

Genesis 18:16-33

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.^[a] 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.^[b] 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^[c] 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.

Luke 11:1-13

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

² He said to them, "When you pray, say: "Father,^[a] hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.^[b] ³ Give us each day our daily bread. ⁴ Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.^[c] And lead us not into temptation.^[d]"

⁵ Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; ⁶ a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' ⁷ And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' ⁸ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity^[e] he will surely get up and give you as much as you need. ⁹ "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹ "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for^[f] a fish, will give him a snake instead? ¹² Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

A STATEMENT ABOUT PRAYER BY A PASTOR NAMED CHRISTIAN CHEONG CAUGHT MY EYE AS I WAS PREPARING TODAY'S MESSAGE.

HE WROTE: "PRAYER IS NOT OVERCOMING GOD'S RELUCTANCE BUT LAYING HOLD OF HIS WILLINGNESS."

THIS DESCRIPTION APPLIES TO BOTH THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT READINGS.

EACH, IN THEIR OWN WAY TEACHES US THAT GOD IS WILLING TO LISTEN TO OUR PRAYERS.

WE HEAR THAT THE LORD WELCOMES OUR INTERCESSIONS AND PERSONAL SUPPLICATIONS, AS MUCH AS OUR THANKS AND PRAISE.

THE STORY OF THE CONVERSATION BETWEEN GOD AND ABRAHAM OFFERS AN OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLE OF THIS.

HOWEVER, TO UNDERSTAND THE CONVERSATION BETTER WE NEED TO REVIEW THE EVENTS RECORDED IN GENESIS 18, WHICH HAPPENED JUST PRIOR TO TODAY'S READING.

ABRAHAM AND SARAH WERE BLESSED BY VISIT OF THE LORD AND TWO ANGELS.

THEY APPEAR IN THE FORM OF ORDINARY MEN WHO ARE TRAVELING. UPON SEEING THEM ABRAHAM IMMEDIATELY WELCOMES THEM.

HE BIDS THEM STAY AND REST WHILE HE GOES TO PREPARE A MEAL FOR THEM WITH HIS OWN HANDS, RATHER THAN HAVING HIS WIFE SARAH DO IT.

ONE OF THE MEN, WHOM ABRAHAM SOON REALIZES IS THE LORD GOD, TELLS HIM SARAH WILL IN DUE SEASON, MEANING SOON, CONCEIVE AND GIVE BIRTH TO THE SON THEY WERE PROMISED YEARS AGO.

THE READING TODAY OPENS, AFTER GOD FINISHES SPEAKING BOTH TO ABRAHAM AND SARAH, AND THE THREE CONTINUE ON THEIR WAY.

TWO OF THE THREE MEN WALK A LITTLE AHEAD, WHILE THE LORD AND ABRAHAM SPEAK.

GOD, WE HEAR, DECIDES TO LET ABRAHAM KNOW HIS PLANS FOR THE CITIES OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH.

ABRAHAM IS TOLD THAT GOD HAS BEEN HEARING SOMETHING THAT IS DEMANDING HIS ATTENTION.

THE OUTCRY, OR THE CRIES OF THOSE HURTING, BECAUSE OF THE SINFULNESS OF THE PEOPLE IN THOSE CITIES HAS REACHED GOD'S EAR.

SO, AFTER THEY LEFT ABRAHAM THE LORD SENT THE TWO ANGELS TO SODOM TO FIND OUT FIRST HAND WHAT IS GOING ON.

THE IMPLICATION IS GOD HAS ALREADY DECIDED TO DESTROY THOSE CITIES, UNLESS THE ANGELS DISCOVER THE OUTCRY AGAINST THEM HAS BEEN MISPLACED.

WHAT IS PARTICULARLY INTERESTING IS THAT WITHOUT GOD DIRECTLY PROCLAIMING THE PENDING DESTRUCTION, ABRAHAM SENSES THAT IS GOD'S PLAN.

HE THEN INTERCEDES FOR THE PEOPLE OF THOSE PLACES, IN WHAT IS OFTEN CALLED A BARGAINING SESSION WITH GOD.

NOTICE, THE LORD SHOWS NO ANGER AT ABRAHAM FOR SEEKING TO NEGOTIATE A DIFFERENT OUTCOME THAN WHAT LORD HAD PLANNED.

WE HEARD THAT ABRAHAM STOOD BEFORE THE LORD, WHICH IN THE BIBLE IMPLIES THE POSITION YOU WOULD TAKE IF YOU WERE MAKE A LEGAL PLEA.

IN OTHER WORDS, ABRAHAM IS GETTING READY TO ENGAGE IN A SERIOUS PRAYER OF INTERCESSION FOR THE CITIES.

HIS ARGUMENT AGAINST GOD'S PLAN IS BASED FIRST ON HIS RESPECT FOR THE LORD, AND HIS KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS, AS WELL AS LOVING NATURE.

AND WHILE ABRAHAM IS BOLD IN HIS QUESTIONING OF GOD'S CHOICE, AS WELL AS BY HIS NEGOTIATIONS, HE IS ALSO HUMBLE IN HIS APPROACH TO THE LORD.

HE CALLS THE LORD, THE JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH. THIS ACKNOWLEDGES GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY, AND THUS HIS RIGHT TO DO WHATEVER HE PLEASES.

ABRAHAM'S REAL BOLDNESS IS SHOWN IN HIS ATTEMPT TO NOT ONLY SAVE THE INNOCENT, BUT ALSO THE BLATANT SINNERS THAT HAVE TURNED FROM GOD.

AND OVER, AND OVER AGAIN THE LORD SAYS YES TO HIS PLEAS, AND FINALLY AGREES TO SPARE EVERYONE IF ONLY 10 RIGHTEOUS PEOPLE COULD BE FOUND IN THE CITIES.

HERE IS AN EXAMPLE OF PRAYER LAYING HOLD OF GOD'S WILLINGNESS RATHER THAN TRYING TO OVERCOME GOD'S RELUCTANCE.

NOW, THOSE WHO ARE FAMILIAR WITH THE STORY KNOW THERE WERE LESS THAN TEN, SO ONLY LOT AND HIS FAMILY WERE SPARED, WHILE EVERYONE ELSE PERISHED.

THE LESSON FOR TODAY, HOWEVER IS THAT WE ARE SHOWN THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CONVERSATION BETWEEN GOD AND ABRAHAM.

GOD WELCOMED ABRAHAM'S PRAYER FOR OTHERS, AND WAS NOT ANGERED EITHER BY HIS BOLDNESS OR BY HIS PERSISTENCE.

WE LEARN HERE THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS.

AND THE VALUE OF COMMUNICATION IS AS TRUE WITH OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AS IT IS WITH OTHER PEOPLE AND EVEN ANIMALS.

UNFORTUNATELY, OR NOT, DEPENDING ON YOUR PERSPECTIVE, WE DO NOT HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO WALK AND TALK WITH GOD LIKE ABRAHAM DID.

NOR CAN WE WALK AND TALK WITH JESUS FACE TO FACE LIKE HIS DISCIPLES AND OTHERS AROUND HIM COULD.

BUT WE ARE ABLE TO SPEAK WITH AND LISTEN TO THE LORD THROUGH PRAYER.

AND WHEN IT COMES TO PRAYER WE HAVE A PERFECT MODEL IN JESUS, NOT SIMPLY THROUGH THE WORDS OF WHAT WE CALL THE "LORD'S PRAYER", BUT ALSO THROUGH HIS ACTIONS.

JESUS, IT COULD BE SAID, WAS A MAN OF PRAYER. HE KEPT IN CONSTANT COMMUNICATION WITH HIS FATHER, NOT ONLY THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT WITHIN HIM, BUT ALSO BY HIS HABIT OF PRAYER.

IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE, THE LORD'S PRAYER IS TAUGHT TO HIS DISCIPLES IN PRIVATE, IN RESPONSE TO THEIR REQUEST TO BE TAUGHT TO PRAY LIKE THEY OBSERVED JESUS DOING.

THIS IS DIFFERENT FROM MATTHEW'S GOSPEL WHERE THE PRAYER IS TAUGHT AS A PART OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT, SO EVERYONE IN THE CROWD COULD ALSO HEAR AND LEARN.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO GOSPEL ACCOUNTS MIGHT BE EXPLAINED IF THE REQUEST TO LEARN TO PRAY IN LUKE OCCURRED PRIOR TO THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT IN MATTHEW.

IN OTHER WORDS, THE TWELVE DISCIPLES MIGHT HAVE LEARNED THE PRAYER FIRST.

THEN JESUS TAUGHT THE PRAYER TO THE PUBLIC USING THE FORM FOUND IN MATTHEW

BUT THE HOW AND WHY OF IT IS MUCH LESS IMPORTANT THAN THE MODEL OF PRAYER JESUS TAUGHT.

LET US TURN NOW TO THE GOSPEL PASSAGE AND THE LORD'S PRAYER, THROUGH WHICH JESUS JOINS TOGETHER HUMILITY AND BOLDNESS IN OUR PRAYERS.

SINCE MOST CHRISTIANS AND MANY OTHERS ARE SO FAMILIAR WITH WORDS OF THE LORD'S PRAYER, FEW OF US MAY CONSIDER PRAYING THOSE WORDS TO BE BOLD.

BUT IF WE REALLY THINK ABOUT THE WORDS MOST OF US OFTEN PRAY WITHOUT MUCH THOUGHT, WE MAY HEAR THEM, AND THE POWER OF THIS PRAYER IN A NEW WAY.

THE LORD'S PRAYER CAN ALSO BE SEEN AS AN OUTLINE OR MODEL FOR HOW TO SPEAK WITH AND LISTEN TO GOD, IN A WAY THAT SEEKS GOD'S PURPOSE FOR OUR LIVES.

AND REMEMBER THE PRAYER IS PLURAL AND NOT SINGULAR. JESUS TAUGHT HIS DISCIPLES AND THE CROWD TO PRAY USING: "OUR AND US"- NOT "MY AND ME".

THIS MEANS WHEN ASKING FOR DAILY NEEDS, FORGIVENESS, PROTECTION, AND GUIDANCE WE PRAY FOR OTHERS AS WELL AS OURSELVES.

SO, LOOKING AGAIN AT THE PASSAGE: THE SAVIOR'S INSTRUCTION FOR PRAYER OPENS WITH THE INVITATION FOR US TO SPEAK TO GOD AS CHILDREN WHO ARE CONFIDENT IN HIS LOVE AND GOODNESS.

WE ARE TOLD, WE ARE ABLE TO CALL GOD "FATHER", LIKE JESUS DID, WHICH IMPLIES GOD IS NOT A DISTANT POWER BUT A PRESENT AND INTERESTED PARENT.

ON THE ONE HAND, TO CALL GOD "FATHER" IS BOLD IN THAT IT PRESUMES A SPECIAL STATUS AS CHILDREN OF GOD.

ON THE OTHER HAND, ACKNOWLEDGING GOD AS "FATHER" ALSO IMPLIES WE KNOW WE ARE NOT EQUAL TO GOD.

WE GO TO GOD IN PRAYER BECAUSE GOD HAS THE POWER AND THE LOVE TO GIVE TO US-PROVISION FOR DAILY NEEDS, FORGIVENESS, AND GUIDANCE.

CALLING GOD'S NAME HOLY-IS NOT ONLY AN EXPRESSION PRAISE, BUT ALSO OF HUMILITY BECAUSE WE PROCLAIM GOD IS GOD AND WE ARE NOT GOD.

SIMILARLY, PRAYING FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD TO COME AND HIS WILL TO BE DONE AMONG AND WITHIN US ON EARTH- IS A DEMONSTRATION OF HUMILITY, WHEN PRAYED SINCERELY.

ASKING FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE MANIFESTATION OF HIS WILL ON EARTH IS A RECOGNITION OF THE PRESENCE OF SIN, AND THE NEED FOR GOD'S INTERVENTION.

THUS, THE LORD'S PRAYER IS AN INVITATION TO GOD, FREELY GIVEN BY US, FOR HIS INTERVENTION AND INTERFERENCE IN OUR LIVES.

WHILE THOSE WORDS ARE OFTEN VIEWED AS NEGATIVE, IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD THEY ARE SPOKEN IN THE POSITIVE SENSE OF SEEKING GOD'S HELP EACH DAY.

AND BEING FORGIVEN BY GOD IS A PART OF THE DAILY BREAD WE NEED TO LIVE MORE FULLY.

THEREFORE, JESUS TEACHES US TO PRAY TO BE FORGIVEN, AND ALSO TO PROMISE TO FORGIVE.

BUT THE UNSPOKEN AND OFTEN FORGOTTEN PART OF PROMISING TO FORGIVE-IS SEEKING GOD'S HELP TO ENABLE US TO BE FORGIVING.

FINALLY, JESUS TEACHES US TO PRAY FOR DELIVERANCE. AND ANOTHER WAY OF SAYING THIS IS THAT HE INVITES US TO PRAY FOR GOD'S PROTECTION AND GUIDANCE.

LUKE ALSO RECORDS JESUS' INSTRUCTION FOR HIS FOLLOWERS TO NOT SIMPLY PRAY ONCE OR TWICE ABOUT OUR NEEDS OR DESIRES, BUT TO BE PERSISTENT.

SEEKING, ASKING, KNOCKING, IMPLIES A BOLDNESS TOWARDS GOD IN OUR PRAYERS.

BUT AGAIN, THIS IS NOT ARROGANCE BUT RATHER A FORM OF HUMBLE ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF OUR NEED FOR GOD.

REMEMBER, JESUS WAS PERSISTENT IN SEEKING, ASKING, AND KNOCKING, BECAUSE HE NEEDED HIS FATHER'S HELP.

JESUS ALSO DESIRED TO ONLY DO HIS FATHER'S WILL, WHICH WAS ANOTHER REASON FOR HIS PERSISTENCE IN PRAYER.

A DEVOTIONAL BOOK ON PRAYER SUMMARIZES THE PURPOSE OF PRAYER SAYING: "PRAYER IS A PLACE WHERE OUR ACTION AND ATTITUDE JOIN TO PURSUE GOD'S PURPOSE FOR US."

WE MIGHT ALSO ADD PRAYER THAT OUR PRAYERS ARE ALSO MEANT TO PURSUE GOD'S PURPOSE FOR THE WORLD.

THIS BRINGS US TO A REFLECTION I FOUND ABOUT THE LORD'S PRAYER AND HOW IT IS MEANT TO BE MORE THAN SIMPLY WORDS WE SAY TO GOD.

"I CANNOT SAY 'OUR', IF I LIVE ONLY FOR MYSELF. I CANNOT SAY 'FATHER' IF I DO NOT ENDEAVOR EACH DAY TO ACT LIKE HIS CHILD.

I CANNOT SAY 'HALLOWED BY YOUR NAME', IF I DO NOT RESPECT GOD AS BEING HOLY.

I CANNOT SAY 'YOUR KINGDOM COME', IF I DO NOT ALLOW GOD TO REIGN IN MY LIFE.

I CANNOT SAY 'GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD' IF I RELY ON MYSELF INSTEAD OF GOD.

I CANNOT SAY 'FORGIVE US OUR SIN', IF I AM NURSING A GRUDGE OR WITHHOLDING FORGIVENESS.

I CANNOT SAY 'LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION' IF I DELIBERATELY PLACE MYSELF IN ITS PATH."

THIS REFLECTION IS WORTHY OF OUR ATTENTION BECAUSE IT REMINDS US TO DO MORE THAN PRAY THE WORDS OF THE LORD'S PRAYER.

THE MESSAGE REMINDS US THAT JESUS MEANT US TO ALSO STRIVE TO LIVE THE WORDS WE PRAY.

IN FACT, LIVING THE PRAYER AS BEST AS WE ARE ABLE, IS A WAY TO SEEK, ASK, AND KNOCK THROUGH OUR ACTIONS INSTEAD OF JUST SAYING THE WORDS. AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY: GENESIS 18:16-33 & LUKE 11:1-13

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