

## Abrahams Prayer for Sodom – Sermon 2<sup>nd</sup> Feb 2020

### Preamble

#### Reading: Genesis 18:1-8 & 16-33

*The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. <sup>2</sup> Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.*

*<sup>3</sup> He said, "If I have found favour in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. <sup>4</sup> Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. <sup>5</sup> Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant."*

*"Very well," they answered, "do as you say."*

*<sup>6</sup> So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread."*

*<sup>7</sup> Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. <sup>8</sup> He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree.*

*<sup>16</sup> When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. <sup>17</sup> Then the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? <sup>18</sup> Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. <sup>19</sup> For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."*

*<sup>20</sup> Then the LORD said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous <sup>21</sup> that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know."*

*<sup>22</sup> The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD. <sup>23</sup> Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? <sup>24</sup> What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? <sup>25</sup> Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?"*

*<sup>26</sup> The LORD said, "If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake."*

*<sup>27</sup> Then Abraham spoke up again: "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, <sup>28</sup> what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five people?"*

*"If I find forty-five there," he said, "I will not destroy it."*

*<sup>29</sup> Once again he spoke to him, "What if only forty are found there?"*

*He said, "For the sake of forty, I will not do it."*

*<sup>30</sup> Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?"*

*He answered, "I will not do it if I find thirty there."*

*<sup>31</sup> Abraham said, "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?"*

*He said, "For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it."*

*<sup>32</sup> Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?"*

*He answered, "For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it."*

*<sup>33</sup> When the LORD had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.*

## **Introduction**

This is not a part of the bible we often preach on.

- We tend to steer clear of Sodom and Gomorrah for fear of offending
- But I believe God has something to say from these verses this morning
- I think we have much to learn from Abraham's attitude towards Sodom
- From his pleading for them
- As well as something about God's desire to be merciful and patient.

As, with many sermons, this one has its origins in something that happened

- In this case two things.
- The first was over Christmas
- I heard that the Rev Richard Coles' partner had died
- Richard Coles is a vicar and often appears on TV programmes,
- He does 'thought for the day' and quiz shows.
- He is gay but, as a Christian had chosen to live a celibate life with his partner – also a vicar I believe

But what upset me most was that he was getting messaged on social media

- Presumably from people who would call themselves Christian
- Telling him his partner was in Hell and he was going there too
- Where on earth do people find such ruthless unkindness from the Grace of God

The other issue was similar and occurred this week.

- In Britain's final session in the EU parliament
- Our European colleagues, rather graciously, I thought, bid us fond farewell
- Talked of finding love in separation
- And sung 'Old Lang Syne'
- This was followed by a frankly 'yobbish' and insulting tirade from certain members of the English contingent

And I was ashamed

- Why do we have to be so unpleasant?
- We're leaving – we've got what we wanted
- What is gained by rudeness?
- Certainly, God's will is not promoted by it.

As these thoughts were going around my head, I was praying for what to preach on.

- Nothing would take shape
- Until 5.00am the following morning, when I woke up
- And Abraham's prayer for Sodom was there
- That's what I should be sharing

### God comes to visit Abraham

But I think we must begin with probably the most amazing part of the story

- God comes to visit Abraham
- Just like that
- Abraham looks up and sees God coming along
- As we read in verse 1-2

*The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. <sup>2</sup> Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.*

This story is often considered as evidence for the trinity

- God visits Abraham as three men
- There is a famous Icon based on this verse showing the three men
- And many people have used it to meditate on the truth of the trinity.
- However, Abraham doesn't wonder about this
- He just hurries to welcome them and offer them some refreshment.

Why did God come?

- There doesn't seem to be some great revelation or moment of great significance.
- They did tell him Sarah would have a baby,
- But really God didn't have to come especially just to say that
- Any old angel could have managed that

It seems to me, God just popped in to have a chat with a friend

- Many years later God tells Isaiah  
*"But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend". (Isaiah 41:8)*

Isn't that amazing – God called Abraham His friend!

- God enjoyed his company
- Obviously, God wasn't lonely
- There was three of Him
- He just wanted to spend a bit of time with Abraham as he was passing

Then as God takes his leave,

- Abraham walks with them as they set off towards the plain,
- And there overlooking the city, God decided to share his thoughts with Abraham

*When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. Then the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?"* (verses 16-17)

That's an interesting thought

- Sometimes God wants to talk to us about something
- Prayer is not always about what we want to bring to God.

And what God shares is about judgement on Sodom (Verses 20-21)

*Then the LORD said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know."*

And Abrahams response is to plead with God for mercy towards the people in that town

- He doesn't send of a few gloating tweets telling them they all deserve hell
- He begs God to remember the good in those people and not just see the bad.
- In other words, he behaved just as any real friend of God should behave
- Conscious of Gods mercy and grace towards himself
- He prayed for it for others.

## **Abraham and Lot**

Now there is a bit of a back story to this

- Many years before *"The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you."* (Genesis 12:1)
- And had promised him he would be a blessing
- We read in Genesis 1 vs. 4 & 5  
*So, Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. <sup>5</sup> He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.*

Lot was Abrahams nephew

- He set out with Abraham on the journey
- And after some adventures on the way they came to Betel.
- But by this time there was too many of them
- And their servants had began to quarrel over the water supply.
- So, Abraham and Lot decided to go their separate ways

Abraham, somewhat generously, as he was the senior party

- Offered Lot the choice of which way to go
- We read in Genesis 13:10-13

*<sup>10</sup> Lot looked around and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan toward Zoar was well watered, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) <sup>11</sup> So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company: <sup>12</sup> Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. <sup>13</sup> Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD.*

Here is a life lesson

- Lot is given the choice of a fertile, prosperous plain or the harder hill country
- Chose the easy life.
- But as Jesus put it in Matthew 16:26  
*“What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”*

The easy way is not always the best way

- Nor God’s way.
- And it is better to stay close to God than be comfortable and drift away from Him

Now the bible doesn’t tell us what Abraham thought of this

- Whether he resented Lot’s selfishness in giving him the harder country
- But now God is telling him Lot and Sodom are to be judged
- And he doesn’t hesitate for a moment
- But pleads for mercy

Like the prodigal son’s father

- His first thought is for love rather than recompense for the wrong done him
- And this is another life lesson
- Our attitude towards the sinner and lost must be one of prayer for mercy
- For we too are sinners and were once lost.
- And each one is a precious prodigal son to God

I guess there is a parallel here with Europe

- Some Christians would equate Europe with the prosperous plain
- And would suggest we need to be separate for the nation to return to following God
- (Others may feel we are more like the prodigal wanting our share of the inheritance without the responsibility of looking after the family.)
- But whether we agree with this or not the point is our attitude must be right
- We must not indulge in a critical attitude of self-righteousness
- But have an attitude of intercession
- Pleading to God for mercy and salvation for them

Like Abraham prayed for Sodom

- We need to be looking for the good in people.
- We need to care for them and their future
- There should be no room for arrogance or insults

## The sin of Sodom

At this point I think we need to pause for a moment and think about the sin of Sodom

- In some ways it's not relevant to what I am saying
- Because that is about our attitudes rather than their sin
- But it is a big topic and I don't think we can ignore it.

God send angels to investigate Sodom and Lot offers them hospitality

- During the night men from the city came to the house
- With intention of raping the visitors.
- Lot tries to protect his guests, even offering them his daughters instead
- But they won't have it
- So, the angels pull Lot to safety and strike the men blind so they cannot find the house.

Lot and his family then escape the city and flee

- Just escaping before the city is destroyed by some form of volcanic eruption.
- Only Lots wife looks back and is turned into a pillar of salt
- As a warning not to return to the things of this world once God has saved us.

So, what was the sin of Sodom

- To many it is homosexuality
- But actually, the bit I find most disturbing is Lot offering his daughters to the rapists
- That is completely unacceptable to me.
- How could he even think of doing that?

In those days, hospitality was of great importance

- To allow harm to a guest was unthinkable
- And we have to accept that different cultures have different values
- And different blind spots
- I am sure there are blind spots in our culture
- Obviously, we don't know what they are
- If we did, they wouldn't be blind spots, would they?

But if we can only really see the story from our cultural perspective

- How can we know what God was offended by?
- Fortunately, He tells us, through the prophet Ezekiel
- A little verse often ignored by preachers – Ezekiel 16:49-50

God speaks to Jerusalem and says

*"Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me."*

Firstly, note God calls her our sister,

- We are not so different
- Secondly, the first complaint is about arrogance and pride
- About our lack of concern for the poor and needy
- And only then does he talk about other unspecified detestable things.

From this I would suggest God is far more concerned about our attitude towards the poor than our sexuality.

- I think we would struggle to find any prophet in the bible that doesn't challenge us to care for the poor
- That doesn't declare judgement on those who deny justice or exploit the weak

It was a theme Jesus also claimed in his mission statement

- Using the words of the prophet Isaiah. (Luke 4:19-20)  
*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."*

In His parable of the sheep and the goats it was not our fine word that mattered

- But our response to those in need.
- He tells them. (Matthew 25:34ff)  
*"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. <sup>35</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, <sup>36</sup> I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'*
- When the sheep ask, when did we do that
- *"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'*

## Conclusion

So, to conclude.

- This is about our attitude towards God
- Towards others
- And towards sin.

I think it is summed up well in Micah 6, verse 8

*"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."*

### Abraham was humble

- He didn't demand his right to the best land despite being Lot's senior
- Neither did he bear a grudge
- But continued to seek his nephew's welfare.
- He sought to find good even in the worst of places

### As for us, there should be no place for arrogance or rude dismissive words

- We are friends of a merciful and forgiving God
- We need to behave like His friends
- We are not here to condemn.
- We are not to be looking for people to blame
- But people to save.
- To pray for mercy, healing and forgiveness
- To bring healing and reconciliation
- To feed the hungry,
- To care for the stranger and immigrant

### Because we are not insignificant

- God listens to us because we are his friends
- Jesus calls us his friends
- I want to finish with his words to his disciples
- As recorded by John. (John 15:9-17)

*"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. <sup>10</sup> If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. <sup>11</sup> I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. <sup>12</sup> My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command. <sup>15</sup> I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. <sup>16</sup> You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. <sup>17</sup> This is my command: Love each other.*

Amen