

June 14, 2026

## Genesis 18:1-15 “Creative Hospitality”

This week we’re still in the Book of Genesis, but we are much further down the road than we were last week when we started “In the beginning.” I know some of you were hoping I’d get into the second creation story with talking snakes and sticky genealogical issues like, “Okay, if Adam was the first man and Eve was the first woman, and they had Caine and Abel and Caine *killed* Abel, then where did Mrs. Caine come from?” See, and I’ve already spent more time on this subject than I should, but in the company of biblical literalists, this would turn into a four week sermon series or a six month Bible study with people locked up in a room debating over logically and biologically improbable theories while a multitude of sick, hungry, orphaned, and widowed people increase in numbers outside the walls of the church.

But fear not, we’re skipping ahead to a story that’s a *little* more grounded than what you find earlier on in Genesis. We’re six chapters into the saga of Abraham, who was promised by God that he would be the father of many nations. His descendants would outnumber the stars in the sky. That’s a tall order. The problem is that Abraham was 99 years old when God made this covenant with him. Could he fulfill his part of the bargain? *Biologically* speaking I suppose. But his wife Sarah was well beyond

childbearing years. Her solution to the problem was to “lend” him her handmaiden Hagar who *was* of child-bearing age. That way, Abraham could theoretically get a start on fathering these many nations. And sure enough, Abraham and Hagar produced Ishmael who we’ll set aside for another day because that whole situation is too complicated for what we’re doing today. But apparently, Hagar wasn’t intended to be part of the covenant between God and Abraham. That’s where we pick up the story today. Here it is in a nutshell.

God appeared to Abraham one day, but in a strange sort of way. Abraham saw three men out in the heat of the day. Abraham, not wanting to be passed by, showed over-and-above hospitality to these men. He even roped Sarah in to help him, but in a way that I would *not* recommend. He told Sarah to make them some cakes, but he proceeded to tell her how to do it by providing a recipe. I’ll spare you the details of what would happen if I did this to Mary. While she was busy making her resentment cakes, the three men asked Abraham, “Hey, where’s your wife Sarah?” Abraham said, “In the tent.” She could hear them. I imagine she was in there thinking, “In the tent.” Then one of the men said, “I’m going to return in a different season and your wife will have born a son.” Since Sara could hear everything, she said, “Bwah-hahahaha!” And thought, “Yeah, that’s going to happen at my age.” The men heard her outburst and said, “Is anything too

wonderful for the Lord? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son.” Sarah, who was a little embarrassed about suddenly becoming a part of this conversation said, “I didn’t laugh.” The Lord said, “Yeah you did.”

So what’s our takeaway for this story? And don’t say, “This proves that people in biblical times lived longer than people today, which proves that Methuselah lived to the age of 969 years back in Genesis 5!” Remember, we’re trying not to treat Genesis like a science or history book. That’s not the point. I believe that one of the main points of this story has to do with hospitality. Abraham sees three strangers approaching his tent and immediately goes into host mode. Water for their feet. Bread from Sarah. A choice calf from the herd. Curds and milk. All the good stuff he had available to him. Abraham isn't just being polite; he's going above and beyond. In the ancient world, hospitality was more than a social nicety. Travelers depended on it. Communities survived because people were willing to welcome strangers.

And that's important. Scripture repeatedly calls God's people to welcome the stranger, care for the traveler, and make room at the table. But I still don't think that's the deepest thing happening here. If this story was simply about hospitality, then it would read like a chart for some kind of reward system. Abraham was generous, so God

gave him a son. Be nice to strangers and maybe God will give you something that you've always wanted too.

But that's not how grace works. Besides, God had already promised Abraham this multitude of descendants long before these visitors arrived. The promise existed before the meal was served. What if Abraham's hospitality isn't the main event? What if it's simply the doorway through which we notice *God's* hospitality? Because when you look closely, God is the one making room. God is the one who comes near. God enters into Abraham and Sarah's ordinary life. God hears their hopes and disappointments. God refuses to let their future be defined by their limitations. Abraham offers a meal, but God offers a future. Abraham opens his tent, but God opens a possibility that Abraham and Sarah can't even imagine. The greater hospitality in this story belongs to God.

Last week we read about how God spoke creation into existence out of chaos and emptiness. In our story this week, God speaks a future into existence where there is barrenness and impossibility. The same creative God who says, "Let there be light," now says, "Sarah will bear a son."

The common thread isn't biology. It's divine creativity. God creates what does not yet exist. God makes room for life where there appears to be no room for life. That's why Sarah laughs. She isn't doubting pregnancy as much as

she's doubting the possibility of a new future. She's lived with disappointment too long. She has become brutally practical. How often do we say, "Well, I'm just being realistic?" See, that's where Sarah is.

Yet God's response isn't anger. It's a question: "Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?" Not "Is anything possible?" in some abstract sense. But "Is anything too wonderful?" Too extraordinary? Too surprising? Too life-giving?

Maybe that's where this story meets us. Most of us know what it's like to think like Sarah. Not cynical. Not faithless. Just "realistic." We've lived long enough to know that some dreams don't come true. Some prayers seem to go unanswered. Some relationships never become what we hoped they would become. Some hurts linger longer than we expected. Some churches don't look like they did thirty years ago. Some parts of ourselves feel as though they've become settled and fixed. And after a while, we stop expecting much to change. We don't laugh because we're mocking God. We laugh because we've learned to protect ourselves from disappointment.

Sarah's laughter is the laughter of someone who has stopped imagining a new future. And yet God comes to her tent anyway. God doesn't wait for perfect faith. God doesn't wait for certainty. God doesn't wait until Sarah believes. God simply shows up and says, "Hey, I'm not

finished yet." The same God who spoke light into darkness in Genesis 1 now speaks possibility into barrenness in Genesis 18. The same God who created a world where there was no world creates a future where Sarah sees no future.

That's what God does. God creates. God brings life. God makes room. And maybe that's the good news for us today. Not that God will necessarily give us everything we've ever wanted. Not that every prayer will be answered exactly as we hope. Not that every impossible situation will suddenly become possible. The good news is that God is still showing up at the tent doors of ordinary people. God is still extending hospitality to a weary world. God is still speaking life where we can only see limitations. God is still creating futures we cannot yet imagine.

So maybe the question for us is not whether God can do what seems impossible. The question is whether we will leave a little room in our lives for holy surprise. Whether we will trust that God's creative work is not finished. Whether we will dare to believe that the final chapter has not yet been written. Because the God who came to Abraham and Sarah's tent is still coming to ours. And the God who asked, "Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?" is still asking the question today.