

# Abraham 5

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Preacher: Rev Iver Martin

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Now this is the second last in our series of studies on Abraham. I promised you at the very beginning that I wasn't going to do an exhaustive study on Abraham. That would take too long. What we're going to do is try and keep it to just the main highlights of his life. And this takes us up to chapter 18. There's one more chapter I want us to do. And then after that, it will be the communion time. And I hope that we'll be able to bring things to a close before that time.

Next Lord's Day, we're going to discover that God had finally brought his promise to pass and Abraham and Sarah in their old age had a son. And yet, as we know, as I'm sure most of you are familiar, God asked Abraham, commanded him to do the most extraordinary thing. I'm going to be asking the question next Lord's Day, why would God ask anyone, why would God ask anyone to sacrifice his own son? Why? Why was it that God asked Abraham to sacrifice his own son, the son that he had waited 25 years for, the son that was born to him in an old age, and God asked him to go and put him to death and sacrifice him to the Lord? That's the question that maybe you want to think about before next Lord's Day. You might also be surprised to learn that I'm not going to talk about the next chapter, chapter 19, which is about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. That doesn't mean that we'll never speak about it at any other time, but that really concerns the life of Lot and his wife, and we might take that as a separate chapter on one occasion. But I want to concern ourselves with Abraham. The other thing I want to do next week is to have an after-church fellowship in the hall afterwards, because we haven't had one for some time. And I want it to be an informal session where you can ask any question that has arisen in your mind over the course of our studies in Abraham, or any other time, I would love you to be able to feel free to ask any question that's been on your mind about the Bible or the gospel, and that will be next Lord's Day, and I hope that Mr. McLeod will also be able to be there. I don't want to speak for him this evening, but I hope that he'll be able to answer questions about something that perhaps has arisen over the course of your listening to him as well.

So that's next Lord's Day after the evening service in the hall upstairs. But for the moment, we'll look at this chapter, which took place 24 years after Abraham had arrived in Canaan. And there are just two questions. I think the chapter itself is summed up in two fundamental questions that arise in the chapter, and that these two questions sum up the way that the chapter is divided into two separate conversations between Abraham and these mysterious visitors that arrived and that we hear about in this chapter.

And the first of these questions is found in verse 14. And this question is this, is anything too hard for the Lord? Is anything too hard for the Lord? The second question is found in verse 25. And the second of the conversations, and it comes at the end of 25, and it says this, shall not the judge of all the earth do right? Now I think you'll agree with me when I say that these are two fundamental questions which open up the character and the being and the nature of God for us and that direct our attention to what God is. First of all, he's the God for whom nothing is impossible. Not a single thing is impossible. He's the God that spoke the universe into being, the universe in all its vastness and in all its complexity. And the God who has done this is the same Lord that has promised Abraham that in his old age, even at an age of 99 years old, he will have a son. And it's the same Lord, as we've seen a moment, who has promised that the graves will open one day when the Lord returns and that the dead in Christ shall rise and go forever to be with the Lord. But it also, verse 25, opens up another aspect of the character of the Lord, that God hates sin. He has a burning and a righteous hatred for sin. Not a hatred the way we hate. When we hate something, our hatred is filled with sinfulness itself. But when God hates, his hatred is perfectly good and righteous. There is nothing sinful about his hatred. And one day, the whole world will come under the judgment of God. The Bible promises that, that we shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. And there, the

judge will be perfectly righteous and he will always give a perfect judgment to this world. Shall not the judge of all the earth do right? It brings us into the justice of God, the power of God and the justice of God. And I think that we'll also see throughout the chapter that God is... Let's look then at these two very important questions. Let's look at the first one. Of course, it begins with the three visitors. And we're bound to ask, who are those three visitors? These strange men that appeared in the heat of the day. And I think we can picture the scene as Abraham and he's in his, he's at his tent. And it's the heat of the day. And he would, like everyone else would do at that particular time of the day, he would be probably half asleep because it would be immensely hot. The heat of the day. That was the moment when, when people would tend to sit because they weren't able to do anything. And all you could do is to sit outside your tent, in the shade of your tent, and doze off. I suppose they call it in some countries a siesta. And particularly in hot countries, you simply can't do anything. You have to, you have to doze off in the heat of the day. And then suddenly he looked up and he saw these three men. Now these three men seem to come out of nowhere. He doesn't know. I don't believe that he knew immediately where, or where they had come from, or who they were. And I'll tell you why I don't believe that in a few moments time. But it becomes apparent later on. But the first thing that Abraham does as he sees those three men is he extends an incredible welcome, a hearty welcome to them. He lifted his eyes and three men stood by him. And when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door. And he bowed himself towards the ground. And he said, my Lord. Now this doesn't necessarily mean that Abraham recognized that this was the Lord. He could have said that to anyone. That was an expression he used at that time, my Lord. My Lord, if now I've found favor in your sight, please don't go away from you. Let me make for you a meal. Let me wash your feet. Let me fetch food for you. In other words, his instinctive first reaction to strangers was to welcome them into his home and to give them the very best of what he possibly could give. Now, why was that?

[ 7 : 47 ] And why is so much time given to the welcome that Abraham gave to these three men, especially if he didn't know who they were, as I don't believe he did. I don't believe at the moment he did know immediately. It became apparent later on. Well, the Bible goes on to tell us. And the Bible goes on to explain in practical New Testament terms why this was so important, because it was part and parcel of the Christian lifestyle to extend hospitality towards others. Listen to what the apostle says in chapter 13 of Hebrews. Be not forgetful. Now he's talking to New Testament Christians. He's talking to the New Testament church. He's talking to us. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers. When that word entertain is an old word, which means show hospitality to strangers. For, listen to what he says, thereby some have entertained angels unawares. What's he talking about? He's talking about Abraham. He's going back to this episode in chapter 18. And he's saying, look, this is how important it is. It is part and parcel of the Christian lifestyle. As you interact as a church, as you gather together in fellowship, as you worship, and as you live out the Christian faith in your life, make sure that hospitality and kindness and a welcoming nature is part of what you are. It's as important as that. We tend to sort of brush off these things, don't we? Because they're not very, don't sound very theological, do they?

They don't sound very deep. They're kind of, they're kind of very practical things. But this is the word of God. It's just the same word of God as brings us into all the deep things of the, of the nature of God. And here's the apostle saying that if you're really going to be, if you're really going to live out the Christian life, you're going to, that's going to be evident in your friendliness. That's what it means. It's going to be evident because you're going to be the kind of person who's going to be warm and approachable. And this extends both to what we are in our personal lives, in our homes, and in our life as a church. You know, there's nothing worse than a stranger coming in that door and feeling as if they're in the most strangest, the strangest place. You know, it's a terrible thing when we're, some of you will have experienced this when you go on holiday. You'll go into a church and you've never been there before. You'll find a church on the Lord's day. You'll want to worship there. And the worst thing that happens to you is nobody talks to you. And you feel as if you're like an alien from another planet. And you feel as if everybody's wishing that you would just go away so that they could just be themselves. It's awful, isn't it? Well, just make sure that that never, I hope that would never, ever happen here. I don't believe it would. I don't believe it would. But it means that every one of us has to work hard at expressing and demonstrating, demonstrating the uniqueness of the love of the Lord Jesus Christ. And God has said that, you remember how there are two, there are two commandments. We're to love the Lord our God with all our heart and mind

and soul and strength. And we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. And here is Abraham. And here's a shining example of what that means. So make sure, says the apostle, make sure that as part of your

Christian witness, that you show hospitality. Now it's up to you to work out how to do that. But whatever way you do it, it's going to cost you. It's going to cost you your time and your convenience. And it's going to make sure that it's going to mean that you're going to have to be on the lookout for people who need your hospitality and your love and your concern. That's the way, or at least one of the ways in which the Christian church develops. If people are looking for anything now in a church, it's a place where they feel that they belong. And if that's not the way our congregation is, and I hope it is, but if it isn't, then let's work together. Let's work together our hardest to make sure that this is a place where everyone feels that they belong. And let's work at that. It's not going to happen overnight. But these things take time and they take effort on our part.

But here's the example, and I don't, and I'm not, I think this is a very, very important example, which is cited by the apostle in Hebrews, and one which challenges every single one of us, both in our own homes, in our personal lives, and in our life as a congregation. Now then, Abraham, who discovers then who the men are and why they have come? And the moment he discovers that is in verse 9, when they say, where is Sarah, your wife? Now, how did they know what his wife's name was?

[12:49] And how did they know that his wife was Sarah and not Sarah? See, originally she was called Sarah. But God, in chapter 16, had changed her name to Sarah. And they knew that.

And Abraham knew from that question onwards that these were no ordinary men, that they were men sent from God. In actual fact, they were angels that were sent from God to give a message to Abraham.

And here's the message. The message was that in a year from now, they would have a son. In a year from now, they would have a son.

The only problem with that was that Abraham was 99 years old. And Sarah was 89 years old. You just don't have children at that age.

You just do not have children at that age. Not even if you're a Romanian woman who's having fertility treatment. That was one of the main stories in the news this week.

[13:55] Was that a Romanian woman, the age I think, I think she was about in her 60s. But she had to have fertility treatment for that. And that's because it's impossible normally or naturally for a person of that age.

Now, that's a person in her 60s. This is a person in her 80s. She's 89 years old. It was completely impossible, totally and utterly impossible, unheard of, for any couple to have a children before or afterwards at that age.

And of course, when the Lord announced this to Abraham in this chapter, Sarah was eavesdropping from the tent. She obviously wanted to know what kind of conversation was going on. And as soon as she heard her name, she became even more interested in the conversation.

And when she heard that she was going to have a son, she laughed. She laughed. And I guess she became, she had become cynical over the years, the 24 years from when God had called Abraham and Sarah from Ur of the Chaldees into the promised land on the promise that they were going to have children, that she would have a son.

But if it was impossible 24 years ago, it was even more impossible now. As time went on with every day that passed, the measure of impossibility became even greater.

[15:19] And I believe myself that she allowed, she had allowed over the years cynicism to creep into her life. Perhaps it was also a sense of guilt. Because if you go back to chapter 16, we didn't have time to go into this, but chapter 16 takes place 14 years previously.

After once again God promising to Abraham that he would one day have a son, after once again waiting for that promise to be fulfilled, Sarah made a very important mistake.

She made a fundamental and important error of judgment. She lost her patience with the Lord. And she decided to do something that was quite common in those days, but that was wrong.

She gave her servant to Abraham so that he would have a son through her, by her, with her as the mother.

And this happened. And it worked. She became pregnant. And in her pregnancy, the chapter tells us that she despised Sarah. Sarah fell out with her and sent her away.

[ 16 : 31 ] And God met her in the desert. And perhaps it was that over the years, that having wrestled with the promise of God, and having at the same time allowed herself to lose sight of that promise, and having allowed a sinful action to creep into her heart, perhaps at the same time her heart grew cold and cynical to the promise of God.

I wonder if the very words that you need to hear tonight are the words that were given to Abraham and Sarah that met her cynicism, and these words were these, Is anything too hard for the Lord? You know, some people, they become a bit more bitter in their older age as the years go past in their Christian life. Perhaps there was a time in your own life when there was a joy of the Lord, when you knew a joy of the Lord that you don't have anymore, when you knew a liberty, and when you knew the delight that there was in prayer, and there was something about your Christian life that you appear to have lost, and perhaps it is that you've allowed sinful things to take over, and you've allowed yourself to become distracted, and you might even have allowed yourself to become cynical towards these things.

So every time you're confronted with the Word of God anymore, you think, Ha! That's what she said. She just, Ha! You know, it's the easiest thing in the world to become cynical.

Please don't allow yourself to become cynical. The only way that... Tonight, if you know the Lord, and if things haven't, throughout the years, if things haven't gone the way you expected to, maybe you're holding some kind of grudge against the Lord, you wouldn't admit that.

[ 18 : 25 ] You wouldn't put it in those terms. You would never say, Oh, I'm holding a grudge against the Lord. But you know, that's what happens when your attitude is, Huh! That's the cynicism that creeps in, and it's the easiest thing in the world, when things don't happen the way you expect them to.

That's what happened in Sarah's life. Things didn't happen the way she expected them to. She expected to become pregnant right away, 24 years ago, and because it didn't happen, and over time, then she became cynical.

Don't let that happen in your own life. Don't lose sight of the preciousness of God. Is anything too hard for the Lord? That's a rhetorical question, in which the answer is no, there is nothing.

Nothing is too hard for the Lord. And that's what our faith tonight is so grounded on. That question, is anything too hard for the Lord?

When we consider how utterly impossible the promises of God are. Utterly impossible. When you think about it tonight, what is it that our faith rests upon tonight?

[ 19 : 31 ] It's the promise that one day, those who are in the graves, men and women who have been dead for hundreds and thousands of years, and who have disappeared physically, there's nothing left of them.

Not a scrap left of them. How is God going to come and resurrect people who are no more bodies that simply don't exist anymore?

And the answer is, is anything too hard for the Lord? When we think of how God promises that he will create a new heaven and a new earth, that's the promise.

I don't know how he's going to do it. I don't know how physically and physiologically God is going to bring together the elements and components of our bodies that have been dead for years, but I believe it with all my heart because, because nothing is too hard for the Lord.

And that's what faith is. Faith is resting in the impossible. And faith is looking at what God has done in the past and believing that the same God who did all that in the past is able to do it again and even greater than that.

[ 20 : 40 ] That's why there are so many miracles in the Bible. That's why there are so many catalogued miracles in the Bible. So that we can rest in the Lord and so that we can know for sure that God is able to fulfill and he's able to do anything that he chooses to do.

But then we come on to the second of these questions. The question that's found in verse 25. And now we're changing the subject altogether. After giving that promise to the Lord, to Abraham rather, it has now become clear that these men are angels.

Angels. And they have taken on a human form and they've become so human. And I say that, I'm not quite sure if I understand what I'm saying here. I'm not sure if anybody understands how it is that angels can change their form so much and assume the human form so much that even they're able to consume a meal with Abraham.

But that's what we read. That's what we read. Again, it's one of these mysteries that we have to wrestle with and that we're quite happy to wrestle with because God knows the answer to all these things. But that's what happened.

These three angels came. But it's also clear that one of these angels stands out from the rest. You notice that one of these angels stands out from the rest.

[ 22 : 05 ] We see this especially in verse 17. The Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I do? It was the Lord who said it. So, if you get the picture, there's three angels and they've come to meet with Abraham but when one of them speaks, the Bible says, it was the Lord who spoke.

That means that one of those angels was none other than the Lord himself. The Lord himself appearing before Abraham as a human being.

And that's not the only time this happens. This happens several times throughout the pages of the Old Testament. We don't have time to go into other examples but believe me, you can check it out for yourself. This happens several times.

There is a particular mysterious character in the Old Testament who appears every so often a person of mystery and he's given the title, this is the name he's given, the angel of the Lord.

The angel of the Lord. Now, I don't have time to explain the whole detail but I believe tonight that that angel of the Lord was none other. It wasn't Gabriel or Michael.

[ 23 : 24 ] Some of the angels, we know their names. But this angel, I believe, was none other than the Lord Jesus Christ appearing at certain times to certain individuals before he was born at Bethlehem in Matthew chapter, at the beginning of Matthew.

The angel of the Lord. And that's why we read that it was the Lord who said to Abraham, verse 13, and the Lord who said to Abraham in verse 17. And it's the Lord before whom Abraham stands in verse 22.

And this time the subject is not Abraham's son or Sarah's son. This time the subject is Sodom and Gomorrah. Because it appears, and we know about Sodom because we saw this earlier on when we discussed, when we looked at the choice that Lot, you remember Lot, Abraham's nephew who had chosen to go to live in the region of Sodom and Gomorrah because it happened to be a more fertile area for him to rear his cattle and his animals.

But it was also an incredibly, incredibly corrupt place. So much so that these verses make it very clear to us that there was nobody, apart from Lot and his family, there was nobody who worshipped the Lord.

Not a single person. But not only so. The whole of the population of Sodom. See, most, a lot of people, you hear a lot of people equating Sodom with homosexuality and that was part of it.

[ 25 : 06 ] No question whatsoever that was part of it. But there was much, there was more than that. It appears that the whole of Sodom had become so corrupt that all their intentions and their motives and their actions were directed against God.

In other words, whatever God said or whatever God was, the people of Sodom had taken it upon themselves to do the very opposite and to live the very opposite from what God wanted them to do. Well, you say, how did they know what God wanted? How can you, this is the Old Testament, what about all these Old Testament people? They've never heard the gospel. The people in Sodom never heard the gospel.

Then how did they know what was right and what was wrong? That's a very good question. I'm sure it's a question that many of you have asked yourself and maybe have asked other people.

How do people know? Well, there are actually two separate issues there. One is that they never heard the gospel and in actual fact, it's strange, one of the interesting things in the Bible is that Jesus said if they had heard the gospel, they would have repented.

[ 26 : 13 ] That's a mystery, isn't it? It's a real mystery. If they had heard the gospel, they would have repented. But it's a mystery that actually challenges us.

You see, you can't get away with asking all these intellectual questions. You're put on the spot as soon as you come to face to face with it. You say, well, why haven't you repented? If the people of Sodom and Gomorrah would have repented had they heard the gospel, then where does that leave us tonight?

Who have heard the gospel many, many, many times. You know it off by heart. You know tonight that you must come to faith in Jesus and you haven't done it.

You haven't come and taken that step of faith. And that puts you in exactly the same position. In fact, there's a sense in which it puts you even in a worse position than the men and women of Sodom.

Isn't that terrible? But that's what Jesus said. That's what Jesus said. These are the words of Jesus. If the people of Sodom had heard, then they would have repented.

[ 27 : 21 ] Where does that leave us tonight? Where does it leave you? Have you repented? Have you turned away from your sin? God's not going to ask you about the sins of other people. He's going to ask you, what about your sin?

Have you repented and have you taken and accepted the death of the Lord Jesus Christ as a sacrifice for your sin? See, we almost all stand, all of us, before the judgment seat of Christ. But in this very, very special picture, this conversation, because as it dawns on Abraham what's happening here, and as God reveals his plan to Abraham that he must go down and see himself, the wickedness that is in Sodom, so that he will know what action to take.

You see, the first thing it tells us, it tells us several things about the Lord. It tells us, first of all, that God is not willing that any should perish.

That's what the Bible tells us. He's not willing that any should perish. I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked. God's desire and his longing and his love is that men and women should come to know him and come to be saved.

[ 28 : 37 ] And yet, for people to refuse to recognize God. You see, the other issue I spoke about earlier is this. The Bible tells us that regardless of whether a person hears the gospel or not, we're all accountable to God for the way we live our lives.

Every single one of us knows in our heart of hearts that there is a God, that God is. And because of what we see around us, because of the creation we see around us, the sun and the moon, the stars, the heavens declare the glory of God, says Psalm 19.

Everywhere around us there is testimony and evidence to the truth and the reality of God. God. So whilst these men and women never heard the gospel, they still knew in their heart of hearts the reality and the truth of God.

And they knew in their heart of hearts that their lifestyle was a bad one and a wicked one. So, Paul tells us in Romans 1, they are without excuse.

There is no excuse. And when God is going to bring judgment on them and punishment and when he's going to destroy them, he is going to do it in righteousness.

[ 29 : 57 ] Shall not the judge of all the earth do right? And perhaps you've wrestled with this question before. You've wrestled with similar questions about what's going to happen to people who haven't heard the gospel all over the world tonight.

And there are many of them. Well, that fact raises several questions. First of all, the Bible tells us that men and women have within them a recognition of the truth of God.

There's something, there's a voice within every single human being that says, God is. That's what Romans 1 tells us. And when people say, well, I choose not to believe that, what they're choosing to do is to block out the truth of God from their consciousness.

That's their choice. But that leaves them without an excuse, regardless of whether they've heard the gospel.

But the second question it raises tonight is, if we know that, if we as those who have heard the gospel and we know that the gospel is the only way that a person can be saved and come to know the truth, then what are we doing about it?

[ 31 : 20 ] Are we making sure that we are giving support to every effort that is being made to fulfill the command of Jesus? Jesus said, go into all the world and make disciples of all nations.

And I wonder tonight if part of the reason why there are so many people who haven't heard the gospel, it's because of the laziness and the disobedience of Christians.

Whenever we're confronted with humanity, we're confronted with someone who is made in the image of God, a soul that is precious in the eyes of God.

God knows how precious that person is, but he's also the God who is perfectly just and who must do what is right.

And so when Abraham argues with the Lord, he's not really arguing, he's asking questions. He's coming back to God because he can't understand.

[ 32 : 30 ] He asks the Lord if it is possible for him to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah when there are righteous people in it. And what he's doing here is he's speaking with the Lord as a friend.

That's what it is. That is what it means to be a Christian. It means that we can speak with the Lord as a person speaks with his friend. I'm not saying that we should be over-complacent with the Lord, but this passage here is a wonderful example of the way in which a person who lives by faith is able to speak directly to the Lord and the Lord listens just as he did to Abraham.

But tonight, Abraham's concern for Sodom was a concern that God himself has. It was a concern that asked the question, shall not the judge of all the earth do right?

once again, a rhetorical question. Once again, the answer is yes, the judge of all the earth will do right.

And once you come to terms with that, it helps us at least to accept some of the things that take place in life which are beyond our explanation.

[ 33 : 53 ] some of the natural disasters that take place in the world beyond our explanation. We don't know why these things happen.

And it's very often foolish for us to try and attempt an answer. We don't know the mystery of God, of why God allows things to happen and why God ordains things to happen.

Many people will ask and I've heard over the last four weeks since the tsunami disaster. Why? How can you believe in a God who allows 250,000 people to be swept to their deaths in a single moment in time?

How can you believe in a God who allows such suffering to take place? And there were some of course in Jesus' time who thought that these disasters were because directly because those same people were more sinful than others.

Therefore God brought this judgment upon them. That's foolishness to suggest any such thing. And yet at the same time God is in control.

[ 35 : 03 ] He is always in control. There's not a moment but which God exercises his perfect control over the whole world. We have to leave the rest to him.

We have to believe and to believe that the judge of all the earth will do right and he will always do right. God is not a God who delights in judgment and destruction but a God whose plan and purpose was to send his son into the world to experience the darkness and the suffering and the death and the pain and the agony of the cross in order that this rebellious sinful world would by hearing the gospel turn and find life and forgiveness and reconciliation with him.

That's what it means for the judge of all the earth to do right. And it leaves you and I this evening with that question.

Do we know the Lord as a friend? Do we know him as Abraham knew him? Do we know him by having come to the Lord Jesus in faith and accepted him as our Savior and as our Lord?

And tonight as these were confronted once again with the truth of God we pray that the Lord will speak to each one of us and draw each one of us to know him and to love him and to serve him as the judge of all the earth who will do right and for whom nothing is impossible.

[ 36 : 53 ] Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Our gracious and eternal God once again we pray that as we as we wrestle with what is a mystery to us as we wrestle O Lord and as we fail to fully understand with our finite minds we pray O Lord that as we come to the holiness and the power of God we see also the mercy of God the long suffering of God the patience of the living and true God we ask O Lord that we may come to that that indescribable love that was demonstrated supremely by the Lord Jesus Christ when he came into the world to give himself on the cross and Lord on the cross we see the love and the justice of God meeting one another and setting men and women free we pray that each one of us will be set free by the gospel for we ask in Jesus name

Amen