

Trusting God
“The Glorious Impossible”
Genesis 18:1-5

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The Triune God

Sometimes God seems absent. We covered that last week. What do you do then? Wait.

- Wait on the Lord, but...
- Wait actively, not passively.
- Do what you know is right, then leave everything in God’s hands.
- Never act in order to secure your own existence. The Lord has already secured your life for you.

Sometimes God seems absent.

Revelation

But sometimes God – almost alarmingly – shows up!

That’s what happened to Abraham one day... in the heat of the day, when you wouldn’t expect visitors to be traveling – all of a sudden there are three men standing close by. Note well: Abraham doesn’t see them approaching from a distance. The text is clear – all of a sudden there they were!

I believe this is more important than mere information. It’s one of those many revelations of who this God is. God will surprise us. You wait and wait and maybe even forget about what you were waiting for with God, but then, suddenly, God shows up. The Lord makes himself known to you!

This comes FROM GOD AND TO US. We don’t make up who God is – it comes to us through God revealing it.

Furthermore, we cannot manipulate God or make God do what we want when we want or turn God into who we want God to be. Do you remember the 3rd Commandment? You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain? This commandment is violated whenever we turn God into whatever we want God to be. Happens all the time ... and it's wrong – it's dangerous. Whenever someone says something like this... “I like to think of God as...” That person is in a danger zone. They are about to diminish God and bring him down to our expectations. They are seeking to use God to their own ends.

The Lord who is revealing himself through his covenant with Abraham and Sarah is **powerful** beyond comprehension, **great** beyond expectation, **Elects, redeems and covenants with us** because of his love and for his purposes, not our own, The Lord is **patient**, and **merciful** beyond reason. The only way we know any of this is by God revealing himself to us. I say this to prevent us from the common error of believing we can learn about God primarily through our own insights, or experiences, or study. No. We know God because God reveals himself to us.

Let me read you a quote that gets at this from Will Willimon, a Methodist Bishop and former dean of the chapel at Duke: *“We just can’t stand to submit to the living God who is determined to have us on God’s terms rather than ours, so we devise a god on our own terms. Flaccid, contemporary Christianity is the result.”*¹

God’s name, used by Abraham and Sarah, then forgotten by the Israelites in their long slavery in Egypt, and then re-revealed to Moses at the burning bush tells us everything: I AM has sent you – put better, God’s name means I will be whom I will be. God is who God is. God lets us know who he is because being related to this God is what gives life. REVELATION.

Part of what is being revealed here is the triune nature of God. God is ONE, yet God is also the three-personal God. None of this or its importance is explained here. We have to wait until Jesus to learn the importance and the meaning of the triune nature of God. But it is clear in this story – God shows up, represented by THREE.

¹ Will Willimon, from the introduction to *Christless Christianity*, by Michael Horton, pg. 10.

All the time I hear people who don't understand the crucial importance of the triune nature of the One God. And history is full of people who have made drastic errors on this – either merging the three-ness of God into one, or splitting the three-ness into three separate Gods.

Let me also say that no analogies work to explain the triunity of the God who reveals himself through his relationship with Israel:

- Not the 'roles' analogy – i.e. everyone has different roles in life – the same person is a son, a father, and a friend. That doesn't get at it at all.
- Not the 'apple' analogy an apple has skin, fruit, and a core – all three add up to God
- Both of these fall short of the mystery of the one God in three persons.

This story helps us to accept the revelation that it is true. Let me also skip ahead and declare – if God is not triune, then our sin was not borne by God in Christ, and the world is lost to it. But if God IS triune as the scriptures declare him to be, then God himself has taken our broken-ness upon himself and in him, in Christ, we are saved.

Recognize

Abraham immediately recognizes who these visitors are. The reason I believe Abraham was able to recognize God when he showed up without warning, was because he had walked with God long enough to recognize when God was present. Anyone else might have seen just three men, needing food for their journey. Abe recognized God when he showed up in disguise.

So many can't recognize God when God IS at work; when God IS present. It's because they are blind.

This happened when Jesus came. After eons of waiting, waiting, waiting – finally, God came personally, not in a brief visit like this one in Genesis, but to stay. Jesus is God with us. And most people, especially the religious leaders didn't, couldn't and wouldn't recognize him for who he was.

Faith gives sight to blind eyes, according to Jesus. Abraham is evidence of that central truth. If we will trust God, then we will recognize him.

Receive

What do we do when God shows up?

Abraham shows what we're supposed to do. Note again, that Abraham does what he does in this story after 25 years of experiencing God, of having the Lord make himself known over time, of speaking with God, hearing the promises, seeing God at work in life ... what he does here is the result of faith.

Abraham RECEIVES God as a guest. This is a picture of the deepest thing humans can do with God's presence: welcome him.

Abe is the most gracious host you can imagine: he invites the guests into the shade, where they are protected from the sun and the breeze can cool them. He has the BEST meal prepared for them – not just a snack, but the best bread, the best meat, the best refreshing drink. He then stands while they eat, just to make sure that they have everything they need. He is respectful, not deigning to sit down and break bread with God. He is humble, gracious, accommodating – he is RECEPTIVE.

How often do we treat God as our slave, rather than acting like his servants? How often do we expect God to meet our needs, rather than making sure God has what he needs from us to do God's work? How often do we shut the Lord out of certain areas of our lives? Letting him in to the obvious places – church and prayer, but keeping him waiting at the door at work and play? We are his humble servants – everything is his in the first place...receive the Lord as the honored ONE.

- Recognize God
- Receive God as an honored guest

Respond

And then, respond. Respond to the glorious, impossible word of God. The Lord gives an impossible announcement of bringing life where there has been nothing. Abe and Sarah are beyond any hope of having a child. The ONLY way this could happen is if God were to do the impossible. It is the impossible that God promises – “This time next year Sarah will have a son...”

Sarah's response is laughter. LOL! She knows this announcement is ridiculous.

Abe is strangely silent. His response is to continue to receive the announcement with some level of faith, but we aren't really told what he does.

What we do know is the impossible nature of the Word of the Lord – a couple utterly incapable of producing a child will be given one.

This is the way God works – God enters the scene and brings life out of barren-ness. Impossible.

In response to Sarah's laughter, The Lord asks a question – it's another one of those questions of scripture – it is addressed to all of us, for all time... "Is anything impossible for the Lord?" Other translations put it this way... is anything too hard? Is anything too wonderful? It's a Hebrew word that has to do with the miraculous – the wonders of God that we can only contemplate, but never explain...all we can do is wait and watch as God does what only God can do.

The response to that question determines everything that follows. IS anything too hard, too wonderful, impossible for God?

We all know the right answer. No. Nothing is impossible. But we also know how hard it is to answer that question. Nothing is too wonderful for God, and here is my life that I place into the breach between the right answer and the way I feel, which is – "I'm not sure..."

Once again, we are given hope by the passage. After the laughter, and the silence of Abraham, God simply acts – despite the laughter of doubt, despite whatever Abraham felt, God acts according to his side of the covenant.