

Scripture Reading: Genesis 18

“16 Then the men rose from there and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on the way. 17 And Jehovah said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, 18 since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, & all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? 19 For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of Jehovah, to do righteousness and justice, that Jehovah may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him." 20 And Jehovah said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, 21 I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know." 22 Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before Jehovah. 23 And Abraham came near and said, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? 24 Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it? 25 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?" 26 So Jehovah said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes." 27 Then Abraham answered and said, "Indeed now, I who am but dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to Jehovah: 28 Suppose there were five less than the fifty righteous; would You destroy all of the city for lack of five?" So He said, "If I find there forty-five, I will not destroy it." 29 And he spoke to Him yet again and said, "Suppose there should be forty found there?" So He said, "I will not do it for the sake of forty." 30 Then he said, "Let not Jehovah be angry, and I will speak: Suppose thirty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." 31 And he said, "Indeed now, I have taken it upon myself to speak to Jehovah: Suppose twenty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of twenty." 32 Then he said, "Let not Jehovah be angry, and I will speak but once more: Suppose ten should be found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of ten." 33 So Jehovah went His way as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.”

"Wilt Thou Destroy the Righteous?"

We are taking these two weeks to consider the intimate nature of the visit that God makes with Abraham here in Genesis 18: Jehovah has come to affirm the promise of a son to Abraham & Sarah: And to bring judgment upon some of the wicked cities like Sodom and Gomorrah. In the midst of this we see Abraham as the friend of God, which we considered at length last week...

- AND we see Abraham having quite a conversation with God which we will focus on this week.

Last week we saw some of what it means to be called friends by Jesus and I concluded by saying in part...

“This means spending time with Him in prayer AND it means spending time in His Word; especially in the Gospel accounts of His life because Jesus said IF you see Him there in His earthly ministry then you have seen the Father!”

Of course all of this is effectively accomplished by God’s Spirit that has been poured out upon us and He also uses others in the Body of Christ, our worship together, the preaching of the Word and the fellowship around His Table to bring us closer to Jesus as well.

- I hope we can see that drawing close to God and getting to know what it means to be the friend of Jesus will likely come with some questions!

This is certainly what happens as God decides to speak with His friend Abraham about the coming judgment and there are many lessons we can learn from their exchange...

I entitled my sermon, Wilt Thou Slay the Righteous, which is the topic of this discussion, but I could just have easily used, “A Conversation with God.” Now what I will cover today may seem more appropriate for our Charismatic friends, but I assure you that these principles are very reformed!

So God has informed Abraham that He has in part come down to evaluate the situation at Sodom and confirm that its day of judgment has arrived... This of course brings a series of questions from Abraham and I want us to see that he is not rebuked for asking tough questions nor for his continued back and forth in the discussion.

- **As we strive to know Jesus better and to fully understand the gracious salvation that He provides, we should have questions as well!**

What we have to learn is that there can be good questions and bad questions and there can be questions asked with a good attitude and those asked with a very bad attitude. [mention Mary & Zacharias]

With Mary and Zacharias the questions came from events that were to take place in their individual lives which can apply here with Abraham. Remember Abraham’s nephew is residing in Sodom with his family and Abraham had not so long ago rode off and defeated Sodom’s enemies. Thus I would argue that it is not wrong to ask questions about things that come into our lives... When the Lord calls one of our covenant children home at an early age or someone is stricken with a severe disease it is not inappropriate to cry out ‘Why?’

The important thing is to ask such questions in the same spirit that Abraham approaches God here or as Mary did with her disturbing news.

- **We must also be ready & willing to hear the answers that God gives!**

His answer is sometimes no, and sometimes incomplete, like the Apostle Paul being told that God’s grace was sufficient for him without an explanation of the why he suffered.

- **This is certainly a lesson that Job learned the hard way, but knew well in the end.**

But here with Abraham we are also talking about a BIG event with the destruction of entire cities.

Thus when we see terror as we did in France or Nigeria this past week...

- **Or something like the devastating Tsunamis that we have seen in recent years, then BIG questions for God can come to our mind.**

And of course there may be many questions that come up about God and His world as we study the Scriptures to know Jesus better!

- **So with all of that in mind I trust we can learn from this passage of scripture and the life of Abraham how we can approach God boldly but with humility!**

Obviously from the first question we can see that God has made His intentions about judging these cities very clear...

23 “And Abraham came near and said, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked?”

This is the basic question that lies behind this ongoing discussion with God: How would God handle the destruction of a city that has become very wicked IF there are still righteous people in its midst.

It is good for Abraham to have this discussion because we see from further examples in the Bible that the answer would not always be the same...

When the Prophet Elijah proclaimed to God that only he was left faithful in Israel, wanting to be taken out, God revealed to Him that there were 7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal.

On the other hand when the Prophet Jeremiah pleads for God's people and Jerusalem he is informed that God has made His decision and that he is not even to pray for their deliverance!

[Thus the discussion should come to an end!]

Jeremiah 14: "8 O the Hope of Israel, his Savior in time of trouble, Why should You be like a stranger in the land, And like a traveler who turns aside to tarry for a night? 9 Why should You be like a man astonished, Like a mighty one who cannot save? Yet You, O Jehovah, are in our midst, And we are called by Your name; Do not leave us! [a very passionate pleading!] 10 Thus says Jehovah to this people: "Thus they have loved to wander; They have not restrained their feet. Therefore Jehovah does not accept them; He will remember their iniquity now, And punish their sins." 11 Then Jehovah said to me, "Do not pray for this people, for their good. 12 "When they fast, I will not hear their cry;..."

And of course we see examples in Exodus where Moses & Aaron pleaded with God on behalf of the people...

- **And again sometimes their prayers turned back the wrath of God and at other times He carried out His judgment.**

So I think it is safe to assume that Abraham is approaching this conversation with the right attitude and would be willing to accept the answers that he is given. So he next posits a simple question:

24 "Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it?"

There is no specific mention of Lot or any of the leaders in Sodom that Abraham would have known...

So I think he is asking a very general question here trying to understand the mind of God when it comes to judgment. I think we see this in the follow-up questions he asked before being answered... Again we see Abraham being very bold in the midst of his humility...

25 "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?"

Some might argue that Abraham is presuming to know what the answer must be, but I think he is simply being honest as we see Moses and others being when they plead for mercy for the sake of God's reputation.

- **Again as we saw with Mary and Zacharias the attitude is important when asking questions, even deep theological questions like these that Abraham asks about judgments.**

The Apostle Paul often anticipated questions that might be asked as he outlined God's truths. After Paul has powerfully presented salvation by grace through faith in the first three chapters of Romans, he anticipates a very logical question and gives the honest answer with no rebuke for those who might ask it:

Romans 3:31: "Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law."

- **As an aside if anyone asks how we should see the Law of God today; that is a good place to send them!**

Paul continues on in Romans to show how God's Grace also sanctifies us and how it conquers sin in our lives and again we come to an anticipated question at the beginning of chapter six:

Romans 6: "1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?"

We also see in Romans an example of a question that he anticipated that was much more like those found in the Book of Job, calling God's wisdom or justice into question...

In Romans chapter nine Paul delves deeply into the judgments of God and begins with the promise being given to Isaac and not to Ismael as we find in this very chapter of Genesis...

So again we have a logical question anticipated when teaching that God chooses those He will save...

Romans 9:14 “What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! **15** For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion."

Paul goes on to give more details and examples and then comes the question that is hard to ask with any humility: **Romans 9:19** “You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" **20** But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God?”

- Here we see a response more in line with God speaking to Job from the whirlwind and just as God goes on to explain to Job why he was in no place to ask some of what he asked we see the same here:

“Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" **21** Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?”

Of course the short answer is God is God and you are not, but we must see that this all comes in the midst of a very long Epistle with many great truths and many anticipated questions. So I would argue that even though Abraham is probing some of the mysteries of God’s character he is doing so humbly and honestly when he asks these questions:

25 “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?”

And so God gives him a simple answer that reveals some amazing truths...

26 So Jehovah said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes."

Abraham was not praying that God spare Sodom for the sake of fifty and God was not abiding by such a prayer:

- This honest conversation is revealing to Abraham both the extent of God’s mercy AND the importance of the presence of God’s people.

We will see more of God’s mercy as the conversation continues but whether it is fifty or ten Saints in a city like Sodom their presence is important to that City.

Jesus spoke of His people being both salt and light which is what we see here with a small number of righteous people preserving a city: But sadly as we shall see when we look again at Lot, salt can lose its savor and lamps can fail to shine...

Matthew 5: “**12** Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. **13** "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. **14** You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. **15** Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. **16** Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

Now that would be plenty to learn from this visit by God to Abraham, but there is more...

- And it is here that we learn what it truly means to have a conversation with God... Abraham wants to continue on but he does so very carefully & yet continues in his boldness:

27 Then Abraham answered and said, "Indeed now, I who am but dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to Jehovah: **28** Suppose there were five less than the fifty righteous; would You destroy all of the city for lack of five?" So He said, "If I find there forty-five, I will not destroy it."

- A simple follow-up with a simple answer and so Abraham continues...

29 “And he spoke to Him yet again and said, "Suppose there should be forty found there?" So He said, "I will not do it for the sake of forty."

- With appropriate caution, Abraham continues...

30 “Then he said, "Let not Jehovah be angry, and I will speak: Suppose thirty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not do it if I find thirty there."

The Lord is not angry with Abraham even with his repeated questions and now Abraham realizes that he can continue, probing to see just how deep the mercy of God might run...

31 And he said, "Indeed now, I have taken it upon myself to speak to Jehovah: Suppose twenty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of twenty."

- Abraham is ready to ask his final question and again does so with proper caution...

32 Then he said, "Let not Jehovah be angry, and I will speak but once more: Suppose ten should be found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of ten."

- Now we see how important even a few righteous people can be!

Then we read in verse 33: “So Jehovah went His way as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.”

So the conversation is over and God moves on to the task at hand and Abraham returns to his place...

- A wiser man who has had a conversation with God.

I want to quickly draw two very important applications from this conversation:

- We, if we truly desire to be close to God and know that we are the friend of Jesus must learn to have such conversations...

NOT with God in person, but in our prayers and our studies and our conversations with other Saints.

To do so properly we must study and meditate on these conversations that we find in the Scriptures...

This one here in Genesis 18, and the pleadings of Moses in Exodus or King David or Daniel are good ones.

- The struggles of Job can be studied as warnings to be humble & careful as well.

We can even learn from Jesus Himself during His earthly ministry as He spoke with His father during His ministry & prayed to Him in the Garden.

- And please remember that when God gives us a clear answer like those we saw in Romans, we should go no further!

In other areas He might say not yet, or we may have been a bit timid with our questions as Abraham was at first and thus the conversation can continue.

As I said last week, Jesus is not a stranger who has befriended us on Facebook nor is He our buddy.

- He is a true friend who desires to converse with us and help us grow just as God did with Abraham here on the plains of Mamre.

The other important lesson to learn is how we are to treat those who might be under our authority when they come seeking wisdom from us with questions as well as how to question those in authority over us!

- This can apply to the Elders and teachers here at Church of the King.
- It can apply to parents who have been given the responsibility to instruct their covenant children.
- It can apply to those of you who supervise others in the workplace!

- What are some of the principles we should be applying?

It should be obvious that we must give honest answers to honest questions.

Sometimes as we saw in Romans the answer is that we should not be asking that question because we are in no position to judge the matter we are asking about.

- It should also be obvious, but much more difficult to accept and practice that we need to be patient with people and their questions.

Abraham went from fifty to forty-five to forty to thirty to twenty and finally down to ten and yet God continued to answer his questions: Patiently and Kindly!

I know that my initial reaction to a follow up question is too often, ‘didn’t you listen to the answer I gave you!’ *[No less on the four, fifth or sixth follow-up.]*

I am sure parents & people who supervise others have the same experience.

- We must learn to be no less patient than God was with Abraham: & also no less firm!

Children can be especially tedious in the way they often ask questions and we tend to think, or say harshly,

‘Why don’t you just get to the point!’

- Well I would point out that Abraham in this exchange did not learn only about the mercy of God, but the patience of God as he saw how he was treated by God.

We must be so careful that we do not give the ‘correct’ answer with all the wrong body language or added insults.

My hope and prayer is that the lessons of this message might help us to more fully see what the writer of the Hebrews tells us after explaining all that Jesus has done for us...

Hebrews 10: “19 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Communion Meditation: Isaiah 1:16-20

“16 "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, 17 Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow. 18 "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the Lord, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool. 19 If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land; 20 But if you refuse and rebel, You shall be devoured by the sword"; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”