

F.B. Meyer:

"The LORD appeared unto Abraham in the plains of Mamre." -- Genesis 18:1.

When, in the course of some royal progress, a Sovereign deigns to sojourn in the homestead of one of the subjects of his realm, the event becomes at once the theme of chroniclers, and the family selected for so high an honor is held in deepened respect. But what shall we say in the presence of such an episode as this -- in which the God of Heaven became the guest of His servant Abraham!

There is no doubt as to the august character of one of the three who, on that memorable afternoon, when every living thing was seeking shelter during the heat of the day, visited the tent of the patriarch. In the first verse we are expressly told that Jehovah appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre, as he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day. And in the tenth verse there is the accent of Deity, who alone can create life, and to whom nothing is too hard, in the words of promise which tell how certainly Sarah should have a son. And, besides, we are told that two angels came to Sodom at even. Evidently they were two of the three who had sat as Abraham's guests beneath the tree which sheltered his tent in the blazing noon. But as for the other, who throughout the wondrous hours had been the only spokesman, His dignity is disclosed in the amazing colloquy which took place on the heights of Mamre, when Abraham stood yet before the Lord, and pleaded with Him as the Judge of all the earth.

It was thus that the Son of God anticipated His incarnation; and was found in fashion as a man before He became flesh. He loved to come INCOGNITO into the homes of those He cherished as His friends, even before He came across the slopes of Olivet to make His home in the favored cottage, where His spirit rested from the din of the great city, and girded itself for the cross and the tomb. "He rejoiced in the habitable part of the earth, and His delights were with the sons of men" (Proverbs 8:31).

It is very marvelous! We may well ask with deepest reverence and awe the question of Solomon, when he felt the utter inadequacy of his splendid Temple as the abode of the eternal God: "Will God in very deed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house that I have builded!" (1 Kings 8:27 RV). But this question has been forever settled by God Himself, in the majestic words: "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isaiah 42:15). And the life of our blessed Master is a delightful commentary on these mighty affirmations. He said to a publican, "Zaccheus, make haste and come down, for today I must abide at thy house." He went to the home of Peter, and was ministered to by one of the household, whom He had raised from the gates of death. And after His resurrection, He entered the humble lodging of the two disciples in whose company He had walked from Jerusalem, seeking to dry their tears as they went.

Nor is this all. There is no heart so lowly but that He will enter. There is no home so humble, but that He will make Himself a welcome inmate. There is no table so poorly provided, but that He will sit thereat, turning water into wine, multiplying the loaves and fishes, and converting the simple meal into a sacrament. When seated at meat with those He loves, He still takes bread, and blesses it and breaks, and gives to them (Luke 24:30). To each and all He says, as He stands laden with raiment, eyesalve, gold, and viands for the evening meal: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him; and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20).

Abraham evidently, at the outset, did not realize the full meaning of the episode in which he was taking part. Even so do we often fail to value aright characters with whom we come in contact. It is only as they pass away from us for ever, and we look back upon them, that we realize that we have been entertaining angels unawares. Let us so act always and everywhere, that as we review the past we may have nothing to regret; and may not have to reproach ourselves with having omitted to do something or other, which we would have inserted in our programme had we only realized our opportunities.

Abraham treated his visitors with true eastern hospitality. ... he ran to meet them, and bowed himself toward the ground. He proposed water for their feet, and rest for their tired frames, beneath the spreading shadow. He started his wife to the immediate kneading of the meal for baking on the scorching stones. He ran to choose his tenderest calf, refusing to delegate the work to another's hand. He served his visitors himself, and stood as a servant by their side, under the tree, while they did eat. Christians have not much to boast of -- and a good deal to learn -- as they consider the action of this old-time saint, and his dealings with the three strangers who came to his tent. The faith which he had towards God had a very winsome aspect towards men. There was nothing in

him which was austere or forbidding; but much that was exceedingly lovely, and brimming with the milk of human kindness.

MAY IT NOT BE THAT CHRIST COMES TO US OFTEN IN THE GUISE OF A STRANGER?

But we are too busy, or too tired, or too much afraid of making a mistake; and, therefore, we either refuse Him altogether, or we treat Him so badly that He passes unobserved away, to carry to some one else the blessing which He would have left with us had we only shown ourselves worthy.

Does He not test us thus? Of course if He were to come in His manifested splendor as the Son of the Highest, every one would receive Him, and provide Him with sumptuous hospitality. But this would not reveal our true character. And so He comes to us as a wayfaring man, hungry and athirst; or as a stranger, naked and sick. Those that are akin to Him will show Him mercy, in whatsoever disguise He comes, though they recognize Him not, and will be surprised to learn that they ever ministered to Him. Those, on the other hand, who are not really His, will fail to discern Him; will let Him go unhelped away; and will wake up to find that "inasmuch as they did it not to one of the least of these, they did it not to Him" (Matthew 25:45).

There was much truth in the simplicity of the little German lad, who left the door open for the Lord to enter and sit with his mother and himself at their frugal supper-table; and who, as a beggar stood within the portal, asking for alms, remarked: "Perhaps the Lord could not come Himself, and had therefore sent this poor man as His representative."

BUT GOD NEVER LEAVES US IN HIS DEBT

He takes care to pay for His entertainment, royally and divinely. He uses Peter's fishing smack, and gives it back, nearly submerged by the weight of the fish which He had driven into the nets. He sits down with His friends to a country marriage-feast, and pays for their simple fare by jars brimming with water turned to wine. He uses the five barley loaves and two small fishes; but He fills the lad with an ample meal. He sends His prophet to lodge with a widow, and provides meal and oil for him and her for many days. And Abraham was no loser by his ready hospitality; for, as they sat at meat, the Lord foretold the birth of Sarah's child: "I will certainly return unto thee; and Sarah thy wife shall have a son."

Sarah was sitting inside the flimsy curtain of camel's hair, secluded after the Eastern fashion for those of high rank; and as she heard the words, she laughed within herself the laugh of incredulity. That laugh was at once noticed by Him from whom nothing can be hid, and whose eyes are as a flame of fire. "And the Lord said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Genesis 28:13-14).

With strange simplicity she answered through the curtain, denying that she had laughed: for she was afraid. But her reply was met by the stern and uncompromising asseveration, which was altogether final, "Nay, but thou didst laugh." These were the only audible words which we know to have passed between God and Abraham's wife; and they reveal the superficiality and unbelief of her nature. But we must not judge her too harshly, for she had not had the opportunities of her husband. However, she seems to have been led by these words into a true faith; for it is said, "By faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised" (Hebrews 11:11).

THIS IS THE TRUE LAW OF FAITH

Do not look at your faith or at your feelings; but look away to the word of promise, and, above all, to the Promiser. Study the punctuality of His orderings in the starry firmament. Are planets ever overdue? or do the seasons forget to revolve? Consider how accurately He has kept His word with the nations of the past, whose ruined cities attest His judgments! Has He ever failed to keep His word? Is there any conceivable reason why He should not keep it? His power is omnipotent; and would He ever have pledged Himself to do what He could not effect? "He is faithful that promised." Look from faith to the promise, and from the promise to the Promiser. And as we become conscious of possessing the power of vision whilst we look on any object to which we may direct our gaze, so we shall become conscious of the presence and growth of faith as we look away to our faithful God.

"IS ANYTHING TOO HARD FOR THE LORD?"

That is one of God's unanswered questions. It has lain there for three thousand years, perused by myriads,

answered by none; unless, indeed, those words of Jeremiah are the only answer which mortal men can give: "Ah, Lord God" behold, Thou hast made the heaven and the earth by Thy great power and stretched-out arm; and there is nothing too hard for Thee" (Jeremiah 32:17).

It may seem to you hard to the verge of impossibility, that ever God should keep his word, in the conversion of that friend for whom you have a warrant to pray, according to 1_John 5:16. Hard to vindicate your character from the aspersions with which it is being befouled. Hard to keep your evil nature in the place of death; and to cast down your evil imaginings, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. Hard to make you sweet and gentle, forgiving and loving. Hard to produce from you the fruits of a lovely and holy nature. It may be hard; but it is not too hard for the Lord. "With God all things are possible." And, as Sarah found it, all things are possible to those who believe.

The one thing that hinders God is our unbelief. Sarah must believe, and Abraham also, ere the child of promise could be born. And so must it be with us. As soon as we believe, then, according to our faith it is done to us; yea, exceeding abundantly beyond all we had asked or thought.

It may seem hard that the sins of a life should be forgiven; but God will do it for any penitent and believing soul. "All that believe in Christ are justified from all things" (Acts 13:39). It may seem hard that our naked souls should be attired in vestments fit for the royal palace; but it shall be so, if we have faith; for the righteousness of Christ is imputed and reckoned to all who believe (Romans 3:22). It may seem hard that rebels should become children; yet this, too, shall be; for to them that receive Him He gives the right to become children of God (John 1:12).

You ask how to obtain this faith. Remember that faith is the receptive attitude of the soul, begotten and maintained by the grace of God. Christ is the Author and Finisher of faith; not only in the abstract, but in the personal experience of the soul. Faith is the gift of God. If, then, you would receive it, put your will on the side of Christ; not a passing wish, but the whole will of your being: will to believe patiently, persistently, yearningly; let your eyes be ever toward the Lord; study the promises of God; consider the nature of God; be prepared to be rid of everything that grieves His Holy Spirit; and it is as certain as the truth of Christ, that you will have begotten and maintained in you the faith that can move mountains, and laugh at impossibilities.

And to such faith God will come, not as a passing wayfarer, but to abide; to feast with the soul in holy strengthening fellowship; to fill it with the true laughter; and to leave behind promises soon to become accomplished facts. "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them; and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Revelation 21:3).