

16. Intercessor

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A businessman who needed millions of dollars to clinch an important contract went to church to pray for the fund. By chance he knelt next to a man who was praying for \$100 to pay an urgent debt. The businessman took out his wallet and pressed \$100 into the other man's hand. Overjoyed, the man got up and left the church.

The businessman then closed his eyes and prayed, "And now, Lord, that I have your undivided attention...."

If I wanted to make any Christian to squirm, I could ask that person if he or she is praying enough to the Lord. Somehow we all feel that we must pray long hours with flowery words. Otherwise, we think that God wouldn't hear our prayers. Addition to that, most of the time our prayers limit to "Give me this, let me have that."

Among prayers, one of the most important ones is intercessory prayer. It is a prayer or petition to God on behalf of others, not ourselves. Sometimes we know exactly what we should pray for, but sometimes we don't know what we should pray for that person. Guess what? When that happens, the Holy Spirit intercede for us.

Romans 8:26-27 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. 27 Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

A. THREE VISITORS

Genesis 18:1-5 Then the Lord appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. 2 So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, 3 and said, "My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant. 4 Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. 5 And I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts. After that you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to your servant." They said, "Do as you have said."

Here again, the Lord came to Abraham in human appearance for the fifth times. This is another presentation of Jesus in human form before His incarnation.

We don't know if Abraham immediately recognized who these visitors were. Although the Lord appeared to Abraham twice before, we don't know if Jesus looked the same each time, or if Abraham could just know who this was.

Abraham is given a special title "the friend of God" in 2 Chronicles 20:7, Isaiah 41:8 and James 2:23. He is the only person in the Bible to have it. But Jesus called Lazarus His friend in John 11:11, and He calls "friends" all who believe on Him and obey Him in John 15:13-15.

B. ENTERTAINING STRANGERS

Genesis 18:6-8 So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes." 7 And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, and he hastened to prepare it. 8 So he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate.

Abraham spares no pains to make Christ feel at home.

Ephesians 3:17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

What Paul means here is that Christ may settle down and feel at home in our hearts. How important it is for the Christian to make Christ feel at home! Our Lord yearns to spend time with us and have communion with us, if only we let Him. We make ourselves far too busy for that.

All ministry must first be to the Lord. Because if we fail to be a blessing to the Lord, we will never be a blessing to others.

Colossians 3:23-24 And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.

To begin with, Abraham served the Lord personally. Remember, Abraham was ninety-nine years old and a wealthy man, and he could have entrusted this task to his chief steward or one of his more than 300 servants. Instead, he decided to minister to his Lord personally.

Let me ask you this: When was the last time you serve and minister to the God with such a zeal and excitement from your hearts? Have your service to the Lord become mundane and humdrum, business-as-usual? It shouldn't be. Because our God deserves our best.

For those who are not serving the Lord in this church or any other ministries, I will tell you simply this: If you are not serving the Lord and His people, you are cheating yourselves from the blessings of God that He has stored for you. Serve Him, you will be blessed.

C. DID NOT, DID TOO

Genesis 18:9-15 Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" So he said, "Here, in the tent." 10 And He said, "I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son." (Sarah was listening in the tent door which was behind him.) 11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. 12 Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" 13 And the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?' 14 Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son." 15 But Sarah denied it, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh!"

You can sum up this portion of the Scripture in four words: "Did not. Did too" between the Lord and Sarah.

Significantly, having a child of their own was what Abraham and Sarah most wanted all their lives. Yet, they find it so hard to believe God's promise when He says He will grant it to them.

It is a strange character of us to believe God's promise for a long, long, time, and endure through much discouragement along the way, until the promise is almost there, and then we find doubt. We are grateful that God is greater than our doubts.

Of course, whenever we doubt God, we are questioning both His integrity and ability. Does He keep His promises? Does He have the power to do what He says He will do? The answer to both questions is ABSOLUTE YES!

Romans 4:20 He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, 21 and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.

If God makes a promise, we can be sure He has the power to fulfill it. And He will remain faithful even if we are faithless.

D. GOD'S CONFIDENCE IN ABRAHAM

Genesis 18:16-22 Then the men rose from there and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on the way. 17 And the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, 18 since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? 19 For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him." 20 And the Lord said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, 21 I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know." 22 Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the Lord.

Abraham being a good host walked out with his guests. Some ladies talk more after they say, "Bye" to each others. In meanwhile, their husband stand around and wait for them to finish their conversation which last about 50 minutes in average.

Because of what God would bring from Abraham and because Abraham had to be a great leader, God will reveal to Abraham what He will do with Sodom and Gomorrah.

This point is vital. God's purpose in this is not "gossip" with Abraham about what He will do, nor is it to satisfy Abraham's curiosity. God wanted to do something in Abraham's life through what He will reveal to him.

Abraham belonged to that select company of God's people known as intercessors, individuals like Moses, Samuel, Elijah, Jeremiah, the apostles, and our Lord Jesus Himself. In fact, our Lord's ministry today in heaven is a ministry of intercession. So we are never more like our Lord than when we are interceding for others. It is not enough for us to be a blessing to our Lord and our home, we must also seek to win a lost world and bring sinners to the Savior and pray for fellow believers.

E. ABRAHAM, THE INTERCESSOR

Genesis 18:23-33 And Abraham came near and said, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? 24 Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it? 25 Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" 26 So the Lord said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes." 27 Then Abraham answered and said, "Indeed now, I who am but dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: 28 Suppose there were five less than the fifty righteous; would You destroy all of the city for lack of five?" So He said, "If I find there forty-five, I will not destroy it." 29 And he spoke to Him yet again and said, "Suppose there should be forty found there?" So He said, "I will not do it for the sake of forty." 30 Then he said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Suppose thirty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." 31 And he said, "Indeed now, I have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: Suppose twenty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of twenty." 32 Then he said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak but once more: Suppose ten should be found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of ten." 33 So the Lord went His way as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.

Abraham's prayer was based not on the mercy of God but on the justice of God. A just and holy God could not and would not destroy righteous believers with wicked ones.

The sudden destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is used in Scripture as an example of God's righteous judgment on sinners, and Jesus used it as a warning for people in the end times. But why would Abraham want God to spare such wicked people? It seems that far better that they should be wiped off from the face of the earth. Of course, Abraham's first concern was for Lot and his family.

In fact, Abraham had already rescued the people of Sodom solely because of Lot, though none of the citizens seemed to appreciate what he had done for them. Because they all went right back into the old way of life and did not heed the warning of God.

But even apart from Lot's situation, Abraham did not want to see all those people die and be lost forever.

Ezekiel 33:11 Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?' 2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Out of this conversation between God and Abraham, we can learn a valuable lesson about the principles of 'intercessory prayer.' We will talk about it at the end of this study.

It is a privilege of the Christian that we can communicate with God through prayer. The aim of prayer is not to force God's hand or make Him do our will against His own, but to deepen our knowledge of Him and our fellowship with Him through contemplating His glory, confessing our dependence and need, and consciously embracing His goals. Our petition must be according to God's will and in Jesus' name.

Abraham was thinking that there should be at least ten righteous people in the city of Sodom. But there were not after all.

Do you know that the Great Tribulation Period cannot come as long as the church is in the world? It just cannot come, because Christ bore our judgment, and the great tribulation is part of the judgment that is coming. The current world is becoming more and more like Sodom and Gomorrah. Ruth Bell Graham, Billy Graham's wife commented, "If God doesn't judge America, He owes an apology to Sodom and Gomorrah."

God will judge this world and non-believers. Before He does that, He will come and take all the believers out of the world. No one knows when He will come. He will come for sure. You'd better be ready.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) Intercessors must draw near to the Lord.

As we see in v23, Abraham came near to the Lord. Effective intercession is a matter of drawing near to God so that we can pray according to His will.

2) Intercessors must have compassionate hearts and a deep concern for others.

The issue is not what kind of sins people commit, though some sins are certainly worse than others, but that the wages of sin is death and beyond that death is an eternal hell.

Some of intercessory prayers don't involve prayers for someone who is in sin, but help. When we have compassionate hearts and concern for other, it is a lot easier to get involved in prayers on behalf of them.

3) Intercessors must have bold humility.

Intercessors should not be proud or arrogant before the Lord, but continuously plea to the Lord for others.

This is the kind of heart God wanted to draw out of Abraham – a heart that cared so much for people made in the image of God that he worked hard to intercede on behalf of a city that deserved judgment. This was the heart a great leader of a great and mighty nation needed to have.