

ABRAHAM

An All-In Life

Serving God

Devotional

Genesis 18:16-33

Abraham has been informed that the hour of judgment for Sodom has come. He is appalled by this, but it is very important for us to see what is really troubling him. If you ask, "Is Abraham really trying to save these cities?" the answer has to be, "No, that is not really his concern." Abraham knows that God's hour of judgment has struck, that there has been a long record of his patience up to this point. He knows that it is only unrighteousness that will ultimately be judged, so he is not trying to save the cities. He expresses his concern in these words: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" Are you going to treat righteous people the same way you treat wicked people? That is what is troubling him.

There is a cold fist of fear gripping the heart of Abraham. He fears he is going to find that God is not quite who he thought he was. Perhaps he understood that righteous people have a way of "salting" the world, preserving it from corruption and from judgment. Perhaps he is troubled that if God destroys a whole city full of wicked people, with some righteous among them, the word will go out that righteousness is of no effect and a wrong impression will be left. Abraham has a troubled heart, questioning whether God really is the kind of God he has thought him to be.

Have you ever felt that way? In your prayers, or in your confrontation with life, have you suddenly seen God moving in ways you did not anticipate, allowing things to happen that you did not think he ought to allow? Have you thought, "Lord, can you really do this? "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" This is not right." We are getting very close to how Abraham felt at this point, when we sense that sudden horror that God is not going to act as we expected him to. Abraham is really raising the question here, "Does righteousness make any difference? If God wipes out these cities filled with both wicked and righteous people, if they are all treated alike, isn't it telling us that righteousness really does not make any difference?"

In the rest of his prayer, you can see how timidly he ventures, "Lord, just a moment. Supposing there are fifty righteous in that city, will you then destroy it?" Immediately the response comes, "No, I'll not destroy it for fifty." Again, timidly he ventures. "How about forty-five?" "No," says God immediately, "if I find forty-five I won't destroy it." Then Abraham girds up his courage and says. "Lord, now don't get upset, but I'm going to press this a little further. How about forty, or thirty, or twenty?" Finally, he goes as far as he dares, feeling the end of his sense of concern when he says, "Lord, how about ten? If there are ten righteous will you save them and the city?" God's immediate response, as all along is, "As far as you go, Abraham, I will go. If there are ten righteous I will not destroy the city."

Each prompt answer of God eases the fist of fear that is gripping Abraham's heart. Each answer is a reassurance that God will honor his promise, that he will preserve the righteous in the hour of crisis and danger. Abraham is reassured that God means what he says, that righteousness does make a difference, that God's promises are valid in the hour of crisis, and that he does not treat the righteous as he does the wicked. When he reaches that place, Abraham is satisfied.¹

Open it

1. **Where did you grow up? Share with the group some things about what you liked or disliked about your childhood hometown?**

Read it

Genesis 18:16-33

Explore it

2. **Why was God bringing judgment to Sodom?**
3. **What question did Abraham ask about God's plan for Sodom in verse 23?**
4. **How does Abraham see himself in comparison to the Lord?**
5. **Where does Abraham begin in his deal with God and where does he end up?**
6. **If Abraham could fulfill his end of the deal what would happen to Sodom?**

¹ Daily Devotion © 2014 by Ray Stedman Ministries found @ <https://www.raystedman.org/daily-devotions/prayer/prayers-anchor>

Apply it

YOU'VE GOT A FRIEND IN ME

Abraham was sitting at his tent door in the heat of the day when he looked up and saw three normal-looking men. In accordance with his custom, Abraham showered these men with hospitality. As he learned before the day was over, he was entertaining angels without knowing it (Heb. 13:2). I believe that one of the three was Jesus Christ in a preincarnate appearance ("the Lord," 18:17, 19, 20, 22, 26, 27).

These men told Abraham that at this time next year, the long-awaited promise of Sarah bearing a son would be fulfilled. Then, as the men rose to go, they cast an ominous glance toward Sodom, where Abraham's nephew, Lot, was living. As Abraham walked a short distance with his guests, the Lord spoke, probably to the two angels, but deliberately so that Abraham could overhear, and asked, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" That got Abraham's attention!

Then He rehearsed the covenant promises He had made with Abraham (18:18-19). Speaking directly to Abraham, the Lord said that the outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah's sin was very great, and (using human language) that He was going down to investigate the situation.²

7. Abraham would be given a bird's eye view of the future. Where does God do the same for us? (cf. Psalm 25:14 & John 15:5)

8. Abraham had shown great hospitality to his three heavenly visitors (one being our LORD!). While we have no opportunity to host God for dinner, how can we show God hospitality in our lives?

² Sermon excerpt by Steve Cole entitled "The Man Who Bargained With God" found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-2-man-who-bargained-god-genesis-1816-33>

One commentator translates the following phrase in verse 19 "For I have chosen him." "For I acknowledge him to be my intimate friend."³

9. What does it mean to be a friend? In what ways can we experience friendship with God? How can we take this too far?

The purpose of the intimate relationship that God establishes with Abraham is the ordering of his family. This ought to encourage us concerning the first priority of the family. God does not elect Abraham in order to be a great preacher, or in order to subdue uncivilized nations, or in order to generate a prosperous society, but in order to rule his family well.⁴

10. We often equate service with work in the church or world. God says that Abraham's purpose began in the home with his family. What does "keeping the way of the Lord" look like for families?

11. Abraham was to raise a godly family in the same area code as "The Original Twin Cities: Sodom and Gomorrah" (which archaeologists say is now covered by the Dead Sea). Where have you seen godly families impact the lost communities around them?

³ Leupold, H.C. Exposition of Genesis. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1942.

⁴ Commentary notes by Van Parunak found @ <http://cyber-chapel.org/sermons/genesis/index.html>

DANGER ZONE

*The Hebrew word for "outcry" is used in Scripture to describe the cries of the oppressed and brutalized. It is used for the cry of the oppressed widow or orphan (cf. Exodus 22:22, 23), the cry of the oppressed servant (cf. Deut. 24:15), and the cries of the Israelites in Egypt (cf. Exodus 2:23; 3:7, 9). Jeremiah uses it to refer to the scream of terror by an individual or city when it is attacked (cf. Jer. 18:22; 20:16; 25:36; 48:3-5, 34; 49:21; 50:46; 51:54). Such an outcry is the miserable wail of the oppressed and brutalized.*⁵

12. What things around us happen each day that would cause an outcry? Is our response to such sorrow and sin adequate?

*Abraham is under no illusions. He knows how bad Sodom really is (13:13). He knows how truly wicked the city and its leaders are, evidenced by the fact that he refused to accept anything from the king of Sodom (14:21-24). He knows that when the Lord's angels observe the sins of the city, he will be obligated by all that is right and holy to destroy it. But Abraham feels an obligation to protect his own family from that destruction.*⁶

13. It seems like times haven't changed. Our culture seems to mimic Sodom in so many ways. How was Abraham to remain pure while engaging with the lost people of Sodom? Likewise, what is the balance between spiritual self-preservation and proactive engagement?

⁵ Commentary on Genesis by Paul Apple found @ <http://www.bibleoutlines.com/library/pdf/genesis.pdf>

⁶ Sermon excerpt by Dr. Ralph F. Wilson entitled Abraham's Prayer for Sodom found @ http://www.jesuswalk.com/greatprayers/3_abraham_sodom.htm

- 14. Our church is in the midst of an initiative to upgrade and renovate our facilities so that we might be well positioned for future ministry and impact. What might this say to our community and how can these changes impact the communities around us?**

HOLDING OUT FOR A HERO

In our series on Abraham I have from time to time pointed out some of the "firsts" we encounter in this section of Genesis. Here we come to yet another "first." When Abraham prays for Sodom it is the first intercessory prayer in all the Bible. To "intercede" is to plead the case of another person. When a friend speaks up on behalf of a student about to be punished, that friend is interceding. Likewise, when Abraham asked God to spare Sodom he was interceding in the highest court of the universe.

But that raises an interesting question. Why did God allow Abraham to intercede for Sodom? After all, God already knew the facts and he already knew what he was going to do? Doesn't that render Abraham's request useless? To say it that way is to come up against the greatest mystery of prayer. If God already knows what he is going to do, why pray?⁷

- 15. Spend time thinking about what prayer is and write down some thoughts. What does it do for the believer and for the circumstances we face in life?**

- 16. As we journey together in this ALL-IN For Tomorrow generosity initiative, what are some areas of prayer that we must engage in? How might a concerted focus on prayer change the outcome of this initiative?**

⁷ Sermon excerpt by Ray Pritchard entitled "Christian Boldness In An Age Of Tolerance" found @ <https://www.keepbelieving.com/articles/1998-02-13-Christian-Boldness-in-an-Age-of-Tolerance/>

KNOCKIN ON HEAVEN'S DOOR

Abraham continued on from point to point, daring to ask God for more, until he went as far as he dared. Someone has said that Abraham ceased asking before God ceased giving. My opinion is that Abraham sensed that he was at the limit at ten, and that if he went further he would no longer be pleading according to God's will. God answered Abraham by rescuing Lot and his family before destroying Sodom. We need to remember that prayer is not getting God to do my will, but rather His will.

And yet Jesus taught that we need to persist in prayer. He told the parable of the man whose friend came late at night asking for bread. The man and his family were already in bed, but this "friend" kept banging on his door. Jesus applied it to our need to keep knocking on heaven's door (Luke 11:8-10). He also told of the judge, who would not listen to the repeated pleas of the widow. But finally, to get some relief, he gave her what she wanted. How much more, said Jesus, will God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him (Luke 18:4-8). Persevere in prayer!⁸

17. Abraham started his bargaining with God at fifty and ended at ten. This shows a spirit of perseverance and endurance. Why is persistent prayer more effective than a one-time prayer? How does that persistence change your perspective?

18. Abraham served his community by praying and warning them of God's grace and judgment. It seems that his prayers compelled him to go. Why is it important for us to saturate our service to God in prayer? What happens if we fail to take this important first step?

⁸ Sermon excerpt by Steve Cole entitled "The Man Who Bargained With God" found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-2-man-who-bargained-god-genesis-1816-33>

On the basis of this passage, I have some good news and some bad news. The good news is really good. You can make a difference. A few people united for any cause can change the world. What is the bad news? This passage makes it clear that it is not the presence of evil but the absence of good that brings God's judgment. Ten people could have saved Sodom. No matter what we may think of the sin of Sodom, this much is beyond debate: God wanted to spare that wicked city.

What does God see when he looks at your family? Your school? Your place of work? Your neighborhood? Your village? Your city? Where are the righteous men and women who can make an impact for eternity?

When all is said and done, your prayers matter more than your politics. God would have spared Sodom not because of Abraham's protest (there was none), but because of his prayer. If we take this passage seriously, it forces us to consider one question above all others: Who are you praying for? **Don't stop! Don't stop! Don't stop!**

Charles Spurgeon said, **"If sinners will not hear you speak, they cannot prevent your praying."** He's right. You can reach people through prayer who won't listen to your words or even look you in the eye. They can stop you from speaking, but they can't stop you from praying. Sinners have no defense against the mighty weapon of prayer.⁹

19. If the above statement by Charles Spurgeon is correct, why is it that so few Christians pray? What can we do this week to make prayer a priority?

20. What is your Sodom? Is it your school? Your neighborhood? Your workplace? Your family? How can you begin to intercede and what steps can you take this week to effect some change?

⁹ Sermon excerpt by Ray Pritchard entitled "Christian Boldness In An Age Of Tolerance" found @ <https://www.keepbelieving.com/articles/1998-02-13-Christian-Boldness-in-an-Age-of-Tolerance/>