

“The Prayers of the Righteous”

Having stopped by the tent of Abraham and Sarah to announce the good news that Sarah would give birth to a child the next year (that the Lord will send His Savior) – now, here in our text, the Lord heads down to Sodom and Gomorrah to check things out – “because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great ...”

You’ve heard of Sodom and Gomorrah. They are synonymous with great wickedness and depravity. This is where we get the term “sodomy” from. You know your reaction to homosexuality – so, you can just about imagine the Lord’s wrath.

“Their sin is very grave” – true! It’s deadly. However, ALL sin is “grave.” The wages of ALL sin IS death – including yours! The Lord doesn’t just come down because “the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave” – He comes down to us, this very day, because of the outcry of our sin.

So, let’s stop right there. If we say we have no sin – or, that our sin is not deadly – then, we are deceiving ourselves, fooling ourselves, and the truth is not in us. The Lord has not just come down to deal with Sodom and Gomorrah – but with us.

Our father Abraham asks the Lord – “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?” If you believe that what the Lord says is true, then you stand before the Lord confessing that you are not righteous – in and of yourself. That, I do not deserve anything from God but His “temporal and eternal punishment.” I deserve to be whipped and punished for my sins in this life – and be swept away to suffer for all eternity in hell.

Again, let’s stop right there. This is God’s truth. This is the baseline from which we must start. This is what we truly deserve. And we confess this with our lips – but are our hearts far from the Lord’s truth?

Folks, we don’t have a leg to stand on before the Lord. No one is righteous, not even one, the Scripture says. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God – sinned gravely – and deserve to be swept away. Sodom, Gomorrah, and us.

NOW, now we can stand before the Lord and present our petitions. By His Word and Spirit, He is teaching us to pray – but like Jesus’ own disciples – we, as sinners, don’t know how to pray. “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.”

How did John the Baptist teach his disciples to pray? The Scriptures don’t give us the specifics – but John is always teaching and proclaiming in this way – pointing to Jesus and saying, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” In Jesus, and Him alone – ALL your grave sin is taken away – and you ARE righteous in God’s sight.

Did you hear what God says to you through His servant the Apostle Paul? “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.”

You have been taught that you are not righteous in yourself – that you have no standing before God on your own – but having received Christ Jesus by faith, you walk in Him. You are rooted and built up in Him. In Christ, your sin is forgiven – and you stand before God as one who is righteous and holy in His sight.

You are like one who walks with their spouse – looking to them for input, for help, for comfort. You are like a child whose parents love and care and protect them – not shy to look to them for help – always crying out, “Mom! Dad! I need ... will you ... can you?”

So it is with you as you walk in Christ – the forgiven sinner made righteous by His blood. Your life rooted and built up from His very life given for you – resurrected to a new life of faith. So, you cry out, “Lord! God! I need you ... will you ... can you?”

With Abraham you cry out – Lord, “will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?” Sodom and Gomorrah – and all of us – certainly deserve to be swept away in God’s wrath at our sin – but Abraham prays for Sodom and Gomorrah.

Is Abraham bartering with God? For the sake of 50 – 45 – 40 – 30 -20 -10? Is he afraid to go further – knowing that God had not spared the world when there were only 8 who were righteous in Noah’s day? What if there were only 1 who is righteous?

“Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked!”

I don't know about you – but that's a pretty BOLD thing for a sinner to say to God! But Abraham IS bold and confident – because he knows who the Lord is. He is the Lord who is gracious and merciful – who desires not the death of the sinner but that he would live – who promises Abraham to send a Savior for sinners – a God who keeps His Word.

Abraham is like the friend who comes at midnight asking for loaves of bread. He doesn't have a leg to stand on. He's fallen short of having his own bread to give to his friend. It's inconvenient, it's midnight – but he is impudent. He will not give up – he asks, seeks, knocks – because the Lord knows how to give good gifts to His children.

Dearly beloved, you are baptized into Christ. Your Old Adam with all your sin and evil desires are buried with Him. Swept away into His grave are your sinful suggestions to give Sodom and Gomorrah and others what their wickedness deserves – but spare me, because my sin is not “grave.”

Baptized into Christ, you are raised to life with Him – with the One who alone is righteous – and who clothes you with His righteousness. Even now, He gives you His very own Body and Blood – put to death for you, and buried in the grave, but raised to life, never to be swept away by death again – and says – eat, drink, my Body and Blood – for you, for the forgiveness of all your sin.

The Lord Jesus resurrects you to walk with Him – to pray to God with all boldness and confidence – to confess that, “I am dust and ashes, but YOU are my Father, gracious, merciful, delighting to hear and answer my prayers, giving good gifts.”

You are resurrected to new life – to walk with Christ by faith – righteous before Our Father who art in heaven – abounding in thanksgiving. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.