

**"Nothing. Nada. Zip. Zilch. Zero."**

**Genesis 18:1-15**

**7 April 2024**

**NOTHING, NADA, ZIP, ZILCH, ZERO, \_\_\_\_\_ IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR GOD.**

And, if you don't believe me, ask the 100-year-old man, Abraham, and his 90-year-old wife, Sarah. 'Cause God told them they were going to have a baby boy, and they waited 25 loooooong years, and their little boy named *Laughter* appeared on his due date. Just like God said. When they were 100 and 90.

So, yeah, *nothing* is impossible for God. You might want to add that to your coffee tomorrow morning 'cause you're probably gonna need to get it into your system for later use.

Okay. We're back in the book of Genesis. Chapter 18. What do you do when God shows up unannounced to your house? What do you do when God just drops by uninvited? And, not just by Himself, but with 2 angels, and you don't have any cookies handy to serve them? What do you do? Well, you get busy bakin' cookies, that's what you do! And, that's exactly what Abraham and Sarah did when God showed up unannounced at their house.

LOOK AT VERSE 1...

*And Yahweh 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.*

Don't rush past verse one too quickly: *And Yahweh appeared to Abraham...* I know at this point in the story, like Abraham, you've probably just got used to the Lord showing up and speaking to Abraham. But, let's not forget the miracle of this. God Himself appears to Abraham!

I think we have a tendency to read verses like this, and they just become too familiar to us. We just get too cozy with texts like this, and we're just not that shocked by it anymore. I mean, just imagine for a second if Jesus actually appeared to you. In physical form. Dropped by your house one day for tea and cookies. I mean, you could see Him with your eyes eating your cookies. You could touch Him with your hands. And, you actually heard him speaking to you.

Would you ever get over that? Wouldn't you be telling everyone about it? I mean, that's the ultimate name drop right there: *"I made Jesus brunch and we chatted about my future."*

Listen, no matter how many famous people someone says they have met, you could always trump them by saying, *"But, I had cookies with Jesus."*

I know I just said that perhaps Abraham was used to Yahweh appearing to him. And, he may have been at least very familiar with it. We don't know how many times God appeared to Abraham. They could have had weekly meetings. They could have had quarterly meetings. We just don't know. But, what we do know is that at least a number of times, the Lord did appear to Abraham because the Bible tells us that.

But, I don't think Abraham has gotten too cozy with the idea of Yahweh, the Sovereign Lord, appearing to him, because of how he reacts in this passage. Abraham kinda freaks out. When the lights finally come on, Abraham realizes that these three men represent God, and at the very least, one of them *is* God Himself, because verse 10 says, *"Yahweh said..."* Abraham gets busy telling Sarah to bake some cookies.

Abraham realizes that this is actually Yahweh Himself visiting him. So, Abraham runs around like he's on a cooking show on the *Food Network* and he only has 30 minutes to whip up some scrumptious meal because he's taking on legendary chef, Bobby Flay, in some sort of competition like that. Abraham tells Sarah to get up, get some flour, and make some biscuits. Then he runs out into the field, gets a young calf, and then tells a young servant to cook it up.

You can actually *feel* the "hurry" as you read the passage. It's as if Abraham is on *Beat Bobby Flay* and there's a 30-minute timer on the wall, and time is almost gone and someone is shouting at them, *"Two minutes on the clock! Two minutes!!"*

But, this is more than just a reality cooking show on the Food Network. This is God Himself coming to have a meal with His friend Abraham! I say that Abraham is God's friend because of 2 verses in the Old Testament:

2 Chronicles 20:7

*Did you not, our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel, and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend?*

Isaiah 41:8

*But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend...*

This meal is nothing less than God Himself coming to visit Abraham, His friend, and share some good news with him. Because that's the whole point of this visitation: Yahweh is bringing good news to Abraham and Sarah once again. He is reassuring them, rubbing their faces in the promise that they will have a baby boy in one year.

So, we have these three men who appear, and they *are* men, that's why Abraham says, "Sit down, cool off in the shade, and let me make you a meal." But, then we also see that one of the men is Yahweh, the Lord, God Himself. Now, we don't know any details, other than Abraham viewed them as men. What color was their hair? Did they have beards? Were they left-handed? We don't know. All we know is that the text tells us that:

1) They were men- verse 2: "...three men were standing in front of him."

2) One of the men was God- verse 10: "*The LORD said...*"

3) The other 2 men were angels: Genesis 19:1 "*The two angels came to Sodom...*"

So, we have God and 2 angels eating a meal with Abraham. But, they are human in form. They look like regular men who need their dirty feet washed and need to rest in the shade of a tree, and who actually eat a meal.

It's very mysterious. We have all kinds of questions don't we! And, I think that's the point: it's mysterious! We serve a mysterious, baffling God. Sometimes God just appears to Abraham, and it appears to us that it's just an audible voice speaking to Abraham. And, sometimes the Lord appears to Abraham and He's a smoking fire pot that you would cook in, and He's a flaming torch, as he was in Genesis 17. And, then, sometimes the Lord appears to Abraham and it's an angel representing the Lord, speaking to Abraham on God's behalf. And, then sometimes, like our passage today, it's Yahweh in human form with two other angels in human form.

Why does God appear in different ways to Abraham? I think, at least in part, it's to stress His mystery. He's baffling. He's different from us. We can't put Him in a box...*and we're supposed to be humbled by that.* It's supposed to draw us to our knees in humility.

Understand this: We serve a God that we cannot fully understand. As one person said when speaking about God, it's like children talking about nuclear physics. And, that's what we have here in Genesis 18. We go with the text, and it says that Yahweh appeared to Abraham. And, it says that three men appeared to him. So, when we put those things together, what we have is the Lord appearing with two angels- and they all have the appearance of human beings: feet, hair, arms, elbows, kneecaps...shoe sizes.

And, that's about all we can say. But, we can say it with *certainty*: it's Yahweh, the Lord God, appearing with two angels to Abraham. And, the three of them have the appearance of men, and yet somehow, Abraham knew it was Yahweh and two angels.

Listen, let me let you in on a secret: the Bible does not answer all our curiosities! We want the Bibles to answer all our questions, cross all the theological t's and dot all the theological i's. But, it doesn't do that. It tells us what it wants us to know, and then it leaves a lot of questions unanswered.

But, as mysterious as God is, don't miss how friendly He is! He fellowships, has communion with Abraham! Yes, we serve a mysterious and baffling God, but at least He's not out of reach! We often don't understand His ways, BUT (!!!) we can know Him! We won't always get our prayers answered the way we want, and we may not get all our theological questions answered, but we *can* know Him! We can know Him *intimately*, just like Abraham.

I think you're supposed to read Genesis 18 and then jump to John's Gospel in John 15:15 where Jesus calls us "friends." And, then I think you're supposed to jump to the end of John's Gospel, after His resurrection, when Jesus appears to His disciples and makes them breakfast. It's friendship. Communion. Eating cookies with one another. Friends. Friends with God.

And, we'll see that next week in the back half of Genesis 18 when the Lord says, "*Shall I hide from Abraham what I'm about to do?*" And, the answer is "No," because Abraham is God's *friend*. And, so are you.

God's friend. Whatever it is that you are going through in your life right now, you have this truth that you can fall back on at the end of the day: *I am God's friend*. You can make it through a lot with that promise!

Isn't that beautiful? You are friends with Jesus. Let that sink in.

And, one of the unique benefits of being friends with Jesus is that-

**NOTHING, NADA, ZIP, ZILCH, ZERO, \_\_\_\_\_ IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR GOD.**

And, that's exactly what Yahweh will tell Abraham next.

LOOK AT VERSE AT VERSE 9...

*They said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "She is in the tent." Yahweh 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?" Yahweh 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 Yahweh? 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."*

So, Sarah is eavesdropping on this conversation between Abraham and God, she's inside the tent with her ear pressed against the door, when Yahweh tells Abraham, *"I'm gonna come back and see you in about a year, and Sarah your wife, will give birth to a baby boy."* Sarah feels every bit of her 90 years. She knows that the get-pregnant ship sailed a loooooong time ago. So, she laughs at God's word. But, she doesn't know that God can hear her! So, Yahweh asks Abraham why Sarah laughed at her being able to get pregnant at her age.

Then, Yahweh, poses a question that is rich with hope-giving theology. God asks Abraham- *and the eavesdropping Sarah-* *"Is anything too hard for Yahweh?"* Then God reiterates His plan to visit in a year when Sarah gives birth. And, then, Sarah lies to God and says that she didn't laugh! I love the exchange:

*But Sarah denied it, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. He said, "No, but you did laugh."*

Sarah's like, *"I don't know what you're talking about. I didn't laugh."* And, God is like, *"No, but you did."* And that's it! God doesn't say anything else! This woman just laughed at God's word, and all she hears is, *"No, but you did laugh."*

If it bothers you that God didn't bring the hammer down on Sarah for laughing at Him and then lying to his face about it, just think back over the past week and see if there's anything you said or did that God could have brought the hammer down on you for. Okay. That's what I thought.

Let's just all agree that we love mercy. We love that God doesn't give us- or Sarah- what we deserve. So, Sarah laughing and lying might become one of your favorite verses in the Bible because it reminds you just how merciful Jesus is. Who knew? An eavesdropping, old woman who laughed at and lied to God Himself could remind you that you escaped the hammer of God this week too. We serve a merciful God. Don't be surprised if that ever moves you to tears.

So, Sarah laughs and lies, and I guess that was enough because the conversation ends here. I guess when God calls you out, the conversations ends. Just be glad you didn't get intimately acquainted with God's hammer, I guess.

So, what does this passage teach us about God? What can we learn from an old woman who waits 25 years to finally get a son and then laughs in the face of the God who promised her said son? Besides the aforementioned mercy of God, we see that Sarah and Abraham really are in an impossible situation. They are helpless. They are in a pickle. There is no chance- *nothing, nada, zip, zilch, zero-* chance they can have a baby at their age apart from divine intervention. Only God could cause them to get pregnant and have a baby. They are completely helpless to bring a baby into the world.

And, we're just like Abraham and Sarah. We're helpless too. We forget that helplessness is how prayer works. Helplessness is how the Christian life works. Helplessness is the door to God's grace. Jesus wants helpless people. So, the criteria for coming to Jesus is helplessness. It's being overwhelmed with life. It's coming messy and collapsing at His feet. That's how get rest. Collapsing at His feet all overwhelmed, weak, helpless, and very messy- just like *Mrs. I Laugh At God*. Being helpless is what connects you to Jesus. Helplessness opens the door to see Jesus.

So, this is a match made in Heaven:

*Our helplessness + The Nothing-is-impossible-for-Me-God*

What hope! What peace! What security! What rest! This is the essence of Christianity. We are helpless (before AND after being saved) and He is sufficient. Nothing is impossible for God. Jesus will pick up on this idea in Luke's Gospel. I love what Scotty Smith says-

*"What is impossible with man is possible with God." Luke 18:27 - That's my pillow for tonight's sleep."*

What do we rest our heads on? *Is anything too hard for the Lord?* What do we rest our heads on? *What is impossible with man is possible with God.*

Listen, if we learn nothing else about God from this passage, it's that He likes to put His people in precarious situations, impossible situations. That's just His M.O. in the Bible.

He often brings His people into impossible circumstances and situations so bleak, so dark, and so hopeless- for what? Perhaps for the very purpose of impressing upon our hearts that if we make it through these bleak, dark, hopeless situations, if we somehow endure, if we are not overwhelmed and washed away, and if we don't lose our minds and go crazy (!), it will be only because of His grace and power.

He does it so that we will lift our eyes to Him, so that we will have no illusions or delusions about where our help is found.

So, sometimes life just batters you and batters you with hopeless situations, and you're helpless, and God's intervention looks downright impossible. But, it's not. It never is. Not when the God of Genesis 18:14 is eating a plate of cookies you made Him. Not when the God of Luke 18:27 is your Friend.

But, let me say something about this *"Is anything too hard for God?"* language. It's tied to a promise from God. This does not mean that we can "claim" it in order to win the lottery! Like, *"Is anything too hard for God? Nope! That's why I'll win the lottery today!"* It's tied to the promise from God. Humanly speaking, can a 100-year-old man and a 90-year-old woman get pregnant? No. But, when it's tied to a promise from God, the answer is Yes!

So-

**NOTHING, NADA, ZIP, ZILCH, ZERO, \_\_\_\_\_ IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR GOD.**

What do you need to add to that blank space this morning? What feels like an impossible situation that you find yourself in? What impossible circumstances has God lead you to? What situation has Jesus sovereignly orchestrated in your life that feels so bleak, so dark, and so hopeless? Lift your eyes to Him. And, don't have any illusions or delusions about where your help is found.

In her book *Nothing Is Impossible with God: Reflections on Weakness, Faith, and Power*, Rose Marie Miller recalls a difficult time in her life on the mission field in Uganda, when she was overwhelmed as she traveled back to the States. Her husband, Jack, gave her the help she needed:

*As we walked the streets of Geneva, surrounded by sophisticated, well-dressed people, I finally couldn't hold it in any longer. My suppressed anger and guilt came to the surface. With tears streaming down my cheeks I said to Jack, "Why couldn't I cope? Why do I collapse so often and then get filled with guilt? What is wrong with me?" Jack turned to me and said, "Rose Marie, you act like an orphan. You act as if the Holy Spirit never came and could never help you through impossible situations like Uganda and Mombasa. You act as if there is no Father who loves you." The Holy Spirit took those words and pressed them into my heart. I knew Jack was right. All I could say was, "Lord, I am sorry. Please teach me how to be a daughter." (Nothing Is Impossible with God: Reflections on Weakness, Faith, and Power, p. 11)*

Let me ask you today: What impossibility are you facing where you need to be taught how to be a daughter or son? What's happening in your life right now where you are tempted to act like an orphan? What burdens are you carrying? What's keeping you up at night? What impossibility do you need to hand over to Jesus?

Andrew Bonar once told his church right before communion, which we're about to celebrate-

*"Jesus is walking today among the seven golden candlesticks, and he will stop here, at our Communion Table, to see if any of you want anything from Him."*

Isn't that wonderful? Jesus is here. At the table before us. Do you need anything from Him? Do you have a need? Is something weighing down your heart? He will meet you here today. The God for whom nothing is impossible has stopped here this morning at Grace Baptist Church, Santa Maria, to see if you need anything from Him. He came to church today just for you.

Let me tweak our big idea as we prepare to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Maybe someone here needs to hear this today:

**NOTHING, NADA, ZIP, ZILCH, ZERO, \_\_\_\_\_ IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR GOD...TO FORGIVE.**

This is the Gospel. Christ crucified for sinners. There is no sin that you have committed that God is not willing to forgive if you come to His Son Jesus. Will you come? He's waiting for you today. Come. Collapse into His merciful arms.

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"Nothing. Nada. Zip. Zilch. Zero."

Genesis 18:1-15

Sermon Study Questions

1. Discuss this thought from the sermon:

*Why does God appear in different ways to Abraham? I think, at least in part, it's to stress His mystery. He's baffling. He's different from us. We can't put Him in a box...and we're supposed to be humbled by that. It's supposed to draw us to our knees in humility. Understand this: We serve a God that we cannot fully understand. As one person said when speaking about God, it's like children talking about nuclear physics.*

2. READ John 15:15 and discuss:

*Whatever it is that you are going through in your life right now, you have this truth that you can fall back on at the end of the day: I am God's friend. You can make it through a lot with that promise! Isn't that beautiful? You are friends with Jesus. Let that sink in.*

3. READ Genesis 18:12-15. Why did God respond the way He did to Sarah? What does this teach us about God?

4. Discuss this thought from the sermon:

We're just like Abraham and Sarah. We're helpless too. We forget that helplessness is how prayer works. Helplessness is how the Christian life works. Helplessness is the door to God's grace. Jesus wants helpless people. So, the criteria for coming to Jesus is helplessness. It's being overwhelmed with life. It's coming messy and collapsing at His feet. That's how get rest. Collapsing at His feet all overwhelmed, weak, helpless, and very messy- just like *Mrs. I Laugh At God*. Being helpless is what connects you to Jesus. Helplessness opens the door to see Jesus. So, this is a match made in Heaven: *Our helplessness + The Nothing-is-impossible-for-Me-God*.

5. Discuss these quotes:

Scotty Smith

*"What is impossible with man is possible with God." Luke 18:27 - That's my pillow for tonight's sleep."*

Rose Marie Miller

*I said to Jack, "Why couldn't I cope? Why do I collapse so often and then get filled with guilt? What is wrong with me?" Jack turned to me and said, "Rose Marie, you act like an orphan. You act as if the Holy Spirit never came and could never help you through impossible situations like Uganda and Mombasa. You act as if there is no Father who loves you." The Holy Spirit took those words and pressed them into my heart. I knew Jack was right. All I could say was, "Lord, I am sorry. Please teach me how to be a daughter."*

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*"Jesus is walking today among the seven golden candlesticks, and he will stop here, at our Communion Table, to see if any of you want anything from Him."*