

“A Few Good Men”
Genesis 18:16-33
August 21st, 2016

"Where is my Sunday paper?!" So yelled an irate customer after calling the newspaper delivery office.

"Sir," said the newspaper employee, "today is Saturday. The Sunday paper is not delivered until tomorrow...on *Sunday*."

There was a long pause on the other end of the phone, followed by a ray of recognition as the caller muttered, "Well, that explains why no one was at church either."

As I studied the text for today, I couldn't help but think of actor Jack Nicholson who starred with Tom Cruise in the 1992 movie with the same title as this message – “A Few Good Men.” Nicholson played a Marine colonel who ordered his men to rough up a Marine who sought a transfer because he didn't respect the chain of command in his unit. The Marine died at the hands of his comrades. Called to the witness stand, Nicholson is questioned by Cruise who played a prosecuting attorney:

Nicholson: *You want answers?*

Cruise: I think I'm entitled to them.

Nicholson: *You want answers?*

Cruise: I want the truth!

Nicholson: You can't handle the truth! Son, we live in a world that has walls. And those walls have to be guarded by men with guns. *Who's gonna do it? You?* I have a greater responsibility than you can possibly fathom. You weep for Santiago and you curse the Marines. You have that luxury. You have the luxury of not knowing what I know: that Santiago's death, while tragic, probably saved lives. And my existence, while grotesque and incomprehensible to you, saves lives... You don't want the truth. Because deep down, in places you don't talk about at parties, you **want** me on that wall. You **need** me on that wall.

We've come to the second half of Genesis Chapter 18. Last Sunday, we studied the first 15 verses. There we learned three mysterious visitors appeared to Abraham outside of his tent as he rested in the heat of one day. Seeing them, Abraham rushes out to greet them, recognizing that one of them is the Lord God (Jesus Christ), Who appeared to Abraham along with two angels. Abraham had a meal prepared for them, and they ate together.

After the meal, the LORD announced what Abraham had been promised by God three times previously – that he would become a great nation and would father a son who would continue the line of the family of God. In one year, said the LORD, Abraham's 90 year old wife would give birth to 100 year old Abraham's son, Isaac.

The predominant theme in today's passage is another announcement – this time one of justice. Surrounding nations that might otherwise share in the blessings God promised to Abraham and his offspring would be disqualified if they didn't live according to God's desire. And, in today's text, we see two such peoples that will be judged.

Genesis 18:16-33:

“¹⁶Then the men (the LORD and two angels) rose from there and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on the way. ¹⁷And the LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham

what I am doing, ¹⁸ since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? ¹⁹ For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.” ²⁰ And the LORD said, “Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, ²¹ I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know.”

²² Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD. ²³ And Abraham came near and said, “Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴ Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare *it* for the fifty righteous that were in it? ²⁵ Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

²⁶ So the LORD said, “If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.”

²⁷ Then Abraham answered and said, “Indeed now, I who *am but* dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: ²⁸ Suppose there were five less than the fifty righteous; would You destroy all of the city for *lack of five*?”

So He said, “If I find there forty-five, I will not destroy *it*.”

²⁹ And he spoke to Him yet again and said, “Suppose there should be forty found there?” So He said, “I will not do *it* for the sake of forty.”

³⁰ Then he said, “Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Suppose thirty should be found there?” So He said, “I will not do *it* if I find thirty there.”

³¹ And he said, “Indeed now, I have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: Suppose twenty should be found there?”

So He said, “I will not destroy *it* for the sake of twenty.”

³² Then he said, “Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak but once more: Suppose ten should be found there?”

And He said, “I will not destroy *it* for the sake of ten.” ³³ So the LORD went His way as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.”

These verses can be divided into two primary sections:

MP 1 – The Pursuit of Godly Living (verses 16-21);

MP 2 – The Problem of Answered Prayer (verses 22-33)

God’s desire for Abraham, and for all who descend from him (spiritually), is that **they pursue Godly lives**. Fellow believer in Jesus Christ, that means me and you. Our lives are to be lived distinctly from pagans who do not live for God’s glory.

With verse 16, Abraham escorts his visitors as they begin to leave. As they do so, we are given a glimpse into the thinking of the Lord as He ponders informing Abraham of the destiny of two wicked places – Sodom and Gomorrah. Verses 17-21 reveal God speaking aloud. *Should he share Sodom’s impending destruction with Abraham? Can Abraham “handle the truth?”*

In verse 20, the LORD says Sodom’s sin was “very grave.” We learned what kind of people lived in Sodom when we studied **Genesis 13:13**- “the men of Sodom *were* exceedingly wicked and sinful against the LORD.” These sinful men were given over to sexual perversions contrary to nature and God’s will. Our words “sodomy” and “sodomize” characterize such sexual sins.

But, that's not all the people of Sodom were guilty of. The prophet Ezekiel sheds more light on their sins in **Ezekiel 16:49**, "...this was the iniquity of...Sodom: She...had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy." The people of Sodom were haughty, gluttonous, and lazy. And they did nothing to help the poor and oppressed! Such unpunished sin cried out to heaven like the blood of Abel did!

Does this not strike a chord of familiarity with America today? Look at the violence that took place during the electoral primary season, the racial unrest and the killing of law enforcement officers this summer! Historian David Wells describes it this way in *No Place for Truth*:

"There is violence on the earth... the powerful ride roughshod over the weak. The poor are left to die on the street grates. The unborn are killed before they can ever see the rich and beautiful world that God has made. The elderly are encouraged to get on with the business of dying so that we might take their places. The many forms that violence takes in our world provide stunning reminders of how false have been the illusions about freedom with which we have, for two centuries, been enticed in the West." (Quoted in Hughes, 264)

Ours is a society that is becoming a smut-filled morass. Pornography is readily available on television, computers, I-Pads and cell phones; sexual perversion is prized as diversity; and immodesty has a foothold everywhere, even among the professed people of God!

In the face of such depravity, God says His people are to rise above the standards of the culture. We read God's Words in verse 19, "For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him."

In this 19th verse, when God uses the words "I have known him," He means "I have chosen Abraham...he is My intimate friend." God chose Abraham, as He does for each soul whom He would save, and who would serve Him.

Abraham – and God's people – are to raise up generation after generation of God-fearing children who keep the way of the Lord. Well, fathers and mothers, *how are you doing here?* Even though Wonderful Wednesday has concluded for the summer, *are you continuing to work through the catechism with your children? Are you showing them Jesus? Are you guiding them down the pathway of faith in Christ?* Regular attendance at Sunday School and worship is the bare, but necessary minimum – "regular," as opposed to periodic or scant. The Church needs a few good men (and women) who will stand in the gap and bring up their children to know Jesus!

The second portion of this chapter shows Abraham bartering with God over the people of Sodom (**the problem of answered prayer**). Abraham was surely concerned about Sodom because his nephew Lot lived there. But, Abraham would also have been concerned because the wicked people who lived in Sodom would die in their sin if they didn't turn away from it and trust their lives and eternity to God.

No less than six times, we see Abraham asking God if he would spare Sodom if He (God) would find a certain number of righteous people there – from 50 righteous people down to 10.

Abraham’s primary concern is voiced in verse 23 – “Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked?” *If Sodom and Gomorrah represent the wicked, who would the righteous be?* Allen Ross, in his commentary provides helpful input when he writes, “Those who are joined to the Lord by faith and follow his standards in obedience are called ‘the righteous;’ those who have no part with the covenant and have no interest in obeying the Lord are ‘the wicked.’” (Ross, 351)

So, those upon whom God has given salvation from their sins - believers in Jesus Christ – are the righteous. Those who stand apart from God and His people (the true church) are the wicked. Abraham’s questioning of God here in verses 22-33 reveals his concern that he and his seed would be spared because God graced them; yet, his questions also reveal his concern for the wicked. *Would they be destroyed if even a small remnant of righteous people lived among them?*

God’s responses indicate the presence of righteous people would have spared unrighteous Sodom from destruction. Even if there were only 10 righteous people in the city of Sodom, God would have spared the unrighteous even from destruction. We’ll find that out when we study Genesis chapter 19 next week.

Righteous people preserve society. God is willing to spare even the wicked for the sake of the righteous. There are many reasons why God should destroy the United States of America – legalized abortion; the redefinition of God’s view of marriage; racism; governmental graft and corruption among them. But, God has not yet brought destruction upon our nation because of the righteous – because of us, Christian. The whole number of God’s elect have not yet been brought to saving faith.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus describes His people as the “salt of the earth” (**Matthew 5:13**) As salt is for food, followers of Christ are the preservative of the American way of life. For the sake even of God’s enemies (those who persecute Christians and the Church), we must pray that God brings unbelievers to saving faith in Christ. We must then tell people about their need for Jesus!

I’m a big fan of the Gaither Vocal Band. They perform a song that summarizes well this message. It’s called “A Few Good Men.”

“What this dying world could use is a willing Man of God
Who dares to go against the grain & works without applause;
A man who’ll raise the shield of Faith, protecting what is pure;
Whose love is tough & gentle; a man whose word is sure.

Men full of Compassion, who Laugh & Love & Cry-
Men who’ll face Eternity & aren’t afraid to die-
Men who’ll fight for Freedom & Honor once again-
He just needs a Few Good Men.

He calls the broken derelict whose life has been renewed;
He calls the one who has the strength to stand up for the Truth.
Enlistment lines are open & He (calls) you to come in-
He just needs a Few Good Men.”