

Genesis 18:16-33

Abraham Pleads for Sodom

16 When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. 17 Then the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? 18 Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. 19 For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."

20 Then the Lord said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous 21 that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know."

22 The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the Lord. 23 Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24 What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? 25 Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

26 The Lord said, "If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake."

27 Then Abraham spoke up again: "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, 28 what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five people?"

"If I find forty-five there," he said, "I will not destroy it."

29 Once again he spoke to him, "What if only forty are found there?"

He said, "For the sake of forty, I will not do it."

30 Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?"

He answered, "I will not do it if I find thirty there."

31 Abraham said, "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?"

He said, "For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it."

32 Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?"

He answered, "For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it."

33 When the Lord had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.

Notes

In this passage Abraham's trying to make sense of God's plan to destroy the city of Sodom. He's speaking to God in prayer from his worldly perspective and trying to see things from God's perspective and to understand what God's doing and why. He already has a close relationship with God and is in partnership with him. He knows God is good and merciful so he is trying to understand how a good God could want to destroy an entire city and all its inhabitants, including the people there who are righteous and follow him. He's wrestling with the situation and crying out to God in heartfelt prayer, trying to understand his will.

Abraham's honest with God and tells him exactly how he feels and puts his point across. He speaks boldly before God on behalf of the good people who've done nothing wrong. He's basing his appeal on his knowledge of God's loving good nature. He speaks humbly to God saying that he is only dust and ashes, not challenging his authority but merely wanting to understand his will.

As we know God doesn't see things in a worldly way like we do and that's why it's so important to talk to him in prayer, as this is how we hear from him and stay on the same page. He has an elevated view of things and sees the whole picture, which is like a kind of heavenly jigsaw puzzle, you could say, whereas we only see our own little jigsaw piece. If we pray to God in every situation, we catch a glimpse of his view of things and see things his way and discover the best way forward.

We see that Abraham had a strong faith, but it was not perfect because he was only human. Sometimes he despaired or made wrong choices, but he was in partnership with God and seeking God all the time. Therefore, even considering all his bad decisions the summary of his life in romans 4:3 is: "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" So, we can be inspired by his faith. As Abraham knew God so well, he knew that he could trust his decisions were the right ones and not need to understand all the details.

In this passage he negotiates with God eventually asking him to save Sodom if there are even ten righteous people there. There were ten members in Lot's family who was Abraham's nephew and a good person who followed God. Lot and his children and the ones they were to marry made up ten people. Abraham knew that, and he must have had Lot and his family in mind in his prayer. Perhaps he thought if he could just get the Lord to agree to save the city for ten, Lot's family would be saved, hoping that, by this time the rest of Lot's family would also have turned to God.

As it turned out in that whole city there was only one single righteous person in the end, Lot himself. So sad a whole city and only one good person to be found. It must have been doubly hard for Lot to stay good when all around him were going astray.

We need to believe that God can do the impossible and nothing is too difficult for God. So, let's be real with God and speak boldly to him and be like a close friend in partnership with him like Abraham was, to understand his will in all situations rather than trying to present him with a shopping list of demands and let's be persistent and know that his timing and perspective is very different to ours and not give up.

Questions

- 1) Why do you think Abraham bartered like he did, whittling down the numbers of righteous people rather than just go straight to the saving of ten righteous people?
- 2) Do you find intercession easy to do, or does it feel like going through a shopping list? How can we do it differently if we struggle to pray?
- 3) How do you pray, what tips would you give a new believer to help them engage in prayer?
- 4) In this passage we see that God reveals His plans to Abraham. Psalm 25:14 tells us that he confides in those who fear Him; he makes His covenant known to them. Make a time of prayer, but not that we do all the talking but let Him confide in us, give space for Him to talk, it's good to listen, not just with our ears but with our Spirits too.