

Sermon: Genesis 18:20-32

**The Believer Follows Christ
Followers of Christ Pray Boldly**

Trusting in God's grace
Submitting to God's will

Then the LORD said, "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 men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD. Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 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? 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?"

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

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, 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."

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."

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."

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."

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."

Endearing. Annoying. There is a thin line that children often walk between the two. Did you cross that line often as a child? Are you crossing it often now? You know what I mean. The first few times a child asks for something it might be endearing. They put on their best puppy dog eyes. They tell you what a great parent you are. The start to melt your heart like butter in a microwave, but then the request is one to which you have to say "no." "No you can not have the car keys." No, you can't go to your friends house." No, you can't have ice cream for supper." When the question is repeated again and again and again, your melting hard quickly becomes a block of ice, doesn't it? Sometimes it does not take long from a child to go from endearing to annoying.

When it comes to your walk with Jesus how often are you endearing to him? How often are you annoying? Even more than annoying you and I are sinful. We can't melt God's heart like butter by anything we do. Even when we act in faith in a way that pleases God we still don't get close to earning anything from God. We are much more often annoying than we are anything else.

Yet God invites his annoying little children (that's you and me) to be persistent and bold when we talk to him in prayer. Isn't that absolutely amazing! God invites us to come to him confident that God can do anything. We can be bold and ask him for things we can never deserve (like forgiveness). What a blessing and privilege prayer is!

Today as we continue the series, "The Believer Follows Christ" let's focus on this amazing truth, Followers of Christ Pray Boldly. As we look at Abraham's bold prayers we will learn to Pray trusting in God's grace and to Pray submitting to God's will.

We have all had some great days in our lives, but I wonder if any of them came close to the day that Abraham had in Genesis 18. In the events that led up to what I read to you a little bit ago Three men stopped by Abraham's tent for a visit. There were three men. It turned out that one of them was the LORD and the other two were angels. Abraham greeted them with hospitality. You might remember it. He had Sarah take over 20 quarts of flour and make some bread right then and there. He had a servant butcher and prepare a calf for their meal right then and there. After they were well fed God revealed to Abraham that within a year he and Sarah would have a son. You might remember that Sarah laughed at this. But God reassured them that the son he had promised 74 years earlier was soon going to be on the way.

Then as the three men were leaving Abraham walked with them and then we are told this:

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.^[c] 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.”

That brings us to what I read to you. God told Abraham that he was going to go and destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. He puts it in human terms “I am going to go and see” so that Abraham and we would know that God does not act on whims, he acts on evidence. The evidence, as Abraham knew, was overwhelming. God would destroy the cities that to this day are known for the sin of homosexuality. No matter what popular opinion of any age might say, the eternal, unchanging God calls this sin. So he tells Abraham he is about to act.

Does Abraham’s response surprise you? Many Christians today seem to bemoan the fact that God does not act to punish those who are caught in sins they would never see themselves committing. Abraham reacts in a completely different direction. He prays for the righteous who might be destroyed with the wicked. He prays over and over to the point of being a little like an annoying child. “50, 45, 40, 30, 20, 10…” How patient would you be with your child today if they kept coming to you like Abraham did to God? Also, did you notice that Abraham based his appeal on who God is, not on the people or on himself. He didn’t say these are good people who deserve to be spared. He didn’t say, “Well, since the Messiah is coming through me, could you also do right by me and spare the city for the sake of the believers?” No, he said,

“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?”

He knew that this had to be a gift of God’s undeserved love, or grace. He had no claim. He knew he was pushing it. He said things like “Now that I have been so bold” and “don’t get angry at me for asking.” He knew that it was only grace that would lead the Lord to turn away from destroying the cities. Just like it was grace that had chosen Abraham to be the one from whom the Messiah would come. Just like it was grace that declared Abraham righteous by faith. Just like it was grace that gave us faith in Jesus. It was grace that declared us righteous through faith in Jesus’ life and death in our place.

Abraham and we today can pray boldly because our confidence is not in ourselves. It is in the undeserved love of our God. We know this to be true in our heart of hearts, yet do we sometimes forget it? Do we fall into Satan’s trap of thinking that God owes us something because we have served him or we love him? Do we fall into Satan’s trap of adding negotiations to our pray life? “Lord, if you do this for me, I will be in church every Sunday and increase my offering.” That is not God pleasing prayer. That is not really prayer. When you pray to God you are not Scott Boros, an agent for major sports athletes today. You are not driving home a fair deal from God. You can’t. You have nothing to offer him. You are a sinner. He is a holy God. You can point to stats and say “I’ve been a good set-up man for you Lord.” You can’t say “my avoiding sin percentage is tops in the league so cut me a better deal Lord!” You’ve got zip, zilch, zero that God needs. So, don’t try to make a deal. Instead simply trust in his grace.

His grace saved you. His grace gave you faith. His grace leads God to continue to speak to you in Word and Sacrament. His grace has seen to it that one day you will see him face to face, exactly as he is, and live. You will live forever in the perfection of heaven. His grace is beyond your understanding. Just rejoice in it! Revel in it! When you pray, know that his promises of grace surround and sustain you. Stand in awe of that love he has for you!

When you trust in God's grace alone and set aside any confidence that you know better than God how things should be done it is much easier to do what Abraham did. He prayed boldly trusting in God's grace, certainly. But then he trusted God. He submitted himself to God's will.

Abraham did push it. He went from 50 to 45 to 40 to 30 to 20 to 10. But then he stopped. He knew that a holy God would do what God alone knew to be best. I wonder how much he slept that night? Did he toss and turn, worrying about who might be destroyed by God? We are told in chapter 19 that

²⁷ Early the next morning Abraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood before the LORD. ²⁸ 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.

I wonder how long it was until Abraham learned that Lot and his daughters were spared. All we are told is that he saw was the smoky remnants of God's judgment. He had to know that not even ten righteous were found in the city. We are told that Abraham "called on the name of the Lord" wherever he went. That means he told other people about the one true God and his plan of salvation. How despondent Abraham must have been that not even ten were found! Yet Abraham continued to serve the Lord. He was even willing to kill his son, Isaac, the son of the promise, a few years down the road when God tested him. That tells us that he submitted to God's will. He did not turn his back on God and wander off because God did not do what Abraham wanted him to. He did not stop talking about the Lord even though all his talk had failed to lead to even ten believers in Sodom and Gomorrah. He submitted to God's will and served him faithfully.

I would guess that Abraham was tempted to say "What's the use?" like you and I often are. You know what I mean. Do you know people who have wandered away from God because God did not answer their prayers the way they wanted? Do you ever feel like joining in the group of people in a congregation that says it doesn't go to voters' meetings anymore because the voters didn't do what they wanted? Your pastor has heard that over and over. Maybe we can learn from Abraham to submit more regularly to God's will. Whatever decisions our voters make we trust that God has led them to it and will accomplish his purposes. Whether you or I agree with it is irrelevant. We submit to it by supporting it and doing our best to see that God blesses us through it.

This becomes much easier for us to do when we take our focus off ourselves and put it on the grace of God. When I focus on the grace of God I trust he will do what is best for the eternal good of souls. After all, that is what our ministry and life itself is all about. We are here to get souls ready for eternity through the message that Jesus lived and died for my sins, your sins, and the sins of the whole world. Everything else is fluff. The meat of our life is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Keep that in mind and you will pray boldly for souls like Abraham did.

Amen.