

Providing Counsel to the Lord – *Genesis 18:16-33*

Introduction – It is popular in modern church culture to talk about making Jesus your friend, but this concept is abused to make Jesus more like a buddy than the type of friend that the Bible speaks of. James 2:23 tells us, “*And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” And he was called the friend of God.*” And Jesus called His disciples His friends (John 15:13-16). They were His friends because He chose them (v16) and that choosing was so that they would go and bear good fruit (v16). And it is in that context that He says whatever they asked, their Friend would give (v16). And so, this asking is likened to providing counsel to God as to what good fruit needs to come forth. And it is in this light that we come to this passage in Genesis and see how it was that Abraham was a friend of God.

Counsel Regarding Sodom (v16-21) – The chapter turns from Sarah’s impending future to Sodom’s impending future, from words of blessing to words of judgment. As the three men rose and looked toward Sodom, the LORD declares He must bring his friend, Abraham, into the counsel (v17). He must do so because He knows that Abraham will be a great nation and will bless the nations of the earth (v18). He has known Abraham (v19), speaking of His covenantal election, choosing in love (see Amos 3:2 for another example of this covenantal usage of the word “know”). This covenant-love includes his children and bringing Abraham into this counsel means Abraham will be able to “*command his children...that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice...*” (v19). Abraham and faithful fathers tell their children of God’s electing love and warn them to do righteousness and justice in that loving covenant through stories such as the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. Those covenant promises and warnings are passed on from generation to generation (Psalm 78:1-8). And that lesson is that God hears the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah (as He heard the cry of the blood of Abel) – there is no hiding your sin from God (v20). On the one hand, God knows everything, but in the context of time, He finds out (v21).

Notice how the LORD speaks to Abraham like we might pray to Him: “*There is a terrible situation that must be dealt with.*” And notice that He will “*find out*” via messengers He sends; “*Tell me what is going on.*”

The Outcry – “*the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great...their sin is very grave*” (v20). We naturally think of the sins of these cities in sexual terms, “sodomy” is the term for perverted sexual sins. But it was more, for the word “*outcry*” is used to describe the cries of the oppressed and brutalized of which Sodom was well known for (Gen 13:13, as in the days of Noah, Gen 6:5, 13). Unpunished sin cries out to heaven for vengeance, like the blood of Abel (Gen 4:10). And this is a comfort for us: He hears the cry of the oppressed, the baby who suffers abuse, the old man beaten on the street, the Christian persecuted for his faith, the weeping of the women and children sold into sex-trafficking, the tears of the abandoned or mistreated wife, the silent screams of the unborn ripped from their mother’s womb.

Wrestling in the Counsel of God (v22-33) – And so, Abraham is brought into the counsel of God, into the Situation Room of God’s righteousness. But it is complex, and Abraham has questions. “*Would you also destroy the righteous with the wicked?*” (v23). “*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*” (v25). The question seems to be: will the wickedness of the wicked destroy the righteous, or will the righteousness of the righteous save the wicked? Which is more decisive: righteousness or wickedness? And so, he asks, “*if there are 50, would you not preserve the city because of them?*” God responds and is happy to go along with Abraham’s negotiations (as though in a middle eastern bazaar). He ends up going all the way down to 10. Maybe he stops there because this would be the number of Lot’s family, but this is not explicitly stated.

I think it has to be said that Abraham would already know, just as we do, that many times, especially in wars and various calamities, the righteous do in fact suffer with the wicked. This lesson, this counsel, is looking beyond a particular situation to the far deeper question of whether the righteous have ultimate protection from the judgment to be brought eternally upon the wicked. And this is why Paul could say, “*If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*” (Rom 8:31-32).

Goodness is More Influential than Evil – Here is an application of wisdom and the way of this world under Christ. And prayer, or entering the counsel of God, is His invitation to us to bring it forth. This is why we are instructed to pray, “*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done...*” That is giving counsel in the Situation Room. Elijah was a man like us (James 5:16-18). This is not an invitation to treat prayer like coins for a vending machine. But maybe our ditch (with our materialist mindset) is to pray with no expectation of change, which would be to say, with no faith.

Posture of Prayer – We are to come to Him in prayer because He has commanded it and invited us to do so. He wants us to persist and gives us examples and stories to teach us (Luke 11:5:13, 18:1ff). And yet it is that we come with humility, (Gen 18:27) and also with boldness (Heb 4:16). We come to Him as a friend who cares for our needs (1 Pet 5:7).

Pray for the Unconverted – You cannot know the secret things of God, yet you are invited into the Situation Room to plead for any unconverted individual, or city, or generation, and to have no embarrassment doing so. As you do, you cannot know the predeterminate purpose of God, yet He would have you tell Him your hearts desire for them (Rom 10:1). And if prayer and other means used by God to bring salvation to others, you can rest assured that your prayers change the world.

Would You Destroy the Righteous with the Wicked? – That question is answered in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. His is the substitutionary power of righteousness. The Righteous Christ became sin on the cross, bearing our wickedness, and bore the full brunt of God's holy judgment and wrath. Righteousness was robed in horror with the mass of our corruption and then hung as God's cursed (Gal 3:13). Righteousness died with wickedness. But He did so that we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:21). Righteousness won. Righteousness wins. Righteousness is winning. Righteousness will win.

So, take heart as well. There is no sin that will not be fully and completely judged, no wrong not finally and eternally vindicated. There will be no shameful act gone unnoticed by God. On that Final Day in the Resurrection and before the Judgment Seat of God, every sin will either be declared to be fully covered in the Atonement of Jesus Christ or it will be justly reckoned upon the sinner who refused to believe on Jesus for his salvation, forgiveness, and eternal life, who will then fall under God's eternal judgment.