

The Work of Intercession

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[0 : 0 0] What a blessing. If you have your Bibles this morning, I want you to turn to Genesis chapter 18. Genesis chapter 18. Leonard Ravenhill once said, one of these days somebody's going to pick up this book and read it and believe it and the rest of us are going to be ashamed of ourselves.

Well, I tell you, when the Word of God's applied, it'll change lives. When you apply it to your life, it'll change your life and it'll also change others through you.

Abraham believed God. He believed in God's sovereignty and he knew that if God would move, things would change.

Now the setting is that three men have come to visit Abraham and Sarah. They found out that in fact, within a year, they'll have that child that God had promised them so long ago.

They took care of these three men and we find when we look at this passage that one of those men, or at least look like a man, was in fact the pre-incarnate Christ.

[1 : 1 7] He's having an interaction now with heaven itself. And as that conversation continues, I want you to notice what happens.

It's in Genesis chapter 18, verse 16, it says this. Then the men set out from there and they looked down towards Sodom and Abraham went with them to set them on their way.

The Lord said, shall I hide from Abraham what I'm about to do? Seeing that 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 so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.

Then the Lord said, because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I'll go down to see whether they've done all together according to the outcry that has come to me.

[2 : 1 7] And if not, I will know. So the men turned from there and went towards Sodom. But Abraham still stood before the Lord. Then Abraham drew near and said, will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?

Suppose there are 50 righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for 50 righteous who are in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteousness to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked.

Far be it from you. Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just? And the Lord said, if I find at Sodom 50 righteous in the city, I'll spare the whole place for their sake.

Abraham answered and said, behold, I undertaken to speak to the Lord. Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. Suppose five of the 50 righteous are lacking.

Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five? And he said, I will not destroy it if I find 45 there.

Again, he spoke to him and said, suppose 40 are found here, there.

[3 : 3 5] He answered, for the sake of 40, I will not do it. Then he said, oh, let the Lord not be, let, let not the Lord be angry and I will speak. Suppose 30 are found there.

And he answered him, I will not do it if I find 30 there. He said, behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. Suppose 20 are found there. He answered, for the sake of 20, I will not destroy it.

Then he said, oh, let not the Lord be angry and I will speak again for this once. Suppose 10, 10 righteous people are found there.

He answered, for the sake of 10, I will not destroy it. And the Lord went his way when he had finished speaking to Abraham and Abraham returned to his place.

It is the responsibility of every Christian to be like Christ. And one of the ways we can be most like Christ is when we are engaged in doing something that we not only see Christ do again and again in Scripture, but that we now know that he is doing.

[4 : 52] Hebrews chapter 7 verse 25 tells us that Christ, listen to this, lives to make intercession for us.

In other words, we need not worry about the concern that Christ has for us. So not only do you have a church family that's praying for you when you go through a valley, but you have the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, interceding for you daily.

Jesus is pleading to God the Father on behalf of the church, on behalf of the world, and on behalf of you and the concerns that you have in your life. It is the first, this passage is the first scene of intercession that we see in Scripture.

And it may be one of the best besides John 17 where Christ himself prayed for the church. There are areas of Abraham's life and his episodes that he faces that are difficult for us to grasp.

Hard to understand that scene of the covenant. Hard to understand how in the past he's went into a foreign country and called his half-sister who's his wife just his sister in order to protect himself.

[6 : 13] He'll do that again. And that's hard for us to understand. There's some things that is hard for us to grasp. But this is not one of them.

This passage truly connects to anyone that has pleaded to the Lord on behalf of somebody else. And don't be mistaken.

God longs to hear the petitions of his people. The pleading intercessions of his people not only invites him to show up and thank God to show out in our life, but it is evidence of our dependence upon him, which is a relationship that God strives for us to have.

But there's another side to this as well. God wants us to know what he's up to. God wants us to get in on what he's doing. He wants us to see how he works.

And he gets us involved in his work. I want you to notice in verse 17, it says, The Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?

[7 : 22] What you see here is a soliloquy of the Lord where we get to hear his thoughts. It's almost as if God is speaking to the camera of sorts as this plays out before us in Scripture.

He's telling us why he's doing what he's doing with Abraham, why they're having this conversation. And he says in the following verses in 18 and 19, because Abraham will be used greatly and will lead his family in the ways of the Lord.

I'm going to let Abraham in on what I am doing. That tells me there's a longing in the heart of God to tell us his intention. God wants to tell us his will for us.

And we serve a Lord of love, and he wants those who serve him faithfully and those who are committed to live out their faith before their family, to know his nature, to know his work, and to know his will.

Now, you may be like I am. You may be like the prophet Amos was, who is blown away that God would share his plan with us.

[8 : 35] Amos said, I'm not a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I'm a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees. But if the Lord has spoken to me, I'll do what he tells me to do.

And he says, in Amos chapter 3 verse 7, the Lord does nothing without revealing his secrets to his servants. Psalm 25 14 tells us that the secrets and the friendships of the Lord are shared with those who fear him.

Jesus said in John 15 verse 15, no longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing, but I call you friends, for all that I've heard from my father I have made known to you.

I want you to get this this morning. Just think that the God that makes this world and all that is in it allows us to get in on what he's doing. That is the God who made a galaxy that has millions of suns that are bigger than ours.

If you could travel at the speed of light at 186,000 miles a second and you were to travel for the 6,000 years of recorded history, you would not be able to get a tenth of the way across our galaxy.

[9 : 55] Yet, that is one of at least 20 galaxies in such arc, in just our corner of the universe. Yet, the God who made it all wants us to know his intentions.

He wants to interact with us. And when God lets Abraham know that Sodom will be destroyed if 50 righteous people are not found, Abraham begins to boldly approach the throne of grace.

And I want you to notice two matters concerning the cares of this world. One is, God listens to the cry of the world. It says there, I will go down and see if it's really that bad.

Now that is what's called anthropomorphic talk. Okay? And what that means is that's the way we would talk about something. We'd have to see it with our own eyes.

But God speaks like this so that we can understand him and understand that God surveys what's happening in the world. He's speaking to Abraham who does not understand the omnipresence of God, who that's not been revealed to him in the way that we see in scripture today.

[11 : 20] Meaning that God can be all places at all times. And the message is simply this. When we bring our concerns to him, God is on it. Actually, he's already there before we bring our concerns.

He's already involved. And if we're praying in his will and with his nature, he is the one that planted that prayer within our hearts. If we're praying in his will and in his way, he's the one that plants that heart, that prayer within our heart.

He is the one that leads us to bring it before him. God wanted evidence that it's not too late for the mercy of God to change this city.

And this God-man, because I believe that it's God in human form as in the pre-incarnate Christ, he says, I can hear the cries.

He said, I hear the outcry of the city. Now, I want you to know from where they were standing to where that city was, 70 miles. You and I cannot hear the happenings of Sodom from the Oaks of Mamre.

[12 : 29] It's too far. It's an hour's drive away. But God hears the inanimate and the inarticulate things of the world crying out.

When Cain killed Abel, God told him, the voice of your brother is crying out to me from the ground. Genesis 4, verse 10. In James 5, verse 4, it tells us that God hears the wages of the workers that have been fraudulently held back by the rich.

The world cries out. We don't hear that. God hears that. God hears the cry of the aborted baby. God hears the cry of the secretly abused child. God hears the midnight cries of the abandoned wife, of the raped student, of the unjust wage.

God hears the cries of the sinful desires of our heart. God hears all of that.

[13 : 49] And we know little to nothing about it. The cries of this fallen world reach the ears of the God of the universe.

And God sees it and he knows it. Not only what we're concerned about, but things that we're not concerned about. He knows about things that we ought to be concerned about, that we know nothing about.

That's not all he hears though. Not only does he hear the cries of the world, but God hears the cries of the intercessor. I want you to notice the way that Abraham prays here.

One concession after another that God is willing to hear and to honor because one man pleads with the Lord in prayer. Abraham just overrated the spiritual state of Sodom.

He just thought at least there's ten there when in reality we'll find in the coming days that there was not ten there.

[14 : 53] He had overrated the spiritual state of Sodom. Let me tell you church, I believe we've overrated the spiritual state of pickings.

Oh, we know of some that may not know the Lord, but then there's some others who we just think are faithful church attenders, but good people, or excuse me, we just think are not faithful church attenders, but they're good people.

Are there so many others that we think are fine because they do attend church when God knows they're lost? One of the greatest burdens I have as a pastor, and something that haunts me, is what if somebody faithfully comes week after weeks, hears the gospel preached, and never responds to obedience to follow Christ?

that's why every time we come in this room, I want us to be clear what the gospel is, the hope that we have in Christ, and to give the opportunity for one to respond, because the God of the harvest is seeking workers to labor in the fields, yes, and in the fields of intercession, and in the fields of witness, that God chooses to use to change our very community.

we don't hear those cries, but God does. We don't know all the lost folks, the folks without Christ, but God does, and God seeks to involve us in his plan.

[16:44] if we are to pray, and we are, it's good to know how to do it, and so let's notice the faithfulness of Abraham's prayer, and the nature of it.

For one, it was a proper plea. It's a proper plea. He pleads with God on the basis of God's nature, and God's character, and God's glory.

Abraham says, it would be profane, inappropriate for you to do this to these people. This reminds me of Moses pleading for the idol makers at Mount Sinai.

I want to remind you, Moses went up on the Mount of Mount Sinai to get the law from the Lord. We know him as the Ten Commandments. It was much more given to him there.

We see that in the book of Exodus, and we see that in the book of Leviticus. We see it in the book of Deuteronomy. That's what God revealed to him on Mount Sinai, but it took a long time. He was up there before the Lord, and it took a long time.

[17:54] He was gone a long time, and the people at the bottom of the mount were idle for too long. They waited too long on Moses to come down with the word from the Lord that would be the law, and so they made an idol, and God told Moses while Moses was on top of that mountain, God told Moses what was happening at the base of that mountain, and Moses prayerfully interceded for them.

However, when Moses went down and saw the chaos, he got angry, and he confronted him. He then went back up the mountain, and he began to pray again, and I want you to listen to his prayer. It's in Exodus 32 and 32, and he said this, but now if you will forgive their sin, but if not, please blot me out of your book that you've written.

If you won't forgive them, let me pay for their sin. blot me out. What a prayer. He leveraged his own relationship with God for their renewed relationship with God.

Can I ask you something? Because I have pondered on this all week long. Can't get it off my mind. Who are you willing to go to hell for?

[19:28] Who are you willing to go to hell for? Who is it that you want to see saved by the blood of the Lamb so much that you'd be willing to go to hell for them?

Now, I am thankful that you don't have to, but I want you to hear the pleas of Moses' heart.

oh dear God, I'll lay everything that I am down for all of eternity for you to change these people, for you to forgive their sins, pray that God will stir hearts and allow them to open, that he'll work and open a door and let folks be able to witness what it means to give their heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ.

He leverages his own relationship with God for their renewed relationship with God. And you know, I couldn't help but think, sometimes we don't even want to leverage our friendship with them to ask them about their salvation.

We don't want to even leverage the little tension at the workplace because we don't want to ask them an uncomfortable question. We're concerned about their salvation but only to the comfortable point.

[21:03] But Moses laid it all out there. Blot me out, Lord, in the book of promises that you've given me for all of life and for eternity. Blot me out if you'll forgive them.

That, that's intercession. Abraham's prayer reminds me of Joshua pleading after the unexpected loss of Ai.

They weren't supposed to lose to Ai. Ai was small. They only took some of their forces but there was sin in the camp and because there was sin in the camp they lost that battle. And afterwards, Joshua tore his clothes, he fell on the ground and he asked God why did you bring us this far to watch us fall?

We should have stayed in the desert. None of them pleaded on the basis of the character of the ones that they prayed for.

When they prayed, they didn't pray on the basis of who they were praying for. they didn't pray on the nature and the character of their own lives.

[22:19] They waged their prayer on the basis of the nature and the character and the glory of God. Their example begs for us to ask the question, what is the basis of our pleads to God?

because a proper place, a proper plea, excuse me, puts God in his proper place in our hearts and lives.

And we understand why we ask what we ask. It was a proper plea. It was also a humble plea. He is a 100-year-old man who has talked to God a long time and Abraham says, I who am but dust and

ashes.

He's saying, I'm not worthy. And in verse 30, he says, please don't be angry if I ask you again. You know what you don't see here? You don't see some brassy name it, claim it type of prayer that if you'll just name it, you can command what you want God to do and God will do it.

There's a Greek word for that. It's baloney. That ain't the way we pray, folks. That ain't the heart in which we come into prayer. We're not in control.

[23 : 38] We can't order heaven around and tell him what we want. No, a proper plea acknowledges who he is. A humble plea is what's right. But not only that, but a persistent plea.

And I want you to get this and I'll close. Abraham just kept on coming. He didn't back off. He was praying for a city that he don't even like. Lot. Lot went down there.

He don't even like them. He only has one relative and that's Lot. And they have a constrained relationship at best.

They had to split up because they couldn't get along. But yet he pleased with persistence. And this passage does not take us long to read. Seems pretty quick.

But I'll tell you the agony of the prayer wasn't near that quick. Because Abraham persisted on.

Notice the Lord did not leave Abraham as he interceded. It says Abraham still stood before the Lord in verse 22.

[24 : 39] God didn't go anywhere. God listened to his prayer. The angels went down to Sodom but God heard the cry of Abraham. And do you notice how he prayed? He said pray.

God, what if there's not 50? What if there's only 45? It sounds like an auction. It's like I buy something on Marketplace, you know. What about 40? What about 30? What about 20?

What about 10? And then he stopped. Why did he stop at 10? Did he stop too soon?

God's mercy on this earth may be for the sake of his own people. Because the field of the Lord is made up of wheat who are real believers and they're made up of tares people who look real but they're not.

That look like they're of God but they're not. But God does not pull up the tares because he does not want to uproot the wheat. It happens again and again.

[25 : 43] God protects others because of his faithful followers. Laban told Jacob in Genesis 30 verse 27 that he knew he had been blessed.

Why? Because of Jacob. He knew that. When Joseph went to Potiphar's house was falsely accused and all those things but when he was a servant in Potiphar's house running Potiphar's house Potiphar's house was saved because Joseph was there.

Paul was on a ship and they got in a storm and it began to break up. They weren't going to make it and that ship that was wrecked with Paul on it in Acts chapter 27 made it finally to shore and all were saved because of the apostle Paul being on that ship.

In Jeremiah chapter 5 when God pronounced his judgment on Judah he states that he will not bring a full end to them because of the righteous among them.

God listen to me God spares a city for his people. God spares a nation for his people. Sodom did not appreciate that. They thought they could save themselves and they couldn't.

[26 : 57] They couldn't. It's the prayers of interceding Christians that help us to be the salt that flavors and preserves our society as Christ told us to.

Let me tell you something. If you're living for the Lord one of the reasons why you're able to live for the Lord today is because there's been prayers that have been mentioned for you from people who are already in glory today a long time ago and God's still working off those prayers. prayers. It is the prayers of interceding Christians that help us to shine like beacons of light in a dark world.

You don't think those old time preachers that told me when I went into ministry man I'm glad I'm not going in the day you're going in I'm glad I'm getting out and I said well thank you for the encouragement I appreciate that.

You don't think we ride on the back of those guys prayers? They're already in glory but they done prayed for the coming generation for God to do the work in us.

[28 : 10] Let me ask you something. If the coming generation is based upon the prayers of this generation what's their status? In the convoluted world in which we live today the confusing ever changing world in which we live today how can our prayers affect that?

I think scripture points again and again to it can powerfully affect that and I believe it comes no other way to my understanding this is the first example of intercession praying on somebody else's behalf in scripture and I believe it's one of the best examples because it tells us that God hears and heeds the pleading prayer of his people.

My question is does he hear ours? Does he hear mine? Does he hear yours?

he won't unless you pray him but if we're godly and if we're faithful to pray and to lift it before the Lord he will hear our prayer and he will answer may we never be satisfied with less with every head bowed and every eye closed I've not been here long just a few days over a year and yet I know already I knew when I came in but I even know personally now about so many that I know there's a pain on every pew in this building some of them I know about some of them I don't but I know there's folks that got stuff on their hearts and minds weighing on them struggling with it and I get that because when I know about it

I pray along right there with you and I ask you to do the same for me in the indecisiveness and the clear direction that I want so bad for those I love I ask you today are you taking those matters before the Lord are you entrusting them to him sometimes we take our agenda to God and ask God to do what we want him to do and then there's times when we just go and say God based on who you are I entrust this matter to you I ask for you to move in this way but I entrust this matter to you God will you work and move as only you can I want you to know if you're here today and you've never accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior or you're unclear about that matter you've already been prayed for maybe not by name but you've already been prayed for because I pray that God would work and move in your life today and that you would come to a point in your life where you know for certain you have eternal life and you'll go to heaven when you die and if you want any clarity of that and want to understand that even any better

[31 : 40] I encourage you we're going to stand and we're going to sing in just a moment you obey God and do exactly what he tells you to do you just come down and say preacher I need some guidance with where I am in life let's spend a few moments talking about that together afterwards maybe you're here and you do know that but there's things in your life that are not pleasing to the Lord and you need to settle those matters not only do you need to pray for other people you need to pray for yourself and you need to get those things right before God because they hinder your prayers for other people as well and then I know I know that in a room this size with this many people there are a lot of burdens in this room today stuff that you've worried about stuff that maybe you prayed about stuff that you need to give over to the Lord Jesus and it's been my prayer that today we just hand things over to the Lord you can do that where you are you can do it at this altar you can do it any way God tells you to do it but don't ever do less than what God tells you to do and I'll never ask you to do more than what God tells you to do just be obedient today maybe God's drawing you to be a part of this fellowship you know that God's leading you to be a part

I encourage you to come we'd love to guide you in that process and what that means Lord Jesus I love you and I thank you for the love that you have for us guide us right now to simply be obedient to follow you as you lead us right now oh God I pray in Jesus precious name amen stand together