

September 2, 2007
Pentecost 14

"Praying More Because the Final Judgment Is Real"

GENESIS 18:16-33

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 because 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.

"O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder,

Consider all the works thy hand hath made.

I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder.

Thy power throughout the universe displayed."

Rolling thunder? Did you hear the rolling thunder this past week and see the flashes of lightning in the sky. The aircraft show last week aptly named "Thunder in the Valley" did not begin to compare to the thunder in the valley we heard last Thursday morning. Did

you know that a bolt of lightning generates millions of volts of electricity, up to 200,000 amperes of power, and heat up to 60,000 degrees? There is a lot of power in one bolt of lightning.

Yet the power of lightning is small in comparison to the power God used to create the heavens and the earth, or the power God will someday use to destroy this present world in the twinkling of an eye, or the power God will show on judgment day when he creates a new heaven and new earth. Some day we will see Jesus come back to us in clouds of glory, flashing like lightning the sky.

Power. Lots of power. That's what we see in the hand of God when he destroyed the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Fire and brimstone rained down from above and completely destroyed these prosperous cities and beautiful surrounding area. It was Abraham who prayed to God and pleaded with God to spare these cities for the sake of handful of righteous people living there especially his nephew Lot and his family.

Some day we will see Jesus come back to us in clouds of glory, flashing like lightning the sky. One important job you and I have here on this earth is to pray for people to be spared from the coming judgment of God. I would be the first to admit that this is not always as much a part of my prayer life as it should be. There are people I know personally who are not trusting in Christ for their eternal salvation. There are people who are slipping away from Jesus a little more each day. You have these people in your life as well. This morning we want to look at Abraham as he prays fervently to the Lord

to deliver people from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. We want to become more fully convinced how important we are at this time and moment in history as we fervently pray for those who are lost and without Christ.

What a privilege the Lord provides

It was the Lord who provided Abraham with the privilege of praying for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. We are told, "When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way." Remember from our sermon last week how these three men were actually two angels and the Lord God himself appearing to Abraham in human form. It says that they looked toward Sodom. The Lord wanted Abraham to know what he was going to do to the city. He even says, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" The Lord wanted Abraham to know what he was going to do.

God has revealed to us what is going to happen to this present world when it comes to an end. "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." He reveals to us that everyone will be raised to life again and they will stand in the final judgment. Jesus himself spoke to us about a place of eternal fire and everlasting punishment for those who do not believe in him. He spoke of everlasting life for those who put their trust and hope in him. What are we going to do with these clear words of Jesus? Should we dare to cut them out of the Bible as Thomas Jefferson did, or believe as some do that these words are just legends and stories never spoken by Jesus? If we accept these words to be true, it affects our view

of life here on this earth. We begin to see how valuable we are for reaching out to people who are still without hope and also praying for them to come into the kingdom of God.

The Lord had his hand on Abraham just as he has his hand on you. Listen to what the Lord says about Abraham and then think about what the Lord says about you. "Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. 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." God chose Abraham. He brought him out of darkness into the light. It was the Lord who moved Abraham to keep the ways of the Lord and the Lord who led him to trust in his promises, even though it took a long time before the child was born. God did not choose Abraham to believe because he was a little better than other people. It was purely by God's grace that Abraham was chosen to believe and it was grace that made him what he was including a person who would fervently pray for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.

I am sure you can see the application to your life. It was the Lord who made us what we are this morning. We are people who believe we are spared from eternal death not by any good works or deeds, but only by the perfect life of Christ and perfect death. Jesus declared us to be worthy by removing our sin and replacing it with his righteousness. A few weeks ago we held up a dead stick (hold up stick) to illustrate how the Lord took spiritual dead people like us and made us alive in Christ. We are now branches attached to Christ the vine bringing forth fruit in our lives including all the prayers we pray for people who are without Christ. 1 Peter 2 describes your life and mine with these moving words, "Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

Sodom and Gomorrah were in serious trouble. The Lord told Abraham how bad the situation was with these words, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous 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." The Lord did not have to go down and check it out. This is a human way for God to speak to Abraham to show that he knew how bad the situation was. The Lord sees everything that goes on in the world, including every thought that ever enters our minds and hearts. He heard the groans and cries of the people living in Sodom and Gomorrah where wickedness and evil were running wild. God hears the cries and mourning of people who have lost loved ones in places like Iraq and observes the injustice of evil terrorists. In time God finally says, "I have had enough." Psalm 46 says, "He utters his voice and the earth melts." The wheels of God's justice seem to grind very slowly, but they grind exceedingly fine. Justice prevails. God has his moment and time when he will end this world in which are living.

It was amazing how the Lord took Abraham into his confidence and showed him what he was going to do Sodom and Gomorrah. The Lord has taken you and me into his confidence. He walks with us down the paths of our lives and shows from his Word what will happen to the world in which we are living and to people who are without Christ on the day of judgment. Then it becomes clear to us how important our lives are here on this earth. If we know the truth and how to be free, why would we not devote ourselves to sharing this with people who are without hope? We have the privilege of using the power of prayer to ask the Lord to find ways to rescue people especially the people we personally know

and love. That is what we see Abraham doing. Let's look now at fervently Abraham prays because of the urgency that prevails.

What urgency daily prevails

Abraham approaches the Lord as his friend and father, just as we can go directly to our heavenly Father through Jesus. "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? What if there are fifty righteous people in it? 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 the earth do right?" Abraham is challenging God, pleading to him for mercy, pointing out his justice and yet also his love for people, so bold, so audacious, so confident in God's love and mercy. And the Lord responds by saying if there just fifty people left he would spare the city.

Can we be so bold with our God as Abraham? Romans 5 gives us our license and privilege with these words, "Therefore since we have been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand." We are standing in grace, with the door of God's mercy wide open. That means we can specifically pray for people whom we know who are without Christ that God would spare their lives, bring the Word to them or even use us to reach out to them. To pray is such a privilege in all matters of life. Yes, if you are having a bad day today you can pray for a better day tomorrow. You can pray for better grades in school, a better job, relief from pain, even a space in the parking lot if you cannot find an opening. But dear Christian if these are the only things that fill our prayer life we are missing out on praying for urgent situations that need our daily attention, especially the salvation of those without Christ. How powerful we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy Kingdom come." "Thy will be done." "Deliver us from evil." Yes, we can specifically pray for the King of kings and Lord of lords to march into the lives of people we know, ask him to claim them for his kingdom and spare them from the judgment. The Lord loves those prayers.

Abraham kept on praying and challenging the Lord. "What if there are 45, what if there are 30, and what if they are 20 and what if there are only 10. The Lord would have spared the city if there were only 10 people. Abraham prevailed in prayer. He saw the urgency. He also prayed humbly "I am but ashes and dust." The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by fire. But Abraham's nephew Lot and his family were spared. God answered the prayers according to his justice and his love for all people. May this sermon be a turning point in your life and mine as we pray more for people because God's judgment is real, just as the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was real. Amen.