

Genesis 18:20-32

²⁰So the LORD said, “Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very flagrant, ²¹I will go down now and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has come to me. If not, I will know.”

²²The two men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD. ²³Abraham approached him and said, “Will you really sweep away the righteous along with the wicked? ²⁴What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep them away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? ²⁵You would never do such a thing, killing the righteous along with the wicked, treating the righteous the same as the wicked. You would never do such a thing. The Judge of all the earth should do right, shouldn’t he?”

²⁶The LORD said, “If I find fifty righteous people within the city of Sodom, then I will spare the entire place for their sake.”

²⁷Abraham answered, “See now, I who am but dust and ashes have taken it on myself to speak to my Lord. ²⁸What if there are five fewer than fifty righteous? Will you destroy the entire city if the number is five short?”

He said, “I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.”

²⁹He spoke to him yet again and said, “What if only forty are found there?”

He said, “I will not do it for the sake of the forty.”

³⁰He said, “Please, do not be angry, my Lord, but I will speak again. What if thirty are found there?”

He said, “I will not do it, if I find thirty there.”

³¹He said, “See now, I have taken it upon myself to speak to my Lord. What if there are twenty found there?”

He said, “I will not destroy it for the sake of the twenty.”

³²He said, “Please, do not be angry, my Lord, but I will speak just once more. What if ten are found there?”

He said, “I will not destroy it for the sake of the ten.”

...Just Once More

I.

The outlook was grim. Looking at the spiritual condition of the place, that was plain to see.

Last week’s First Reading showed God himself, with a couple of angels, stopping at Abraham’s door for a visit. One purpose for their visit was to reiterate to Abraham and Sarah the promise that they would soon have the child of promise, who would be the ancestor of the Savior.

That announcement wasn’t the only purpose for his arrival, however. Between the reading from last week and this week’s reading, God says: “Should I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?” (Genesis 18:17, EHV). God’s judgment would soon take place.

Today’s reading begins: “So the LORD said, ‘Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very flagrant, ²¹I will go down now and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has come to me. If not, I will know’” (Genesis 18:20-21, EHV). He already knew, of course. In his grace, God showed his personal interest in people by coming down from the throne of heaven to go there personally.

The sin there was great. When Abraham and his nephew, Lot, split up because of the size of their flocks and herds, Lot looked toward Sodom and saw how good the land appeared to be for his purposes and chose to go there. Immediately on his arrival in the area the Bible says: “Now the men of Sodom were extremely wicked sinners against the LORD” (Genesis 13:13, EHV). Lot did not choose the location for his home very well for a believer. He moved in to their city and, it would seem, adopted at least some of their attitudes.

The chapter after today's text describes in detail one of the egregious sins of Sodom. When the two angels arrived there, the men of Sodom wanted to rape them. Homosexuality was prominent there. That wasn't the only sin. Ezekiel tells of more. "Look, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: Pride, overindulgence in food, and complacent ease were the way for her and her daughters, and she failed to strengthen the hands of the poor and needy" (Ezekiel 16:49, EHV).

II.

The outlook is grim. Looking at the spiritual condition of our society, it's plain to see. Sodom and Gomorrah are not dissimilar to today's society. I last preached on this text nine years ago. How tame our society would look if you could turn back time, knowing what you know now!

Homosexuality was a problem then, too. Now, however, the month of June is devoted to flying flags and flaunting as normal what used to be termed an alternate lifestyle. Courts have asserted that it is normal for such people to be married. Children are being convinced to undergo hormone therapy and sex-change operations, thinking that the doctors—and God—must have made a mistake when they were born. The court has said that abortion is a matter that states are to decide rather than the Supreme Court, so ballot initiatives are being pushed to codify in the Michigan court that the killing of the unborn can occur right up to the moment of birth.

Isaiah wrote: "They parade their sin like Sodom. They do not bother to hide it. How terrible it will be for them! Look, they have brought disaster upon themselves" (Isaiah 3:9, EHV). How easily Isaiah could have been writing about this very time in history! The same God who put in an appearance at the tent of Abraham could stand in the altar area of this church and announce to us all: "The outcry against... is great, and... their sin is very flagrant" (Genesis 18:20, EHV).

III.

Abraham knew what the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were like. Their sins were not hidden. As Isaiah said in that passage moments ago, they flaunted it. They were proud of their cosmopolitan attitudes.

"Whatever has been is what will be again, and whatever has already been done is what will be done again. There is nothing new under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9, EHV). Solomon was absolutely correct. Sin is nothing new. Since Adam and Eve, sin has always been around. The Bible lists exactly the same sins as we see today.

The difference today from my sermon from 9 years ago on this text seems to be the kind of flaunting Isaiah wrote about. Just as Sodom did, our society flaunts the evil and proclaims it to be good. In fact, it is considered commendable to tolerate and promote the kinds of evil that were so prevalent in Sodom.

Abraham was not unaware of the conditions in Sodom. By the time God announced his intentions, Abraham knew who was standing at the door of his tent. While he wasn't surprised about the wickedness of Sodom, he was concerned for his relatives who remained there.

"The two men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD. ²³Abraham approached him and said, 'Will you really sweep away the righteous along with the wicked?'" (Genesis 18:22-23, EHV). The angels left to begin the process of God's judgment. Abraham knew that he stood before the LORD. This was the same God who had just announced that soon the promised seed would arrive who would be the ancestor of the long-promised Savior. He wasn't afraid to stand before this God and make his request for mercy.

"Will you really sweep away the righteous along with the wicked?" Righteous means innocent. Is anyone innocent? Is there anyone who is pure and holy? The Psalmist David admits: "There is no one who does good. There is not even one" (Psalm 53:3, EHV). In the eyes of God no one can be called righteous.

But the LORD to whom Abraham prayed is the God of full and faithful love. He is the God who promised the Savior. He had just spoken of that promise to Abraham moments before announcing his intention to go down and see for himself the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Bible says of

Abraham: “Abram believed in the LORD, and the LORD credited it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6, EHV). Faith in God and his promises is righteousness and innocence in the eyes of God. Faith in God’s promises is faith in the Savior, who has taken sin to the cross and paid for it in full.

So Abraham prays boldly to this God, in whose forgiveness he trusted implicitly. He starts by asking about 50 righteous people—that is, believers. God promises that for the sake of 50 believers he won’t destroy the city.

Abraham is bold to come back with a request for fewer believers. Note how he starts his second round of prayer; this is the attitude of one who humbly knows his place before God. “See now, I who am but dust and ashes have taken it on myself to speak to my Lord” (Genesis 18:27, EHV). Abraham realizes he is not fit to go to the LORD of heaven himself with this request, but he is bold to do it anyway.

Abraham’s prayers go on and on. 50 to 45 to 40 to 30 to 20. Finally he comes again with his last request. “Please, do not be angry, my Lord, but I will speak just once more. What if ten are found there?” (Genesis 18:32, EHV).

Just once more. Abraham’s model shows him going again and again to the Lord in prayer. Notice what he was asking for: God’s mercy. He was asking that God would spare those cities, wicked though they were, for the sake of the believers who might be found there.

Just once more we pray. You will notice that the prayer of the church nearly every week includes petitions and requests that God would bless the governing authorities and give them wisdom to lead our nation in a way that blesses believers. We make these requests of our God no matter who those officials might be, whether the majority of the people sitting in these pews would agree with the decisions those officials make or not. We pray for our leaders—both the godly and the ungodly—because they have been placed in those positions of authority.

Abraham recognized his unworthiness to stand before the Lord and pray by calling attention to the fact that he was dust and ashes, and by asking “just once more.” Yet, in the end, he left it all in God’s hands.

IV.

Those who know their Bible history know the rest of the story. God answered Abraham’s prayer, but in a way Abraham could never have dreamed of. The wickedness and the sin of that city God had determined to judge. 10 righteous people—10 believers—could not be found within the city limits. The cities and their inhabitants would be wiped out.

But God still answered Abraham’s prayer about the righteous. The angels said to Lot: “Do you have anyone else here? Sons-in-law, your sons, your daughters, whoever you have in the city, get them out of this place” (Genesis 19:12, EHV). Those pledged to marry his daughters did not go with Lot; just his wife and two daughters left the city. His wife ignored the direction of the angels, looked back, and lost her life.

Three people were spared. God answered Abraham’s prayer.

The homosexual sins of Sodom are not the only sexual sins. All sexual activity outside the marriage of one man and one woman is a sexual sin, including pornography and passions of lust stirred by any other thing.

But sexual sins are not the only sins. *All* sins are equally serious in the sight of God. Remember what we said about the righteous: there is no one who is good—no one who is without sin. All your friends and neighbors need to see and understand their sins, lament them, and repent of them.

Pray for your community. Pray for your country. Pray for your friends and neighbors—both those who already know Jesus and those who do not. Pray without ceasing that the Lord would lead many to see the truth of his Word and turn away from their sin. Jesus has paid for all those sins and more. He paid for the sins of the people of Sodom. He has paid for the sins of this generation, too.

Pray just once more. Again and again and again. Amen.