

Genesis 18:22-33 Prevailing Prayer 2/18/18

Abraham Intercedes for Sodom

²² So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD. ²³ Then Abraham drew near and said, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴ Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? ²⁵ Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" ²⁶ And the LORD said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake."

²⁷ Abraham answered and said, "Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. ²⁸ Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking. Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?" And he said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." ²⁹ Again he spoke to him and said, "Suppose forty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of forty I will not do it." ³⁰ Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there." He answered, "I will not do it, if I find thirty there." ³¹ He said, "Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it." ³² Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it." ³³ And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place.

(Pastor prays)

Charles Hadden Spurgeon, the great English preacher of another age, said about prayer: "I know of no better thermometer to your spiritual temperature than this, the measure of the intensity of your prayer life." A.W. Pink said, "Prayer is much more than an act, it is an attitude – an attitude of dependency upon the living God." The frank and manly J.C. Ryle said, "Faith is to the soul what life is to the body. Prayer is to faith what breath is to the body. How a person can live and not breathe is beyond my comprehension, and how a person can believe and not pray is past my comprehension, too." And yet, so many Christians, maybe even you, started this day without a simple utterance of

thanksgiving to God or a plain request of protection and provision from the God who created you and in Christ saves you. As James says, “My brother, this should not be so.”

Today we go into the belly of the first prayer recorded in scripture. In the text, Father Abraham stands before the living God and pleads for God to move and save and protect and spare people from judgment. Do you plead with God to spare people from judgment? In v. 25, Abraham has an awakening realization as he addresses the living God as the judge of all the earth and he petitions the mighty judge to have mercy. Abraham is bothered because he knows the holiness of God and he knows the foul sin of Sodom and Gomorrah and on top of that, his nephew, his brother’s son, is there in the middle of it all. Let’s hold this prayer up as a model to be imitated and a life to be emulated. If we are people of the cross and people of forgiveness, if we are people of God, then, surely, we must also be people of prayer.

God’s People Are People of Prayer

Let’s learn some lessons.

God’s People Seek His Presence

Let’s pick up the story. The Lord has revealed to Abraham what He is about to do, to destroy the 5 cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the clipping description in v. 22 should remind us of our divine calling as believers. Let’s read v. 22. *So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD.* Those are the two angels of destruction headed to bring Sodom to justice. Now look at the camera angle at the end of v. 22. Abraham *still* stood before the Lord. His prayer was alone. He stood there, just him and his God, all of Abraham’s past and duplicities and faults. He stood before God. You’ve got to get alone, not with your thoughts, but with your God. For me, it’s in the morning, quiet, without a phone. It’s private and not in front of people.

Matthew 6:6 says, *But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.* The prayer it’s talking about is concentrated, specific and clear. If you are in Christ, purchased by the blood of Jesus, adopted in grace, ask Him. He is your father. He loves you, His child. He deserves your affection and time. What parent here won’t drop

everything they're doing for a few moments of good conversation with your child? If we, being evil, know how to love and listen to our children, how much more our Father in heaven who loves with everlasting love – how much more will He hear our prayers? Get up earlier or stay up later. Write it down, use a prayer guide or find another way, as God's child, to seek Him. God's people seek His presence.

God's People Have a Burden for Other People

Let's read Abraham's full prayer from verses 23-25. Read and hear the burden in this prayer:

Then Abraham drew near and said, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴ Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? ²⁵ Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?"

Abraham acts as an intercessor, a mediator for Sodom. God reveals himself to us in His Word. Out of this revelation, we know things about God. Abraham knew things. He knew what was going to happen in Sodom. God gives us this revelation from the Bible, not so that when we see sin in someone else we can gossip about it or talk about someone or feel superior to others and thankful that it's not us. He shows us things so that we can *pray*. In the text, Abraham knows that God has decided to bring judgment on Sodom. Abraham knows that if those angels go down to Sodom, they will find all that sin down there, all that was rumored to be there and more. If God destroys Sodom, Abraham knows that Lot and his family will also be destroyed. Not only that, hundreds of people will receive everlasting judgment. Abraham is a protector. He could protect Lot from people, but he couldn't protect him from God.

And so, he's burdened. He's burdened because he knows God, and the more you know God, the more you are struck by His holiness. And if you are struck by His holiness, then you are sure about His judgment. And the only reprieve for God's judgment is one thing and one thing only – mercy.

Read it again and hear Abraham pleading for mercy. Verse 25 - *Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?"*

Pleading for mercy but understanding justice. Mercy and justice are double arrows that point us to the cross of Christ. The justice of God was poured out at the cross as He made Him who knew no sin to become sin for us. And Jesus took the punishment for sinners that He might be righteous before God.

Covered in the righteousness of Christ. You and I must develop a burden for people. You live where you do to pray for your neighbor's health and happiness, finances and marriages. But judgment hangs over them like a sharpened sword and they need mercy. You know this God. The God of the Bible. You know that He will judge sin and you know that in Christ, He will love and receive sinners. And as God's people, we seek His presence and we have a burden for people. So, we've talked about others. Let's talk about us.

God's People Have a Clear Understanding of Themselves

There can never be a sense of superiority or spiritual one-upmanship among God's people. Look how Abraham understands and describes himself in verse 27. *Abraham answered and said, "Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes.* Dust and ashes. From dust we come and to dust we return and yet God created us in His image, and when we rejected His plan and forsook His glory, He redeemed us by the blood of His son Jesus. This is a reminder of grace. There is no valid or driving reason for God to love us, care for us, or sustain us except His grace. The Psalmist reminds us in Psalm 103:14, *For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.*

Grace kills pride. Grace deepens your love. Grace reminds you to forgive. Grace creates patience. When you understand grace, you are a lot less hard on people. Grace removes racism and classism and sexism because you realize you deserve nothing but receive all of this by God's grace. God's people have a clear understanding of themselves. Do you understand that without Christ, you are a sinner alienated from God and under His judgment? That's God giving you eyes to see and to look to grace in the face of Jesus. There's something else we learn.

God's People Don't Give Up Praying

Let's look at the persistence of Abraham as he keeps going back asking if God will spare the wicked on behalf of the righteous. In verse 24 Abraham asks for the 50, and God agrees to spare Sodom if there are 50 righteous in Sodom. Then in verse 28, Abraham asks for 45. In 29 he goes to 40 and the Lord says He will spare Sodom for 40. And then Abraham drops it to 30 in verse 30. In verse 31 he asks for 20, and finally in verse

32 he asks, “What if there are only 10 there?” He keeps going back, six times, over and over again. Each time Abraham went back with humility, but that humility was infused with a boldness, a boldness to ask.

Have you quit asking? Have you quit praying for your children’s souls, for their salvation? Students, do you pray that God will give your parents eyes to see and ears to hear and a heart to believe? Have you quit praying for me, your pastor, or your church? Remember the parable Jesus told of the persistent widow, that she kept coming to the judge over and over asking for justice. The judge finally gave in but not because he was a great guy, but because she wouldn’t leave him alone. In Luke 18:1, Luke tells us why Jesus told that parable. *And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. God’s people never give up praying.*

One last thing I want to point out.

God’s People Understand the Need for a Moderator

There is something inherently theological in the passage that Abraham couldn’t have known completely. The basis of his prayer is that the wicked would be spared on behalf of the righteous. Isn’t that the very heart of the Christian message? That’s what Paul said in II Corinthians 5:21. *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

There is your hope, your life, your joy and your tomorrows. There is the power of every prayer uttered. The righteousness of Christ. Believers – repent of prayerlessness. Unsure – You need Christ as a mediator.

(Pastor shares the Gospel, gives the invitation and prays)