**THE LORD VISITS ABRAHAM**

 January 21, 2018

Genesis 18-19

Key verse 18:19 “For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.”

In chapter 17 God changed Abram’s name to Abraham. God gave him this new name so he could have God’s vision and hope for him to be the father of many nations and to be a blessing to the whole world. God also commanded that Abraham circumcise himself and all males in his household. Abraham obeyed this command as a sign of the covenant between himself and God. When Abraham did this, he was circumcising his heart to God and cutting away any unbelief he had in regards to God’s promise. He was putting on a new self to believe the great promises of God by faith. Now in chapter 18, God visits Abraham like a friend would. God visits Abraham to reveal some important news for him. Through this visit, we can see how God treats his people who made a decision to obey him and follow him by faith. They become God’s friend. In fact, in the Scripture, Abraham is called God’s friend (Is.41:8; James 2:23). In this passage, we can also see the contrast of the lives of two men: Abraham and Lot. We will see how their earlier decisions affected their lives and their outcome. A person’s life and the outcome of their lives will depend upon the choices they make. Do I depend on God and earnestly seek him to make my decisions or are my decisions based on my physical desires? Through this message, may God help you to walk with God and to be a friend of God like Abraham.

**First**, three visitors (18:1-15). When the Lord and two angels visited Abraham in the heat of the day, he was sitting at the entrance to his tent. He welcomed his guests and did his best to show them hospitality. When he invited them to stay and rest and eat a bit with him, they readily agreed. They felt a genuine welcome in Abraham’s home. Abraham quickly mobilized his household and they prepared a banquet for the guests. The words, “hurried” and “quickly”, “ran” suggest that Abraham was eager to serve his guests. Remember, Abraham is 99 years old. Old men do not run. Usually in the heat of the day, during the afternoon hours, old men are falling asleep taking a long nap. But Abraham was happy to serve them. Perhaps he did not recognize the Lord at first, but surely by the time they sat down to eat, he knew whom he was serving. The banquet he served consisted of a choice, tender calf, expertly butchered and cooked by his servants, about 16 kilograms of fine flour, personally kneaded and baked into bread by Sarah, some curds and milk. Abraham, in good oriental fashion, did not sit and eat with them; he stood near them to serve them and make sure that they had everything they needed. Abraham joyfully welcomed his wonderful Friend into his home and did his best to serve him.

But this was not just a social call. The Lord had come to Abraham with some good news and also, some bad news. First, the good news. The Lord made sure that Sarah was in hearing distance, because he had come to give this good news to her. She was to bear Abraham a son. Sarah was in the tent, listening. When she heard the Lord’s message, she laughed in disbelief. Her barrenness was her life problem. How much she had wanted to bear Abraham a son! But now? She was old—past the age of child-bearing. She had given up hope of having children long ago, and had even given her servant Hagar to Abraham so that he might have a son by her. Fatalism about her life problem was deeply rooted in her heart. In chapter 17, the Lord had told Abraham that Sarah would have a son, and when Abraham laughed to himself, the Lord told him that his son’s name would be Isaac, which means, “he laughs.” Isaac would be born the next year. I am sure that Abraham must have told Sarah, “The Lord said that you would have a son next year.” But Sarah would not believe it. Probably she said to him, “You silly old man.” Now God came and said in person, but Sarah did not believe. She laughed, saying, “After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?” Look at verses 13,14. The Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh? Is anything too hard for the Lord?” God came to teach Sarah that nothing is too hard for the Lord. God came to plant creation, resurrection faith in her heart. Sarah was caught in her unbelief, and she was afraid, so she said, “I did not laugh.” But the Lord rebuked her, “Yes, you did laugh.” God planted enough faith in her heart to overcome her fatalism and have a son by Abraham the next year.

We should not limit what God can do because of our human circumstances. When things look humanly impossible, it does not mean that they are impossible to God. If God has a will and purpose to use us, then he will use us no matter what kind of circumstance we are in and no matter what our human condition is. When we look at Toronto students, they look like Sarah’s barren condition. It looks impossible to preach the gospel and raise disciples of Jesus in this campus. But as God asked Sarah, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” so we should also hear this word from God speaking to us today, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” How will we answer this question? We can only say, “Nothing is too hard for the Lord.” God can work in ways that we know nothing about and he can do greater things than we can even imagine. Let us not laugh in unbelief like Sarah but let us change our unbelief to faith in God the Creator of the heavens and the earth who can do everything and anything he says and who can use us in greater ways than we can think or imagine.

**Second**, Abraham pleads for Sodom (18:16-33). After the delicious meal that Abraham and his family cooked and served, God began to reveal to Abraham another purpose why he came to visit him that day. Look at verse 17. “Then the Lord said, ‘Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?” God was sharing his deep secrets with Abraham, just as a friend would. True friends share secrets with each other. They share their thoughts and dreams and aspirations and plans. Jesus said in John 15:15, “I no longer call you servants because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.” What was God going to do? In verse 20, he talked about the grievous sin of Sodom and Gomorrah. His two angels planned to visit Sodom to see if it was as bad as they had heard. The implication was clear: God planned to destroy Sodom. Here God was educating Abraham. God is not only a God of blessing; he is also a God of judgment. He punishes wickedness and injustice. The mighty acts of judgment in the Bible—the flood, the destruction of Sodom, the plagues in Egypt, the destruction of Amorites and Canaanites, even the destruction of Jerusalem—all look forward to the Final Judgment, the Day of the Lord, when the Son of Man will come to judge the living and the dead. The apostle Peter speaks of this final judgment as follows: “…by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed…by the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire being kept for the day of judgment and the destruction of ungodly men.” (2Pet 3:5-7) God who saves is also God who judges and punishes.

Look at verse 19. “For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.” For Abraham to be a blessing to all the nations on the earth he must actively lead his children to keep God’s word in their hearts by learning it and doing it. He must teach who God is and his purpose for their life. God can only bless people when they keep his way and obey his way. God’s desire is to raise a nation of faith that knows his love and who live by his love and who spread his love in action. When parents make a personal effort to keep the way of the Lord in their day to day lives, by living lives of love and forgiveness according to the Bible, then their children can see it and can model after it. When the parents are eager to study the Bible and to pray and to share God’s word with them, then the children will also learn this and learn by example and want to copy their parents. There is always a great spiritual battle to teach what is right and just to our children based on God’s word when our society has become so relativistic that trying to follow the Bible invites criticism and rejections. But we must believe that God will honor those who honor him and his word and that our love and labor to help our children to keep God’s way will bear good and lasting fruit.

The Lord knew that Abraham was concerned about Sodom for personal reasons: Lot lived there. So when the two men turned to go to Sodom, Abraham stood before the Lord to pray. His prayer and God’s reaction reveals that this is an intercessory prayer that reveals his close walk with God and his friendship with God. Abraham was earnestly praying for others who were in danger of God’s judgment. Through Abraham’s prayer to God we can learn about prayer. First we need to know who God is when we approach him. Look at verse 25b. “Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?” We need to know that God is righteous, and God will do what is right even when we do not understand what is going on. Secondly, we need to have a humble heart to approach God. In verse 27, Abraham prays, “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes.” His prayer was based on the righteousness of God, not on his own worth or goodness. Finally, in verses 28-33, we see that we need to be persistent in prayer. Abraham was persistent in praying to God for the one prayer topic to save the righteous in the city. Notice how he keeps on asking God, “What if only…. are found there?” and God’s response, “For the sake of ….I will not destroy it.” Abraham went from 50 all the way to 10. You would think God might become tired of this or annoyed. But God didn’t. God honored his prayers and answered them. We see here that we should not become discouraged when people go astray like Lot. Perhaps Abraham had not heard from Lot for a long time even though he sent him emails and a birthday card every year. Lot seemed to ignore his Uncle Abraham, but Abraham kept him in his heart. Likewise, let us keep those who we are concerned about in our hearts always in prayer. Let us have confidence that God hears our prayers through our faith in Jesus and that God is not willing to let any soul perish.

**Third**, Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed (19:1-38). Lot lived in Sodom. He was called a righteous man (perhaps by comparison with the people of his times) (2Pet 2:7,8). God had agreed to spare Sodom for the sake of ten righteous men, and Lot was one. This chapter clearly shows us that there were no others. The two angels arrived in Sodom in the evening. They met Lot, who was sitting in the gateway of the city. He was sitting by himself, apart from the other men of the city. When he saw the strangers, he got up to meet them. He recognized them as godly men and he invited them to his home to spend the night. They had readily accepted Abraham’s invitation, but they hesitated to accept Lot’s. They sensed that his invitation came from a sense of duty. He insisted, however, and they went with him. Lot prepared for them a simple supper of unleavened bread (modern version is a frozen TV dinner). No one in his family helped him. Where are his wife and two daughters? They were either out having fun, or did not care about the guests. Though Lot had plenty of money, he was cheap in his service because his heart was half in the world and half in the Lord.

That night, all the men of the city came to Lot’s house to demand that he turn the strangers over to them. They wanted to sexually abuse them. The people of Sodom had no shame in their sin but were sinning boldly against the Lord. Their lifestyle was perverse and corrupted. But what about Lot? He knew what they were doing was wicked, and yet he also tried to do something wicked by suggesting he give his own daughters to these perverse people! Lot seemed no better than them! Lot had come to Sodom to enjoy its material advantages—he had not come as a missionary. So he had no friends. Even his sons-in-law laughed at him. He had tried to live a moral life, and he had succeeded to some extent, but when he tried to protect his guests from the evil men of Sodom, he exposed his own corrupted and compromised heart and life by offering his daughters instead. There were not even 10 righteous men in Sodom because Lot had not tried to make friends for God. He had lived there like a Pharisee, keeping himself pure and looking with contempt on the unrighteous people around him. Even when God’s servants told him that God would destroy Sodom, he hesitated to leave. This attitude reflects Lot’s life of faith. He didn’t consider God’s word and the seriousness of it. He did not value what the Lord said and instead followed his own flesh desires. Even after he was warned of the coming judgment, he did nothing! He seemed not to be able to decide between heaven and hell. How did Lot escape the destruction of Sodom? It was only by the mercy of God. Look at verse 16, “When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the Lord was merciful to them.”

Look what happened to Lot’s wife in verse 26. It says, “But Lot’s wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.” This verse shows Mrs. Lot’s love for the world. She looked back, meaning that she might have regretted, leaving behind her house with all her convenient appliances, her Jacuzzi and her gossip hours with all her friends in Sodom. In Luke chapter 17:32-33, Jesus warns about the coming of the Son of Man and the judgment to come on all people who ignore him and love themselves more than him. He uses Lot’s wife as an example. He said, “Remember Lot’s wife! Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.” We should not look back at the life of sin that Jesus saved us from and desire to have it again. We should look ahead and look forward to greater things as we follow Jesus. We look forward to a more abundant life and the richness to know Jesus.

Now we need to take a moment to think about the comparison of Lot’s life and Abraham’s life. Lot’s life of faith had started good because he followed along with Abraham. But chapter 13 was the turning point because he chose his way, not God’s. Proverbs 16:25 says, “There is a way that seems right to man, but in the end it leads to death.” Lot could not be a blessing to anyone. Lot could not enjoy the friendship and relationship with God that God wanted to give him. Look at his life! Look how he ended up! This is not how we want to live and finish our life. But what about Abraham? He heard God’s call and followed God’s leading. He repented when he failed and came back to God. He learned to hold onto God’s word of promise and believe it with all his heart and he became a blessing to the world. Now we have to ask ourselves a question. What kind of life do we want to live? Abraham or Lot? I know that you all want Abraham’s life. However, you are going to have to keep his word in your heart like he did, believe and obey. May God help you to be a blessing and be a source of blessing like Abraham.