

Guess who's coming to dinner?

" three men were standing and Abraham bowed himself to the earth "

[For those online, there is the text of Scripture at the end]

Introduction

One of the things people know about us Jewish people is our willingness to negotiate. Middle East news being covered worldwide is aching for the Israelis and the Palestinians to come to the bargaining table. A real bargain is something we rather enjoy, and the old joke is that God made so many Gentiles since someone had to buy retail. Being shrewd in business characterizes us, so they say. That all may be true. We do find a good deal here and there, and in today's story of the Bible we will see a master bargainer at work, teaching one of his disciples what is really valuable. The bargainer is none other than God Himself, and the disciple is our Father Abraham. We'll get to that later in our sermon.

Also in our story today we find out about justice on sin and also about God in his number. That is, we find out that God again is identified in the plural and in the singular. That could be and is intentionally confusing. So I believe. God wants to confuse the haughty and the unwilling. He wants to reveal Himself to the lowly and let's hope that includes all of us.

Our story today may be marked by the outline as follows: 1) Visitation in the camp, 2) Baby Announcement and one of war and justice, and 3) the meeting at the Bargaining Table. Read Gen 17.

1. Guess who is coming to dinner?

Do you remember the famous slogan of Benjamin Franklin, the great American statesman from the Revolutionary War days? He said concerning relatives... Fish and visitors smell after three days. The Swahili proverb is not dissimilar. It says, "Treat your guest as a guest for two days; on the third day, give him a hoc."

But Abraham had not read either of these sayings. He was taught by the Great Host of Heaven to receive others. So we read in today's story that when the three visitors came to Abraham's area, he actually ran to meet them. 10 times in the Bible, the word Mamre is used, and all in the book of Genesis. The contrast the rabbis see is that in Salem, Abraham would have been under the tutelage and wisdom of Melchizedek, whereas here in the Beersheba area, Abraham would have no competitor for religious idealism. Makes sense. Mamre is also a name to note of a future disciple.

So here he is minding his own business, in the Retirement village known as the Oaks of Mamre. Abraham is 99 years old. He's rocking. He's whistling. And the aged one sees three visitors approaching. He hops out of his chair, runs to meet them, washes their feet and gets them lunch. Whew... what hospitality! What grace!

Here we see the three men arriving. Or are they men? Hear what Abraham says to them, "אֵלֹהִים אֲנִי בְּעֵינֶיךָ". This is none other than the expression that described Noah. (Gen. 6.8) Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Here Abraham is saying, gentlemen, you are like God to me. And if you will grace me as God graced Noah, then I will be a favored person. He is recognizing the deity

in three persons. Now this might be a stretch for some of you. I understand. But the language of Abraham is a definite echo of Noah's testimony of God's favor.

He offers them a 'piece of bread' but actually bakes up three saah of fine flour which is a huge amount (Eruvin 83A shows that each contained 144 eggs!), enough for an entire company of diners. This modest speech is very characteristic of our Father Abraham.

So Abraham runs (hebrew is Ratz) a root of the word ratzah (desire). He demonstrates his desires by where his body goes. One of the latest understandings I have is that people do what they want to do. If you want to know what you wanted to do this week, look at what you did. In other words, it's not about what was required or what you had time for and the things you really wanted to do you didn't get time or money or inclination to fulfill. You actually did what you wanted. If you want to do something different next week, set your desire on them now and run a test on this next Shabbat.

Did you notice the food they ate? It's milchig and fleishig together. Oh, oh.... Not very kosher! A point most rabbis skip right over. But Rabbi Hertz says, "this is quite in accord with the dietary laws." Huh? How could that be? He avers that they were given milk products first to assuage their thirst and then much later to eat the main meal which had meat as the base. What a silly argument, and forcing later views on earlier readings. It makes sense to me that

the laws of meat and milk are forced rabbinical preventions, what are called 'hedges about the law.' And these are not to be read back into the text at all. Meat and milk eaten together may well be fine.

So this three yet one visitor arrives and Abraham sets out to honor them, to feed them, and to spend time with them. He (verse 8) stands over them under the tree and they ate. At today's beginning I said that the master negotiator is God, but here the master host is God as well. Why do I say that? For we read in the Talmud (Kiddushin 32B) "the Creator causes winds to blow and He brings the clouds and causes rain to come down and causes the earth to produce, and He sets a table before every man." Sounds like Psalm 23, doesn't it? "He prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies." This notion of setting a table is God's way to let us know of his hospitality, of His affection towards us, and it is this that Abraham learned and practiced.

Bruechner says, "God does not need the Creation in order to have something to love, because within Himself love happens." This pleasure of God within Himself is of note as Trinity would well describe. In other words, if God needed humanity to share His love, He would not be complete in Himself, thus lacking something which is inconsistent with the nature of God. But here, the complete in Himself, three yet one God makes an appearance to humanity and desires to share such completion with another.

These guests, complete in themselves, yet willing and longing to share with men, wonder where Sarah is. Abraham now is sure they are God in the flesh as who would know his wife's name but God?

2. Did he say...baby? HA! HA!

So now we come to our second section today, the scene with the angels, visitors, God... and Sarah. She laughs and the angel affirms and reaffirms the promise of God to Abraham from decades ago and from last week that it will be a personal matter and that Abraham will bear a son through you! Next year, this same time. No dispute, no arguments. Shein g'night. (that's all she wrote).

A little boy asked his mother where he came from, and also where she had come from as a baby. His mother gave him a tall tale about a beautiful white-feathered bird. The boy asked his grandmother the same question and received a variation on the bird story. Outside to his playmate he said, "You know, there hasn't been a normal birth in our family for three generations." [Howard Hendricks, quoted in *Homemade*, September, 1989].

Sarah should have heard the word of promise and believed. After all, faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10.17). True? What you hear is what you end up believing. That's why it's key to keep coming here to learn and to read your Bible each day and thus to keep growing in your faith and learning about God's plans for you.

Her one sin of laughing (thus disbelieving) was followed by another very quickly. Isn't that the way it is with most of us. When Sarah sinned she covered it up with a lie, "I did not laugh." (verse 15) Shocking what things we end up doing when we really don't want to, or so we say. Remember the thesis that we do what we want to do. So our evil inclination tends to weigh more heavily on us and cause us to do things,

but we have to fight against it continually and trust God more often. We get to believe more and thus yield more to His love and grace. Stop sin in its tracks; don't give in!

The word given is "Is anything too hard for God?" Hebrew is **הֲיִפְּלֵא מִיָּדָהּ**

The Hebrew pele or here "too hard" is also the word used in Isa. 9 where we read the child would be born whose name is "wonderful", Pele. Not to be confused with the footballer from Chile.

There is also an announcement of impending doom. Justice always warrants that, doesn't it? " **by doing righteousness and justice;**" God's character is known as just and righteous altogether, and Abraham is called to be so in his doings and living.

3. How about 14.95?

The third part of today's lesson is from verse 23 and following. The plea bargaining, the wheeler and dealer, Abraham! Here's a couple key points to learn about bargaining from Jewish people. Sam Levenson used to say, "Our mammas did not hesitate to bargain. Questioning a price was standard procedure. "How much are these cucumbers?" "Two for five." The mamma pushed one aside. "And how much is this one?" "Three cents." "Okay. I'll take the other one."

Or how about this one, "Never buy a portable TV set on the sidewalk from a man who's out of breath." Quoted in *Funny Funny World*.

Of course, it's not only Jews who know about bargains and good deals.

But in our story today, we see Abraham bargaining for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. He wants them to live. Why? What could he possibly care about two pagan cities, not in his control and without any relevance to him? Because Abraham had learned God's love and concerns. Looking back at verse 17-19, we read that God said,

"And the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed? For I have chosen him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice; in order that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him." John Piper in the book "The Pleasures of God" says this: Another way of talking about this 'choosing' is to say that God 'knew' Abraham just before he destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. He pondered (verse 18), then He answered Himself, "No for I have known him..." The special way of 'knowing' is used again in Amos when God declares his unique relation to the people of Israel "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." (3.2) This does not mean that God is ignorant about all the families of the earth. It means that he has set his special attention on Israel and acknowledged them to be his unique possession out of all the other peoples of the earth." (page 126)

God here looks (verse 16) on the face of Sodom and Gomorrah and aches. Abraham notices the wincing and believes he can bargain for the cities. It's because of God's love for all people that Abraham sets out in his negotiating table work. Also, as we will find out in next week's episode, his nephew Lot, who earlier pitched his tents toward Sodom (14.12) is now living there and thus would be part of the judgment on the cities. Abraham who ached to see Ishmael live (17.18) continues to demonstrate the compassion of a child of God concerning the lost. We would do well so to learn of God's grace and kindnesses, amen?

Summary

Here are some things I see as we conclude today, and some things I want you to take with you after the songs from today's service are just faint memories.

- 1) God is willing to negotiate with us because He cares for the many
- 2) One little sin really does grow into others
- 3) Hospitality is a grace for all the people of God
- 4) You will end up doing what you really wanted to do, so choose well!

Next week we will look at Lot and his backsliding ways. It is a special week to bring along someone who is out of fellowship. Please implore people to join us next week, ok? And then in 2 weeks it's Rosh Hashanah and the dedication of the new sefer Torah. You won't want to be apart from us the next couple weeks.

Dear friends, we have eternal life due to the Saviour, due to His love and forgiveness. His Resurrection has proven His new covenant. His teaching is great, but it goes well beyond that to His life and death. No amount of good works will give us enough information to help us overcome evil. No amount of information will help us overcome our own evil inclination. Only the messiah can repair our relationship with God, which will in turn give us pleasure with Him.

If you have never experienced this eternal and new life about which we are speaking, if you are yet outside the relationship with God, then pray with me. If you haven't yet been restored into fellowship with Him, maybe God is removing a veil from you today. Won't you pray this prayer and ask God to forgive you of your sins, whatever they might be, and come home to pleasure with God?

Lord forgive me in the name of the Messiah, the Serpent Bruiser, Y'shua himself. Forgive me for all my sins, and make me clean again. Give me eternal life in the name of Y'shua and make me born again. I trust you.