

“You Have Come to Your Servant”

I don’t know that many of us can really put ourselves in Abraham and Sarah’s shoes. They were a bit old - 99 and 89 respectively - but they didn’t have any children. Sarah was barren throughout her childbearing years, and now she was well past that age. But still, the LORD promised Abraham that he would make his family into a great nation, a blessing for all people. God even told Abraham to count the stars or the grains of sand on the seashore. He would have more descendants than that! How could this be possible without even one son? It was hard to believe.

Maybe we haven’t been in Abraham and Sarah’s situation, but we’ve all had our hardships. There are points in our lives where something seems impossible, and it’s hard to believe. When you or your loved one receives a cancer diagnosis. When the economy takes a dive, and you lose your job, your investments crash, and the bank forecloses on your house because you can’t make payments. A sudden disaster wipes away all your possessions. Doesn’t the LORD promise to bless you? Maybe not to make you into a great nation with more offspring than the sand along Lake Michigan. But to guard and keep you, to give you hope and a future?

What do you do when all seems lost? Like Abraham and Sarah, who traveled across countries at the LORD’s call, like any good Christian who knows their Savior, you cling to the LORD. What does the LORD ask of you? **“Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength”** (Deut. 6:5). So, when the going gets tough, we need to just love God a little bit more, right? If we love better, life will be better!

As we look at this account of Abraham, Sarah, and three strange visitors, we’ll learn about the one thing needful. On that day, just like today, there’s one thing that’s necessary. Not a hot meal, not a baby boy to carry on the family name. The only thing we need is the LORD’s presence. We say with Abraham, **“You** have come to your servant.”

Abraham and Sarah had already tried taking matters into their own hands to bring God’s blessing to fruition. When the LORD told Abraham at age

75 that he would be the father of many nations, Abraham already wondered how it was possible. He figured that his chief servant would be the heir of all his possessions. But the LORD assured him that he would have a son. When Sarah remained barren, she offered Abraham her maidservant Hagar to bear his child. Abraham did have a son Ishmael with Hagar, and immediately Sarah was jealous. The LORD promised to bless Hagar and Ishmael, but he was not the promised child. Do you see how messy things get when human hands try to force the situation?

Shortly before this reading, the LORD appeared to Abraham alone. It doesn’t seem that God appeared in human form at that time. But he gave new names to Abram and Sarai, indicating that a change was coming for them. In a year’s time, they would have that promised son. Abraham fell down and laughed at this. Can a hundred-year-old man have a son? Will a ninety-year-old woman bear a child? How must Sarah have reacted when her husband brought her this news? Maybe Abraham was standing out in the desert sun too long. Was his mind starting to slip?

If they couldn’t believe it then, maybe they would when the LORD and two angels visited them. We don’t know that Abraham immediately recognized these men for who they were. But he still jumped up into hurried hospitality. He ran to meet them, bowed down before them, and pleaded for their favor. He asked for the opportunity to wash their feet and bring them a bit of food so that they could be refreshed for their continued journey. Abraham didn’t know why these men came to “their servant,” but he was certainly going to serve them while they were there.

It seems that Abraham took Martha’s approach to the LORD’s visit. He wanted to do as much as possible to serve the LORD as best as he was able. The “little bit” of food he offered? With three seahs of flour, Sarah could bake 45 small bread-cakes. Abraham selected a choice, tender calf from the herd, a prime cut of veal. Along with curds and milk, these guests had a fine meal in the shade while their servant stood by to meet their needs. Was this what the LORD wanted? A demonstration of faith by serving?

Sometimes we become convinced that this is what we need. In order for God to be pleased, we need to love him with all that we’ve got. So we pour ourselves into service to our LORD. Serving God is good and right - if done with proper motives. Are we trying to present ourselves as right

before God based on our deeds? Are we trying to save ourselves? Do we think that if we love God well enough, then in response he'll send his blessing? Our hearts feel that pull to earn our way. If we work hard enough, we think, then God will be pleased and will bless us. But that's not the one thing needful. We end up with worried, frantic hearts like Martha, with a never-ending checklist that can't reach the point of good enough for God.

After the meal Abraham presented, the men revealed the purpose of their visit. They asked where Sarah was. That was an odd request - what strangers asked about the woman of the house? What did they have to do with her? How did they know her - and her new name? This already begins to reveal their identity. Abraham confirmed that Sarah was back in the tent, behind the men. They couldn't see, but she was listening intently. She was just as curious as her husband was to find out why these visitors came.

One of them replied, "I will surely return about this time next year, and Sarah will have a son." Sound familiar, Abraham? This was the promise from the LORD! And if Abraham hadn't believed before, here was the LORD in the flesh reminding him of the truth. For Sarah, though, it was still too good to be true. Just like Abraham did, she laughed to herself. "Ha! Yeah, right. That can't happen. We're too old!" But without being able to see her or even hear these words, the LORD knew exactly what she thought. He asked, "Why did Sarah laugh? Is this too incredible? **Is anything too hard for the LORD?**" He set the time and guaranteed once more that Sarah *will* have a son.

The rest is history. With renewed faith in the LORD's promises, Abraham and Sarah did indeed have a son. They named him Isaac, which means laughter. Before, they laughed in doubt; now they were filled with joy! And through the generations, Isaac to Jacob to Judah, all the way down, there came another baby boy, the promised child. What seemed impossible, the LORD made reality. God came to his humble servants in the flesh. Jesus is that blessing for all nations promised to Abraham.

We think that in order for God to bless us, in order for things to be right with God again, we need to take action. But the LORD shows us the most incredible thing. How can we believe, even in the hardest times? How can we trust God's goodness that he will fulfill his promises to bless us?

The LORD himself comes to us. It's not about *us* serving *him*, but about *him* serving *us*.

Jesus came to show the fulfillment of God's long-laid plans. He came to assure weak and worried souls that the LORD is always in control. Jesus doesn't come into your houses demanding a meal, that you scurry about to give God your best. He invites you to sit down at his feet and receive rest for your weary heart. The LORD has come to his servants, lowly as we are, and he made himself even lower. **"The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many"** (Mark 10:45). That's the one thing needful; that's all we need.

God has commanded us to love him with all that we have. We couldn't keep that command. No amount of running around, no humble hospitality, not the greatest mountain of our best deeds would ever measure up. But we aren't left without what we need. We gladly say, "***You*** have come to your servant." In his great love, the LORD came and met our needs and saved us. He came to demonstrate that great love, which now empowers us to serve in return.

When you come to worship, don't get so caught up in what you do. Worship isn't about our deeds, our songs and prayers and treasures brought before God. We can't present a rich enough meal for the LORD of the universe. Instead, worship is about the meal the LORD lays before us. He unrolls his sweet scroll and says, "Come, and be well-fed by my words." God sets out bountiful bread. The LORD selected the best animal from the herd, the spotless Lamb of God. He says, "Take and eat; take and drink, my body and blood, given for you." Here we see the LORD face to face. He serves us with what we need for forgiveness, for peace, for the strengthening of our faith.

Not all of us will live to be 90 or 100, and I would guess that none of us will have a baby boy at that age. But is anything too hard for the LORD? When the LORD comes to his servants, we see him make the impossible happen. He brings children to women who shouldn't physically be able to bear a child. He heals the sick, casts out demons, and calms the storms. He raises the dead. He erases the record of all our sins and makes us fit for the kingdom of heaven. All because of his great love. You, LORD, have come to your servant. Thanks be to God that he visits us with his grace and provides exactly what we need. Amen.