

One God, One Mediator

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Date: 07 May 2023

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, we're going to begin and end this morning in a courtroom. If you've ever done jury, duty, or been a witness, you know what a courtroom looks like.
- If you haven't, you've surely seen courtroom dramas, A Few Good Men is a classic, or more recently, a bit more up-to-date. I watched Anatomy of a Scandal recently.
- Maybe you've seen a courtroom drama. You can picture the scene. And who do you find in a courtroom? Well, a judge, a jury, surely, a defendant, maybe witnesses.
- And a courtroom wouldn't be a courtroom, would it, without lawyers. Now, why are the lawyers there? What do the lawyers do in a courtroom? Well, they're not there, are they, to give their own opinion about things.
- They don't speak for themselves. No, they speak on behalf of others, don't they? They stand between the judge and the defendant to plead the case of the defendant to the judge and jury.
- [1 : 1 5] This is why my client shouldn't be found guilty, shouldn't be punished by the law. And so, to kind of take some maybe unfamiliar words and put them into that more familiar context for us, they are mediators who intercede for their people.
- I hope that kind of gives us maybe a picture scene to hold on to this morning and maybe demystifies those words a bit. When we come to church and speak about a mediator or a mediator's work of intercession, interceding, it can maybe feel a little bit like religious language or Christianese.
- What do those words really mean? But we know, don't we, what that means in normal human life. And so, when we come to speak about our mediator then, who stands between God and us, and who intercedes for us, who speaks on our behalf to defend us, well, we know what's happening, don't we?
- It's a courtroom trial. God is the judge. And we are on trial. And our mediator stands between to intercede Jesus, the one and only mediator between God and man.
- And so, this morning, Genesis 18 brings us into the supreme courtroom of the universe, the highest court where Abraham stands before the judge of all the earth.
- [2 : 5 5] And he intercedes for others, doesn't he? Now, just keep that picture in mind. We're going to come back to it. Just put it in your back pocket, okay?
- Because the chapter this morning builds up to that courtroom scene, and we're going to build up with it. So, three points that build up to that courtroom.
- And firstly, we see Abraham, not in a courtroom, but in his kitchen. Okay, so the first point is hosting the God who is present. What do we learn, first of all, from the way that Abraham hosts the Lord, the judge, the God, who comes to visit him in his house?
- Well, part of the drama, part of the lesson, actually, is that we know something that Abraham doesn't. What do we find out there in verse 1? And just look, what do we find out? We know that the visitors include the Lord.
- The Lord appeared to Abraham. Now, I don't know about ye. Maybe this is just me. But it had never occurred to me before that Abraham didn't know who his visitors were.

[4 : 03] But verse 2 begins, look, Abraham looked up and saw, what, three men standing nearby. So, that's what he saw, just three normal guys.

He didn't know, I don't think, who they were at first, anyway. We're not told anything, are we, about their appearance, that they look different from anyone else in the land of Canaan.

Then, the Lord and his angels are traveling, we might say, incognito. Which means that the way that Abraham greets and treats his guests isn't because he knows that it's the Lord and his angels.

As far as he knows at this point, it's just three ordinary guys. Now, just to pause, that brings up loads of questions, doesn't it? It did for me in the week.

You know, how is God revealed through these three men? What does that mean? Well, one of them clearly speaks as the Lord, verse 10.

[5 : 03] One of them said, I will surely return to you, and Sarah, your wife, will have a son. So, that's God speaking. And so, it seems as though one of these men, at least, represents the Lord.

Or, we sometimes say, we could say it could be a pre-incarnate appearance of God the Son, the Lord Jesus on earth. By verse 22, Abraham seems to have grasped who he's speaking to.

The men turned away and went towards Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the Lord. So, by that point, I think what we're supposed to picture is two men going and one staying.

Because at the start of chapter 19, we read, the two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening. So that, I think what we're meant to picture is this. If the three guys, one stands for the Lord in some way, and the other two are his angels.

Now, that doesn't answer all of the questions we might have. But it just helps us to get into the passage, doesn't it? You question, where do they come from?

[6 : 15] And what do they look like? Helpfully, Gordon Wenham, commenting on this, says, The fact that it's unclear to us is a reminder of how limited our grasp is of the spiritual realm.

It's not all meant to make neat and tidy sense to us, this chapter, how it works. Because how can it? This is God revealing himself to us, creatures of dust, in a way that we can understand and grasp.

That in itself is an incredible grace to us. And so we're left simply with a situation in which Abraham is unexpectedly hosting the Lord and his angels.

But without him knowing that that is, in fact, what he's doing. Yesterday was the coronation. I'm sure you anticipated lots of coronation-themed illustrations this morning.

Surely it was the coronation yesterday. You surely watched it. But just imagine for a minute that that king, his crown, his scepter, everything that we saw.

[7 : 24] Imagine that king, Charles III, coming to your house. I expect you would want some kind of warning to do some kind of preparation, wouldn't you?

You'd be busy for days, surely, cleaning and tidying. You'd get out the fine china. Maybe you'd put in a fortnum and mason's hamper delivery, something like that.

I don't know. But what about God coming to your house? What about hosting the heavenly host? How ready would you want to be for that to happen?

Because here's the thing. What if, like Abraham, you didn't know that that was who was coming to your house? What if the king of kings and the Lord of lords was traveling incognito?

You, of course, think of this. People did have Jesus in their houses and at their tables when he was on earth. Baled in flesh, the Godhead see.

[8 : 24] Does that not blow us away to think of that? This chapter, actually, is probably one of the places that Hebrews is referring to when it says this. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers.

For by so doing, some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. So what if we didn't know that that's who we were feeding and serving?

Do we stoop to the lowest common denominator in our service of others, assuming that it's not the Lord and his angels? Or would we not excel our service of others to the highest common denominator, knowing not only that it could be angels, but knowing that we are serving the Lord Jesus himself as we serve one another?

While Abraham does the latter, his response is almost comically generous. He springs out of his tent. He bows to them. He insists that they stay and take the weight off their feet and be refreshed.

He says he does the oldest trick in the book. Maybe someone's done this to you, Abraham. He literally says, won't you have a morsel of bread? You just stayed for a few nibbles, a few snacks.

[9 : 42] But then when they agree, he spreads the table and he puts the oven on and he cooks an absolute feast. He rushes off, doesn't he, to Sarah. Quick, bake some bread with 16 kilos of the finest flour.

That's the measurement there. Yeah, just a wee bit of bread in the oven. Then he hurries off to the field to choose a calf. And not just any calf, but the choice of the tender calf to give it to the servant to cook.

He gets some milk and cheese. There's a pace about this chapter so that when he gets back to the guys, he's breathless. He's breathless. With so much food and so much water that they couldn't possibly finish this meal.

Eve, has anyone ever done that to ye? I've just got a few bits in, but then the table's groaning under the weight of their hospitality. quality. Gordon Wenham again points out that this is a meal fit not only for a king, but for God himself. The finest flour, the choice calf. We'll see these things again on the altar of the sacrifices, in the tent, in the temple. Abraham's bow to the ground in other contexts is translated worship. Abraham does not know that that's what he's doing, but he is worshiping God in his home, in his kitchen. And friends, that is the simple takeaway point from that section of this chapter, that in the way you serve others in your home, you are serving and worshiping the living God. Who in your home are you serving? Perhaps your family, your neighbors, your church family. Hebrews reminds us strangers, not in the same sense understand that the Lord today travels incognito. Hebrews doesn't let us rule out, does it, the possibility of angels at the dinner table. But more simply than that, just in the simple sense that when we gather, the Lord is present in our homes with us to bless us. Jesus tells us, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did to me, to me. So don't think that you need the king to come personally to your home to have the most important guests at your table. You are loving and honoring the Lord Jesus Christ when you have his people to serve in your home. You are blessing him, honoring him, serving and obeying God when you have strangers at your table to serve them in this way. Lots of you are wonderful at showing hospitality as God gives opportunity. So know this, when we treat others in our home as we would treat the Lord himself, he is honored by that service. Who knew that your dining room or your kitchen could have such significance to the living God, hosting the God who is present?

But we keep building up to that courtroom scene. And so the second point for us in this chapter is trusting the God of the promise. Verses 9 and 10, I think, are the first indication we get that these visitors are no ordinary men. Where is your wife Sarah, they ask him. They're in the tent, he says. Then one of them said, I will surely return to you about this time next year and Sarah, your wife, will have a son. So firstly, they know the name of his wife Sarah, even though she is in the tent. And secondly, the Lord repeats the promise that he's made again and again, the last chapter and chapter 15 about the promised child. Remember, last chapter, God promised to give Abraham a son through Sarah to carry on his covenant, his promise plan to humanity. And remember that Abraham laughed at that idea.

[14:07] I'm 100, he said, and Sarah, my wife, is 90. Really? He made God an offer. Remember, what about the son that I already have, my son Ishmael? Won't he do? No, said the Lord. Your wife Sarah will bear you a son.

You will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant. And so God here is repeating that promise for them to rest their faith upon. He didn't need to, did he? This is a flying visit. And yet he gives them this promise again. And so if you're wondering why I'm saying this to you again, as you surely are, why in this book of Genesis is Joe keeping saying that God promises and we are to trust him, it is because Genesis is saying it again, friends, this book brings us up against this again and again and again. Why? Because like Abraham and Sarah, we are slow to believe that the Lord is as good as his word.

How does Sarah react on the second and the third time of hearing this promise? Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. Abraham and Sarah were already very old. Sarah passed the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, after I'm worn out and my Lord is old, will I now have this pleasure? This isn't the first time she's heard this, is it? But she laughs out loud, humanly. It seems impossible to her. But by now, surely, surely Abraham and Sarah should not be thinking humanly about God's promise because this is the Lord and he's given them his word and his word does not fail and his promises do not come undone. It was tempting for us to want to let Sarah off the hook and say, maybe she was laughing out of joy or relief. But verse 14 doesn't let us do that. The Lord said to Abraham, why did Sarah laugh and say, well, I really have a child now that I'm old? Is anything too hard for the Lord? It says, Sarah laughed because she doubted God's word.

It was sinful laughter. It was sinful laughter. In the same way that Abraham laughed sinfully in God's face when he promised him the promised son. But what does God do? Does he get angry about it?

Look, he simply repeats the promise again. Verse 14, I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son. And so I wonder this morning, how are we doing on this point again?

[17:08] Faith in God's promise. We've been confronted time and time again, haven't we? I've put it to you that God's word and his promises are not flimsy or fragile or flaky as our words and promises are.

God does not ever go back on his word. And so are you living now as if your life depended upon his word? Knowing that it is rock solid under your feet, not least his promise of a chosen son.

Why is the son so important here? Well, to kind of short circuit the legwork that we've done already in this series, it's to get us ready for Jesus, isn't it? Do you know, I spend a bit of time in the week thinking about what we'll sing in our services.

And I've been going through the psalm book thinking, what should we sing in our Genesis services? Do you know there are not many psalms about Abraham? Do you know that? When do people start singing about Abraham in the Bible?

Luke chapter 1, when Jesus is coming, listen to this. Mary hears she's carrying God's promised son and she sings this, God has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised. Zechariah hears that his son is going to go before God's promised son. And what does he sing? God has done this to show mercy to our ancestors and listen to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham. And so brothers and sisters, when I tell you that this promise is leading to Jesus, I'm saying it because this book says it.

[19:01] We haven't made that up. This is where that promise is going. It is Jesus. So where am I asking you to put your faith today in God's one chosen promised son, Jesus Christ? If you doubt that he really is who God says that he is and that God sent him into the world to send to save people like me and you and that having a right relationship with God rests on him. Why do you doubt? God promises us that when we put our faith in Jesus Christ, he saves us. And so either we doubt because we think that he's not willing or we doubt because we think he's not able to keep his promise. We'll think in a few weeks time about whether God is willing or not. Despite all of their laughter, God does give this couple their son in chapter 21. And his name is Isaac, which means he laughs. Because when it comes to Isaac, God gets the last laugh. God gets the last laugh, just as he does with Jesus. We might laugh at the idea that God would save us through a Jewish carpenter. He was nailed to a Roman cross for crimes he didn't commit before being raised again from the dead. But do you know, he who sits in heaven laughs at our rebellion and our refusal to trust him. He has kept his word. He sent his son. And now he does save all who draw near to him through Jesus. And so as the rest of that psalm says, kiss the son. Kiss the son lest he be angry and you perish in the way. He is willing to save. But is he able? Well, this is what he speaks about here, isn't it? Is anything too hard or wonderful for the Lord to do? Well, no, it isn't. How can it be?

He is God. He has no obstacles to doing what he says he'll do like we do. He is faithful and he is powerful to keep his word. And so I trust that you will not laugh or dismiss it when I tell you to trust in the promised son, Jesus. Or if you doubt that in your heart, that you won't lie to God about that like Sarah does. No, I didn't laugh. I didn't doubt. Tell God how you doubt, why you doubt. Pray to him about it.

He will meet you there just as he did this couple then. He will give you his promise again and again and again and tell you again and again, rest your faith upon it. Put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is so patient with us. He is so faithful and he's true to his word. So won't you take him at his word today, trusting God's promise? Finally then, we've reached our courtroom scene and our final point this morning. Abraham interceding for a world due to be punished. I said this is where it's all leading because in fact, we find out in verse 16 that the Lord and his angels stopover is really just a stopover on their way to the cities of the plain. Look, when the men got up to leave, they looked down towards Sodom. And then we hear the Lord wondering out loud for our benefit, okay, not his, whether to involve Abraham in what he's going to do. And just listen to why it is he wants Abraham involved.

The Lord said, shall I hide from Abraham what I'm 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's promised him. So in short, it's because of his covenant with Abraham that he wants him involved in his plans for the world because that is what he's promised. Now remind me what those promises to Abraham were. Do you remember three M's that we've spoken about? Three M's that God promised to Abraham to multiply him, a great nation, and to magnify him, a great nation, and what? To make him a mediator of his dealings with the world. All nations will be blessed through him, a mediator. And so this is God now putting Abraham in that position of a mediator, the position that we spoke about right back at the beginning, a mediator in the courtroom, to stand between God the judge and the defendant. God has said he would deal with the world through Abraham.

[24 : 28] That is what we're seeing here as God deals with the cities of the plain through this chosen mediator. And so what does Abraham do? Well, he begins, doesn't he, to do the work of a mediator to intercede for the cities of the plain.

Now to be clear, the people there, they are guilty. Just look what the Lord says in verse 20. The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin is so grievous.

We're going to come back next week to chapter 19 to see about that. But Abraham's concern now is to do with God's justice, Luke. Verse 23, Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?

He rightly cannot believe of God. He cannot believe of God that he would treat the righteous and the wicked in the same way as judge.

He says, how can you treat innocent people the same as these whole cities that have rebelled? And our guts say the same, don't they? Do you know, the BBC News website estimates there have been at least 198 mass shootings in America since the start of this year.

[25 : 53] And what makes that so horrible, mass shooting, is the indiscriminate killing, isn't it? Not just killing, but the indiscriminate killing of people who have done no wrong whatsoever to the one who is doing the killing.

It's an awful thing. And our hearts cry out against that injustice, don't they? And sometimes that might be directed towards God. Why do the righteous and the wicked die together?

Why does that happen? And the Psalms grapple with that question all the way through. But here, Abraham's question is all the more urgent. Not only why should they die together, but why should they be judged together by God?

Let me be really clear that those killings were not judgment from God. But what God will do to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah is his judgment. So will God judge them the same?

That is Abraham's question. Now, even though Abraham has a strong sense of justice, it isn't perfect. He almost seems to be bargaining with God, doesn't he?

[27 : 09] You know, what if there's 50 righteous people? Or what if there's 40 righteous people, all the way down to 10? As if to say, if there were less than 10 righteous people in the city, that it would be okay for God to destroy those people with the wicked.

You notice he doesn't get all the way down to one, does he? Or zero. His sense of justice is imperfect. And so he's troubled by it, but it's a relative sense of justice.

There's a sense in which to Abraham, some innocent lives can be lost for the greater good. But not with God. God does not compromise on justice.

Far be it from ye, said Abraham, to kill the righteous with the wicked. Well, friends, know today that that is eternally far from God to thee.

He is the judge of all the earth. And his justice is perfect justice. He won't allow even one righteous person to be judged along with the wicked.

[28 : 17] More on that next time. But for now, let's just see what God has Abraham doing. He is not telling God what to do as if he's wearing him down at 30.

Okay, fine. Then 20. Okay, then 10. No, God knows what he's going to do. And he needs no one to teach him justice. But he puts Abraham in this position to plead for the people of the city so that in chapter 19, if you just turn there quickly with me, it is through his prayers that God does what he does.

Look at just 19 verse 29. So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham. He remembered Abraham and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived.

He remembered the mediator and worked through his intercession. So that even though Abraham's prayers don't change God's sovereign plan, they are the way that God works out his sovereign plan in time.

And I just want to end this morning by dwelling on two big, huge implications of that for me and you today. Firstly, this is what happens when we pray.

[29 : 44] Our prayers do not change God's plans, but they do have a place in his sovereign plan.

Now, praise God that he follows his plan and not my plan, because I do not have perfect knowledge or perfect wisdom or perfect justice in what I pray.

My prayers are imperfect prayers. But God answers those prayers in accordance with his own counsel, his perfect sovereign will.

So the question is, why then pray for others or for the salvation of others or the needs of others if God's plan stays the same? Well, because God is pleased to work through our prayers so that what God does in the world is an answer to the prayers of his people.

We need to get out of this mindset of thinking that answered prayer is only the prayers that God has answered in the way that we wanted or that he's given us what we asked him for.

[30 : 52] All prayers are answered prayers in God's economy. Prayer is not about getting what we want. Prayer is about seeing how God answers.

How God answers our prayers. And praying and seeing how God answers is what brings us closer to him. It's the relationship that grows.

As we watch and pray, we come to a deeper understanding and love of his character and his work and his ways. We grow in our trust and our dependency upon him.

We learn to love what he loves. To hate what he hates. And so prayer is about being part of what God is doing in the way that he's given us to be part of it and growing closer to him through it.

Notice that it's God who initiates Abraham's prayer and it's God who closes it. When the Lord finished speaking, he left. So what a thing that the Lord of the universe, the judge of all, wants me and you involved in his work in the world directly by speaking to him about it.

[32 : 06] What a privilege that is to pray to the judge and the king of all the earth, knowing that he hears and that he answers always, always perfectly.

Always perfectly. But the second implication is this, that our prayers are not the most important prayers in the universe because we only pray in the name of the one true mediator, Jesus Christ.

Abraham is terrified, isn't he, of speaking to God. Please don't be angry, he says. I know I'm just dust and ashes. I know I have no place before you. Jesus is not like that.

He is perfectly righteous, so he goes before God with confidence and boldness to pray to him and bring his requests. Abraham's sense of right and wrong is skewed.

We've seen that. What about 50? What about 40? Jesus isn't like that. He prays with perfect wisdom, perfect knowledge, perfect righteousness, in line with God's will in every way.

[33 : 19] And here's the thing. Jesus prays those perfect prayers for us. Me and you, his people.

He intercedes for us before the judge of all. He pleads for our salvation. When you first believed, there's any number of reasons that we could use to explain how that came about.

But you can be sure that one reason you first believed is that Jesus prayed that you would. He prayed for your salvation. He pleaded on his own death.

I died for him, for her. He says to God, let him then, let her be spared your wrath. From beginning to end, friends, it is his intercession that saves us, sustains us, sanctifies us.

It is his prayers that work most fully in this world. Why is that? Surely you can tell me. Surely you can tell me now at this point of Genesis why it is it's his prayers that work because he is the mediator of God's blessing to the world.

[34 : 31] It is because he is the chosen, promised son of Abraham through whom God deals with this world. It is Jesus Christ. And so God deals with us through his intercession, through his prayers.

Prayers prayed on earth and prayers prayed in heaven. So that at the end of time, it will be said of us who are in Christ that God remembered Jesus.

And brought us out of the overthrow and destruction of his judgment on the world. Not for our righteousness and not for our prayers, but for the high priestly intercession of our mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us praise him for that together now as we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. God, our Father, what a privilege to speak to you, to call you our Father in Christ.

Father, how we thank you for the place that you have put us before you, that you have stood us, not for our rightness, but for Jesus in his place before you, to speak to you in his name.

[35 : 55] And so we simply praise you for that and thank you. Lord, how we thank you for Jesus and pray that we would know him more and more. Lord, help us as we pray, not to pray idly, but to look for your answers.

Lord, to seek your face, to grow in trust and dependence upon your promises. Oh, Lord, lead us to Christ all the more we pray. Lord, as you increase our longing, would you increase our love for him.

For this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.