

Middleton, WI

July 10, 2016 -- Please read Genesis 18:1-14

In Jesus' name, dear fellow-redeemed,

Abraham is one of the most famous men in the Bible, and yet if we met him on the street; we probably would not know him. We don't know what he looked like. But what we do know about him is that he was a man of faith.

When he was about 70 yrs. old, God called him out of his homeland, and after his father had died in Haran, Abraham continued on, not knowing where the Lord was leading him. That took faith, and a faith that many admire.

When Abraham did not own one square inch of land in Canaan, God told him that He would give this land to Abraham and his offspring.

When Abraham and his wife had no children, God told him that He would make of Abraham a great nation and that there would be kings among his descendants. God also told him that in his seed all nations of the earth would be blessed.

And Abraham believed God! There are many who admire and long for such a faith that can step forward into the unknown with boldness and confidence.

Wouldn't we all like such a faith, a faith that trusts in God even "Tho' the eye of sinful man His glory may not see"? (LH 246)

This morning we have a sample of how the Lord God sparked and strengthened such a faith in the heart of Abraham. And we might be surprised to find that it was not done by a great display of almighty power, nor by a stinging threat, but by the mercy and lovingkindness of God.

Surely God's lovingkindness is shown in the way He came to Abraham.

Abraham was sitting in the doorway of his tent (resting in the heat of the day). Perhaps he was meditating, deep in thought about something, for suddenly he looked up and there were three men standing there. He had not even seen them coming.

But come they had, as three weary, hungry travelers-travelers who had no place to rest in the heat of the day;

-travelers who stood at a respectful distance

until Abraham should notice them;

-travelers who posed no threat at all to a rich and powerful man like Abraham.

Nor did they immediately overwhelm Abraham with their majesty as Jehovah and two angels. Rather, when Abraham begged them to stay and have a bite to eat, they graciously accepted his offer.

One of the reasons they had come was to reaffirm to Sarah the promise that God had already given to Abraham, that they would have a son. That was a wonderful message, but notice how kind was Jehovah's manner of coming in the form of a poor traveler. It reminds us of how He came in Bethlehem as a poor baby who again could frighten nobody (except Herod).

Of course, such lovingkindness does leave itself wide open to rebuff and rejection. Sarah could stand and laugh in disbelief, something she would never have done if the Lord had arrived in a flaming chariot.

But would Sarah have been persuaded to trust one who came with the threat of thunder and lightning? Such a picture might call forth shock and fear, but not love and trust.

In the same way, when God comes to us today, He does so in the mild form of human language; and that in a word written many years ago. And if it is not enough that He comes through the words of His apostles many of whom were uneducated fishermen, He continues to call pastors and teachers by His Holy Spirit to bring their words to men. Thus through fallible human beings God chooses to send His

infallible divine Word. In such a human form He comes that He leaves Himself wide open to being laughed at and rejected. Yet this "lowly" Word continues to convince men to trust God when He speaks.

Even the message God sends, like the word of promise to Sarah, is such a merciful and mild message that it hardly seems that it will get the job done in this wicked world. Sometimes it seems that people would straighten out their lives a lot quicker if we came with a few demands

or conditions

or left a sword hanging over them, rather than just the message of repentance (desiring and needing forgiveness) and forgiveness.

The fact is that God did not give His word of lightning and thunder (the Law) in order to get men to become pleasing to Him. God knows our wickedness comes from the heart and changing a lifestyle in response to a threat is not a change of heart. The Law was given, and is a wonderful gift of God, to make it plain that a change is needed. "Ye must be born again!" That's law.

But the change itself is brought about by the "lowly" approach of the lovingkindness of God in Christ. "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son . . ."

Does it work? Does the kindly word of God prove strong enough to change the heart and even show a change in the life? Is the gospel, without any "teeth," really the power of God to salvation?

Let's look again at Abraham. Here he sat, a successful man, able to rest in the heat of the day, a wealthy and respected man. He had had his time of wandering and had lived through some "depressed" times. Now he could sit back and say, "Let these travelers learn about life the way I did. It'll be good for them to suffer a little in the heat of the day like I did once. They still won't go through all I had to anyway."

But no! Abraham rushes out and bows down, in effect thanking them for giving him the opportunity to serve them. It does not appear that he recognizes one of them as Jehovah, offering them as he does "a bit of bread. "Yet to strangers Abraham reflects the mercy that God had shown unto him and which is the power of his life. His faith is shown by its fruits.

Abraham says, "Stay for a bite of bread," and then goes to tell Sarah to make almost a bushel of flour into cakes. He rushes out to personally select a choice calf. One gets the picture of Abraham, the mighty sheik, rushing around like a servant to bring a bountiful meal to these traveling strangers. Then he does not eat with them but stands by to wait on them.

Truly the faith that God brings about by His kind Word is a faith that works by love! Abraham trusts God to take care of him, so he can afford to think about the needs of someone else.

Dear friends, how often doesn't God come to us with kind and faith-strengthening words, like the words of Ephesians, ch 1, which assure us that in Christ He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places . . . that in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of His grace.

Notice that God does not just bless us "out of" the riches of His grace. If a millionaire gave you ten dollars that would be something "out of" his riches. But if a millionaire gave you a gift "according to" his own wealth, then he would be giving you something in proportion to what he possessed. Even so God has declared that we have forgiveness of our sins "according to" the (limitless) riches of His grace.

The more God impresses this kind word upon our hearts, the more our faith will grow like Abraham's and we will trust that whatever God has promised He is able to perform (Rom. 4: 21).

Lord, grant us such a faith as this,

And then, whate'er may come,
We'll taste e'en now the hallowed bliss
Of an eternal home.

Amen!