

## Bold But Humble In Prayer

## A Sermon on Genesis 18:0-32

Year C - Pentecost 10

24 - July - 2016

JJ<sup>1</sup>

A man walks into his boss's office and says, "I want a raise!" Is this man being bold or brash? It depends on what has happened before he went into his boss's office. If he has only been working a few months and a raise has never been mentioned or promised, the man is being brash. He is making a fool of himself and jeopardizing his job at the company! But could a person go into their boss's office and say, "I want my raise," and not be brash? Can a person do it boldly and yet humbly at the same time?

Consider another set of circumstances. A man had been working for the company for 10 years. His boss had promised him a raise, but had not given it yet. This was the way the boss had done it before, not to be mean, but to test his employees to see if his employees had enough initiative to confront their boss, but to also do it with respect. The man enters his boss's office and says, "Sir, I know you're an honorable man. You promised that you would give me a raise. Now I'm holding you to that promise. I want my raise."

This employee did not demand his raise because of his own work, he simply held his boss to his promise. Today, through Abraham, the LORD teaches us that he also wants us to hold him to his promis-

es. Today we learn to be **BOLD BUT HUMBLE IN PRAYER.**

Abraham has just had the most amazing drop-in visit of his life. Unannounced and in the heat of the day, three men show up at his home. And these weren't any ordinary men. It was the LORD, God the Son, with two angels! But they appeared as regular human beings. It wouldn't be until later in their visit that Abraham would realize who they are.

Abraham invites them to stay, rest and have a meal with him. He rushes off to tell his wife Sarah and his servants to prepare a feast. The LORD and the two angels eat their feast as their host Abraham watched, like a servant. It's then they reveal who they are. The LORD speaks to Abraham about the great promise he had made to him years ago, the promise of a son! And now at 99 years old and Sarah at 89, the LORD tells him that the time had come for him to keep his promise! "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." (Gen. 18:10)

On the heels of this renewed promise, we see Abraham put his faith into action.

In the verses just before our text we see something very interesting happen. The

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<sup>1</sup> JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

LORD takes Abraham into his confidence and shares his plan for Sodom and Gomorrah. Why? Not only to give Abraham a chance to put his faith into practice, but even to invite Abraham to participate in his rule of the world!

Picture in your minds the LORD and the two angels walking away toward Sodom with Abraham just behind them. Then, loud enough for Abraham to hear, the LORD says, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on the 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." (Gen. 18:17-19)



"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.'"

So why does the LORD do this? To test Abraham. To see whether the great love the LORD has shown him and promised him regarding his family and the salvation of mankind will produce fruit. And indeed, the LORD's test did bring about fruit. Beautiful fruit, holding the LORD to

his promises and yet doing so humbly and for the sake of others.

Put yourself in Abraham's sandals. Abraham knows that the LORD is gracious, but he also knows he is holy and that these cities deserve to be wiped off the face of the earth for their wickedness. Yet, he pleads for the LORD to act in mercy. He pleads not just for the sake of his nephew, Lot and his family, but also that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah would have an extended time of grace to repent. Look at the number he starts with for the two city-states that would have had thousands of citizens. He starts with a mere 50 people! "Even for the sake of 50 believers, LORD, do not sweep them away with the wicked."

Abraham is not being brash and demanding but bold and humble in his request. He is well aware of who he is talking to and

what he is asking. We see this in his own admission: "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city because of five people?"

Again and again Abraham goes back to the LORD, for the sake of 40, 30, 20 even 10!!! Again and again the LORD assures Abraham and finally says, "For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it."

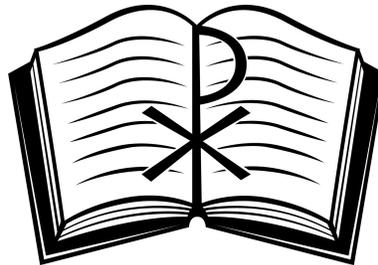
How could Abraham do this? How could he be so bold? It was because he lived in the humility of faith. "... I am nothing but dust and ashes..." he said. Here he was, a lowly sinful human being, made out of the dust of the earth, standing before the LORD God Almighty, the Creator of all things, asking him not to carry out his judgement on two terribly wicked cities. As we pray to the LORD it would do us well to remember this very thing—that we, too, are but dust and ashes.

Sadly, we often forget this. All too often we treat the LORD as if he's a soda machine. "Well, I put in my buck, and I want this one!" As if the privilege to pray were earned, not given. Sometimes we even threaten God with ultimatums, "If you don't do this, I'm through with you!" As if we were king, and not Christ.

Yet just as shameful as misusing God's merciful gift of prayer is if we don't go to him at all. Sometimes we ignore praying altogether. Maybe it's because we've become embittered, thinking God doesn't care or listen because he hasn't followed *our* plan. Sometimes we think we're too busy, or we're so confident in ourselves that we think we can handle things on our own. Sometimes we even think God doesn't care to hear what we have to pray for because we're beyond his help or because he has far more important things to do.

We are certainly dust and ashes. And yet, we are dust and ashes that God loves dearly.

We are the dust and ashes that he formed with his own powerful hand in the womb of our mothers. (Ps. 139:13) We are the dust and ashes that the Son of God took upon himself when he was conceived by the Holy Spirit. We are the dust and ashes he came to seek and to save. We are the dust and ashes for whom he poured out his blood until death so that this dust and these ashes might live with him eternally! And it is us he invites **to pray, boldly but humbly.**



Friends, let us live in repentant forgiveness and pray like Abraham. Let's pray, not dictating, but humbly begging and pleading for God to keep his promises!

Our prayer of the day puts it so well: "O Lord, your ears are always open to the prayers of your humble servants, who come to you in Jesus' name. Teach us always to ask according to your will that we may never fail to obtain the blessings you have promised."

Friends, your God's ears are always open to you. Search the Scriptures so you know what God's promises are for your life and then be **bold but humble** in holding him to those promises. Yes, even that great promise that is perhaps the hardest to believe from Romans 8: "in all things God works for the good of those

who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Rom. 8:28)

When we meet the struggles and hardships God allows to come into our lives we often ask God in our prayers, “Why? Why are you letting this happen to me?” or “What? What is your purpose in this?” While we might want these questions answered, those questions don’t really put our faith into practice or help us to trust God’s promises. In fact, those questions really betray a lack of trust in God’s promises!

Why not rather be **bold but humble in prayer** and hold God to his promises? Why not rather pray, “Lord, help me to believe that this struggle or hardship, no matter how great it may be, you give to me for my eternal good and the eternal good of others. Lord, help me to believe and see the greatest purpose is to strengthen me and draw me closer to you to bring me safely home to heaven.”?

Friends, this is the lesson Abraham had learned over the years. Sometimes we see Abraham fail in holding God to his promises, but we also see him live in the forgiveness of his Savior. Friends, let us also live in the forgiveness of our Savior. Let us be **bold but humble in our prayers** by holding God to his promises for us in our lives and for others. May we be just as concerned about the eternal

lives of lost souls as Abraham was over those of Sodom and Gomorrah. Let us hold God to his promise of mercy and ask that he extend the time of grace of those who do not yet believe so that he would use us to bring the Good News to them. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for “To God Alone Be The Glory”. This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn’t about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.