

To Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, forever and ever. Amen.

¹⁷ And the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, ¹⁸ since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? ¹⁹ For I have known him" ²⁰ And the LORD said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, ²¹ I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know." ²² Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD. ²³ And Abraham came near and said, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴ Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it? ²⁵ Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" ²⁶ So the LORD said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes." ²⁷ Then Abraham answered and said, "Indeed now, I who am but dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: ²⁸ Suppose there were five less than the fifty righteous; would You destroy all of the city for lack of five?" So He said, "If I find there forty-five, I will not destroy it." ²⁹ And he spoke to Him yet again and said, "Suppose there should be forty found there?" So He said, "I will not do it for the sake of forty." ³⁰ Then he said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Suppose thirty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." ³¹ And he said, "Indeed now, I have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: Suppose twenty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of twenty." ³² Then he said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak but once more: Suppose ten should be found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of ten." ³³ So the LORD went His way as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.

Text: Genesis 18:17-33 A 5/21/17 1 John 3:19-24 Luke 24:36-49 Psalm 86
Hymns: 537, 4, 459, 46

PRAY!

- 1. Pray by faith in Jesus**
- 2. Pray with humility**
- 3. Pray with persistence**
- 4. Pray with faith in God's goodness**

Come, my soul, thy suit prepare,
Jesus loves to answer prayer;
He Himself has bid thee pray,
Therefore will not say thee nay.

Thou art coming to a King,
Large petitions with thee bring;
For His grace and power are such
None can ever ask too much. (TLH #459:1-2)

Dear fellow believers in Christ, in whom we have the privilege of prayer,

One of the greatest blessings God has given us is prayer. We sinners can pray to almighty God, and He listens to our prayers and answers them! Today through the example of the Old Testament believer Abraham, you and I are encouraged to pray.

– 1 –

The Lord says about Abraham, *“All the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him. For I have known him.”* God was speaking of the future when He would send Abraham’s descendant, Jesus, to be the Savior of the world. Abraham believed in God and in God’s Son. It was because Abraham believed in God that he could pray to God and God would listen to his prayers and answer him.

It’s only by faith in the living God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – that we can pray to God and have Him hear and answer our prayers. God doesn’t answer the prayers of those who don’t believe in Him. Hebrews 11:6 says, *“Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him”* (NIV). If someone doesn’t trust in Jesus for his salvation, he rejects God. A person can’t reject God and His salvation in Jesus, and expect God will still hear and answer his prayers: *“God, I’m going to ignore You and Your Word and live however I please. But You should still answer my prayers whenever I want or need something.”* That doesn’t work. We believe in Jesus who died on the cross to save us from our sins. By faith in Jesus, God forgives our sins and loves us. For Jesus’ sake, God wants us to pray to Him and promises to answer our prayers. Abraham believed in the Savior who was to come: Jesus. We believe in the Savior who has come: Jesus. By faith in the Savior, God heard and answered Abraham’s prayers, and God hears and answers our prayers.

– 2 –

We’re struck by Abraham’s humility as he speaks to the Lord in prayer: *“Indeed now, I who am but dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord.” “Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak.”* Abraham knew he was a sinner, and that he was standing before the holy, righteous, almighty God. When Moses approached God in the burning bush, God told him, *“Do not come any closer ... Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.”* (Ex. 3:5). When Isaiah was given a vision of God in heaven he said, *“Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts”* (Is. 6:5). The Lord assured Isaiah that He had forgiven him for his sins, and that Isaiah was therefore welcome to come before Him.

We’re told in Ecclesiastes 5:1-2, *“Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few”* (ESV). When we come to church we’re in God’s house, and we want to show God respect. The same thing is true whenever we come before God in prayer, here at church, or wherever we are. God wants us to pray to Him, and He listens to our prayers. When we pray to God, we shouldn’t ramble on and on without much thought to what we’re saying, or making demands of God and telling God what to do. God

doesn't want us to be afraid or hesitant to come before Him in prayer. Hebrews 4:16 says that because we come to God by faith in Jesus, *"Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."* God does want us to remember that we are sinners and He is the holy God so that when we come before Him we come with humility.

Abraham wasn't being arrogant or telling God what to do when he told God, *"Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"* Abraham wasn't telling God to be fair. He was acknowledging the fact that God is fair, and that God wouldn't unfairly punish the believers because of what the unbelievers were doing.

– 3 –

God told Abraham He was going to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of their terrible wickedness. Abraham understood that by their perversity, their defiance of God, and their unrepentance they had brought God's just punishment upon themselves. At the same time, Abraham thought what a tragedy it would be if there were believers in Sodom and Gomorrah who would be destroyed along with the unbelievers. So Abraham began his prayer by asking God to spare the cities if there were at least fifty believers in them. God said He would. As Abraham kept thinking about the possibility of any believers being destroyed along with the unbelievers, he kept reducing the number of believers needed to spare the cities until he reached ten. God promised to spare Sodom and Gomorrah if there were even ten believers living in them.

Abraham persisted in prayer. God wants you and me to do the same. Our second Scripture Lesson was Jesus' parable about a widow who kept pleading her case before a judge until the judge gave her justice. Jesus says that we *"always ought to pray and not lose heart."* Jesus adds, *"And will not God give justice to His elect, who cry to Him day and night? Will He delay long over them? I tell you, He will give justice to them speedily"* (Lk. 18:1, 7-8a, ESV).

God wants us to be like Abraham and keep on praying to Him when something is on our mind. We're not bothering God. In fact, God tells us, *"Call upon Me in the day of trouble"* (Ps. 50:15a); *"Keep on asking ...; keep on seeking ...; keep on knocking"* (Mt. 7:7). Like Abraham, we know we're not worthy to ask God for anything and have Him listen to us and answer us. The devil likes to remind us of our unworthiness, especially when we've been praying for a long time about something, to try to discourage us and make us give up. But God's answer to our prayers doesn't depend on our worthiness. If it did, God would never answer our prayers. God answers our prayers because He loves us and has forgiven our sins and has mercy on us for Jesus' sake.

– 4 –

Think about what Abraham was asking God to do: spare Sodom and Gomorrah! Those cities existed a very long time ago. Yet to this day, even many unbelievers have heard of Sodom and Gomorrah and how God destroyed them with fire and brimstone. Abraham didn't want believers to be killed along with the unbelievers, and he knew that God in His mercy would listen to his concern and take it into consideration.

In our liturgy we sing, “Lord, have mercy on us! Christ, have mercy on us! Lord, have mercy on us!” If we let ourselves, we can sing those lines without giving much thought to them. But they’re tremendously meaningful. We’re **begging** God to have mercy on us. That’s a prayer that, in effect, we all pray on our own often. How often don’t we ask God to help us or someone else, to give us hope, to make a way for us, to forgive us, not to give up on us but to keep us as His children? In essence, those are all cries: “Lord/Christ have mercy on me!” And God always does. The psalmist reminds us, *“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. ... He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. ... As a father has mercy on his children, so the Lord has mercy on those who fear Him”* (who revere Him) (Ps. 103:8, 10, 13).

Abraham prayed with faith in God’s goodness, and so do we. Jesus says, *“If you, ... though you are evil”* (sinful), *“know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give **good** gifts to those who ask Him!”* (Mt. 7:11). James says, *“Every **good** and **perfect** gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows”* (1:17). We read in Romans 8:32, *“He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”* God loves us so much that He was willing to sacrifice His only dear Son, Jesus, to save us. God is always good to us. Since God gave us Jesus, then He’ll give us every good thing that we truly need. And there are many good things God gives us and does for us, not because we need them and couldn’t live without them, but because He is our loving Heavenly Father who likes to make us happy.

Dear Christian friends, **PRAY! Pray by faith in Jesus. Pray with humility. Pray with persistence.** And **pray with faith in God’s goodness.** Amen.