

INI

St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
June 19, 2016
5th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Acts 8:26-38; Matthew 5:7-12

Hymns: 279; 456; 310; 309

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Genesis 18:20-33

And the LORD 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."

²²Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the Lord. ²³And Abraham came near and said, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴Suppose 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? ²⁵Far 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?" ²⁶So the Lord said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes."

²⁷Then Abraham answered and said, "Indeed now, I who *am but* dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: ²⁸Suppose 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*."

²⁹And 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 the Lord 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 the Lord: 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 the Lord 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 the LORD went His way as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God my Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: The Focus of our Prayers.

As we look at our text today we see two features that stand out. The first is that the Lord informs Abraham of the judgment that He is about to bring down upon Sodom and Gomorrah because of their great wickedness. The second feature that is especially important for us to absorb is Abraham’s response to the Lord’s announcement of impending doom upon those wicked cities. .

The evil of Sodom and Gomorrah was nothing new. God had been very tolerant and patient, granting them time to repent. The Lord finally and ultimately judged,

Genesis 18:20-21 “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.”

The outcry was great. There were victims of their evil. There were many souls and bodies tormented by the evil they had done. Their sin was very grave. This was a serious matter in the eyes of the Lord, We know what was going to happen. The Lord would ultimately rain fire and brimstone down upon these wicked cities

and they would be thoroughly destroyed. So is the justice of God. It is sure and it is right. If things were not as reported and observed by the Lord, who know all things, He would know and would continue to have mercy.

So for us it is important to note that Abraham did not find any joy in the impending judgment of Sodom, or relief, or a sense of self satisfaction. He responded with intercessory prayer. --

THEME: Abraham's Prayer for Sodom Offers Lessons in Intercessory Prayer.

Let us begin with--

I. A Lesson in Mercy

Abraham's heart went out to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham prayed for mercy for Sodom. Abraham began with an appeal to God's justice. He pleaded with God on behalf of the innocent citizens that might be found among the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Yes, he knew that his nephew Lot with his wife and daughters had gone to live among the people of those cities, but Abraham didn't mention Lot specifically, and so we should not conclude that Abraham's concern was limited to his relatives. Abraham possessed the same quality of mercy that he knew from God toward Abraham.

Abraham lived under the mercies of God. God did not chose Abraham, and call him to come out from his people, because Abraham was sinless. God did not promise to make of Abraham a great nation from whom the Savior of the world would come because Abraham was morally superior. God choose Abraham in grace. It was the mercies of God that led God to call Abraham out from among his people so that his Seed would be a blessing to all the nations of the world.

Abraham lived in a close relationship with God who not only called Abraham to faith in His promises, but then credited that faith as righteousness. Abraham learned the mercies of God as God dealt with Abraham in mercy. Abraham understood about God from his own salvation what the prophet would write so much later, "**As I live,' says the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the**

wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezekiel 33:11).

Abraham appealed to God’s justice that the Lord would not destroy the righteous with the guilty. Abraham prayed that, in the greatness of His mercy, God would spare the wicked for the sake of the righteous.

So we also recall the words of the psalmist:

Psalms 145:8-9 The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, Slow to anger and great in mercy. The Lord is good to all, And His tender mercies are over all His works.

Neither has the Lord dealt with us according to our sins, but according to His grace. Some might call for the Lord to give people what they have coming, seeing the evil that others do, but forgetting their own sin and unworthiness. We have already confessed this morning that we deserve nothing but punishment, but God is merciful toward us. May that mercy rule our hearts also. When we hear of atrocities or great disasters, even when such things befall those who are without Christ, let us remember the Lord’s mercies and how His mercies are over all His works. Let us learn this lesson concerning intercessory prayer from Abraham, and pray for others that God might have mercy on them and deliver them, and show them His ways, and lead them to repentance and life everlasting.

“Lord have mercy upon us!” We say it and we sing often in every church service. We ask the Lord’s mercy for ourselves, but let us remember to cry out for the Lord’s mercy for others. One of the few advantages of the constant news cycle is that we quickly hear of the horror that others endure. We know also how multitudes of sinners are wandering in the darkness of unbelief. These are souls bought with the blood of Christ, souls the Father loves and our Savior cherished. Pray that the Lord have mercy upon them, even as He has mercy upon us; that He help and deliver them even as He has helped and delivered us. **Lord have mercy!**

The second lesson we learn from Abraham’s intercessory prayer is --
II. A Lesson in Humility before the Lord.

Abraham began his prayer with what may be regarded as a reasonable request, but it was not for himself. His concern was for others. Already in Abraham's appeal to the Lord's mercy and justice we see that he was not self-centered, but in a humble spirit Abraham prayed for others. But then Abraham did not leave it at that. Even so, he was humble in prayer, not presumptuous nor demanding. Listen how Abraham addressed the Lord, acknowledging God as his Lord who ruled over Abraham in his life. **"Indeed now, I who *am but dust and ashes* have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord..."** (v.27); and then we read, **"Then he said, 'Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak:'"** (v. 30); And again we read Abraham's words of prayer, **"Indeed now, I have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord"** (v. 31); and finally **"Then he said, 'Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak but once more'"** (v. 32):

I suppose some might simply dismiss all this as customs of the east, ceremonial groveling that meant little and should not be seen as a measure of what was in Abraham's heart. It may be that such formal supplications are still in practice in the Middle East among those who would come before their potentate seeking his favor. However, that does not diminish in the slightest the sincerity of Abraham's words or manner. Indeed it is a clear indication of the man's heart and his reverence for the Lord. He was humble before the Lord. He understood that he was only dust and ashes and that the God he addressed in prayer was the Almighty, his Maker, and the Lord over all the earth. He understood that the Lord hears our prayers only because of His grace and the lovingkindness He extends toward us.

This is a lesson for us to learn and learn well whether our prayers be for ourselves, a loved one, or people we hear about in the news even from a distant land. Peter encourages us in such humility also, a lesson Peter had to learn from the Holy Spirit as he endured the trials and temptations that showed his frailty. We read in Peter's first epistle:

1 Peter 5:5-7 "Be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.' ⁶Therefore humble

yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, ⁷ casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”

In **humility** we trust. We trust the Lord to grant us only that and all that we need for our good, for our salvation. Abraham possessed that trust in his heart also, and so we learn from Abraham --

III. A Lesson in the Confidence of Persistent Prayer.

Abraham didn't stop with one prayer when pleading for God's mercy for Sodom and Gomorrah. He turned to the Lord again and again pleading for mercy and more mercy. Abraham's prayer was not only persistent but also progressive. He didn't say the same prayer again and again. He dared to be bold before the Lord. Boldness comes from confidence. He was confident not in himself but in the Lord. He knew God's grace. He knew God's faithfulness. He knew God's love. Abraham's persistence in prayer, Abraham's confidence in prayer that led Abraham to make this progressive prayer where he dared to ask God for more and more were all founded on the knowledge of God and the salvation that is found in His name.

God doesn't look for wavering weak prayer. He desires bold and confident prayer. James writes of this in his epistle.

James 1:5-6 “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ⁶But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.”

Yes, of course we ask with confident faith when we know that we are asking for that which pleases the Lord. So in intercessory prayer as we plead for God to be merciful to sinners, and bless the advancement of His Kingdom in this world we should exude the confidence of faith. However such faith filled confidence should not be limited to prayers for spiritual wisdom. We can be and indeed should be confident in our every prayer offered in Jesus' name. We are confident that God loves us, and cares for us. We are confident that God hears our prayer through the intercessory grace of Jesus who sits at the right hand of the Father. We are confident, knowing that the Holy Spirit perfects our prayers, presenting them

before the Father. We are confident because we know that **He who spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all will also with Jesus freely give us all things** (Romans8:32). We are confident that our Father in heaven will grant us all, but only that which is for our good.

So then let us be bold in all prayer. Today we are focusing especially on intercessory prayer, as we realize the privilege and purpose God grants us to look at the needs of others and call upon Him on their behalf. Our prayers can and are a real power and blessing for others every bit as much as they are for us as we take our personal spiritual and temporal concerns to the Lord. Again it is James that encourages us to maintain that same assurance of faith that we see in Abraham as he prayed. James teaches us his epistle:

James 5:15-16 “The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. **The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.**”

Know that you are righteous before the Lord through the merits of Jesus Christ. Know that your prayers are effective, even as they are fervent, and they avail before the Lord!

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.