

Genesis 18C (2011)

- When we last met, we left Abraham and the Lord standing together on a hillside overlooking the Arabah valley below the Dead Sea
 - Some 25 miles to the southeast lie the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah
 - These cities were among the most sinful, the most depraved of any places ever known on earth
 - So evil were these towns that the Lord decided to make examples of them
 - Moments earlier the Lord dispatched the two angels who had accompanied Him to Abraham's tent, into the cities
 - In Abraham's presence, the Lord instructed the angels to investigate reports of the great wickedness in Sodom and Gomorrah
 - And if these reports were true, the Lord would take action against the cities
 - This was the plan the Lord announced before Abraham, but we noted in our last lesson that the Lord was already certain of the sin in the cities
 - Therefore His angels were not visiting the cities merely to confirm the reports
 - They were traveling with another purpose entirely, one which becomes evident later in our story
 - And likewise, the Lord's comments in Abraham's hearing revealed His true intentions
 - The Lord wanted to show Abraham what would happen next and why it must happen
 - So the Lord could teach Abraham important lessons he must understand if he is to raise a nation according to God's desires
 - Moreover, the Lord wants to give Abraham the opportunity to join in the Lord's work through prayer

- We'll begin reading today in v.22, just as the Lord and Abraham are left alone to contemplate the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah

[Gen. 18:22](#) Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the LORD.

[Gen. 18:23](#) Abraham came near and said, " Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?"

[Gen. 18:24](#) "Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will You indeed sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it?"

[Gen. 18:25](#) "Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?"

- As this scene begins, we find the Lord standing alone with Abraham
 - And it's clear that the Lord has remained here in Abraham's presence to allow opportunity for this conversation
 - The Lord has determined to show Abraham what He will do in Sodom
 - And now comes the conversation the Lord intended to have with Abraham
 - But the Lord waits for Abraham to begin the conversation
 - The Lord has revealed Himself to Abraham and He has revealed His plans
 - And now it falls to Abraham to respond and join the work
 - What choices did Abraham have?
 - Abraham could have chosen to stand silently, effectively remaining on the sidelines, while God's work went forward
 - But we know God wants Abraham to get involved, hence the Lord's decision to reveal His plans as He did
 - How could Abraham respond?
 - The Lord has revealed His plans in such a way that only one response is possible
- The Lord announced that He was prepared to bring judgment against the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah if the angels found their depravity to be true

- Abraham knows of the depravity of these cities
 - After all, if the news of their depravity has reached to Heaven, then certainly the news traveled a few miles away to Abraham
 - He knows that these cities will be found guilty as charged when the angels visit
 - And he makes the correct and obvious conclusion: the cities would be destroyed by God's wrath
- Earlier, these cities had come under attack by a powerful ruling authority
 - The kings of the north came to judge the cities for their rebellion against the kings' authority
 - The cities were laid waste, and everyone in the city was taken away
 - Even Abraham's own relative Lot and Lot's family had been caught up in the calamity
 - But Abraham intervened to save the city
 - Not to save the king and people of Sodom, for they deserved the judgment from the kings
 - Rather, Abraham intervened – with God supporting him – to rescue Lot, who was unfairly included in the judgment
- Now here again, the city is about to face judgment, but this time from the ultimate authority
 - There is no force or king greater than the Lord
 - So if Abraham is to rescue his nephew again, he can't assemble his men for battle
 - Instead, Abraham will have to appeal to the Lord Himself
 - And in doing so, Abraham once again becomes the man intervening for the sake of Lot and his family
- So as Abraham contemplates the Lord's wrath upon a depraved and unrepentant city, he worries about the fate of Lot and in v.2 he drew near to the Lord

- This is essentially prayer, a petition placed before the Lord
 - Whether the Lord is seated in Heaven or standing next to us, it makes no difference
 - We draw near to Him when we petition Him, placing our requests before Him
- Abraham begins to speak with the Lord in the form of questions
 - He asks the Lord if He will indeed (or also) sweep away the righteous with the wicked?
 - The city of Sodom is undoubtedly filled with unrighteous
 - And they are deserving of God's judgment
 - In this case, the judgment is earthly...the destruction of the city and the loss of their earthly lives
 - But then that will lead to their eternal judgment in a future day
 - Nevertheless, the sweeping manner of destruction will stand as an example of how God responds to rebellion
- Knowing God's actions will create a perception among men, Abraham seizes on an opportunity to rescue Lot once again
 - He asks the Lord to consider the example He will create if He appears to treat wickedness and righteousness in the same way?
 - What will people say if the righteous are swept away in the same judgment with the wicked?
 - Even though the righteous enter into a glorious eternity after death, nevertheless the world will perceive the Lord to have been unjust
 - Abraham appeals to God's perfect character and name
 - He asks if the Lord would risk His reputation by treating both the righteous and the unrighteous alike?
 - Notice in v.25 Abraham says, shouldn't the Judge of the earth be seen as One Who deals justly?

- Abraham is praying or petitioning the Lord in exactly the right way here
 - Abraham's appeal to the Lord is based on an expectation that the Lord will act in ways consistent with His character and nature
 - This the foundation of effective prayer
 - We are told in Scripture to seek for His will, not our will
 - The model Jesus gave us begins by calling to mind the holiness of God's "name", which means His nature and very being
 - Then Jesus says we should call for the Father's kingdom and His purpose to be done, not our will
 - James echoes these expectations

[James 4:2](#) You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.

[James 4:3](#) You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

- If we petition the Lord with wrong, worldly motives, we should expect Him to refuse our requests
- Because His desire is to see us following Him and His plan
- Moses made the right choice when he prayed to the Lord in the desert

[Num. 14:11](#) The LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst?"

[Num. 14:12](#) "I will smite them with pestilence and dispossess them, and I will make you into a nation greater and mightier than they."

[Num. 14:13](#) But Moses said to the LORD, "Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for by Your strength You brought up this people from their midst,

[Num. 14:14](#) and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, O LORD, are in the midst of this people, for You, O LORD, are seen eye to eye, while Your cloud stands over them; and You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night.

[Num. 14:15](#) "Now if You slay this people as one man, then the nations who have heard of Your fame will say,

[Num. 14:16](#) 'Because the LORD could not bring this people into the land which He promised them by oath, therefore He slaughtered them in the wilderness.'

[Num. 14:17](#) "But now, I pray, let the power of the Lord be great, just as You have declared,

Num. 14:18 'The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations.'

Num. 14:19 "Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now."

Num. 14:20 So the LORD said, "I have pardoned them according to your word;

- The Lord gave Moses the opportunity to become the father of a new nation
 - While this possibility might have appealed to Moses' pride, it wouldn't have been consistent with the Lord's glory
 - So Moses appealed to the Lord's character and to His reputation among the nations, and the Lord responded
- And when we pray for the Lord's will and His glory and His name to be magnified, then we are praying in the right way
- Abraham's specific prayer request was that if 50 righteous exist in the city, would the Lord wipe the city away?
 - We can see the wheels turning in Abraham's mind, can't we?
 - He wants to save Lot and his family
 - But for some reason, Abraham is afraid to ask for this specific result
 - He doesn't say, please save Lot's righteous family
 - Instead, Abraham asks for the entire city to be saved if 50 righteous live in the city

Gen. 18:26 So the LORD said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account."

- Of course, we can take the Lord at His word
 - Had Abraham stopped here and 50 were found, the city would not have been destroyed
- This is exactly the work that the Lord wanted to see from His servant Abraham

- A prayer that petitions the Lord to move in ways that are consistent with His character
 - And by this petition, Abraham begins to align himself with that work of God, exhibiting the Lord's purposes in his own desires
- But remember our story of the father and the young son working on an old car in the garage?
 - The father wants his son to work with him, but he also expects the son will be clumsy and unfamiliar with the process
 - So when the son grabs the wrong tool or tightens the nut when he should have loosened it, the father just smiles and waits for his son to discover his mistake
- And so the Lord waits as well, as Abraham discovers his error
 - What if there aren't 50 righteous people in Sodom?
 - Knowing the depravity of the city, it's entirely likely that the city may have fewer than 50 people who follow the Lord
 - If so, Abraham will fail to save Lot as he hoped
- So Abraham wonders if he can get the Lord to agree to a change in terms
 - And thus begins the most remarkable example of bargaining with God in the entire Bible

Gen. 18:27 And Abraham replied, "Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am but dust and ashes.

Gen. 18:28 "Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five, will You destroy the whole city because of five?" And He said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there."

Gen. 18:29 He spoke to Him yet again and said, "Suppose forty are found there?" And He said, "I will not do it on account of the forty."

Gen. 18:30 Then he said, "Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak; suppose thirty are found there?" And He said, "I will not do it if I find thirty there."

Gen. 18:31 And he said, "Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord; suppose twenty are found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it on account of the twenty."

Gen. 18:32 Then he said, "Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once; suppose ten are found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it on account of the ten."

Gen. 18:33 As soon as He had finished speaking to Abraham the LORD departed, and Abraham returned to his place.

- Abraham draws near the Lord for a second time
 - I find it interesting that the Lord was still standing and listening throughout this exchange
 - He invited Abraham into this exchange and encouraged it by His presence and patience
 - It's clear that Abraham felt once he had set the pattern for his petition that he was bound to it
 - He asked God to spare the entire city if a certain number of righteous could be found in the city
 - And so as Abraham felt the need to improve his odds for Lot's sake, he moves in increments from 50 to 45 to 40 to 30 to 20 to 10
 - The readers know what Abraham is truly seeking: to save Lot
 - And we're as struck by Abraham's persistence and boldness as we are by his obtuseness
 - Why didn't he just ask that the righteous in Lot's family be spared?
 - Perhaps it was because Abraham wasn't sure how much righteousness existed in Lot's family?
 - In fact, what does it say about righteous Lot that Abraham felt the need to bargain down so low?
 - Lot has been living in the city for nearly a quarter of a century
 - We know him to be a representative of the living God, an ambassador for the Lord living among the reprobate
 - Surely, Lot has managed to rescue a few along the way?
 - He has his wife and children and their future husbands
 - And what about friends, business associates, neighbors?
 - Abraham seemed to understand that Lot hadn't been very persuasive
 - He only felt comfortable when he reached 10

- Watching Abraham bargain in this way, we learn several valuable lessons concerning prayer and witnessing
 - First, when we pray we are to pray specifically
 - John told us to pray specifically in His will

1John 5:14 This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

- And as Jesus said, the Father knows what we need before we ask
- So ask specifically, in the Father's will, and in accordance with His character
- Abraham wanted Lot and his family saved
 - But he asked for the city to be spared, which really wasn't what Abraham wanted
 - And he asked for this to happen only if a certain number of righteous were present in the city
 - His request talked around the real point and forced him into a negotiation when one wasn't needed
 - Yet still we marvel at the patience of the Lord
 - He entertained all of Abraham's requests without showing the least bit of displeasure
 - If anything, the Lord was pleased to see His servant working so hard to appeal to the Lord
- This gives us our second lesson: pray boldly
 - Abraham approached the Lord without fear, expecting to see his boldness rewarded, not rebuked
 - He appealed to God's character but wasn't afraid to ask and ask again
 - But even Abraham fell short eventually
 - Abraham stopped at 10, probably because he assumed it was good enough
 - Could he have gone farther?

- Abraham stopped asking before the Lord stopped agreeing
- When you pray, be bold
 - Name your request plainly
 - Be sure it's inline with God's character and nature and purposes
 - And don't give up on God...be persistent
- Finally, we learn something about Lot
 - He was a righteous man, but he lived a sorry life of faith
 - He has consistently chosen the world over living a life for the Lord
 - When he separated from Abraham, he was attracted by the well-watered valley of Sodom
 - He traded the testimony of living in tents for the worldly security of the city of Sodom
 - And he has been caught up in the troubles that come upon the world
 - Many believers over the centuries have followed in Lot's footsteps
 - Most make no excuses for their choices
 - They prefer to earn the world's approval and gain a name for themselves here
 - Rather than earning the Lord's approval and earning eternal riches through their earthly sacrifices
 - But others believe think themselves wiser than Lot
 - They choose to unite themselves with the world, but as missionaries of sorts
 - A marriage to an unbeliever, a business partnership with an unbeliever, fellowship with a unbiblical church community, a friendship with a worldly and unbelieving friend
 - And they tell themselves that they can be the influence to bring faith and godliness

- If this is truly God's call, then they can expect to go in His power and see the fruit He has intended
- But if God is not giving this specific call, then beware
- Lot probably told himself similar lies
 - He probably told himself he could do more for the Lord if he lived in the city
 - He could witness to the Lord while living among the people of Sodom
 - But he was simply making excuses for his own desires
- The reality is quite different
 - The Bible makes clear that we do our best work for God when we stand apart from the world
 - Jesus told us to be salt and light in the world but He asked, what good is salt if it has lost its saltiness?
 - Yes, we are to reach out to the world to bring them the Good News
 - But we are most effective in bringing that message when it comes from a source as distinctive as the message itself
 - We cannot expect the world to take much interest in our message when the messenger lives a life no different than their own
 - Some might argue that we must identify with the ones we are trying to reach, and that is very true
 - But we may only identify in ways that don't compromise our identity in Christ
 - We can learn their languages, eat their foods, live in their towns
 - But we cannot be mistaken for one of them, especially as it relates to following the Lord and His word
 - Lot lived in Sodom for 25 years but, as we'll soon see, he couldn't convert his whole family much less the city

- And because he chose to identify more closely with the city rather than with his Lord, he will pay a dear price when the Lord's angels come calling
- Lot learned the lessons we all should remember: we can't make the world holy by our association
 - But it can make us worldly

- As Paul taught:

[2Cor. 6:14](#) Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?

[2Cor. 6:15](#) Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?

[2Cor. 6:16](#) Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said,

" I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM;
AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.

[2Cor. 6:17](#) " Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," says the Lord.

"AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN;
And I will welcome you.