

Anthology | Learning to Love the Stories of God

Week 2: Abraham Intercedes for Sodom & Gomorrah (Genesis 18:16-33)

Read the story:

When?

This story occurs during the period of God Creating a Covenant Family after God promises to give Abraham a great family that will bless all the families of the earth, but before Abraham is asked to sacrifice his son, Isaac.

Who?

Abraham, the Lord and the people of Sodom.

Where?

Sodom & Gomorrah, Mamre (Abraham is currently camped there)

Summarize the story:

Abraham is entertaining some guests at his house. The men are on their way toward Sodom and Abraham walks with them on their way. The men turn out to be angels and God Himself in disguise. God asks himself if he should hide from Abraham the plans he has about Sodom and Gomorrah. He wants to use Abraham to direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord.

The Lord says to Abraham that the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is great that He must go see about it. The other men (the angels) start on their way to Sodom but Abraham stays behind. Abraham asks God if He will destroy the righteous with the wicked. Then he begins to reason with God; will you destroy the city if there are 50 righteous men found in it? What about 45? 40? What about as few as 10 righteous men? The Lord agrees to the terms and Abraham goes back home.

Leader Notes: The main point of this story is that Abraham is essentially posing and then probing the reaches of a theological question: How few righteous men would be required to deliver the many unrighteous from the punishment they deserve. Abraham presses this question all the way down to 10 righteous men, but he doesn't go far enough to realize just how few righteous men are required to spare the many. The final answer from God to this question won't happen until the cross when Jesus shows us that the righteousness of one man can deliver the many unrighteous men from the punishment they deserve?

This is important to note for our study in Anthology. Sometimes the Old Testament points us to Jesus in an indirect way. Abraham here sets up a theological question but we don't immediately get a solution. And that's the point. Some of the theological questions and problems in the Old Testament aren't explicitly solved until Jesus comes. So instead of there being a Christ-figure in the story, the story anticipates the coming of Christ by giving us a world-wide problem that only Jesus can solve.

Analyze the story:

Attributes of God displayed:

- God has just wrath for sin and idolatry. (There is a need for sin to be dealt with. God will deal with sin at His appointed time. Consider the first and second coming of Jesus. In the first He comes with truth and grace. In His second He will come with grace for those who are His, and judgment for those who have rejected Him.)
- God is present. (The Lord is active in the dealings of His creation. He goes down to see about the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah.)
- God is personal. (He's willing to have a conversation with Abraham about Sodom's salvation.)

- God is merciful and compassionate. (God doesn't desire that any perish and thus hears Abraham's request.)
- God spares the guilty because of the righteous. (He was willing to spare the guilty because of the righteousness of 10)
- God is powerful. (He has the power to judge and destroy entire cities.)

Who is who in the story? (Who is like us? Who is like Christ?)

Who represents us:

- We are like Sodom and Gomorrah in that our sin is great and grievous to God's holiness.
- We are like Sodom and Gomorrah b/c God is willing to spare us of the wrath that we deserve because of righteousness that we did not earn.
- We can be like Abraham in that we can pray for God to intercede on behalf of the unrighteous.

Who represents Christ:

- Abraham is like Jesus in that he intercedes for the people.
- Abraham is like Jesus in that he understands our sin against God is the biggest problem and so he intercedes not for the prosperity of their land, but for the forgiveness of their sins against God.
- Abraham is like Jesus in that he humbly considered himself as "but dust and ashes" in v. 27. In the same way Jesus humbly took the role of a servant and died, going back to the dust to save us.
- The hypothetical number of righteous men Abraham keeps mentioning is like Jesus because God says it's possible for their righteousness to be imputed (given freely) to the unrighteous who are deserving of punishment.

Connect the story:

Parallel Statements:

- God is willing to accomplish salvation by crediting unrighteous people with the righteousness of someone else.
- God uses a chosen messenger (Abraham/Jesus) to intercede for other people.
- God keeps His covenant/promises. He is faithful to Abraham.
- God saves many because of the righteousness of the few; specifically one (a.k.a. Jesus)
 - **Leader Note on Imputed Righteousness:** This is a massive New Testament theological concept that is very well represented here in the Old Testament. God is willing to spare many because of someone else. God is willing to allow the wicked to receive what the righteous deserve. Taking it a step further; Jesus not only gives us his righteousness but also takes what we deserve - our wickedness and our punishment on to Himself. We are spared because God destroyed the one and only righteous man to ever walk the earth.

Apply the story:

- Remember that you are wicked and have been spared because of Jesus righteousness imputed to you!
- Then, REJOICE because God spared us and loves to show mercy to undeserving sinners like us.
- Intercede for others (Pray for those that are enemies of God: Lifegroup, church family, non believers).
- Remember that no one is too sinful for God to save!! (Because salvation is based on the righteousness of Jesus, *not us*.)
- Be humbled remembering that you did nothing to accomplish your salvation. We are saved only because Jesus was righteous in our place and gives that to us freely.
- Fight your self-righteousness and insecurity, remembering our relationship with God isn't dependent upon us or our good works.
- Forgive others in the same way that we've been forgiven. (a.k.a. Not because they deserve it.)

- Tell others about how great God's forgiveness is. Share the Gospel of God's great love with all who don't know Jesus, knowing that He can intercede and save anyone.

Who needs this story?

- People who struggle with self-righteousness (You accomplished nothing on your own. You were helpless to save yourself.)
- People who doubt God's faithfulness. (God always remembers His covenant love.)
- People who minimize the gravity of sin (Our sin is against a perfectly Holy God. Our sin is very great and grievous and must be paid for with death. Jesus' death accomplished that because we were not able to.
- Proud people. (Those who depend on themselves for their own salvation)
- People that don't see God's justice and mercy clearly and minimize either or both of the two (God loves to show mercy but because of His perfect justice, He must also deal with sin.)
- People who struggle to believe that God longs to show mercy to them.
- People don't feel like that they can't come boldly to the God
- People who are apathetic about God's mission and/or don't pray for the salvation of others.