

Key idea: The intervention of a righteous man brings the salvation of an unrighteous man – God’s use of this man.

FCF:

Application: The intervention of righteous people.

1. Intervention

In May 1994, Nelson Mandela became the first black President of South Africa. A controversial figure throughout his life – hated on the right as a ‘terrorist’ and derided on the left as a ‘negotiator’ – he had emerged from 27 years of jail to lead the African National Congress to political power in 1994. In a country divided by the legacy of apartheid – the institutional racism that discriminated against non-whites – Mandela’s election was regarded with fear and trepidation. What would this man do, as leader, as black leader, of a nation in which the white minority had oppressed the black majority for so long?

Under the intervention of Mandela, apartheid was dismantled, Truth and Reconciliation Commissions were established, and even the most reviled activists on both sides were pardoned in an extensive process of national healing. Whilst the result might not be as rosey today, the intervention of this one man was crucial for the salvation of the nation.

In no way was Mandela perfect. In no way was Mandela the messiah. In no way was Mandela the saviour of all. But the intervention of one man can have a remarkable effect. Today, we

see the intervention of one man on behalf of many – and it is wonderful to behold!

PRAYER...

When Abraham followed the original command of God – way back there in Genesis 12 – to leave his homeland and to go to a land that God promised, he took his nephew Lot. We don't ever know Lot's age. But, by the time we see Lot and Abraham in Genesis 13, Lot has a significant pastoral empire, with a large amount of stock and shepherds and the infrastructure that goes with that.

In Genesis 13, once Lot and Abraham have been travelling for a at least a number of months, perhaps even a few years, their competing interests mean that they must split. Abraham gives Lot the first choice of the land in front of them – remember this? Lot, thinking of his business interests, chooses the Jordan Valley – well-watered, fertile and plenty of feed. When he does, he chooses an area that contains the notorious cities of Sodom and Gomorrah – cities that we are told are renowned for the evil.

Lot disappears from the scene after this – well, after Abraham has rescued him at least once.

2. Intercession (18:16-33)

Abraham has finished entertaining God and his two companions – isn't that a remarkable thing to say? Imagine preparing a meal for God and two angels! What an amazing thing to have happen in your day!

The meal is finished. The three men stand up. They are on a ridge of mountains that look that run the length of the land of Canaan. If you look out to the east, you look down on the Dead Sea and, in the distance, at the foot of the Dead Sea, down in the south, you can see the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

As they stand, looking out over that land, we get a glimpse into the mind of God – **look at verses 17-21... READ.**

On face value, the thinking is clear – God is pondering about whether to tell Abraham what he is about to do to those cities. God knows that the outcry associated with these cities is loud and proud. These cities are known for their evil – and they do not hide it. He is going down there to see if it is really as bad as people say.

There are many remarkable things about this small glimpse into the internal conversation of God. But notice two that are crucial. First, God's judgement is never unfounded – God gets the facts and God judges based on the truth. God is not a judge who judges unfairly. Second, how wonderful that God should regard Abraham so closely that he would share his judgements and plans! That speaks to the closeness of the relationship that God has with his covenant people – the people he has committed to!

It is these two ideas that form the foundation for Abraham's response when he hears what God is going to do – **look at verses 23-26... READ.**

It is a wonderful image of God and Abraham standing and talking. Abraham responds to God's statement by recognizing the fundamental truth of God's judgement: as the judge of the earth, God judges justly (REPEAT).

God is not unfair in his judgements. God is not varying in his judgements. God is not inconsistent in his judgements. God is not unfair! God is just, reasonable, fair and right when he judges. And, on the basis of this truth, and knowing the privilege of intimate relationship with God, Abraham intervenes. Abraham speaks up. Abraham intercedes: 'Would God sweep away those who are righteous as he judges the overwhelmingly wicked cities?'

It is a wise and brave intervention. And it leads to a remarkable conversation between God and Abraham. God listens patiently. Abraham intercedes, intervenes, speaks up passionately. Eventually, they come to a point where God says very clearly, 'If there 10 righteous people in those cities, I will spare them'.

Abraham has a vested interest in this – his nephew, Lot, is down there in that region.

3. Perversion judged (19:1-26)

God leaves. His angels head down to Sodom – **look at verses 1-2... READ.**

The first person we meet is Lot. We haven't seen Lot since he was rescued by Abraham in Genesis 14 – that was more than a decade before. Now Lot is high up the social scale in Sodom – he is a member of the town council. He helps oversee this city of ill-

repute. He moved here as a travelling pastoralist. Now he has set down roots, moved in and settled down. Now he is part of the fabric of the city.

He offers the angels hospitality. He forcefully offers them hospitality. They accept.

As they sit down for the evening meal – **look at verses 4-5... READ.**

There is a knock on the door. The whole male population of Sodom is standing there. And now the question of God is answered – ‘Is this city as bad as everyone?’ This city is as bad as God has heard, and worse... The whole male population has gathered to abuse these guests. Are there even 10 righteous men here in this city? Is there even 1?

Lot’s response reveals his true state – **look at verses 6-8... READ.**

This man might have come from Abraham’s family, but he has lived in the swamp of the sin of Sodom for too long. He has not been discerning, he has not been wise, and he has been sucked into the rebellion and evil of this city. Not even this man stands out as righteous – he is as perverted as the rest of the city, just more controlled in how he expresses it! He made an economic decision that would benefit his pastoral empire, but at what cost?

The angels intervene. Lot is saved – how amazing that they save such a man!

They then speak to Lot about their job – the decision is made, the evidence is in, the outcry is true, the evil is great, the city is condemned.

Their words to Lot reveal two important truths – there are not even 10 righteous people in this city, and God's judgement will be fair and just. But their words also reveal a stunning question – after Lot's behavior, he – and his family – will be saved? How can this be?

Well, the future son-in-laws are warned. I presume their response is partly due to the fact that their eyes are still recovering. They laugh.

'At the crack of dawn' – who is first up? I mean, if I had had a visitation from God, that proclaimed certain judgement on my city, and I was encouraged to flee so as to be saved – I'd be beating the crack of dawn. But it is the angels who are first up. Lot is lazing in bed, hesitating, because the bacon is cooking, the coffee is brewing, and his investments need tending, too. His settlement in the swamp is affecting his judgement. His heart has been seduced by Sodom and the success it has brought him. He is hesitating in the face of the clear pronouncement of the judgement of God – how can he do this?

The angel's frantic words and actions rouse him. But not swift enough – **look at verse 16... READ.**

There is a clear statement of how Lot had become seduced by sin and evil and rebellion, and the lifestyle it brought. It took the direct intervention of God, the compassion of his will, and the grabbing of his angels, to take this hesitating man and his family from destruction. And this is the man who offered his virgin daughters! And God intervenes for him! Why?

Again, as they leave the city, the angels urge frantic fleeing – ‘Don’t even look back!’ And still Lot hesitates and focusses on his plight and his loss – he bargains about fleeing to a smaller town. The effects of living in this city are clear on the man. And the judgement of God – imminent and nigh – struggles to break through his attachment to his life in Sodom. And, yet again, God’s messengers display their mercy and allow him to move to the smaller town. Why would God act in such a way?

The judgement rained down – **look at verses 23-26... READ.**

The sun comes up. And the judgement falls. And the two cities are wiped out – their evil was too great, the evidence was clear, and God’s judgement was fair and right. Lot’s wife could not bear to leave her home, her lifestyle, her luxury in that city – and she experienced the consequences.

4. The intervention of a righteous man (19:27-38)

Abraham wakes and looks out – **look at verses 27-29... READ.**

His conclusion would have been unavoidable: ‘There were not ten righteous people’. And so God judged fairly.

But verse 29 is crucial. Just as we started with the intervention, the intercession, of Abraham, so we finish. Lot was saved because God remembered Abraham. God brought Lot out of the cities where he had risen to great heights and sunk to such depths. Why? Because of Abraham's intercession. God had warned Lot and his family, even as they displayed their depravity. Why? Because of Abraham's intercession. God had seized Lot's hands and dragged him from the city. Why? Because of Abraham's intercession. God had listened to Lot's pitiful complaining and let him flee to Zoar. Why? Because of Abraham's intercession.

The intercession, the intervention, of Abraham is crucial. It is because of this intercession that God clearly saves Lot and his family.

Did Lot deserve this intervention?

Listen again to his behavior after he has fled the city – **look at verses 30-38... READ.**

Lot is a grub. Lot is a drunkard. Lot and his daughters have fallen from the heights of the city, and revealed that they lived in the cesspool and swamp of Sodom's mindset and heart. There is nothing about Lot that says God should have saved him – but God did. Why? Because of Abraham's intercession.

5. The intervention of a righteous man...

There are many striking revelations in this passage – the nature of human perversion and sin, the compassion of God, the judgement

of God, the nature of judgement, the way in which people can be damaged by their decisions – all are worthy of sermons in their own right. However, I want to focus on what I think is the main idea of the passage: the intervention of a righteous man (REPEAT).

Nelson Mandela did intervene for the state of South Africa. I do not think he has saved that nation, even though he affected the course of history.

Abraham clearly intervened on behalf of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, moved by the place of Lot within those cities. Abraham spoke to God personally. God listened. And, God saved Lot, we are clearly told, because he remembered his conversation with Abraham.

There was nothing in Lot to recommend him. Lot was a man who had made decisions based on his economics, not on wisdom. Lot had clambered to the top of the local government tree. Lot's priorities had been warped and damaged by his time in Sodom. Lot couldn't even take the explicit warning of God's judgement seriously. And, yet, because of the intervention of a man right with God – God saved him!

That is a remarkable and moving testimony to the mercy of God – Lot received undeserved kindness, when he deserved fire and brimstone, from God, because a righteous man intervened on his behalf.

That establishes a pattern in Scripture of how God's people act. In fact, God says very clearly, that the man descended from Abraham who will save the world, will 'intercede on behalf of rebels' (Is.53:12). The intervention of a righteous man can, and will, save sinners – because God listens to that intercession.

As a pattern, the climax is reached in Jesus – the long-descendant of Abraham. **Listen to 1 Peter 3:18... READ.**

Jesus interceded for sinful humans so that people not right with God could come back to God. His intercession was his whole life (lived as we should've lived), his whole death (where he died what we deserved) and his whole resurrection (where he shows that he has paid God's judgement in full). Here is the intervention of THE righteous man for people like Lot, like us.

And this continues. Even after his resurrection and ascension into heaven, Jesus speaks in our defence – **look at 1 John 2:1-2... READ.**

We are saved – and we do not deserve it – by the intercession – the intervention – of THE righteous man: Jesus!

The grace of God is applied to us, because Jesus has come down into the 'city', seen that the judgement is deserved, and so he intervenes!

And, so, as righteous people now – that is what Jesus does for us: not just save us but also make us perfect before God – we have a model to follow. Are there people you know who do not

know Jesus? Are their family members who are camped in Sodom? Are there close friends who scoff at Jesus? Are there people in our town who seem 'too far gone'?

Well, we are the people who must intervene with God on their behalf – because Jesus has intervened for all those God has chosen to be his. Our intervention will only be effective because of Jesus' intervention on our behalf! And God will listen and judge fairly and save mercifully!

But there is a warning here, too. The judgement of God is real. God knows the facts. God has seen the reality of our world. God knows that our rebellion has broken this world. And he will definitely judge it.

Those who are not trusting in the intervention of Jesus – that he died for our sins – will be swept away just as surely as Sodom and Gomorrah was. There is nothing so certain.

Our world does not like this truth. Our world needs to have intervention – the intervention of Jesus, which only we can bring – if we are the righteous. Where else in this town, will people here of both the judgement of God, and the needed and merciful intervention of Jesus – if we do not speak!?

This is what we must do. And we can do this because, as we saw, God listens to the pleas of his people – and saves. So, let me exhort you to intercede with God for those who are facing the judgement of God – not because we are the savior, not because they deserve it, but because Jesus has already achieved it!

Place: NAC

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Passage: Genesis 18:15-19:38

We can intercede through prayer...

We can intercede through speech and action...