

THE MINISTRY OF INTERCESSION

Genesis 18:23-33

"Abraham stood yet before the Lord." He waited until he was alone with God before making his intercession. True prayer requires undisturbed access to God without distraction or the presence of others. Prayer is a matter between the individual and God. Of course, there is a place for corporate prayer also. Nearness to God is essential for successful prayer. This essential nearness to God, without which true prayer is impossible, is brought about by the blood of Christ. There is no other instrument or agency that can bring those who are at a distance from God by reason of sin into a relationship of nearness to Him. No priest, no religious rite or ordinance, no effort, no self-denial or no alms-giving can break the barrier which separates the sinner from God. Nothing can do so except the blood of Jesus Christ, personally appropriated by an act of faith.

Concerning Abraham's intercessory prayer, we note that it was reverent, definite, unselfish, importunate and persevering. He based his petition on his knowledge of the righteous character of God, and we ought to do the same. For our prayers to be successful, they must conform to the revealed will of God and to the principles on which He acts toward men. Abraham's prayer was concerned with the salvation of the righteous from destruction. He based his petition on the righteousness of God. The patriarch was so closely in touch with the mind of God that he knew how He would act, so he was pleading with Him on the ground of the impossibility of His acting contrary to His nature and principles.

Fellowship with God is always associated with the knowledge of His will. Servants do not know the purposes of their masters, but friends and intimates do. Our Lord taught this plainly to His disciples. "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you" (John 15:15). There is no position like that of fellowship with God for knowing fully our Master's will.

Abraham was perplexed by the fact that the destruction of Sodom would involve the destruction of the righteous along with the wicked. With this difficulty in his mind he did the very best thing possible; he told God about it. Problems thus brought to God will either be resolved, or else sufficient grace will be given to wait for the perfect solution. Abraham had somehow learned the great truth that righteous people are as salt preventing surrounding corruption. How often one Christian in a family keeps back divine judgment on sin! How often wandering children are withheld from ruin through the prayers of their parents! Abraham did not believe that the righteous would be destroyed with the wicked. He considered indiscriminate destruction very unjust. Concerned for God also, he was particularly anxious that the heathen around should not get a wrong impression of his God.

"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" It should be mentioned that these words are uttered to justify an earnest prayer for the preservation of those in danger. They are used as a basis for action, not for inaction. The very first relationship in which God stands to men is that of Judge. All are responsible to Him. Abraham also knew that God was the Judge of all the earth, not of one family, one race or one people only, but of all men. In saying this he acknowledged that there is only one true and living God. He also knew that God's dealings with men were perfectly right and just. This meant that he could trust himself to God and rejoice in all His acts.

Point by point the prayer of Abraham was met by a divine response. God met His servant's request by a definite promise that if he would find fifty righteous people He would spare the place. For the sake of these righteous He promised to do this. Thus God responded to His servant's conviction that there was indeed a great power and wholesome influence in good people. The fact that the whole city was to be spared, notwithstanding its sin, simply and solely because of fifty people therein was indeed testimony to the salutary power of godliness.

Abraham had a proper sense of his own unworthiness and referred to himself as but dust and ashes. In this description of himself he emphasized that he was earthly and mortal, whereas God was heavenly and immortal. Six times Abraham interceded for the wicked cities. His heart was drawn out in pity and compassion, and he kept on pleading. Steadfastness in intercession is one of the sure marks of reality and earnestness. Six times God responded to the prayer of His servant. After each petition came the definite answer. So it is always; as long as we ask, God will answer. Abraham ceased asking before God ceased giving.