

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Whatever things were written before were breathed by God's Spirit for our instruction in righteousness. That Scripture which forms the basis for our patience and comfort today comes from

**Genesis 18:1–14 (NKJV)**

- 1** *Then the Lord appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day.*
- 2** *So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground,*
- 3** *and said, "My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant.*
- 4** *Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree.*
- 5** *And I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts. After that you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to your servant." They said, "Do as you have said."*
- 6** *So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes."*
- 7** *And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, and he hastened to prepare it.*
- 8** *So he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate.*
- 9** *Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" So he said, "Here, in the tent."*
- 10** *And He said, "I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son." (Sarah was listening in the tent door which was behind him.)*
- 11** *Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing.*
- 12** *Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?"*
- 13** *And the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?'*
- 14** *Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son."*

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

**Remember Isaac ("I laughed")**

1. God is passing through with promises
2. Nothing is too wonderful for Him

**PRAY: Lord, visit us today with Your sure promises and cause us to believe that with You, nothing is impossible. Amen.**

In the name Jesus our Savior, dear fellow redeemed,

This last week a notice came to the church's email address: "You won \$2.8 million via Western Union." Sounds like a pretty good deal? Too good to be true? Yes, it does sound too good to be true. And so the email goes on: "Contact the Western union Agent: Mr. Vincent Rex. You will pay him \$210 dollars for the processing of the ownership certificate before he will give you the information to pick up your first payment of \$5,000.00.dollar."

Most of us in today's day and age have caught on to such scams. We chuckle at it. We laugh within because we know this promise is a fake. These scammers offer something that they never intend to follow through on, nor could they even if they were genuine.

When Sarah hears that she is going to bear a child in her nineties, "she laughed within herself." The Hebrew word here is onomatopoeic – it sounds like what it means: "tzachach!" She laughed. We read earlier in ch. 17 that Abraham laughed at this idea also. In a twist of irony, the LORD says to Abraham – "Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name: "yitzchaach." In English: "Isaac", meaning "I laughed." When God speaks promises He is not shuffling a scam; He will never fail to make good on what He has promised. Remember Isaac.

## **1. God is passing through with promises**

Some of us are expecting visitors this week. What do you do to prepare? Maybe its someone you've never met. You want to make a good impression. Perhaps you clean something that doesn't regularly get cleaned. Or perhaps you plan a meal when normally you would pop in a frozen pizza. You open your cupboards; you wash the linens; you open the futon. Now what would you do if you found our one of these visitors was God.

*1 Then the Lord appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day.*

Our text doesn't tell us how Abraham recognized these three men who were traveling through. But it does tell us Abraham's first reaction. "He ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, saying, 'Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass by.'"

We ask the same question. "Have I found favor?" We ask because we know this is something we don't deserve. Have we thoroughly cleaned up our life for Him? Have

INI

we dropped what were doing to run and meet Him when His word visits us? Or are we are so often just too busy to recognize that the LORD is passing through?

Consider Mary and Martha in our Gospel text. It was not that what Martha was doing was inherently sinful. The point of the lesson was not that we should drop everything, quit our jobs, leave our kids to fend for themselves and enter a monastery. The difference between Mary and Martha is that many things troubled and distracted Martha from resting at the feet of Jesus. She had forgotten that she cannot control it all, do it all, busy herself through her problems. She had forgotten that the LORD was passing through with the solution.

The LORD is passing through in our lives too. Every opportunity we have to hear the Word and share in the blessings of Christ we stand in the sandals of Abraham. But how often aren't we troubled about many things? As fathers we're so busy with work that we neglect time we need to spend with our wife and children; we're too busy with commitments to lead the family in evening devotion or share a hymn or prayer at dinner time. As a wife, perhaps you are too busy planning or organizing that you fail to notice the fact that you just lashed out at your husband simply because he forgot to put the cap on the toothpaste. As a child, maybe you're too busy playing that you don't hear your parents calling your name for supper over and over. Or maybe you've become consumed with health complications, bills, and stress. Whether you are a pastor, a teacher, a construction worker, a mom, or a child – we've all had those moments – busy and troubled about many things.

This is why we bow our face to the dust. There are areas of our life that just have not gotten cleaned up – no matter how hard we try. The show we put on in front of others just has not been enough to entertain God. We wonder, "Have I found favor in Your sight, O LORD?"

Well stop wondering. God is passing by and He stops not because of who you are; not because your or Abraham's accommodations are so wonderful. He stops to visit because of who He is and what He has promised.

He has promised to Abraham that through him "all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). God's promises do not scam us into offering him something before He will give us something in return. That is the scam of work righteousness. His favor is pure grace. His visit is purely undeserved. He stops to visit you – man to man. This God before whom we bow passes through in the humbled form of a Servant, as the Man Jesus. God's favor is with you because He has promised it.

*Luke 9:56 the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.*

He comes not to destroy but to save. He passes through to bear the "busy-ness" of our sinful thoughts; the moments when our sinful flesh has distracted us – the moments of

INI

looking away from Christ and His will; ignoring what our parents asked of us; lusting after sensual fulfillment; and refusing to walk in God's ways. Jesus carried the guilt of each moment when we have laughed or ignored God's ways. He bore the scorn we deserve. All this that He might stop to visit you with forgiveness and blessings. In your Baptism, God has stopped to spend eternity with you.

*Colossians 1:21,22 And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled 22 in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight.*

Now God has a basis to stop and visit with you. Jesus Himself has cleaned those places that never get cleaned; He has labored to please God in those ways we never have. Through faith in Jesus Christ God counts you righteous. God sits down with you to have a conversation. He listens to your troubles and returns with words of promise. This is the conversation you are having with God right now – a spiritual communion through His Word. The Word is His means of passing through and especially His means of visiting. This is how He forgives your sins and how He assures you He is always with you. He sits at Table with you giving His living body and eternal blood. This is not something to laugh at; this is something to rejoice in.

The cake, the calf, the meal were all expressions of peace and fellowship with God. This is the peace that you now take with you through word and sacrament. Now all your labor: your job, your family life, your Christian walk, are all by-products of the LORD's promises. He has visited you with grace and forgiveness. Your busy life flows from the fellowship you have with God and not against it.

The LORD is passing through with promises.

## **2. Nothing is too wonderful for Him**

Why is it that you don't believe \$2.8 dollars have been placed in your bank account? Well, for starters, where are the credentials? There is nothing to back up the promise, to prove they are legitimate. The fact that they are asking for money from you rather than giving money to you is the first clue that this is not for real. On the other hand, when some comes who does have the credentials, who is legitimate, who can back it up, how do we respond?

*12 Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" 13 And the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?' 14 Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son."*

INI

He says nothing more than "behold" (v.10). The promise is nothing more than a mere word.

And his name shall be called: "yitzchaach." Yes that's right. Sarah laughed and God delivered. Remember "Isaac."

This week in VBS we are studying a series called "God Speaks to Us – Prophets of the true God." There are over 2000 prophecies in the OT that have been fulfilled down to the last detail as God predicted. But these are all really one promise. Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, John the Baptist – they were united in one promise; a promise spoken some 3500 years ago to Abraham: "In your seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed."

Remember Isaac. Isaac is a stitch in the weaving of God's glorious tapestry of salvation. Without Isaac, God's promises have failed. Without Isaac, God's salvation is left to dangle as a loose thread. But God did stitch this thread. Remember Isaac. God didn't leave us hanging. Throughout the OT He kept on stitching, weaving our hope and confidence into a picture of Jesus. So He sewed a sign through the prophet Isaiah, *Isaiah 7:14 **Behold**, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.*

Again, the word Behold accomplishes God's will. From this seed of Abraham would be born one to rule all nations, One to be a blessing to all people. The virgin did conceive, she did bear a Son, and His name is "God with Us."

God keeps His promises despite all odds. In fact when you find yourself in worst distress, alone, struck by tragedy, depressed, when it seems all odds are against you – remember Isaac. When Sarah laughed, God lifted. God lifted up His Son to the cross for our sins, and lifted Him to life for our justification.

The psalmist writes of the most wonderful work of all: "The stone which the builders rejected, has become the chief cornerstone. This is the LORD's work; it is wonderful in our eyes" (Ps. 118:22-23).

The most wonderful work of all is that this Jesus who died for your sins would be raised to life. Nothing is too wonderful for Him.

God has promised nothing but good things for you. Even in the midst of suffering, pain, rejection, failure, and every other evil, God will still keep His promises. *Isaiah 54:10 10 For the mountains shall depart And the hills be removed, But My kindness shall not depart from you, Nor shall My covenant of peace be removed," Says the Lord, who has mercy on you.*

In the resurrection of Jesus, God has proven that nothing is impossible. He has also shown that what concerns Him above all else is the salvation of your soul.

INI

Maybe you know that couple who is having difficulty conceiving. Maybe you suffer from health concerns day by day. Maybe you are looking for a Christian spouse to share your life with. While we can't say exactly how God will keep His promise, whether or not these temporal blessings will be part of it, we can say that He promises to bless you in ways more marvelous than we could imagine. Maybe the blessing will be the faith to overcome doubt and anxieties. Maybe the blessing is that He will lead you to a stronger trust in Him. Remember how long Abraham and Sarah waited for His good will to be revealed. God is leading you each day through prayer to total dependence on His final decision. He wants you to give you every good thing, above all, that you would trust in His will.

*2 Corinthians 4:18 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

God's promise to give you every blessing in the heavenly places is unconditional. It doesn't rest in whether or not you believe. It doesn't rest in whether or not you do something or don't do something. It rests in the word "BEHOLD." Remember Isaac. "I laughed" and God delivered. Call upon Him in every trouble. Ask Him for these things that you desire in Christ. But as you ask, remember Isaac – pray that God's will be done; that His kingdom come; that His name be hallowed.

Don't get caught up in the ponsie schemes of the world. They ask you for something and give you nothing in return. Get caught up in the schemes of the LORD. He asks for nothing and gives you everything in return. Don't laugh, its true.

God is passing through with promises. Nothing is too wonderful. Remember Isaac. Amen.