

Abraham the Intercessor

Text: Gen. 18:1-33

Introduction:

1. This chapter forms a prelude to the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19. Abraham receives a visitation from God and two angelic beings. God reiterates His promise concerning Isaac in Sarah's hearing and then reveals His intentions judge the cities of the plain viz. Sodom and Gomorrah.
2. In our last lesson we considered the theme of Abraham as the friend of God and spent time on the first three points of the below outline. Today we focus on the last point dealing with Abraham's ministry of intercession.
 - Serves in the Lord's Providence (Vs. 1-8)
 - Trusts in the Lord's Promises (Vs. 9-15)
 - Learns of the Lord's Plans (Vs. 16-21)
 - Intercedes in the Lord's Presence (Vs. 22-33)
3. Abraham responds to the news of Sodom's impending doom with intercessory prayer. This is the first recorded example of intercessory prayer and it is rich in instruction for this aspect of the believer's prayer life. Moses is also another example of a great Intercessor in the Old Testament (Gen. 32:30-33; Deut. 9:18-29).
4. We note two very important aspects of the Christian life at this point in Abraham's life. We see him both:
 - Serving before the Lord.
 - Standing before the Lord.
5. Vine provides a simple and helpful definition of intercessory prayer. Intercessory prayer is "seeking the presence and hearing of God on behalf of others." It means "to plead or intercede on behalf of someone." Robertson remarks that "It is a picturesque word of rescue by one who happens on or happens upon another in trouble and in his behalf pleads". So intercessory prayer is not so much praying for people in a general sense as it is praying for people in a place of danger or great need.
6. We will learn **7 principles** for effectual intercessory prayer from Abraham's godly example in this chapter.

I. THE PREREQUISITES FOR INTERCESSORY PRAYER (VS. 17-21)

It is important to briefly remind ourselves of Abraham's spiritual position before God which put him on praying ground to intercede in this way.

Abraham had:

A. A Relationship with God (Gen. 15:6)

1. You cannot intercede before God until you first know God! Abraham had come to saving faith in God years earlier and this meant He could pray to God on the basis of a real and personal relationship.
2. You cannot approach God as your Heavenly Father until you have been made His child through the New Birth.

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B. A Friendship with God (Vs. 17-19)

1. We need to be reminded that not only did Abraham have a relationship with God through salvation, Abraham was also walking in close fellowship with God as His friend.
2. While Abraham had his ups and downs as we have seen, overall, he was growing in faith and closeness and conformity to God and His will. A life of trustful obedience goes hand in hand with an effective prayer life. The believer who is living in disobedience to God will not know real power in the place of prayer.
3. We can only intercede in proportion as we abide in close fellowship with God – “If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (John 15:7). This is why we pray in Christ’s Name. “In my Name” means, not simply using His Name as a plea, but praying in union with Him and with all that we know of His will.
4. Abraham’s prayer was also prompted by Divine Revelation. This prayer was Abraham’s response to what God had just Revealed to him. Be sensitive to the promptings of the Lord in the area of intercessory prayer.

II. THE PLACE OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER (VS. 22-23)

Intercessory prayer takes place in:

A. The Presence of God (Vs. 22)

1. “but Abraham **stood** yet before the LORD” – Abraham’s posture is of interest. He is standing in God’s presence. Abraham’s reverence is profound (we will note this soon) but he also has confidence and boldness in God’s presence. All that stood between God and judgment at this time was godly Abraham. He pictures our Lord Jesus Christ who is our Advocate with the Father (1 Jn. 2:1).
2. In this passage we see God seeking a man to “stand in the gap” to intercede on behalf of the doomed cities. It is a reminder that judgement is God’s strange work (Is. 28:21) and not something in which He delights (Ez. 33:11).
3. Ezekiel 22:30 “And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and **stand in the gap before me** for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none.”

B. The Nearness of God (Vs. 23a)

1. Abraham not only “stood before the LORD” he “drew near” to the Lord. Abraham was alone with God! There are times when we need to pray with others. There are times when we need to just get alone with God in a quiet place and pour out our hearts before Him.
2. We are reminded that for the believer, prayer takes place in the holiest of all, where Christ is. Hebrews 10:19-22 “Having therefore, brethren, **boldness to enter into the holiest** by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And *having* an high priest over the house of God; **Let us draw near** with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.”

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3. We are reminded that when we draw nigh to God, He will draw nigh to us. James 4:8 “**Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.** Cleanse *your* hands, ye sinners; and purify *your* hearts, ye double minded.”

III. THE PLEA OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER (VS. 23B-25)

Note two aspects to the appeal Abraham makes to God:

A. It was a Specific Appeal (Vs. 24, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32)

1. Abraham made six specific appeals to God and received an answer for each. There was a common theme of pleading on behalf of the righteous in Sodom but it was expressed in six specific requests.
2. It is a reminder that prayer needs to move from the general to the particular. Intercessory prayer is clear on what the need is and seeks God accordingly.

B. It was a Spiritual Appeal (Vs. 23b-25)

1. Abraham appealed to the righteousness of God. Intercessory prayer involves appealing to God’s Holy character. Abraham was close enough to God to know something of His Nature and that it would be inconsistent for God to mete out the same judgment to the righteous as to the wicked.
 - a. Knowing God’s heart and character are key if we would be effective prayer warriors. It brings our praying in line with the will of God.
 - b. 1 John 5:14-15 “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, **if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:** And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.”
 - a. Note: Perhaps God intended to remove Lot and his family all along but it demonstrates how that God has chosen to include the intercessory prayers of the saints in the carrying out of His plans.
2. Abraham was concerned for the reputation of God. It is clear that Abraham was also concerned for God’s glory in all of this.

IV. THE PERSISTANCE OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER (VS. 26-32)

There are two aspects of Abraham’s praying that highlight this principle of importunity¹ in intercessory prayer. Take note of:

A. The Season of his Praying

1. This was clearly a protracted period of praying. Abraham “stood **yet** before the LORD.” The LORD was “communing² with Abraham” (Vs. 33). How long Abraham was in God’s presence we don’t know. It only takes us a couple of minutes to read the account but it is very likely this season of prayer took much longer.

¹ Pressing solicitation; urgent request; application for a claim or favor, which is urged with troublesome frequency or pertinacity. (Webster 1828)

² Share one’s intimate thoughts or feelings with (someone), especially on a spiritual level. (Oxford Dictionary)

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2. There is a time for brief prayer in the Christian life. Nehemiah is a great example of a man who was in touch with the Lord and would put through those lightening prayers to heaven when needed. However, there needs to be seasons of prayer in the Christian life where we spend greater lengths of time in the Lord's presence, pleading with Him for others. It is important that we have such seasons in our lives individually but also corporately as a church.
3. Col. 4:2 "**Continue in prayer**, and watch in the same with thanksgiving;"
4. Luke 18:1 "And he spake a parable unto them *to this end*, that men ought **always to pray, and not to faint**;"
5. Matt. 7:7-8 "**Ask**, and it shall be given you; **seek**, and ye shall find; **knock**, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that **asketh** receiveth; and he that **seeketh** findeth; and to him that **knocketh** it shall be opened."
6. F.B. Meyer writes, "We cannot climb the more elevated pinnacles of prayer in a hasty rush. They demand patience, toil, prolonged endeavour, ere the lower slopes can be left, and the brooding cloud-line passed, and the aspiring soul can reach that cleft in the mountain side, where Moses stood beneath the shadow of God's hand...How much we miss because we do not wait before God! We do not give the sun a chance to thaw us. We do not linger long enough upon the quay to see the vessels return freighted with the answers we had been praying for. If only we had remained longer at the palace door, we might have seen the King come out with a benediction in His face and a largess in His hands."
7. John Butler notes, "God is anxious to grant us answers to our sanctified request, but we are too often not interested enough to pray for as many answers as God would like to give us. We cut short our own blessings, for we do not persist in our tasks and are not determined enough in our efforts to accomplish much."

B. The Stages of his Praying (Vs. 24, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32)

1. Abraham's prayer progressed in stages. Each "yes" answer from the Lord helped Abraham to discern that His praying was headed in the right direction and gave him confidence to ask for more.
2. On this point F.B. Meyer notes, "It looks at first sight as if he forced God back from point to point, and wrung his petitions from an unwilling hand. But this is a mistake. In point of fact, God was drawing him on...He did not learn the vast extent of God's righteousness and mercy all at once; he climbed the dizzy heights step by step; and, as he gained each step, he was inspired to dare another...It is so that God educates us still. In ever-widening circles, He tempts his new-fledged eaglets to try the sustaining elasticity of the air."
3. Abraham did what the old timers often called "praying through". He prayed the matter through to a conclusion and a definite answer was obtained from the Lord.

V. THE POSTURE OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER (VS. 27, 30, 31, 32)

We note Abraham's attitude and spirit as he interceded before God. We see a combination of both confidence and reverence.

A. Confidence before God

1. Abraham was confident in the petitions he brought before the Lord. He had confidence to plead with God on the basis of His relationship with God.
2. We are exhorted by the writer to the Hebrews to come boldly to the throne of grace. Hebrews 4:16 "Let us therefore **come boldly** unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."
3. Boldness is not a fleshly brashness or a prideful arrogance. It is simply confidence before God. We come not with self-confidence, but with confidence in God and the fact He has brought us into a right standing with Himself.

B. Reverence before God

This is the right combination. A confidence that is coupled with a deep spirit of reverence for God. There were two perspectives that influenced this reverential attitude in Abraham. He had:

1. A humble view of himself.
 - a. "I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes" (Vs. 27).
 - b. Even though Abraham was called a "friend of God" he still had an accurate view of himself. A spirit of deep humility is required for effectual prayer.
 - c. Isaiah 57:15 "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name *is* Holy; I dwell in the high and holy *place*, with him also *that is* of **a contrite and humble spirit**, to revive the spirit of the **humble**, and to revive the heart of the **contrite** ones."
 - d. Psalm 9:12 "...he forgetteth not the cry of the **humble**".
2. A high view of God.
 - a. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Vs. 25)
 - b. "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak" (Vs. 30)
 - c. "Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord" (Vs. 31)
 - d. "Oh let not the Lord be angry" (Vs. 32)
 - e. There is not the slightest hint of presumption in Abraham's praying. It is all in the spirit of reverential, humble entreaty. He is not commanding or ordering God around as an equal or a subordinate. He is deeply conscious of his smallness and God's greatness and presents his requests as humble pleas and petitions.
3. "This is always the consciousness of the true child of God as he abides in the Divine presence. God's holiness and our sinfulness, God's greatness and our nothingness, are the overwhelming experiences." (Griffith Thomas)

VI. THE PASSION OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER (VS. 30, 32)

We note the 'oh' was in Abraham's praying. This was not cold, clinical appeal. The kind of praying that touches God's heart is praying that comes from your heart. Some people approach prayer like they would a speech. They may use exact grammar and well-formed sentences, but their praying is cold, a mere exercise of the mind. I would rather hear a halting prayer from the heart than a clinical one from the head. Not so with Abraham. We could say that:

A. Abraham's Praying was Urgent

1. He had compassion towards Lot and his family.
2. He had compassion towards the doomed cities.

B. Abraham's Praying was Earnest

VII. THE POWER OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER (Vs. 26b, 28b, 29b, 30b, 31b, 32b)

This account should strengthen our confidence in the power of prayer. We note that:

A. God Answered Each of Abraham's Requests (Vs. 26b, 28b, 29b, 30b, 31b, 32b)

B. God Answered Beyond Abraham's Requests (Gen. 19:29)

1. Genesis 19:29 "And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that **God remembered Abraham**, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt." Notice it doesn't say God remembered Lot. He remembered Abraham, the intercessor, and moved in mercy in the life of Lot. Intercessory prayer brings great and miraculous answers from God.
2. Eph. 3:20-21 "Now unto him that is able to do **exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think**, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."
3. Vance Havner wrote, "If we are beset by an unseen foe we are also befriended by an unseen friend. Great is our adversary but greater is our Ally."

Conclusion:

1. As we consider this example of Abraham, let us be encouraged in the intercessory ministry of Christ. We can see a clear picture of Christ who is our intercessor in this account. Hebrews 7:25 "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, **seeing he ever liveth to make intercession** for them."
2. As we consider this example of Abraham, let us be challenged about the ministry of intercession in our own prayer lives. Are you praying and pleading for others?