

GOD MADE ABRAHAM HIS FRIEND

Genesis 18:1 - 19:38

Key verse 18:19

"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."

In the previous lesson, we learned about God's patient help for Abraham. God visited Abraham after he had lived for thirteen years like a father to a child with no clear identity. He gave him the new name "Abraham," which means "father of many nations," and made his covenant with him. Abraham renewed his faith and, as a sign of the covenant, circumcised himself and every male in his household.

God also helps each of us to live as the father and mother of many nations. This help for one person is often lengthy and requires much patience. However, this help is infinitely precious because through it a person is changed in inwardness, grows in faith, and is eventually used by God as a blessing for all generations on earth.

In today's lesson we learn that the Lord made Abraham His friend. Abraham was chosen by God to pass on the way of faith to his children and the generations to come, and to teach them the obedience of faith. God visited him and renewed his promise to give him and Sarah a son. He then spoke to Abraham about the coming judgment for Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham responded by interceding. From Abraham we learn what it means to be a friend of God, namely, to have all of God's counsel revealed to us and to cooperate in God's eternal work of redemption. Abraham's example encourages us to be friends of God and to cooperate in God's

eternal work of redemption through the World Campus Mission.

1. God visits Abraham (18:1-33).

Let's look at verse 1: "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." The Lord appeared to Abraham in the grove of Mamre near Hebron. The heat was sweltering. Abraham sat at the door of his tent. Even after long years in the Promised Land, he was still living in a tent. He was resting when suddenly three men stood before him. Abraham jumped up and ran to meet them, bowing down to the ground and saying, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my Lord, do not pass your servant by." Then he cordially invited the three men to rest in the shade, to refresh themselves, and to eat a snack: "For therefore you have passed by your servant." The men felt very welcome and said, "Do as you said."

Let us read verses 6-8: "So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs of fine flour and knead it and bake some bread." Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. 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." Abraham was already 99 years old, but he ran and jumped like a young man so that his guests would not have

to wait. Three measures are almost 40 kilograms of the finest flour. To go with it, he chose a tender, good calf. Abraham gave his guests plenty and of the very best.

His life of service shows his pure and rich inwardness. In the Middle East, hospitality is certainly a good tradition. But even this hospitality is done with expectation, at least the expectation of being recognized as a good host. Abraham's hospitality, however, came from faith. Out of his faith, he lived a giving life. He had a wide heart, even to welcome strangers and serve them as if they were the Lord himself. Being allowed to serve was a grace for him. To be a friend of God means to be hospitable because of the rich grace we have received. Hebrews 13:2 says, "Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it." Dawson and Lila Trotman's house church opened their home to God-seeking sailors immediately after their wedding and always had 7-8 guests in the house. They were friends of God through whom many came to know the joy of giving, serving lives and making disciples through Bible study, prayer and fellowship. Our God has given us abundant grace in Jesus Christ. As His friends, we may witness to that grace by giving and serving heartily and abundantly.

After they had eaten, the Lord now asked for Sarah. She was in the tent and could also hear him. Let us read verse 10: "Then one of them said, 'I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.'" Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him." God had spoken to Abraham about the promise before in chapter 17. Now He renewed that promise with the specific date: just one year later, Sarah would have a son. How did Sarah react? When she heard this word, she had to laugh. She was already 90 years old, and Abraham almost 100. She no longer felt like the women's way. It was unimaginable for her to give birth now. But the Lord rebuked her and said, "Then the LORD said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am

old?' Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son.'" Sarah should not laugh, but think of the almighty Lord, to whom nothing is impossible. Actually, Sarah had already experienced much of God's activity at Abraham's side: God's guidance into the Promised Land, God's protection in Egypt, God's victory over the enemy kings in rescuing Lot. But with the promise of a son, doubts kept coming to her, looking at herself as a barren woman. Therefore, God now helped her by asking, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" It was not impossible to the Lord for a barren woman to produce offspring. On the contrary, it is precisely through barrenness that God would be glorified as the Almighty God. With the Almighty God, no thing is impossible. Sarah denied having laughed, but the Lord said, "Yes, you did laugh."

Sarah accepted God's admonition and continued to learn faith by remembering the faithful God. Hebrews 11:11 says, "And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise." Her laughter from unbelief turned into one of joy and gratitude at God's faithfulness and omnipotence.

Missionary Sarah Chang came to Germany almost 50 years ago in obedience to Jesus' Great Commission as a nurse missionary. God gave her the vision to raise up twelve Mothers of Faith at each faculty of Bonn University. It was not easy for her to imagine how this could happen through her. But she kept looking to Almighty God and clung to the One who is faithful and who had made this promise. To glorify God, she continues to serve the work of making disciples through one-to-one Bible study and life fellowship to this day, and in the meantime prays with an even greater vision that God will raise up mothers of faith through her house church not only in Bonn, Germany and Europe, but also in the M-countries.

It also always seems inconceivable to me that God, through me and my house church

of all people, would raise up an Abraham, a Sarah and a faithful Chancellor at the Juridicum. But should anything be impossible to the Lord? Almighty God can do this and even greater things. I may stop laughing out of unbelief and start laughing out of joy at God's working and praising God.

Let us look at verse 16. The men now set out and turned toward Sodom. Abraham accompanied them a little way along the way. Let us read verses 17-19: "Then the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. 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." Here we see that God wanted to work with Abraham for His worldwide, eternal work of redemption. God had a worldwide vision to bless all generations on earth. He had chosen Abraham to do this according to His sovereign grace. Abraham was chosen to teach his children and his household after him to walk the path of faith and, like himself, to love God and love his neighbor. In other words, God had called him to be a prayer servant and Bible teacher: "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." To be a friend of God is to cooperate with God in His eternal work of redemption. God reveals His whole heart and counsel to His friends and entrusts His work to them, knowing that as His diligent and faithful servants they will trade in His purpose and bear fruit (Matt. 25:20, 21).

Being a friend of God is different from being a mere servant or employee. Jesus said to his disciples in John 15:14,15, "You are my friends if you do what I command. 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." As friends of God, the disciples accepted Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection for the salvation of the world, and after His ascension, went and testified to His victory over sin and death, cast out evil spirits, taught and healed many, and finally gave their own lives as His witnesses.

God has also given us His privilege of being His friends. To this end, He has revealed to us His counsel for making disciples and mobilizing the next generation in Nehemiah 2:17 and Ezekiel 37:10: "Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." "So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army." God wants us to cooperate as His friends in this great work of revival and spiritual renewal of Germany and Europe. To this end, God has chosen us to command young people to keep the Lord's ways and to do what is right and good. How can we command the young people to keep God's ways? Young people are much influenced by the zeitgeist of rebellion and individualism and seem to be inaccessible to God's commands. But this can happen in 10,000 one-to-one Bible study teams and by helping next-generation co-workers engage with the Word of God. God's Word opens their spiritual eyes to the counsel of God. At GLEF and the leadership seminars, the youth engaged with the Word of God from the book of Exodus and other books of the Old and New Testaments, plus history and God's work through the ancestors of faith. When they realized God's hope, they repented with tears for their petty life and accepted God's calling as prayer servants and Bible teachers. They are the friends of God of the next generation, following the example of Abraham and the forefathers of the faith.

Let's read verse 19 again: "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." God has given us His great grace to be His friends and to cooperate as prayer servants and Bible teachers and responsible spiritual leaders for His work of salvation in this generation. Let us seize this privilege and form one-to-one Bible study teams this winter term through which God will lead young people to the obedience of faith and rebuild the spiritual walls of Germany and Europe. Let us also work responsibly for the mobilization of the next generation, so that God will make the withered bones of the dead alive and set them on their feet as an exceedingly great army for the world mission.

Let us read verses 20 and 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." God revealed that the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was so grievous that the cry about it reached to heaven. Of course, God knew the condition of the people there. But the Lord came down with His angels to see what His friend Abraham would do. What could Abraham do? Verse 22b says that Abraham stopped before the Lord. Then he came near to him and said, "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 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? 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?" Abraham understood God's hurting heart. He also understood the urgency of God's judgment. That is why he interceded. His intercession came from the heart of God. God is the judge of all the world. He must judge sin. But he can show patience to sinners and give them another opportunity to repent. But this does not happen automatically. It happens where a person intercedes with a burning heart. Abraham prayed, and God agreed to forgive the city for the sake of fifty righteous people. Abraham could not imagine that there were any righteous people in Sodom. Therefore,

he continued to pray and lowered the number of righteous over 45, 40, 30, 20 down to ten. God said, "For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it."

Here we learn that a friend of God intercedes. Where no one prays, a school, faculty, college, people group or nation has no hope. Where a friend of God prays, there is hope. Dorothea Clapp lived across the street from a school in a small town in New Jersey. Seeing the students every day and thinking of the heart of God, she made a prayer list. She prayed like this for seventeen years. One of the students was particularly wild. Dorothea thought of how precious God could use him and prayed for him to become a missionary. God did not think of all the ungodliness and impudence, but knocked on this young man's heart door until he accepted Jesus in faith with John 3:16 and became a friend of God and zealot for world missions. When we see this judgment-ripe generation, we must never give up praying or shorten our prayer list, but intercede all the more, personally, at early morning prayer, in home churches and communities. The medical school has hope because there are the house churches of M. Dr. Petrus and Sh. Dr. Johannes interceding for them. The students at Ernst-Moritz-Arndt-Gymnasium have hope because some young people there have decided to intercede for their fellow students. The M countries have hope because there are those who are preparing to establish mission bases and are already interceding for Istanbul, Cairo and Dubai.

2. God destroys Sodom and Gomorrah and spares Lot (19:1-38).

The two angels now came to Sodom. Lot was sitting there in the gate. When he saw the angels, he went to meet them, bowed down and invited them into his house. The two said they wanted to spend the night outside, but Lot compelled them to come inside. He probably thought it was too dangerous outside. Then he baked unleavened cakes, and they ate. There is no mention of his wife and two daughters. Perhaps they were

already in bed, protesting because Lot had dared to bring guests into the house.

Consider verses 4 and 5: "Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them." The men from Sodom wanted to abuse the angels for their lust. The men of Sodom were very corrupt. The angels of the Lord visited them, but they thought only of their lust. When Lot went out and tried to appease them, they threatened him, called him a stranger, and pressed hard on him. They also tried to break down the door. The angels seized Lot and pulled him into the house and struck the violent men of Sodom with blindness, so that they gave up trying to find the door. Then they announced the doom of that place and told Lot to flee. Let us read verses 12 and 13: "The two men said to Lot, "Do you have anyone else here—sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here, because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the LORD against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it."

As we know, God is patient with sinners, and does not want even one to be lost, but for everyone to find repentance and be converted and saved. But there is a "too late." God had given them repeated opportunities to be converted to the righteousness of God. He had Abraham pray for them. He was even willing to forgive even if he found only ten righteous among them. But they hardened their hearts, despised his word and his servants, and acted worse than animals. Now the judgment of God came upon them.

Lot went to the men betrothed to his daughters and announced the judgment, but they thought it ridiculous. The angels urged him (15), "Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished." But Lot hesitated. Verse 16 says, "When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of

his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD was merciful to them." Although Lot had heard of God's judgment and mercy, he remained hesitant. Two powerful angels could barely drag him out of the city. But even after that, Lot did not simply trust God's guidance. Instead of going to the mountains, he preferred to go to the small town of Zoar. Lot was obsessed with city life. He was glued to city life and thought that outside a city he would die. Actually, Zoar was also to be destroyed, but God granted his plea. As soon as Lot was there, fire and brimstone fell from heaven on Sodom and Gomorrah and destroyed the cities and the whole area and all the inhabitants of the cities and what had grown in the countryside. Lot's wife could not stand it, thought of all the comforts of Sodom, looked behind her and became a pillar of salt. Meanwhile, Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had made intercession before the Lord and looked down eastward into the valley toward Sodom and Gomorrah and saw smoke rising from the land like smoke from a furnace. Verse 29 says, "So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived."

What happened to Lot? Even in Zoar he was tormented by fear, so he went to the mountains. There he stayed in a cave with his two daughters. Because they were worried that they would not get a husband, they got their father drunk and became pregnant by him. Their children became the progenitors of the Moabites and Ammonites, the enemies of God's people.

Why did Lot's life have such a bad influence and produce such bad fruit? Lot did not live with the mission of God. He had moved to Sodom, not to make God known and be a blessing there, but for a little more comfort, which seemed to exist only in Sodom. This became a snare for him. He remained an eternal sheep whose life was determined by fear and whose inheritance was shameful. Abraham, on the other hand, lived with the privilege as the friend of God. As the friend

of God, he renounced many comforts and rather enjoyed the blessings of God, becoming a man of mission and a blessing to all generations on earth. When we compare Abraham's life and Lot's life, we learn that in this corrupt world, one deceives oneself with a compromise of the world's comforts and faith. What the world offers us only enslaves us and makes our lives miserable and without influence. To be used as a blessing, we may separate ourselves from this world and humbly accept God's training in faith and learn as a friend of God to live with the mission and be good influence for the world.

In this lesson we have learned what it means to be a friend of God. A friend of God is the one to whom God reveals all His counsel and who cooperates in His eternal work of salvation. May God bless us to cooperate as friends of God in His eternal redemptive work through disciple making for spiritual renewal in Europe and through mobilizing the next generation as global spiritual leaders.