

## Genesis 18:20-33

Our story begins with a man of faith looking down upon a hardened people; people set in their ways against God. And yet this man pleads for these people. They do not deserve mercy, but mercy is what this man prays for. He prays, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." The name of the man is Jesus. Our story begins at the cross. Our story now moves to a high place overlooking the city of Sodom. Again a man of faith is there looking down upon all the people set in their wicked ways. And this man of faith, Abraham, pleads for these people. They do not deserve mercy, and yet he prays for them. And now our story moves to a little town called Augusta where people have gathered together into a church building. These people, though Christians, do not deserve mercy for they often set themselves against the will of their God. But the man of faith is there with them. Jesus is present in their midst and He prays for them. He pleads to His Father on their behalf that they be spared from destruction, that they be forgiven of all their sins.

Throughout history the story never changes. It's always the story of sinful people going their own way, but also the story of one who intercedes on their behalf, and the story of a God who has a merciful heart. There is no difference really between the soldiers gathered around the cross, the sinners living in Sodom, and you and me. The same sin lives within all of our hearts. Our names may be different, but we share the same guilt and condemnation. If you think you're better than those who lived in Sodom because you do not practice sodomy (perverse sexual sin), think again. In First Corinthians 6 the Apostle lists the sin of greed right next to the sin of homosexuality. Both sins are deserving of eternal fire and brimstone. If you think you're better than the soldiers who nailed Jesus to a cross, think again. Jesus says the sin of hating your brother is the sin of murder.

When Abraham prayed that God would not sweep away the righteous with the wicked, he was not judging by their actions and behavior. For his nephew, Lot, was no better than the worst sinner of Sodom. Abraham knew that the righteous were those who lived by faith, who were sinners not because they wanted to be sinners, but because they were weak, but who also trusted in God's mercy. If you and I think we're righteous because of how we live, because we're better than others, then we will be swept away with all the wicked.

The reason why Lot was saved from destruction is because Abraham appealed to the mercy of God on his behalf. Out of pure grace God led Lot out of Sodom. He and his family were reluctant to go, but Abraham pleaded, he appealed to God's mercy, and so out of mercy God pulled Lot and his family to safety.

Don't kid yourself...that's why you are here today. It was not that you and I made some great decision to come to this place of refuge. It was God who pulled us here. You have a Savior, an Abraham, pleading for you, and so God, through your parents, lovingly brought you to the holy waters of baptism. Because your Abraham pleads for you, God led your parents to bring you back here to Church and Sunday School, sometimes kicking and screaming, and yet always coming to where He nourishes you in your faith. Today, still, because Jesus pleads for you, God pulls you out of Sodom every Sunday morning and brings you to His House of Salvation. And we, like Lot, are often hesitant and reluctant, but your Savior pleads, and in mercy God draws you here to His grace.

But it's not because we deserve this. As Abraham pleaded for Sodom they, the entire time he was praying for them, were living in sin, committing immorality, hating their neighbor, acting selfishly. Even Lot, as Abraham was praying for him, was living foolishly, surrounded by wickedness and yet unwilling to distance himself from it. But God acted in mercy. He did not give Lot what he

deserved. If He had, Lot would have perished with all the unbelieving city. But God saved him, giving him life instead of death.

And the same is true for us. If you want what you deserve, then you're in the wrong place. I have a friend, a pastor in Iowa who, when he was at the seminary in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, was leading the liturgy at a local church where he was assigned. One Sunday the pastor of that church did not preach a sermon. Instead he used the entire fifteen minutes or so to call out the names of the people who served on all the various boards and committees of the congregation, and people who did any little thing in service to the church. And after each name was called out, the pastor led the members in a round of applause. But when my friend's name was called out, he refused to stand up and receive applause. And rightly so. For to God alone be all the glory. What we deserve is not applause, but punishment now and forever. For even as Jesus pleads for us, you and I are busily engaged in going our own selfish way. There is not one of us here who deserves applause, who deserves to be shown mercy. But friends, be assured, here you receive not what you deserve; you receive every good gift of God's grace.

Whether you have committed sodomy or greed, murder or idolatry; whether you have lied, listened to gossip, gotten drunk, committed adultery, or the like...God does not give you here what you deserve. Your Abraham pleads for you. Your God is full of mercy in His heart toward you. I assure each and every one of you--you are forgiven. For the sake of the Righteous One, Jesus Christ, God cleanses you of every sin right now, here, today. The fire and brimstone will not fall upon you for all eternity. You are safe here with your Savior. He is your Rock and Refuge, your Shelter and Hiding Place.

You see, Jesus went beyond Abraham. Abraham prayed for the people of Sodom, but he did not go down there and take their punishment. He did not tell God, "Punish me in their place; let them live." But Jesus did. As He was praying for you from the cross, He was also dying for you. He felt the fire and brimstone in your place. He left the safety of His Father's arms in order to stand alone and receive every bit of punishment that you and I deserve.

It did not matter to Him what your life is like; whether you live like the righteous or like the wicked, whether you love Him or not, whether you're a good parent or not, a good son or daughter or downright disobedient. He gave His life for you no matter who you are, no matter how you have lived. Think of this, He died for every person living in Sodom. He took all of their sin too, perverse as it was; all of their punishment. And He also died for you. Now the people of Sodom will never benefit from the death of Christ. They have a Savior in Jesus, but He does them no good. They perished in unbelief. They clung, not to Jesus, but to their sins.

Let this not be true of you. You are too precious to your God. Do not let His blood be wasted on you. Turn away from your sinful life. You have a Savior who loves you. He forgives you freely. Live in His forgiveness, not in your sins. He pleads for you as your Abraham day after day. He never stops interceding for you. He always appeals to the mercy of His Father on your behalf. None of this is what we deserve, but it's all yours in Christ Jesus, your Abraham. Amen.