

Genesis 18: 26-30 Sodom

So, God is proposing to destroy the city of Sodom on account of the sinful actions and wickedness of those living there and their resulting unrighteousness in God's sight. At the beginning of this passage we have a picture of God talking to himself; saying, "Shall I hide from Abraham the thing I am about to do?" and then he begins to list to himself the reasons why he should include Abraham in his plan and not hide it from him.

He decides that he won't keep this plan from Abraham for two reasons: first, because Abraham is going to become a large and strong nation; all the nations of the world are going to be blessed through him and secondly because Abraham is to be the one to direct his children and future family to observe God's way of life, living kindly and generously and fairly, so that God can complete in Abraham what he had promised him.

Abraham was a righteous man. He had received God's grace and he walked closely with God. So, God told Abraham what he was proposing to do.

'The cries of the victims in Sodom and Gomorrah are deafening; the sin of those cities is immense. I'm going down to see for myself, see if what they're doing is as bad as it sounds. Then I'll know.'

Before he judges the city of Sodom, God carefully investigates the charges and looks to see what the conditions are. Then he tells Abraham that he is going to destroy these cities. Actually, he does not specifically tell Abraham what he will do, but when Abraham hears the words, "I will know," then he knows what God will do. Abraham knows that the cities are doomed.

If we were there at the time, we too would probably guess that the cities were doomed but I think that there is also a good chance that we might go one step further and say amongst ourselves, 'Good for you, God; they've had that coming!' If I was being very honest, I know that I would have to say that there have been situations in my life when I've seen how people's actions have been judged, and thought, 'well didn't you just ask for that to happen!'

Perhaps on the surface that is the most obvious outcome for Sodom but Abraham looked further and could see a problem with making that judgement and he dared to question God regarding it.

Abraham stood before God with the thought in his head that in the city of Sodom there might be fifty righteous people who would be destroyed along with the unrighteous. This thought has stirred up in Abraham's heart such emotion and passion that he feels compelled to have a conversation with God which might lead to God having mercy on all the unrighteous in the city so that the fifty righteous might be saved.

God has been continually merciful towards Abraham and poured out his grace and blessing on him. Abraham wants to pass that mercy along to those in the city who he

thinks do not deserve the destruction that will be coming on this city. If God has made the decision that the charges against Sodom are true and that the punishment is to be the city's total destruction, Abraham believes that not all people from the city are deserving of being punished for the crimes that others around them, even the vast majority of those around them are guilty of. He wants God to not only take pity on the 50 righteous people but the majority of the people in Sodom who are unrighteous.

In fact, Abraham takes it further and wants God to extend his mercy and save the whole city for 45 righteous people which God does. With boldness and no doubt trepidation at the thought of incurring God's wrath, Abraham goes on to ask God to save the whole sinful city for firstly 30 righteous men and when God agrees he goes even further and asks him to save the city for 20 righteous men and then 10 which God, as we know, agreed to do.

Abraham is an example of 'pass that along', paying it forward. He had experienced God's mercy and grace, and he had been hugely blessed by God. He wanted God to show the same mercy that he had experienced on the unrighteous in the city of Sodom so that the very small number of righteous men would be saved.

What can we learn from Abraham in this passage, about being human in a God shaped world? In a God shaped world, mercy and grace are in abundance. Ever since Adam and Eve ate from the tree in the Garden of Eden sin has been in the world making God's people sinful by nature. Our sinful nature separates us from God and makes it impossible for us, by our own efforts, to be close to him and walk with him as righteous people. It is through God's mercy and grace that each of us can be made righteous.

None of us deserves God's mercy or grace. We have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory. We are reminded of this in the story that John tells in chapter 8 his gospel of the time the teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "This woman was caught in the act of adultery and in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. What do you say we should do?" Jesus knew that they were trying to trick him and didn't answer to begin with but bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. However, they kept on questioning him, so he looked up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her. On hearing this reply, everyone walked away.

Jesus' reply to them can serve as a humbling reminder to us that we too are not without sin. 'Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her'.

Jesus repeated one message throughout his time on Earth: no one is righteous. All of us are sinners in need of God's forgiveness and grace. Each of us has to recognise our sin and come to God for forgiveness.

Psalm 14 verse 3 also tells us that we have all gone astray, there is no one who does good, no, not one.

And in Romans 3 Paul tells us that we are all under the power of sin and that it is written,

“There is no one who is righteous, not even one;
there is no one who has understanding,
there is no one who seeks God.
All have turned aside, together they have become worthless;
there is no one who shows kindness,
there is not even one.”

We are all dependent on God's mercy and grace.

It is through his mercy that God has blessed us and looking back at our privileged lives we can see how hugely blessed we have been by God. In the geographical lottery of birthplace, we find ourselves in a country where we are free to live our lives as we wish. We live in comfort with no fear of famine, flood, earthquake, or other such natural phenomena ripping away our livelihoods. We aren't under constant attack from enemy forces who could tear apart our families and take away our loved ones. We do not live in poverty but comfort and we have a government and health service to support those who have need. And lastly, we are free to come together to worship with others.

It is by God's grace that we can be made righteous and walk with him as Abraham did.

It has to be through God's grace that we are made righteous because we cannot be made righteous through our own actions. To do that we would need to be perfect and none of us is that. What we have to do is have faith, in Christ. Through God's great love and mercy, we have been given a means by which we can be saved. We don't have to earn our salvation. Christ has earned our salvation for us. He paid the price for our salvation, that price being his own life, paid as a ransom to free us from our sins enabling us to become righteous in the sight of God. What we have to have is faith, faith in the person of Jesus who came down from heaven as God's son in human form, to give us our way back to God. He took the punishment for our sins as he died an agonising death on the cross and in doing so made us blameless in the sight of God and able to walk with him as righteous people and in the same way that Adam and Eve once did in the Garden of Eden. For our part, as we put our faith in him, we have to also acknowledge our sins and ask for forgiveness of them from our loving and merciful God.

Through our faith in Christ and because of God's grace, we have been made righteous in God's sight and we can walk with God as Abraham did. God wants everyone to put their faith in Christ and receive his grace so they too might walk with him. It is his desire that all may know him, love him and share their lives with him, walking closely with him and discovering his purpose for their lives and knowing how deeply he cares for them. So, in the same way that Abraham wanted to pass on the mercy and blessings he had received from God to the unrighteous in Sodom so that the very few righteous may also be saved, so we should also want to look around us and pass that mercy, love, kindness and care

on to others. Those people who we might be guilty of judging to be unrighteous and deserving of any punishment that might come their way.

God wants us, as we live in his world, to reach out to those we wrongly consider undeserving and show them our mercy which is an extension of God's mercy. Giving them the opportunity to come to know the God we know and the God who loves everyone equally and who is wanting everyone to come to him and know the love he has for them. God wants us to do this and demonstrate what it means to be human in a God shaped world.