

FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

Genesis 18:1-22

Our life in relation to God may be summarized in four words--sonship, worship, stewardship and fellowship. The believer is at once a son, a subject, a servant and a friend of God. The last-named relationship marks the later period of Abraham's life and seems to be associated with growth and maturity of spiritual experience. Abraham is the only one in the Old Testament who was called "the friend of God."

In spite of all the things which Abraham did that displeased God, the latter did not fail to appear to him. The character of this divine appearance is noteworthy. It was not in the form of a vision, nor was it merely a word or message. It was a divine appearance as a guest, thus marking Abraham's position of friendship and fellowship with God. Note the occasion on which the Lord appeared to Abraham. It was not when the patriarch was busily engaged but when he was at rest. In the quiet of noonday with its opportunities for meditation, Abraham was in a position to receive the Lord. It seems that he looked up before he was aware of the presence of his visitors. If so, the implication is that he was in a state of expectancy. If we are expecting blessing and if we lift up our eyes and look to God for it, we are likely to receive it.

The response made by Abraham was characteristic of Eastern politeness and hospitality. The elements of courtesy, activity, hospitality and respect are very interesting and noteworthy and strictly true to Eastern life. We notice that Abraham offered his visitors three things--water, rest and food. The water was for washing the feet after the dust and stains of a hot journey. Our Lord wants the rest which He has provided for us to dwell in our hearts. A good meal of food will help to get an individual in good spirits. God's purpose in visiting the human heart is to enjoy fellowship with the person.

We are told that Abraham hastened. It is always good not to lose time in carrying out the orders of the Master. "The king's business requireth haste." Sarah was to cooperate in doing service to the guests. She was to share the urgency. Have we this sense of urgency in the service of the Lord? Three measures indicate that there was one measure for each guest. The fine meal represents righteousness in the sense of standing with God, and it is the first thing for which the heavenly Visitor looks in our hearts. The tender calf was the next thing that Abraham brought. It represents a burnt offering, and for this we must offer our bodies as a living sacrifice. The third thing for which the Lord looks when He visits a human heart is mentioned here as butter. Butter represents richness and fatness, and this means the best. All that we have is His, but He looks for the exercise in His service of the best of the gifts that He has given us and for the best that our personalities can be. Milk generally represents the Word, and the Lord takes pleasure in the reflection of His own Word in the hearts of His people. We are to take our lives and set them before the Lord.

If Abraham had not realized the identity of his guest, he was now no longer left in doubt. The guest knew all about him and his wife. When He said, "Where is Sarah thy wife?", Abraham knew who the Speaker was. The promise of a son was then repeated with the assurance of the near approach of its fulfilment. The fulfilment of the promise and the realization of the blessing depend on the presence of the Lord. It is when He comes to us that barrenness is turned into fruitfulness. The Lord had brought Abraham and Sarah to a very ripe old age, where fruitfulness was no longer naturally possible, in order that His work upon them physically might symbolize the work of the Holy Spirit in the sinner's heart. Sarah was in a condition relative to motherhood identical with that in which fallen human nature stands relative to pleasing God.

Sarah received the promise of a son with utter astonishment of unbelief. She could not accept the possibility of it. She laughed in incredulity. She ridiculed the idea that

she would experience the joys of motherhood. While her laughter may have been within herself, it was heard by and known to the One before Whom all things are open. "The Lord looketh on the heart." He knows the thoughts of all of us as He knew those of Sarah. From Him no secrets can be hidden.

"Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Nothing is too hard for Him. The creation and preservation of the world were not too hard for Him, nor was the redemption and salvation of His believing people and their deliverance from the power of Satan, sin and death, although that redemption cost Him the life of His Son. No single miraculous act, as in Sarah's case, is too hard for Him. Every conversion is a miracle and lies in the sphere of the supernatural.

When the visitors left the hospitable tent of Abraham, he went with them. The fact that he accompanied them on their journey was an act of courtesy. It led to a superb opportunity for intercession.

The time had come for a further revelation to Abraham. How beautiful is the suggestion made by the Divine soliloquy! "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" God's friends are permitted to know His secrets because they are His friends. God regarded Abraham as having a right to know what was about to be done. Here is a marvelous instance of the condescending desire of the Lord to share His secret purposes in fellowship with men. In spite of all his past failures, Abraham was again in touch with God and was going to be told His secrets. No one else knew them. God told Abraham that Sodom was going to be destroyed, but He did not reveal that to anybody else. "He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel" (Psalm 103:7). Do we know something of His ways, or do we only know His works? Do we share His secret purposes of spreading His gospel in the world?

Verse eighteen gives us the reason for God's condescension in revealing to Abraham what He was going to do. It is that Abraham had been caught up in the purpose of redemption. He was to be the means of blessing to all nations, and it was, therefore, necessary for him to know the reason for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. It is the same with us. As believers, "called according to His purpose," each of us has his place in God's plan for blessing the world. If we are faithfully fulfilling the plan as God gives us light and ability, we may expect that He will seek to show us something of His mind, not only the general principles of it as they are revealed in His Word but some of the particulars and details which He wants us as individuals to carry out. We may seek these from Him in prayer. God's purpose in making Himself known to Abraham was that He might bring into being a family that would give witness to Him by consistency of moral conduct, enabling Him to fulfil the promises that He had made.

God asserted His knowledge of the fact that Abraham would command his children. Notice here the responsibility of parents and the necessity of training children and evangelizing each generation. Notice that God's purpose was to bring into being a family or nation which would witness as a group to His righteousness. "Keep the way of the Lord" means to live a consistent and godly life. To keep, in this connection, means to exercise diligence, to believe the Lord's Word, to obey His commands, to keep to the way without turning off to the right or the left and to continue doing so all of one's life. "The way" means the line of conduct laid down by the Lord for man to follow as he passes through this world. Keeping the way consists in doing. The way lies through the practical daily tasks which are made by God into opportunities and tests and thus lifted out of the trivial. Justice and judgment are the fundamental moral requirements. They are equivalent to practical righteousness. Justice means that which God has declared to be right, that which is right and fair in relationship with men. Judgment means that which the will decides to be right in reliance upon the revealed will of God.

The sins of Sodom and Gomorrah were very grievous. In fact, all sin is abominable to God. Therefore, God announced that He was going down to see. The underlying idea here is that God takes no action in judgment except upon the strictest assessment of the facts. God knows all without the necessity of finding out. Verse twenty-one is an expression of the purpose of God in human terms. This shows the condescension of God, and the terminology is intended to make us understand the principles on which God moves in His dealings with men.