

# Prayer and the Sovereignty of God

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Father, we live in a time, Father, and you know how deeply Canadian most of us are, and we're afraid to talk about certain things, and we're even afraid to see certain things written in your word.

And so, Father, we ask that you help us not to be afraid, to be secure, Father, in your word, and secure in your love for us, and that as your gospel becomes more real to us and helps us to be more secure in who you are and your great love for us, and that this is your word, your world, and we are your children living in your world under your care, that you would help us, Father, to allow your word to form us deeply and deeply, knowing that as your word forms us deeply, it'll form us to generosity and hospitality, to righteousness and to justice and mercy, and to prayerfulness.

So, Father, do this wonderful work in our lives, and we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. So, you might have noticed when Matt was reading, but I have a full disclosure in case you didn't.

The first half of this, we're reading the first half of a story. So, there's a story in two parts, and it's the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

I'm also aware that it's Pride Month. And so, if you're a guest here, or if you're a guest online, just let you know, those of you, if I move my head like this, it creates feedback, just let you know that this isn't like me throwing down the gauntlet, or trying to give the finger to anybody, or anything like that, or a challenge.

[ 1 : 5 7 ]     I sort of, I don't think about what months they are, and stuff like that. And those of you know, we don't really do anything for Mother's Day, or Father's Day, or other days. We just preach through books of the Bible, or large sections of the Bible, and it never really struck me that we would be talking about this chapter, during this story, during Pride Month.

So, it's not a challenge. It's, but I'm not embarrassed about the story. And maybe it's, in fact, one of the best times for us who are Christians to look at a story like this during Pride Week.

Because actually, as you see this week and next week, it forms us towards compassion, as well as to justice and to righteousness. Now, just the other thing about it, it's the actual, this is sort of the lead up to Sodom and Gomorrah, and next week we actually have the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Spoiler alert, but there you go, it gets destroyed. But interestingly enough, in this lead up to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah being destroyed, the Bible actually touches very, in very simple ways, in a very simple story, with the mystery of human freedom and worth and dignity, and the possibility of having true meaning in your life.

Not a meaning that you sort of grab for yourself, but a meaning which is bigger than you that you can enter into and walk into it. So let's look, open up your Bibles, and we'll read this text together, this scary text.

[ 3 : 34 ] Part of this text has a bit of a, anyway, let's get into the text. And it goes like this, Genesis 18, verse 1, and we're going through the Abraham stories, and we're going to end in, we're going to take a week off the last week of June, but then we'll finish it the first week of July with the story of Isaac being sacrificed, potentially sacrificed, or sacrificed because of God's command.

Here's how this story goes. And the Lord appeared to him, that's Abraham, by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day.

He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth.

And I just sort of pause, look again at verse 2, he's at his tent, and then verse 2, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. Now, just a couple of things about this.

I don't want to take too long about it. The first thing is, is you're going to see Abraham reacts in a very odd way to these men. And I know there's at least two people here in the service today who know Hebrew very well, and so if they tell me otherwise, I'll acknowledge it next week.

[ 4 : 59 ] But I think part of what explains the oddness that's going to happen afterwards is that they just appeared. He's sitting there, you know, and all of a sudden there's three men.

Like, one moment there's none, and all of a sudden there are. And I think that's what helps to explain the odd things that he's going to do in response to it.

Like, in a sense, the over-the-topness of how he responds to it. The other thing is about these men, and here's the thing, is if you read the text, as we read the text, and as you go into it next week as well, they're always called men, but they're also called angels.

And one of the men is also called the Lord. And the narrator uses the word Yahweh, in a sense the covenant name for God, and they also use the word Adonai.

Adonai, Abraham himself, clearly refers to this one of the people as God. So, you know, what's really going here? The Bible doesn't really explain it. It's not the incarnation.

[ 6 : 05 ] I don't think it's the pre-incarnate Christ or anything like that. Using a bit of a video game analogy, I think it's an avatar. That may be a better way to explain it. That two angels, in a sense, appear or take on flesh, just for the purpose of this story, and are in the story.

And God himself, the angel of the Lord, who's mentioned throughout the Old Testament in different places, an angel who, in a sense, represents God, this also is like an avatar.

So that to speak to this angel as if speaking to the Lord, and to hear this angel speak as if the Lord speaks. I think that's what's going on in the text. But the Bible never makes it clear, other than the fact that the Bible is clear, that up until the coming of Jesus, no man has ever seen God and lived.

So I think it's like an avatar. Those of you who are familiar with video games, I think that's what's going on. So these three humans and or angels, all of a sudden they're there.

And that's why Abraham, in verse two, he runs from the tent door to meet them, and he bowed himself to the earth.

[ 7 : 15 ] And in verse three, he speaks and says, O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant.

Let a little water be brought and wash your feet and rest yourselves under the tree. In other words, in the shade. While I bring a morsel of bread, just a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves.

And after that, you may pass on, since you have come to your servant. So Abraham is showing hospitality and also deference. So they said, do as you have said.

In other words, they said, okay, we'll go and sit under the tree and you go and get the little morsel ready. Now just sort of pause here for a second before I read the next little bit. But, you know, I think we went, all told, 11 days without hydro.

And, you know, such first world problems. It was so frustrating. I mean, we had a generator connected, you know, but I, you have to, first you have to make your coffee.

[ 8 : 23 ] Then you have to unplug the coffee maker. And then you have to plug in the toaster. And then you have to make the toast rather than putting the two on at the same time. And I'm just being a big baby.

But that's like tiresome and stuff like that. And, you know, and you, you know yourselves as well. You know, some of you have virtually nothing in your fridge because between eating out and calling Uber, all you have in your fridge is maybe some mustard or some ketchup or something like that.

Because we like everything quick. We like everything instant. We like everything eating out. So this next bit would drive us crazy. He says, let's just have a bit of morsel of bread, right?

And then look what happens in verse six. And Abraham went quickly into the tent to Sarah and said, quick, three seahs of fine flour. Knead it and make cakes or bread.

That's 22 liters of flour. Take 22 liters of flour, get a fire going and make bread out of 22 liters.

[ 9 : 29 ] That's a huge amount of flour. And then, verse seven, Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf. Well, just, I mean, I'm a city guy. I grew up in Montreal and then I went to Eganville.

You know, and then I lived in Ottawa and I mainly lived in Ottawa. But let me tell you, like a calf isn't just like a little thing like this. He's not talking about like a baby goat, like a calf. It might weigh 500 pounds.

500 pounds. So, look, look what's going on here. It's like, it's crazy. For us Canadians, right? Have to stop for a moment. A morsel of bread and a bit of water, right?

Verse seven, and Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and good. Hard text for vegetarians.

And gave it to a young man who prepared it quickly. In other words, he killed it, skinned it, took out the guts, starts roasting it.

[ 10 : 28 ] This isn't just something like getting on the phone and hoping that if your Uber order is going to be longer than 25 minutes, you're not going to take it. Like, this is lots of work. 500 pounds of beef, 22 liters of flour made into bread and all this other stuff as well.

Then he took curds and milk, verse eight, and the calf that he had prepared and set it before them. And he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

Now, just sort of, you know, pause here for a second. Some of you might be thinking, like, this is way overkill, this is exaggeration. And what waste?

Like, three dudes cannot, even the biggest eaters amongst you, if we were to pick the three guys with the biggest appetites, could not eat 500 pound calf, 22 liters of stuff, and all the other stuff.

So what's going on here? I had a little tiny bit of a glimpse of what was going with this the first time. I got invited, unworthy as I am, to, in 2003, to go to rural Kenya.

[ 11 : 35 ] They invited evangelical Anglican, evangelical Anglicans from all over the world to come together for this consultation. And, this wasn't like a fancy type of thing where people on, you know, government expense accounts or Apple expense accounts or something like that go.

This was in rural Kenya where, like, real Kenyans would actually go and real Nigerians and real people from the Congo and real people from Chile where it goes.

So it was in rural, it was like about 50 kilometers north and upstream of, uphill from Nairobi. And on the Sunday that I was there we got invited to go, me and a fellow from India and a fellow from England.

The three of us got invited to walk several kilometers down a road that a car couldn't make it to this place where there was a church. And we were the guests of honor and the English fellow got to preach.

And it's so neat. Some of you have been to rural Africa or maybe some of you even have grown up there. And it's not just a church building but there's like a compound as well. And so as we're coming up for the meal the women are at several fires in the church compound making food.

[ 12 : 47 ] And as the service is going on you can smell the food. And at the end of the service the three of us with the elders of the congregation and the lay reader who was looking after it we get invited for the meal.

We're invited to stay for the meal. It was part of the deal because they wanted to honor us. Now it was very, very odd for me as a Canadian to have this meal because basically other than the lay reader and the several men who were the elders and us three guests nobody ate.

The women and others sat around us the outside of the room and others were outside. And after we ate they ate. Now it was just a way of them and their culture showing us honor.

I felt uncomfortable like by my nature I would have said you know, no, no, you have this seat. That would have insulted them. They were honoring us. So what we see here is if you think about it for a second Abraham has realized that the Lord has showed up.

So he's not just going to make two pieces of pita bread and a couple of dried fish to give to the Lord. Everybody should celebrate. And we know from other places in this story that Abraham has many servants many other dependents and others.

[ 14 : 07 ] They're all going to eat. It's not just for these three guys. This is a celebration. We're going to have the fatted calf. This is going to be a great day but as a way to honor them not even Abraham in this particular case eats with them.

Just the three people eat. But you could be sure that if you went back in a time machine after the three had eaten everybody would eat. It's a festival. It's a celebration. But it's also showing honor to these three.

And now we see something that they're going to actually say. Now before we read the thing that the angels say and remember this is part of the story leading up to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

And one of the problems that we Canadians have with the Bible is we think the Bible is confused and we're not. But often what happens is that we are inconsistent and confused and massively unaware.

Now if you think about it for a second and many people pray what happens so first of all most of the time we like to live our lives and basically have God do nothing to do with us. We want to do our own thing in our own way in our own time.

[ 15 : 15 ] But sometimes when we're really really really really really in trouble we pray and when we pray what do we want God to do? We want God to almost make all of the people you know maybe the bank managers or maybe our boss or our parents or our wife or our husband we want him almost to make them like puppets and he can just sort of all of a sudden move them around in such a way that the trouble that we're in goes away.

And other times we pray that we want God to intervene in a sense that's like that's almost miraculous. We pray because you know somebody is close to death's door and we want them to live or we know that there's a financial crisis in one of you know for our friend or one of our kids and we want we want that to come to an end and so in a sense we pray for a miracle and if you think about it for a second what we're what we're showing is that when we want it when I want it when you want it I want God to intervene when I don't want him to intervene I want him out of the way but I want him to intervene and when he intervenes in a way that's like a miracle it's like this and if we're in a Bible study group or we're having a mentoring thing or maybe if you know because lots of people who aren't Christians and lots of people who even consider themselves secular they also pray I was talking to a young man this week who has nothing to do with the Christian faith but he told me he prays amongst other things but you see here's where inconsistencies if God is a God who can intervene and we want him to do that why why is it bad if God intervenes alright for a miracle but not in judgment like the reason we have a problem with that it actually reveals not only that we're confused but that in our heart of hearts

I want to be God now each of you are saying George you're not God and under your breath you're saying because I'm God and that's why there's often conflict you have two people with God projects in denial trying to live together if you have kids you have four five six whatever the number is with God projects all trying to live together so we're a bit confused about this but this is the right type of intervention and that's what we see here in the next few verses look at verse nine these that's the guest they said to him verse nine where is Sarah your wife and Abraham said she's in the tent the Lord said I will surely return to you about this time next year and Sarah your wife shall have a son and Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him now Abraham and Sarah were old advanced in years the way of women had ceased to be with

Sarah now just sort of pause here what the language is saying is that Sarah had been post-menopausal for a long time the original language the normal menstrual cycle that women have once they get a certain age puberty that has come to an end for quite a long time one of the things which is going on in this story is it's very similar to what happens if you read the gospels the eyewitness ancient biographies of Jesus is you see as you read the gospels very carefully that nobody believed first of all that Jesus would die and then second of all that if he did die that he would rise from the dead like nobody believed it and the stories all four of them set this up and this is setting up the fact that she's old she doesn't believe this nobody believes this that God in fact is going to do this profound miracle which is going to happen in a couple of chapters so after the general promise that there would be a son now it's very specific this son is going to come this time next year when they come back

Sarah will have a son and it's setting up the miracle verse 12 though Sarah doesn't believe this verse 12 so Sarah laughed to herself saying after I am worn out and my Lord is old it's a different word than Lord that's been used all the way through by the way it's the old guy shall I have pleasure the Lord said to Abraham why did Sarah laugh and say shall I indeed bear a child now that I am old he reads her thoughts is anything too hard for the Lord that could be a whole sermon just in of itself it's the big challenge to every single one of us it's the big challenge of prayer it's the big challenge of how to live our lives with a type of confidence and humility is anything too hard for the

[ 20 : 28 ] Lord at the appointed time I will return to you about this time next year and Sarah shall have a son but Sarah she's caught by her lie she's caught by what she her lack of faith her laughing at God and she's embarrassed and so she lies but Sarah denied it saying I did not laugh for she was afraid but the Lord said no you did you laughed now this is going to be important at the end of it but we see here once again we see that the Bible does not show that Abraham and Sarah are perfect people and that God is going to show grace is showing grace to imperfect people and imperfect is not even the right word to use the old fashioned biblical word Abraham and Sarah are sinners and God shows grace to sinners nothing nothing is too hard for the Lord now we come to the part that's going to start to make us a little bit nervous it's the part about what what is

God going to do about Sodom and Gomorrah look at verse 16 then the men set out from there and they looked down towards Sodom and Abraham went out with them went with them to set them on their way he's a good host he's going to walk a little way with them on their journey and the Lord said shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great nation a great and mighty nation and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him for I have chosen him and the word there is it's a relational word I know him I understand him it's not just like you know eeny meeny miny mo there's this idea of the choosing the it's sort of a little bit similar to in a sense the man who's marrying the woman chooses his wife and the woman chooses her husband and they know each other it's not just the marriage ceremony but as life goes on they have a knowledge of each other and that's being communicated here it's a it's a personal interpersonal relational type of word verse 19 for I have chosen him that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the

Lord by doing righteousness and justice the way of the Lord is to do righteousness and justice so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him so so God the Lord says to himself you see what this story is communicating to us in a very powerful way and it's one of the reasons you see we gather in church on a Sunday and part of what gathering in a church on a Sunday is all about is the word of the Lord is opened and we spend time thinking about it because God desires to reveal his heart to us he desires to speak to us and his words are grace he desires to give to us and he desires us to help him to understand better who he is and who we are and what the real world is like and how to live in the world and so we see here that we see here this in a sense how God normally thinks it's brought out here in this particular story that that's partly what

God wants to do and righteousness and justice are put together it's not that you either be righteous or you be just that you have to choose one of the two of them you can't have one without the other and they come from the same same root and and and and it's all about righteousness is is living well and it's living well in God's world and it's living well with God and with all God's creation with other people and it's it's righteousness is connected to flourishing in that world and justice is all about restoring the flourishing of human beings and human relationships in God's world in God's presence and sometimes you have to restore because we live in a fallen world and God's people get oppressed and when God's people get oppressed then justice is required the oppressors have to be stopped and there has to be some punishment done to them and the oppressed need to be delivered and set free to the end that they can flourish and that is the way of the

Lord so God knows what's going to happen and he realizes or he communicates he's going to let Abraham know what's happening verse 20 and the Lord said this is now to he's speaking to Abraham because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave I will go down to see I will go down to see whether they have done all together according to the outcry that has come to me and if not I will know now here's the thing about stories stories work in connection with abstract ideas to help us to understand abstract ideas better stories in a sense shape us to understand things sometimes when we realize you know how sometimes you come to an insight and on one level it's like you always knew it but you never sort of put it into words and that often happens because stories have formed us to understand certain things so one of the things that we've seen I haven't talked about it much lately but when they talk all the time throughout these stories when they talk about God giving the land that's a simple way of communicating that

[ 27 : 20 ] God is sovereign that he's all powerful that he's transcendent that he's a higher higher than all those gods and I can use words like transcendent and I can use words like sovereign and we might or might not know what they mean but when we hear the Bible say that God is going to give the land to Abraham that's communicating that God is sovereign it's forming us to have a bit of a sense about what sovereignty might mean or all powerful might mean and the same thing here it's not that because you might say well how did like this doesn't make any sense George like I thought God knew all things like didn't you just say earlier is anything too hard for the Lord like isn't that what you just said earlier is not what the Bible just said so how is it that God can't know what's going down there well this story is using this very simple type of language to communicate profound truths about God and profound truths as well once we we understand that who God is and how he's made the world and if God does this we need to do it we need to do it as well and what what's being communicated is that

God is not petty he's not anger driven he's driven by justice he's driven by goodness he's driven by the truth he's driven he's deeply patient and those are what drive him and none of his judgments are done slap dash or without knowing what's actually gone on it's why in many other places in the Bible especially in the New Testament and you read the book of Revelation the constant claim made at the end of the days as God's judgments are fully revealed and in a sense we replay what's happened both at the end of the ages and throughout the ages the constant refrain is that God was just praise him he did what was just and he wouldn't be just if he did things slap dash he wouldn't be just if he didn't do it with what truly had happened what was truly wrong who were truly affected he wouldn't be just he wouldn't be just or worthy of praise if he was driven by anger and pettiness and so this is communicating in a very simple but easily to remember what like you can tell this story to young children and and read it to them over and over and over again and as you read it over and over and over to them it's it's forming within them this idea

God is not anger driven God wants to know the truth and and God acts out of the truth and God acts in a way that's just he acts in a way that's fair and that's what's being communicated here in this particular thing but there's something else that still has to be revealed about God and that is his mercy even before the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah the question is is God merciful well that's what's going to be communicated very powerfully and not only powerfully it's going to be communicated in such a way that it gives us a an insight about the profound dignity and worth of human beings here's how it goes and some of you will recognize this is a very famous story and at least in some circles it goes like this verse 22 so the men turned from there and went towards Sodom but Abraham still stood before the Lord then Abraham drew near and said in other words

Abraham comes right up to the Lord this is an image of prayer by the way right coming near to the Lord to speak to him and to hear him speak to you verse 23 then Abraham drew near and said will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked in other words you've said you're just will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked suppose there are 50 righteous within the city will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the 50 righteous who are in it now by the way just pause here for a second the assumed subtext of all of this is two things which are very important to grasp Abraham knows Sodom and Gomorrah and he knows that if God goes and looks they will be swept away see part of what's being shown here about us as

Christians is that we are to pray for all sorts and conditions of men and women now obviously you do not make the mistake of praying for Putin the way you pray for the Ukrainian freedom fighter but you are to pray for both but not with moral equivalence but you pray for both so Abraham knows and believes two things that if God actually comes down the city is destroyed so this isn't moral relativism this isn't moral indifference but this is Abraham interceding for very bad people verse 23 again then Abraham drew near and said will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked suppose there are 50 righteous within the city will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the 50 righteous who are in it far be it from you to do such a thing to put the righteous to death with the wicked so that the righteous fair is the wicked far be that from you shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just and the

[ 33 : 25 ] Lord said if I find it Sodom 50 righteous in the city I will spare the whole place for their sake Abraham answered and said behold I have undertaken to speak to the Lord I who am but dust and ashes suppose five of the 50 are righteous are lacking will you destroy the whole city for lack of five and the Lord said I will not destroy it if I find 45 there again Abraham spoke to the Lord and said suppose 40 are found there and the Lord answered for the sake of 40 I will not do it then Abraham said oh let not the Lord be angry and I will speak suppose 30 are found there and the Lord answered I will not do it if I find 30 there Abraham said behold I have undertaken to speak to the Lord suppose 20 are found there and the Lord answered for the sake of 20 I will not destroy it then Abraham said oh let not the Lord be angry and I will speak again but this one suppose 10 are found there and the Lord answered for the sake of 10 I will not destroy it and the Lord went his way when he had finished speaking to



Abraham and Abraham returned to his place I did a bit of an inner internet search and I'm not sure if this is connected to it but in modern Judaism and it's been mod this for quite a few centuries you need 10 men for synagogue you have less than 10 you don't have a synagogue and I don't know if it's connected to this at all but the idea that you need that the 10 that one righteous community praying and bearing witness in that community so what's going on here does God does Abraham change God's mind one of the biggest crises I had in my young Christian life and it affected me for quite a few months and I wasn't able to find any help when I talked to Christians about it was that I was challenged by I guess what I would now know to be naturalist philosophers people who believe that really all there is is what science can discover if you can't weigh it if you can't measure it if you can't do scientific experiments on it it's not real and in this world where there's matter and there's energy things just happen it's like a billiard ball the you hit the ball and the ball hits other balls and the balls all move around and and they hit different things and and it's just cause and effect and that effect becomes a cause and I might think that I have free will and I might think that I've chosen to be a Christian but it's just all cause and effect and and that I almost lost my faith over it and it's in effect on one level it's the dominant philosophy underlying all of Canada although most people haven't really thought through what it actually means if it's true if there's only cause and effect which becomes another cause it's just really an endless series of causes and all of the causes are material and physical if that's the case there is no freedom and in a sense there is no you and if there is no freedom and there is no you life doesn't have any meaning and really ultimately have absolutely no type of dignity and that in fact is a problem and usually in naturalistic philosophers and thinkers they try to get around it in some way one of the things that they'll try to do now is create things like multiverses and stuff like that but it doesn't get around that fundamental problem that if a human being is really just a biological organism and biology can be reduced to chemistry and chemistry can be reduced to physics and it's just cause and effect then you really have no particular identity and you have no freedom and you have ultimately no meaning to your life and no type of a of worth and of course there's other ways of thinking about this in the world but you know the other two ways of thinking about it in the world apart from the Christian one have their own types of problems that if you take seriously ideas of karma and death and rebirth and and the fact that there was originally some type of cosmic accident or tragedy that left to distinct entities but every distinct entity is really ultimately just not the way things should be there should just be the one and at some point in time we will return to the one and if if we don't really have an identity and and and we do have some type of a of dignity in the sense that we do different things and it might move but it all it's doing is moving us towards that day when we lose who we are and we become like one and and in our for our Muslim friends I mean obviously people live better than this

because you see on one level at a very deep level we know that we have that there should be meaning to life and we know that we have some freedom and we know that we should have dignity even if that doesn't fit with our religions and our philosophies and in Islam you just have divine command Allah just wills it it's written on who you are when you are born what your destiny is going to be and everything is just the will of Allah but here we see and here I mean it's not obviously talking about the Trinity but the Christian you know what when Jesus the Jesus brings to clarity what the Old Testament teaches and Jesus reveals how he is both God and the Father is God and both are God but there's not two gods but just one God and then as he talks about the Holy Spirit in such a way that it's very clear that the Holy Spirit is God and the Holy Spirit isn't Jesus and there's just ultimately there's ultimately only one God but there's these three persons you actually only in Christianity do you have at a very very very deep level this picture of difference and freedom and action but without there being any sin and it's this Trinity that creates human beings and he creates us in his image and so what you see working out in here is that God gives the dignity of causality and provides the context that human beings can have true causality and not just causality in the physical world and the mental world and the emotional world but also in the spiritual world that that God gives human beings we have a mind we have a soul and our soul is enfleshed or another way to look at it would be that our flesh our physical biology is ensouled two different ways of saying the same thing and that means we are part of a world of cause and effect and flow but there's always part of us that part made in the image of God and likeness of

God which is separate but connected not completely determined that really does have freedom that's made in the image of God and part of the way that God created human beings was that human beings would have the dignity the worth of being able to cause things to be to create to choose to build to plant to dance to sing to flourish and that goes not just for the physical world but for the emotional world the mental world and the spiritual world in prayer and God in his sovereignty his will in a sense is intermingled without ever diminishing his will at any time whatsoever is intermingled with our prayers as he is sovereign over the entire earth and that is what's being seen here very very powerfully and simply in this very simple dialogue between Abraham and the Lord Abraham praying to the Lord and what we see here is that the Lord not only is not anger driven but that he's truth driven he's justice driven he's goodness driven but he's also concerned with mercy now Abraham has made a mistake his mistake is to think that the distinction between the righteous and the unrighteous is the distinction between persons and that's a mistake it's not that I'm righteous and one of you is unrighteous but the Bible as it goes on and as more is revealed and as more is revealed in in Genesis and Exodus and all the way into the New Testament the line between the righteous and the unrighteous does not go between people does not go between people groups it does not go between nations it goes right down every single human being there are parts of me that are very very good and made in the image of God and there are parts of me that are very very bad and wicked and Abraham could only conceive of God coming down to wipe away but the very fact that this story shows mercy points to that greater time in the future when God would come down and live amongst us and his name was Emmanuel he came and dwelt and lived amongst us not so that we would be destroyed but that in his life and in his death upon the cross justice and mercy meet they kiss they embrace and you see the perfect justice of God and the perfect mercy of God and the perfect goodness of God and even amidst all of the blood and the pain the beauty of God

God the Son of God Emmanuel coming and dwelling amongst us in our mess and seeing eye to eye our great need and his response is to die his response is to have mercy and so the justice of God is met the things that I have done wrong that would demand God's justice and payment are paid by him and his mercy is met and that it's I am clothed with his righteousness as a gift and you see then that it's not that we practice hospitality and if we practice hospitality and hospitality enough that maybe God will like us and it's not that maybe if we practice justice enough that God would like us or that we practice mercy enough that God would like us or if we pray enough that God would like us but that when we understand that Emmanuel came down that justice and mercy in a sense meet on the cross and that

[ 45 : 40 ] I who have a part of me that is unrighteous that I cannot fix for myself that that is dealt with by a pure and utter gift of God that is given to me as I reflect upon that and as I receive that gift that gift forms me to be more hospitable it forms me not to live in fear of other people but to be hospitable it forms me to show mercy it forms me to pray even for very bad people it forms me to pray even for the impossible why?

God showed hospitality to me when he died upon the cross God showed mercy to me when he died for me on the cross God did something for a bad person like me when he died upon the cross and God did something impossible for me when he died upon the cross and he brought a sinner like myself to himself and so that as this gift of Emmanuel becomes more clear to us this time when the true and greater story the true and greater story of Genesis 18 when Jesus walks amongst us is Emmanuel as we realize the gift of who he is it forms us it forms us he was hospitable to us I am to be hospitable out of his hospitality he has shown mercy to me out of his mercy I am to show mercy out of his care for the bad I am to care for the bad out of his doing the impossible I am to pray for the impossible that is the gospel that's how it forms us please stand let us bow our heads in prayer father if there are any here who are listening who would not have described themselves as

Christians and father ask that your holy spirit would move and work in their lives to help them to bow the knee to you and to ask Jesus to be their savior and their lord and father for us father you know we can get very upset about the badness of the world we can wish that we could just have rose colored glasses to no longer see the world and the badness but father we thank you for stories like this we ask lord that as we deal with the badness of the world and the goodness of the world as we that father that it's not be that we want rose colored glasses but that we want the gospel to be more real to our hearts so that we can see the world as it really is but as we see the world as it really is it creates within us as we reflect upon the gospel this desire to be hospitable to see mercy to see justice to see goodness to pray even for the worst to pray even for that which is impossible and father mindful of of how long

Sarah and Abraham had to work to wait that you would grant us a great patience and persistence in prayer that we would not just pray for an hour or for a day or a week but that you would put it within our hearts to be people who would pray in some cases for years and for decades father form us and shape us by the gospel the gospel that we have received and we ask this in the name of Jesus your son and our savior amen and the ■f the gospel but that we offer and the winding on the šil and your side and our savior to find them so that we have opportunity to discrete the captain and he stated no behind but no behind that we are we have the clang that's again and our speaker with the family and the people who already■■■ and then and then you have