

Genesis 18:20 - 32
Psalm 138

Interceding for Others
1 Timothy 2:1-7

A sermon preached by Emma Hodge on 27th July 2025
at St. Michael and All Angels Church, Sandhurst

May the words of my lips and the thoughts and meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight O Lord our strength and our Redeemer.

Today's Old Testament reading is a conversation between Abraham and God, about two cities, Sodom and Gomorrah. Just before our reading, Abraham and Sarah had been visited by three angelic visitors described as men, who, after giving their message to Abraham and receiving hospitality from them left and departed towards Sodom.

Sodom and Gomorrah were known for being cities that a lot of people avoided and the cities were known for, among other things, sexual violence as well as not following God's commandments. The reading tonight is the part of the story, where God decides that the cities have become so wicked they need to be destroyed because people had been crying out to God in prayer about them.

We don't know who had been calling out to God in prayer about these places, we don't know how long they had been praying for the cities, but we do know that there were people who were so concerned about Sodom and Gomorrah that they cried out to God in Prayer. God heard the prayers and was preparing to act

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after first reviewing the evidence in person (via the angelic visitors).

We don't know what people hoped for when they prayed to God in prayer, but it may not have been the destruction of the cities! However, that was God's plan.

God tells Abraham his plan, the plan to destroy the cities, and Abraham is concerned, Abraham knew that there were a few people in the cities who were good and kept the Lord's commands so why should they suffer?

Abraham listens to God and then barter with God

What about if there were

50 righteous people

Or how about 45

Well it goes on for 6 times until the number is down to 10 righteous people. Finally the bartering ends

This haggling or bartering is not common practice to us, but in Abraham's culture, haggling and bartering were standard practice, so this exchange may not be as strange as it first seems to us, but to Abraham, it would have been part of everyday life for the majority of people where as today while people in business

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often do negotiate and come to an agreed cost, it is limited in it's scope and role. But for Abraham and the people it was in every aspect of their lives.

Abraham is concerned about both the righteous people in Sodom & Gomorrah, he has compassion for them, his concern that the righteous people should not suffer the same fate as the wicked people.

It is worth noting here that Abraham does not say that the destruction of the cities is wrong, nor that wicked people shouldn't be punished, all Abraham is asking for the righteous to be spared from the same fate as those committing sin. Abraham is asking for justice. Justice includes not punishing the innocent. Abraham showed compassion to those who would suffer needlessly.

We see this same compassion in news reports today, the outrage when civilian targets, especially hospitals and schools suffer because of bombings in war torn countries, for example in June the Soroka hospital in Israel bombed, and this month the Kharkiv maternity hospital in Ukraine was attacked. These attacks made headline news across the world due to the fact that the attacks focussed on targets which have a high proportion of innocent or righteous people, newborn babies for example and the outcry from these attacks is typically very high. This week the starvation of

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children in Gaza hit our headlines and again our collective compassion was high.

We see reports of people standing with others crying out to those in power, including governments about needless suffering. The situation in Gaza is just one recent example that is making headlines this week where people on both sides have protested.

Abraham is also worried about God's reputation, Abraham reminds God of his destruction after the flood of Noah, about the destruction of the tower of Babel. Abraham didn't want God to become the party where He is blamed for events when they go wrong "blame game"

It is only this week that that both Israel and the UN have blamed each other for the humanitarian aid getting through to Gaza and it is very hard to know what the truth is and the actual situation as we are removed.

Abraham's compassion for other people, and his respect and love of God become clear. Abraham appeals to God for Justice.

God's justice to his righteous people is shown, it's why he allows Abraham to continue haggling, he knows what has to happen to solve the wickedness of Sodom

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and Gomorrah. Neither God nor Abraham wanted righteous people to suffer needlessly, the sense

Spoiler alert – there are not 10 righteous people in Sodom & Gomorrah! God will destroy the cities – read all about it in Chapter 19! The destruction happened and the cities are no longer standing, they weren't rebuilt.

So, what can we learn from this passage.

Firstly,

God hears us when we cry to him. The outcome may not be what we would expect but he does hear us. He heard the cry of people about Sodom and Gomorrah, and he heard Abraham's plea for Justice for those who didn't abandon God, for those who were righteous.

It is not just Abraham who knew that God would hear him, tonight's Psalm, had in verse 3 has these words ³***When I called upon thee, thou heardest me and enduedst my soul with much strength.***

The psalmist knew that when people cry to God, we are heard and are answered. The psalm is a prayer of thanks, and it acknowledges that God is in charge, he listens to us and that he cares for us, the lowly. It goes onto say how by raising our concerns to God we are

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strengthened and that even when everything seems impossible, there is hope and that hope is God.

It is this certainty that people throughout the ages know that God hears us when we speak to him. Our service tonight had this line **“and mercifully hear us when we call upon thee”**. When you sang or heard that, do you believe that God does hear us when we pray?

God may not answer our prayers the way we expect them,

Did the people who had cried out to God for Sodom and Gomorrah expect God’s wrath and destruction of the cities?

When we pray, we know that God will hear us, if any doubt look at this story, God hears our prayers, he hears us when we cry to him.

Secondly,

We need to be concerned about people and places in the world and just like Abraham stand with those who are suffering needlessly.

The letter to Timothy encouraged us to make prayers, supplications and intercessions to God for people.

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Praying for cities and places is still done this day, regularly at morning prayer we pray for people living in countries under brutal and intolerant regimes such as Afghanistan as well as for cities and countries torn apart by war and natural disaster such as Israel, and Gaza in the sure knowledge that God hears our prayers.

It's a small way to stand with people and doesn't take long each day only a few moments but we are following in the tradition of crying out to God for justice for the people and places who are suffering.

Amen