

**Genesis 18: 20-33; “Abraham’s Intercession For Sodom”, Sermon # 54
in the series – “Beginnings”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
on September 16th, 2012, in the Morning Worship Service.**

When I spoke to you from this passage last week I told you that our God is a Being who has secrets. These secrets, for the most part, relate to his plans and purposes either in salvation, or in justice and judgment. And He does not reveal them to everyone. He only reveals them before hand, if He chooses and when He chooses, to His friends. “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing?” He did reveal the coming judgment of Sodom to Lot before He destroyed it, but He did not take counsel with Lot, like He did with Abraham. God and Abraham in the verses that I just read to you, are having a conversation.

I would like to term it, Abraham’s time of prayer and intercession with God. Because even though Abraham’s drawing near to God is given to us in the form of a conversation, it has a number of the elements of prayer contained in it that we should take notice of, and learn to include in our own prayers. Intercession is prayer to God on behalf of others. If you and I are becoming intercessors with God, we are growing in our relationship with Him because we are learning to care about other people around us; people besides ourselves and our immediate family. We are becoming particularly concerned about people around us who are going to perish in their sin if they don’t come to Christ.

Our prayers are significant in the sight of God. Our God is so great that He is able to bring our prayers into His Eternal purpose. It is not that God actually changes His eternal purpose when we pray. God is infinitely wise and unchangeable in His Being. He would not at all have needed to reveal His purpose to Abraham unless it was His intention from all eternity to do so. So what we must conclude is that God hears and makes use of the prayers of His people as a part of His fulfilling His eternal purposes. Prayer to our Lord is an integral part of His plan and purpose, and that should bring joy and excitement to God’s people. The prayer of the upright really is His delight. (Proverbs 15: 8) So let us look this morning at the 3 elements of prayer in Abraham’s conversation with the Lord that we would do well to remember when we converse with God in prayer.

1st – We should remember that in prayer we are drawing near to God. (verses 22, 23)

Abraham has been hospitable to accompany his guests and give them a good send off to where they would be going. But when he begins to hear from the lips of his Lord what the mission of the two angels who look like men is, it says that he “still stood” before the Lord. They were going down to confirm that things were really as bad as the “outcry” against it had related. And Abraham knows that the place really is that bad, and that the city was certainly worthy of destruction. But he thought of Lot. And he thought of Lot’s daughters, and he also thought of the men that they had married. And he thought, “Perhaps I might be able to speak to the Lord about them.

He was sure that Lot was a man who believed in God’s promises and a man who followed after righteousness. But he was not sure about Lot’s wife and daughters and their husbands. Let us understand that there may be some who are saved from their sins in a family, but not necessarily all. Some may even think that they know the Lord, but they may not. Abraham had no doubt thought about these things before, but now his love for his nephew motivated him to pray. It is a good thing to learn to pray in your mind as you are about to address the Lord of glory audibly. He “still stood” before the Lord.

Love for his dear relatives would find a way to ask the Lord about this thing. He stood still to consider whether it was the right thing to do to ask. And he concluded that it was. He knew that he should never attempt to pray that the Lord would set aside His holy attribute of Justice. He knew that God had been very patient with these cities of the plain. He remembered that the

Lord had granted him victory years before over the 4 kings that had come up against the five kings of the very cities under consideration by the Lord now. And although God could have given them into the hands of these invaders; yet for Abraham's sake, He did not. Abraham interceded by going to battle, at that time, and he overcame those kings and brought everything back. But it does not appear that the king of Sodom was thankful, in the right sense, at that time. He was thankful that the people and the goods were brought back. But he apparently did not consider it an important thing to bless God most High for the mercy shown, and to inquire after Abraham's God.

The goodness and kindness of the Lord are designed to lead us to repentance and to the prayer which would ask that we or others that we love would be saved. Abraham knew of the great kindness of the Lord, and so he was determined to sue for mercy on the grounds of God's great compassion. Turn with me over to Lamentations 3: 22. "It is the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not." "They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness." But all of that compassion and all of the Lord's goodness is meant to lead us to what it says next. "The Lord is my portion, says my soul, therefore I hope in Him!" "The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him."

The Lord shows you and me His goodness in order that we might seek Him and take Him as our portion and that we would find our hope in Him. It is not at all a good thing when men will take all of God's goodness and kindness but do nothing about their sins which cry out to Him for judgment. This Abraham knew, but he still draws near to ask. He would attempt to intercede on behalf of those who were still blind to the implications of their sins. This is what you and I must do as well. Prayer is first of all drawing near. Abraham had the Lord standing close by him, but it says that he drew near.

We do not have the Lord standing close by us physically, but we have the Lord close by us spiritually if we know Him. And if we do not know Him, the way that we come to know Him is by drawing near to Him, as well. The principle set forth in James 4: 8 is very plain, simple and straightforward. "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." When we draw near, if we would be heard favorably by God, we must come confessing our sins. The rest of verse 8 says, "Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom." I have seen Christians try to refer these verses only to unbelievers, but the context here does not indicate it.

The verses before verse 8 are talking about the holy jealousy that the Lord our God has in relation to professed Christians who are fighting to hold on to the sinful pleasures of the world and their flesh. We should see from this that some people who profess to be Christians, or some who actually are Christians, we may not be able to tell; think that they can have a love for the world and a love for Jesus as well. James calls this spiritual adultery. He says that the "Spirit who dwells in us", "jealously yearns" over us to become godly people.

Christ, he is saying, gives a greater grace to overcome the world. Therefore we are to pray, submit to God, resist the devil, mourn and weep over ourselves, in order that we might overcome the world, the flesh and the devil. We are not to allow ourselves to stay in a condition of spiritual lukewarmness, continuing on with all these worldly lusts and pleasures, to see if we can have both. We are to "come boldly before the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and grace to help in time of need," as it says in Hebrews 4: 16. We are to "set the Lord always before us," (in prayer) as it says in Psalm 16: 8. And then because "He is at my right hand I shall not be moved." You and I must have the intercession of the Lord Jesus on our behalf, in order that we might make progress in our faith and repentance. And if we would grow in Christ-likeness, we must ourselves become intercessors. We will see how, as we go on here.

2nd – We would do well to remember that when we intercede in prayer, that it is good to use holy reasoning with God like Abraham did.

Intercession is of first importance in the church of Jesus Christ today. Perhaps we have forgotten its importance. The Apostle Paul says in 1 Timothy 2: 1, “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior.” To intercede in prayer is to use holy reasoning with God on behalf of another person who is in danger of falling to temptation or perishing under God’s judgments.

Jesus Christ, in what He has accomplished in His righteous life and holy death, is the basis of all of our intercession. He “forever lives to make intercession for us” because He merits the consideration and favor of God to have His prayers heard with God on our behalf. We have nothing, in ourselves, to form a similar basis of favor in God’s sight that would merit our being heard by God on behalf of others who are in danger of losing their souls or their lives, unless we have Christ. But when we do, we can and we should consider it a solemn duty to intercede on behalf of those around us who are perishing. This is what Abraham did. And the way that He did it should be taken notice of. He begins with addressing God in accordance with His righteousness.

He comes to the most important issue first; the most important in God’s mind. Abraham knows that it is imperative that God’s justice be addressed first, if any further possible mercy is to be shown to anyone in Sodom. And indeed, he doesn’t directly ask for further mercy to be shown. He only asks the question, “Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked?” He knows that it is always righteous with God to punish sin wherever He finds it. He knows that God is angry with the wicked every day, but that God cannot not let great wickedness and evil go on indefinitely in any city or society. So he puts forward a supposition. “Suppose there were 50 righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it?” “Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

Abraham is using holy reasoning here in reminding the Lord of His holy responsibility to be able to distinguish between the righteous and the wicked and to preserve those who are righteous. He knows full well that the Lord is able to distinguish between the precious and the vile among men and surely the righteous are precious in His sight and He will do them good. “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow them all the days of their lives....” He is appealing to the Lord not to let His strict justice prevent His goodness and mercy being shown to the righteous in Sodom. They don’t deserve to be destroyed along with the wicked. They are trophies of God’s grace.

The Lord realizes that Abraham is not asking for His righteous indignation to cease, but rather that He would be gracious to those whose who, by His grace, were His faithful servants in that place. The Lord says that if He “finds 50 righteous with the city, then He would spare it for their sakes.” This is certainly a great truth for us to consider in relation to prayer. God does take notice of His people in every place and knows their exact number and the kind of influence for good that exists in that place, because of them. Of course, anything good in them is there because of His grace and truth, but God could spare this city, as wicked as it was, because there might be enough people in it who belonged to Him and who were living for Him.

Our knowledge of how bad a situation is, should only lead us to further prayer and the consideration that God has, in many generations, spared places where judgment was deserved, and delayed or suspended it until a later time, because of the righteous influence and intercession of a few of His own people. Why should the badness of the times that we live in deter us from intercessory prayer? Think of the Apostle Paul interceding for the Israelites of his own day in Romans 9: 1. He says, “I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also

bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh who are Israelites. He sees their blindness, he knows that a “partial hardening has happened to them,” that there is a veil over their eyes which hides Christ from them.

And yet what does he say in Romans 10: 1? “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.” Now I wonder if this is our heart’s desire as well? How good it is to be an intercessor, not only for nations but for individual men, all men, providing that they are not sinning the sin unto death, the sin against the Holy Spirit. We do not know who the Elect of God are to be. So why should we hesitate to pray for any man or group of men, even cities, and nations and peoples as well?

A man who intercedes is putting himself in the position of the people he is considering, and he is saying, “If they knew the overwhelming judgment that they were falling under, they would want to escape it.” “They would want someone to intercede for them if they knew that they could not save themselves.” “I will intercede for them.” In Matthew 7: 12 when speaking about prayer, Jesus says, “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” But you say to me, “Why should I pray for wicked people, and ask for the Lord to save and bless them?”

Jesus will answer you for me in verse 11 of that same passage. “If you then, being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” And the verses before those say, “Ask, seek, and knock until the door is opened for you”. You do not know what the outcome will be, but you should keep on asking for your children and others to be shown mercy, who may presently be under the wrath of God.

3rd – We should remember to speak to God with a humble attitude in all our prayers, being willing to let God decide how to answer our requests.

You see Abraham’s humble attitude in the words that he uses in verses 27. He says there, “Indeed now, I who am but dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord.” What a lowly view he has of himself in the presence of His Holy and All-Wise God! He thinks of himself as dust. Man was made of the dust of the earth. He is but ashes, one whose person and ideas could go up in smoke if God did not approve of the way that he thought. Ashes are all that is left of what used to be of greater substance, but it has been consumed by the flame. You and I need also to be convinced that even our best reasonings in prayer before God would be presumptuous if He does not approve of them.

And the most holy and intelligent of men dare not presume upon what God has given them in the first place, to be able to think that they know better than God what is the right thing for God to do! We must remember that God, after all, is God. He can easily see if our thoughts and motives are right in the way that we approach Him in prayer. We must come to Him in prayer being willing to be taught and have our thoughts be set straight in His Holy Presence. We should not simply come to Him with requests to be answered but with hearts and minds willing to be instructed.

In Job 37: 19 Elihu speaks for all godly men when he says to Job, “Teach us what we should say to Him, for we can prepare nothing because of the darkness.” “Should He be told that I wish to speak?” “If a man were to speak surely he would be swallowed up.” There is so much more that God knows that we do not know when we come to pray to Him, and we should acknowledge it in the way that we speak to Him. When Job finally did hear from God he says, “I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.” “Therefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.”

Abraham had already come to the place where he saw himself as dust and ashes. He was

willing to let God teach him and to hear from God's lips his instruction. He wanted God to decide what answer would be best to his prayers. Let me ask you now if this is you? Because there are many things that God would teach us related to His justice and judgment, His love and His mercy, which will require that our spirit be right within us. And if we are those who are trying to make some point to God about what we would desire to see, from selfish, or fleshly, or worldly motives, then He will not answer.

But if we have a humble attitude and a teachable spirit, then we will find Him giving us grace and answers to our prayers, even our intercessory prayers. We may not be able to turn away the judgments of God from a wicked society, but we may just be able to turn some sinners back from destruction. Remember, that "He who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins." (James 5: 19 and 20)