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Life of Abraham / Genesis 18:22–33

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## Introduction

If you study philosophy or theology long enough you will eventually come across the question of “theodicy”. Theodicy is a fancy word to address a big question. What are we to make of the presence of evil in the world? If God is good and he is in control of everything, why does He allow evil to happen.

This question has been considered by men for centuries. Ancient pagans and philosophers have wrestled with this dilemma and this question has possibly taken up more space in books of philosophy and theology than any other.

The Bible is no exception here. It asks the same question, “How can God be just and righteous if He puts the righteous to death with the wicked?”

In large part, the entire book of Job can be considered as “theodicy”. It is a vindication the goodness of God in the presence of evil and seeming injustice in the world.

When Abraham intercedes for Sodom there is something similar going on. Abraham asks God, would it be just for you to sweep away the righteous with the wicked? In essence, Abraham asks if God is going to be just?

This passage divides into two parts:

1. Verses 22-26 ask the question, “Will God ask justly?”
2. Verses 27-33 answers the question, God will be just.

## Will God Act Justly? (vv. 22-26)

In verse 22, the two angelic visitors turn and leave Abraham toward Sodom while the LORD remained.

Verse 23 states that Abraham “***Drew near and said, ‘Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?’***”

This is the question at hand. Is God going to be just regarding Sodom? Sodom has loomed on the horizon over the last several chapters of Genesis and things are coming to a head. God has told Abraham that a cry has come up from Sodom and He is going to go and inspect the

city regarding the cry. Just as the blood of Abel cried up from the ground to God after Cain murdered him, so too is the injustice and wickedness of Sodom reaching to God.

But the question is whether God is going to be wholesale in his judgement of Sodom. The language of “sweep away” recalls the language of the Flood when God swept away ungodly while preserving Noah and his family and all the animals in the Ark. In the account of the Flood it is clear that the wickedness of mankind was great **and** God raised up Noah as a prophet to warn man of the coming judgement.

But God said He would never sweep away humanity again like He did in the Flood and Abraham is asking the question, “God, are you going to sweep away the righteous with the wicked?” The question hanging in the air concerns Lot and his family. God delivered Noah from the flood of His judgement, will Lot and his household be preserved?

In verse 24 there is beginning of this unusual bargaining that carries through the end of the chapter. Abraham asks, “**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?**” Abraham restates the primary issue in verse 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?**”

If you have ever done any haggling or bargaining before you will know that there is a process involved. Typically there is a back and forth between the two parties looking to find some sort of agreement. But that is not how things go here.

In verse 26 and throughout the rest of the passage, God offers no counter-figure or negotiation to Abraham God just keeps saying yes.

God’s first response is, “**If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake.**”

When you read the Bible what you find is God is not eager to destroy or bring judgement. This is one of the reasons why it is so baffling when people have a misconception that in the Old Testament God is presented as eager to judge while the New Testament presents a merciful God.

After actual inspection, you find that God is exceedingly patient and merciful throughout the Bible. Yes, God is just and He will bring judgement upon evil. But the scriptures are very clear, God is slow to anger and quick in mercy. This is no excuse to live in sin. God’s patience and mercy is to drive us toward the forgiveness offered us in Christ and thanksgiving to God. Nonetheless, God is merciful.

Always remember that it is God who is calling you into His presence so that he can show you His mercy and grace. He does not remind you of your sins to condemn you, but in order to wash you white as snow!

# God Will Be Just (vv. 27-33)

In the second section the question of God's justice is answered. God will be just. This question is answered through Abraham's continued bargaining with God.

The course of the bargaining goes on from verses 28-32. Abraham asks if God will destroy Sodom if 45 righteous are there and God says he won't. Abraham goes from 45 to 40, from 40 to 30, from 30 to 20, and from 20 to 10. At every point God response to Abraham that He will not destroy Sodom if He finds 45, 40, 30, 20, or even 10 righteous there.

But what is most illuminating about this section are it's opening and closing verses.

On several occasions in this sermon series I have made note of the fact that Abraham is a prophet and prophets are welcomed into the council of God. But there are several things going on in our passage this morning that draw this out and expand upon it. Back in verse 23 we are told that "**Abraham drew near to God.**" This language is used throughout the rest of the Bible to describe how the priests and levites would draw near to God to offer service in the Tabernacle. Here in verse 27, Abraham says, "**Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes.**"

Abraham acknowledges that he is merely a man. In the creation account we find that Adam was made from the dust of the earth and yet Adam had communion with God in the Garden. Ever since man's expulsion from the garden, God has been setting things up to bring humanity back into His presence. One of the high points of this drama is when the Tabernacle is erected after God gives Moses the 10 Commandments. The Tabernacle made a clear way for man to commune with God.

But before the Exodus, before the giving of the Law, before the construction of the Tabernacle, we have Abraham. And with Abraham we find a man who is drawing near to God and undertaking to speak to God even though he is but dust and ashes.

I am reminded of [Psalm 8:3-4](#) as I read this passage :

## **Psalm 8:3-4 ESV**

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?

What is man that God is mindful of us. And yet He has crowned us with glory and honor. And this is why man's fall and the presence of sin and God's righteous judgement against sin is such a tragedy. God created man as the glorious capstone of His work. Yet man rebelled against God and suffers under God righteous wrath. Abraham is dealing with this as he bargains with God about Sodom. God is just to condemn man, but that was not man's destiny.

Abraham is also likely thinking of his beloved Nephew Lot who lives in Sodom. Lot is married with children who are married now. Their household is likely at least 10 persons. Abraham hopes that Lot and his family are righteous and that they can be saved through his intercession.

So Abraham intercedes for Sodom which in many ways is in line with what God has promised Abraham. God told Abraham that through him the nations would be blessed. Perhaps a blessing might be in store for Sodom through Abraham. Perhaps God will turn from His anger and leave behind a blessing.

The bargaining stops at 10 and ***the LORD went on his way***. The question after the bargaining is whether there **are** 10 righteous in the city. Is Lot righteous? What about his household? Is anyone righteous in such a manner as to avoid God's judgement. God is just, but is humanity righteous? Or is many wholly lost in sin?

The answer of course is that humanity is lost in sin and wickedness if God does not intervene and save humanity in grace. The good news of the Bible is that God does cover for humanity. God covers our sins because of the shed blood of Jesus Christ, the offspring of Abraham through whom all the nations of the earth are blessed.

## Conclusion

In conclusion I want to note a final thing. Verse 33 states that "***the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham.***" If you read through this passage it seems clear that Abraham is the one driving the conversation. But when you look closely at the first and last verses of the passage there is something interesting going on.

The two angels turn toward Sodom in verse 22 but God hangs back with Abraham. It is as though he is inviting Abraham's intercession on Sodom's behalf.

Living a life of prayer can often be discouraging. There always seem to be so many things to do and so many distractions before us and it seems like prayer doesn't do anything anyways. Besides, we often think, God is in control and He can do anything.

But the Bible presents another picture. Yes, God is in control of all things. But He often ordains that our prayers serve as the means to the ends He wishes to accomplish.

Let us be a people who commit ourselves to prayer.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN!