

Study Notes and Questions for Locking Castle Church Life Groups

Please take the opportunity to listen to the Genesis 18 sermon on the Locking Castle Church website. These study notes present some extracts and reflections from this sermon with thoughts and questions for discussion. It will be advantageous to read the whole of Genesis, chapter 18, and familiarise yourself with the events, character, and fate of Sodom and Gomorrah in the following chapter.

The supplementary scriptures referenced in the sermon, which may provide additional guidance, understanding and clarity, are: Genesis 12:1-3; Genesis 15:4-5; Genesis 17:1-8 and 15-22; Deuteronomy 7:6; 1 Peter 2: 8b-9; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 12: 1-2; 1 John 1: 8-10; Luke 9:26; James 4:8; Luke 7:22; Luke 7:22; Mark 10:31; and John 14:27.

The world's many messages, and the power and influence wielded by emerging agendas and ideologies, present a challenge to and for the Christian. Indeed, it is the same for many across the Abrahamic faiths who share similar values. In addition, current political, social, economic, and moral confusion present significant challenges.

However, the Church has something to say or should have concerning these worldly messages and challenges, not as a state department but as the voice of God's Holy Scripture and God's will and hope for all humankind. As followers of Christ and His Word, as spiritual ancestors of the God of Abraham and inheritors of the Gospel, we must follow scripture, not culture. Thus, the Kingdom of God presents both challenge and choice.

In this Genesis 18 encounter between Abraham and the Lord, something exciting and significant is unfolding; the reaffirming of God's promise to Abraham and Sarah, which will birth a nation under God. Not just a chosen people, Israel, but the Kingdom of God, of Jew and Gentile, every race and colour, of which we are a part of today, is promised here. In the fullness of time, this birthing of a nation under God will culminate in the true vine, the life source, the way, the truth, and the life presented in Christ Jesus. Indeed, there is freedom and familiarity rather than grandeur and majesty in this encounter, indicative of that great visit the Son of God was to make to the world when the Word would be flesh and appear as one of us.

It is both significant and revealing that the city of Sodom is the next destination on the heavenly envoy's itinerary, and the juxtaposition of the reception they receive there compared with their encounter with Abraham and Sarah is stark and unambiguous. Moreover, it is illuminating that God reaffirms the promised hope and blessing through Abraham before presenting the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah, two cities flooded with worldly distortion, confusion, depravity and wickedness.

1. The dichotomy between God's will and way and the world's way cannot be any more apparent. Therefore, the Kingdom of God presents both challenge and choice. How might this understanding and insight speak into (a) the world, (b) our nation, and (c) our lives?

2. Consider Romans 12:1-2 and any other relevant scriptures that come to mind in the light of your discussions concerning question 1.

The Lord affirms Abraham and Sarah before turning His attention to the unrighteousness of Sodom and Gomorrah. This encounter between Abraham, Sarah, and the Lord, amidst the impending destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, affords a clear distinction between the outcomes of those who seek God's will and those who do not.

1 John 1: 8-10 states,

'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.'

With all its urgings and persuasions, the world still seems rather fond of deceiving itself these days. However, as followers of Christ, we share a spiritual heritage with the God of Abraham, who made a way, but we have to choose that way, make those choices and face those personal and worldly challenges.

3. Consider Luke 9:26 and James 4:8. How might these verses enlighten, inform and edify your journey of faith?

The Lord drew near Abraham and Sarah in the heat of the day by the Oaks in Mamre. Despite Sarah and Abraham's challenges and failings, they would have a son and heir, a perceived impossibility for them in their old age. So the question left hanging for the aged couple and us is this:

4. Is anything impossible for God? When we see the unfolding of the scriptures and revealing God's faithfulness to those within its pages, are the challenges we face too powerful and too complex for God to overcome?

The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them (Luke 7:22). Is anything impossible for God?

When Jesus prayed in the garden before the authorities arrested him, he prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me, yet not what I want but what you want." (Matthew 26:39)

Even in his prayer for deliverance, Jesus is prepared to be fully obedient, and he cannot avoid his "cup of suffering"; such is the love of God for us.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." (John 3:16)

As followers of Christ, we have received a promise and hope. There is no hidden agenda; God has revealed Himself through Christ Jesus. Therefore, we need not flounder upon constantly shifting sands of misunderstanding and conjecture because we have the Word of God as our strength and the unbreakable foundation upon which we can stand in these turbulent times.

This holy and revealed hope through Christ Jesus will invariably and graciously invite us to re-evaluate our choices and alliances, reposition our priorities and realign our perspectives in the light of the scriptures, wisdom and revelation of Christ Jesus and the Kingdom of God. In addition, such hope brings fullness of life and the promise of forgiveness; this hope can transform and redeem damaged lives, broken identities, hopeless situations and times of utter despair.

God, in and through Christ Jesus, invites us to choose the fullness of life (John 10:10), to receive the only hope that brings true freedom from fear, despair, hurting, and confusion. In short, Jesus says,

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” (John 14:27)

Amen.