

## GENESIS #14 18:9-33 1-31-16

### *THE OUTCRY AND THE UPCRY*

(Genesis 18) Having last week wrapped up our look at Genesis 17 you might expect that we would be coming today to the first verses of Genesis 18. But not so fast, my friend. In a previous study in our series on Abraham we looked at the story in chapter 18, the story in which Sarah laughs at God's preposterous promise of a special son. Because we covered it already I decided to move on in our study time to what follows it in chapter 18. The story continues of what happened when three strange visitors came calling on Abraham and Sarah. One of those visitors, referred to in our story as "men", was the Lord Himself. **16-19** *Then the men rose up from there, and looked down toward Sodom; and Abraham was walking with them to send them off. 17 The Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, 18 since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed? 19 For I have chosen him, so 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 upon Abraham what He has spoken about him."*

I have just a brief comments on this passage before we get to the next section which will give us the bulk of our study today. But, there are some choice truths in verse 19. And I call them *choice truths* because they pertain to God's choice of Abraham. Abraham is referred to several times in Scripture as God's chosen. He did not choose God. God chose him. That's the way it works. Jesus said to His disciples John 15:**16ab** *You did not choose Me but I chose you.* In that verse Jesus goes on to say what He had chosen his disciples to do. **16abc** *You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit.* The choosing and election of God, in our case as Christians, in Abraham's case as well, is not an end in itself but is unto something. We are chosen for a purpose, chosen for a certain end. And in our text for today we see two things that God has chosen us for and Abraham for. First off, God has chosen Abraham and He has chosen us unto holiness. We are chosen to be holy. We have already spent time on that idea in our series on Abraham, so let's move on to the second aspect of verse 19. The verse implies that righteousness is what God has chosen Abraham for, but what it explicitly says is that God chose him so that he would command his children and his house to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice. So, the second thing we are chosen to do is to parent. To parent. And I am using the term "parent" to describe the task of commanding righteousness. That is what God says Abraham, and

that is what God says all fathers and mothers are supposed to do. Now some of you kids here, you will often look at your mom and dad as if to say, “who gave you the right to tell me what to do?” Our text answers that. God did. Commanding the child regarding his or her lifestyle is not just a parent’s privilege by virtue of position, it is God’s commandment. The parent who takes the passive approach and leaves the lifestyle choices up to the child is not parenting God’s way. Parents are not to simply present the options and back off. We are to teach and reinforce the ways of God. Ephesians 6:**4** *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.* The book of Deuteronomy is full of this same kind of instruction to parents from God. Deuteronomy 4:**9-10** *Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons. 10 Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when the Lord said to me, ‘Assemble the people to Me, that I may let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.’* This special covenant with God is not just an individual thing. We are to seek to make it a family thing. God, you see, is establishing thru Abraham and thru us a holy people, living in holy families. That is part of the vision of our church because that is the vision of God’s covenant. The covenant blessings are for you and your children. But there is included here the calling to teach by precept and by example. As I read these passages from Genesis and then from Deuteronomy, I am struck by the similarities between covenant parenting and New Testament discipleship. What did Jesus say we were to do in the great commission? Matthew 28:**19-20a** *make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.* And, if you are a parent, your chief disciples are whom? Your children. That is one reason why we baptize them. That is why we teach them, not just to know the commandments, but to observe the commandments of our King. We are chosen by God - what a privilege! Chosen unto holiness and chosen as well unto parenting or discipleship.

Well, that is our side-road to begin today. Now we will bore in a little deeper on the rest of our passage. Genesis 18:**20-33** *And the Lord said, “The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. 21 I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know.” 22 Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the Lord. 23 Abraham came near and said, “Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24*

*Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will You indeed sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? 25 Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?” 26 So the Lord said, “If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account.” 27 And Abraham replied, “Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am but dust and ashes. 28 Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five, will You destroy the whole city because of five?” And He said, “I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.” 29 He spoke to Him yet again and said, “Suppose forty are found there?” And He said, “I will not do it on account of the forty.” 30 Then he said, “Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak; suppose thirty are found there?” And He said, “I will not do it if I find thirty there.” 31 And he said, “Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord; suppose twenty are found there?” And He said, “I will not destroy it on account of the twenty.” 32 Then he said, “Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once; suppose ten are found there?” And He said, “I will not destroy it on account of the ten.” 33 As soon as He had finished speaking to Abraham the Lord departed, and Abraham returned to his place.*

From here I want you to look with me at the three cries, two of which are described in this story. The first of these is the cry of sin. ® Or you can call this one the Outcry. 20 *the Lord said, “The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah. What does that mean? The outcry? It is Biblical language which is meant to describe the way in which sin, by its own vile nature, calls out for judgment. In reading Genesis you would have already come to this language in chapter 4 where God has this little conversation with Cain, the son of Adam and Eve, the murderer of his brother Abel. 9-10 the Lord said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” And he said, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” 10 He said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to Me from the ground. You get the picture? Cain’s guilt is portrayed here as an agitator, demanding vengeance, calling on God to act in justice. Similar language is used in James 5:4 Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. There God is saying that people who were defrauded and even their imaginary payments cry out to him. And what does this spilt blood, this unpaid wage, these oppressed persons, this guilt cry out to God? They all are calling for judgment! The Scriptures tell us that when we walk in blatant wickedness, ignoring the*

commands of our God that our sin is all the time, day and night begging for retribution, crying out to the Almighty to destroy us. And if we don't repent you can expect that God will.

God had heard just about enough from the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah. The text says their sin was exceedingly grave. Just how bad it was and how it compares to the sin of our culture I cannot know. Jude describes the sin of these cities as being gross immorality. ® And that word "immorality" has specific reference to sexual deviance. It is no historical accident that the primary act of homosexual sin is called *sodomy*. The men of Sodom were in-your-face and blatant with their perversity. Isaiah says in 3:9 (NLT) *The very look on their faces gives them away. They display their sin like the people of Sodom and don't even try to hide it. They are doomed! They have brought destruction upon themselves.* That puts it so well. By their sin the people of Sodom were bringing evil on themselves, asking for judgment to come. And not even Abraham who lived nearby knew how bad it was. Abraham figures that if he could strike a deal with God he might, for a second time, rescue the people of Sodom and his nephew with them. But even when he gets God to agree to spare the city if there are only ten righteous men judgment remains imminent.

In Sodom and in Pittsburgh and in the USA and on the planet earth there is more wickedness and less righteousness than we want to believe. There is a preponderance of evil that is crying out against us and calling for judgment. If you understand that you realize that the greatest threat to America then is not drugs, and its not ISIS and its not a nuclear Iran, and it's not global warming. The greatest threat to America is God. This is why we pray for revival, for renewal, before it is too late. You know the outcry of our sin has reached his ears and one has to wonder if God's patience with us is about to run out.

But there are other cries that God hears. A second such cry is mentioned in Hebrews 12:24. To get the context read from **22-24** *But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.* Oh this is sweet! Remember what God said in Genesis 4? How the blood of Abel cried out to God against his brother's sin? Here it says there is something which speaks better than that blood of Abel. What is it? What does this verse say is speaking to the Almighty Judge? Once again it is blood that is speaking, but this time it is the blood of Christ. Abel's blood said, "Condemn him!" The blood of Christ speaks better. The blood of Christ speaks better! It speaks mercy. It says, "Forgive!" In one of Wesley's great hymns he writes

about the mediation of Jesus on behalf of sinners. With Hebrews 12:24 in mind he writes this, “Five bleeding wounds he bears, received on Calvary. They pour effectual prayers, they strongly plead for me. ‘Forgive him oh forgive’ they cry, ‘nor let that ransomed sinner die.’” Our sin cries out, “Condemn!” Thank God, that if you are in Christ, there is another voice that reaches the throne, the voice of your advocate, whose blood cries out for mercy and for grace. And the blood of Christ speaks better and louder than the outcry of our sin. Call it the blood-cry and give hearty thanks to God.

Look back to Genesis 18. I said there are three cries to discuss. We have seen the outcry and the blood-cry, now lets look at the up-cry --the cry of God’s servant in intercession. Outcries, call for upcries, for cries unto heaven for deliverance, and that is what Abraham brings. Consider three things from this conversation with God. First, Abraham shows a concern for justice. **23-25** *Abraham came near and said, “Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24 Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will You indeed sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? 25 Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?”* There is almost a tone of admonition in what he says. Abraham is taking a stand here for justice, but it is his idea of what justice is. Really, this is kind of a bizarre thing going on. Here is the perfectly just, all-knowing Creator being schooled in justice by one of his self-seeking, biased, fallen creatures. It is rather ludicrous but we do it all the time. Our justice gland gets all worked up when the perceived injustice works against us. We are often rather selective about our moral indignation. My guess is that Abraham is concerned about this upcoming divine activity for one reason. He has a nephew in Sodom that he cares about. We saw before that it was when Lot got carried off into battle that Abraham decided to enter the war against the five kings. Here its the same concern. He doesn’t want to see Lot go down with the city. Lot was family.

Whatever his motive, Abraham decides to take a stand and appeal to his Lord on behalf of Sodom. He keeps arguing with God that there might be enough righteous men in that city to make it worth saving. And what he is doing here is the task we call *interceding* or *intercessory prayer*. Abraham has a relationship to God that no one in Sodom has. And he uses it for blessing. Abraham goes to bat for the city. And I like what Abraham does and says here. His is a humble prayer. He isn’t presumptuous and assuming. He says **27** *Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am but dust and ashes.* He realizes his place before God. Secondly, it was a persistent

prayer. Abraham didn't give up did he? He kept going for the best deal he could get from God, and he whittled it down from 50 -10. Thirdly, it was a persuasive prayer. He argued from the holy character of God. This is a good example of praying, and he submitted to the will of God without whining at the end result which was not what he preferred.

On now to the third thing we learn in this conversation between Abraham and his maker. The third thing is the preservation by the saints. This is not the perseverance of the saints which is a precious doctrine. It is the preservation by the saints. What I mean is that a city, state, nation or church may be preserved by God or kept due to the presence and influence of a few godly men or women. Imagine - had Sodom or Gomorrah had just ten righteous men, just ten - they would not be the city of infamy they have been for the last 3000 years. The presence of holy men and women of God keeps a society from falling apart. Jesus said in the sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5:**13a** *You are the salt of the earth.* What does that mean? Does it mean you give the earth flavor? I don't think so. Salt, in the ancient world, in the not-so ancient world, in the world before Frigidaire was used as a preservative. It is salt that would keep meat from spoiling as rapidly as it might otherwise. It retarded decay. Jesus says that is what His people are supposed to be doing. Our presence in the midst of this fallen, broken, world is to make it significantly less fallen and less broken. And to keep it from the quick and final judgment of God. Friend you don't do that by being like the world. I hear all the time that we should help the world be being more like the world. No, no. You help the world by being different in meaningful ways. And you don't do that by running away from the world. You do it by being different while you are in it. Our object as believers is not simply to save ourselves from the world, it is to save the world from itself. That means we dwell here, but we dwell as living witnesses, by life and by deed, to the truth and the salvation of our God. We know our citizenship is in heaven but we still seek the good of the society where God has placed us. That means we get involved. We don't sit on the sidelines when elections arrive. We inform ourselves about issues and candidates, and we maybe even run for office. We look for ways to prevent devastation and restore the devastated. We oppose what is destructive and lift up what is healthy in our society. And we pray. We use our influence with God.

It is the lie of the devil to us that our little contribution doesn't count. Look at this story! Ten men! In the midst of all this evil ten guys who decided to let their lives count for God would have spared the city! You wonder, how many times throughout history has judgment been withheld because there were ten righteous men and one fervent intercessor for a place like Sodom. How many times did God turn a Sodom into a Salem thru the witness of some salty believers? FB Meyer

writes, “*Ungodly men little realize how much they owe to the presence of the children of God in their midst. Long ago would the floods of wrath have swept them away, but judgment has been restrained because the Lord would not do anything while the righteous were found among them. The impatient servants have often asked if they should not gather out the tares. But the answer of the righteous Lord has ever been: ‘Nay, lest while you gather up the tares, you gather up the wheat also.’ Ah, how little the world realizes the debt it owes to the saints, the salt that slows its corruption.*”

Sadly for Sodom, the little salt that was there had lost its savor and was overwhelmed by the wickedness of the city. We will read of what happens there in our next study in the life of Abraham. For this week, would you determine in your heart to live like the chosen of God, seeking holiness in the fear of Christ, teaching your children or grandchildren to walk in his ways? Would you determine, with God’s help, to be a salty influence in your family and business and city and state. And finally, like Abraham, will you counter the outcry of our nation’s wickedness with the upcry of our hearts to God for mercy? Will you? If so, say *amen*. Shall we pray *-Lord Have Mercy-*