“Will the Judge of All the Earth Do Right?”

– A Question of Justice, A Revelation of Grace

Genesis 18:16-33

INTRODUCTION

Immanuel Baptist Church is a strategically SMALLL Church committed to excellence in worship and discipleship, all for the glory of God. This is our identity, our mission, and our purpose. But if we are honest, lost people don’t care about any of this. Our friends and neighbors have their own interests and felt needs. They “don’t have time” to think about such things. From us, as God’s representatives, they just want their questions about life and death answered, and quickly! And if they are satisfied, then they will consider a relationship with God.

This morning, we are going to read about someone who had the opportunity question God. You might be surprised by God’s answer. Turn in your Bibles to Genesis 18, this morning we will begin reading in verse 16. Please stand in reverence of reading God’s Word.

*16 When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. 17 Then the Lord said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? 18 Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. 19 For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.”*

*20 Then the Lord said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous 21 that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.”*

*22 The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the Lord. 23 Then Abraham approached him and said: “Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24 What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? 25 Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?”*

*26 The Lord said, “If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.”*

*27 Then Abraham spoke up again: “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, 28 what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five people?”*

*“If I find forty-five there,” he said, “I will not destroy it.”*

*29 Once again he spoke to him, “What if only forty are found there?”*

*He said, “For the sake of forty, I will not do it.”*

*30 Then he said, “May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?”*

*He answered, “I will not do it if I find thirty there.”*

*31 Abraham said, “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?”*

*He said, “For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it.”*

*32 Then he said, “May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?”*

*He answered, “For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.”*

*33 When the Lord had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.*

Let us pray. May the LORD add the blessings of understanding, conviction, and application to the reading of His Word. In Jesus Name I pray, Amen. You may be seated.

QUESTIONS FOR GOD

The theological implications of this conversation are staggering! The all knowing, all powerful, all holy God allows Abraham to walk with Him. Along this hike, God decides to let Abraham in on his plan of judgement. And instead of just listening intently, Abraham begins to question God’s judgement! In English, Genesis 18:22 says that Abrahm stood before the LORD. However, at better interpretation of this verse is that the LORD stood before Abraham. This is significant because in this stance, it's as if God is the accused and Abraham is the judge. Now, Abraham is a quite kind and respectful judge to God. He recognizes the enormous privilege he’s been given to question God. And he seems ready to acquit God quickly if He has a reasonable defense for killing the righteous along with the wicked. What a weird proposition!

APPLICATION

Also, what an amazing opportunity! The chance to put God on the witness stand and fire away at all the questions on your heart. And Abraham’s line of questioning is what many of us self-appointed lawyers would ask God. Listen to this question again.

*“Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked” (Genesis 18:23)*

God, will you judge the innocent and the guilty in the same way? Yes, Sodom and Gomorrah are bad, but what if there is someone in these cities who is doing the right things? Will you judge them, too?

APPLICATION

Folks, this is one of the intellectual barriers to Christianity. God’s justice seems unfair. Good people could get caught up in such sweeping actions of judgement. That’s just not right!

Abraham agrees with us. He said to God,

*“Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right? (Genesis 18:25)*

God, think about your reputation here. If good people get hurt, this will profane your name!

From there, with the zeal of a reverse auctioneer, Abraham begins to seemingly bargain with God. What if 50 righteous people are found in these cities? Will you spare them? How about 45? 40? 30? 20? 10? Will you hold back on your judgement for just 10, 10 righteous?

Now, consider this word righteous, based on the Hebrew word sadiq. It means “just in conduct and in character.” The last time it was used in Genesis was to describe Noah. Out of everyone on the planet, Noah was the one described as righteous. In that scenario, only Noah was found righteous. Therefore, the whole world was destroyed in judgement. But, here, Abraham has upped the “grace ante.” God, if there are righteous people this time, spare everyone!

How did God answer every question? Surprisingly, he agreed with Abraham! If there is a remnant of righteous people in Sodom and Gomorrah, I won’t judge them. This holy God who is just once again shows Himself to be gracious.

APPLICATION

And guess what? If we have the same question for God today, his answer will still be the same. God, what if there is someone who is found righteous? Will you spare us all? Yes, I will spare those who are wicked for the sake of the righteous, even though the wicked deserve my judgement. Now, for those of you who know the scripture, do you see the foreshadowing starting to develop? Let that sink in for a moment.

Not only do we see Abraham’s questions for God, we also see Abraham’s relationship with God.

RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Abraham’s relationship with God is unique. He was chosen to be the one whose family would be blessed and be a blessing to the nations. That role is highlighted in this conversation, for Abraham is Abraham interceding with God for others. He is standing up for cities that do not deserve such favor. He is asking God to show grace to those who don’t deserve it so that a few good men and women might not get caught in the crossfire. And God listened to this one man.

APPLICATION

As in every story, at this point we are identifying with Abraham, right? We want to be seen as the hero. We are the one pointing out disagreements. We are asking the questions. We are the one interceding for those dirty Sodomites. But guess what? You are not Abraham! And neither am I. In this story, you and I are Sodom and Gomorrah! Don’t believe me? Well, maybe you will believe Jesus. Next week, we learn that the Sodomites were immoral. Jesus said in Matthew 5 if we lust after someone, we are guilty of adultery. That means we are immoral. The Sodomites were murderers. Jesus said if you and I hate someone, we are murderers in our hearts. Folks, we aren’t the ones in the story who are righteous. We are Sodom and Gomorrah! In fact, we are not the righteous ones that Abraham is interceding for, in the hopes of not getting swept up in judgement. We are the ones who will benefit if even one is found righteous. In fact, the Bible tells us in Romans 3

*“What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. As it is written:*

*‘There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.’” (Romans 3:9-12).*

This should be the turning point for us. Many believe because we are nice people, because we say our prayers, we are the righteous ones. But none of us are righteous on our own! And, as much as it pains me to say it, if you never understand that point, there is no hope for you.

CONCLUSION

But the news is not all bad. In fact, this is a good news story today. Unfortunately, no one was really righteous in Sodom and Gomorrah. And no one is righteous here even today. But there is One who is truly righteous. He comes from the line of Abraham. And just like Father Abraham, He has a relationship with God. And He intercedes for the Sodom and Gomorrahs today. His name is Jesus. And because He was found righteous, not only in His acts, but in His very essence, every one of us can escape the judgement we so richly deserve. That is why we celebrate this ceremony that represents Him today. It is called the Lord’s Supper. In His crucifixion, he took upon Himself the world’s judgement. And he was destroyed. But because He is who He is, he rose from that destruction three days later. And ascended into heaven. And He is seated at the right hand of God right now interceding for us. And if we admit we are more like Sodom and Gomorrah and less like Abraham. If we are truly sorry for our immorality, our hatred, our pride, our sin, we can be saved from that eternal destruction waiting on those who stand on their own before a holy God.

Before any of us partake in this ceremony, we are required to examine ourselves. Have we truly embraced God’s grace offered to us through the intercession of Christ? Or are our sins still crying out to a holy God, who will one day bring His judgement? Let the Lord’s Supper remind us that today is not a day to question the Holy, Just, Gracious God. It is the day to fully accept his mercy and escape His judgement. Let us pray.

AFTER THE LORD’S SUPPER

When we accept the Son of God as the One who interceded for us, we are changed. We are now called the friends of God. We are Christians, which literally means little Christs. We can now stand before God and intercede for others. We can now boldly approach the throne of God in our time of need. And that time is now. As we leave this place today, we take on the role as intercessors. We are the salt and light for a lost world that will one day face judgement unless they embrace God’s Righteous One. Will you pray for those who are lost? Will you pray for those who wrestle with the deep questions that keep them from accepting Christ? Let’s move out today as those who intercede for others because someone interceded for us!