladies picture this? She may have laughed on the inside but she probably also did the eye roll. Maybe she even did the hair flip. Do any of you guys know what I am talking about? Your wife doesn't say a thing but you know exactly what she is thinking, and she is mocking you. This was Sarah. Here is another point to apply.

**Application:** *Beware of looking pious on the outside but laughing at God's words on the inside.*

Ladies, can any of you relate to this? Many ladies give great attention to their appearance. When it comes to guys, we are lucky if we shave and put on a clean shirt. Ladies, you give great attention to clothes, makeup and how you look. Some ladies have even perfected that perma-smile that gives them an angelic look. If people could get under the hoods of their heads they would be shocked. These women are critical. They are judgmental. They are mocking

others. They are angry. They are grumblers. They are even mocking God. The problem is we think it doesn't count if we are only thinking these things. We think it only counts if we are say things. My friends, does God just care about how we appear on the outside or does he also care about what we are thinking in our minds? What we are thinking counts too.

And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Hebrews 4:13 (ESV)

O Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. Psalm 139:1-2 (ESV)

**Application:** *It doesn't just matter what we say. It matters what we think.*

Next is my favorite part. God addressed Sarah's disbelief. "Sarah, is anything too hard for the Lord?" Can God take care of this or not? We learned this last week, God loves to put us in impossible situations so he can come riding to the rescue and when he does everyone knows without a shadow of a doubt it was Jesus that did it. This was where Sarah found herself. There was no human rescue so it was a great time for God to ride to the rescue. Rather than trusting God, she chose to mock God and laugh at him.

Now that Sarah was caught with her mocking laughter, what did she do? She denied it and lied about it. Can any of the ladies relate? Somebody says to you, "Why are you laughing at me?" You say, "I wasn't laughing at you." It is easy to lie about this. The problem is that while we may be able to pull the wool over some people's eyes, we can't pull the wool over Jesus' eyes. He knows the truth. Jesus knows our hearts. Jesus knows our innermost thoughts.

The story continues.

Then the men set out from there, and they looked down toward Sodom. And Abraham went with them to set them on their way. The Lord said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.” Then the Lord said, “Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know.” Genesis 18:16–21 (ESV)

Because God had chosen Abraham as a friend, he shared with Abraham what was about to happen.

Abraham needed to be able to teach his children there are consequences to sin. Nobody gets away with sin. Eventually God will bring judgment for sin. Jesus told Abraham that he needed to know why Sodom and Gomorrah were about to be hit with flaming road tar. “I don’t want you to be ignorant about what is about to happen to them. It is judgment for their sin. It is not bad luck. It is not poor timing. It is judgment for sin. You need to know this so you can teach your children that sin will always be brought to justice.” When you see people get away with murder, remember that nobody gets away with murder. If they escape justice on earth, they will not escape justice with God. The New Testament reminds us of this.

...if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly... 2 Peter 2:6 (ESV)

What happened to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah was not just for Abraham’s good to learn about the consequences of sin but it was for our good. We need to learn there is a God, and he is involved in life. He brings about

justice for sin. The only way to escape justice for sin is to have Jesus take the punishment for sin we deserve.

We often think of Sodom and Gomorrah as just guilty of sexual sin but it was more than that.

Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. Ezekiel 16:49 (ESV)

Sodom was guilty of sexual sin and social sin. They were prosperous, but they didn't care for the poor and needy. There was no middle class. It was the rich who had more than enough and the poor that didn't have enough. Their sin was both sexual and social.

The story finishes.

So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the Lord. Then Abraham drew near and said, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 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? 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! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" And the Lord said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake." Abraham answered and said, "Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking. Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?" And he said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." Again he spoke to him and said, "Suppose forty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of forty I will not do it." Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there." He answered, "I will not do it, if I find thirty there." He said, "Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it." Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it." And the Lord went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place. Genesis 18:22–33 (ESV)

What happens next is amazing. Abraham intervened on behalf of Sodom. He engaged in a kind of reverse auction talking God down instead of up. Abraham stood in the gap for Sodom. He appealed to God's character of not punishing the righteous for the sins of the wicked.

There are a few things we can learn.

**My sin impacts others.**

We often think we can sin in private and our sins will stay private. That is not true. Every sin has unintended consequences. Every sin has a ripple effect beyond ourselves. There is no such thing as private sin that doesn't affect others. In Joshua 7, Achan sinned by stealing clothing and gold bars. He thought it was private sin, but in the Israelites' next battle, 36 of them died. Achan's sin cost the lives of 36 people. When we sin, we impact our families. We impact our children. We impact our church. There is no such thing as a victimless crime. We are all interconnected. This is why God destroyed the city of Sodom. He was dealing with them as a unit. It is like saying we only have cancer of the pancreas. Cancer affects everything in the body just like our private sin affects everyone in the body.

On the flip side, **my righteousness protects others.** When I live a righteous life, it provides protection for others and is a powerful influence on others. If there were only 10 righteous people in Sodom, God would have spared the city. I am sure those 10 people wouldn't have felt they were a significant light in a dark city but they would have been enough to make a difference and turn away God's wrath and save lives.

This morning, you don't realize the power of right living in your world, especially if it is a dark place. Right living doesn't just make a difference in your life, it make a difference in your family, your community and even your nation.

Look what God said to Ezekiel.

I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found no one. Ezekiel 22:30 (NIV)

Today, will you be that righteous person who stands in the gap for your family, for your community? We find the same thing with Moses after the people of Israel sinned by making a golden calf.

So he said he would destroy them— had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him to keep his wrath from destroying them. Psalm 106:23 (NIV)

The righteousness of Moses' life allowed him to stand in the gap and save a nation.

If God had found only 10 people in Sodom who were righteous, he would have spared the city. Doing what is right in my life doesn't just affect me. It saves others.

## **Applications**

What did we learn?

1. If God has touched my life, I will love serving strangers, not just friends.
2. Good hospitality is hard work.
3. Good hospitality is costly.
4. Good hospitality leaves a lasting picture of the gospel.
5. Beware of looking pious on the outside but mocking God on the inside.
6. It doesn't just matter what we say. It matters what we think.

7. God will judge sin. Learn from the example of Sodom.
8. Righteousness isn't just about my life. It protects and influences the lives of others.



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