

Abraham on Behalf of Sodom



The Ministry of Intercession (Part 1)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you at the beginning of a new week, sharing with you out of truths that life has taught me, truths that have made the difference between success and failure in my life, and can do the same for you.

First, let me say "thank you" to those of you who've been writing to me. Before I finish this talk we'll be giving you a mailing address to which you may write. Feel free to share with us about your personal needs, your problems, your prayer requests.

All last week I was sharing on the theme of "Ruling by Prayer." I explained that the world is not really ruled by kings or presidents or dictators or parliaments but by those who know how to pray.

This week I'm going to continue with this theme. I'm going to speak about one of the highest and most powerful ministries open to any Christian, "The Ministry of Intercession." I believe that this ministry is God's answer to problems that cannot be resolved in any other way: problems in the lives of individuals or families and of whole nations.

First of all, I need to define what is meant by intercession. The word "intercession" in English actually comes from a Latin root which means "to come I between" and in the other languages that are relevant of scripture, both Hebrew and Greek, the word has basically the same meaning, "to come in between." An intercessor is one who comes in between.

"In between" whom or what? The answer is that the intercessor comes in between God and the objects of God's just wrath and judgment. The intercessor stands before God, positions himself between God and those who deserve God's wrath and judgment and says, "God, I acknowledge your justice. You have every right to smite these people, but if you smite them you're going to have to smite me too, because I'm standing in between you and them."

This week we're going to look at a number of the Lord's servants who played the role of intercessor and I think you'll find that all of them were men close to the heart of God. I believe this particular posture, this ministry, is something

very, very close to the heart of God. The first example we're going to look at is the example of Abraham interceding on behalf of the city of Sodom which was a very wicked city and ripe for God's judgment. In the 18th chapter of Genesis, we read how the Lord had come to visit Abraham and the Lord had two angels with Him. Abraham welcomed them and entertained them and they gave Abraham the promise of the heir that was to come, Isaac. And then they were ready to move on and the Lord told Abraham, "I'm going on to have a look at the city of Sodom for Myself to see if it's really as bad as the reports I've heard about it." And we'll read now at this point in Genesis 18:17 & 20-25:

> "And the Lord said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do...?' [Another Scripture in the book of Amos says that God will do nothing except He reveals the secrets to His prophet. Abraham was a prophet and God wanted to share His counsel and His purposes and His thoughts with Abraham.] Then the Lord said, 'The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave.' 'I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know.' Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the Lord. [I want you to notice those words, 'Abraham was standing before the Lord.' This is between the Lord and the city of Sodom, which was the object of God's pending judgment.] And Abraham came near and said, 'Wilt Thou indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?' 'Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt Thou indeed sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it?' 'Far be it from Thee to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from Thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?'" (NAS)

Now, I want to point out the main features of this situation and its implications for intercession. I've already said we need to see Abraham's posture. He was standing before the Lord, standing between the Lord and Sodom, as it were, holding up his hand and saying, "Lord, don't go any further."

Then we want to notice Abraham's intimacy with the Lord. Elsewhere in Scripture Abraham is called the "friend of the Lord." Here he was talking to Almighty God as an intimate and personal friend.

We need to notice also Abraham's boldness. He was actually challenging God's righteousness. He was not afraid to speak out and say what he thought, and yet with holy reverence at the same time.

And then we need to notice also that Abraham had an absolute conviction of God's justice, both positive and negative. Negatively, that God would punish the wicked; positively, that God would not deal with the righteous as with the wicked. That is an essential part of the ministry of an intercessor, a conviction of God's absolute justice.

Now, let's read how the conversation proceeded. Genesis 18:26-33:

> "So the Lord said, 'If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account.' And Abraham answered and said, 'Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am but dust and ashes. 'Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five, wilt Thou destroy the whole city because of five?' And the Lord said, 'I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.' And he spoke to Him yet again and said, 'Suppose forty are found there?' And the Lord said, 'I will not do it on account of the forty.' Then he said, 'Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak; suppose thirty are found there?' And the Lord said, 'I will not do it if I find thirty there.' And he said, 'Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord; suppose twenty are found there?' And He said, 'I will not destroy it on account of the twenty.' Then he said, 'Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once; suppose ten are found there?' And He said, 'I will not destroy it on account of the ten.' And as soon as He had finished speaking to Abraham the Lord departed; and Abraham returned to his place.'" (NAS)

Again, I want to point out two additional points, that God responds to the prayer of His servant. God did not brush Abraham aside, He listened. And, in a certain sense, He allowed his course of action to be influenced by what Abraham said to Him.

Think of both the privilege and the responsibility of being able to speak to God in such a way that we actually influence His course of action.

And then we note that God delights to show mercy. He came down, step by step, from promising to show mercy if there were fifty to the last promise He made that he would show

mercy if there were only ten righteous persons in that entire wicked city.

This raised a question in my mind some years ago. What was the probable population of Sodom in the days of Abraham? And, after some considerable research, I came to the conclusion that there must have been at least ten thousand persons as a minimum in Sodom at that time. So, ten persons could cause God to spare a city of at least ten thousand and that gives us an interesting proportion. One to a thousand. One righteous person can ward off God's judgment from a thousand wicked persons. You see, we come back again to that illustration of salt that I spoke about in my talks last week. Jesus said we are the salt of the earth. Two functions of salt: first of all, to give flavor to that which would otherwise lack flavor; secondly, to hold back the process of corruption. But salt is not dumped out in one piece or one lump or one big portion anywhere, but it's scattered in little grains across whatever has to be salted. And that's how we Christians are. Each of us should be just a little grain of salt but we should be holding back the process of corruption, recommending the particular area of the earth where we live to God's mercy and to God's favor.

Let's apply that proportion for a moment to the United States. Say the population of the United States is 250 million. It's somewhat less than that, but that gives us a good round number. Then, according to that proportion it would require 250 thousand righteous persons to ward off God's impending judgment from this nation. That's one quarter of a million righteous persons. I'm not talking about church-goers. I'm talking about persons whose lives are so upright and honorable and righteous that it would be unrighteous of God to bring judgment upon them.

Do you think that there are a quarter of a million such persons in the United States today? More important still, are you one of them? Is your life so righteous, so pure, so upright before God, that your very presence would hold back God's judgment from the entire community or area where you live?

We need to take into account the tremendous influence that righteous persons can have in the world today. Two ways: by their prayers, and by their presence. By their prayers, like Abraham, we can stand between God and the object of His just wrath and hold off His judgment; and by our very presence we commend the area where we are, the community, the society to God's mercy and favor. Our presence can cause God to hold back His righteous judgment from an entire community or city or even nation. But, on the other hand, passivity and indifference in the face of evil is sinful. James 4:17 says:

> "Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin." (NAS)

That Scripture really faces us with some kind of a choice. Are we going to commit ourselves to be righteous persons, prayer warriors, intercessors, holding off God's wrath and judgment on our nation, or are we going to be passive and indifferent and fail to do what the situation demands?

All right, our time is up for today but I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow our lesson on the power of intercession will be taken from the life of Moses. We'll see how one man's prayers saved a whole nation from destruction.

Radio Program

Transcript: TS-R021-101-ENG
Last Updated: 12 Apr 2023
Website: derekprince.com

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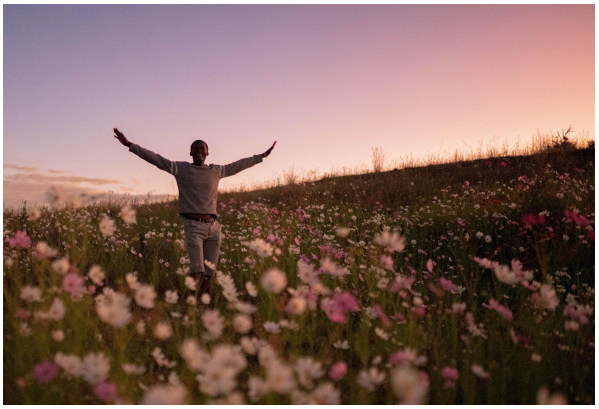

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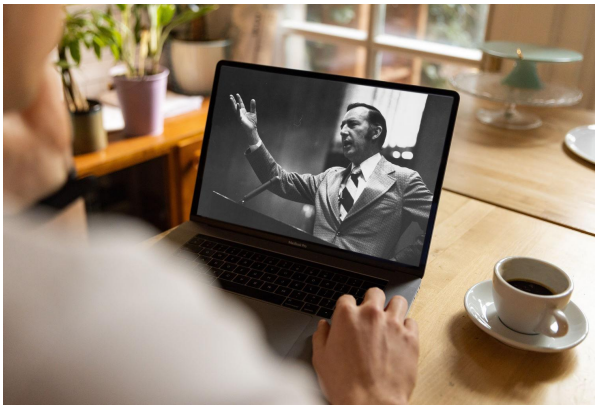

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