

# (Genesis) - Part 17

by Zac Poonen

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*Zac Poonen's sermon explores the significance of God's covenant with Abraham, emphasizing immediate obedience, faith, and the importance of humility and hospitality in our spiritual lives.*

**Duration:** 58:30

**Scripture:** Genesis 18:1-8, Matthew 20:26-28, Mark 9:35, Luke 22:26-27, John 13:14-15, Romans 12:13, Hebrews 13:1-2

**Topics:** "Hospitality", "Obedience"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the attitude of Abraham and Sarah towards hospitality. He emphasizes that Abraham, despite being a servant of God, humbly serves the three men who visit him, offering them the best of his calves. The preacher highlights the importance of immediate obedience and repentance, as God gives us chances to change but may eventually let us go if we don't take it seriously. The sermon also mentions that Abraham didn't initially recognize that one of the men was the Lord in human form, showing the manifestation of God's presence.

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## Transcript

Let's turn to Genesis chapter 17. We read here of the covenants that God made with Abraham. And we saw that there was a sign of that covenant, and that was circumcision, which in the New Covenant we mentioned is symbolic, as we read in Philippians 3.3, that of no confidence in the flesh.

Just like physical circumcision is the cutting off of the flesh, Philippians 3.3 Paul says, we are the true circumcision, who glory only in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. Man has a great tendency to not only have confidence in the flesh, but to glory in men. Out in the world, people glory in their connection with cabinet ministers or big people in the world.

It's possible also in the church to glory in men, to glory in our connection with some spiritual man or leader. Paul says, we glory only in Christ Jesus. Those who glory in men, even spiritual men, we can say they have not had a 360 degree circumcision, only being partial, incomplete.

The circle is not complete. And we find as we walk, seek to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, how much there is of confidence in the flesh, how much there is of leaning on the arm of flesh, on men, and glorying in men. And wherever we see it, the mark of the covenant is that we cut it off.

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts. This is man's part. This was the part that Abraham had to fulfill.

And the Lord said that a person who does not do it, verse fourteen, the uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person will be cut off from his people. He has broken My covenant. And where man does not do his part, the covenant is broken.

There is a part for man to do in every covenant. Verse fifteen, Then God said to Abraham, Ask for Sarai, your wife. You shall not call her name Sarai, but Sara shall be her name.

And Sara means princess. And I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations, kings of peoples shall come from her.

And Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said in his heart, You see how, though he did trust God, he didn't believe that God would give him a son through Sara. In Genesis fifteen, God had spoken to him, and he said, Amen. But now thirteen years more had gone by, and the situation looked impossible.

And Abraham laughed, and he said, Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? It is almost as though he had given up hope. Will Sara, who is ninety years old, bear a child? And Abraham said to God, O that Ishmael might live before Thee. Even after thirteen years, Abraham's hopes are still set on Ishmael.

He thinks this is the real promised seed. Just like we said earlier that it is possible for us to have a certain type of victory which we think is the real thing, but it's not the real thing, and it's manifested in a time of temptation, of provocation, that it is not the real thing. And that is the time where we are to be honest and say, Lord, this is not the real seed.

This is only an Ishmael. With my determination and gritting my teeth, I have produced something, but it's not the real thing. And that's not the time to say, O that Ishmael might live before You, but to cast Ishmael away and seek for that which God gives.

But God said, No, this is not going to be the one. Sara, your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.

And concerning Ishmael also, God says, I have heard you. I will bless him and will make him fruitful. But my covenant I will establish with Isaac.

Verse 22, And when he finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham. Then Abraham took Ishmael, his son, and all the servants who were born in his house, and all who were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's household, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the same day as God said to him. And Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised, his Ishmael thirteen, in the very same day.

Notice that phrase again in the last part of verse 23. In the very same day. Again in verse 26.

In the very same day Abraham obeyed God. Now, obedience, if it is not immediate, an instant, reveals that there is a wrong spirit in that person. And it's a bad sign when God says, tells us to do something, and we still sit and think about it, the chances are that all our life that will be our attitude to God's commandments.

And God takes note of it. He doesn't send thunder and lightning down upon us, but He takes note of the fact that here is a person who will obey, but not immediately. Whereas concerning Abraham, as soon as God told him, in that same day, we read in Genesis 14 that he had 318 servants and his children.

Imagine the time it took to circumcise all of them, but in the same day, within twelve hours, he had finished doing it. He took it seriously. It was not a question of convenience or, well, wait till tomorrow, let's do it in stages.

No. God has spoken and he obeyed immediately. Whatever weaknesses there may have been in Abraham, there was one thing in which he excelled, that when he was clear concerning God's will, he obeyed immediately.

And there can be things that God speaks where we delay obedience. It's a very bad sign. Usually such a person, brother or sister, will never make much spiritual progress in their life.

There are people I've seen who've heard about baptism and think about it, take time to obey. It's usually a sign that all their life they'll be like that. It may be a little thing.

It may be that God tells the sister to take off her ornaments and she thinks about it. Maybe after one month she does it. But it's a very bad sign.

The chances are that all her life that sister will be like that, never taking obedience seriously. Or it can be in another area. God says, go and apologize to that person.

Apologize to your husband or your wife concerning what you did. And I think about it and I wait for a day or two days or three days. The chances are that all my life I'll be like that.

God sees that I would not obey immediately. It's a very bad sign. Where we've seen something in God's word or God has spoken something clearly to us and I think about it, I know in my spirit that this is what I must do, that I must return the money I've taken wrongfully.

Or can I take it lightly or a debt that I borrowed, I take it lightly. I can say with almost absolute certainty, it can never go well with such a brother or sister all through their life. You can write it concerning them right at the beginning.

This is the thing that makes the difference between certain types of brothers and certain others. All understand the new and living way. They all think they are very zealous, but it's in these little things in private life where God speaks that these words cannot be written about them in the very same day as God said to him.

The last part of verse 23, he did it. That is the thing that makes the difference between a spiritual brother and a carnal brother, or a spiritual sister and a carnal sister, even though both may understand and explain and believe the doctrine of the new and living way perfectly. It's that immediateness of obedience that brings God's blessing and approval and God's meeting us on.

Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, when we hear God speak concerning anything which we know clearly, we must do it. Let there be no delay. What can we do about the past? We can only repent.

Only repent and hope that it'll be better in the future. God gives us another chance many times. But after a while, I think God sees that certain brothers and sisters will never take it seriously, this matter of

immediate obedience, and he just lets them go.

He lets them go. And then many people, they just drift along for the rest of their lives and waste their lives. So there's a lesson there that we must take very seriously from Abraham's life.

And now we come to chapter 18. The Lord appears to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day. And when the Lord appeared to him, he didn't look like the Lord.

Because it says when Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, what he saw was three men who were walking down by that desert and stopped by Abraham's tent, and he saw them. And he ran from the tent door to meet them. He didn't know that that was the Lord come in a human manifestation.

Not that he had taken on a body. Jesus took a body only many years later, many thousands of years later, but that he had manifested himself, apparently looking in human form, appearing to be in human form. And the other two were angels, and one was probably what we've read of earlier, the messenger of the Lord.

And these three. But Abraham didn't know that was the Lord. There's a verse in Hebrews chapter 13 which says, don't forget to entertain strangers, be hospitable.

Let me read that verse. It says to believers, let brotherly love continue, verse one. And it's talking about brothers in the church.

And do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. That's referring to Abraham, obviously. Because he didn't know that those were angels.

He just thought they were men going by, and he showed hospitality. It's always the mark of a man of God that he's hospitable and open-hearted as far as his home is concerned. No person can ever consider himself to be spiritual if he's not hospitable.

And we read here, when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth with respect and said, My Lord, if now I have found favor in Your sight, please do not pass Your servant by. You don't get the impression that Abraham is some type of great man who thinks he's got very high thoughts about himself, who just had a revelation yesterday from God, where God told him, You're going to be the father of many nations. No, you see a humility here.

For ordinary people doing that, that's very common. But for someone who's had such supernatural revelations from God, where God has told him what a great man he's going to be, for him to have that attitude towards others is really a mark of spiritual greatness. And there we see the mark of a true man of God, that whatever revelation he gets from God, it doesn't go to his head.

It doesn't make him think that he's some type of big shot spiritually. Whenever you see a person behaving like a big shot spiritually, you can write it down that that person is carnal. And that's the condition of the vast majority of so-called Christian leaders today.

They're more like business executives rather than humble men of God. But Abraham was different. He had such a humble attitude, and that is manifest in his attitude towards these people who came.

And he said, Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, and I will bring a piece of bread that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may go on. He calls

himself, in verse 3, your servant. He says, I'm here to serve you.

Think about attitude. He doesn't say, I'm one of those who just had a revelation from God. God's told me that I'm going to be a blessing to the whole world.

No, that's all secret. If God's given you a revelation, brother, keep it secret, and let your attitude to others be your servant. That's how it was with Abraham.

That's why he continued on till the end. It's very difficult for people when they get some revelation from God to remain with that attitude. And then, you may refresh yourselves, verse 5, and after that you may go on, since you have visited again your servant a second time.

And they said, So do, as you have said. So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, Quickly prepare three measures of fine flour, knead it, and make bread cakes. We know in 1 Peter, chapter 3, that Sarah is given to sisters as an example.

It says, Be, you must have that imperishable quality of a meek and a quiet spirit like Sarah, who is an example for sisters. And we read here that Sarah, though God had just changed her name a few days ago to Princess, she doesn't behave like a princess. She doesn't act as though she's a big shot.

She's one who's learned to work with her hands. And Abraham told her to knead the dough. She didn't... Those three hundred and eighteen servants that she worked with her hands, think of that.

Have you seen a woman with three hundred and eighteen servants who works with her hands? Almost impossible to find such a woman today, even if they have one or two. Very often they wouldn't work with their hands. And I always tell young people, when you are looking for a wife, look for one who's got rough hands, who's learned to work with her hands.

These soft, gentle hand types are not the ones that'll be a blessing to you. Those who've learned to work with their hands. And Sarah is an example there.

And there's something we see here about Sarah, and that's, when Abraham came, you just picture this, the man coming suddenly to his wife and saying, we've got free guests for lunch today. And you know the reaction of the average wife. Why in the world don't you tell me about all these things before just slamming up suddenly and all that? No.

There you find Sarah with an ungrumbling, equally hospitable attitude as her husband. Blessed are you if you've got a wife like that. Really you're blessed.

One who will not grumble. Think, she had to suddenly go and knead the dough and make something extra, and she did it. And Abraham also ran.

Think of this 99-year-old man running. Just look at his attitude to serve these people. There's really something we can learn from this man.

He's not the big shot. He's not the man who calls himself the father of many nations, the one who's going to bless the whole world. No, he's a servant.

And that's always the mark of a man of God. He ran to the herd and took the best. He didn't find some cheap dying calf that he could get rid of just for namesake to show hospitality, but took the best of his

calves and gave it to the servant.

He hurried to prepare it. And he took curds and milk and the calf which he had prepared and placed it before them. And he was standing by them under the tree as they ate.

Think of the attitude of this man standing there serving them. Really, I believe that all brothers and sisters can read those eight verses and learn some tremendous lessons in our attitudes towards one another. Many precious lessons in our attitudes to the brothers and sisters.

We can learn from someone who did not even have the old covenant, leave alone the new covenant. And then they said to him, where is Sarah, your wife? And he said, ah, in the house, of course. She's not wondering of visiting some people.

No, where should a woman be? In her house. She doesn't have this wanderlust to wander. Where is your wife? Blessed is the man who can say, in my house.

You'll find her there. You see, there are so many things that we can learn from Abraham and Sarah. I'm not surprised that God picked them up.

They may not have had knowledge like we have, but they had an attitude which delighted God's heart. And if we take those lessons seriously, I believe it can go well with us. And he said, I will surely return to you at this time next year, and behold, Sarah, your wife shall have a son.

And Sarah was listening at the tenth door which was behind him. And Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age. It had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women, and Sarah laughed to herself.

After I become old, shall I pleasure my Lord being old also? And the Lord said, why did Sarah laugh? Saying, shall I indeed bear a child when I'm old? Is anything too hard, too difficult for the Lord? A wonderful phrase. We sing that in one of our choruses. Is anything too hard for the Lord? And remember that God Himself said that.

It was God who said those words. Is anything too hard for the Lord? And He said that to what was, humanly speaking, impossible. And that is meant for our encouragement.

That one sentence can remove a lot of depression, can take away a lot of fear and anxiety. One sentence. Is anything too hard for the Lord? It's a question of faith.

According to your faith, be it unto you, you believe that particular matter is a bit too hard for the Lord. All right, it will not work for you, because that is too hard for the Lord. You think so.

Whereas another person who is in a more difficult situation than you says it's not hard for the Lord. He gets a miracle. And you wonder how he got a miracle.

Is it because God is partial? No, there is no partiality with God. But because you had this attitude of that was too difficult for the Lord, you never got it. The other person said it's not too difficult, and he got it.

Because God honors faith. And it's all a question of what our response and answer is to that question. Is anything too hard for the Lord? You can think of perhaps one circumstance which is a bit too hard.

Maybe it's difficult for the Lord to find a convenient house for you to live in. Maybe it's difficult for the Lord to find a good marriage partner for you. That's tough.

Think of these days when it's so difficult. It must be hard for the Lord. Brother, sister, according to your faith, be it unto you.

It will be difficult, probably impossible in your case. But another person will find, because he says it's not difficult. She says it's not difficult.

God has got all things in power. I don't have to scheme and manipulate and do all types of tricks to do those things. It's all a question of our answer to this one question.

Is anything too hard for the Lord? And one brother or sister gets up and says, no, nothing is too hard. I trust him. He gets God's best.

Another person says, yeah, that's tough these days. Yeah, then it will be tough these days for you in that area. Think how much we can miss by giving a wrong answer to that question on God's death.

Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time, I'll return to you at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son. See, the more light God has given us, the more he expects from us. Even though Abraham and Sarah were pretty unbelieving.

Abraham laughed, it says in the previous chapter. We read that in chapter 17, 17. And Sarah laughed, it says here in chapter 18, verse 12.

Both of them laughed, laughed in unbelief. But God was merciful. But that's because they didn't have so much of light.

But to whom much is given, much is required. Do you remember when the angel Gabriel came to Zachariah, the high priest, and said, you're going to have a son? And he said, how can that be? And he became dumb. And then the angel Gabriel went to Mary and said, you're going to have a son.

And she said, how can that be? And she didn't become dumb. Why was that? How is that? Mary didn't become dumb, but Zachariah became dumb, even though both of them couldn't believe it? Only one reason. Zachariah was a man who knew the word of God.

He was a leader. He was a preacher. He was a priest.

God expected a thousand times more from him than from that little girl Mary. To whom more is given, more is required. And if Zachariah behaves like that, he'll be dumb.

If Mary reacts like that, okay, God's merciful. Just like, say, a person who's newly converted, responding in one way to God's question is taken by God in quite a different way from another person who's been a believer for, say, five or six years. And he reacts in that way, quite differently.

God may ignore the unbelief of one person, but not the unbelief of the other person. Because if more has been committed to us, God expects us to have more faith. And I believe God's committed a tremendous lot to us in the Church here.

And so he expects much more from us when he asks us that question. Is anything too hard for the Lord? And may God really stir faith in our hearts that whatever the situation, our answer will be, no, nothing is too hard for the Lord. And then Sarah denied it, the usual way to tell a lie when you're caught, saying, I did not laugh because she was afraid.

And he said, no, but you did laugh. I know that. You can't try and fool God.

And then the men rose up from there and looked down towards Sodom. They were going towards Sodom. And Abraham was walking with them to send them off.

And that's two of them. The two angels went to Sodom. But the one other person, the messenger of the Lord, the manifestation of God, the Son, the Lord was there.

And he said he didn't go to Sodom. He stayed back. The third person, shall I hide from Abraham what I'm about to do? The Lord said in verse 17, since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed.

Now listen to this wonderful verse, verse 19, which tells us the purpose with which God has chosen Abraham and also the reason why God could fulfill that purpose in Abraham's life. I have chosen him in order that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice. Why did God choose Abraham? So that in order that he may raise up another generation to keep the way of the Lord.

And we can say that God has chosen us also with the same purpose that you and I, if we are married and have children, can raise up another generation that is God-fearing, that will keep the way of the Lord in doing righteousness and justice. To teach our children to keep the way of the Lord and to do righteousness and justice. That's why God has chosen us.

For our calling in this sense is the same as Abraham's. And then in order that, again that phrase, in order that, notice the twice it comes there in that sentence, one Abraham's part and the other God's part. The first in order that is Abraham's part, that he will bring up his family in a God-fearing way so that God can bring upon Abraham what he has spoken about him.

In other words, God could not bring upon Abraham what he had spoken unless Abraham did his part in his family. And there we see way from the beginning in Genesis the importance that God gives to the bringing up of a family in God-fearing ways. And where people neglect that, God is not able to fulfill in their lives what he has intended.

That's a serious thing. You can compare that with what we read about Eli in 1 Samuel chapters 2 and 3. And you see the contrast, how God told Eli, the high priest, that your seed will not continue as high priest, because you did not bring up your children in God-fearing ways. When you saw them going astray, you said, why did you do that, my children? You did not straighten them out.

And God held Eli, the father, responsible. Why do we find, for example, that certain children in the church know how to behave themselves and certain others don't? Can you blame the children? No. There are Abrahams and there are Elis in the church.

It's the fathers. It's the fathers who are responsible. Always.

Don't say, oh, some children are like that. That is a convenient excuse to get out of our responsibility. No.

Contrast Abraham and Eli. And think that God could not do what he wanted for Eli because he did not take it seriously concerning the bringing up of his children, but he could do what he wanted for Abraham because he took the bringing up of his children seriously. So let's not take that lightly.

Let's not take these little disobediences in our children lightly. When you see your child behave in some carnal way and you take that lightly, you are moving in the direction of Eli. He took it lightly.

Of course, he just said, yeah, you shouldn't do that. And we can also say, yeah, you shouldn't do that, instead of taking it seriously. And you see, time goes on and we don't take it seriously, and after some time they are hardened in that carnal way.

And then it's too late. And the fate of Eli can come upon us, and it's too late to do anything about it after that. It's when they are young that they dare to be taught a fear of God, a respect for older people, a respect for the church, etc.

That is the way God could fulfill something in Abraham's life. It's indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly great. I will go down now and see if they have done entirely according to his outcry, which has come to me, and if not, I'll know.

This teaches us that when there's sin in one part of the world, Sodom and Gomorrah was one part of the world, and when sin multiplies in one area, that can happen. There's certain areas of the world where there's more sin, particularly moral sin, sexual sin, in certain areas. There's a cry that comes up from that area up to God, and God can bring judgment down on you.

Wait for a long time. It doesn't come immediately, but finally judgment will come. And then men turned away from there and went towards Sodom while Abraham was still standing before the Lord.

And Abraham came near and said, and here is the first place in Scripture where we read of somebody interceding for another. The first intercessory prayer in Scripture. That's a good example we see in Abraham's life, praying that God will be merciful to somebody else.

That was his heart. He didn't say, yeah, Lord, these fellows deserve judgment, and that's compromising a lot he's going to live there too. So easy to be hard.

Think this man who lived even before the old covenant had such a soft heart. He said, Lord, be merciful. It's right, he believed in righteousness, he knew that judgment must come upon the city, but he said there may be some righteous people there, and he prayed.

Now you see, Abraham did not have this attitude to prayer, saying, oh well, what God has planned to do, it will happen in any case. Those are the clever people who have all their logic and their cleverness, who say what God's plan will happen in any case. These are the people who never pray, because they don't believe that nothing, anything will change.

They are so clever, they've got it all worked out. But Abraham didn't have that human cleverness. He didn't say, oh well, what God has planned will take place in any case.

He believed that he could try and change God's mind. Think of that attitude to pray. Jesus taught us to pray so that God would do certain things which he wouldn't do otherwise.

You know, there are many instances like that, and I've come to see that those who are very logically clever-minded find it almost impossible to understand this. These are hidden from the wise and intelligent. You find little children have no problem praying, because they don't ask all these logical questions.

They simply pray. And that's why Jesus said, it's good to be like a babe. And Abraham was like a babe there, when he came in intercessory prayer, and he prayed to God for Sodom and Gomorrah, and he says, will thou indeed sweep away the righteous with the He didn't say, spare the wicked, but he said, think of the righteous.

And suppose there are 50 righteous within the city. Will you not spare the place for the sake of 50? You won't do such a thing. You are the judge of all the earth, and won't you deal justly? He's pleading with God there.

And I want you to notice one thing here, that this prayer of Abraham's was based on a revelation that God had given Abraham concerning Sodom and Gomorrah. You see, effective prayer is always based on the word of God. That prayer, which is not based on some word of God, is not really very effective.

Abraham had received a word from God concerning Sodom and Gomorrah, and it was on the basis of that word of God that he prayed. A good example for us to pray in response to something that God has spoken. And he prayed and said, Lord, you're not going to let, destroy the righteous.

Are you supposing there are just 50? Won't you spare the city? And the Lord said, verse 20, 65, find in Sodom 50 righteous. I'll spare the whole place. And Abraham said, now, Lord, I venture to speak, and I'm but dust and ashes.

Think of his attitude. Think of what he thinks of himself before God, what he thought of himself before other men was that he was just a servant. And what he thinks of himself in relation to God is that he's just dust and ashes.

And he said, supposing there are only 45. And the Lord said, all right, I won't destroy the 45. Then he said, supposing there are only 40.

He said, I won't destroy it. He said, O Lord, verse 30, don't be angry. Supposing there are only 30.

He said, I won't destroy it if there are 30. Then he said, supposing there are only 20, verse 31. He said, I won't destroy it if there are 20.

Then he said, I'll ask once more. Supposing there are only 10. Because Abraham knew it was a wicked place.

Possible that there may not even be 20 righteous people. And he said that there must be at least 10. And whatever city is it, if there are not even 10 righteous people there.

And I think he had the feeling that that will be spared. Because surely there must be 10 righteous people in all those thousands. And he said, if I find 10 righteous people, not 10,000 compromisers, no.

10 upright, righteous people could save a whole city from destruction, from the judgment of God. Do we learn something there? Do we learn the tremendous power that righteousness has to bless a city? 10 people can protect a whole city from God's judgment. It's a tremendous challenge.

But he's not impressed by compromisers. He's not impressed by those who are hypocrites. 10 righteous people.

You think God can find 10 righteous people in Bangalore? Like Abraham, we may say, oh, sure. Yeah, I would have a question mark. Absolutely upright and righteous and God-fearing by the new covenant standards.

I hope God can find 10 righteous people in the city. I think this city would be tremendously influenced if he could find 10 people who lived in absolute integrity before his face. Multitudes of compromisers may know the doctrine, but 10 righteous people will influence a city for good, and even a nation.

But not if they're not righteous. You know that word in James chapter 5 which says, James 5 and verse 16, the last part, the effective prayers of a righteous man can accomplish much. Not the effective prayer of any believer.

No, some believers are not righteous. But the effective prayer of a righteous man, one man, one man praying, can accomplish a fantastic amount if he's righteous. That's why I'm not impressed when I see a notice saying 5,000 people are going to gather for an all-night prayer meeting in a particular hall.

I say, that's fine, they can go ahead and have their all-night prayer meeting. If they think that God's going to hear them because there are 5,000, they don't have a clue about God's way. See, men are impressed by numbers.

If one million people protest against something, even the government will change its policy on a matter, as we have seen in our country again and again, because so many people are protesting against it. Numbers impress men. God's not impressed.

Even if one million come to a prayer meeting, one righteous man, one righteous man praying, can accomplish such a lot. And he takes the example of Elijah in verse 17, who prayed, and it didn't rain, and he prayed again, and it rained. How many people there were in Israel? Do you know that God told Elijah at that time, that there are 7,000 people in this country who have not bowed down to idols? All the others have bowed down to idols, but there are 7,000 people in Israel who have not bowed down to idols.

They had kept themselves pure from that. But they were not righteous like Elijah. That one man could do more than all those 7,000 believers.

We can say the rest of Israel were unbelievers. These 7,000 were believers, but among these 7,000, there was one man, Elijah, who was absolutely righteous. He could open... The others were just drifting along.

Of course, they didn't bow down to idols. They were not as bad as the rest of the Israelites. And so we find there were three categories in Israel.

There was the Elijah, there were the 7,000, and the rest. And it's the same with Christendom today. As the occasional Elijah, there's a multitude of those who, they don't bow down to idols, they don't cheat anyone, but they're not absolutely righteous.

They don't live before God's face. Their private life and hidden life and secret life is not upright. That is a rare Elijah that you find there.

This is a multitude of people who have a good testimony before men. They're not like all the other unbelievers who are bowing down to idols. But all those 7,000... Think of those 7,000 people who had a prayer meeting, all-night prayer meeting for fire from heaven.

Do you think the fire would have come? But one man prayed for two minutes, and the fire came. Not even two minutes, a few seconds, and the fire came. What does it prove to us? It's not numbers.

It's not all-night prayer. It's a question of righteousness in the life. And that man prayed just a few seconds, and the fire fell.

If we can learn a lesson from this, the ears of the Lord, it says, are always open to the righteous. It's like a telephone. We can use the illustration of the telephone, that when a man prays, the Lord can pick up the phone, but the Lord knows who's praying.

Is it a righteous man? He picks up the phone immediately. Is it a man who's not righteous in his private life? The Lord doesn't even pick up the telephone. He just rings.

Of course, the man can keep on speaking at the other end, like some people can do, like children die with some number and nobody's picked it up. They keep on speaking. A lot of all-night prayer meetings are like that.

They keep on speaking, speaking, speaking, speaking, speaking. Nobody's listening at the other end. This child's praying.

Waste of time. We can learn something from Abraham in this area. Two seconds, pick up a telephone and say something, and there's action.

And the other child is speaking into the telephone for two, three hours, and nothing's happening. Are we impressed when we hear that somebody spent three hours in prayer? It is to the righteous that the ears of the Lord are always open. Be righteous and upright, brothers, sisters, if you want to make an impact with your life in the world in our one short life.

Be upright and live before God's face. Don't live before the face of men, as we have often said. Live before God's face, and only fear God, and your one life can make a tremendous impact for God.

However weak or ungifted or whatever weakness and limitation you may have, if you're upright and you live before God's face, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, cleanse yourself from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and God sees your wholeheartedness in that area, you pick up the telephone, saying, Lord, it's me, and He picks up. Five seconds, I've just got to say something, and then action. Think to be able to be on such terms with God.

Jesus was like that. He would say, I thank God, thank you, Father, that you always hear me. There was never another person like Him.

But we can strive towards it, and get nearer and nearer and nearer to that. Yeah? So we see here in Genesis 18 that ten people could have saved that city, but there were not ten righteous people. There must have been a lot of religious people in Sodom, but there were not ten righteous people.

And as soon as he had finished speaking to Abraham, the Lord departed, Genesis 18, 33, and Abraham returned to his place. Chapter 19. Now the two angels came to Sodom, and this is how we know that the

other two were angels out of the three people who came to see the Lord.

Came to Sodom in the evening, as Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. Now, in the Old Testament, whenever you read the phrase, in the gate, that doesn't mean a watchman. Lot was not a watchman.

It would have been beneath his dignity to be a watchman. He was a millionaire. In the Old Testament, sitting in the gate means one of the elders of the city.

The gate was the place where the elder sat to judge the disputes. It was the most honored seat in the whole city. To sit in the gate meant to be one of the elders of the city.

And there you see how Lot drifted. What we read in Genesis 13 is that he pitched his tent in the direction of Sodom. He didn't go as far as Sodom, just in that general area.

And then from there, he moved out into Sodom and began to live there. And then after some time, you find he's advancing. He's getting a promotion.

And he probably thought God was blessing him in that promotion too. He has become an elder in the city of Sodom. Sitting in the gate is one of the respected elders, utterly deceived as to what God's blessing means.

He was sitting in the gate of Sodom, one of the big shots of this wicked city, without a clue, without a clue that God was going to judge this city. Abraham had a clue, because God said, shall I hide, verse chapter 18, verse 17, from Abraham? I can hide it from Lot, but I can't hide it from Abraham. The secret of the Lord is with those who fear him.

The others don't have a clue what God is doing. They can be elders in Babylon and not even realize that God's about to destroy this whole religious system. But an Abraham will know that God's about to bring judgment on Babylon.

But a Lot, we can't say Lot is an unbeliever. 2 Peter chapter 2 makes it very clear that Lot was a righteous man. That's why God saved him out of Sodom.

If he was unrighteous, God would have judged him along with Sodom. So Lot is not a picture of an unbeliever. He's a picture of a compromising believer who sits in Babylon.

He's a picture like of those, like those seven thousand in Elijah's time, who could accomplish nothing for God. But they had a testimony, we have not bowed down to idols. In Elijah's time there was a man called Obadiah.

Not the Obadiah who wrote the letter, the book in the Old Testament. Another Obadiah we read in 1 Kings chapter 18, who was the manager of Ahab's palace. But it says he feared God.

How can you fear God and be a manager in the King, King Ahab's palace? And be a virtual servant of Queen Jezebel? He was there. But he'd have lost his job if he had stood up for the Lord. But he didn't bow down to idols.

He was one of those 7,000. But do you think he could accomplish anything? Do you think he could bring fire down from heaven? No. Of course he was living comfortably there in Ahab's palace while Elijah was struggling out in the wilderness, or in some widow's house.

This chap was living comfortably in Ahab's palace. He had the best. And he thought he was getting the best of both worlds.

I fear God, and I also have it good in this world. And he didn't realize that he was just one of those compromisers. God wasn't picking up the telephone when he prayed.

It's only when Elijah prayed that God picked up the phone. And there was a difference between Abraham and Lot. And when Lot saw them, of course, he was humble and hospitable, just like Abraham.

He rose, and he bowed down, and he said, Please come to me, O 7,000, and spend the night and wash your feet. And you may rise early and go on your way. But notice the difference in the response.

When Abraham said that in chapter 18, those people said, Sure, we'll come into your home. But when Lot said, Come into my home, they said, No, we'd rather stay outside in the street. Think.

Think of that, that the Lord's messengers did not feel like staying in Lot's house, because it is the house of a compromiser, of a man who appeared to be religious, talking all the right language, but his heart was set on making money, on being an elder in Sodom, and being a big shot. That was his deep down his motive, getting on in the world, getting on in his profession. And all the time he had this religious whitewash on him.

And the messengers, the Lord said, No, we'll stay out on the street. Think of that, brothers and sisters. Yeah, God distinguishes between the righteous and the compromisers.

Yet he's merciful, he's compassionate, he urged them strongly, so they finally did go. But they were reluctant. But they went only with one reason, to save him out.

They didn't stay the night there. He prepared a feast for them before they lay down. I doubt whether Lot would have, Lot and his wife would have done it like Abraham and Sarah.

I don't think Lot's wife worked with her hands. And I don't think Lot would have stood there with a servant's attitude like Abraham. No, he got a feast prepared, and there were plenty of servants there in his house to do that.

And before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, young and old. Young people and old people were all corrupt in Sodom. They were perverted sexually.

And even today, sexual perversion is called sodomy. People from every quarter, and they called to Lot and said to him, Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them. And Lot went out to the doorway and shut the door behind them and said, Please, my brothers, don't act wickedly.

These were his brothers, these evil people, these ungodly people over whom he was an elder, this Babylon over which he was sitting as an elder. And look at the evil that has penetrated into this man. He says, Please save these people, but I'll give you two of my daughters.

Think of a father who's so evil that he can give his daughters. Yeah, and do whatever you like to them. But they said, Stand aside.

And they said, This one came in here as a stranger, and already he's acting like a judge. He'll treat you worse than them. And they pressed hard against Lot and came here to break the door.

Remember what Jesus said? The last days will be like the days of Lot. Jesus said that in Luke 17. These are the days of sexual perversion and violence.

And the movies and the videotapes and television are all promoting this cult of sexual perversion and violence, just like Noah's day, Lot's days, and Sodom. The world is going to be like Sodom and Gomorrah. That's what Jesus said.

And in the midst of that, there'll be Lot sitting as an elder in Babylon, and there'll be an Abraham. Just like in Noah's day there was a Noah, in Lot's days there was an Abraham. And that's our calling as a church, to be like Noah, to be like Abraham, not to be like Lot.

And the men reached out their hands, that is these angels, and brought Lot into the house and shut the door. And they struck the men who were at the doorway of the house with blindness, both small and great. Now one would think that when these people are struck with blindness, that they would at least say, Oh, this is God's judgment.

But no. Even after blindness has struck them, it says here in the rest of that verse, they were still trying to find the door, to break it in, and go and catch these people. Can you imagine how evil they've become? That even when God strikes them with blindness, they still don't see it as God's judgment.

They continue in their evil way. No repentance. And that's what happens to people when they continue and continue and continue in sin, that a time can come when it is impossible for them to repent, even if they want to.

It says about Esau, that a time came when he wanted to repent and he couldn't. And when people continue in sin, we studied that in Romans chapter one, in one of our Sunday Bible studies, three times, Romans one. It says God gave them up, God gave them up, God gave them up.

And what happened? They went into sexual perversion. That's what happened here. And when God gives up a man, the man has got no more desire to repent.

And I believe that's the mark of a man who has sinned against the Holy Spirit. Jesus spoke about the sin against the Holy Spirit, and people often ask about that sin, what is the sin against the Holy Spirit? I say, well, we may not know exactly what that sin is, but we know when a man has committed that sin. That is, the man has no more desire for repentance.

He doesn't have any desire for repentance. He can sin in an area and keep on sinning in that area without any repentance. That's how it is with these people.

That God strikes them with blindness, continue in their sin. They're still eager for their sin, even when God judges them. Sickness counts, judgment counts, but they don't think that is God.

Think of this verse in the book of Amos, chapter four, very instructive. In the book of Amos, chapter four, verse six, I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities and lack of bread. Cleanness of teeth means there was no food stuck between your teeth, because there was nothing to eat.

You were starving, but in spite of that, you didn't turn back to me. You didn't see that as a judgment. Verse seven, I withheld the rain from you.

I would send rain on one city and not another. Still, verse eight, you didn't return to me. I smote you with scorching wind and milled you, and your crops were all destroyed.

There was no prosperity in what you did. Still, you didn't return to me. I sent you a plague.

You didn't return to me. I overthrow you, God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, yet you didn't return to me. Therefore, prepare, verse 12, to meet your God.

Not O unbelievers, but O Israel. Many of the verses that we quote for unbelievers in the Bible, if you look up carefully, they are meant for believers. Prepare to meet your God, you Babylonians, that you don't see God's hand in that judgment, when everything you put your hand to goes wrong.

Have you ever thought of judging yourself? With a constant problem, all the time. Have you ever thought, sit back and say, what's God trying to say to me? Let me cleanse myself. Let me judge myself.

I don't mean tribulation. Tribulation from men. Oh, that Jesus had all through his life, and we will have all through our life.

I don't mean that. But when you see that God's blessing is not there upon your life, then you really need to sit up and ask yourself, why? Why is God's blessing? There may be difficulties. There may be tribulation and trials, sure.

But God's blessing is lacking. That is, God is trying to say something, turn back to me. And he tries again through another method, through starvation, lack of rain, judgment on the cross, failure here, failure there.

They don't turn. He says, okay, now there's only one solution. I give you up.

Prepare to meet your God. So that's how it was, that they were so evil, that God had only to say to them, to Lot, get out of here, for we are about to destroy this place. And we see there, verse 12, God's graciousness to Lot.

He says, do you have sons-in-law, sons, daughters? 1912, Genesis 1912, bring them out of this place, for we are about to destroy it. Because their outcry has gone beyond a certain limit, and now the Lord has sent us to destroy it. God is merciful, long-suffering, but when people cross the line, he brings judgment.

And Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, and said, let's get out of this place. The Lord will destroy the city. This man who was making money suddenly becomes a preacher.

But the sons-in-law laughed, hey, you came here to make money, and now you started preaching to us, eh? No testimony. No wonder. The sons-in-law have no respect for him, because they saw the motivation of his life, just like Lot of believers.

When they get up to speak, even unbelievers with discernment can see through the hollowness of their testimony. And we know what this fellow is after, and he gets up to preach. Saying, God's going to judge the world, let's be ready for the coming of the Lord.

And they all laugh. You see, if we don't have a life to back up what we are saying, it's impossible for the Spirit of God to bring conviction through the words. Mere words are not enough.

We can speak the right words, but it's only when there's a life behind those words that it brings conviction to those who hear. And Lot didn't have that life, and they laughed at him. But the angels urged Lot and put him up when the morning dawned.

Now that we can stop there, there's much that we can learn from the contrast there is between Abraham and Lot. A tremendous warning for us in the days in which we live.

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