

Abraham's Prayer

by Bill Barratt

Abraham's prayer teaches us to reason with God's character, be persistent, appeal to His righteousness, not demand, and know when to stop.

Duration: 33:14

Scripture: Genesis 18:27-33

Topics: "Prayer"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the story of Abraham's prayer for the city of Sodom and Gomorrah. The speaker uses the analogy of knocks on his door to illustrate different types of prayers. He emphasizes the importance of having knowledge and revelation of God before praying intelligently. The sermon also references the verses from Matthew 7:7 and Luke 11:9, which encourage seeking, asking, and knocking in prayer.

Transcript

We're going to read now one of the finest prayers in the Bible. It's the prayer of Abraham, and there's a lot we can learn. I'm going to read to you from the 20th verse down to verse 33.

And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me. And if not, I will know. And the men turned their faces from fence and went towards Sodom.

But Abraham stood yet before the Lord, and Abraham drew near and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city. Wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked, and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee. Shall not the judge of all the earth do right? And the Lord said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.

And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes. Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous. Wilt thou destroy all the city for the lack of five? And he said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it.

And he spake unto him yet again and said, Peradventure there shall be forty found there. And he said, I will not do it for forty's sake. And he said unto him, Oh, let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak.

Peradventure there shall be thirty be found there. And he said, I will not do it if I find thirty there. And he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord.

Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for twenty's sake. And he said, Oh, let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet, but this once.

Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake. I have lived in my home now, 8 Hazel Avenue, well over ten years.

And while I've been there, there have been all kinds of knocks on our door. As a minister, of course, I possibly get a few more than most people. Sometimes it has been a timid tap.

You have to really strain to hear it. Sometimes it's been quite a confident rat-a-tat. Sometimes it's been one strong firm knock.

Sometimes, perhaps in the middle of shaving, and no one else in the house. It's been a good strong knock, then a weight. Another strong knock, and then a weight.

And another strong knock, and then a weight. And I'm shaving, and I think to myself, I wish they'd go away. But then they knock, and they knock, so I just rub my face without finishing the shaving, and open the door, for it must be urgent.

I want to speak on that type of prayer this morning, from Matthew chapter 7 and verse 7. Seek, and ye shall find. Ask, it shall be given you. Knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

That same verse, in a slightly different form, is in Luke chapter 11. And there, it is connected up with prayer, the Lord's Prayer. Following the instruction on how to pray, Jesus gives the illustration of the man knocking his friend up at midnight, and keeps knocking until he gives him what he requires.

Knock, and it shall be opened unto you. Abram's prayer, we could say, is a prayer in which he knocks six times, and God answers. I would think Abram's prayer is perhaps as near perfect as you could find a prayer.

We have within this prayer of Abram sound principles of prayer, and I would like to go through it with you, that we may learn some good principles in praying, in this type of prayer. Before we can pray intelligently, we need to have some knowledge or revelation of God. Verse 17 says this, and the Lord said, shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do? Verse 20, and the Lord said, because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now and see whether they have done all together according to the cry of it which has come unto me.

And if not, I will know. And so God revealed to Abraham his servant what he was going to do. You and I have a revelation of God, of what he is going to do to this world.

His judgment is going to fall. It is called in the Bible that great and terrible day of the Lord. The world is ignorant of it and does not believe it.

But we know, and that includes our city of Manchester. As we pray for our assault and for our city this year, perhaps we can learn from this great prayer. God had come down to Abraham with two angels, and when he had revealed to Abraham what he was going to do, he sent his two angels to destroy the city.

And Abram was looking on. Within the city was Abraham's nephew, Lot. And Lot's family, two daughters and a wife, and some other relations.

And Abraham stood. He saw Sodom and Gomorrah in the plain, and he knew that Lot and his family were there. Now he did not know whether Lot was living righteous for God.

If you read the story, Lot has a question mark about him. Now the Bible declares that Lot was righteous in the New Testament, that his righteous soul was vexed by the wickedness of the city that he lived in. But there's a question mark for those who read the story.

There's something in Lot of self, it seems to me, when he was asked to choose. And Abram showed him the land. There was fighting going on between the two brethren.

He chose the best. Yet he hadn't been called out to the land Abraham had been called. But Abraham let him have it.

It was then Abraham received the great promise from God. Your seed will be like the very stars of the sky. And he went and lived and pitched right near the cities there.

And you'll find that in the later part of this story, we are looking at the prayer now, the later part, you'll find that even when God was delivering him, because of Abram's prayers, and God told him to go in the mountain, even then he says, well, could I not go into the city? It's only a little one. Then my soul will live. It seemed that it was a question mark.

He seemed to want to live as near to the wicked and the world as he could. Where Abram was a man with no continuing city. But he looked for a city whose maker and builder was God.

They were both righteous. And it seems to me there are many Christians, perhaps, who are like Lot. They're righteous, but they seem to want to live as near to danger as possible.

But let's go to his prayer. Verse 23, And Abram drew near and said, Will thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city, wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked, and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee, shall not the judge of all the earth do right? That's some prayer. And the Lord said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sake.

What can we learn? The first thing we can learn is that Abraham reasoned with the Lord with deep humility. He reasoned with the Lord. And he reasoned because he knew God's character.

He knew that God was righteous. He knew deep in his heart that God was just. He knew God was merciful.

He knew the qualities of God. The first thing that we have to realize if we're going to pray, we must know God's character. And then he was able to appeal humbly to that character.

Look, you're righteous, you're just, you're merciful. Would you destroy the righteous with the wicked? Reason with the Lord. That's what he did.

That was his first knock. And notice, God immediately answered that prayer. His first knock was answered.

The door was opened right away. I will not destroy for fifty's sake. So he gained his point.

His prayer was answered. First knock. He knocked six times.

The second knock. What can we learn from that one? Verse twenty-nine. Sorry, verse, I'm going ahead a little, aren't I? Verse twenty-six.

Sorry, verse twenty-seven. I'll get it yet. And Abraham answered and said, Behold, now I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes.

Peradventure, there shall lack five of the fifty righteous. Wilt thou destroy all the city for the lack of five? And he said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy. Notice the persistence here.

In every prayer, he reasons with the Lord and he uses this word, peradventure. Six times in six prayers, peradventure is mentioned. It means, if by chance, now you're righteous, you know all things, you're going to destroy the place, but if by chance, just in case, that's a good prayer.

He was persistent with it. Just in case, Lord, perhaps, maybe, if there's only five less than fifty, would you destroy the city and the righteous? I will not destroy it for forty and five. He was persistent.

Every time he said, perhaps, if, he questioned, he put it to God, perhaps, maybe there's somebody there, Lord. Have you looked? It's very bold, but it's humble and persistent. Second thing we can learn, to be persistent.

His prayer was answered. I will not destroy for forty and five. Then we move on to the third knock.

And he spake unto him yet again and said, peradventure, just in case, there shall be forty there. Notice how he's getting brief. You don't have to keep telling God things, you know.

He gets briefer now. Sometimes we pray the things that we've prayed so many times. God knows.

He doesn't have to repeat the whole thing again. So he says, just once again, Lord, perhaps, maybe, if there's only forty, I will not destroy for forty's sake. He was not demanding.

He just kept knocking. Fifty, forty-five, forty, thirty, twenty, ten. He was not demanding, but he was appealing.

I am but dust and ashes, he said. Verse thirty, and he said unto him, Oh, let not the Lord be angry. What an appeal! And I will speak, peradventure, maybe, Lord, there shall be thirty found there.

I will not do it, if I find thirty there. Notice there was none of them bombastic. We demand, Lord, according to your word.

There was a humility. I am but dust and ashes. Oh, Lord, don't be angry.

It was a beseeching. It was an appealing. He didn't know, but he appealed to God's righteousness.

If there be thirty, Lord, I'll not do it, if I find thirty. Verse thirty-one, and he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, peradventure, there shall be twenty found there. I wonder how he prayed that.

You know, a thing I notice in this prayer, Abram never asked God to do anything out of his will. He never mentioned Lot, never mentioned Lot's family. Do you know why? Because he wasn't sure whether Lot was righteous.

That was possibly, when we see what God did after, that was possibly the desire of his heart. But Abraham himself understood God's integrity, because he had integrity. You know, we can't understand justice unless we're just.

We can't understand the mercy of God unless we are merciful. We can't understand God's righteousness unless we are righteous. He understood God's righteousness.

He understood God's justice. He was a man of integrity himself. He was a man of mercy himself.

When Lot wanted, when he gave Lot the choice, there was a division. He had every right to say, Look, Lot, this is mine. You go there.

But he didn't. He says, Choose. That tender spirit of the humble and the meek of the earth.

He had the spirit of Christ, you see. And here he is again. He doesn't pray to God, Lord, save Lot.

Save Lot's family, Lord. He didn't pray that. But in his heart, he was thinking to himself, Poor Lot, he's my nephew.

I've known him from a little toddler. Oh, well, he's not perfect, but he's a good lad really. But he didn't say it because he didn't know and despite the difficulty of praying this way, he steeled himself against the temptation to pray, Lord, save my kin.

No, flesh and blood cannot come into it. It's like a sword sometimes in the heart. But you can't do it.

God's no respecter of person. But God can see his heart. So he prays the only prayer he can with integrity, the only prayer that does not go against God's will.

He says, Look, if there's only 20, I hope lots amongst them in his heart, but if there's only 20, Lord, don't you think that's a marvelous thing? Never to pray about things you're not sure of. You know, we pray to save so-and-so, to heal so-and-so, to do this, to do that. We don't know.

Do we? Some people, and I say it very carefully, very tenderly, some people are better to stay crippled in a bath chair than to be healed and go to hell. Sad to say. I know it from experience.

I know a woman who was paralyzed from the waist down. She was marvelously healed without anyone going near to her in the first crusade we ever held. Nobody prayed or touched her.

And she walked three miles after from town. And she was walking for 10 years after, as I know of. When I went to see her the Christmas afterwards, she was blind drunk.

I wouldn't criticize her. I don't know the circumstances. God forbid.

Maybe she'll go to heaven. I trust she will. But we don't know.

I've got a lot of reservations now when I pray. And God's channeled me to a place that it's all right people say, well you can't pray if it be thy will, but that's what it is really, isn't it? And Jesus prayed it. What do we know? So that was something that he did that we can learn from.

He would not go out of God's will. He'd pray as near to it as he could and he'd hope that it would cover. But you see he was a man of integrity.

He was real with God. God was real to him. He drew near to God.

He wasn't just one of these perhaps that say a few mumbled prayers. His heart was in it. I can feel the very throb of the heart of Abraham here.

Can you? What can we learn from his last knot, the sixth one? And he said, oh I like that. It's there again. He's right at the end now, but that same appealing.

He'll go as far as he dare, always respecting the awfulness of God's power and righteousness. Oh, let not the Lord be angry. I will speak yet but this one more time.

You know God can't resist a prayer like that. A man who prays like that, God can't resist because he goes always within the confines of God's character. God recognizes integrity.

He says, my this man's praise. Behold he prayeth. Peradventure, just in case, just perhaps, on the thousand to one chance Lord.

If there's ten, I will not destroy it for ten. He answered every prayer, you know, because he prayed right. You know what this last one teaches me? Abraham knew when to stop.

Can you see the integrity here of Abraham all the way through? He would not go beyond the principles of God or his character, the things that are right. He would not respect flesh and blood. All he wanted was God, though it hurt him, though he would have loved to pray, and though God may have even answered his prayer.

He kept to God's righteousness and justice. He kept to the rules. And when it came to ten, I believe Abraham knew if he went any lower, it'd be coming right down to Lot, his wife and two daughters.

There was only four of them, and any other relations outside, I don't know. But he knew when to stop. He knew that he didn't have to keep knocking with God.

He knew that God could see his heart. You know when you pray to God and you don't mention it, you know that God sees the wounds and the heartache and the sorrow and the hurt and the longing. You don't have to mention it, but if you keep to the rules and you show your integrity and God says, look at that, despite his great desire for Lot and his family, he's never even mentioned them.

Oh, that's great, God said. Now, I don't know about you, I'm not so sure where Lot stood here. Perhaps Lot was righteous in the sight of God for Abraham's sake.

The New Testament said the righteous soul of Lot was vexed, but if you read about Lot very carefully, he was very near the wind. Maybe he was righteous, but just about in, I think. The most staggering and amazing thing to me when I read this this week and meditated upon it, was the way God answered Abraham's prayer.

He never mentioned Lot, but you know when the angels went to the city and there was awful things going on, if you read the story, you'll read for yourself. There was awful things going on in that city and they even tried to take the two angels and commit a sodomy with them. That's where the word comes from, sodom.

It's an army word, they call it gay today. It's a sign of God's judgment coming when nations turn to that. We know God's judgment's coming, we should see it everywhere.

We don't have to wait any longer for signs, we can see them and we should pray. Pray for those such as should be saved. But you know what the angels said to Lot? They said, come on, you've got to get out, go and tell your brethren.

Now God never mentioned Lot, but the angels went straight to Lot. Isn't that tremendous? You don't always have to mention by name what you're after, especially if you're not sure. God knows.

He answers our prayers before we even ask. So the angels went first to Lot and they said, look, God's told us we're going to destroy this city, go and tell your brethren. And so he went out and he told his brethren and they wouldn't believe him.

So he came back, he says, well you come, and he hesitated. They said, listen to this, here's God's integrity. He says, look, the angel said, look, we can't destroy the place till you get out.

Those were the words they said to him in effect. In other words, God won't destroy it while you're here. And yet Abram never mentioned Lot.

What a prayer. Anyway, he went in the end. Verse 29, and it came to pass in verse 19, and it came to pass when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham.

He'll always remember a man who prays like that. And sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow. It didn't say remembered Lot.

God remembered Abraham. The consequences, he sent Lot out of the overthrow. When he overthrew the cities in which he dwelt.

What can we learn? First, we can learn when we knock in prayer, that if we understand God's character, we can reason with God. Because we know how to reason. Second, we can learn that we must be persistent and keep knocking.

And gain in all we can for what we believe is right within God's principles. Third, we can learn that we cannot demand and we should not demand. We are dust and ashes.

God could be angry with us. He's a mighty God. We're not approaching an earthly father.

We're approaching the creator of all things. The God of might and dreadful justice. And so we can learn we mustn't demand.

We must appeal and beseech. Knowing the beauty of his righteousness and the awfulness of his judgment. You can only pray when you know God.

Thirdly, we can learn to not ask anything out of God's will. If we're not sure, leave it. God knows.

Leave it. Whatever you decide is, leave it. But pray around it.

God knows. We can learn to know when to stop. I trust God will help me and you.

Not only to preach his word and not only to hear it but by his great grace to put it into effect as we pray for the city of Manchester.

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