

IS ANYTHING TOO HARD FOR THE LORD?

By

Richard Ormesher

Good Morning!

What a blessing this is for me to preach for you this morning...thank you, Pastor Matt!

I had someone of status at work ask me this week "How are you?" My reply wasn't acceptable. I said, "Okay, thanks", and before I could respond further, I was chided with: "Just okay? You should say you're doing great!"

On one level, I could and perhaps should. I have a job, I'm not Covid-positive, and all things considered, things could be a whole lot worse.

But that comment really annoyed me. I'm not "doing great"; in fact, far from it. I have my struggles and troubles, I have my aches and pains (and then some), I have things that I keep to myself and bring with tears privately to the Lord, and so on. You do, too. Doubtless, some of you are going through a level of suffering that few know about. And yet, some of you are, without doubt, filled with joy and are rejoicing.

It's the cycle of life that we all experience.

But it stuck me again how shallow we are as a people when we use "How are you?" as a form of greeting, no different than "Hello"!

And I'm guilty as charged. I do it all the time.

"How am I?" Do you *really* want to know? Do you have a couple of hours or more to sit down with me and listen? Do I for you?

We're created as relational beings, not automatons. And we need human fellowship. To look into each other's eyes and see the light of life in another human being.

Our response to this pandemic has put a massive damper on that, hasn't it?

And, no, this sermon isn't my diatribe about that. Just an observation by a needy sinner. I miss fellowship – a lot.

But I do have God to talk to. Pandemic or not, He's always there for me. And He's always there for you. He loves us with a love that defies comprehension. When I come to Him with my tears, He's there to listen and He has all the time in the world for me.

And for you.

After all, He has promised never to leave us or forsake us. And we can take Him at his word. Because He is God and His promises are sealed in His own character.

Genesis 15:17

Just as Abraham learned – or rather Abram at that time – when he broke the animals in two and God passed through them – as we learned a couple of weeks ago from Pastor Matt as he expounded Genesis 15. May this happen to Me if I don't keep my promise!

What was the promise that the LORD gave to Abram?

Genesis 12:2-3

Back in Genesis 12, God called Abram out of Ur of the Chaldeans with the promise to make him into a great nation and that all peoples on earth would be blessed through him. Abram was 75 years old at that time (v. 4).

Genesis 15:4

And then in verse 4 of chapter 15, God specifically told Abram that he would have a son who would be his heir. Abram believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.

Unfortunately, Abram and Sarai were impatient and tried to hurry along God's promise by having a son, Ishmael, through Sarai's handmaiden, Hagar.

Genesis 17:1-2

When Abram was 99 years old, The LORD confirmed His covenant with him to make him the father of a great nation...

Genesis 17:16

...specifically telling him – now Abraham – that she – now Sarah – would be the mother of many nations, bearing him a son herself.

At which point Abraham fell apart laughing at how ludicrous a thought that was.

Don't you just love Abraham? He's real. Earthy. Not superficial. And when God repeated His promise that Sarah would have a son, giving that son a name, Isaac, Abraham believed again, and confirmed it with his own circumcision.

That brings us to today's text – Genesis 18:1-15

Hear now the Word of the LORD...

Full text read aloud

The Word of God. For the people of God. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Would you please pray with me?

Almighty God, to Whom all hearts are open,
All desires known, and from Whom no secrets are hid.
Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts

By the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit
So that we may perfectly love You
And worthily magnify Your Holy Name
Through Christ our Lord,
Amen.

There's so much here in this text, I can't possibly do it adequate justice in the time we have. So please bear with me.

Genesis 18:1

First of all, we have the LORD appearing to Abraham while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. I don't know about you, but if I'm 99 years old sitting in the heat of the day, I'd be more than likely half asleep at the very least. It's siesta time.

Genesis 18:2

Suddenly, he's aware of three men standing nearby.

It was customary for sojourners to be seen coming from afar off and be met and served by hospitable hosts with refreshments. Even if dozing, surely a servant would have alerted him to the approach of strangers traveling towards them.

So, Abraham very likely was caught off guard by their appearance and took immediate steps to rectify the matter. He hurried to meet them and bowed low to the ground. At this point, it's highly unlikely that he recognized that one of the guests was, in fact, the LORD.

Bowing low was not only an act of worship when done before God, but was also a form of deep respect and honor to a peer, a fellow human being, or one in authority. And this latter form of bowing low was not intended to be an act of worship. Of course, when done before an idol, that was a different matter...

But we see numerous examples in Scripture of people bowing low before other people:

Genesis 33:4 Jacob meeting his brother Esau
Exodus 18:7 Moses meeting his father-in-law, Jethro
Ruth 2:10 Ruth and Boaz
1 Kings 1:16 Bathsheba and husband, King David
2 Samuel 9:6 Mephibosheth and King David

And Abraham's hurrying was likewise a gesture, an expression of his warmth and respect in greeting the visitors.

Genesis 18:3

Then Abraham said: "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by."

I want to pause here for a moment and take a slight detour...

One of the things I remember vividly in my early deep studies as a Christian was the ways the Bible addresses the word "Lord".

RC Sproul's book and teaching series on "The Holiness of God" does an outstanding job of this and I commend that to you. You will find it very profitable.

In your Bible, you will see the word Lord denoted in several ways:

First, when it is written in all capital letters, LORD, it is speaking of God's Holy Name, YHWH, or Yahweh. The name God reveals to Moses at the burning bush.

Exodus 3:14 YHWH = I AM WHO I AM

Second, when it is written as capital L, and lower case "o-r-d", "Lord", the Bible is speaking of the supreme TITLE for God, "Adonai".

The Hebrews revered the name of God so much they virtually never said it, instead preferring to use His Title, Lord, or Adonai.

In Psalm 8:1, it says: "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth"

O Yahweh, our Adonai, how majestic is Your name in all the earth. Adonai and Yahweh are one and the same.

Compare that with Psalm 110:1:

"The LORD says to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool'."

Do you hear that?

Yahweh – Jehovah – the LORD God Almighty – says to my Adonai, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool'

Here, it's quite plain that there is a difference between Yahweh and Adonai. A personal difference. They are not the same persons.

It's no accident that this passage in Psalm 110, is the most quoted verse of the OT found in the NT.

I hate to leave it there, but I note it here just in passing as a point of major importance to NT Christology.

Then we have lesser uses of the word "lord" or "master". It can refer to deference, especially to one in authority.

Again there are numerous examples in Scripture in lesser the use of the word "lord" (or "master")

Genesis 24:48 Rebekah being chosen as wife for Isaac

1 Samuel 1:15 Hannah and Eli ... "No, my lord, I am a woman troubled in spirit"

1 Samuel 24:6 David spares Saul's life

1 Kings 1:17-18 Bathsheba and David

Luke 16 The Parable of the Shrewd Manager

In this sense, "lord" can be used as modern day "sir".

When a cop pulls me over he or she might say, "Sir, your driver's license and registration, please"

He's not addressing me as "Sir Richard Ormesher, Order of the British Empire". It's just a simple expression of a respectful greeting.

Then, there is that appropriate use for an official title, such as a military officer. "Yes, Sir!"

And, yes, there are real formal titles: "Sir", "Dame" for women ... Sir David Attenborough, Dame Agatha Christie. Who really have been granted the formal Order of the British Empire title.

Progressively increasing significance to the term "sir" is understood. And it is the same with "lord".

So the question is, in what way does Abraham use "my lord" here in our text?

Genesis 18:3

He's addressing a single person by that usage, so he at least recognizes one of the three as being leader. My bible uses the full lower case "lord", not Lord, and certainly not LORD.

And the commentaries I reviewed almost unanimously indicate Abraham is addressing someone of importance – leader of the three – but not necessarily more than that in his understanding at that particular moment.

I mean, think about it, he's dozing off in the heat of the day and is startled to find three visitors standing nearby.

He's more than likely in the hurry-up/catch-up mode after seeing he was neglecting his new guests.

Genesis 18:4-5

Especially since offering refreshments was customary practice by hospitable hosts to offer travelers/sojourners some water, rest and some nourishment to help them as they go on their way.

But Abraham, consistent with his noble character, provides far more than a morsel of bread.

Maybe it's dawning on him by now who he's dealing with.

Genesis 18:6

Abraham hurries into the tent to Sarah ... "Quick, get three seahs of fine flour and knead it and bake some bread"

This isn't the bread we're familiar with. It's flour mixed with water and rolled into round cakes and baked on hot stones after covering them with hot embers. It didn't take that long to actually bake such bread.

But it is noteworthy that the flour used was choice, premium fine flour. The best of the best. And also, Abraham assigned the task to Sarah herself, not a servant or hireling.

Amazingly, though, the sheer volume of flour used is staggering. Three seahs tally one ephah. And an ephah in today's measurements is roughly equivalent to five dry gallons.

U.S. Measure ^ hide ^			
We only include several basic units here for you to convert historical units to contemporary ones. A more comprehensive list of U.S. units is available on the main volume conversion page .			
ephah (איפה) to barrel (liquid)	0.1384	ephah (איפה) to gallon (dry) (gal)	4.994
ephah (איפה) to barrel (dry)	0.1903	ephah (איפה) to pint (liquid) (pt)	46.49
ephah (איפה) to bushel (bu)	0.6243	ephah (איפה) to pint (dry) (pt)	39.96
ephah (איפה) to gallon (liquid) (gal)	5.812	ephah (איפה) to fluid ounce (oz)	743.9

Think of it...five gallons of premium fine flour, and that for strangers.

That's a bakery quantity, not that for a family, even with guests.

Five gallons!

It wasn't customary to offer meat to sojourners, but Abraham does so here...again, showing his noble character.

Genesis 18:7

Hurrying, he selects a choice, premium, tender calf. Even a calf is a big animal. But he picks the best of the best and has it hurriedly prepared. I can only imagine the meat was cut into small morsels and skewered like a kebab for roasting over hot coals. Regardless of how it was done, it was far above and beyond what could be reasonably expected by any sojourner or visitor.

Genesis 18:8

And then he brought curds and milk to go with it and the cakes baked by Sarah. These are not just simple curds. It is still customary to this day for Bedouins to enjoy yogurt or lebbene with such cakes and meat.

It's amazing what you can find on the internet today, isn't it? Some not at all good, as we all know. But here is what I found about lebbene on cheese.com:

<https://www.cheese.com/lebbene/>

Lebbene is an Israeli **cheese** produced from sheep's milk and shaped into small, little balls. It is unbelievably soft and stored in olive oil. ... This **cheese** can also be made from goat's milk and its consistency is almost liquidly with a fat content of 45%.

Abraham provided his guests with a colossal feast! A feast par excellence!!

And then he stood aside like a waiter while they ate.

Hebrews 13:2

We don't know at what point Abraham became fully aware of the identity of his guests, but the common cross-reference here is to Hebrews 13:2 where we are commanded to not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

Some commentators speculate that the sheer quantity of food indicates there must have been many people in a caravan led by the three visitors. But the text doesn't say that. In fact, it does say "them" and "they" in reference to the three of them, so it seems to me it's just the three of them. The leader – who we know is the LORD God in a theophany, and two angels who shortly after this instance head off to Sodom and Gomorrah – next week's sermon.

Genesis 13:9

Now the purpose of their visit is revealed. The visitors take over and question Abraham. He rapidly becomes aware of who his guests really are.

Genesis 13:10 The LORD (Yahweh) said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son."

I want to pause here and take another slight detour...

One of the methods the bible uses to make a point, to stress a thought, to emphasize something is through repetition. In our writing, we use bold, italics, underlining, etc. to highlight something of importance. Well, repetition was a key and pointed method for emphasis that was utilized by the authors in the bible.

It's used of a person's name as a means of stressing endearment

Examples:

"Abraham, Abraham" -

"Moses, Moses"

"Martha, Martha"

Names / Persons

- ... Genesis 22 ... "Abraham, Abraham" ... when he was about to slay Isaac
- ... Exodus 3:4 ... "Moses, Moses" ... God calling Moses from the burning bush
- ... 2 Samuel 18 ... "my son, my son" ... by David over Absalom's death
- ... Luke 10:41 ... "Martha, Martha!" ... "My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over these details"
- ... Matthew 27:46 ... "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ... Jesus on the cross
- ... Acts 9:4 | Acts 26:14 ... "Saul, Saul! Why are you persecuting me?" ... Saul on the road to Damascus when he was stopped cold and became a Christian

And repetition is also used for things, circumstances, and so on to make a strong point. In other words, DON'T FORGET THIS!!

Jesus used it frequently in conversation with His disciples. Do you remember?

The NIV misses the boat on this one, frankly. It says: "I tell you the truth..." or "Very truly" instead.

John 3:3

"...Truly, Truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God"

The old King James Version – "Verily, verily".

Literally, Jesus says “Amen, Amen...”, meaning it is true, sure, certain

We end our prayers with Amen – He begins many of his teachings with it. Now, everything Jesus said and taught is important, but even He put an emphasis on certain things.

It’s as if he’s saying “Don’t you dare forget this!!”

Genesis 18:10

Well, back in our text, the LORD says “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.”

And four verses later, He says the same thing:

Genesis 18:14

Why did He repeat Himself? An academic point of emphasis?

Look back to verses 10 to 12

Genesis 18:10(b)-12

Sarah hears God say that she will personally have a child and just like any one of us would do and like Abraham did previously in Chapter 17, she laughed out loud at the very idea of it.

She’s been barren her entire life and now she’s well past the age of child-bearing. What more ridiculous a thought could there be than an aged, worn out woman (her words) become pregnant and have a child?

Who among us can fault her for thinking like this? Of course, it IS ridiculously impossible to us, but to God, it’s pathetically easy.

And that’s precisely the point!

It is now, and only now, that the covenant child can be born. Not before.

God’s repeated promise is that Sarah WILL have a son. Not maybe, not perhaps. But a 100% certainty.

And will happen at the appointed time. A time fixed by the determined will of Almighty God.

Genesis 18:15

Now Sarah is afraid and tries to hide her fear by lying. What a foolish thing to do, right? But so human...

Is anything too hard for the LORD?

If He has promised it and sealed it in a covenant, then nothing in all the universe can prevent it.

This promise hinges entirely on the character of the one making the promise – as do all promises.

Our promises, though, are frequently broken, aren’t they? We’re promise breakers. Sinners.

Not so with God.

He is Omnipotent. He is Omniscient. He is Omnipresent. He is Sovereign...in total control over His creation. Again, nothing in all creation can stop Him from keeping His promises.

God is the Ultimate Promise Keeper!

Think about it for just a minute...can God do anything?

Can God do anything?NO!

God cannot sin. He cannot tell a lie. And He cannot build a rock so big He can't move it.

And He cannot promise something and fail to deliver on it. He has placed His Holy character on the line.

Genesis 15:17

May this happen to me, God says of the broken body parts, if I fail to honor my covenant, my promises.

That's a really big deal.

Again, God is Omnipotent. All powerful. But that's an attribute of God we need to embrace, not a promise to claim. He doesn't share it with us.

Human beings can do many incredible things – from splitting the atom to walking on the moon – there are things we simply do not have the power to do. Raising the dead and creating life are not one of them. And creating a covenant community from a couple of aged, worn out people is not one of them either.

We all need to be trusting God's actual promises – especially the ones He repeats many times for our sake.

But we need to know and recognize His promises, don't we?

(Slide)

The flip side is also true: we should never presume on God to fulfill a promise He never made. Sadly, there are many people who do declare false promises.

And God condemned the OT false prophets for exactly that.

Jeremiah 6:14 Jeremiah 8:11

“They dress the wound of my people
as though it were not serious.
'Peace, peace,' they say,
when there is no peace”

Again, note the double repetition this time of both words and verses!

We have something similar today, don't we? The “Prosperity Gospel” and “Faith-Healers”. God will deal with them in due course. Just as He condemned the OT prophets, He will do the same to these people.

In the meantime, we need to know the Word so we can know God and know His iron-clad promises.

Is anything too hard for God?

One final point...

God is Sovereign. He is Lord of Creation. He determines the Ends but He also establishes the means. That's Providence. He determines the ends and establishes the means.

Genesis 50:20

Joseph lived that out and spelled it out to his treacherous brothers, remember? "You meant it for evil, but God intended it for good..."

Trusting God's promises means trusting Him when things are seemingly not good, at least not good or pleasant to us. But He knows what He's doing and we have to trust Him in the midst of our struggles. Especially in the midst of our struggles. Our testing periods.

But think with me, if you will – just for a minute – about the implications of God's sovereignty in our lives...and nothing ever being able to stop Him from keeping His promises.

And, Pastor Matt, I for one would love to see you do a sermon series on this one day.

The Sovereignty of God.

God is Sovereign over Nothing. I don't mean there's nothing over which He is sovereign.

Genesis 1:1

Before He created anything, there was only God. God alone. "In the beginning, God..." Nothing else. And out of nothing, he created all that is. EveryTHING.

Nothing but God for all eternity, then God creates, out of absolutely nothing, everything that exists now.

Genesis 2:7

God is sovereign over life itself. He created life ... God created man and breathed into him the breath of life.

Mark 4:41

God is sovereign over nature ... "Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

*** Do we believe this things? ***

Mark 1:34

He is sovereign over the spiritual realm ... the Son of God drove out demons

John 14:14

He is sovereign over the body ... Jesus healed the sick, the blind and the lame. And in the text for today, He would sovereignly regenerate Sarah's body so she could carry a child. And also with Mary, He would sovereignly intervene in her life so she would carry the incarnate Son of God.

Psalm 2:4-5

God is sovereign over the nations ... politics are one thing in our daily lives – especially today – but God rules over the nations. He can raise them up and He can tear them down. He is the LORD!

Matthew 28:18-20

He is sovereign over the church – over its missions and evangelism – the Great Commission. We obey and He brings His will to pass. Again, by His Providence – the determines the ends and establishes the means. What a privilege it is to be used of God to achieve His ends.

*** Do we believe this things? ***

Ephesians 2:4-5

He is sovereign over the soul ... only God can raise a spiritually dead soul back to spiritual life

Matthew 25:32-33

And finally, God is sovereign over eternity ... there really is a Day of Judgment to come. The sheep – the blessed ones – will spend eternity in God's immediate presence, blessed forever. The goats, however – the cursed ones – will spend eternity in hell. Forever condemned.

Mark 16:16

But here is another great promise of God. And it's so simple.

It's the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ all the way from Genesis to Revelation.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. Believe in Him and you will – you WILL – be saved from the wrath that is to come. Not might be. WILL be.

That's a promise upon which the LORD God Omnipotent rests His own character. Just as He promised Abraham and Sarah they WOULD have a son in their old age. They contributed nothing except the privilege to participate in it – by faith.

And by Faith in Jesus Christ, God WILL bless you. He will see you through to the end.

"Hi, how are you doing?" ... I'm doing GREAT! The LORD God Omnipotent reigns!

Amen.