

Trusting God

“Abraham’s Prayer”

Genesis 18:16-33

Luke 11:5-10

Pastor Bruce C. Armstrong

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As we continue on our journey with Abraham this morning, this journey of learning to trust God, we come to what one commentator calls *“Abraham’s finest hour”* (Timmer, p. 73), and there’s no question, this is a very dramatic scene that is set before us in the last half of Genesis 18. As always in scripture, we need to see the context, the setting of this prayer of Abraham, this very interesting conversation between God and the one God had chosen, set apart for his purpose – our friend Abraham.

In the first half of Genesis 18, the Lord appeared to Abraham and Sarah and reminded them that they would in fact become the parents of a son in their old age. Some 25 years prior to this appearance, God said to Abraham, *“I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing . . . and in you all families of the earth shall be blessed.”* (12:2-3). This is a promise that is repeated in our text this morning (18:18), as it will be several more times before we are finished with the Abraham “cycle of stories” in Genesis.

As we pick up the narrative this morning, Abraham and his mysterious visitors set out from Abraham’s tent toward Sodom (18:16). This verse connects us back to Genesis 14, where we learned about a war between two groups or tribes of people. In this battle the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are heading for defeat, until Abraham enters and leads them to victory. As a result of his leadership, Abraham is welcomed as a hero in Sodom. But now God is talking about destroying this city, and all its inhabitants, because of their unrighteousness and sin (18:21), which we will learn about in Genesis 1

What follows is certainly one of the most remarkable passages in all of scripture, as Abraham pleads for the city of Sodom. Listen again to what Abraham said to God:

Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will you sweep away the place and not forgive it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to

slay the righteous 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?"

Wow, that's a pretty bold prayer, isn't it? It really sounds pretty arrogant. How dare Abraham "scold" God, or suggest what God should do! Who is this man Abraham, who dares to "confront" God? *"Lord, don't destroy the city; there are some righteous people there!"*

What's going on here? Well, let's remember Abraham's journey of faith. God called him to leave the land of his birth and begin a pilgrimage to an unknown place. *"Come, Abraham, leave your family and follow me to a land I will show you. You don't need to know where it is, you only need to know the One who is leading you!"* It was a call to trust God, a journey of faith, and along that journey Abraham didn't always trust God. Remember that little episode on the border between of Egypt – *"Sarah, sweetheart, let's just say you're my sister . . . that didn't work out so well!* And remember that Sarah didn't always trust God either. Remember her suggestion – *"Honey, I have this slave-girl, Hagar . . . Perhaps we should 'help' God fulfill the promise he made to us."*

What Abraham and Sarah did discover in their journey with God was the character of God, including God's amazing grace and mercy! Now, Abraham, when he hears about God's plan to destroy the city of Sodom, the city where his nephew Lot has settled, pleads with God because he has experienced God's mercy! Abraham has come to know that the God who calls is also a God of great mercy. He experiences this from failures.

Abraham's prayer is one of boldness and honesty. God can handle our honesty in prayer. God can handle our complaints and concerns. Prayer is simply pouring out our hearts to God.

Let's notice also that Abraham's bold and honest prayer is born out of compassion. *"Will you destroy the city if there are 50 righteous . . . 40 . . . 30 . . . 20 . . . if there are 10?"* Do you sense Abraham's heart? It is a heart of compassion, it's God's heart. Abraham is never more like God than at the moment he is praying for Sodom – this is why it's his finest hour! His prayer did not save the city, but it did draw from Abraham the mercy and compassion of God.

We know that not all of our prayers get answered in the way we expect or desire. Sometimes God – for his purpose that we may never fully understand – says **"NO"** or **"NOT YET"**. God answers all our prayers in one of four ways: direct (sometimes God says "yes"), deny (sometimes God says "no"), different (sometimes God says "I have something else") and delay (sometimes God says "not now"). But one of the reasons

that God invites us into this intimate experience of communication with him that we call prayer is so that we might take on his character!

Does prayer change things? Certainly it does many times, but – at least in my experience – more often prayer changes me! In that great New Testament verse about prayer – Philippians 4:6, the Apostle Paul writes, *“Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.”* And what happens? God will do whatever you want? No, that’s not the promise, *“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”*

The peace of God, which we cannot reason out, which cannot be fully explained, which no circumstance can change “will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” Circumstances may not be different, you rise from prayer and find your boss just as unreasonable, your children just as irritating, your spouse just as stubborn, but the peace of God makes you – and me – different!

Admittedly, in speaking about prayer we are treading at the edge of great mystery. But through the mist certain things are clear, things that we learn from Abraham’s prayer. First, God invites our honesty in prayer. God can handle whatever we bring to him in prayer, our honest feelings and our deepest desires, disappointments and challenges. God is not surprised by anything we bring to the “courts of prayer”. Second, prayer provides an opportunity for us to discover the very character of God, as well as our own character. Of course to discover the character of God in prayer we must do at least as much listening as we do talking!

And finally, God does respond to our prayer, sometimes by changing circumstances and situations, and sometimes by changing us! This is the character of God that we discover – along with our friend Abraham – as we open our hearts to God in prayer. Thanks be to God!