



BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: Ignite Your Faith: Genesis 12-25 wk. 3

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Let's imagine that you and your family had saved your money for several years to take this once in a lifetime vacation. And so, you meet with a friend of yours who's a travel agent. You tell them that you know, we've been saving our money for a couple of years and we want to take this once in a lifetime vacation. What do you recommend? And she says, well, I recommend vacation A. And she talks about this is the most spectacular vacation we have. Everyone who's ever taken it says it's one of the best experiences of their life. It's really the best that we have to offer. And so, you talk about it for a while and that really sounds good. But you say, you know, I, I saw this television commercial and it talked about this vacation that really sounded like fun. What do you think about that? And she said, Oh, I know that package, we'll call it vacation package B. And it looks great on the commercial, but I have to tell you, it's an absolute nightmare. Everything about it is a nightmare. As a matter of fact, we've had about 20 people that have taken this vacation and every single one of them, 100% of them would tell you it's one of the worst experiences of their life. It's just horrible.

So, you go home, and you talk about it for a while and a couple of days later you come back and you say, you know, we've made our decision. We, we're really excited about this. We want to go on vacation package B. And your friend is startled by this. You know, we talked to about 10 of those people who have taken that vacation package and all 10 of them agree it was the worst experience of their life. It was horrible. Everything about it was a nightmare. But we just decided we think we'll be the first people ever to take that vacation and somehow have a good time. So, we're going to take vacation package B.

How many of you think you would make that decision? I mean it seems absolutely ridiculous. Not only did you have the witness of the expert, the travel agent, but you also had witnesses who had been on that vacation and 100% of them told you it's an absolute nightmare! Let's take that exact same picture and move it into the spiritual realm. The Bible is very clear from Genesis to Revelation that there are two roads we can travel, two paths. One is a path that leads to life. One is a path that leads to death. You go all the way back to Genesis chapter two and it starts with God creating this, this garden He called Paradise and then He took Adam and Eve and He placed them in the garden and He said, let's just celebrate this relationship together in this place called Paradise. It's everything God ever wanted for people made in his image.

But we also find that sin introduces into the picture in chapter three and maybe one of the clearest early pictures would be Cain and Abel. Of these two different paths, we're able to experience the blessing of God and Cain experience the judgment of God. You go all the way through the New Testament, and that is just a theme that emerges that there was one road that leads to God's blessing and there's one that leads to God's judgment and there isn't really ground in between. You get all the way up to the prophets and God sends one prophet after another to the nation of Israel. And what did the prophets say? The

prophets say that if you choose to walk in obedience to God, God will pour out His blessing. But if you continue in this way of rebellion, God will pour out His judgment. It just seems like such a no-brainer, and yet they just continue down the path of rebellion. You get into the New Testament and Jesus states very clearly there is a road that leads to life, there is a road that leads to death.

We've been tracking the life of Abraham. Abraham and Sarah have made some significant choices by faith, the most recent in chapter 17 to enter into this covenant relationship evidenced by, by the sign of the covenant where they have said together as a people that we will, we will take God's path. We will walk in obedience to Him. We want to experience the blessings of God. But also, we're going to be introduced to the contrast to that which is the wrath and judgment of God. So if you have a Bible turn to Genesis chapter 18 which is really a chapter that focuses on the blessings of what it means to live in a covenant relationship with God, to choose God's way, God's path, and what we receive because of that choice.

The events of chapter 18 would have been a very short time after the events of Chapter 17. *"Now the Lord appeared to him, Abraham by the Oaks of Mamre while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day. And when he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, three men were standing opposite him. And when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth and said, my Lord, if now I have found favor in your sight, please do not pass your servant by. Please let a little water be brought and wash your feet and rest yourselves under the tree. And I will bring a piece of bread that you may refresh yourselves; after that you may go on since you have visited your servant. And they said, so do as you have said. So, Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, quickly prepare three measures of fine flour, knead it and make bread cakes. Abraham also ran to the herd and took a tender and choice calf and gave it to the servant and he hurried to prepare it. And he took curds and milk and the calf, which he had prepared and placed it before them, and he was standing by them under the tree as they ate."*

Now there's lots of discussion as to whether or not Abraham understood who these visitors were and at what point in the story, he really came to grips with that. But we as the readers don't have to guess that we're told in the very first verse that this was God Himself. This was Yahweh, the God of the universe who had taken on human form to pay a visit to Abraham. We're told a little bit later in the story, he was flanked by two angels that were there with him. Now, I personally think that Abraham figured it out very quickly. At the very least, he understood these were visitors from God and I think very quickly understood this was God himself.

When you read the text, it's interesting. These three visitors just simply appeared. They didn't come strolling up across the field. They were just there, and Abraham responds in some way consistent with the culture. They were very hospitable people. It would not have been unusual at all to have been very hospitable to a visitor in many ways. But here in the heat of the day, Abraham really goes far beyond what would have been the norm. As a matter of fact, when you read through the text there, you notice there's an emphasis on Abraham being hurried and quickly prepare, and it's the idea that he understands these are very special guests here and he was really scrambling around in order to do everything possible to treat these guests as special.

Can you imagine what it would be like to know that this person who was paying you this visit was God himself? God in the flesh at my dining room table. I mean, I can't even imagine what that would be like.

This was Yahweh. This was the God who spoke the universe into place. This is the God who covered the earth with a flood. This is the God of unlimited power that had entered into this covenant relationship with Abraham and now He was sitting down at Abraham's table.

This is one of the most beautiful pictures in the Old Testament of this covenant relationship. As God demonstrates it's not just some mysterious relationship with this spirit who just kind of floats out in the heavens somewhere, but it is very real, very personal, very intimate covenant relationship. As a matter of fact, of all the blessings that we receive from God, there is no blessing that is as great as just simply entering into relationship with the God of the universe, that God is seated at my table.

The story goes on verse nine. *"Then they said to him, where is Sarah, your wife? And he said, behold in the tent. And he said, I will surely return to you at this time next year, and behold, Sarah, your wife, shall have a son. And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age. Sarah was past childbearing, and Sarah laughed to herself saying, after I have become old, shall I have pleasure? My Lord being old also. And the Lord said to Abraham, why did Sarah laugh saying, shall I indeed bear a child when I am old? Is anything too difficult for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son. Sarah denied it, however, saying, I did not laugh, for she was afraid. And he said, no, but you did laugh."*

It would have been customary in those days for the men to have gathered to eat and it would have been inappropriate for a woman to have been in their presence, and so she would have been behind this tent flap and kind of what we would call the kitchen area. Now, in a sense, God reveals who He is. When He simply asked Abraham, where is Sarah? He didn't ask, are you married? He didn't ask, what your wife's name. He just knew. Where is Sarah? Well, she's behind the tent flap. Why, I'm here to tell you that a year from now, this 90-year-old wife of yours is going to have a son, and Sarah laughed. Frankly, I don't blame her. What would you do if you found out at age 90 you were going to have your first child? She laughed to herself.

Now notice the text says she didn't laugh out loud. She laughed to herself, but God heard her, and God said, why did Sarah laugh? I think when Sarah heard that she figured out who this was and it says she became frightened and she even denied it, no I didn't laugh, and God said, yes, you did. You laughed.

See, part of what she's coming to grips with is what happens when, when God is at the table. It allowed God to make this magnificent statement in verse 14, why did she laugh? Is anything too difficult for Yahweh? Is anything too difficult for God? That word difficult is a Hebrew word that is also translated wonderful. As a matter of fact, Isaiah 9:6, "and His name shall be called wonderful." Same word. Is there anything to wondrous for God?

See, part of the blessing of entering into this covenant relationship with God that is so personal, it's so real. You have God sitting at your dining room table and understanding this is a God for whom there are no boundaries. There are no limits. There's no end to His power. It's hard for that to sink in because every day our life is defined by our boundaries, by our limits, by all the things that we can't do. That's just how we live. So, it's hard for us to come to grips with one for whom there are no boundaries, no limits. He's the God of the impossible and He's seated at my dining room table!

Every day is a day filled with the potential for the impossible. Every day we walk on the threshold of the mysterious, never knowing what's going to happen because we're intimate with one for whom there are no limits.

Have you ever laughed at God? I've done it quite a few times. I'll never forget, I was sitting in the Tumbleweed Cafe, Broken Bow, Nebraska. Kurt Layman was passing through town and we had lunch together and out of nowhere he looked me in the eye, and he said, Bryan, have you ever thought about coming to Lincoln and being the next senior pastor? I laughed. I laughed, but he didn't. I went home and I said, Patty, Kurt said the strangest thing. He asked me if I've ever thought about going to Lincoln and being the senior pastor and she said, what did you say? I said, I laughed. She said, what did he say? I said, he didn't laugh. I've had many times where God has called me to something and I've said, yeah, right. You ever done that? When God calls you way beyond your own capacity and you respond by saying, yeah, right God, that's funny.

Must have been about two years ago, I'm not quite sure the time frame, where I opened a sermon and told everybody to imagine in your head the person that you imagine is absolutely the most unreachable person you know. If there's one person you could not possibly imagine coming to faith in Christ, who would that person be? I was talking to somebody just a couple of months ago and they said, you know, when you said that I thought of this person and I laughed and two weeks ago they trusted Christ as Savior. After the first hour this morning, I told that story and somebody stopped me afterwards and said, you know, I thought of that person and I laughed and a month ago they were baptized.

You See, God is the God of the impossible. God is the God of unlimited power. God is the God for whom there are no boundaries. There is no such word as hopeless. When God sits at your dining room table, which is the blessing of a covenant relationship with Him. Some of you really struggle with your past. You really struggle with just accepting the reality that God has forgiven you. That God says, you stand righteous before me, and every time God says that, you say, yeah, right? You laugh. Some of the most magnificent promises that exalt the position of the believer in Christ come to you and you say yeah, right? There's just something within us that struggles to come to grips with some of these magnificent truths. As we come to grips with who God is, there is nothing too wondrous for God.

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Cara: All right, Bryan, for anyone wondering why God has put him or her in an impossible situation right now, I think you pretty much just gave us that answer. He is the God of the impossible.

Bryan: He is the God of the impossible and it's one of the ways he likes to reveal himself.

Cara: So why does he allow impossible situations into our lives? Is that so we take a look at Him?

Bryan: Yeah. I would say there's no way to definitively answer that question. There's probably lots of reasons, but that could be one reason that God wants to reveal himself to us or the people around us. You know, one of the questions I like to wrestle with is what am I doing that would be impossible without God? You know, we tend to settle in and kind of just do our thing. But what's the God dimension to my life?

Arnie: Is there a difference between doubt and unbelief, was Sarah doubting?

Bryan: Yeah, I think there's a big difference. So, unbelief biblically is simply a refusal to believe. It's an act of my will, but doubt reflects that I desire to believe. And on some days, I do and some days it's more difficult, but it reflects more of the idea of a struggle, I want to believe, but I'm struggling to get there.

Cara: - I think one of the most mind-boggling things to understand is that this all-powerful God of the universe actually wants to spend time with me. Why is it so hard to wrap your mind around that?

Bryan: Yeah, that's, I think that's hard for everybody and that's one of the things I love about Genesis 18, that picture is just such an amazing picture that in that case literally God comes over for supper. But I think it's just so contrary to our experiences in life. I mean, we all wrestle with who am I? Why me? Why would God care? Why would God want to come to my house for supper? But to wrestle with the reality He actually desires to spend time with me more than I desire to spend time with Him. The problem is always with me not with Him, it's kind of hard to process.

Cara: Right.

Arnie: Bryan, we have this scene of Abraham entertaining angels, even Christ himself. Then we have the passage from Hebrews 13:2 that talks about the possibility of entertaining angels unaware. Do you think that's really a possibility today?

Bryan: Yeah, absolutely. I do. That's a very interesting verse in Hebrews, but I think absolutely we're not the only players in the story. We tend to think everything in the universe is either about God or us and we forget there's a whole another dimension to all this. But I also think over the years it's been interesting why we as Christians are so focused, often on like demonic spirits and seem to so often dismiss the fact that God has his own army that is certainly engaged in part of the story.

Cara: That's why I always tried to be nice to people because it might be an angel.

Bryan: Yeah, well, it's, it's very interesting to think about.

Cara: This study brings up those two paths of life again, so there's the path of life and then the path to destruction. There are a lot of people who aren't on the path of life, but it also does not appear like they're on the path to destruction. Is there middle ground for people?

Bryan: Yeah, I don't think there is. So, the whole point of the path of destruction is it doesn't look like a path of destruction. So, if people are going down that path, the enemy's going to leave them alone. And you know, Jesus talked about wide is that path, which has the idea that it's, it's appealing. It's kind of the, the default path. And Proverbs 14:12 says there is a way that seems right to a man, but the end is destruction. So, based on what that says, the path looks right. So, it's not going to look like a path of destruction. That's part of the deception and the lies.

Cara: I always say those are the people comparing themselves to Ted Bundy because they look pretty good next to Ted Bundy.

Bryan: Right. You know Paul talks about Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. And I think within that context he's clearly referring to religion. So even think about that dimension that a lot of people that are up to their eyebrows in religion, which is full of self-righteousness, that's a path of destruction. The end is not going to be good but try convincing them that they're on a path of destruction. It's just how clever the enemy is.

Cara: Is there a way to show them that they're being legalistic or ...

Bryan: I think self-righteous, highly religious people are the most difficult people to reach.

Arnie: And the most dangerous! My thing is, if you find them, run as far (laughing) and as fast as you can ... away from them!

Bryan: They see no need for a Savior. That's the challenge.

Arnie: They're scary.

Cara: And there's no way to infiltrate that though?

Bryan: I think in my experience it's been when the bottom drops out and their religion doesn't hold up, that's when they're willing to rethink whether they really understand the truth correctly. So, build a relationship, but often it's a waiting game until something falls apart and they're willing to listen.

Arnie: Usually it's when they get caught.

Cara: So sad.

Arnie: In my experience with these guys, it's usually when they get caught doing something that they cannot talk their way out of is, is when they come, clean, if you will.

Bryan: Busted.

Arnie: Busted.

Bryan: I think for like your average, like the Midwest is full of really good religious people and they see no real need for a Savior, and you just kind of have to wait until something -- we used to talk about getting people lost before you get them saved. I mean, that's almost part of the methodology.

Arnie: Yeah.