



## **BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: Ignite Your Faith: Genesis 12-25 wk. 3**

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This is one of the most beautiful pictures in the Old Testament of this covenant relationship. As God demonstrates, it's not just some mysterious relationship with this spirit who just kind of floats out in the heavens somewhere, but it is very real, very personal, very intimate covenant relationship. As a matter of fact, of all the blessings that we receive from God, there is no blessing that is as great as just simply entering into relationship with the God of the universe, that God is seated at my table.

The story goes on verse nine, *"Then they said to him, where is Sarah, your wife? And he said, behold in the tent. And He said, I will surely return to you at this time next year, and behold, Sarah, your wife, shall have a son. And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age. Sarah was past childbearing, and Sarah laughed to herself saying, after I have become old, shall I have pleasure? My lord being old also. And the Lord said to Abraham, why did Sarah laugh, saying, shall I indeed bear a child when I am old? Is anything too difficult for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son. Sarah denied it however, saying, I did not laugh for, she was afraid. And he said, no, but you did laugh."*

Have you ever laughed at God? I've done it quite a few times. Some of the most magnificent promises that exalt the position of the believer in Christ come to you and you say yeah, right? There's just something within us that struggles to come to grips with some of these magnificent truths. As we come to grips with who God is, there is nothing too wondrous for God.

Well, the story continues on verse 16, *"Then the men, the men rose up from there and look down towards Sodom and Abraham was walking with them to send them off and the Lord said, shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation and in him, all the nations of the earth will be blessed? For I have chosen him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice in order that the Lord may bring upon Abraham what he has spoken about him. And the Lord said, the outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. I will go down now and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to me and if not, I will know."*

One of the things that just flows out of this text is this, this relationship that Abraham and God have, it's as if they are two friends having a discussion. Are you aware of the fact that there's only one person in all of the Bible that's called a friend of God, and it was Abraham? Three different biblical writers, two in the Old, one in the New Testament referred to Abraham as a friend of God. And a lot of people think they took it right out of this text because this text has so much relationship in it as Abraham and God are together as if they are two friends and God lets us in on His thinking saying, you know, should I tell Abraham what I'm about to do? And He says, yes, I think I should because I'm going to pour out my

blessings upon Abraham and he's going to be a great and mighty nation, but he's going to have to teach his children and he's going to have to teach his children's children that they need to walk in righteousness and justice before me so that I can pour out my blessing upon them. What God is saying is I want a covenant people that will walk in obedience to me, that will walk in righteousness and justice because I want to pour out my blessings on them.

In order for Abraham to come to grips with the magnificence of this covenant relationship, he does have to understand what the alternative would be. There are many things in life that we don't fully understand, unless we have some sort of a contrast. For example, we don't fully appreciate light unless we've known darkness. We don't fully appreciate warmth unless we've known cold. We don't fully appreciate peace unless we've known anxiety. We don't fully appreciate freedom unless we've known bondage. And we don't fully appreciate the blessings of God unless we understand God's wrath. Unless we understand what, the alternative is. And so, God says, you know, I'm going to have to deal with Sodom, should I tell Abraham yet? Yes, I need to tell him. I need him to understand what, what it means to have my blessings and for me to pour out my goodness and my grace upon him. He needs to understand how special that is in light of the alternative.

You know, some of us that have been in this covenant relationship with God for such a long time, we forget this, we forget this. We just take it all for granted. We fail to realize what a remarkable thing it is that God has made it possible for us to have God Himself with us at the dining room table, the God for whom there is, there are no boundaries, a God of unlimited power, a God that pours out His blessings upon us even though we're deserving of His wrath. When was the last time you were on your face before God just celebrating the incredible blessings you have because you're in relationship with Him, realizing, I don't deserve any of this? Every day is a day of unimaginable blessings because we dwell in covenant relationship with God. Well, that's what He's saying to Abraham. Abraham needs to know that. He says there's, there's trouble in Sodom and I'm going to go down there and if it's what I hear it is, I'm going to have to deal with it.

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*So, the story goes on verse 22, "Then the men turned away from there and went towards Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the Lord. And Abraham came near and said, wilt thou indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city, wilt thou indeed sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from Thee to do such a thing to slay the righteous with the wicked so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from Thee! Shall not the judge of all the earth deal justly?"*

*So, the Lord said, if I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account. And Abraham answered and said, now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am but dust and ashes. Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five, will Thou destroy the whole city because of five? And He said, I will not destroy it if I find forty-five. And he spoke to him yet again and said, suppose forty are found there? And He said, I will not do it on account of the forty. Then he said, oh, may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak. Suppose thirty are found there? And He said, I will not do it if I find thirty there. And he said, now behold, I ventured to speak to the Lord, suppose twenty are found there? And He said, I will not destroy it on account of the twenty. Then he said, Oh, may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once, suppose ten are found there? And He said, I will not destroy it on account of the ten. And as soon as He had finished speaking to Abraham, the Lord departed, and Abraham returned to his place."*

This is really quite a dialogue between God and Abraham. Again, reflecting a relationship as Abraham intercedes on behalf of Sodom, he and God talk, and God responds to him and they're interacting like a, like a real relationship. But in Abraham's heart, he has a concern for the people of Sodom. You remember Abraham had a connection with Sodom. He had rescued these people. He had risked his life to set these people free. He probably knew many of these people. They probably were very appreciative to Abraham for what he had done for them. But you remember also Lot, his nephew was living there.

The driving question though of Abraham's interaction with God boiled down to, God will you treat the righteous and the wicked alike? He said, God, I appeal to you on the basis of your character. Would you do that? Would you treat the righteous and the wicked alike? And God's response is, no, no, I would never do that. As a matter of fact, as Abraham starts working his way down 50,45,40,30,20,10 and maybe he landed on 10, because if you do the math, Lot and his family equal 10. And maybe he thought, if nobody else in that city is righteous, but just my nephew's family Lot, will you spare the city? But what you see in that dialogue is God's fierce commitment to His righteous people. No, if there's 50, I won't, I won't destroy the city. For 45, for 40, for 30, even if there's just 10 I won't do that. I won't treat the righteous like the wicked.

Maybe some of you feel like you're out there all alone, out there in the marketplace, out there in your school and your dorm, in your neighborhood. For some of you, even in your own family. Maybe you feel like you're the only Christian. You're out there slugging it out and you wonder if it's worth it. You need to read this text and look at God's fierce commitment to the righteous. If there had just been 10 ... if Lot would have just reached his own family, those people would have been spared that judgment because of God's commitment to His own, His righteous.

When God goes down into Sodom what will He find? Will He find 10 righteous? If it's true that God has this fierce commitment to the righteous and the righteous experience this incredible blessing of a covenant relationship, this intimacy to have the God of the Universe at your dining room table, the God of unlimited power, the God of no boundaries, the God for whom nothing is too wondrous, the God who wants to pour out His blessing, all of that is a picture of this, this covenant relationship with the righteous. But the question is still who are the righteous and who are the wicked?

I found over the years that if I preach on heaven, everybody likes that. If I preach on heaven and hell, it gets a little more tense, but people accept that. But when I make it personal, people get offended. When it becomes personal, where people actually have to come to grips with the reality that they are deserving of God's wrath, that's when the temperature rises. That's when people in our culture get very offended. Then suddenly we're judgmental. We're intolerant, we're self-righteous. They don't like that. You see, I think by and large, people do believe there's a heaven. And by and large they accept the other, probably there is some hell for really bad people. But they certainly don't see themselves as deserving that.

If we gathered all the people in the culture, that basically believe that they are in this group of the righteous, it'd be a very large group. By and large, I'm as good as the next guy and God grades on a curve and if anybody's going to get in, I am. And a lot of these people are very good by the world's standards. They are. They're very religious by the world's standards. They by and large think they're okay. I certainly don't deserve that. As a matter of fact, this group of people would listen to this message today and say, that's really neat, I can't wait to get my blessing. Because they would certainly consider themselves among the righteous.

You have a much smaller group over here. These are the people that would readily admit, I am deserving of God's wrath. I'm deserving of God's judgment. I deserve to spend eternity in hell. That would be fair and that would be just, that's what I have coming because of my sin. Now, hearing those two descriptions, the culture would say, well, that's pretty clear. This is the righteous group. This is the wicked group, but the reality is that's exactly backwards. That's exactly backwards. This group of people over here, they're okay. They measure up. They certainly don't deserve that. Bottom line, they have no need for a Savior. I can enter into this covenant relationship on my own. I don't need any help. I can do it myself and the overwhelming majority of the people that ever live, we'll put in this category, thinking themselves to be righteous.

But this group of people over here are desperate. They're desperate. They know that they deserve God's wrath. They know that they have sin. They know that they have no hope of salvation. Therefore, they need help. They need a Savior. Just like Abraham, they believe that God must shed His blood, Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary to pay for my sins, and it's only on the basis of Jesus as my Savior that I can enter into covenant relationship because I know what I deserve, and on the basis of that choice, by faith, God declares them righteous. Genesis 15, Abraham believed, and it was credited to him as righteousness.

You see these people here that are righteous, they're not self-righteous, they're not intolerant, they're not judgmental. They're not holier than thou. They're the people that know they deserve wrath. They're the people that know they deserve judgment. That's why they know they need a Savior.

These people over here don't need a Savior. They don't need any help. They, they can handle it themselves and the Bible says very clearly those people in this category will be numbered among the wicked. My prayer is that every single person would be numbered among the righteous by faith. By faith, we receive the blessing of God.

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CARA: Bryan, thanks for reminding us just how dependent we are on God's grace and mercy.

Bryan: Yeah, that's a great text, isn't it?

CARA: Yeah. It seems pretty common for religious people to think they're okay before God and that's due to self-righteousness, isn't it? Could you just talk some more about that?

Bryan: Yeah, so this is a huge problem. We mentioned yesterday, Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. I think that's a reference to religion, but also goes all the way back to Genesis 3, that my desire to be my own god manifests itself in self-righteousness, which is the essence of religion. So, we tend to look at people that are really good people that are really religious, and we think, oh, they're so close. It's almost like they're good enough and we've failed to see actually, they're determined to be their own God and they're not close at all. They're self-righteous and that's never going to get them there. Tim Keller talks about there's two ways to avoid Jesus. One is by being really bad, but the other way is by being really good. [hm] If I'm really good, I don't, I don't need a Savior.

Arnie: You said that if Lot would have reached his own family with God's truth, the people of Sodom would have been spared. That's such a mindblower. And you say that's because of God's commitment to the righteous. So, what does that say to someone who is sort of out there on their own?

Bryan: Yeah, so I think it says the righteous matter to God. That can be a pretty lonely road. Jesus talks about it being a light in the darkness. That's where we need to be. But I, I think it's also a reminder, God doesn't need a majority. I think we struggle with this, that we keep thinking we have to have a majority to win. God's a majority. So, God and one, that's plenty. And so, people that are out there in the darkness and feeling it, they just need to trust that God's enough.

Care: I just think Jesus didn't take a popularity poll to figure out which was the best way to heaven. He just said, I'm the way.

Bryan: Right. And even Jesus lost popularity about halfway through his ministry.

Cara: One thing I struggled with when I came to Christ - Christians just scared me so much. So, I sort of isolated myself and spiritually fed myself. But ultimately, I discovered it's really not good to be alone in faith. And that's where that church family comes in.

Bryan: Yeah, I mean obviously as a pastor, I'm going to tell you the church is really important and the community of faith, but sometimes Christians can be kind of scary. It has to do with stereotypes. I mean you find the most amazing, wonderful people, but you also find people that maybe are a little bit scary or hurtful or judgmental [challenging] challenging, that is going to happen.

Arnie: Incredibly scary.

Bryan: But you know, in a culture where we're completely losing our value on "us" and everything's about "me", the church is about coming together as a community of faith and who we are together. It's the only place my faith actually makes sense. You know, it's a gathering of resident aliens. It doesn't make sense anywhere else except when we gather and share beliefs and values. You know, when we gather to worship, we as the people of God worship God. So, we're talking to God, but at other times in the worship, we're talking to one another about God.

Bryan: So you think of the voices all week long that are contrary to our beliefs. At what point do people step in and be reminded what's true? And I tell you, without a consistent rhythm of that, it's pretty hard to stay dialed into what's true.

Arnie: Bryan, it seems like Abraham is gearing up for a second rescue attempt for Lot. Doesn't seem too surprising.

Bryan: Well, it doesn't seem surprising that Abraham's gearing up cause he cares about Lot. I think what's more surprising is what is Lot doing? Lot and his family who, you know, Abraham's rescued them once. It had to be obvious God did that. But I also even think of the people of Sodom, they were in trouble and the God of Abraham showed up and rescue them. But they seem to have no interest in what pleases God and are determined to offend Him. That's the surprising part to me.