

Osaka International Church
Date: June 29th, 2008
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Series: Patriarchs
Title: Intercession for Sodom
Scripture: Genesis 18-19
Key Verse: 1Timothy 2:1

I. Introduction

Good morning! A week ago we looked at **Genesis 17:5**, where the Lord says, “**No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.**” “Abram,” means “exalted father,” and “Abraham” means, “father of a multitude.” God gives this new name because Abraham will become the father of many nations.



And, in Genesis 17, verse 21 says, (**Genesis 17:21**), “**But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year.**” Abraham and Sarah have been waiting for many years, but their time of waiting will soon end. Within a year, God will fulfill His promise to give them a son, a son who is to be named Isaac. Today we will look at Genesis 18-19, and we can see that this passage follows within a few weeks of Genesis 17, since Sarah is not yet pregnant. Let’s start by reading Genesis 18:1-10.

II. Scripture

Genesis 18:1-10 (NIV)

[1] The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. [2] Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. [3] He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. [4] Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. [5] Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way--now that you have come to your servant." "Very well," they answered, "do as you say." [6] So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs of fine flour and knead it and bake some bread." [7] Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. [8] He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree. [9] "Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him. "There, in the tent," he said. [10] Then the Lord said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him.

III. Teaching

Genesis 18:2 tells us that Abraham saw three men standing nearby. However, when we read all of Genesis 18-19, it becomes clear that one of these men is the Lord, and the other two are angels. Whenever we read that the Lord appeared in human form, it makes sense to conclude that this is Jesus, since the Father and the Holy Spirit do not appear this way. So, here we understand that Jesus, accompanied by two angels, has come to see Abraham. At first, Abraham probably just saw them as three men, but before long Abraham realizes that he is speaking with the Lord.



In the culture of that time, hospitality to strangers was a moral imperative. People were viewed as good or bad, according to how they treated strangers. This makes some sense, because when we deal with friends, neighbors, and relatives, the history of the relationship influences us. But when we meet a traveling stranger, there is no history of problems or of favors received or given, and it is

likely that we will never see the person again. There is very little self-interest involved, so how we treat strangers is a good indication of the condition of our heart.

In Genesis 18 and 19, both Abraham and Lot welcome the traveling strangers and treat them well. But the rest of the people of Sodom try to hurt and humiliate the strangers, an attitude that shows the wickedness of their hearts. Sodom is infamous for sexual sin, but in many cultures Sodom's lack of hospitality would be seen as an even more serious sin than sexual perversion. The strong contrast between those who offer hospitality and those who do not is used here to show the difference between the righteous and the wicked.

Abraham prepares a great feast for the three men, even though he probably did not know who they were until after the food had been served. My guess is that Abraham first realized that it was the Lord when the promise of Genesis 17:21 was repeated in **Genesis 18:10a, "Then the Lord said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son."**



Hearing these words, Abraham must have suddenly realized the true identity of His guest. This renewed promise must have been an encouragement to Abraham, but the following verses tell us that Sarah laughed in unbelief. However the name, "Isaac," means, "laughter," and Sarah will laugh again when Isaac is born. Then it will be the laughter of joy, and not of unbelief.

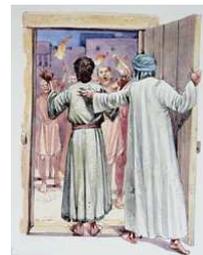
The feast must have taken hours, but eventually it was finished. **Genesis 18:16-17, "When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. Then the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?"** The Lord then told Abraham that He was going to judge Sodom for its wickedness, and in response to this news, Abraham intercedes for Sodom in a fascinating way. Let's take a look at a portion of the discussion.

Genesis 18:23-28:

[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 because of five people?" "If I find forty-five there," he said, "I will not destroy it."

Abraham continues after this asking, "What if there are 40?" "What if there are 30?" "What if there are 20?" Each time the Lord answers saying that He will not destroy the city, if there are that many righteous there. Finally, in **Genesis 18:32**, Abraham finishes his intercession. **"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.""** Through Abraham's bold intercession, the Lord promised to spare Sodom if ten righteous people are there. But in the end ten righteous people could not be found in Sodom, and the city was destroyed.

Before the destruction comes, Lot and his family are led out to safety. Lot is even told to take anyone he wishes with him. **Genesis 19:12, "The two men said to Lot, "Do you have anyone else here--sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here,"** But even the men engaged to Lot's daughters refused to leave the city.



Genesis 19:27-28, "Early the next morning Abraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood before the Lord. He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, toward all the land of the plain, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace." The Scripture says that the Lord rained down fire and brimstone, burning sulfur, on Sodom and the other wicked cities of the plains. The cities were completely destroyed and the wickedness of these people was erased from the earth.

Abraham boldly interceded for Sodom and the Lord said, “yes,” to all of Abraham’s requests. The Lord even did something Abraham did not ask for, He saved Abraham’s nephew Lot and Lot’s family. Here we see both the Lord’s love and the Lord’s justice. The Lord will not allow even one righteous person to be destroyed. Because of the Lord’s love, Lot had to be led out of the city before it could be destroyed. On the other hand, because of the Lord’s justice, the wicked city had to be destroyed. Some people find this hard to understand, but if we think about it carefully it is not so hard to understand.



God is good; the Scriptures clearly show that He will always do what is right. In **Genesis 18:25**, Abraham said to the Lord, **“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?”** Abraham knows that God the Judge of all of the earth. And a good judge will not treat the righteous and the wicked alike.

Imagine a human judge for a moment. Imagine a city where there is a judge who always declares every defendant, “not guilty.” When they get arrested, all of the thieves, the gangsters, the rapists, and the murderers want to get this judge for their case. Because no matter what they have done, this judge always says, “not guilty.” Would you say that this is a good judge? No! This is a terrible judge. A good judge punishes the guilty and sets the innocent free. The people of the city would demand that this judge be replaced by a good judge who puts the criminals in jail, for justice and for the safety of the city.

God is good. But we should understand what that means. Some people think something like, *“Oh, sure, I have done a few things wrong, but God will never condemn me because God is good; He is a God of love.”* These people think that the goodness of God means that God will not punish the guilty. But they are wrong. Because God is good, He will punish the guilty. And because God is a God of love, God will not allow violent men to continue hurting the righteous forever. The guilty must be punished. The wicked must be separated from the righteous. This has not happened yet because the Lord is giving them time to repent, but in the end God will judge everyone.

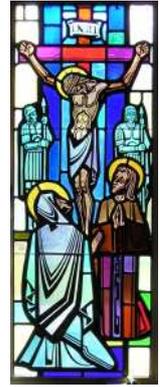
2 Peter 3:9-10 tells us, **“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.”** God loves each and every person. It is the heart of God that every person would repent of their sins and be saved. But God will not wait forever; the time for judgment will come. And when that time comes, God will not allow unrepentant sinners to go to heaven. After all, if God allowed even one sinner into heaven, then it would not be heaven anymore. Those who refuse God’s love will be sent away, and there is only one other place to go, the place of suffering which we call hell.

The destruction of Sodom is a historical event, and it is also a strong warning that God will not ignore sin. On the other hand, the story of Abraham’s intercession and of the rescue of Lot is a great encouragement to us. We see how the Lord comes to those who trust in Him. The Lord comes to Abraham to bless him and to hear his prayer of intercession, and the Lord comes to Lot to rescue him at the time of judgment. The Lord is always coming to those who believe in Him to meet their needs. And the Lord is always ready to hear our prayers.

Abraham and Lot are shown to be righteousness by their hospitality, but their hospitality is not the source of their righteous. **Genesis 15:6** told us, **“Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.”** Abraham’s righteousness comes from believing God, that is faith. And Lot is the same. God declares those who believe His Word and trust in Him righteous.



The heart of God is for each and every person to repent from sin and to believe and be saved. **1 Timothy 2:1-4** makes this very clear. Paul wrote to Timothy saying, **“I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone--for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”**



Isn't it a wonderful encouragement to know that it is God's desire that all people be saved! And God has provided a way through the cross of Christ. At the cross, the love and the justice of God are both satisfied. God comes to us in the person of Jesus and suffers and dies for the sins of the world. The justice of God is satisfied, because the death penalty for sin is carried out. The love of God is satisfied, because God offers Himself as a substitute sacrifice for us.

IV. Conclusion

Let's think again about a human judge. But this time imagine a good judge. Imagine that one day a friend of the judge is brought to court. The friend is sorry for his crime and promises never to do it again. Even so, he is guilty and the judge must find him guilty. But the judge loves his friend. How can the judge serve justice, and yet show his love for his friend? The judge decides what he will do. He declares his friend guilty and declares that he must pay a high fine or go to jail. The friend is poor; he cannot pay the fine. But he does not go to jail, because he is rescued by the judge. As soon as the trial is over the judge lays aside his robes and comes down and pays the fine for his friend.

What God has done for us at the cross of Christ is very similar. We are guilty and we deserve death for our sins, but God takes the penalty on Himself. Our part is to trust in Him and humble ourselves to accept the salvation that He offers us. It is as **Ephesians 2:8** tells us, **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.”**



May I encourage you today? If you are not certain of your salvation, then make certain. Repent of your sins and turn to the Lord in your heart, trust Him, receive the free gift of salvation, and commit your life to Him. Or, if you are already walking with the Lord, then make it a priority in your life to intercede for others in prayer and also through your actions. Share the love of Jesus with everyone that you can, because the Lord desires that every person would be saved.

V. Let's Pray