

Introduction:

- A. Over 30 years ago now I was asked to give the children's sermon at a community Thanksgiving service. Let me tell you the short version.

Lorrie was always in trouble with her parents. She was a complainer, a whiner; nothing was ever like she wanted it to be. She was miserable and she made everyone around her miserable. One night, right about this time of year, at the dinner table when she'd just complained that she wanted a chocolate sundae when her mom had served angel food cake, her father had had just about enough. "That's it!" He exploded. "You need to think about how much you have to be thankful for. On Thanksgiving Day when all the family is here I'm going to call on you to pray our thanksgiving prayer."

Lorrie was infuriated. She jumped up and stormed to her room. Thanksgiving dinner at Lorrie's house involved four grandparents, two sets of aunts and uncles, and about six cousins, plus her own family. She stewed and schemed, then she decided what she'd do. When her father called on her she'd show him! She'd just pray, as fast as she could, "*Come-Lord-Jesus-be-our-guest-let-this-food-to-us-be-blessed-amen.*" That would show him.

So the day came and the family gathered, all crowded around the big table with the platter of turkey in the middle. Lorrie's father said, "I've asked Lorrie if she would offer our Thanksgiving Prayer." Her brothers gave her one last look and bowed their heads with everyone else.

Lorrie swallowed hard and then with defiant determination she began just as she had planned: "*Come-Lord-Jesus-be-our-guest-let-this...*" She stopped, then she started again, "*Come-Lord-Jesus-be-our-guest-let-this...*" No one around the table moved. It was like they were frozen in place.

Then with a gasp she saw someone walk through the kitchen door into the dining room. Her mouth dropped open

and her eyes grew as big and round as the dinner plates for she had never seen anyone like this before. It was a man whose face shined as bright as the sun and whose eyes flashed like lightning. He was wearing a long white robe—as white as lightning—with a gold sash. Lorrie looked wildly at the others but they all sat motionless with heads bowed. Then she looked at him again.

“Thanks for inviting me,” he said with a voice that sounded something like the tumbling waters of a waterfall.

“Who a-a-are y-y-you?” she stammered. Her eyes were beginning to hurt from the bright light. Then it dawned on her. “Are you the Lord Jesus?!”

“You invited me, didn’t you?” There was that waterfall voice again. “I’ll be with you all day. I always come when I’m invited. I love you and your family and I would love to join your feast.”

- B. Let’s look at a similar story. Turn to **Gen 18:1-8**... I read that this week several times and wondered why the Bible tells us so much about this scene and meal. It’s like an ancient version of the “Top Chef” show. This lavish show of hospitality was not uncommon in that culture. In fact, it is still practiced today. But the Bible rarely wastes ink describing social niceties. This *means* something. We know, of course, that the LORD is one of those three visitors but did Abraham know that? I suspect he figured it out pretty quickly. You see it, I think, in his urgent request, “*If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by.*” Then something I read opened my eyes.

The important thing in this scene is not whether Abraham recognized the LORD right away but that the LORD came to dine with Abraham. Here’s the thing: throughout the Bible and on to today, **the LORD makes a habit of inviting himself to our tables.** This scene in this particularly wonderful story is repeated in other ways over and over.

I. THE LORD OFFERS HIS PEOPLE THE HONOR OF HIS COMPANY (18:1-8)

A. This is miniature of God's way among his covenant people. It started with God keeping company with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Here, don't let the disguises fool you. This was the LORD, Creator of the universe, the Judge who sent the flood and who scrambled the languages at Babel. This is God Almighty who promised Abram the stars. And he comes for dinner; for flatbread and goat meat and curds. The issue isn't whether Abraham recognized him but that he would come, personally, to receive Abraham and Sarah's hospitality.

B. Meals are often the signal of God's fellowship with his beloved people. God invited the elders of Israel to the top of Mt Sinai for a meal. He had fresh bread in the Tabernacle. Passover is marked by a meal as are all the other biblical festivals. Communion is our taste of God's constant fellowship. And one day, instead of God coming to our tables, we will go to his. **Is 25:6** promises,

*On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare
a feast of rich food for all peoples,
a banquet of aged wine—
the best of meats and the finest of wines.*

Revelation calls that "the wedding supper of the Lamb."

The LORD wants to be with us. He comes to us, far more intimately now than he did in the Old Testament. God honors us with the pleasure of his company. And when he comes he comes to bless us, to enrich us, to delight us, to *feed* us. The LORD likes to be with us!

Remember when Jesus went to the house of Martha and Mary. Martha duplicated the role of Sarah in this story, in kitchen overdrive to prepare food for Jesus while Mary sat at Jesus' feet and listened. The surprise in that story is that Jesus didn't come to be fed, he came to feed. He was the host, not the guest. So it was in our story today.

However we pray, "*Come Lord Jesus, be our guest,*" he welcomes the invitation. Illus.: Last Sunday night we

got to have dinner with our son. I couldn't wait. I just wanted to see him, to be with him, to hear him talk. Now, if I being a sinful father, felt that way how much more does your heavenly Father delight to invited to be with you?!

- C. I identified with Abraham's urgent request in v.3, "*My lord, do not pass your servant by.*" There are many times when God appears and he is not welcomed. John summarizes Jesus ministry, "*He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.*" No wonder Jesus wept over Jerusalem before his death. But John 1 continues, "*Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.*" Jn 1:11-12. Jesus told the lukewarm church in Laodicea, "*Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.*"

This has been one of the most urgent prayers of my own life because I know how fickle my heart is and how prone I am to guard my door. For many years I have kept the words of an old hymn in the back of my Bible:

*Pass me not, O gentle Savior, Hear my humble cry.
While on others thou art calling Do not pass me by.*

So the three guests eat, not because they were hungry, of course, but because they were invited. **Finally, the LORD speaks (v.9), "Where is your wife Sarah?"** Wait! How did he know her name?! Her *new* God-given name?? You know what? I bet he knew where she was, too. The divine Guest was getting Sarah's attention, his voice raised a little when he asked, "**Where is your wife Sarah?**" When someone says your name, even in low conversation, you tend to hear it! Sarah's ears perked up and she went to the shadow just inside the tent door. The next verses are really a conversation with Sarah, over Abraham's head. It's her big scene in this whole story, only she's out of sight the whole time. **Vv.10-15...**

This is a covenant story. It rises from the covenant God had made with Abraham. This is a little jewel of a love story—of God's covenant love for his people, first in showing up to enjoy

their hospitality and now in this great blessing given to Sarah. Remember, in all the earlier promises of a son, Sarah had never been present. She'd only heard from Abraham.

**II. WHEN IT COMES TO SHOWING US HIS COVENANT LOVE
NOTHING IS TOO EXTRAORDINARY FOR THE LORD TO DO
(18:9-15)**

- A. Sarah was 90 years old. When v.11 says she “was past the age of childbearing,” there is no suggestion that she was the on-in-a-million exception. Sarah was unable to have a child. She couldn't when she was young and she certainly couldn't when she was old. Impossible.
- B. But there is another subtler story here. Let's read to the end: **v.12...** Remember, Sarah is behind the tent door. Then she laughed *to herself*. Literally, “*she laughed on her inside.*” The LORD who knew her name also knew she laughed to herself and he knew what that laugh meant—that this was too hard—too extraordinary—even for the LORD. And when he said to Abraham, loudly enough so Sarah would be certain to hear, “*Why did Sarah laugh?*” Abram looked bewildered and she blurted out from the shadow, “*I didn't laugh.*” And the Lord, speaking over Abraham's head said to her unseen voice, “*Yes, you did laugh.*” Sarah is the Old Testament's **Doubting Thomas**.

In the last chapter we're told that Abraham also laughed but it wasn't the same. I think we could say that Sarah laughed ruefully. “*Hah! Right! I've heard that before.*” I don't suppose Sarah would have said that there was something too hard for the LORD, the Creator of the world, but Sarah, I think, was worn out, not only in body but at heart. She'd left her home to follow Abram. In desperation she'd given her maidservant to sleep with Abram in hopes of a child Sarah could claim by proxy. But when that worked, she became bitter and biting. She despised Hagar and despising anyone dries out your soul. Then she'd lived around Hagar and Ishmael for 12 years, feeling more barren than she ever had before. Ishmael was Abram's son and his pride and joy, but she was no one's mother. Abraham had

told her of God’s appearances and promises but God had never spoken to her. God never took her out to look at the stars. She saw no covenant fire and blood. Somewhere in all those long years her faith had all but died. She believed in God, I’m sure, but I suspect she felt she didn’t matter to God. What faith she had—if any—could no longer give birth to hope. Life—the God-blessed life—had passed her by

So there she was, hiding in the shadow, barren-hearted, fruitless in her soul. When she heard *the* most wonderful news of her whole 90 years she just harrumphed! *Hah! Yeah, right!* It was... *inconceivable* to her that God could or would give her the pleasure of a child when her body was way out of commission.

Often worn-out hearts and barren souls cannot conceive of God blessing them. Has that ever happened to you? Ever thought it was impossible that God would bless your life?

- C. As far as Sarah’s part of this story, it ends right there. “*I didn’t laugh.*” “*Yes, you did laugh. And you don’t think I can do what I promise.*” You turn the page to see what happens... and *nothing* happens. For about a year. What would you *think* the LORD might do, given Sarah’s faithlessness? Might you expect him to leave her out? To turn his blessing in another direction? To *pass her by*? **Here’s the blessed thing: God doesn’t pass her by.** A year later she held Isaac—He Laughs—in her arms. God is like that. *Merciful and gracious, abounding in love.* God is like that. He doesn’t treat us as we deserve. **Giving grace to barren, doubting hearts is not too hard for the LORD.**
- D. The key statement in this whole story is in v.14, “*Is anything too hard for the LORD?*” The Hebrew word doesn’t just mean *difficult*. It means *is anything too extraordinary for the LORD?* The same word appears in those titles of the coming Messiah, “**wonderful Counselor.**” *Is anything too wonderful for the LORD to do?*

The thing here is not just the miracle of an aged couple miraculously having a baby. That's just the beginning. They had a baby in whom the world-changing promise of God was carried—the promise that all the nations of the world would be God-blessed. From that baby would come a life-giving blessing of God stretching from one unlikely son to another for 2000 years to the birth of Jesus Christ, to a virgin, (did you hear that, Sarah!). And that Son, having no children of his own, would give life to countless believers by conquering death and hell. Like I said, the birth of a baby to a 90-year-old woman was just the beginning of the wonders.

Paul reminded us of Isaiah's promise:

“What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived”— the things God has prepared for those who love him— these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.

When it comes to blessing his people *nothing is too incredible, too extraordinary, too wonderful for the LORD!*

Conclusion

As I said before, this story is a miniature of God's great story. What God did for Abraham and Sarah—especially Sarah—in this story, he keeps doing in grander and more wonderful ways.

The Lord offers his people the honor of his company. He comes to our lives, to our table, to our church. He wants to be with us and bless us.

Secondly, **when it comes to showing us his covenant love nothing is too extraordinary for the Lord to do.** Every promise God has ever made is *Yes* in Christ. It isn't too hard for him to forgive all our sins. It isn't too hard to heal all the diseases of our souls. It isn't too hard to redeem our lives from death's dungeon. It isn't too hard for the LORD to crown our lives with love and compassion. It isn't too hard for the LORD to satisfy your soul's desires with good things.

In my story, when Lorrie calmed down from the shock of seeing Jesus she collected herself and said, “Lord Jesus, I can

hardly believe you would join our family for dinner. I never really realized that you cared about me and that would talk to me. And if you did, I thought you'd always be angry with me. You are welcome at our Thanksgiving Feast. I'm very thankful you've come."

She was silent a moment, then to her surprise she heard her father clear his throat and say, "Amen." She'd completely forgotten about her family around the table. Everyone looked at her strangely and finally Grandma Williams said, "Why, Lorrie, that was a beautiful prayer. That was the nicest Thanksgiving Prayer I think I've ever heard."

Lorrie said, "Well, I am thankful for our Guest," and she thought she heard a gentle laugh that sounded like a faraway waterfall.