

## When God Visits

### Gen 18 – 20

Whenever the front door bell goes at our place it's a bit of an event. To start with I always jump just a bit. Unless you hear the footsteps coming up you get a little bit of a surprise. And then there's a kiddy stampede to see who it is. It's all pretty exciting, you'd think no one ever came to visit us.

And sometimes it's the fruit man. Sometimes it's the Australia Post man. Sometimes it's Nanna and Pa.

Unfortunately..... sometimes it's the Jehovah's Witnesses. When we were kids, we used to hide and pretend we weren't there. Unfortunately we can't do that anymore.

But what if..... it was God. What if God came to visit? I know it sounds bizarre. And I'm not saying you should expect it, but what if God turned up. Knocked on the door, and said hi??

What would you do? What would you say? Would you invite him in? Would you talk about the weather? Be pretty interesting talking to God about the weather I'd say. Be interesting talking to him about anything. But what would you say.....

What would you do? Would you offer him something to eat? What would you offer him? Would it be ok to give God a muesli bar?

I know it sounds strange. But that's exactly what happens to Abraham here in chapter 18. And he has to figure it out.

In Genesis 18 God comes to visit. And he's here to make two house calls in particular. He visits Abraham and his household.

And he drops in somewhere else as well. To the city of Sodom.

Two different places God visits. Two different places. With two different responses. And two very different outcomes.

Now let me just say. This is pretty hard hitting stuff here. And I reckon. Here's something that happened way back in deep dark patriarchal history. Thousands and thousands of thousand years ago. In another part of the world. The middle east. And I'd be surprised if most people in 21<sup>st</sup> century Australia didn't know something about what happened at Sodom and Gomorrah when God visited.

They might not be moved by it. But they know about it. There's a powerful illustrative force in this story. Which we'll see.

What's it going to be like when God visits? It's going to be one of two things. Either it's going to be very very good. Or it's going to be very very bad.

And that's pretty much what it's like here.

So let's catch up with Abraham again in chapter 18. He's out the front of his tent. Just after lunch. He's trying to catch a bit of the afternoon breeze after a hard morning of work. And he looks up verse 2. To see three men. It's a bit mysterious. Because it could be anyone.

But he rushes over to meet them. And he doesn't shake anyone's hand. Not sure that's the custom anyway. But he doesn't kiss anyone on the cheek either. He bows down low to the ground.

Which maybe is tradition, or maybe it's the first hint that he recognizes them as something more than just neighboring villagers. So he bows down. And asks them to stay.

"If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. <sup>4</sup> Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree.

He honours them. In his words and with his actions. And he's keen for them to stick around.

Like you'd do if some celebrity turned up at your house. Might be Brad Pitt for you. Might be Inglebert Humperdink. Might be Andre Rieu. Hannah Montana.

So Abraham says hey why don't you stay a bit and hey why don't I get you a little something to eat. And he persuades them. And then he gets to work.

And you'll notice the sense of URGENCY. Abraham HURRIES to the tent to Sarah. QUICK he says. Get three seah's of fine flour and knead it and bake some bread. Then he RAN to the heard and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who HURRIED to prepare it.

It's the sign of someone who's eager to please isn't it.

A little water and something to eat he says. And maybe you might aim higher than say a vegemite sandwich. But here's a WHOLE BEAST. For three people.

Abraham's whipped up a banquet. And he doesn't even join in. He just sort of hangs around at a comfortable distance as they eat the food. While Sarah listens from inside the tent.

One of the three men who turns out to be THE LORD tells them the details for the birth of Isaac. 12 more months. And they'll be holding the son of the promise in their hands. Which is great news. But in a way. Not that much of a surprise. Seeing as that's been the agenda item for the last 24 years.

But that's not all. Because just as they're leaving. Abraham's seeing them off. And the Lord says. Presumably to the men with him. And presumably in the hearing of Abraham. He says.

Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Strange in a number of ways. One that Abraham can probably hear. Two that if it's the Lord, and he's talking to the others who turn out to be angels. There's no way they're answering back. So I guess it's rhetorical.

Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?

And we know the answer is - NO because of the conversation that happens next. So Abraham's in the loop on this one. And no one else is. And here's why.

Verse 18 Listen in on God's thinking out loud.

<sup>18</sup> Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. <sup>19</sup> For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."

See, there's the promises from Genesis 12 in a nutshell. And somehow, knowing what God's about to do in Sodom. Is important for Abraham, and his descendants after him who get a mention there, his children and his household after him. It's important for them, for the fulfillment of the promise.

So what's God reveal to Abraham? You see it there from verse 20

<sup>20</sup> Then the LORD said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous <sup>21</sup> that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know."

There's an ominous tone to God's words there. Which Abraham picks up on. This will be a different kind of visit to what Abraham's just had. Which is why you see the back and forth between God and Abraham talking about destruction.

And by this time tomorrow. The destruction of Sodom will be news for everyone. But as to why....you wouldn't know.... Unless you're privy to this conversation.

And God wants the bearer of his promises to know exactly what's happening and why.

You might have seen a T-shirt that says two words – STUFF HAPPENS.

Which is basically the worldview that says. There's no God and no reason behind anything. Stuff just happens. So don't over-analyse.

But that's not what's happening in the destruction of Sodom.

This is not just STUFF HAPPENING.

And this is not the arbitrary action of a capricious, angry deity who's had a bad morning either.

See what he says there. I heard the cries. Which is why I've come to investigate. The same phrase will be used in Exodus. When God hears the cries of his people being brutally oppressed in Egypt. The cries of the victims. The cries of the oppressed. The cries of the brutalized and downtrodden. Because even though we might like to play that line in our head that we're not really hurting anyone. When you're living in rebellion to God you're hurting EVERYONE. Sin hurts people...Including yourself. And the trajectory of sin at its worst. Is brutal. As we'll see in a minute.

So this is not arbitrary. And it's not just stuff happening. This is the right and proper response of a righteous God to sin.

And it's not just a burst of anger. I mean I assume. God doesn't really....need to come down to find out how bad things are. I assume he knows already. This conversation is for Abraham's benefit. I'm going to investigate he says. If it's as bad as I think it is. And if it's not, I'll know. Make no mistake. The destruction of Sodom... is God's patient, considered, proper justice.

And you think God's rubbing his hands to bring down the fire and brimstone? Even if there's 10 righteous people he's going to spare the whole city. Because Abraham's got it right. I guess if he's omnipotent he could do whatever he pleases. But when the judge of all the earth visits. He'll do right.

So the Lord heads down toward Sodom. And Abraham goes back to his tent.

And the scene jumps from there. To the two men arriving at Sodom as the sun goes down. It's twilight.

And they arrive. And there's a bit of a parallel scene here because Lot looks up from out the front as well. The front gate of the city. And he also honours these men as he goes and bows down. And there's an urgency with Lot as well.

But Lot's urgency is a bit different. See Lot urges the two men to stay at his place. Because he lives there. And he knows how bad place is in the daytime. Let alone after dark. And even though they don't accept at first. You can almost imagine the conversation. No No No you don't understand. You NEED to stay with ME.

He insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. And Lot prepares a meal for them as well.

Now I'm not sure how you go about investigating the wickedness in a place. But you don't have to worry. When it's as obvious as it turns out to be here.

It's not long. And the men of the city have surrounded the house. Verse 4 says all the men from every part of the city. It's a comprehensive line up. All the men geographically. From every part of the city. And all the men generationally. Both

young and old. Verse 5 They all surround the house. And they want to show their own hospitality to these strangers. Verse 5.

<sup>5</sup> They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them."

Now the perversion is obvious. The sexual deviancy of what they want to do. Hence the label of Sodomy that still exists. But the prevailing idea here...surely...is more than that. Surely the deviancy. Is just a part of their wicked intent. To mistreat these visitors. They don't JUST want to fulfill their perverse desires. They want to utterly shame, violate, abuse, and torture. And then probably kill them. When the fun's over.

The house is surrounded. And listen to Lot. He puts himself between the mob and his guests. Which is either pretty brave or pretty dumb.

." <sup>6</sup> Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him <sup>7</sup> and said, "No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing.

And I think I know what the investigation report is going to say.

This is a wicked thing. Don't do it. But they won't listen. And even when Lot offers up his virgin daughters to appease the crowd. Which is bizarre and maybe who knows if he'd have gone through with that. Maybe he was stalling. Very strange. But they won't listen. And they surge. We'll treat you worse than them. Get out of the way.

Now let's just hold the phone. Let's just imagine..... for a second. They'd they listened. Lot when you put it that way. You're right. You make a pretty good point. It is pretty wicked. Sorry about that. Our bad.

Now if they'd done that. And all went home. What do you reckon the outcome would have been? See you get the idea that even then. God would have relented.

But they won't listen. And sometimes enough is enough. So the visitors pull Lot inside. And the mob are struck with blindness. Not so they'll repent. But so they won't be able to find the door. Because they're so far gone that even then they won't repent. Lot and his wife and his two daughters get out. The men grab their hands and lead them out. And they're told to run for their life.

And verse 24. There's the short but vivid description of the overthrow of Sodom.

<sup>24</sup> Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah-- from the LORD out of the heavens. <sup>25</sup> Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, including all those living in the cities-- and also the vegetation in the land.

And Abraham gets up the next morning to see the smoke rising. From God's visit to Sodom.

Two visits. Two responses. Two outcomes.

It's a real event. And one of the theories going around is that a fissure in the ground spewed out huge amounts of flammable substance into the air which lit and then fell where it did. Which makes some sense I suppose in the land of oil

which is the middle east. But the point is it's real. But it's not just news is it? It's not just stuff that happened. It's a lesson.

It's a lesson burned into Abraham's retinas. For the sake of the children of the promise. And it's a simple lesson. The lesson is...don't go down that road.

And the prophets will talk about Sodom and Gomorrah again and again and again. To remind a rebellious Israel. To warn them. About turning away from God.

Deuteronomy 29. When you go into the promised land. Remember Sodom and Gomorrah. Or you'll be kicked out in judgment.

Isaiah 1, 3, 13. Remember Sodom and Gomorrah. Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel. Remember Sodom. Amos, Zephania.

And then Jesus. Who sends out his disciples to the towns in Israel.

**Matthew 10:14-15** <sup>14</sup> If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. <sup>15</sup> I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

Do you see what Jesus is doing? He says. Look back to the day God visited. Then look forward to the day when he's coming again. Which will be judgment.

Look back and listen to the warning. Because it will either be very good when God visits. Or it'll be the opposite. It'll be terrible.

What'll you do when God visits? Abraham accepts God's word and he trusts God's promises. And so what does he do....he humbles himself, he welcomes God when he visits. The fools at Sodom. Do the opposite. Which is interesting. Because that's what happens when Jesus visits too isn't it. John 1 tells us that Jesus is God in the flesh. God visits again in the person of Jesus. And there's two kinds of responses to him.

Faithful Israel rejoices at his birth. They bring him gifts they obey his words from the heart. But hard hearted Israel. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees. The self righteous.....do the opposite. And if you think what the Sodomites wanted to do to the angels was repulsive....just have a think about what they ACTUALLY DID to Jesus. And the shame, the violation, the abuse, the torture. And finally death. The Son of God suffered at their hands.

It's a horrible thought. And a horrible thought. I mean if God wiped out Sodom like that for what they did. What will he do to people who reject God the Son?

There are a lot of parallels between that day that God visited Abraham. And when Jesus came. And the cross is the evidence of the reality of the depths of sin. At the cross God's wrath comes down. God's right and proper judgment not just on the sin of a couple of towns, but the sin of the world, including yours and mine. But there's some differences too. When Jesus visited he wasn't on a fact finding mission. He was on a rescue mission. And the warning is also the way out.

For when God visits again in the final judgment.

That Day. Which is the song we'll sing in a minute.

Because not only will the judge of the earth do right. But because of his mercy in Jesus he's provided a way for sinners to escape.

So you don't have to fear that day. But you can approach it with confidence.

Turn to Jesus. Walk with Jesus. And you can be confident about the day when God visits again.

**1 Thessalonians 5:1-11** <sup>NIV</sup> **1 Thessalonians 5:1** Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, <sup>2</sup> for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup> While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. <sup>4</sup> But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. <sup>5</sup> You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. <sup>6</sup> So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. <sup>7</sup> For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. <sup>8</sup> But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. <sup>9</sup> For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>10</sup> He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. <sup>11</sup> Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

