

So as you might have read in the weekly email, we're starting a new sermon series today called "A Beatitude Legacy," which is a follow-up series to our Summer series on the Beatitudes.

And I felt drawn to this because we spent ten weeks in the summer covering some fairly impactful verses, memorizing them and seeking to incorporate them in practical ways; and I want to make sure that we don't drop them and forget about them.

If you don't use it, you'll lose it. Kind of like learning a new language; you have to continually practice the vocabulary and use it in regular speech in order for it to stick.

And so I want to take the Fall to look at some of our ancient ancestors, our kingdom forebears, and see how their own hearts and minds were transformed or guided by the Spirit to seek God's Kingdom realities rather than the patterns and realities of the world around them.

Because these forebears foreshadow Christ. As Sally Lloyd-Jones puts it in the Jesus Storybook Bible, every story in Scripture whispers his name.

Some, of course, a bit more obviously than others. 99% percent of the Old Testament is what went wrong. The vast majority of characters are people who we probably *shouldn't* look up to.

But every story in the Old Testament whispers His name because it points towards the *need* for a savior, for deliverance, for someone to come and fix the brokenness, the issue of sin and separation from God.

And so within these ancient words, we do find the occasional story where we can think, "Hmm, that sounds like Jesus. That sounds like and looks like what Jesus said on the mountainside when he sat down with the crowds and with his disciples and began to teach them."

This looks familiar. It looks almost like a Beatitude.

So that's what we're doing—as we journey this Fall towards Advent and towards the time when we celebrate the coming of Christ. We're going to jog our memories of what Christ said.

We are going to anticipate His coming by looking at some of the characters and events that foreshadowed His coming, and specifically foreshadowed His teaching on the Kingdom-come-near. People and events who foreshadowed what the Kingdom-come-near in Jesus would look like.

People who—through the Spirit—were already-but-not-yet allowing Christ's Kingdom to break through them. To have a Beatitude impact. A Beatitude legacy to pass down and inspire all of us.

Read Genesis 18:16-33.

So just previous to this passage, we have a very significant event that happens in the life of Abraham that sets the trajectory for God's covenant with His people.

In chapter 17, the Lord calls Abraham into a covenant with Himself. And normally a covenant or a treaty between parties in the ancient near east involved lengthy conditions, conditions that both sides needed to uphold.

Well, God gives Abraham a lengthy list of all the things—not that He's requiring of Abraham—but of what *He* is planning to do *for* Abraham and for His descendants.

“As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. . . . I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”

So you would think—with such incredible promises—that the Lord would then throw everything but the kitchen sink at Abraham, ya? You have to earn all of this. Do you have a pen and paper handy, because this is going to take a while.

But no. Earlier he says to Abraham, *“Walk before me faithfully and be blameless.”*

That's it. Later he mentions the obligation of circumcision, but that's just the sign of the covenant. It was the sign of walking faithfully and blameless before God.

This is the relationship that has been fostered between the Lord and Abraham. Abraham is literally the prism through whom God is seeking to bless the nations.

So we need to then pay attention to what happens next. Will Abraham actually walk before God faithfully and blamelessly? Will this covenant survive? The Old Testament is fully of messy people, and it was no easier to pursue God faithfully then than it is today.

What happens? Well, the next scene is one where three visitors come to visit Abraham and Sarah—and the text says that this is how the Lord chose to reveal Himself.

Either way, they engage a bit with Abraham, Abraham gives them some food, they reiterate the promise that Abe and Sarah will have a son.

And then we have our passage that we read earlier, where the men get up to leave, look down towards Sodom, and the Lord's voice is heard. It's written as if it's a soliloquy, an inner monologue that no one else hears.

The Lord says to Himself, “*Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?*” Everyone’s supposed to be blessed through Abraham, He’s my chosen one, He needs to direct His household and his children in my ways *so that* I can do what I promised him and fulfill what I’ve got planned.

So then what happens? The Lord shares with Abraham what He’s intending to do. So the answer to the soliloquy is *yes*. He *does* share with Abraham what His plans are. He involves His chosen. He invites Him around the table. Abraham gets to be in the room where it happens.

Now, I can’t say this enough. *No other god does this*. The gods did not involve human beings in their plans. In most ancient near eastern creation stories, humans are only created to do the work that the gods don’t want to. They don’t actually care about you. They just want you to do what’s best for them.

But YHWH, the Lord, involves Abraham in His plans—which is to go down to Sodom and Gomorrah and check out the situation. If the evil is as bad as the outcry that He has heard, then the assumption is that God will do away with it.

Abraham knows this. And how Abraham responds is noteworthy. Beatitude worthy.

V. 23: “*Then Abraham approached him and said: ‘Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 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?’*”

What’s he doing? It sounds like he’s questioning God’s character, but he’s actually affirming it.

V. 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!*”

‘Far be it from you’ could also mean ‘this is profane.’ He’s basically saying to God that this wouldn’t be worthy of you. He can’t handle the thought of God being unjust. It wouldn’t make sense.

Because imagine if God *was* unjust? The very foundation of everything we stand on would be ripped out from under us. This just simply cannot be. It *has* to be the case that God cares more about justice than us, *and* that He takes evil more seriously than us.

See, because Abraham isn’t downplaying the evil of Sodom and Gomorrah here. It’s a terrible place. But if God is truly just, then there is no such thing as collateral damage. If God is truly merciful, then He will not let His charge against evil affect His righteous followers.

Death—the consequence of evil—will not defeat the righteous. This is an incredible comfort to us.

And you have to love Abraham's audacity here. Abraham *knows* who this God is. And he's got so much confidence in who He knows God to be that he's comfortable enough to confront Him.

But he does it such a meek and humble way, because—and here's the key—*He knows what God has done for him*.

God, you've given me promises that I could have never gained on my own. You've shown *me* mercy. You've asked me to be in right relationship with you and faithful to you.

God, there are people in this city who are righteous—as I am. They seek to be faithful to you. My own nephew, Lot, and his family are there. Be merciful *to them*, God, as you have been to me.

See, Abraham is demonstrating a poverty of spirit before God, with meekness, seeking mercy. “Be merciful, God, because *I know that's who you are*. *Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?*”

It's a rhetorical question, because of course the answer is yes. But note that earlier in v. 19, the Lord says that He's chosen Abraham so that *Abraham* will direct his children by doing what is right and just.

God wants *Abraham* to be wise in the ways of mercy and justice, to be able to judge situations with a Kingdom logic and perspective.

So who's really on trial here? Abraham is doing exactly what God has asked of him. He's opened up the space for Abraham to participate in His divine courtroom of justice, and Abraham is operating *exactly* how the Lord hoped He would. With righteousness. With mercy. With justice.

So much so that he enters into—what looks like—a bargaining match with God. What about fifty? What about forty-five? Will you take forty, or even thirty? How about twenty? Okay, final bid – what if there's only ten?

And the whole way along, God assures him that even for only ten faithful and righteous individuals, He will not destroy the city. His mercy is too great.

Now, as it turns out, there weren't even ten. And Lot and his family were the only ones delivered. But regardless of the outcome, this interaction between Abraham and God is hugely significant.

Because what does it imply? That when we come before God hungering and thirsting for righteousness, for right-relationship with Him, knowing all that He has promised to us, knowing the expansive covenant that He has made *with us* in Christ, when we come in our poverty of spirit knowing that we need Him, we can be just as bold—if not even more bold—as Abraham.

This is the legacy that Abraham has left for us. He trusted God's covenant and merciful character towards Him, and that trust translated out into mercy for others. If you have chosen *me* and can offer such wonderful promises to *me*, then surely that mercy can be offered to others as well.

It's one of the most beautiful truths about Christianity. Everywhere else in the world, in every other situation, if you are "chosen," that usually means that someone else was not.

Not in Jesus. When you see your chosenness—as Abraham did—your eyes are opened up to see the potential for chosenness in others. To see the potential for righteousness in others. To hunger and thirst for God's mercy to be extended to others and alive in situations and events today.

Think about this. What if we prayed for Ukraine and Gaza like how Abraham prays for Sodom and Gomorrah? I recently read this past week on a blog post that more than 1500 healthcare workers in Gaza have been killed since the conflict began.

And one of the comments said this: "These white-coated healers became targets in a conflict where mercy was criminalized. Their sacrifice echoes the biblical horror of Sodom: a society that attacks those who come to help."

We can hate the evil that's happening in Gaza. Sodom was a *terrible* place, and we will never even know the actual horror that it was.

Yet Abraham fought for it. Abraham fought for the righteous that were in it.

And it makes me wonder: what if we saw ourselves as invited to stand in the divine courtroom of God, around the table of justice, and—like Abraham—insert ourselves into God's inner thought process to bargain our way through His plans? To judge court cases alongside of Him?

Do we even believe that God has opened this up to us? That this is the kind of boldness and confidence of relationship that He desires of us? So that we actually hunger and thirst for deepened relationship with Him because we *can*?

So often we look at Biblical characters like Abraham as people who were God's besties without realizing that what was available to them is *even more so* available to us because of the Spirit.

The Spirit, as Gal. 4:6 puts it, who calls out from within us, "Abba, Father," something Abraham never had.

Because of the Spirit, you can have court room conversations with Jesus *all the time*. You can be seeking His council, His justice, His mercy *all the time*. He will never shun you or kick you out of his courtroom—provided of course that you come to Him with poverty of spirit and meekness.

For example, do you have members in your family, perhaps even in your own household, who do not believe? Or who have walked away from belief? *Storm the courtroom.* The same Lamb who sits on the throne in heaven is the same Lamb who sits in the Judge's bench.

I bet every single one of us—like Abraham—has a family member or friend who we regularly hold up in prayer. And Abraham's benevolent bargaining in this passage should encourage all of us to bang on the courtroom door and plead for an audience around the table with God.

What are your plans for my friends? For my family? I know how merciful you can be; will you be merciful to them? I know how powerful you are; will you demonstrate your power to them?

Will you yet save even them? Will you allow them to be a part of your grand story?

I remember, years ago, when I was doing a semester at Calvin Seminary in Grand Rapids, I attended a chapel service where a current seminary student shared a story of how persistent prayer changed the life of his family. He had been praying—he said—for *ten years* that God would break through into the lives of his parents and his siblings.

And he said this, “Don't ever underestimate the power of prayer.” Because just a few days before, he said, his sister committed her life to Jesus.

Ten years. Abraham had to wait until he was a hundred to have a son. Sometimes we might need to wait longer than we want to see God's mercy pull through. But know that you have a voice in the conversation.

Abraham's beatitude legacy is important for us to acknowledge. But we always need to remember that his legacy only points us to an even greater and bolder example.

Because of course, in Christ, we are not tasked with simply praying for the righteous, but also—just as strongly—praying for our enemies.

What did Jesus say? “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

In Christ, there is now a power unleashed—a presence, a Spirit, so overwhelmingly significant and powerful that even your greatest enemy cannot resist Him.

And if God can be merciful to the thief on the cross who hungers for Jesus in his last breath, that should signal to us that it is never too late. That no one—not matter how grave the evil they've committed—is ever beyond the mercy of God.

There's a group of pastors down in the States who recently sent a letter to President Donald Trump. Now, Trump's impact in office is complicated, but no doubt there is significant injustice happening. And decisions have been made that are causing significant harm.

The letter, which is currently circulating on social media, was fairly to-the-point. They didn't shy away from naming the issues. And of course there is only so much that a prayer letter can do. But it is *closer to* a Beatitude way than the path that many others have taken.

They write this: "Though we are among those you demonize because we disagree with you, we do not join those who pray for your demise. We cannot. We serve a God who calls us to pray for our enemies, and we have taken vows that compel us to offer pastoral care to all people – especially to those who are captive to the powers of sin, death, and the devil.

"When we say our prayers each morning, we ask God to set you free."

Can God yet be merciful? Can He yet bring transformation, and set loose His mercy?

Whatever it is that is making your heart ache today—whether it's for a family member, a friend, or a global crisis, my encouragement to you is to storm the courtroom of God. Storm it with all the bargaining chips you have.

He knows you inside and out, so don't fear Him; *revere* Him. It's a different kind of fear. A holy kind. Approach him in a poverty of spirit and converse with Him like Abraham does. This story is here for us in Scripture for a reason.

You are a part of His chosen priesthood. You are His beloved son or daughter. He has chosen you, also, so that you may direct others to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that He can bring about for *you* what He has promised in Christ.

As Micah 6:8 puts it, He has shown you what is good: to seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with Him.

Abraham did. Don't for a second think that you can't.

You too have been invited to the table.