

God Decides What is Fair

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. Greg and I, as he's already alluded to, We don't take for granted that God has you here this morning.

! I didn't see you guys from over there. Bless the Lord! They've been struggling with some health issues as well, Jeff and Carolyn, so it's just a blessing to see your faces here this morning with us. Oh, my goodness. It's wonderful. Praise the Lord. And we have guests. Now, I didn't get to talk to you beforehand. I'm a little bit behind the power curve as I'm recovering from some surgery. South Georgia? Where are you from?

I know where Blackshear is, brother! I'm a Macon guy, and we've spent all kinds of time in South Georgia and got friends scattered all over the place.

Yeah! Oh, praise the Lord! Good to have you guys. You found out about us through the Internet, I suppose. Good. Well, I hope it did its job in helping you discern if this would be a place that you could worship and hear the Word, exalt Jesus.

[1 : 17] Good. Good. We intentionally put those out there so that those in the know will say, Aha! Yes. Well, it's good to have you. And then I got to meet Cal before I came in.

Brother, good to see you. I told him, I said, You've been here more than I have lately. So, good to see you. Good to have all of you here with us this morning. It's just a wonderful honor for all of us to sit before the Lord together as His people and enjoy Him.

Enjoy Jesus. Now, I want you to do that this morning. Alright? But more than I want, God wants. He wants you to enjoy Him. To enjoy the treasure of who Jesus is.

And we're going to try to do that. I want to invite you to turn to Genesis 18 where I'm going to attempt to wrap up this chapter. Now, I have intentionally divided this chapter into four different sermons, four different sections.

Now, they would probably teach us, well, I don't say probably. I know for a fact they would.

Whenever we're preaching narrative, we typically try to take the entire story as one sermon.

[2 : 26] That would have meant I preached all of 18 in one sitting. Now, let me tell you why I didn't do that. Not because people are complaining or asking. Because I know my congregation. Because I'm with my people.

And because I know my life. And so, slowing it down and taking it in sections helps us digest what God is doing here. And what I try to do is, as I get into the weeds with you in these four messages, the final one today, I try to pull back and hover a bit, Matt, at a helicopter level.

He's a helicopter pilot. And so, you can see the bigger picture and keep it in mind. I don't want to get so much in the weeds that you forget the bigger picture of what's going on in the passage.

And so, we'll be reminded of that today as we work our way through to the end. Let's read in this chapter together. I'm going to begin in verse 16, about halfway through.

Now, let me tell you that the first part of what we've already covered in two different messages prior to 16, God has come in the form, I think it is a pre-incarnate manifestation of the Lord Jesus Christ before He was born of a virgin.

[3 : 39] I think this is Jesus and two angels visiting Abraham. I went through all that in the earlier message and why I believe that to be the case here. He is referred to as Lord and the judge of the earth by Abraham.

I think Abraham understands who he's bowing to and who he's speaking with. And it's just an incredible reality of God condescending or coming down to meet with His servant Abraham.

And what He's done is He's reassured Abraham and Sarah, I'm going to fulfill the promise that I made to you more than a decade ago when you were 10 years younger and now Abraham's 99, Sarah's 89.

I'm going to give you a son and that son's going to be born from you guys. Abraham and Sarah are going to share in the consummation of their relationship toward this promised heir.

This one who will come. And Isaac will be that baby, right? And as Isaac is born, he is born in the line, the bloodline that will eventually produce whom?

[4 : 42] The Lord Jesus Christ. And so this is a very, very important history, not just for Israel, but for us. So let me pick it up in verse 16 because I'll end up in my sermon referring back to it in just a bit.

Well, then these men, these three men, the Lord Jesus and these two angels with Him in human form, these men rose up from there and looked down toward Sodom.

And Abraham was walking with them to send them off. And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham what I'm about to do? Since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed.

For I have chosen him so that he may command his children and household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice. Interesting, by doing righteousness and justice. That isn't something that just belongs to the Lord in revealing himself to Abraham. Now Abraham can live that out in his life. So that the Lord may bring upon Abraham what he has spoken about him.

[5 : 48] That he will be this progenitor of a great and mighty nation. And many, many, many, many millions of people will end up being blessed in the way of Abraham.

Verse 20, And the Lord said, The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great and their sin is exceedingly grave. I will go down now, now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry which has come to me.

And if not, I will know. Now I covered those verses in my last message. We went through all of that together. Now we pick it up in verse 22 to the end of the chapter.

Then the men turned away from there and went towards Sodom while Abraham was still standing before the Lord. Abraham came near and said, Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?

Suppose there are 50 righteous within the city. Will you indeed sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the 50 righteous who are in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike.

[7 : 00] Far be it from you. Shall not the Judge, capital J, of all the earth deal justly or righteously or fairly?

So the Lord said, If I find in Sodom 50 righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account. Abraham replied, Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am but dust and ashes.

Suppose the 50 righteous are lacking five. Will you destroy the whole city because of five? And he said, I will not destroy it if I find 45 there.

He spoke to him yet again and said, Suppose 40 are found there. And he said, I will not do it on account of the 40. Then Abraham said, Oh, may the Lord not be angry and I shall speak.

Suppose 30 are found there. God replied this way, I will not do it or destroy it if I find 30 there. And then he said, Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord.

[8 : 01] Suppose 20 are found there. God patiently, very patiently replied, I will not destroy it on account of the 20. Then Abraham said, Oh, may the Lord not be angry.

I shall speak now only this once. Suppose 10 are found there. And God said, I will not destroy it on account of the 10. As soon as he had finished speaking to Abraham, the Lord departed and Abraham returned to his place.

Now, please don't read into this something human that we might experience if we were in this situation with Abraham. God's not impatient here. God's not rolling his eyes.

God's not taking an attitude toward Abraham like, Really, dude? That's not what God is doing here. This is a very patient, gentle, and caring exchange between friends.

And God is patiently caring for this man because God knows his heart and knows his concern.

Now, what have we already identified in previous messages to be Abraham's paramount concern in this exchange with God as he intercedes on behalf of the people of Sodom?

[9 : 11] Who is he mainly concerned about? Lot, his nephew, Lot's wife, and then Lot has a couple of daughters. And so, when we do the math on that, we know that the Bible mentions at least four

people in the city that Abraham would be very concerned about.

Well, that's less than half of 10. And so, maybe with 10, Abraham feels like, I've hedged my bets okay. I'm good. Maybe there'll be six more. Maybe Lot witnessed to some people or whatever. Maybe there have been some people that have come around in their understanding of the Lord. And so, he got it down to 10. Folks, listen. People in general, even Christians, even Christians, have a hard time with what is fair.

Have a hard time. Our constant temptation, and I think one that we often succumb to as human beings, is that we self-favor in our evaluation of what is fair.

We self-favor. We tend to evaluate God's sense of fairness with how we view what is fair in any given situation.

[10:22] How we view what is reasonable, what is just. Now, Isaiah captured our dilemma well when it comes to how we sometimes struggle to believe God's goodness, to accept God's wisdom, and to trust God's ways of what He deems fair and just as it plays out in our lives serving a sovereign God.

And I want to share that with you this morning. The title of my message is, God Decides What Is Fair. And this is what Isaiah says about all that. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, God says. This is God speaking of Himself to us. My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Now, since God's ways and His thoughts are higher than our ways and our thoughts, what do we need God to do? Well, we need God, the Lord God, to help us.

Help us what? To help us know Him. We need to know God as He reveals Himself to us in Scripture and most manifestly, most supremely in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[11:41] We need God to reveal His thoughts to us. How else would we know them? We cannot ascend to God's thoughts. God has to bring those thoughts to us.

And we are grateful in our hearts that He does so, aren't we, church? We need God to help us understand His ways. How will we know how to live in the way of the Lord with the rebellious heart that we have against the Lord?

So God has to do a mighty work in our lives to bring us to the place where we know Him, where we understand His thoughts, His purposes for life, and where we have a clear understanding of how God wants us to live in relationship to Him.

How else will we know that unless God brings it to us, reveals it to us, shows us what's going on? You know from reading the Scripture and being in this church long enough, human beings do not in their nature reach for God.

We rebel against God. And so that's why we refer to the cross and salvation as a miracle, a true miracle of God's grace where a dead soul is made alive in the power of the Holy Spirit.

[12:49] Folks, we are dealing in really, really heavy and deep realities when we talk about what God does in the hearts and lives of sinners. Now as we think about God doing this for us and revealing Himself to us, His ways to us, His thoughts to us, and that kind of thing, it is God's will then, it is His purpose, for us to have certainty, certainty about the matters of living a holy, God-pleasing life before Him and what it means for us to actually live by His truth.

God doesn't play games with us in the gray areas. He wants us to know His will. He wants you to know His will more than you do. This is the heart of the Lord for His people.

And so what I shared with you last time is this, God wants us to live by His heavenly certainties.

Now what that does for us is it helps us help each other live with perseverance and hope.

The heavenly certainties of God concern His promises. We want to live by the promises of God, not by our feelings, not by the fickle ways of the world and the culture and the fads that come and go, even the spiritual ones that plague churches many times as we try to mimic the world to win the world.

That is not what God called us to do. We live by the heavenly certainties or promises of God that help us persevere together in hope. That hope is not a hope that says I hope it doesn't rain today.

[14:27] It is the hope that says I am certain that God will fulfill what He says and so I have hope. I have hope. Now that's what Christians live by.

We have something far, far greater and more foundational to put our feet on as we live by faith in the faithfulness of God. We live by faith in the faithfulness of God.

He does what He says and He doesn't play games with His people. Then I told you that we live by His objective truth and that is we are able to help each other live in obedience to His commands. We know what God says and what God expects and that is the truth and Jesus Himself said I am that truth. I'm the way, the truth, and the life. And so we live for Christ. We live for Christ. And then finally I told you that we live by His grace through faith. We live by God's favor. His holy favor on our life that empowers us through the Spirit to live by faith and not by sight.

[15 : 31] That helps us help each other to love and to serve for God's higher purposes of being conformed to the image of His Son. This is the Christian life.

This is what we are called to be. Not just do. This is who we are in Jesus, friends. And this is what we are called to praise God for.

Now, interestingly, Abraham is a good but not a perfect example of these truths that we have been rehearsing operating in a believer's life.

Even under difficult to understand circumstances which we will often find ourselves in. We have just enough light to take the next step but we don't know what the future holds. We don't know what will happen an hour from now much less tomorrow.

So we live by what God gives us in the moment. Now, here's an important reality. God took the initiative to come to Abraham and Sarah to involve them in the knowledge of His will for them.

[16 : 37] He made a promise a decade ago and then these people have lived and lived and grown older and older and on a human level they've probably been thinking well, you know what? I mean, this is looking really bad.

God promised us this error but nothing's really happening with regard to the error and now I'm 99, my wife's 89, we're not even having relations anymore. The Bible makes that clear.

How in the world is this ever going to come about? Well, God took the initiative to come and say I'm going to fulfill what I promised and reassure these people.

Look, folks, God helps us know His heart. God helps us know His ways in our covenant relationship with Him. How does He do it? Well, He favors us.

He favors us with His knowledge about His good works with us and the way that He operates in His world. I'm going to continue to hammer that theme through this message.

[17 : 33] Now, we've been tracing the good work of the Lord in God's visit to Abraham. We've been bringing out some principles that we can understand in that relationship.

It's a true story. This is a true story and it reflects God's good character and His wise ways in two prominent aspects of His character as Redeemer and as Judge.

Now, those two realities of God's character are not juxtaposed. They're not antithetical to one another. They're not opposites. They're not in competition with one another. God is both Redeemer and He is a just Judge.

And in His character, those are reflected in perfect ways in the way that He operates in His world. This story is no exception. Sodom and Gomorrah are no exception.

There are people who have a very, very difficult time with the Bible because they read stories like Sodom and Gomorrah and say, I will never serve a God like that. Oh, what a tragedy.

[18 : 36] Because in their unbelief in rebellion, they are not seeing what these stories reveal about the character of a saving God. A God who must punish sin. And in punishing that sin, He punished His Son to death that we might be forgiven for those sins.

And they miss that completely. They miss it completely. Well, we're not going to miss it today. We're going to highlight it today because it's very, very encouraging.

God rewards or blesses those who live according to His righteousness. It's a promise. Now, in stark contrast, it's true, God judges or punishes those who live according to unrighteousness.

God gets to define what righteousness is and what unrighteousness is. Because if we try to do it on our own, we self-favor. And again, that self-favoring gets in the way.

We're always going to default toward getting ourselves off the hook. It's a yes, but in our conversation with God. God, if you just understood the full nature of the circumstances, you'd come around to my thinking kind of attitude.

[19 : 50] It's what we do with each other as we want to make our point at all costs. Now, what we're forced to face is this. We are forced to face the issue of God's fairness and God's wisdom and how God Himself chooses to relate to Abraham and Sarah and, hear this, how He chooses to relate

to Sodom and Gomorrah.

How He chooses to relate to Abraham and Sarah in keeping His wonderful and beautiful promise to them and how He chooses to relate to Sodom and Gomorrah are not in competition and do not reflect negatively in any way on God's character.

The fact that God chose to wait and bring these people to this late stage in life, that's not unfair in any way. People might say, how unfair of the Lord to make these poor people wait this long without further explanation or that's just, that's not nice of the Lord.

Then we come over here and see Sodom and Gomorrah and realize that that place doesn't even exist anymore. We can't even find any trace that it exists where hundreds and hundreds if not thousands of people were incinerated in an instant and we say, that's not fair.

That's not fair. That's not a nice God. And I'm saying to you this morning that neither of these realities about God as a righteous Redeemer and God as a righteous Judge are in conflict at all.

[21 : 25] What we see in Abraham and Sarah and what we see in Sodom and Gomorrah need to be brought together so we see the fuller character of a saving God doing a saving work.

God must punish sin. And because God must punish sin, Jesus had to go to the cross. We cannot miss that.

Alright, now what I've outlined for you in the way of these messages begins with God's friendship in verses 1-8. And we're seeing in the text in terms of Abraham that he experienced God's friendship and God's condescension.

That's what I mean here by what you see on the screen. And we experience God's friendship in the same way. God must condescend to us and the highest way that God has condescended to us is in His Son, Jesus Christ.

God became a human being and was born of a virgin and came into the world and lived a sinless life that we might become friends with Almighty God through Him.

[22 : 29] Now, God came to Abraham at the Oaks of Mamre. I've already explained to you what that means in a previous message. The point here is this. God initiated. God came to Abraham.

Abraham would have lived and died without any fulfillment of that promise and no ability whatsoever in His human body to make it happen. You understand that? He and Sarah had no ability to make her...

She was barren. They were old. They weren't together anymore. God had to come and initiate this thing and get this thing going so that these two people could see the promise fulfilled in their life.

And then, as you see on the screen, as God's servant, Abraham and you and I and all believers respond to God with humility and hospitality. That's what I brought out as we looked at how God dealt with Abraham and Sarah as He promised that He would bring an heir.

So, what I'm saying to you is God initiates. We respond to God and that is a heart response. Okay? It's not rote obedience. It's not blind faith.

[23 : 41] There is no such thing in the Christian life as blind faith. None. Faith is the opposite of blind. We are given sight by the Lord to live by.

So, don't let anybody talk to you about a leap of blind faith. There's no such thing as that in the Christian life. God initiates and we provide a heart response to what God initiates in our life.

Our heart responds and resounds with the goodness of God and we live in response to the goodness that God is showering on our life. Even when we don't understand the circumstances that we're in, that does not change the goodness of God.

We've got to have something that keeps us stable. It stabilizes the reality of who we are in our walk with the Lord and how we navigate life. So, we're not doing this.

We're not swimming all over the pond. We're staying straight on the course, the straight and narrow of following Jesus. We obey because we love Him and because we know He loves us.

[24 : 44] This is the truth of how we live. Now, that was the first message. The second message outlined God's faithfulness in 9-15. God's faithfulness. And we experience as Abraham did, we experience all of this in the faithfulness of the Lord in His confirmation and confrontation.

And again, I can't re-preach all that now, but if you listen to those messages, you'll see what I mean. God ministered His truth to Abraham and to Sarah, particularly to Sarah.

He confirmed His promise will be fulfilled and then when Sarah had a problem with it and kind of got in the flesh with the Lord in that, He confronted her with the truth in love.

He didn't let Sarah stay in that disobedience. He brought her to the point, Hebrews said, where she believed Him who made the promise and is faithful.

And we outlined that for you. As God's servant, we respond with faith and repentance. We believe the promises of God and we repent when we struggle against those promises or waver from those promises in disobedience as His people.

[25 : 52] We repent. We're repenters. It's part of life. Now, verses 16 through 21 were defined by a central question last time that I spoke to you which God asked and it was this, shall I hide from Abraham what I'm about to do?

That's the question that set the tone for that entire section and it led us to this point from last time, God's favor. God's favor.

Shall I hide from Abraham what I'm about to do? God has highly favored Abraham. He has chosen Abraham. And so now it's as if to say this, I have made known to you my righteous will.

Abraham, I have shown you my ways. Abraham, I have revealed myself to you. You know my thoughts on this now. Now I'm giving you even more in the way of my thoughts.

I'm not going to hide from you what I'm thinking about what I'm about to do with Sodom and Gomorrah which is a stone's throw away from where you live and God says, I know what your greatest concern is with that city and any judgment that would come upon it.

[27 : 07] You have loved ones there. You have people there. People you care about. And isn't it wonderful that God isn't standing back and saying tough.

I'm going to wipe them off the face of the earth and I don't care how it affects you. You're not God. I am. We can't make God like us. You cannot do that.

But when things get tough, this is what we're tempted to do. So, why does the Lord choose to reveal to Abraham what He has purposed for Sodom and Gomorrah?

Why does He do that? Why does God let us in on these kinds of things about His will and the way that He works in the lives of His people? Why does God favor the righteous with the knowledge of His will?

Here is how we know the will of God. Alright? I don't get down on my knees in my house and light candles and stare into my navel and say, God, give me a word.

[28 : 11] He's already given me a word. And so, it's for me to come and discern and dig out the principles of Scripture that help keep my life on the straight and narrow of becoming more like Jesus Christ.

I know that I'm always on the wrong track if I'm moving away from becoming like Christ. Not honoring Christ. I know that's not God's will. And so, I need to do an about face and begin to think carefully, seek out wise counsel, discern in the wisdom of the Lord the direction.

This is exactly what Abraham and Sarah now are challenged with. So, again, I ask the question, why does God let us in on His will, His thoughts, His ways?

Why does He favor us with the knowledge of His will? Now, I shared this with you last time. I'm just going to state it and move on, okay? I promise. Under God's favor, that last one I did, because God wants us to trust Him and His ways.

That's why He makes Himself known to us in His ways. Because He wants us to be encouraged and faithful. I talked about all this, I did an entire sermon on this. Because He wants us to, He wants to teach us His ways and He wants us to teach those ways to others.

[29 : 28] Right? That's what we're doing. Because He wants us to be blessed in His love. To know the love that He has for us. And because He wants us to know His goodness.

Now this is just a handful of reasons that we have pulled out of the text to help us better understand the character of our God as He works in the life of Abraham and Sarah and in particular as He moves His way towards Sodom and Gomorrah.

The chapter is setting us up for judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah while at the same time laying that judgment with a foundation of His grace toward Abraham and Sarah.

So it's a beautiful and powerful mix. All of this that I have on the screen now are responses of our hearts leading to an obedient holy truth-filled life.

We want obedient truth-filled living. And these are things that play into that that give us a foundation for that. Now beginning in verse 22 then going to the end of the chapter the Bible describes a conversation between God and Abraham.

[30 : 42] Now what we see happening is very clear. Abraham is interceding on behalf of those righteous people quote unquote who may be living in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because God's already told Abraham hey the outcry is great.

The sin is exceedingly grave. This is God's determination. So there's no wrong here. There's no error in judgment. The sin is exceedingly great.

The sin is grave. Grave means what? Death producing. That's what's going on. And Abraham intercedes for these people.

For his part God patiently listens to Abraham's plea and then he pledges. He promises to Abraham to do as Abraham is asking.

God gives his oath to Abraham which I have to believe at the moment that was very reassuring and encouraging that Abraham sees this consistency in the Lord.

[31 : 50] I will promise and I will do as I promise. Now that brings us to this today. God's fairness. And that has to do with his sense of justice.

in verses 22-33 that we've already read. Now, if you look in verse 23 with me, Abraham himself asks a question.

He asks a question of God. And that question is, will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?

Now this question serves as the focal point and tension for this section of the passage. It focuses our attention on what Abraham is concerned about.

Now, let me ask you, do you think that Abraham already knows the answer to the question about the character of his God? Do you think he knows?

[32 : 51] Alright, what do you think his answer is about God's character to this question? What do you think? Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? What's the answer? No. No.

And Abraham already knows this. Now folks, again, why doesn't the Scripture just tell us that Abraham walked up to God, since he's had this interchange with the Lord already about Sarah, they've already been talking through some of the issues of life, why doesn't the Bible just say Abraham walked up and said, Lord, are you going to destroy Lot?

Is he going to die with all of the wicked people in the city? Because God knows that's his heart. Why doesn't it do that? This is in the Scripture in this particular way to show us the great patience of God with human beings.

It's in the Scripture for several reasons that I'll pull out in just a moment for you. But it's in the Scripture in the way it is because this is the way the Holy Spirit wanted to present it to us. This is the way it came down.

We're seeing humanity here, but more importantly, we're seeing how God deals with humanity. God is a very patient God. Greg read from Psalm 85 this morning and we saw in Psalm 85 the steadfast love or the loving kindness of God is never ending toward his people.

[34 : 08] And we see this as he deals with Abraham. Now what I want to do is this, because this question serves as the focal point for this section, and then there's another question that also helps kind of set the tone for this one that precedes it.

I want to bring these things together. So let's do this. Just follow with me for just a moment. Let's just do a little bit of how to study the Bible thing here together. And let's bring together, listen now, let's bring together verses 22 and 23, where we currently are in the passage, and put it alongside verses 16 and 17, where I dealt with this material in my last message last Sunday.

All right, let's pull those together. So just look at those side by side, and let me ask you rhetorically, what do you notice? Now this is one of the ways you study the Bible.

You look for things that are similar. You look for things that are repeated. You look for emphases that come out of the Scripture because they're repeated or they're similar.

And that's what you're seeing here. You see literary parallels between these two sections of the passage. as it's translated into English. And we're going to look at that together just for a few moments.

[35 : 29] In verse 16, what are the men doing? Ask yourself about the characters. Who are the characters being highlighted in this story, this passage? What are the characters doing?

This is how you begin to get a grasp on the flow of the passage toward getting the point of the passage. What is this story teaching about the character of God and how he deals with people?

In verse 16, the men look toward Sodom. And what's Abraham doing? Abraham is walking alongside the men to send them on their way.

So at this particular point, the men are looking toward. In other words, they have a plan toward. There seems to be a way that the story is taking our eyes and putting our eyes in a little bit of a different direction.

I wonder what that's all about, looking toward Sodom. And now we have Abraham walking alongside them as they move in a certain direction.

[36 : 36] Abraham is with them in that. That's very interesting to me. What does it all mean? Well, in verse 22, the two men, the angels, as we know them to be, turn to go to Sodom.

They're not looking at Sodom. They're turning to go to Sodom. Now, what is Abraham's behavior? He's left standing before the Lord. Standing before the Lord.

In verse 17, notice, in verse 17, God is initiating, revealing his will to Abraham by asking the question that sets the tone for that section, that passage, 16 through 21.

In verse 23, Abraham is responding to God's revelation. Back in verse 17, shall I hide? Abraham is responding to what God told him.

I'm getting ready to go down and judge the city. I already know what's going on. It's exceedingly wicked. I'm getting ready to go down and judge it. I'm going to see what's going on down there and I'm going to take care of it. Now, Abraham, in verse 23, is responding to God's revelation by asking God a question which reflects on God's character as a just judge.

[37 : 54] Shall I hide from Abraham what I'm about to do? The Lord asks earlier. Now, Abraham responds to what God tells him about Sodom. Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?

Now, God is going to act in judgment. And God is always just. His sentence on the guilty is also always just. So, Abraham's response is something like, God, you've disclosed to me your plan for the judgment of these cities due to their extreme wickedness.

Now, what if there are righteous people in these cities? Surely you know that. And surely you're not going to destroy them also in your punishment of the unrighteous. You cannot punish your people in the same way that that you punish the wicked.

Abraham, he can't handle that. He cannot handle a God like that. And he knows full well the character of the Lord won't allow it. It's why he got God down to ten. Now, I want to believe that Abraham knew as he was talking to the God of the universe that God knew his heart.

And again, this exercise was probably more for Israel and for us than maybe for Abraham. Not that Abraham didn't get anything from it. I think it's really interesting where it came out as these questions are answered in the life of Abraham.

[39 : 19] Abraham's response to all this is something like, God, you've shown me your plan for the judgment of the cities. There are righteous people there, I think. Can't we work something out?

Now, we have God's answer in this section from about verse 26 down through the end of the chapter. And God continues to say, nope, I won't destroy it if there's that many.

I won't destroy it if there's this many. And it keeps getting down and down and down. God uses this interchange with Abraham to teach us his sense of fairness as the judge of all the earth.

Now, this is applied in his relationship to the righteous and the wicked. We see the fairness of God as he deals with Abraham and Sarah with such tenderness and such patience.

Why did Sarah laugh when I told you that I'll be here this time next year and she'll have a baby by you? You too will have a child? Why did she laugh? Are you kidding me?

[40 : 25] Am I going to have pleasure again? Abraham and I aren't even together anymore in that way. How's that going to work? And God said, why did Sarah laugh when I told you?

And she said, oh, no, I didn't laugh. No, but you did laugh. Folks, that's love. That's speaking the truth in love. That's confronting us in our boneheadedness, in our stubbornness, in our desire to look on the situation and evaluate it in the way that we think is right and fair.

what we think the outcome should be. And God says, you know, I don't want you to live like that. I want you to live in the love of my wisdom.

I want you to live in the treasure of my love for you. I want you to be comforted by the reality that my love is steadfast and never failing.

And when you can't trust the circumstances, you can trust me. And that's what he's teaching Abraham and Sarah. And that's why he has to go to Sodom and deal with it.

[41 : 34] Or he's not the God that he promised to Abraham and Sarah. He's got to be consistent in the way that he deals with sin. Now, what does the judge of all the earth want to teach us about himself in the way he judges righteous and unrighteous people?

That's the question. Well, here it is. He wants to teach us about his integrity. What we're talking about here is his uprightness, his blamelessness. And it's demonstrated in his recompense of the unrighteous, which equals punishment.

Now, I want to talk about that. Again, folks, what I'm about to do is I move toward closing this thing out. That's going to take me about 15 more minutes.

My closings are like my introductions. They kind of do this. That's okay. But what I want to do now, because we've read this and we've talked about it and I've referenced it in all three of the other sermons that I've done, this interchange between Abraham and the Lord, there's not a lot here that is unclear.

We see what's happening and why it's happening. We kind of have a grip on that. What I want to do now is help you see your God and the character of your God in the way that he's dealing with Abraham and Sarah brought over into the way that he's dealing with Sodom and Gomorrah and what that means for us in the way of what this is in our life.

[43 : 04] How do we bring those two things together as it measures on the cross and cross living? I think I would be remiss if I didn't do that with you now and help you see this about the Lord.

We're talking about how God recompenses good and evil, how he pays back in this. Now the best way to understand the way that the Bible deals with or renders a just recompense or a right repayment is in keeping with his own perfect character and in response to the hearts and deeds of people.

So a recompense has to do with repayment or paying back. It's God's just, fair, and most appropriate payment based on the deeds of the person in their relationship to God and his laws. So God is, please folks, God is not just punishing a city by throwing all the people into the same bucket no matter how they've lived or who they are.

He's not just throwing them all in the same bucket and saying, it's a lot easier for me than I don't want to have to pick out. We're just going to just wipe you all out. It's just all. He deals with us in the way that I've got on the screen.

[44 : 20] He deals individually. Every person. He knows every person intimately. Now, how can I say that, Alonzo? I can say that because the Bible says that we're all made in?

Amen. He made every soul. He knows every soul. He knows the number of the hairs on your head. Now, you got more hair on your head than I do, but that's not a problem for God.

He knows how many you got and how many I got. Right? He knows how many you got. It's just the way God is. He's a good and righteous king.

So, the Bible makes it clear that we're talking about a right recompense. Now, this is consistent with God's saving favor. God being a just judge does not negate or conflict with the fact that He is a God who makes saving favor on people.

God favors whom He chooses and in that favor God forgives their sins and He deals with them in His love forever. Now, His children do not receive His judgment.

[45 : 32] His children, His chosen ones, like Abraham and Sarah, do not receive His punishment because Jesus was judged and punished in their place as their substitute.

You say, Abraham and Sarah the same way? Yes! Remember I told you in future messages, alright? Abraham and Sarah are living on this side of the cross and they are living in faith in God's promise that a deliverer will come.

From your bloodline, Abraham, someone will come. You will be a blessing to millions of people in the promise that I'm going to make in this person I'm bringing. And Abraham and Sarah believe God.

That's faith. That's saving faith. We live on the other side of the cross. We know that that person's name is Jesus Christ. He is the Lord Jesus Christ.

We look back on the cross and we see what Paul tells us. What was a mystery to these people over here is no longer a mystery because the mystery now has been revealed and is being fulfilled in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[46 : 38] This is how we live now. We live in that favor of the Lord revealing himself to us in that way. And so God does not punish. God does not judge in the same way that he judges and

punishes the wicked the way that he does his people.

Those who are living in faith in the Lord, that's not the same. He does not treat them the same. Now I want to share with you this scripture. Look at this scripture with me.

He made, God made, him who knew no sin, that refers to Jesus, to be sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

That verse is simply telling us in a very profound way that God punished his own son because his own son willingly took on the sins of those whom God has chosen to be his people.

And then God punished his son to death for the sins those people lived. And in punishing his son to death for the sins that those people committed, Jesus willingly offered him as the once for all sacrifice for sin.

[47 : 45] And we don't need any more sacrifices. He is the sacrifice. And this is what this verse is teaching us. So that purpose clause what? We might become the righteousness.

There's your righteousness. God is a righteous redeemer and a righteous judge. so that we might become the righteousness of God in him. You cannot see the Lord apart from being made right with the Lord.

Righteousness refers to how God makes people right with himself. Sinners. Rebellious people. How does God make people right? This includes Old Testament saints who look to God with the same faith as Abraham believing that God would send the person, the deliverer in the future.

What Jews came to know as their Messiah. Now Abraham is asking what is fundamental to our minds when we take a moment to consider God's sovereign rule over all that he's made.

That is, is God just? Is God fair in the way that he's chosen to deal with people, in the way that he's chosen to save people, forgive people, judge people?

[48 : 54] Is all that consistent with a loving God? Now the question comes from our own sense of insecurity. The question comes from our sense of fear and our knowledge that we're not always fair in our dealings with others.

Have you not seen this in someone that might have been your boss and they didn't treat you with fairness? Have you not seen this in your spouse? If you've been married longer than about 24 hours, you have seen, probably as you were dating and engaged, that we don't always treat each other with fairness.

How about our friends? You've had friends and you've probably treated other people this way, right? We do this to people and people do it to us. The world is not based on fairness and God has not promised that in this world we will receive a just fairness in all that we do.

If you've ever been involved in the court system, you should know that by now. What we do though is this folks, we wrongly apply these very human tendencies to God's dealing with us.

Alright? Now if we're honest, we can sometimes think that God might be dealing with us in similar unfair ways. God, this feels unfair. It feels, it just doesn't feel right.

[50 : 14] Should I be suffering this much? Should it be this hard? Should I not have any more understanding than I do right now? And on and on it goes. Now do people question the ways and motives of God?

Would Abraham and Sarah have been tempted over all these years when God made the promise so far back and nothing's changing? They're just getting older. The situation seems to become more dire every week that passes.

And so are they tempted to think that maybe God isn't going to keep His promise and that maybe there's just something that's just not quite fair about this? They're probably tempted. We can sometimes and in a variety of ways put God on trial in our hearts.

Very dangerous. Friends, don't do that. Check yourself quickly and repent quickly. If you find yourself questioning the goodness of God, I think it's okay to ask God questions.

Folks, we have them in the Psalms. When people are grieving, it's okay to ask God questions. It's okay to bring your grief and your sadness to the Lord. He's your Father. He's your friend. He loves you.

[51 : 27] But what we want to guard against in our hearts is coming to the place where we think that God isn't good in what He's doing, even if it's silence. Have you ever prayed for God to give you an answer and silence is what you're hearing?

Folks, that's an answer. It may not be the answer you want, but it's an answer. It's why we're told in the Bible to wait on the Lord. wait on the Lord.

There's all kinds of ways we can draw principles out of this. It's wrong and unnecessary for us to put God on trial. We allow ourselves to get caught in our own confusion, in our own sinful desires, in our own idol worship in our hearts because we feel the weight of our suffering.

We interpret it as God punishing us. God does not punish His people. He does not punish believers and He doesn't deal with believers in the same way that He deals with unbelievers.

Thank the Lord. Thank the Lord. There's hope. Now, look at this. Does God make any distinction or concession between the righteous and the wicked when it comes to how He determines to repay them for their deeds?

[52 : 41] Is God always fair and just? Does God always render a just judgment? judgment? Well, we want to settle the issue once and for all from Scripture. And so, you don't have to turn there at this point.

I'll have you turn to something in just a moment. But look at this. We're settling this question once and for all for us. I know you already know the answer and you believe that God is a just God and He recompenses people in a just way.

But look at what the Scripture slam dunks about this. The rock. His work is perfect. Did you see that? For all, not some, not a few, all His ways are just.

A God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He. Now, if I just left it right there, is that enough? That's just a slam dunk, isn't it?

And don't you think in Deuteronomy that Israel needed to hear this? So, was God just and was God fair when He sent invading armies against Israel to discipline them and to reign them in and tell them, if you keep choosing the idols of these pagans, this is what's going to happen to you.

[53 : 54] Right? Was God just to do that? Well, there were many in Israel that thought not. No. And turned away from the Lord. And then what about this verse?

The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever. The judgments of the Lord are true. They are righteous all together. Alonzo said, Amen.

So, God is just and fair and righteous and good and He's always true in all that He says and does with believers and unbelievers. Now, what God does with Sodom and Gomorrah is right, good, just, and necessary according to God's economy.

And this is how the passage resolves this interchange between Abraham and the Lord. While God's goodness may not be as openly apparent in how He deals with the unrighteous, with Sodom and Gomorrah, God is still good, God still does good, and God is ready to forgive.

One of the reasons that we have Abraham and Sarah being told that the promise will be fulfilled right before we have God saying, I'm going to go down to Sodom and deal with this mess, is we need to see the saving nature of God even when He decides to judge.

[55 : 12] Over here, God is providing salvation. I'm bringing someone from you as I promised, and this one will mean salvation for people.

And yet, I'm going to punish sin. And we bring those together, and when we do, we find the cross. cross. The cross roads of God's righteous favor and His judgment is a cross.

Or if I want to do it this way and get cute, I can do an X marks the spot. Because Jesus is the treasure in the brother. You dig down underneath the X and you find Jesus.

And that's what we want. That's what we're looking for in all of this. His dealings with the unrighteous are not exceptions to His goodness, but demonstrations of it.

A lot of people don't believe that. Now, God's goodness is particularly demonstrated in His treatment of the righteous. We're going to get to Sodom and Gomorrah.

[56 : 26] We're going to have to talk about it. We're going to have to read about it, and it's ugly. It's an ugly, ugly narrative. It's going to be hard for me to read it. It's going to be hard for me to preach through it because it's ugly, but the Bible has it in there, and I'm going to tell you guys, this is a G-rated place.

This is a G-rated place, and I'm going to preach it in a G-rated way, but you need to understand, when we get to Sodom and Gomorrah and we read about what these people wanted to do with these two men and the kids in here, we want them in here, you need to put it down on their level and help them better understand what's happening.

Okay? Get them ready. Get them ready, because this is where we're headed. God, listen now, let me share a couple of things with you as we again draw to a close here.

God's goodness is particularly demonstrated in His treatment of the righteous. What is involved in God's pardon of the righteous is astonishingly beautiful and loving, I say, especially considering how sinful we are in our rebellion toward the Lord.

Look at this, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more. What a promise. Therefore, let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

[57 : 55] How in the world could God say that to people like us? Like us. God will not sweep away the righteous with the wicked.

Look, He will spare Sodom and Gomorrah even if there are only ten righteous people among hundreds or possibly thousands of wicked people across the cities of the valley.

In other words, listen, this is what's going on. The righteous are acting as a holy and gracious influence in the lives of the wicked. But the wicked don't know it and they don't appreciate it.

God will bless the righteous and even allow the wicked to share in this blessing. You say, how?

How? Listen, by withholding His judgment against the wicked on behalf of the righteous.

And as God blesses the righteous and they live under the goodness of God, that trickles out into the lives of those who are unjust. You see this in your unsaved kids, as your unsaved kids live under the umbrella of the grace of God in your life and enjoy the benefits and blessings of God in your life as you walk with the Lord, as you worship and bring them here.

[59 : 04] And then maybe they grow up and get to a certain age, they leave your house and they don't want to follow the Lord. And you see all kinds of stuff start happening in their life as they come out from underneath that umbrella.

Right? I'm not saying they're saved under the umbrella and then they get unsaved. I'm saying they're living under the grace and blessing of how you're living in honor of Christ. And that can't help but trickle down into the people around you and closest to you.

Isn't God good? The unrighteous people will be blessed by how God blesses the righteous around them. Now while this is wonderful, it begs a question which takes us into even greater wonder.

And the question is this, how did the righteous get righteous? Because they were unrighteous. The answer, God made them that way.

In His wisdom and love, God made a way to honor His law. In His wisdom and love, God upheld His sense of justice at the same time.

[60 : 09] And He was able to offer forgiveness and pardon to those who have broken His law and deserve death. How did God do all that? He did it by His mercy.

Look what I say here. God's mercy is His goodness toward those in misery and distress. So God withholds the punishment they deserve. And you'll see that I've got some references there from Psalm 25.

You can look that up later. How does God do this? How does He get to the place where He makes unrighteous people righteous? Well, He does it by His mercy and He does it by His grace.

God's grace is His goodness toward those who deserve only punishment. Who deserve only punishment.

That was my life. That was your life. It's hard to think about. God gives the pardon they don't deserve. You see that in Ephesians 2, 1-9.

[61 : 11] And then God does it by His patience. God's patience is His goodness in withholding of punishment toward those who sin over a period of time. How long have Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities of the valley been sinning against the Lord so that that outcry has been going on?

Years? Decades? God is very patient. How long has Lot lived in those cities and among those people? But now is the time.

God is long suffering and willing to endure being wronged. Now, just real quickly, I want to take you to Romans chapter 2. So please turn there.

I've had you in chapter 18 in Genesis. Now I want you to see this in Romans chapter 2. We're talking about the patience and long suffering of the Lord as it's applied to people who sin against Him and live against Him.

In Romans 2 beginning in verse 4. Or do you think lightly of the riches of God's kindness and tolerance and patience? Do you think lightly of that?

[62 : 22] Not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance. But because of your stubbornness, because of your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of

wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

That's Sodom and Gomorrah. They've been storing up wrath against them day after day. God will render to each person according to his deeds.

Folks, mark that. He doesn't just throw them all in a bucket. To those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, they get what?

Eternal life. But, contrast, to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, what do they get?

Wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil. The Jew first and also the Greek or the Gentile. But glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good.

[63 : 32] To the Jew first and also to the Greek for there is no partiality with God. God, you see? This is your just God. There's no partiality. He doesn't play favorites. That's not what he does.

Now, there is a passage that brings all of this together. It brings together God's mercy, grace, and patience. They come together to declare the Lord is both just and the justifier of sinners.

The same God who punishes sinners is the God who also justifies sinners. In his justness, he punishes them, Mark.

But in his justness, he also justifies them. And Martin Luther, back in the day, Martin Luther went, that rocked his soul.

And eventually, he was saved by contemplating this reality. How can God be both the punisher and the Savior at the same time? In the same person.

[64 : 37] And all of that be just, fair, right. So that his punishment of the wicked doesn't impinge on or threaten at all the rightness of his character in saving some.

And in saving some, he's not a God who overlooks the wrong doing that people do in their selfish ambition. You see, folks, you have a very big God.

God. So don't live like he needs to be put in your little match box. My friends, please, let him be big. Because he's going to be big.

He's going to be big. Let me take you in Romans to this passage that brings all this together. It's in chapter 3. 21 through 26. verse 1.

Verse 1. Verse 1. Verse 1. But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe.

[65 : 42] For there is no distinction. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. He's saying, for all of us need this righteousness that is only found in Jesus. All of us.

There's no distinction. Jews, Greeks, Gentiles, doesn't matter. Being justified. There's your righteousness. Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation, satisfaction in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His what? Righteousness. Because in the forbearance of God, He passed over the sins previously committed. For the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Jesus is at the center of all this, isn't He? Because He's the only way that we can be justified. Folks, here's some takeaways for you. God gave up His Son, Jesus Christ, to be our sinless substitute. Jesus stood in innocence, but He stepped into our place of guilt and condemnation. He did that willingly. God provided Jesus to take our punishment and our place, and He treated the innocent Jesus as if He had committed our sins instead of us.

[67 : 08] Jesus, being fully God and fully man, willingly laid down His life on behalf of guilty sinners like us. Jesus, the perfect righteousness of God, bore the full weight of the guilt and penalty of our sins.

Here's the Scripture. But He, Jesus Christ, was pierced through for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The chastening of our well-being fell upon Him.

By His scourging, we are healed. The Lord has caused... Do you see the initiatory act of God there? The Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to do what?

To fall on Him. God placed our sins on His Son. He caused that. He poured out Himself to death and was numbered with the transgressors.

Yet He Himself bore the sin of many and interceded for the transgressors. And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

[68 : 18] For by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls. Amen. The guardian of your souls.

Now, in a closing note, I want to let you know, and I have permission to do this. Yesterday I made the call and got permission to do this. It was