

STANDING UP FOR THE LOST
Genesis 18:16-33

(Read Genesis 18:16-33)

INTRO: (Show video)

The most heroic thing I've ever done was run out into a dark street to stop an approaching car when Togo broke away from me and ran into its path. We had a love/hate relationship – me and Togo. Most of the time I kinda wished he'd run off into traffic and save me a lot of trouble. But in a moment of insanity I rethought my murderous inclinations and probably saved his life at great risk to my own life and limb.

Not so this Malian immigrant in Paris last year. He saw the horrified crowd looking up at the child dangling off the fourth story balcony and he just began climbing. He didn't pull out his phone and post a pic on Facebook. He didn't even plot his route or look for a conveniently located downspout like the ones that always seem to be available in every action film. No, he literally leapt into action without any care for his own safety. He saw a child in extremely grave danger and didn't stop until the little one was safe.

Abraham was like that. In the verses I just read, he persistently goes to bat for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah in an effort to save them from the divine retribution for their notorious sin. He knew what the consequences of sin were and he knew his Lord was resolute in his plan to bring judgement on the inhabitants of the two cities and he knew he need to intercede for them. So he begins bargaining – starting at, if there are just 50 souls who are righteous (or as Peterson paraphrases it, “*decent*” people). And then 45, and 40, and 30, and 20, and finally just 10 decent people. All the while, at least for me, I'm marveling at Abraham's boldness as he pushes the envelope more and more. But are you remembering, Abraham was known as God's friend – he knew he could push the issue. So he did. He courageously stood up for the lost. We need to do the same.

Nicole is preaching a powerful message next week about the kind of healing that can come from scars. The next following week, when my family and I are home from the family wedding I am officiating next week, we will proceed into Genesis 19 and what happened in Sodom and Gomorrah. Many of you already know it and the urgency of what the result of rampant and unrepentant sin is obvious to you and it will be really obvious in what we will be talking about in two weeks. That's what brings the urgency of this talk today. We need to stand up for the lost, before it's too late. Let's look at it.

First of all, as I've been clearly saying for the past few minutes . . .

Sin is serious business

- Sin doesn't escape the Lord's attention; he knew what was going on in those cities on the Dead Sea Plain. It was horrific and they were flaunting their evil right in front of him. Sometimes, even we act like we don't believe God is aware of the sin in the world, or even our own. We're like Adam and Eve who went and hid when they sinned. God knows where we are and he knows what we do. I'm not trying to creep us out – this is truth.
- And this world we live in seems to miss it completely. Remember what the text says from Pastor J. D.'s sermon last month: *The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.* Romans 1:18-20. All of humanity is without excuse.
- We know that in our heart of hearts, but sometimes we act like we forget it. That doesn't make it any less true and it doesn't make it any less urgent. First we need to deal with sin in our own lives. Jesus makes this clear in the Sermon on the Mount with, “*Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.* Matthew 7:3-5. When the airplane is moving toward take-off, the flight attendants are giving you instructions, and as they get to the part of the presentation about the need for oxygen masks, they tell adults to put their mask on first before putting a mask on their child. This would seem selfish – the first thought of any parent would be to care for their child first, but not in this case. If you are unconscious, you are of no use to your helpless child. So it is for us. Let's

deal with our own sin, even as we set out to stand for the lost. DON'T MAKE IT AN EXCUSE TO DO NOTHING! Deal with it – too much is at stake to avoid it.

- Once that's done, we need to help others out of sin's clutches too. Paul made it clear, *For the wages of sin is death*, Romans 6:23a. People are dying without Jesus, let's do what we can to prevent it. Who are we talking about? Those who have not confessed Jesus as Lord. Sadly, that's many, if not most, of the people you interact with from day to day. God knows this, but he's not an evil ogre just salivating at the chance to zap sinners – he sent his only Son to die for sinners. F. B. Meyer tells us “*Amid the mysteries of God's moral government we must always believe that he is just and righteous.*” Abraham knew this, and that's why he went to bat for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. You see. . .

God's love and mercy compel us to have a similar love and mercy toward people who are lost in sin

- As I just extensively pointed out in so many words, but for the grace of God, there go I. It is truly *Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me*. So being a saved wretch should give us a burden for unsaved wretches.
- We can really have an impact. Pass on the saving message. Commentator Charles Fritsch writes, “*By the presence of God-fearing people in the world, the overwhelming power of evil is restrained and the wrath of God is turned back.*” We'll look at this a bit more as I finish this talk.
- Another commentator points out that the Hebrews and now Christ Followers were preserved for the purpose of the salvation of all humanity. This is the truth ABC, we are the Church and the Church is the hope of the world. We have the Good News, let's not keep it to ourselves.
- All the while, let's not forget where we came from. We do well to learn from Abraham and his humility before God. God owes us nothing and we owe him everything. Humbly go before God on behalf of those we know who don't know him. Also, go humbly to those we are striving to bring to Jesus. Nothing is as off-putting as real or perceived self-righteousness.
- Abraham persisted. He boldly pushed, and pushed, and pushed. He knew the consequences and he was terrified for his friends, so he pressed on. Because he knew, since he had experienced God's patience and mercy, he prevailed upon him for that same mercy and patience for the people of the two sinful cities.
- And finally, since I mentioned it . . .

Notice the extent of God's mercy

- As you know, and as I already said, God is not eager to punish his kids. In fact he is infinitely more willing to forgive than to destroy. Peter, in telling his readers about the last days and that judgement would come to a sinful world, makes this powerful statement, *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.* 2 Peter 3:9. Since God is not wanting anyone to perish, he's not eager for anyone to march off to hell. God wants his kids to be safe. That's why he sent his Son.
- And, speaking of his mercy, notice the preservative power of a few righteous people. I have no idea how many people lived in Sodom and Gomorrah since no indication is given. I did some research and had results of anywhere from 1,200 to several hundred thousand. I suspect anything over a couple thousand souls in each city is stretching it. So we are probably dealing with between 3,000 and 5,000 people and because of that Abraham was asking a big favor of the Lord to spare the cities if a mere 50 are found to be righteous. Yet God would have spared them for 50 people. And then 45. And then 40. And then 35. And the 30. And then 20. And THEN 10. If there were just 10 decent people living in those two cities, our merciful God would have spared the thousands who were hellions. That is how patient and merciful our God is.
- This shows how the true people of God sweeten the population. If you're like me you probably wonder how God is so patient with this sinful world, and right here is the answer. If it wasn't for the Spirit of God in this world it would have imploded long ago. If it wasn't for faithful servants of God who begged for mercy for lost people, God would have swooped in long ago.
- ABC, let's sweeten this world. There is a lot of hate and hatefulness out there. With the presidential election exactly one year from today on November 3rd, 2020, there is going to a lot mud-slinging going on. The temptation will be to take one side or the other and hate on the opposite team. No matter how you vote let's not fall prey to the temptation to be anything other than Jesus to people. Let's sweeten the part of the world

each of us circulate in. This world is not our home, let's stand up for the lost and take as many home with us as possible.

Conclusion: You know I love Fanny Crosby's hymns. One that is especially helpful to close this talk out foes like this:

Rescue the perishing,
Care for the dying,
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave;
Weep o'er the erring one,
Lift up the fallen,
Tell them of Jesus the mighty to save.
Rescue the perishing,
Care for the dying;
Jesus is merciful,
Jesus will save.
*Though they are slighting Him,
Still He is waiting,
Waiting the penitent child to receive;
Plead with them earnestly,
Plead with them gently;
He will forgive if they only believe.*
Rescue the perishing,
Care for the dying;
Jesus is merciful,
Jesus will save.
Down in the human heart,
Crushed by the tempter,
Feelings lie buried that grace can restore;
Touched by a loving heart,
Wakened by kindness,
Chords that are broken will vibrate once more.
Rescue the perishing,
Care for the dying;
Jesus is merciful,
Jesus will save.
*Rescue the perishing,
Duty demands it;
Strength for thy labor the Lord will provide;
Back to the narrow way,
Patiently win them;
Tell the poor wand'rer a Savior has died.*
Rescue the perishing,
Care for the dying;
Jesus is merciful,
Jesus will save. Amen.