

Congregation,

When we explored the first half of Genesis 18, we noted that Abraham is a friend of God! As a Friend of Abraham, God fellowships with him and speaks to convince Sarah that His promise of a son is for her as well as Abraham. And now the Lord bares His heart to Abraham regarding His plan for Sodom and Gomorrah.

Today, I hope we can see more clearly how Abraham is God's friend and confidant. A confidant is perhaps best defined as a deeper degree of friendship, one where the friends share deepest secrets with utmost confidence that the hearer will respond appropriately. He won't disregard what you say. He will take it to heart and respond out love.

As we return to the story of Abraham with his three visitors from heaven, we see them leaving the dinner table together. You can understand why Abraham wants to walk along. First of all, that was common courtesy, much like we might walk with our guests to the door or perhaps even to their car. But more than that, I suspect, Abraham didn't really want to leave God. God came to him in human form, and Abraham knew that God was temporarily stooping down to him in fellowship. But still I'm sure Abraham wanted to stay with God in human form as long as possible. He didn't want to let Him go. I'm sure we would be the same. We want the time to last.

So Abraham walks with God. The group of four walk south from Mamre toward the Dead Sea where Sodom and Gomorrah are located: Abraham the man, the Lord, and two angels who appear as men. And as they walk, the Lord has a burden on His heart. He struggles within Himself. V.17 records God's thoughts:
Gen 18:17 Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do to Sodom and Gomorrah?

God Confides in Abraham

The reason God tells Abraham His plan is two-fold.

a. Blessed to be a Blessing

First, God says that Abraham is the man through whom all nations of the earth will be blessed. God says what amounts to, "I have called Abraham, I have set him aside in order to be a blessing to the world. Surely, I must share with him what I am about to do to a part of this world that He is supposed to be a blessing to." We can so easily forget that we are not just children of Abraham and friends of God who are set apart from the world. That can be a very comfortable position. And many Christians have taken such a stance, saying that we are blessed by

God, a holy people, set apart from the world. But we are more than children of God in the comfortable position of being favoured by God.

Indeed, we are set apart, BUT for a purpose. Listen to the Apostle Peter's words:

1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Peter makes it plain that we too are set apart to be a blessing to the world--to declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. God loves the world and we must love it too. God cares for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah and Abraham must too. He said,

Gen 18: 18 Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him.

It is therefore, the mission of Abraham and us as his spiritual descendants to do all we can to be a blessing to the nations, the people around us.

So the first reason God tells Abraham His plan for Sodom and Gomorrah is that Abraham is God's chosen vessel through which the world will be blessed. Ultimately, Abraham's line will lead to Christ who will earn the perfect blessing of God. And by faith in Him, Jesus passes that blessing of God on to us. And so we are blessed to be a blessing to our neighbours, even those like Sodom and Gomorrah.

b. Called to Holiness

The second reason God tells Abraham His plan for Sodom and Gomorrah and confides in him is that Abraham must also tell his children about the Lord and the covenant obligations. After God says that all nations will be blessed through Abraham, v.19 says,

Gen 18:19 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.

You see, being part of the covenant family is great, but it comes with responsibilities. Just because you happen to be related to Abraham is no guarantee that you are a child of God. Likewise, just because you are born into the Christian community is not a sure ticket to heaven. No, that is why we have to train our children for if we do not give them any instruction in the ways of God they may end up in the same position as the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Teaching the next generation that they are heirs of God's promises is important. It's a task we can so easily forget or take for granted. But it needs to be taken seriously. That's why we make vows of support at baptisms. It's why our churches have education programs for children and why we support Christian day schools as well.

Those pushing for the removal of God in public schools tell us we need religiously-neutral curriculum. And we are told that children should be given just facts and then they will make the moral choices that are right for themselves. But that kind of talk comes from the mind of Satan. Gen.18 is just one of many passages where God gives direct instructions for one generation to tell the next not just about the Lord, but about the holy life God calls us to live. We must teach our covenant children as well as new Christians that the God of Abraham is the only true God and His way is the only righteous and just way.

The covenant is truly a blessed gift of God. God stands ready to care for and fellowship with us as He does with Abraham. But at the same time He calls us to walk with Him in His way. He calls us to a life of holiness—be set apart as a light in the world.

In the context of that covenant relationship, God says, I have to tell Abraham what I'm going to do to Sodom and Gomorrah because he is my friend and I have called Him to be a blessing to the nations and to teach his children to walk in my ways. And that still stands today. The Church of Jesus Christ is the covenant people of God. We are the spiritual children of Abraham. And our God chooses to confide in us for the same reasons as He confided in Abraham.

He shares with us the fate of our neighbours. In the Bible He confides in us. He tells us what will become of those who do not give Him glory. They will perish! Therefore He gives us to the world, sets us apart as His holy people to be a blessing. And that's the calling we must pass on from generation to generation.

That knowledge calls for a response on our part.

Abraham Seeks to Bless Others

As we look at Abraham's response, we see what ours ought to be as well. God confides in His friend Abraham and expects Abraham to respond correctly. He wants us to be a blessing to them. That's why Abraham prays. He talks with God. He humbly argues, reasons, debates with God. He fights for the salvation of his neighbours!

Now let's be clear on something before we look at Abraham's petitions. Abraham did not just pray or talk to God. That appears to be all he did in this chapter. But if you look back to Genesis 14 you will see that Abraham has had some contact with the people of Sodom before.

In chapter 14, some strong kings decide to attack and plunder some smaller kingdoms. As a result, Lot, who was living on the edge of Sodom then already, is taken captive. When Abraham hears about this, he goes after the strong kings and ends up releasing Lot as well as the king of Sodom. The king of Sodom wants to reward Abraham but Abraham refuses. He says to that king,

Gen 14:22-24 I have raised my hand to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.' I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who were with me....

In this incident, you can be sure that Abraham made a big impression on his neighbour. First of all, when Lot was in danger, Abraham didn't only rescue Lot. He also rescued the ungodly neighbours. He showed no partiality between Christian or non-Christian. He worked for justice for all. Abraham's action gave testimony that he cared about his neighbours by rescuing them. Moreover, his words to the king of Sodom gave further testimony that his only source of confidence came from God, who he trusted.

There already we see how much Abraham cares for those people. Perhaps that is because he recognizes how blessed he is to have been called by God and taken out of that life of sin. He realizes that he would be in their shoes, were it not for the grace of God. Until God called Abraham, at the age of 75, it appears that he had been a pagan. But God rescued him from certain eternal death and now Abraham is living out of gratitude to God. His life increasingly becomes a thank-offering to God.

Because he knows what God has done for him, he is eager to see others come to salvation. He longs for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah to turn from their sinful ways and come to the Lord God Most High. So when he hears what God has planned for Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham does the only thing he can do. He pleads with God to spare the cities.

God confides in Abraham, telling him what the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah will be. And Abraham, out of love for his neighbours, prays for them. Did you know that God wants us to pray for our neighbours? Did you know that God confides in us so that we will intercede for them?

An intercessor is someone who goes between two parties that are at odds in the hopes of bringing them together or reconciling them. We who know God as the source of everything good and perfect must plead with God on behalf of those who do not know Him and do not look to Him for good. The apostle Paul reminded Timothy of this when he wrote 1 Timothy 2:1-6,

¹ Tim 2:1 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—²for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. ³This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time.

When leaders do not promote the cause of God, then a city or province or country is headed downhill--in the direction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Therefore, we do well to pray for the salvation of our neighbours who need Christ, but also for our leaders who are responsible to maintain our freedom to serve God. One man wrote: "If our attitude toward our government is directed by the Word of God, we will have the highest type of patriotism, prayerful patriotism." (Spalink, 108). And likewise if our attitude toward our neighbours who are perishing is directed by the word of God, we will have the highest type of love for them, "prayerful love."

Now, as the outcome of Abraham's prayer makes plain, we will not always get our way. Not all who we pray for and work with will come to the Lord. But that is up to the Lord. Our responsibility and love must simply move us to do our part in blessing the nations, in showing people that we are children of the Lord.

And therefore we must pray for their well-being now and for eternity. We can't change hearts but God can. And, though it is not always clear to us why God saves some and not others, we may simply know that He wants us to pray for those perishing. And He will honour our prayers.

God confides; we pray. That is how it works when we are friends of God. We know the secrets of God's heart as they are revealed in His Word. We know that evil will not triumph in the end, that God hates it and that those who continue in their sinful ways will perish. So will we be content simply to let them perish for eternity or will we get on our knees in prayer to wrestle with God as Abraham did? After all, God is the only one who can do something about it.

Abraham had a burden for the lost. He desperately wanted them to be spared from destruction. Do you have that kind of burden? What is our attitude to the lost? The least we can do is pray. And it is also the best thing we can do.

Don't forget this: Though God did not spare the cities, He did spare Lot and his daughters. After the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, we read in ch.19:29, *Gen 19:29 So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived.*

Remember what Abraham prayed for. He asked God to spare the entire cities for the sake of first 50, then 45, then 40, 30, 20 and finally 10 righteous people. Yet not even 10 could be found there. Only Lot believed in the Lord. He was righteous because he had put his faith in the Lord. So the Lord spared him and his two daughters. The record says, because the Lord remembered Abraham. Abraham had prayed for the sake of the righteous and God answered that prayer.

And so congregation, we too need to pray for the lost, not only those who have left the covenant fold, but also those who have never been in it. We need to pray so that God's honour may increase in the world as His church grows.

Jesus cares deeply for the world. He gave His life so that none should perish but that all can be saved. He did this so that we might be His friends and His co-workers for the sake of our neighbours. In John 15, Jesus said to His disciples, *John 15:15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead I have called you friends because everything I have learned from my Father I have made known to you!*

We know how to be saved. God has told us because Jesus is our friend. The only thing that we need to do now is to respond on the basis of what, or better WHO, we know--by praying. We pray for the good of others. And then we must trust God to answer our prayers in the way He deems best.

May it be our growing desire and prayer that we might bless others as we have been blessed by our Lord Jesus.