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| Topic | Abraham’s Prayer for the City |
| Reference  | Genesis 18 |
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| Speaker | Dr Peter Ng |

Nowadays disasters are happening throughout this world. Thousands of years ago there was a disaster that happened to Sodom and Gomorrah. The difference about that disaster was that there was one man who had an opportunity to stop this because God brought it up to him.

Genesis 18:

**20** Then the Lord said, “Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave,

**21** 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

So God leaves it kind of hanging and the challenge is to Abraham who is a friend of God whether he can intervene and stop this disaster and so therefore today’s passage is about that intervention to avert disaster. We are going to talk about intercessory prayer. There are four points in it:

1. It is a response to revelation
2. It is bold and yet humble
3. It is persistent and specific
4. It leaves the results to God
5. **Prayer is a response to revelation**

The passages says

Genesis 18:

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**21** 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

So Abraham does not come out of the blue and decide to pray. He responds to what God is telling him. If God tells you, there is going to be a disaster in Central Market today, He is not just telling you because just before it happened, but it is actually inviting a response. So therefore prayer is a response to the revelation of God. Some people describe intercession bysaying *“It is putting yourself in someone else’s place.”* That is not true!Ostwald chambers write, *“Intercession is putting yourself in God’s place; it is having His mind and His perspective,* which is what is happening God is sharing His perspective. The common misunderstanding about prayer is that it is initiated by men.

People start to pray when they are in trouble. Miranda Kerr says, *"I pray every day. I meditate every day and I do yoga. I'm not religious, I'm spiritual. And praying is something my grandmother taught me as well. To pray and be grateful, have gratitude, is a big thing for me."*

So here she is praying because it helps her attitude, helps her outlook in life. So her view of God is kind of fuzzy. Prayer is not to get our will done but to get God’s will done.

James 4:

**2** You do not have, because you do not ask.

**3** You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

When we pray we are like people who are just going out to ask for our will rather than God’s will. So the first lesson that we learn that prayer is often a response to revelation.

**17** The Lord said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do

Here we have an inside picture of God. God knows that disaster is going to come and He is thinking should I tell Abraham or not. God does not know whether He can trust Abraham and Abraham does not know whether He can trust God. There are three easy reasons why Abraham was told by God of this disaster before it occurred.

1. **17** Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, **18** seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?

Here there is a promise and this has implications in immediate future and also implications for the later future. The immediate implications that the nations of the earth which in this particular case would be Sodom and Gomorrah will be blessed in terms of having someone to intercede for them, now for the first time before a disaster occurs God chooses one man and that one man has an opportunity to bless that nation. He has an opportunity to learn to intercede. Now Abraham is coming in to the covenant. He is coming into what was destined for him to do. He is destined to be a people who intercede on behalf of the nations. The long-term implication of this is all nations will be blessed by Abraham’s ultimate seed who is Jesus Christ

Isaiah 53:12b

because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors

Jesus was Abraham seed later on shall intercede for all the transgressors which is basically every single person here who belong to the church of Jesus Christ.

1. Why did would God tell him.

**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.

The word chosen is actually in the Hebrew is ‘Yadah’, it is not really chosen, it is because I know him. God knows him, in fact in Isaiah 41:8 it says

But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend;

In the Old Testament rarely we will find somebody called God’s friend. Jesus elaborates to us what it means by God’s friend. Jesus says,

John 15:15

No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

The difference between a friend and an acquaintance is that a friend is someone who will share with you what you are planning to do, so therefore the second reason why God tells Abraham His plans before the catastrophe happens is that Abraham is His friend and He share with us. It is a function of their relationship. Because you have relationship God lets you in on the inner workings of the universe.

1. **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."

The third reason is that if Abraham is going to be a people of the covenant, if Abraham is going to command his children and the household to follow the way of the lord, Abraham must love to trust God. If Abraham cannot trust God, how is he going to lead and command his children to trust God?

Winston Churchill was a very eloquent man, during the war he prayed a lot and this is what he prays

*"Never, never, never, never never give up. Pray without ceasing seek his face and boldly say it." And we sing, never, never, never, never, never, give in. When you seek the face of God you'll see grace once again. And that grace will bring you to the table. His hand will guide you and you'll be able-to lead and stand up to evil!"*

Privately he writes, *The practice [of prayer] was comforting and the reasoning led nowhere. I therefore acted in accordance with my feelings without troubling to square such conduct with the conclusions of thought.*

So outside he say never, never, never, I pray all the time but actually he is a hypocrite because inside he never did understand what prayer was about. He never did believe in it. He never did actually trust God.

So therefore if Abraham is really going to trust God, what he says and what he does in his heart is going to be coherent and so therefore God tells him this. Genesis 22, when he was walking up the mountain and he is going to sacrifice his son. He can only do that because he remembers the verse,

Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” Gen 18:25c

The only reason he can climb up that hill with a knife is hand is that he has to learn to trust God. So therefore prayer is revelation by God to us to include us in the inner workings of what God does in society today, so that we will learn to trust God.

1. **Prayer is bold and yet humble**

Bargaining with God means that you have something that God wants and God has something that you want, but the funny thing about this is that this is only passage in the entire Bible where actually is somebody haggling with God. The only others were Moses when praying for the people and Hezekiah when he was told that he is going to die, and said God to give him one more chance. Abraham really bargained with God. He got the figure down from 50 to 10.

(Genesis 18:23-24)

23 Then Abraham drew near and said, “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?

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?

He comes to God, he draws near to God. God says I am going to destroy the place and he has the cheek to tell actually what about the righteous people there. The question itself is very-very bold because you are actually challenging God. God wants to destroy the place and Abraham told God that He overlooked the 50.

(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

Abraham was really presumptuous because he is telling God that God cannot do. Nobody can tell God what to do. Abraham was actually telling God that this thing does not suits you, what people will say about that? Will they call you a just and merciful God? Jesus clarifies that

Luke 13:1-5

**1** There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

**2** And he answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way?

**3** No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

**4** Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem?

**5** No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

The bottom-line of Jesus saying, judgment and catastrophe, the bullet comes and hits both the righteous and unrighteous. So Abraham was talking out of his hat, he does not what he was doing. The basis of Abraham’s boldness is in

Genesis 17:7

And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

It is the way we know God is God, because God is your God you can then come before Him and there is a relationship for which he is totally committed to you and you could actually talk to him and intercede because this is the basis of your boldness, the promises of God. He is actually leveraging on the relationship not out of fear and anxiety he wants you to really trust Him. There is a process of teaching you to trust.

Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is right?

He is trying to teach him to understand what this means, the words that come out from his own mouth. What he is trying to do, God is just, God is merciful, He is exploring the depths of God’s mercy. Will you save the city if there are 50 righteous, 40 righteous, 30, how far does God love. You can say the person is really just or very loving but you don’t understand until you actually experience it. So what therefore is exploring the depths of God’s mercy the only problem is he is overestimating the goodness of man because they are not many righteous people there. The boldness that we have when we come to intercede before God is based additionally on

Hebrews 10:19-22

19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,

20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,

21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God,

22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

When we come to God we are going to come because of the blood of the lamb, because through the lamb’s flesh which is crucified on the cross we have an audience with a king. Second of all we are not only God’s friend,

Romans 8:15-16 says

15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”

16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

So therefore we are not only friends where God shares with us the plan but we are his children where we shout ‘Abba’. Abba is a cry, it is a primal cry, not by children by but infants or very young children when they actually cry and grab the neck of the father. It is very intimate.

***Do not have False boldness***

Kenneth Hagin said,

*“Don’t pray about money in the way you have been,” the Lord said. “Whatever you need, claim it in Jesus’ Name. And then say, ‘Satan, take your hands off my money.’ And then say, ‘Go, ministering spirits, and cause the money to come.’ ” This was back in 1950. And from that day forward, I have never prayed about money for myself personally.*

This is a kind of false boldness that is called Believer’s Authority that you hijack this boldness to come to intercede for others and he is interceding for his own money.

Benny Hinn said in one of the healing rallies that he was involved,

*“Activity of Spirit is dependant on my will he will not move until I say it”*

This is not true boldness, in fact Benny Hinn idolizes two woman, Aimee Sample McPherson and Kathryn Kuhlman. He goes to their grave regularly and he says, “*the anointing is so strong, when I go there the anointing comes on me then I rub my coat on my body and then I swing.”* This is not a kind of boldness we have when we come in prayer.

He not only has boldness based on the promises of God he has humility.

Abraham answered and said,

(Genesis 18:27)

“Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes.

(Gen 18:30)

Then he said, “Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there.”

Every time he bargains with God there is a great degree of humility. So therefore for a Christian when you come to interact with God there are two things which are really pull up, you are absolutely bold because of what God said and yet you are absolutely humble because you are worthless and that is the two that you need to get together and for many of us we are either too bold or we are too humble and the two Christians comes to prayer, the beauty of our prayer should be absolute boldness to claim on the promises of God and humility.

1. **Prayer is persistent and specific.**

(Gen 18)

Then he said, “Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose ten are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.”

Here he bargained all the way down to 10. He is persistent and then he leaves it there. Here is verse from

(Isaiah 62:6-7)

I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the LORD, give yourselves no rest, and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.

Jerusalem is a heavenly city based on people who live by faith versus Babylon, the worldly city where we live based on our own efforts.

So therefore how does God want us to pray? God wants us to disturb him day and night with constant praying, give Him no rest, give yourself no rest because he wants to see the glory of Jerusalem in this world.

Sidlow Baxter says,

*“...Men may spurn our appeals, reject our message, oppose our arguments, despise our persons -- but they are helpless against our prayers."*

In 1872, D. L. Moody went to London on holidays. One of the churches invited him to speak anyway. He was very reluctant, but he preached on one Sunday and all people were sleeping during his sermon. Then he went for the evening service he preached the same sermon then he asked all those who want to accept Jesus Christ as your saviour and everybody in the church raised their hands. He was surprised and thought that they mistakenly raised their hands. Then he told them, “you can sit down and those who want to accept Jesus Christ should come in the room”. And then the room was full with people coming to inquire and it was so great that he told them to come tomorrow to see your pastor on Monday. Then D.L. Moody sailed away. He went from Irish Sea to Dublin. The moment he landed on Dublin the pastor in England sent him a message to come back as so many people are coming. So D. L. Moody again went back to London and he preached for 10 days and 400 people accepted Christ. Then he wondered if something is happening here and then he found out there was a young woman called Marianne Adlard. She had been praying for this church for revival for 30 years and that morning her sister came back from the morning service and told her that D. L. Moody came to our church and then she really got on the knees that afternoon itself and started praying again and again and then the Holy Spirit just poured out and people came.

So we need to be persistent because we are fighting a spiritual battle. Daniel prayed for help and the help came a lot later on. The reason why it comes later on, it says

Daniel 10

**10** And behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees.

**11** And he said to me, “O Daniel, man greatly loved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for now I have been sent to you.” And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling.

**12** Then he said to me, “Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words.

**13** The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia,

**14** and came to make you understand what is to happen to your people in the latter days

The angel was delayed for 20 over days because it is a spiritual battle and that is why we need to be persistent.

1. **Prayer leaves the results to God**

William Barclay writes prayer always achieves results

1. The love of God that wants the best for us.
2. The wisdom of God that knows what is best for us.
3. The power of God that can accomplish it.

When you pray God’s love, God’s wisdom and God’s power are going to be with you and so therefore you cannot loose.

**32** 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.”

**33** And the Lord went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place.

Abraham did not asked for more, he stopped at 10 and all the scholars discussed why he stopped at 10. 10 was a minimum quorum for a synagogue, was that the reason why? Abraham stopped bargaining or did God just left? He leaves it hanging open and Abraham watches at a distance and he watches the lightning strike, the brimstone fall and he is worried about his relative, Lot, and he remember these words,

Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?”

He did not succeed in saving Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham never mentioned in his prayer to save Lot, but God knew his heart. So God saved Lot and his two daughters and the wife wanted to stay back. Abraham understood that God is the judge of all the earth and He will do what is right. He learned from that lesson that God will do what is right. We need to leave results to God.

George Mueller was known for his powerful prayer. He started orphanages and he never had to ask people for money. All he has to do is pray and one story was told of him sailing to Quebec to give talks and he was supposed to be in Quebec on Saturday and he was standing on the deck of the ship there was a dense fog and the Captain told him there is no way that they can reach Quebec on Saturday. Mueller said to him, “look in 57 years I have never been late for a meeting and I never will. Your eyes shouldn’t be on the fog but it should be on God”. He then took the Captain with him into the chart room to pray together. He prayed a very simple prayer and when the captain started to pray, George told him to not pray as he does not believe. They both went up and the fog was gone.

Dixon Edward Hoste was a gentleman who took over from China Inland Mission from Hudson Taylor and this is the man who will pray four hours every single day because of all the hundreds of missionaries and thousands of missionaries who are in China at that time. He prayed not only for the missionaries but also prayed for the children and he prayed and prayed and Mao Zhi Tong kicked out 7000 missionaries, everybody left and instead of Christianity crumbling in China he raises up an indigenous church their number are more than 100 million today. We don’t know answers to prayers, we have to leave the results to God.

Annie Johnson Flint. Johnson is her normal name and Flint is her adopted parent’s name. Her parents died when she was young and she was adopted by the Flint family and then the Flint family also died. So she was orphan two times, she got cancer two times and she has got rheumatoid arthritis so bad that when she sit in the bed she needs about eight pillows and this woman alone is responsible for many-many hymns that we sing today and many-many poems that talk about the grace of God and she wrote this beautiful poem that talks about grace.

*He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater,
He sendeth more strength when the labors increase;
To added affliction He addeth His mercy;
To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace.*

*When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,
Our Father's full giving is only begun.*

*Fear not that thy need shall exceed His provision,
Our God ever yearns His resources to share;
Lean hard on the arm everlasting, availing;
The Father both thee and thy load will upbear.*

*His love has no limit; His grace has no measure.
His pow'r has no boundary known unto men;
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus,
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again*

When we see purposeless suffering there is one lesson that we need to learn from it, should not the judge of all the earth do what is right. Ravi Zacharias was attended a funeral and a friend of his had lost a child and this is some years ago and he asked his friend, “does time heal your wounds, are you feeling better?” and his friend said, “No, when the son is taken away from me the pain never goes away”. He further said, “Time does not heal, it reveals”. The longer time goes on you learn that God is a just God.

The challenge for us today in this passage a very important principal which God means to tells us.

“for the sake of 10 I will not destroy it” and the story left hanging there. Here the principle has been established, ‘righteous man can avert judgment on sinners’ and thousands of years later on the one righteous man who was crucified on the cross for a crime he never committed and that righteous man allows God to save judgment on anyone else, thousands and millions of Christians all over the world because of one righteous life calamity will not fall upon us. So therefore it is for some of us who do not know God and you are frightened of the times. This is the time that one righteous life, one holy life, one Jesus Christ who lived so perfectly under the watchful gaze of God, who died for us, he took upon himself the plenty of our sin, he can make a difference in our lives. He is the ultimate intercessor.

Romans 8:34

Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Jesus Christ if you chose to accept him as your lord and savior is now at the right hand of father and he is interceding for us day in and day out. He is mentioning our name and is interceding for us.

Luke 22:31 Peter betrayed Jesus three times but

**31** Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat,

**32** but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

Peter fell but the prayers of Jesus brought him back.

We do not know about what is going to happen the next day, some of us will enter calamity, some of us will be suffering in illness but the illness, the calamity, the things that is bad that happens will cause you to stumble and you got to wonder whether you can trust God and whether God can trust you and some of us will fall but if Jesus intercedes for us, we will not fail. So we live with the calm assurance that Jesus prays for us every day.

Jeremiah 29:7

But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

We have to pray for our country, for its welfare, because we are in an exile here. Sad part was in Ezekiel 22:30

And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none.

So many times God does not find enough people to standing there to pray.

The challenge is for us to pray because if we look at Revelations 8. This is what happens to our prayers

1 When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

2 Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.

3 And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne,

4 and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel.

5 Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

Which means the prayers of the saints having ascended to God affects an earthquake in the world today. This is the power of intercession that we hold in our hands because of our covenant with our Lord Jesus Christ and the question that God poses to us as a church today.

 *“Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do,*

Shall God hide from us what he is about to do? Shall we as God’s people rise up to pray to bring our nation, our families and our friends before God and intercede.

Andrew Murray was basically instrumental in the South African revival in 1860s and he write these words, *“If we as helpers and fellow laborers with the Lord Jesus, are to share His power of intercession, there will need to be with us as well the travail of soul that there was with Him, the giving up of our lives and their pleasures for the one supreme work of interceding for our fellow men”*

Andrew Murray realized. Before the revival in South Africa which happened in 1860 and the revival happened so miraculously. One night they were all praying, one 15-year-old girl stood up and prayed and when she prayed everybody broke in prayer and the revival swept. Before that Andrew Murray’s father prayed for 36 years for revival. It is not easy but intercession requires travail of the soul, giving up of our lives and our pleasures for one supreme work of interceding for our fellow man.

*Intercession must not be a passing interest. It must become an ever-growing object of intense desire for which, above everything, we long and live. It is the life of consecration and self-sacrifice that will indeed give power for intercession.”*

As we see example of Abraham lets go back and think really; Are we actually taking up this ministry which is the ministry of the church, interceding for our world, our nation, our community which is basically falling apart. God will not work without you, God shares this with us so that we will partner with Him but we partner him in pray, we need to put in time, we need to put in some effort and dedication, it is not an easy work.