**Press On: With Prayer** (Feb. 8, 2017)

**Gen. 18:16-33**

16When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. 17Then the Lord said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? 18Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. 19For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.”

20Then the Lord said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous 21that 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.”

22The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the Lord.

 23Then Abraham approached him and said: “Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24What 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? 25Far 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?”

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

27Then 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, 28what 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.”

29Once again he spoke to him, “What if only forty are found there?”

He said, “For the sake of forty, I will not do it.”

30Then 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.”

31Abraham 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.”

32Then 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.”

33When the Lord had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.

**Some Helpful Background**

1. Three visitors come to chat with Abraham at the beginning of chapter 18. We know from chapters 18 and 19 that 2 of them are angels, but the identity of the third visitor has been a great mystery in the Church.

a. Human authority figure: This theory is unlikely due to the conduct of all three as “visitors from God,” and the authoritative words and promises made by the third visitor. Abraham refers to the visitor as “my Lord,” which could refer to “my God,” but could just be a term of respect similar to “Sir.”

b. Another angel: Most Biblical scholars dismiss this idea, as Abraham clearly treats the third visitor with special reverence, and seems to understand that this visitor has authority greater than anyone else.

c. God in human form: Most theologians believe that this third visitor is not another angel, but rather a pre-incarnation of the Son of God. Abraham clearly defers to the third visitor, talks to Him with great reverence and Holy fear, and respects the power and authority of the third visitor. The “Lord” also seems to conduct Himself with authority, command, and clearly knows what Abraham and his wife are thinking/doing.

2. Abraham had divided from his relative Lott, who had moved down to the fertile plains. Abe would have been able to see the city of Sodom in the distance, down on the plain. He would have probably thought about Lott every day, as his relative lived the good life” in the exciting city.

3. God provided Abraham with great security when He disclosed the future. God had made some promises to Abraham, based on their close relationship and Abe’s strong faith. From this position of strength and closeness, Abraham prayed, and bargained boldly with God.

4. Though Abe boldly prayed and bargained with God, his attitude remained respectful, reverant, and worshipful. Abe never forgot who was God and who wasn’t. Abraham reminded God of God’s character, expressed compassion that he reflected back to God, and showed great trust in their relationship.

**Review Questions**

# (18:16) what’s the background? What has just happened? Who are these “men,” and why are they with Abe?

# (18:17-19) What was promised to Abe? Why is this section vital? What fuels this relationship? How will this work?

# (18:20-22) What had God heard about Sodom & Gomorrah? Why did He respond? What did God decide to do? When the two “men” departed to go down into Sodom personally, what did Abe do? Where did he go?

# (18:23-26) What did Abe do next? What did he ask of God? How did he ask? What logic did Abe utilize? How did God respond?

5. (18:27-30) How did Abraham respond to God’s answer? What did Abe ask for next? How did Abraham ask? What characterized the bargaining?

6. (18:31-33) What characterized the further bargaining? What was the final number that Abraham had reached with God? What happened at the end of the bargaining, prayer time?

Pretending that we don’t know what happens next, what conclusion could we reach at the end of 18??

7. So, what happened next? How many righteous and faithful people were found in Sodom & Gomorrah? How did Abraham get an answered prayer or a “yes” from God, while God’s will was still done? (19:27-29)

**Application** (So What?)

8. Have there been times when you felt like you were bargaining with God through prayer? What did you do? Is it “OK” to bargan or make bold requests from God?

9. What should your attitude ALWAYS be in prayer? How can you keep a good attitude? What is the balance that we must keep in our prayer lives?