

Genesis 18:16-33 Then the men set out from there, and they looked down toward Sodom. And Abraham went with them to set them on their way. <sup>17</sup> The Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, <sup>18</sup> seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? <sup>19</sup> For I have 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 the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him." <sup>20</sup> Then the Lord said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, <sup>21</sup> I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know."

<sup>22</sup> So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the Lord. <sup>23</sup> Then Abraham drew near and said, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? <sup>24</sup> 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? <sup>25</sup> 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! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" <sup>26</sup> And the Lord said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake." <sup>27</sup> Abraham answered and said, "Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. <sup>28</sup> 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." <sup>29</sup> Again he spoke to him and said, "Suppose forty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of forty I will not do it." <sup>30</sup> Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there." He answered, "I will not do it, if I find thirty there." <sup>31</sup> He said, "Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it." <sup>32</sup> Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it." <sup>33</sup> And the Lord went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place.

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## Announcements:

1. Baby Dedication: May 9th Email: Maegan
2. Baptism: May 16th email: me
3. Download our App / Giving

## Genesis 18:16-33 | Abraham's Intercession

Many of us hold together two contradictory thoughts. In the political and social realm we have a deep desire for justice. We have differing intuitions as to what precisely that means, but I think we'll see it is something like Abraham's intuition in our text today. That the righteous are treated in kind with their righteousness and the wicked punished. But in the spiritual realm, when we see God performing his justice, we don't meet it with a sigh of relief as the ancients did, but instead we view it as tyrannical or an archaic picture of a vengeful god to keep the masses subdued.

Justice when applied is called judgement. But we're slowly losing consciousness of the judgement of God. Ironically this isn't resulting in anarchy, much the opposite, its resulting in tyranny. We turn on one another in quests for justice, because we don't think we'll get it anywhere else.

I had planned on offering a clear deconstruction of our culture's perspectives on justice in this sermon, but instead I think it will be more beneficial to simply follow Abraham as he explores the justice of God. I promise it isn't like yours. Expect to be surprised. We'll look at the weight of God's judgement, and then we'll explore with Abraham God's justice.

## 1. The Weight of God's Judgement

Genesis 18:16-17 Then the men set out from there, and they looked down toward Sodom. And Abraham went with them to set them on their way. <sup>17</sup> The Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do,

The angelic men that Abraham had feasted with last week now set their vision down toward Sodom. Sodom is the anti-Eden. It is the place on earth in which all things are inverted and counter to God's creative designs. The Garden of Eden is a mountain, Sodom is the lowest place on earth. So the men set their sights towards Sodom because God's plans are to destroy Sodom. But God decides to let Abraham know preemptively his own intentions.

The reasons are twofold (1) Abraham's status as chosen one of God to bless the whole earth, and (2) for Abraham's offspring to understand the justice of God.

Genesis 18:19 For I have 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 the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him."

There is a parallel to this moment in the gospel of John, when Jesus tells his disciples that they are his friends. He says that he no longer calls them servants because servants don't know what their master is doing, but he shares with them everything that the father shares with him. You see here God is treating Abraham like a friend. Why does God tell Abraham his plans? Because Abraham is his friend. After Jesus shares his friendship with the disciples he reminds them that he chose them, and then invites them to pray. We see this same pattern with Abraham.

Genesis 18:20-21 Then the Lord said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, <sup>21</sup> I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know.

Notice, God is speaking in very human terms to Abraham. Does God really need to visit Sodom and take a survey to know whether or not the city ought to be destroyed? Of Course not, but his way of speaking is acting as an invitation for Abraham to engage with him. He is creating space in his description for Abraham to speak up and even question this decision. For half a beat, we wonder if Abraham will seize the opportunity.

Genesis 18:22-23 So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the Lord.  
<sup>23</sup> Then Abraham drew near and said, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?"

You can hear in his question, Abraham is beginning to experience the weight of God as transcendent law-giver and judge. Does the Christian feel any less of a weight than Abraham in this moment? We too know of a coming judgment but not just of one city, but of the whole world, Paul describes the Christian's weight of this reality.

2 Corinthians 2:15-16 For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, <sup>16</sup> to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?

Who is sufficient for these things? Imagine walking down the street and seeing everyone who lined up behind you will go to heaven, and everyone who kept walking would go to hell for eternity. Who can bear such a weight? Abraham shows us how to lean into this question in the presence of God. But it requires exploring God's justice not asserting your own.

## 2. Exploring God's Justice

Genesis 18:25 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! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?"

Here in Abraham's question we are given a sort of definition of justice itself, that the righteous should be treated in accord with their righteousness and the wicked should be treated according to their wickedness. Nobody thinks that the righteous should be treated wickedly or the wicked treated righteously. But the question is, who decides who is wicked and who is righteous? Wicked and righteous, compared to what? And the answer is likewise in this near definition of justice that Abraham provides, God is the judge of all the Earth. God himself is the standard by which justice is to be understood.

Look at how Abraham's method of argument is the perfect opposite of the person who hears of God being the judge and then says that God is wrong. In that picture, justice is held in ourselves and we push God through our grid. Abraham on the other hand, views God as the just one and starts his exploration from this understanding.

When we remove God as the one who determines who is righteous and who is wicked, then all that we have left to judge by is ourselves. Ultimately the result is always some form of tyranny. In order for us to reason with each other about justice, we must have someone outside of us who stands as judge, who is able to arbitrate equally between us irrespective of our position in the world. Abraham has such a God, and it is this God whom he explores in order to discover the reality of justice.

Genesis 18:24 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?

Notice that Abraham is not only asking on behalf of the righteous in the city, but he is actually advocating for the whole of the city to be saved on behalf of the fifty righteous. And it is an appeal to God's own righteousness to do so, that the righteous might be spared and not treated as the wicked.

Genesis 18:26 And the Lord said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake."

We've learned something here, that the Lord will spare the whole city for the sake of some righteous persons. But what is the limit. Abraham continues on, and he asks, what if there were 45, or 40, or 30, or 20, and finally 10? Each time God says that he would spare the city. Okay now this is a strange principle that Abraham has uncovered regarding the righteousness of God. It seems to operate in an extreme proportion. The righteousness of the few somehow can serve provisionally for the sparing of the many. Look this is the very character of God at the center of our justice.

Exodus 34:6-7 The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and fourth generation."

His anger towards injustice is present but slow. His mercy and steadfast love are abounding. It says he will show mercy to thousands of generations but punish iniquity only to the third or fourth. Do you see that this is not like fairness, it is far more dynamic than that. Abraham is discovering this

principle at the heart of God as he himself intercedes for the ungodly. But here is a question why does Abraham stop at ten? How far could it go? What if there was one righteous person? Would God spare the city?

Abraham had uncovered a principle, a reality of God's heart but he didn't go all the way. God himself would go all the way. He would send his only son so that through him the world might be saved. So that by faith in him the only righteous one, the whole world might be spared. Jesus is the only perfectly righteous one, and he would be treated as unrighteous so that we could be treated like we were righteous.