

LIFE GROUP LEADER GUIDE

Genesis: The LORD Visits Abraham

Genesis 18:1-8



SERMON NOTES

We are told repeatedly that this life we live is not by flesh and blood alone. This physical world is not the only reality that exists. What you see is not the only thing that is around you.

The Scriptures repeatedly show us examples of heavenly beings existing around us. The spiritual realm coincides right here with the physical realm. In 2 Kings 6:15-17, the prophet Elisha and his servant are in the city of Dothan. They were surrounded by the Syrian army, which had come to capture Elisha. Elisha's servant, seeing the surrounding army, is scared to death and asked Elisha what they should do. Elisha tells his servants that the one's with them outnumber the one's against them and then the LORD opens the eyes of the servant to see the angel armies of God present. This passage, and many others show us the reality of the spiritual realm around us. We know that the angels of God exist around us. They are messengers of God, guardians, minister to believers, and wage spiritual battle on our behalf.

But this unseen realm sometimes enters into sight. In fact, the Scriptures show us examples of the LORD and angels appearing to people in physical form, even in the appearance of men.

Hebrews 13:2 -- *Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.*

Think about this for a moment...you have likely encountered angels physically in your life, perhaps more frequently than we'd ever think, yet didn't know. Now take this one on for a moment...and it could be possible that you've even encountered the LORD without knowing. I asked Brandon, Nick, and Morgan this week about their thoughts on this. Is there any reason to think that the examples of the LORD appearing to men in the flesh somehow doesn't happen today? Our instinct may be to say it doesn't, but there are no passages that tell us this. Nor is there any evidence that the LORD's appearing to people explicitly stops. Jesus appears after His resurrection to the two men on the Road to Emmaus and they don't recognize Him. Now I'm not saying this 100% happens, but I don't think you can say it doesn't.

The reason this is so fascinating is this is exactly what happens in our passage today. The LORD and two angels appear to Abraham, who at first doesn't realize who it is.

Exegesis

V 1-2 – 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

Verse 1 tells us the LORD appears to Abraham. This is pointing us to what we're going to see in Verse 2 when three men stand in front of him at the entrance of his tent. Now there are lots of questions about these three men. Are these JUST three *men*? The obvious answer is no. We know that because of Verse 1. Is this a manifestation of the Trinity? Is that why there are three of them? That sounds cool, but it is not the case. This isn't the appearance of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the form of three men. So what do we have? We have the LORD and two angels in the appearance of three men. The glory of the LORD and these two angels are veiled from Abraham. We read later in Verse 16 that the three men and Abraham go to a place where they look down on Sodom. Then in Verse 22 it appears that two of the men went toward Sodom and Abraham stood before the LORD. Then at the beginning of Chapter 19, Verse 1, we read the two angels came to Sodom. I walk you through those passages to show you that the most likely understanding of who these three men are is the LORD and two angels.

In the Old Testament, we have appearances of God that are not in human form (cloud by day, pillar of fire by night). These are theophanies. We see it when the covenant is made and the animals are cut in two and the torch passes through the middle. That's a theophany. It is the LORD, but not in human form. Here in Genesis 18, we have a Christophany (a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ). When we see the physical appearance of the LORD in the Old Testament, we have a Christophany. Jesus is the only person within the Trinity to take a physical human form. The vision of the LORD high and lifted up in the Temple, seated on the throne in Isaiah 6, is a Christophany.

Okay, so we know the LORD visits Abraham. He appears to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of day. He could be preparing for the customary nap or steal healing from

the circumcision. But he's in the tent and when he lifts his eyes and looks, three men are there in front of him. We know this is the LORD. We have the appearance of Christ and two angels.

Does Abraham know this? We don't know for sure. Most believe he does not know initially but as the encounter goes on (as we'll see next week) he discerns it is the LORD.

V 3-8 – 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.

We see Abraham bow himself to the earth and say, "O Lord (notice is lowercase letters), if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. Most commentators say that Abraham is greeting them as visitors, not as the LORD or angels. Abraham is showing them honor and hospitality. It's fascinating to consider that Abraham is hosting the LORD and two angels and has no idea. It reminds us of Hebrews 13:

Hebrews 13:2 – Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

The LORD and these two angels appear as regular men. He offers water for their feet while they rest. Then he gives them a morsel of bread to eat. Abraham goes and tells Sarah to start getting a meal going. They prepare a feast for the guests.

Application

Now we're going to dive deeper next week into what happens next in the interaction where Sarah laughs at the suggestion that she's going to have a child within the next year. But I want to look at a few points of application that can be helpful for us today.

1. Christians should be hospitable and honoring to others.

We see that Abraham immediately welcomes his guests, not even knowing who they are, and treats them as honored guests. The unexpected arrival was not an inconvenience for him, but a chance to demonstrate hospitality.

It is fascinating to me that one of the stories Jesus tells us about being welcomed to Heaven is being welcomed in the Father's house. John 14:2-4 says, "In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going." Welcomed by God into His home. Another image of Heaven in the New Testament is feasting at the Table with God. Hospitality is God's idea.

We are called to be hospitable people. Why? Through hospitality, people find connection and community. People find healing from hurts and wounds. Opening our homes is a way of opening ourselves to people. It is a way for the aroma of Christ to serve as a fragrance of all who come in. Our homes can become like little churches where God's grace and love are present.

There are so many stories from church history that show us the power of hospitality.

Augustine, the playboy philosopher found Christ, not just through the preaching of Ambrose in Milan, but through his hospitality. Ambrose was the first to help Augustine realize that not only was the Christian faith intellectually tenable, but was also warm and vibrant. Ambrose won Augustine over through hospitality.

Rosaria Butterfield is another famous example of the power of hospitality. She actually wrote a book called, *The Gospel Comes With A House Key*. It was hospitality that the Lord used to bring her to faith.

If you don't know the story, she was a professor of Queer Studies at the University of Syracuse. A pastor wrote to her about an article she published, challenging some of her premises and arguments, but doing it in such a way that was honest and in good faith. She couldn't shake the letter and left it on her desk. Eventually she makes contact and begins a relationship with the pastor and his wife. She began going to their house for dinner and intellectual conversations about Christianity. Rosaria was a lesbian who lived with her partner. She was very much against Christianity, yet the hospitality and truths of the gospel began to open her eyes to God's grace. She eventually came to faith. She repented from her homosexual lifestyle. She eventually met someone, got married, and had children. She is an incredible testimony of not only the power of the gospel, but the power of hospitality.

My family and I have tried to use our home over the years the same way. Whether it was a bunch of college football players coming for dinner or families that have lost children, or people needing a place to stay for a season of life, we've tried to be open-handed about our home, asking the Lord to use it to show others His love and grace.

A few tips:

- Make your home as welcoming as possible.
- Be willing to be inconvenienced.
- See your home as a place where others can find rest and peace.
- Serve others in your home as a way of honoring them.
- Use what you have rather than excusing what you don't have.

2. Divine encounters happen in the midst of ordinary life.

Think about how cool it is that the LORD and two angels visit Abraham in the form of three men. He has no idea who these men are. He's interacting with the God of Heaven and Earth! There is no tornado that rolls through. There isn't a portal from Heaven or a blinding light that overwhelms him. It's three guys who come to his home. And he is interacting with God.

Divine encounters happen like this in the context of everyday life. This is true in Scripture. It is true of church history. And it is still true today. The LORD works in your life each day. There are things God is doing in the smallness of daily life that we often overlook.

In Henry Blackaby's *Experiencing God*, he talks about the way God speaks to us today: through His Word, through prayer, through other believers, and through circumstances. Every day circumstances can become the stage for experiencing God.

If we would learn to tune our spiritual senses, we would recognize that God is at work in our lives all around us each day. We never know when the thing happening is something that God is up to that we otherwise wouldn't think much of.

3. Christians have access to fellowship with the LORD.

Abraham fellowships with the LORD. He eats a meal with God and angels. The people of God throughout the Old Testament viewed these encounters with the LORD as special rare occurrences. They had no hopes of this kind of personal fellowship with the Living God. But in the new covenant, the LORD makes Himself available to us in personal fellowship through Christ. Through faith in Christ, we not only have our sins forgiven. We have access. The curtain has been torn into. The holy of holies is accessible to those who enter through Christ. We can have fellowship with God directly. The Holy Spirit, living within us, gives us special access to the LORD.

This is available to you today. In Christ, you have access. You can draw near to God. The promise of the Scriptures is that if you would draw near to God, He would draw near to you (James 4:8). Fellowship with God is what Christ has come to provide us. You can know Him. You can walk with Him each day. Through Christ, and the Holy Spirit dwelling in you, you can have friendship with God. In fact, this is one of the main purposes for which Christ saved you.

You were made for fellowship with God.

Sin severs fellowship with God.

Christ reconciles us to fellowship with God.

Heaven is eternity in fellowship with God.

You don't have to wait until that Day to fellowship with God. Trust Christ and seek to know God today.

You can walk with Him in close fellowship. No need to wait for Him to visit your tent like Abraham. He has visited us all through Christ. Now the call is to draw near.



LOOK BACK

- How was your week? What is one thing you're grateful for and one thing that challenged you?
- How did you grow in obedience to Christ over the last week?
- Where did you go to share the gospel or have a spiritual conversation with someone?
- What is a sin you have been struggling with that you need to repent of?



LOOK UP

- **REVIEW**

- Read **Genesis 18:1-8** and then have someone else in the group read it again, preferably from a different version.
- What big takeaways did you have from the teaching?
- Additional Scripture:
 - Judges 19:5
 - Psalm 104:15
 - John 13:14
 - Luke 7:44
 - Hebrews 13:2
 - 1 Peter 4:8

- **REFLECT**

- How do Abraham's actions reflect the importance of hospitality?
- What can we learn from Abraham's quick and generous response to the strangers?
- In this passage the Lord visited Abraham with angels by his side. Hebrews mentions that we interact with angels without knowing it. Is it possible that we interact with God or angels today?
- Although Sarah is not directly addressed in this part of the story, she is involved in preparing the meal. What does this passage say about partnership in hospitality?

- **RESPOND**

- Is there an area of your life where you have not been trusting the Lord?
- Is there an area of your life where you need to practice obedience?
- What is a practical step you can take as a result of this sermon?

- **MEMORIZE**

- John 5:24 – Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

LOOK AHEAD



- **BUILD UP:** How will you follow Jesus this week and grow in your love and understanding of Him? We have several discipleship opportunities for you to participate in.
 - **MDWK** is a time of education and growth in order to build up the Journey Church body. We offer a handful of intentionally chosen classes that cover a broad range of topics and are taught by quality teachers from within our congregation. Classes are at 6:30p every Wednesday.
 - **TJC Women** seeks to equip women to be rooted in the Word of God and bold in their faith. Our events and small groups focus on letting the gospel shape all spheres of our lives. Gather is the first Saturday of every month.
 - **TJC Men** exists to build up men for the glory of God, the growth of the Kingdom, and the good of the world. The men's ministry meets on the 2nd Saturday of every month at 8:00a.
 - **TJC Students** is passionate to see every parent equipped, every leader developed, and every student disciplined into baptized, self-feeding, disciple making followers of Jesus who are letting the gospel shape every sphere of their lives. Our student ministry meets on Wednesday nights from 6:00p-7:30p for MDWK worship and Sunday mornings at 8:30a and 10:00a for small group.
 - **TJC Young Adults** exists to equip young adults ages 18 to 29 in becoming passionate followers of Jesus who enter their life in Christ. We do this through intentional relationships, fellowship, and worship centered around the gospel. The Fount meets Tuesdays at 7:00p.
- **SEND OUT:** Who in your sphere of influence needs to hear this story, your story or the gospel? We have several opportunities for local and overseas missions.
 - **For the City:** Serving international students at Cumberland University, serving the homeless at Compassionate Hands, supporting our local missions – Reach out to Jeff Long (jeff@tjclive.com) for more information
 - **For the Nations:** 2025 trips to the Philippines, Turkey, Rome, Indonesia, London, and Israel – Reach out to Shawn Casto (shawn@tjclive.com) for more information
- **PRAYER**
 - Pray over any request from your group members.
 - **Staff** – Becca Depolitte
 - **Role** – Students Ministry Assistant
 - **Pray for our long-term units on the field:**
 - The Wilsons
 - The Grays
 - The Starks

- **Pray for our short-term teams**
 - Central Asia Team #2 departing on September 27
- **Pray for the unreached.** Want to keep up with Unreached People Groups? Download the Unreached of the Day App <https://joshuaproject.net/pray/unreachedoftheday/app>