

**Interceding for the world**

Last Sunday, we saw God visiting Abraham and Sarah. God came with two angels to share a meal with Abraham, to bring him wonderful news, the birth of a son to Abraham and Sarah. It is a joy to receive such visits and to hear such news. But God's visit to Abraham was not just to announce good news. God has more news to tell and it is very, very bad news. The same God has two very different pieces of news to tell.

God comes to announce to Abraham his judgment against the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. He comes to announce the destruction of these two cities. Think about it. The same God, the same visit, two very different messages. A message of grace and hope and a message of judgment and anger against sin. Let's look at this passage and see first the God who sees and shares and then the man who intercedes.

**The God who sees and shares.**

What did God say to Abraham and why? He tells him that sin is serious, disobedience to God's law is serious. God is aware of what is going on in these cities. God sees what's going on. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are known for sexual immorality. We will see that next Sunday. But the prophet Ezekiel also tells us this: "Behold, this was the guilt of your sister **Sodom**: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy." God saw sexual sin and God saw pride, opulence, injustice against the needy.

We must never forget that. It is easy to think that God does not see sin, that God is not looking. And when you start to reason like that, you start to believe that a life of disobedience to God is not that big a deal. But look at verse 20: "The accusation against Sodom and Gomorrah is so huge, and their sin is so serious." Never think that disobeying God is no big deal. Let's not think that God is indifferent to sin and injustice. Ezekiel speaks of a lack of compassion for the poor and needy. God sees the suffering of the needy. He sees the indifference and cruelty of the proud. And this passage tells us that sooner or later, God will act to judge any form of injustice.

So here is God, about to judge these two cities. He acts as a judge. He wants to be fair and equitable. As he did with the city of Babel in Genesis 11, God decides to "go down and see". He does this so that the world can know he is fair. He collects evidence and he is also ready to reverse his decision if necessary. Look at verse 21: "I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know."

Here is God the judge, but the just and equitable judge. He will examine the evidence. He will not judge hastily. He will take his time to be fair.

And God chooses to let Abraham know what He intends to do to these two cities. Why did God choose to reveal to Abraham what he was going to do? Look with me at verses 18 and 19: "Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice." God gives Abraham the responsibility to explain to his family the importance of justice and the law before the Lord. When the sons of Abraham ask their father to tell them about the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, the cities in ruins, to tell them why and how it happened, God wants Abraham to tell his sons the truth, which he explains to his sons: "This is what God's judgment against sin looks like. This is the fate of all who reject God, who turn away from the ways of God. Here are the wages of sin."

So here God speaks to his servant, to his friend as the apostle James describes Abraham, to reveal a terrible judgment that will take place soon. The Holy God reveals his holy and just anger against sin. Abraham knows people in Sodom. He has family in Sodom. He cares about his family and the residents of the two cities. When the two angels leave to go to Sodom, Abraham does not leave. There is something that troubles him. He has something to say to God. V22: "Abraham also stood in the presence of the Lord" And in the verses that follow, Abraham intercedes for his relatives and for the two cities sitting under the judgment of God. He prays for them.

Do you see the similarities between Abraham and us? If you are a Christian, you are the friend of God, the very child of God. He lets you know about his plan. He told you in his Word that he will judge evil, sin, not of two cities but of the whole world. He wants you to speak about it to your children, to future generations, so that they understand that it is urgent, so that they understand their need for a savior. One could even say that the revelation we have received is even more complete. The judgment to come is even more terrible.

And we all have relatives who live in Sodom. Some of our children or our parents, they live in Sodom. We know many people in the cities that will be judged by God. We care about family members. And like Abraham, we are troubled by the prospect of God's judgment. So we look to Abraham to see how to intercede for our loved ones, for our world. How are we to intercede for a world under the judgment of God?

My purpose for the rest of the preaching is not to give you an intellectual study of the passage. My goal is to incite and encourage prayer, intercession. My goal is that we have a richer, more effective prayer life. I want our study of Abraham's intercession to make you want to intercede like Abraham did. Let's look at Abraham's intercession.

### **The man who intercedes.**

#### **Abraham intercedes with humility.**

I find that in verses 27, and 30 to 32. Abraham does not come in the presence of God with a list saying: "Here I am God and here is my list! Your turn now." V27. "I who am only dust and ashes". He recognizes who he is before Almighty God. He recognizes his lowly position. He is aware of how big God is and how small he is. He knows that God is righteous in everything he does. He doesn't want to sound like he's accusing God of injustice. He does not want to go too far in his prayer - V30 and 32: "May the Lord not burn with anger" Abraham knows that there is a huge gulf between him and God. He intercedes with humility. Are our prayers marked by authentic humility? It is easy to come out with a few pseudo-pious phrases at the start of our prayers and then we move on to our shopping list. But when we pray with humility, we take time to contemplate the beauty, the glory, the holiness of God. We take time to reflect on our human condition, our littleness, our total dependence on the grace and mercy of God. When we come to God to intercede for the world, to ask for mercy and grace, we must pray like the tax collector in the parable of Jesus. We see him aware of his sin, his need for grace and mercy and we read "The tax collector, standing at a distance, did not even dare to raise his eyes to heaven; but he struck himself on the chest, saying, O God, be merciful to me who am a sinner." This is the starting point for all intercession, for any request for grace and mercy: We are, in all things, entirely dependent on the grace of God. We come to him empty-handed.

#### **Abraham intercedes with boldness.**

In a sense, you could say that asking for anything from God is bold and Abraham seems to understand that. This is why he says in verses 27 and 31, "So I have dared to speak to the Lord." But we see his audacity in what he asks of God. We see him asking more and more: 50 righteous, 45, 40, 30, 20 and 10. He is not afraid to wrestle with God in his prayer. We're almost embarrassed by Abraham's audacity. He does not lack respect for God but he is not shy either. He knows his God. He knows that he is a just God and his boldness is based on what knows about God. This is his main argument in this prayer: "I know you are fair and therefore I dare ask you to act justly." Verse 25: "Shall not he who judges all the earth act justly?" Since he knows that God is just, he dares to ask God to act justly. His boldness is fueled by his knowledge of the character of God. It is what we know about God that allows us to be bold in our prayers.

Abraham knows that God is a God of grace. This is seen in verse 19 where God says, "I have chosen him." The relationship between God and Abraham is based on the grace of God. And knowing that God is a God of grace, it gives boldness in prayer. I love the balance that we see in Hebrews 4: "Let us therefore approach with confidence the throne of grace, in order to obtain mercy and to find grace," Let us approach with confidence the throne of grace. When we say "in the name of Jesus" at the end of our prayers, among other things, it is a reminder that our prayer is based on a relationship of grace and it allows us to dare to speak of God.

I wonder if we really dare to wrestle with God in prayer. While remaining humble before him, are we bold in our demands? Perhaps the words of the apostle James are true of us: "you do not have, because you do not ask." Maybe we don't dare to persevere in prayer. We don't see our prayer answered so we give up, we drop our request. For lack of boldness, we dare not come back again and again. Jesus teaches "that you should always pray, and never give up. » Are you tempted to give up? Have the boldness of Abraham. Keep going! Persevere! Dare! Abraham prays with boldness.

#### **Abraham prays for the honor and glory of God**

It is worth taking a good look at what Abraham is asking, not just how he prays but also the content of his prayer. What is he asking God to do? What should we ask God for the world we live in?

We will see later that he prays for the salvation of the two cities, and especially for the salvation of the righteous who live in the cities. But if you analyze Abraham's prayer carefully, you will see that his first concern is for the honor and glory of the name of God. Look at the argument he presents to God from verse 23 to verse 25: "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? <sup>24</sup> Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?"

Abraham asks God to act so that his righteousness is manifest. He doesn't want the world to accuse God of injustice. Abraham does not want the name of God to be blasphemed.

And this passion for the renown and glory of God is a key element in our prayers. We want the glory of God to be recognized in Sodom. We want the people of Gomorrah to bow down to God. We want every tongue in Nantes to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, that every knee in France will bow before him. Why? Paul says it in Philippians 2: "To the glory of God the Father". Speaking on this subject John Piper said: "Mission exists because the worship of God doesn't". And prayer or intercession for the nations exists because there is no worship of God.

I am always amazed to see the passion and fervor of the supporters of the presidential candidates. Their passion and zeal for the honor and glory of their candidate is evident to all. The same could be said of supporters of a football team. There is this passion that dominates their lives. Do we see this same passion for the glory of God with us? When they talk about their candidate, we hear passion. Do we hear this passion in our prayers? Are we energized by a passion for the glory of God in Nantes? We see the tears of supporters of a football team when their team loses a big game. Do we see the tears of Christians because God is blasphemed, because all around us there is contempt for his law? What did we sing in Psalm 119? "My eyes are shedding tears because men do not keep your Law." Abraham prayed humbly, with boldness for the honor and glory of God.

### **Abraham prays for salvation.**

Abraham is not trying to tell God that it would be unfair on God's part to punish the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. But in verse 23 he asks God not to destroy "the righteous with the wicked." He prayed that the righteous would be saved from the destruction of the cities. He repeats this request in verse 24 but goes even further: "Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it?" Do you see what he's doing? At first, he intercedes for the righteous, but he widens the scope of his intercession. He asks that God be merciful to all the inhabitants of the cities. And for us, we intercede for the righteous, for our brothers and sisters in Christ, but we also intercede for the wicked, for those who never intercede for themselves. Abraham knows there will be a judgment. He knows that God is going to visit these cities to pour out his anger on them. Abraham knows that thousands of people will perish under the just judgment of God. God revealed it to him very clearly. And immediately Abraham intercedes. And we know that there will be a judgment. We know that the Lord Jesus Christ will soon return with His heavenly hosts, that the trumpet will sound and that all will be judged. We know it. And we know that the undiluted wrath of God will be poured out on the wicked, on all those who have not bowed their knees before the Lord Jesus. The inhabitants of Nantes, Orvault, Sautron, Bouguenais, Vigneux, Jans, Couëron, Basse Indre, they will be judged and many, many will be condemned. Many will suffer God's wrath against their sin, eternally. Yet we intercede so little for them. And if we don't intercede or if we rarely intercede for them, is it because we don't believe in this judgment? Is it because we are horribly lacking in love for our neighbor, and their eternal fate, we just don't care? If we really are convinced of future judgment and if we really love the people around us, why do we intercede so little? Why does the Church of Jesus Christ intercede so little for Sodom? One author said: "Our intercession for Sodom is perhaps the best barometer of our love for our neighbor." He continues: "Do not tell me that you love your neighbor, tell me how much you intercede for him."

Dear friends, this passage calls us again to prayer, to intercession, humble, daring, persevering, based on the character of God, motivated by the desire to see his name glorified and motivated by a love for our neighbor and for a desire to see him saved from judgment.

Abraham intercedes on behalf of the wicked. Abraham asked God to show mercy to many wicked people for the sake of a handful of the righteous. And in this intercessory prayer for the wicked, we see once again the future descendant of Abraham. We see Jesus. How do we see Jesus here? He interceded for the wicked. He asked his Father to pardon them not for the sake of 50 righteous people

or even for 10 righteous people. He asked his Father to show mercy to the wicked for the sake of one righteous person, for the sake of Jesus himself.

But there is a huge difference between the prayer of Abraham and the prayer of Jesus. Abraham asks God to spare the righteous. Jesus asked his father to punish the righteous, to pour out his anger on the only righteous one. In 1 Peter 3.18 we read: "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God" And if you are a Christian, it is because God saved the unrighteous but did not spare the righteous. The judgment you deserve, you who are unrighteous, you who are wicked, this judgment fell on the righteous, on Jesus. You were living in Sodom. You lived without God. You were under his conviction. But he condemned the righteous in your place. What can I tell you if you are not yet a Christian? Hear what Abraham said in verse 25: "Will not he who judges all the earth act justly? "

God will always exercise justice and that means that all sin will be judged. My sin, your sin, all will be judged. There is not a single sin that will escape the righteousness judgement of God. Not one. It means that we who are unrighteous will all appear before God and we will all receive what our sin deserves. Unless, unless there is a savior, a righteous one, someone who accepts to take this judgment for us. Unless there is a righteous man ready to die in the place of the unrighteous. Dear friends, there is a righteous man. There is only one righteous man. It's Jesus Christ. And he did die. "Christ also suffered once for sins, he the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring us to God". You are under the judgment of God but Jesus invites you to come to him in faith and repentance, take him as your savior and he will bring you to God.