

Unaware

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[0 : 0 0] This morning we're continuing on in our series in the life of Abraham. This morning we come to a really hard part of Abraham's life.

! Not hard because it is tough on Abraham,! But hard because of the topics that are set before us. So if you have a Bible or a bulletin, turn with me to Genesis 18.

And we're studying the life of Abraham. I'm sure as Matthew has told us, because where does the first place that Paul looks to when he needs an example?

An example of faithfulness to God? An example of a well-ordered life? A striving after holiness? He looks to Abraham. So this morning we look to Abraham in Genesis 18.

Starting in verse 16. I will bless her. Oh, excuse me. Started in 18. There we go. Or 1816.

[1 : 0 5] Goodness. Then the men set out from there, and they looked down towards Sodom. And Abraham went with them to set them on their way. And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham what I'm about to do?

And seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him. For I've chosen him that he might 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 to Abraham what he has promised him.

And then the Lord said, Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and their sin is very grave, I will go down and see whether they have done altogether, and according to the outcry that has come to me.

And if not, I will know. So the men turned from there and went towards Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the Lord. Then Abraham drew near and said, Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?

Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked.

[2 : 2 0] Far be that from you. Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just? And the Lord said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake.

And Abraham answered and said, Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. I who am but dust and ashes, suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking. Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?

And he said, I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there. Again, he spoke to him and said, Suppose forty are found there. And he answered, For the sake of forty, I will not do it. And then he said, Oh, let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak.

Suppose thirty are found there. And he answered, I will not do it if I find thirty there. And he said, Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there. And he answered, For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it.

And then he said, Oh, let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there. And he answered, For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.

[3 : 26] And the Lord went his way, and he had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place. Let's pray. Lord, we're thankful for your word. We ask that you might use it in our lives to show us your glory, to show us more of yourself and more of who you are.

We ask that you might use it in this way. And Father, that you might use your spirit to show us our need of Christ. And we pray this in his name.

Amen. During college, I worked odd jobs. I worked in construction. I'm not very skilled in construction, even to this day.

Well, maybe more skilled than most, but not compared to my college roommate. In summer, during the summers of college, he worked at NASA on the Hubble telescope.

I work construction, and he worked at NASA. And it was during this time period, he came to visit me at my home in North Carolina from Washington, D.C. And when he did, he told me this story about how he went out with all his new work friends, scientists, engineers, summer interns, all went out to eat dinner, or what he thought.

[4 : 40] They were going out to a restaurant to eat dinner. In fact, where they ended up was at a nightclub. He was shocked. That's not his scene. That's not necessarily what you think of the scene for NASA employees.

My friend was out of place. He might be a good dancer. I'm not going to give him that credit publicly. But he's a rural kid from South Georgia, living in Washington, D.C., working at NASA, doing these very important engineering projects, and here he is at a nightclub.

He felt really out of place until a song came on. And everyone in the nightclub set up in a frenzy, in a terror, and they all started doing this coordinated dance.

And my roommate had no idea what the song was and still doesn't know to this day, but he knew the dance. And the dance was the Father Abraham dance. I'm sure there are many in here by Chuckles.

You're familiar with the song, you know, the hit song surrounding our main character today where kids are reminded of the promises of God. And that song has an accompanying dance.

[5 : 49] So not only does the title betray the great theological truth of Abraham that he is the father of many nations, but this dance helped kids remember and adults to this day remember what the dance is.

And so I didn't learn it as a kid so I'm not going to do it for you because I can't. Ha, gotcha. But here is my friend as a college student working at the pinnacle of engineering with a bunch of NASA scientists doing the Father Abraham dance.

He's dancing his heart out to the promises that God made to Abraham in the midst of a nightclub, in the midst of everything the world could display.

Success, fame, fortune, scientific achievement, opulence of a nightclub all while doing the picture of the Father Abraham dance.

What a picture of contrast. God's promises against the world and in many respects at the same time in this nightclub. A picture of contrast.

[6 : 56] A similar contrast occurs to us when we read this story today. Immediately our minds will bypass this story and go straight to what we know or what we know of of Sodom in chapter 19.

We think of judgment. We think of the sin of people of Sodom. And yes, we're going to get there. We're going to do it next week. But this week, we know it's bad. We know it's so bad that Sodom and Gomorrah, that term has even carried through to our modern day of their great sin.

But that's not the only picture that we have in Genesis 18. And if we go too quickly by Genesis 18, we miss this contrast that we see.

This contrast of judgment against sin and God's mercy in the process. It's a picture of God's judgment, yes. It is not less than that, but it's so much more.

It's God's promises on display. Promises of mercy. So the story of Sodom this morning is a story of judgment and mercy. But it's done in contrast.

[8 : 03] And as we look at that this morning, we're going to see this in two kind of chunks. They're two conversations. Really, they're really just two more rounds of the same conversation that we heard last week.

But they're very different topics and they're very different takeaways. Instead of being about Abraham and Sarah and this promise of a child or disbelief or unbelief, this morning, it's about those people over there.

Those people down the road. So this morning, let's turn our attention to verse 16 and that first conversation or that first rounds of conversation. As we look at that, let's look at those characters and then what they actually talk about and then how do we feel walking away from overhearing this conversation.

First, the characters. The characters are the same in many respects as what we heard last week. Again, it's another round of this continuing conversation. We've just kind of shifted topics and as they do so, we're met again with a little bit of clarity of who these shadowy, otherworldly figures are.

We know that we have Abraham talking or listening and asking questions later and we know that we have the Lord talking but there is still some mystery about who they are and that's intentional.

[9 : 22] So those are the characters that we see this morning and then we get a little interesting insight into their conversation. Look at verses 17 and following with me.

the Lord said, shall I hide from Abraham what I'm about to do and continuing in 18 seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him.

That's kind of the start of the content of this conversation. they look down towards Sodom and 16 and there's this promise that they're going to set out from there and they're going to go down.

But then as those figures kind of separate we get the content of this conversation and the content starts with this promise to Abraham. It's that promise that you dance around to in the song Father Abraham that God has promised even against the backdrop of God's justice towards Sodom to be faithful to Abraham and in doing so he's going to make him great.

That's where we're going. But you say how do we know that this conversation though is about judgment because he hasn't come out and said it yet but we can almost feel this like weighty cloud about what's going on.

[10 : 41] It's ominous just like these rain clouds that we see come across the mountains. We know that it's coming we can feel it but the rain hasn't fallen yet. We can feel something is casting a shadow over it or as the kids say there's a vibe about it.

There's a vibe that's not really good and we know that from that early conversation there's this discussion among these characters that they're counseling together.

We have these shadowy otherworldly figures angelic than the Lord and they're talking Abraham doesn't know yet. We see that from 17. The Lord says he's talking about Abraham and Abraham isn't party to this.

We see other relationships like this right before God's about to do something big in terms of justice. Think about Abraham or Jeremiah we have that same scene so that's what sets up the vibe of judgment.

Now this backdrop of judgment isn't actually in the content of the conversation yet but it will be but we have this promise it's a reiteration of the promises that we already have heard about in the life of Abraham promises that God is going to lavish his love upon him not because Abraham's that great in fact he's at this point and in many points thereafter he's kind of a knucklehead Abraham is loved by God is given these promises not because he's smart not because he's important not even because he does the right thing he's given these promises because of God's love that should be an encouragement to us against the backdrop of this world we can see the ominous judgment that's coming for in this world we see things that aren't right we know that they're wrong we know that they're sin we might feel like we're in the modern day

[12 : 48] Sodom but God has promised to lavish love on us the promises of God are held forth to us not because of who we are not because we're smart not because we're important and not even because we do the right thing but because of God just like Abraham now if that idea sounds quaint like a platitude like kind of bless your heart I'll pray for you kind of attitude you could walk away from that and think that until you hear how God reiterates these promises we have this promise from Genesis 17 but here it seems very similar but there's some reordering of words to emphasize the power God makes these promises and doesn't say take that and walk away he says I'm going to give you this and I'm going to bring it about and he's going to do that mightily this promise comes with power how do we see that it's because the reorientation of this promise of 17 what does he promise back then descendants his family is going to be great and do this do circumcision all the families of the earth would be blessed but here unlike in chapter 12 he says all the nations of this earth are going to be blessed through you

God is saying lest you be confused I'm coming with power not just bless your heart I'm going to pray for you but I am going to bring this about and so as we survey all this opulence of all these nations who are doing wrong things I'm going to come with power and I'm going to judge them now you might be saying smarty pants families nations that's kind of the same thing it is and it isn't especially in context of this where earlier he's held up all these kings especially that of Sodom and said I'm going to use Abraham a nobody and I'm going to display my power but why now what has happened why is he doing this right now why is he reorienting this promise and smashing up this other promise of Genesis 17 that you're going to have all these descendants and you're going to give them my sign that is circumcision he doesn't say that here in terms of sign he says something different he says it in verse 19 for

I've chosen him 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 Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him not do the sign yes that is a sign of obedience he's pulling forth and saying walk in holiness because in contrast to Sodom Abraham's family as he instructs them and points them back to these promises of God are to be faithful and to strive after holiness and he's going to do it in these huge two huge big promises to Abraham one that comes with power to make him rule over nations that his family is going to bless these other families of the earth and rule over these nations and to give them his family the sign of circumcision and to walk in obedience that's a promise but it's not even new to

Abraham at this point you might be thinking I thought this was about judgment it is about judgment we're getting there but we're beginning where God begins! He begins with the promise and then goes to judgment it's a preface of what will to come if we're thinking about where's the happy ending to the story we're going to be left wanting because the happiness and joy and comfort we've already gone over it's God's power in walking in holiness and then it just goes bad from there read with me in verses 20 through 22 then the Lord said because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great their sin is very grave I will go down to see whether they have done all together according to the outcry that has come to me and if not I will know go to verse 22 in a second their sin is great it's so great that it must be dealt with in that moment just like when the

Lord said to Cain after he asked where his brother was and he had murdered him what the rocks cry out the blood is crying out to me from the ground the rocks cry out in Israel testifying the picture is here that the Lord must do something their wickedness had grown to a level that he can't do anything it was required now the time is now but even in that there's a certain degree of forbearance a certain degree of patience because what is the response in verses 21 I will go down and see whether they have done all together according to the outcry he already knows but he says I'm going to go down it's part of his nature to be slow to anger now does God need to see did he not already know of course he did but it's part of his nature and if he didn't he would cease to be

[18 : 38] God if he didn't hold them accountable for his sin and he also wasn't slow to anger as we were reminded this in his justice he shows patience there's a very famous theologian that said God likes to wait until sinners are mature in their crime Sodom is mature in their crime because we know this isn't the first place this has happened and we'll see that in a minute this is a story though that might sound familiar this theme of great wickedness God judging and then holding forth promises it's a story that we know from the rest of scripture it's a story that we can see in the image of something called a Russian doll does anybody know what those are those wooden dolls or stacking dolls those little guys or they're gals most of the time they fit inside each other and they're kind of egg shaped or almost figure eight shaped and you twist them apart and there's one inside of that times they can all be uniform or they can all be kind of slightly different going all the way down to a little baby and in those stacking dolls they're all in the same form even when they're painted a little differently they're the same design the same style and as you unlock them they look the same in the shape shape and form this story has variations but it's in the same form it's in the same design it's in the same shape of stories that we know already think of

Noah what's held forth in the flood God brings judgment universal destruction almost except for one guy who holds who clings to God's promises a picture of faithfulness and as he does that we see God's judgment against sin but we see the reminder of the rainbow of God's deliverance against judgment against sin it's the same shape it's the same design as what we see in this story God's judgment against sin one man in his faithfulness Abraham and one person will see in a second his faithfulness at the same time God's judgment is on display and is preserving his people and holding forth the promises that God has made it's a different scale yes but that promise of redemption!

His covenant to his people are still there it's ominous because we know what happens in the flood that's the value in having the same design now critical come and say hey look it's just the same story some editor came back and added this in changed the characters around and see it's just the same story but instead when the author does this he's communicating the meaning of the story he's saying you know the story of the flood and what will come look what's about to happen to Sodom look at Abraham that's what he's using and that's what he's communicating now you might be thinking why in the whole life of Abraham are we focusing so much on what this 24 hour period after all one commentator wrote this there's no other 24 hour period in Abraham's life that is related more fully than what's described in Genesis 18 got it yeah a midday lunch with angels transitions into the destruction of a full city the next morning that's pretty action packed zeroing in because it mirrors what happens in

Noah to communicate God's judgment against sin and his faithfulness to his promises even in one man even in one family so what are we to make of this story we can't bypass the signal back to Noah the serious nature of sin that when we sin it pervades all of life whether it's all of humanity and God destroys humanity through the flood except for one family or God destroys all one city all one town because their sin is great in that we see that God desires and demands holiness you might be thinking phew I know that Sodom still exists because I can look out the window and see it outside my door and thankfully that's them and not me I know this story is true because I can watch the news and

I interact with my neighbor that's out there but the reality is all those things of Sodom are also in here the pervasive nature of sin goes on in our own hearts that it goes in every direction and it goes finally completely and it goes all the way down to even my own core and that we should feel the weight of that Ezekiel warns Israel later that Sodom just didn't end up in chapter 19 that there were baby steps all along the way little things led to bigger things and behold he says your sister Sodom she and her daughters had pride excess of food ease they didn't aid the poor and needy sin starts small and then grows and festers and then we get the

[24 : 34] Sodom where God can do only but one thing and that's judge but if that lives not just out there but also in here we should be warned with that internally that first conversation is about judgment God holds forth these promises and reminds his people of these promises but then says hey this is coming judgment is coming to Sodom but that third round of that conversation or the second round this morning is one about mercy look with me at verse 22 so the men turned from there and went towards Sodom and Abraham stood before the Lord there's some clarity as these shadowy figures depart we know that they're going about their business or angelic business because of Sodom's sin and Abraham is left before the Lord and now begins this conversation that

Abraham and the Lord have and what does he do he pleads on behalf of Sodom now let's pause there for a second why in the world is Abraham pleading for Sodom they're not his people he doesn't live there why does he care about Sodom now if you remember as Abraham and Lot depart who goes to Sodom Lot Abraham's family his blood that's his connection he's pleading for Sodom because that's where Lot is and if you remember they've taken different paths and as they did so even back when they departed from each other we knew Sodom was bad Genesis 13 reminds us of this the men of Sodom were wicked great sinners against the Lord Abraham cares because Lot is there and this is why he asked in verse 23 Abraham draws near and says will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked he appeals to the very nature of

God saying hey you are merciful and slow to anger abounding in steadfast love as Moses will plead later why are you going to wipe away Lot and his family he never says Lot's name and he never makes that request but that's what's going on and then we have these cycles starts with 50 and he goes all the way down to 10 and he keeps!

and he's pleading for it and we see little glimpses of Abraham being very sure and then less sure because he doesn't want to be annoying it's not like Job's friends that say these things but they're actually wrong Abraham stands before God and pleads for another because he knows God is merciful this conversation is about mercy it's not necessarily about saving Sodom it's saving Lot look with me at the end of verse 25 far be it from you to do such a thing to put righteous to death with the wicked so that the righteous fair is the wicked far be that from you shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just he's appealing to God's sense of judgment because even in that he has to hold he in his being and who he desire for all his people to walk in holiness to do what is right for him to execute judgment because he can't stand the sin of

Sodom and also being merciful to his people he can't kill a lot because he's righteous and Abraham's appealing to that and saying would you kill him too would you do that and so that's why we have later these commands to normal human judges in Israel they have to decide between truth and error why can God now just execute judgment regardless of truth regardless of error if he requires that of civilian judges of mere mortal judges how would he not do that on himself and we see these cycles get further in number starting in 26 I find 50 that are righteous in the city and then what about if they're 45 what about 40 what about 30 what about 20 what about 10 Abraham is seeing all the more clearly

[29 : 07] God's holiness and his justice but he still pleads for compassion because there is a lot Israel's prophets do this but it's for their own people people like Ezekiel Jeremiah Ezra they plead before the Lord asking for this but these are the people that have done great wickedness he's asking for mercy on people that are not God's people and they had long been known to be wicked now the question might arise in our minds is Abraham being disrespectful if you remember in verse 21 God says I'm going to go down and see we see a glimmer of that mercy of that patience with sin mercy is in the nature of God and this conversation just shows us God is not angered by

Abraham's request Abraham is loved by God and Abraham speaks to him but God is not changing his mind if you will he's doing this so that Abraham sees this and Abraham will instruct his children as we're reminded he didn't have to go down and see what was happening in Sodom he didn't have to hear the request of Abraham he knows Lot is there but we see that picture of intimacy that Abraham has with God there's hope in this mercy but as this conversation wraps up there's that looming picture of judgment against sin it's tragic it's not a story of disbelief or unbelief of Abraham not doing the right thing Sarah not believing that God could bless them with children it's the great wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah now I mentioned when we started this this was a picture of contrast of

God's judgment and God's mercy their sin is great and we hear the pleas for God's mercy that Abraham makes on behalf of Lot and really on behalf of these people our sin if we dare to even call it sin needs great mercy the anger of God's wrath is kindled against us and satisfied in the cross that's merciful but in that we see a picture of mercy and of justice and just like in the flood we're reminded of God's promises to us because we've each sinned and broken God's law and we're in need of a redeemer and it's held forth to us and the mercy that we're shown is Christ himself giving himself on the cross we're offered that rescue from sin rescue from the waters of destruction or rescue from destruction of

Sodom because their wickedness is great because our wickedness is great it's in here and not simply out there and we're offered mercy in the person and work of Jesus this morning for honest with this story this model that we've seen this design of destruction and grace and mercy this story leaves us kind of want and hoping and wishing it doesn't end on a high note or a promising note it's because that this is not the end of the story it should want us we should leave wanting something more and we should want the hope of the mercy that's offered in the form of Jesus because Sodom's wickedness is great there's a day that mercy will come come quickly Lord Jesus let's pray

Lord we're reminded this morning of the great sin that's on display for us in the lives of your saints and even in the lives of those that surround your people like Abraham we pray that we might be stirred in our consciences to see even our great need of a savior and father as we look at the life of Abraham we would see his pleas for mercy and father those pleas would become our own and we ask this in Christ's name amen and I