

Then the LORD said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous <sup>21</sup> 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.”

<sup>22</sup> The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD. <sup>23</sup> Then Abraham approached him and said: “Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? <sup>24</sup> 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? <sup>25</sup> 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?”

<sup>26</sup> The LORD said, “If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.”

<sup>27</sup> 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, <sup>28</sup> 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.”

<sup>29</sup> 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.”

<sup>30</sup> 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.”

<sup>31</sup> 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.”

<sup>32</sup> 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.” (Genesis 18:20-32)

### **Just Once More**

Every now and then I have to turn to my kids and ask, “Who do you think you are?” That usually happens because one or both of them will ask for something that in the moment seems so outlandish and out-of-the-ordinary. “Who do you think you are that you would ask something for like that?” They are still young enough where it’s usually innocent. This also happens when my children will ask me for the same thing again, and again, and again. It’s almost as if she is thinking, “If I ask just one more time, then he will do what I want.” Never-mind only 30 seconds has passed since the last time. Persistent. Bold. Annoying. Trusting. Confident. Humble. Are we talking about children approaching their parents with requests or Abraham as he stands before the Lord’s face?

The outcry against the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah had reached the heavens. It’s not like the Lord had been surprised by it. He already knew what was happening. At the same time, this is Lord’s way of showing himself to us in His Word. He’s not some impersonal being in the great cosmos. He hears the cries. He comes down to personally investigate. The outcry

against Sodom and Gomorrah has the Lord's undivided attention and he's going to do something about it.

So what was so bad about Sodom and Gomorrah that it warrants a personal visitation from the Lord God himself with the threat to sweep them off the face of the earth? What is this sin of Sodom? God's Word tells us. It was the detestable things they did and the attitude they had. We are going to do what we want to do and no one can tell us otherwise. We are free to do whatever we want when we want. It was their corrupt rulers who did not care about the people they were called to serve. It was the fact they did not care for the poor and needy; rampant injustice plagued the land. It was their sexual immorality and perversion (Jude 7), homosexual practices and abuse of God's gift of sex. And on top of it all: they didn't even have the decency to try and hide it. They openly flaunted it before God. They celebrated their sin. It must be quite horrible; Sodom is almost synonymous with exceptionally terrible wickedness in the Bible. What happens to the cities is the example of what is going to happen to the ungodly on the Last Day (2 Peter 2:6).

Now the Lord is telling Abraham he's had enough. And Abraham knows that God is just—the Lord never ignores it when sin occurs. He's not giving a wink on the side letting you know he knows what you did and will let it slide. No, the guilty will be punished as they deserve.

That should be frightening because look at what we've done. How many of those actions of Sodom are we guilty of? Be careful that you don't fall into the temptation of focusing on specifics—I never would do something like *that*. No think about your own prideful sin—I'm going to do what I want because I want to even when I know what God says. Openly flaunting your sin—you know it's wrong, but no one dare tell me otherwise. Injustice—that's ignoring the needs of your neighbor. That's turning a blind eye to those who are less fortunate. It's saying your rights and freedoms are more important than hers. That's being selfish. Sexual immorality—it's not just the homosexuality, LGBTQ+ community. It's the sex outside of marriage. It's pornography. It's looking at someone the way you should only be looking at your spouse whether you have one right now or not.

But notice here in Genesis 18 it doesn't mention any of that. It just says sin. That word "sin" refers to missing the mark. Here's God's target and will for you to live your life; when we sin, we miss the mark. But it's not a whoops; I'll just try again later. This sin cries out to the Lord. Before standing in awe at how horrible Sodom must have been, stand back in awe that God hasn't rained down holy fire on you because of the sin that you have willfully done. Stand back in disgust that you could say or do things like that to people you care about. Don't try to hide behind claims of being a good person or good things you have done. As Abraham says, "I am but dust and ashes," which is all that we are too. From dust you are born, to dust you shall return when you die. By nature we are no better than the people of Sodom. We have no right or business standing before God other than to be judged, which is what waits

for everyone. One day all of us will have to stand before God to answer for everything that we have thought, said, and done.

Abraham recognizes this. He knows his place and who the Lord is. The Lord is just and judge of all the earth. And still Abraham stands before the Lord's face and makes this bold request. How? Because Abraham knew God's promises. He trusted God will fulfill those promises. He relies on God's mercy and grace. Right before this the Lord had come and said in the next year Sarah, Abraham's wife, would have a son. And it's from that son and the line of Abraham that another son would be born—the one who would bless every nation on earth. This son would also be born, taking on flesh; from dust we could say. This son too actually dies but he does not return to ash. He dies so that he might rise again to live and rule eternally.

This Son of Abraham's line is also God's Son, the righteous one. He is the one mediator—the go between God and humanity—who pays the ransom price of his blood to cover your entire debt of sin. There is nothing evil or wicked about him and, yet, for our sakes he became sin. He hangs between heaven and earth, endures God's just justice, so that we are made the righteous ones of God. Yes, it is correct that evil and wicked cannot stand in God's presence and live. But that is not what you are. You have been washed in the blood of the Lamb, you were sanctified—made holy, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. You already know your verdict in God's courtroom. It was declared from the cross and guaranteed with Jesus' resurrection. You are not guilty. You are forgiven. That same Jesus has gone through the heavens having died and rose again and ascended on high. Through him we are made children of the heavenly Father, heirs of eternal life, and welcomed before God's throne with every confidence. There you will receive God's mercy, grace and peace.

It's this Promised One, the seed of the woman from his line that Abraham looks ahead to and places his trust. Credited with this Promised One's righteousness through faith, Abraham stands before the Lord and makes his bold request. His prayer doesn't mention his nephew and family but really is for the whole wicked region. He holds God to who he is: Just. **“You aren't going to sweep away the righteous and the wicked together are you? You aren't going to punish those who trust in you Lord along with those who rejected you, will you? Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?”**

Very bold. Who do you think you are, Abraham? Oh, he knows. He's but dust and ash. At the same time though, the Lord calls Abraham, “my friend” (Isaiah 41:8). That's a position one only could receive through faith. The thing is, Abraham isn't done! He keeps going lower and lower. Humanly speaking we might say he is pushing his luck, maybe even a little annoying. But not to the Lord. He has all the patience in the world and allows Abraham to keep going, just once more. The Lord doesn't say, “Alright, that's enough, one more time

and no more prayer for you.” No, Abraham continues to humbly and confidently pray even for the wicked, just once more.

The thing is, you aren't God's friend. You are more. The baptismal waters that cover you place the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit on you. You are God's Child. He is your father who invites you to stand before him. But how? It's this Promised one, the seed of the woman from Abraham's line that we look back to and place our trust. Relying on his mercy and grace we stand before God's throne with the full assurance not only that he hears you but wants you to be there.

He's not about to get annoyed with you for coming again and again with your prayers, even the same ones, just once more. Sometimes after being pestered long enough, sometimes we cave in and give the gifts and answer the calls for help despite the inconvenience. We are sinful creatures; God is not. He is not pestered by you; and still he invites you to try. He's not annoyed by you, he wants you to ask just once more. Of course he will patiently listen and answer in good timing. After all, you are his child and he is your Father.

Of course he's going to give us everything we need when we ask. I'm a sinful father and I know that when my girls want a glass of milk to drink, I'm not about to pour them some gasoline. I know that when they are hungry I don't tell them to go eat some dirt. If we sinful human beings know how to give good gifts, how much greater our perfect heavenly Father from whom comes every good and perfect gift? So go to him, just once more. He's not about to change his mind about you. His love for you is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Sometimes we change our minds in the middle of prayer. As the Lord does with Abraham he does for you: he allows you to wrestle with him a little bit. He's teaching you to trust in him. Sometimes we don't know what to pray for. He knows that; he is your heavenly Father. So he sends the Holy Spirit who helps us in our weaknesses and works as our go between for us. He knows how we struggle and at times our sin weighs heavily on our minds that we wonder if we can actually speak to him again. There's Jesus, giving you his body and blood in the Lord's Supper assuring you that your sins personally are given. And at the same time, he's at His Father's side reminding him, “Listen again; just once more.”

And what happens? He answers. Sometimes it's not the way we want or expect. But every time it is according to God's will and for your best. He's your Heavenly Father who wants you eternally with him.

And so we go to him, just once more, asking that he teach us to accept his will when it is done. And so we go to him, just once more, knowing who we are—his children who he dearly loves. And we go to him, just once more, confident in his mercy and grace. We go to his throne, just once more, praying even for the wicked and evil that they too might come to the knowledge of the truth. And then we go again, just once more, knowing that until Christ returns there will always be just once more. Amen.