

The Church's Abiding Calling in the World

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Date: 07 May 2023

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[0 : 00] But now this evening we are continuing our studies, which we've been looking at until recently in the mornings, in the book of Genesis. And last week we looked at Genesis 17. Today we are going to read chapter 18 together.

Chapters 15 to 17, which we saw, was really telling us all about the beginning of the Christian church. And in chapter 18 we begin immediately at what is the beginning of real Christian mission. So I'm going to read chapter 18 of Genesis in its entirety. And the Lord appeared to him, that is to Abraham, by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the earth, and said, O Lord, if I find favor in your sight, do you not pass by your servant? Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, while I bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on. Since you have come to your servant.

[1 : 19] So they said, do as you said. And Abraham went quickly into the tent to Sarah, and said, Quick, three sears of fine flour, knead it and make cakes.

And Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to a young man, who prepared it quickly. Then he took curds and milk, and the calf that he had prepared, and he set it before them.

And he stood by them under the tree, while they ate. They said to him, Where is Sarah, your wife? And he said, She's in the tent.

The Lord said, I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah, your wife, shall have a son. Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him.

Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of woman had ceased to be with Sarah. So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, After I'm worn out, and my Lord is old, shall I have pleasure?

[2 : 23] The Lord said to Abraham, Why did Sarah laugh, and say, Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old? Is anything too hard for the Lord?

At the appointed time, I will return to you about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son. But Sarah denied it, saying, I didn't laugh.

But she was afraid. He said, No, but you did laugh. Then the men set out from there, and they looked down towards Sodom.

And Abraham went with them to set them on their way. The Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him.

For I have chosen him, known him, that he may command his children and his household after him, to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.

[3 : 30] Then the Lord said, Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me.

And if not, I'll know. So the men turned from there and went towards Sodom. But Abraham still stood before the Lord.

Or perhaps I think it should be read, But the Lord still stood before Abraham. Then Abraham drew near and said, Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?

Suppose there are fifty righteous men within the city. Will you not then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fair is the wicked.

Far be that from you. Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just? And the Lord said, If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake.

[4 : 44] Abraham answered and said, Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. I who am but dust and ashes. Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking.

Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five? And he said, I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there. Again he spoke to him and said, Suppose forty are found there.

He answered, For the sake of forty I will not do it. Then he said, Oh, let the Lord not be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there.

He answered, I will not do it if I find thirty there. He said, Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there.

He answered, For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it. Then he said, Well, let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once.

[5 : 44] Suppose ten are found there. He answered, For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it. And the Lord went his way when he had finished speaking to Abraham.

And Abraham returned to his place. Amen. May God bless to us his word.

Well, do turn, if you would, to Genesis chapter 18. Now, we've seen that the very heart of the Abraham story in Genesis 15 to 17 shows us the constitution of the Christian church, the household of covenant faith.

That is, faith in the promise of God's salvation. That through Abraham's physical seed, all peoples, all peoples of the earth would be blessed.

And if you look at the last verse of chapter 17, that reminds us that from the very start, God's missionary purpose was to embrace all, and that was evident to all.

[6 : 58] Because the call of Abraham led immediately to mission. the call to circumcision led immediately to foreigners also sharing within the blessing of those who were born in the household of Abraham.

And now, that fact is further reinforced in chapters 18 to 20, which are all about the beginning of Christian mission. these chapters are here to remind God's people in every age, from Moses' first readers right up to us today, to remind us what it means to be a part of that family of those who are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

God preached the gospel of saving mercy to the whole world to Abraham in advance, Paul says to the Galatians. But he also called Abraham to reflect that calling in his own life and his experience. And that's what we see demonstrated right here in chapter 18. In Abraham, the father of all the faithful of God, we see the abiding calling of God's church in the world, his church in every age. That's a long chapter, but it illustrates so clearly what it means to be chosen by God. Verse 19, as that puts it, or as the footnote says, known by God through his covenant grace.

[8 : 29] God's people are called thus in order that they become his true friends and his true prophets and his true priests.

Now, the story falls very neatly into three parts. So, first of all, let's look at verses 1 to 8 where we see that God grants his people, the people that he calls to himself. He grants them a personal relationship with himself.

Abraham was God's true friend. What we have in these verses is a wonderful picture of real friendship. God drops in on Abraham, his friend, for a meal and for a chat.

God's not just a promising God, but he truly is a personal God. It's not just that he speaks to Abraham in a voice or that he appears, as we saw before, in a smoking fire.

No, he appears in the flesh to speak to him, to eat with him in his own home. He's not just a God who rules his people, but he's a God who rejoices in relationship with them, in real friendship.

[9 : 40] And that's what it means to be in covenant with God. God. There's a wonderful intimacy here, isn't there? Something we haven't seen really since Genesis chapter 2 with the man and the woman walking in the garden with God.

He just drops in on him. How soon do you think Abraham recognized that this was the Lord? Well, if you read the scholars, they love arguing about that.

I'm not actually sure it really matters very much. But Moses certainly leaves us in no doubt who these visitors were. It was, look at verse 1, it was the Lord himself who appeared to Abraham. And he speaks with Abraham throughout. Verse 22 makes it very clear that the other two were angels who went off down to Sodom. I'm going to read more about that in the next chapter. Well, maybe it didn't occur to Abraham absolutely immediately at first who these men were because they were, verse 2, look, they were men in the flesh.

They sat down and had a good meal. I think it looks as though Abraham was dozing. He was sort of having his midday siesta in the heat of the day at the door of his tent.

[10:47] And suddenly, he woke and there they were right in front of him. They appeared just like that. I think Abraham probably caught on pretty fast because in verse 3, he addresses one of them in just the same way he spoke to God back in chapter 15, verse 2.

Oh Lord. And that's a term that's only used spirit of God. And remember, of course, this may not be the first time that this has happened. Back in chapter 12, verse 7, we read that God appeared to Abraham.

We're not given any details. That may not have been the first time, but at the very least, Abraham certainly recognized somebody very special was in front of him. Hence, the extreme haste and the lavishness of his hospitality.

Notice in verse 6, the fine flour, 21 liters of it. That's a term that's only ever used of the special flour, the very special offerings devoted to the Lord.

You can read about it in Leviticus chapter 2, the mincha, or Leviticus chapter 24. So this is something very special. And certainly, before very long, it is abundantly clear who the chief visitor is.

[12:00] Look at verse 9, he knows Abraham's wife's name. Not her old name, but her new name that was given to her just the chapter before by God himself. And verse 12, he knows Sarah's own thoughts inside the tent, her inner laughter.

So there's no doubt, is there? Here is the Lord God, the creator of earth and heaven, the maker of covenants, the ruler of all people. And here he is, sitting down to roast beef and yogurt and cakes by the campfire with Abraham just after he drops in out of the blue, unannounced.

And that's the sort of thing real friends do, isn't it? These are not total strangers. Real friends know that you can just ring the doorbell, pitch up. If it's a meal time, there'll be a seat around the table for you.

If you need a bed for the night, you'll get that. And that's the point here. You see, God rejoices in real relationship with his people. He makes them real friends.

That's Abraham's great distinction in the Old Testament. He's called the friend of God. And it's very significant that the apostle James in the New Testament picks that up and reminds us that not only did God credit righteousness to Abraham by faith, he called him his friend.

[13:21] James 2 verse 23. He is a personal God. He engages in real personal relationship with his people. So we shouldn't be surprised, should we, when we read on in the Bible and we find that this is the God who promises that one day he will come to be with his people in the flesh forever.

It shouldn't surprise us that when we read about the Son of God coming in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, he was called the friend of sinners. He was the one who dropped in for tea, wasn't he?

with people like Zacchaeus and people like Levi and many, many others. You're not just servants, said Jesus to his disciples. You're my friends.

And greater love has no one than this, that he lays down his life for his friends. God's covenant people are those that he has called into friendship with himself.

That's so important, isn't it? It's so important not to depersonalize the gospel and make it all about sin and forgiveness and justification and so on.

[14:34] It is all of that. Do not misunderstand. It's never less than that. But the question is, what is all that for? For? And it's because God wants us as his friends.

He wants to sit down and feast with us. To eat fine food and drink fine wine. To laugh, to rejoice, to revel in all that real friendship really is.

He wants us to be at home with him in the Father's house which Jesus tells us, doesn't he? It's a house of joy. I wonder if you've got real friends like that.

Not just acquaintances but real friends. If you have, that's a pointer, isn't it? A pale pointer but it's a pointer to what God has called you to in Christ.

And in Christ's church, surely that should be everywhere. Reflecting the God of relationship. We should be reflecting that surely in our real relationships with one another.

[15 : 41] With deep and precious friendships. Some of us sometimes are too slow, aren't we, to give ourselves like that. We need to learn from Jesus how to be a friend.

How to cherish friendship. But here is indisputable truth that in Jesus God came to offer his real friendship to us.

Just as he had with Abraham. Real personal relationship. Not just servants but friends says Jesus. I actually had a friend long ago at university when I was at medical school who came to Christ from reading that very verse in John chapter 15.

He was actually in hospital detoxifying from drug and alcohol dependence and there was a Gideon Bible in his locker and one day in a kind of haze and fog he took it out and he opened it just at a chance at John chapter 15 and he read that verse and the one that said and you're my friends if you do as I command and so he did what the Lord commanded he came to faith in Jesus Christ and he went on and indeed he was there I met him in Aberdeen he was trained to be a minister of the gospel.

Being in covenant with God means he grants his people a personal relationship he makes us God's true friends but friends share things don't they and that brings us to the second thing here in verses 9 to 21 God grants his covenant people a profound revelation about himself these verses show us Abraham as God's true prophet God's friendship with Abraham means that he shares the deep things of his mind and of his heart with Abraham things concerning his plans his purpose for the future of the whole world and you see God calls his covenant people to friendship with a real purpose and that purpose is to join with him in his plan for the redemption of this world look at verse 19 I've chosen him says God literally as the footnote I have known him personally as a friend so that he may lead his family and descendants after him so that they would be the instrument of fulfilling

[18 : 09] God's mission in the world just as he has promised God's friends join him in that wonderfully privileged calling and that is as we're reminded in verse 18 the blessing of all nations you see God's choice and God's calling go together God's electing grace always goes together in scripture with his missionary with his God's electing predestinating grace of God but it's all about the revelation of God's purpose so that his people now in the church now will fulfill the purpose of their calling as those who proclaim that purpose to the world as God's true prophets that's just what we're told here God doesn't hide the future from Abraham he reveals it so that he'll fulfill his role as the true prophet of God telling the world the gospel of God he and his whole household after him but God's revelation is a profound one as Jesus said to his disciples

I've called you friends for all that I've heard from my father all I've made known to you and so it is here you see God reveals to Abraham both his mercy and his justice both his staggering kindness but also his sobering sternness first of all in verses 9 to 15 we have this staggering revelation of God's kindness and it's so staggering it seems impossible to believe and yet God is determined that his people will come to terms with it it's really a repeat of what God told Abraham in chapter 17 and this is very obviously very soon after these events because in chapter 17 verse 21 he said to Abraham that Sarah would bear a son about this time next year and he says exactly the same thing again here you see in verse 10 and in verse 14 so maybe that's why Sarah seems so taken aback in verse 12 because perhaps

Abraham hadn't yet told her wouldn't be the first time would it a husband forgets to tell his wife something quite important at least that's what they always claim but perhaps he hadn't told her or perhaps he had told her and she hadn't yet been persuaded or convinced of it we don't know but when she hears all this from inside the tent she can't help laughing although we're told she does it inwardly to herself notice not as Abraham had done in chapter 17 she laughed now don't be too hard on Sarah here you read the commentators they berate her for her lack of faith God was not hard on Sarah here notice God is very gentle with her and don't forget what the inspired writer of Hebrews tells us that by faith Sarah herself received power to conceive even when she was past age since she considered him faithful who had promised so let's not berate Sarah let's not be holier than God and let's not think we're holier than

Sarah remember Peter tells us she was a holy woman of God she is an example to Christian women Sarah's inward laugh here is not I think one of pride and hardness or outright unbelief it is a laugh of doubt yes it is but it's like Peter in Matthew chapter 14 when he's on the water and he begins to doubt and the rebuke that God gives Sarah is just the same kind of rebuke that he gave Peter oh you of little faith why did you doubt it's not like the rebuke that Jesus gives to the scribes and the Pharisees is it those who who rebelled against him who refused his word that's quite different he's gentle with her poor Sarah yes she's she's doubted that God's word seems possible but no wonder she's lived with that promise more than 20 years she's waited she's prayed but there's been no answer there's been nothing to show that's very hard isn't it you know how hard that is maybe there's folk here who have prayed and prayed and prayed for someone for 20 years to come to faith maybe a child perhaps a friend maybe a spouse even and it's never happened and it's easy to despair isn't it it's easy to think well that's impossible now it's impossible I'll give up well I think that was Sarah it was doubt born out of despair and hopelessness notice what we're told look at verse 11 she's old and she's childless she's post menopausal that's what that phrase means about the way of women that's the medical fact but look at verse 12 that tells us how she feels she says I'm worn out and she's just saying that joy is just a fantasy now my husband is old she says notice but I am old and worn out I think that's an insight into Sarah's heart it's a deep deep pain for her it's part of her very identity as a woman and as a wife and it's been torn away for her she feels she feels utterly hopeless so don't be too hard on Sarah especially if you're a man like most of these commendators are

[23 : 50] John Calvin shows characteristic very good judgment here he says nothing was less in Sarah's mind than to call God a liar no he says her only sin was that she just didn't expect from God a miracle she simply couldn't conceive of in her own mind and he points out that most of us are like that most of the time as often as we measure the promises of God and the wonders of God by our own reason and by the laws of nature we act reproachfully towards him though we may intend nothing of the sort he says we all do that don't we but the Lord won't have her remain doubting look how kind he is to her in verse 13 notice how God repeats her words but he doesn't say she's worn out he says she's old but he doesn't say she's worn out she's not finished in God's plans maybe that's encouragement to some of us today feeling our age well you can be old and not worn out in God's purpose what about those wonderful words in verse 14 wonderful is anything too hard for the Lord that's one of

God's favorite phrases he loves saying that read Luke chapter 1 it's exactly what he told his angel to say to Mary about another miraculous birth is anything too hard for the Lord of course nothing is too hard for him and nothing that he has surely promised will ever be too hard for him well poor Sarah's left so staggered that she's just left blethering in verse 15 isn't she because she realizes how foolish she's been to doubt and so she pretends she doesn't and it's as if the Lord is just quietly smiling saying no no Sarah don't make anything worse just wait and soon you'll be laughing yourself you will and that's just what happened isn't it as we'll see but you see in all of this God reaffirms yet again the staggering kindness of his mercy and grace and his purpose of grace for Abraham's family personally as his covenant people but also in terms of the destiny that he would share as the means of that blessing overflowing to the whole world verse 18 he will become a great and mighty nation and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him but alongside that staggering revelation of God's kindness and God's mercy to him and to the world there is another side and that too is part of

God's revelation to Abraham as God's true prophet look at verses 16 to 21 it's a profoundly sobering revelation isn't it of God's justice of God's wrath against sin shall I hide that from Abraham says the Lord in verse 17 no of course I can't because any true prophet of God must know and tell the whole truth of God not just half of it that's so important it may be very hard for us to digest but nevertheless it is essential because half a gospel half a gospel is no gospel some people want to have only the love of God to proclaim and the Bible speaks of God's love in abundance but therefore it must also speak of his justice just because true love must hate and oppose sin and wickedness and evil or else it won't be true love at all will it just takes a moment's thought to think about that and see how true it is if you discover children being abused and being tortured by wicked men by abusers true love is not to just express kind thoughts and words to those abused children true love is a determination to stop that abuse and bring those abusers to justice and to punishment isn't it and so it is with God you see who loves the world and therefore is determined to bring justice

to the evil and wickedness that has ruined it and that is part of his saving mercy and love for those that he is saving so here

God reveals the whole of the future to Abraham not just his plan for blessing the nations but also his commitment to judging the world and to punishing sin and evil and you see for Sodom and Gomorrah that time had come if you look at verses 20 and 21 the language there echoes the language in the prelude to the flood and especially in the prelude to the great judgment at Babel remember I will go down and see and Moses readers would certainly understand that and it must be very clear to Abraham the true friend of God whom God had granted a real personal relationship the true prophet of God to whom God had granted a profound revelation laying out his future purpose of salvation and and of judgment but you see something else also became clear to Abraham in all of this and I think this was in big part what the whole episode is about and it's what Moses wanted his people to see and it's what God wants us to see as well about our calling as God's true covenant people and it's this third thing God gives a pressing responsibility to his covenant people see what we see in verses 22 to 33 is Abraham as God's true priest as God's friend he enjoys a relationship with him as God's prophet he knows revelation about the future so he can talk to men for God but as God's priest he intercedes with God on behalf of people he talks to God for men and that's what we see here in this extraordinary encounter and it is extraordinary notice that God seems to draw this out of Abraham because in verse 17 he shares his plan with him and yet in verse 21 look he leaves a chink of hope doesn't he

[30 : 56] I'll go and see and maybe it's not as bad as I've heard and then in verse 22 the Lord stays behind when these two angels the two others go off to Sodom as I said I think the text probably reads the Lord remains standing before Abraham but at any rate why did he stay well he's willing Abraham to pray he wants him to intercede with him for these cities and I think that's what explains Abraham's boldness in approaching God as an advocate for Sodom because that's what the language here implies he is advocating for Sodom Abraham is appealing to what he knows of God's character and of what he knows of God's promise to him that he will be a vehicle of blessing to the pagan nations around him and God has just said hasn't he nothing is too hard for the

Lord so even such a place as Sodom cannot be beyond all hope and Abraham knows look at verse 25 that God is absolutely just and so he will not he cannot act unjustly and so Abraham's saying all right Lord that's why you've called me that's why you've revealed your future to me so I'm going to be bold in wrestling with you for these cities and notice it is the cities that he prays for not just his nephew Lot and his household he doesn't even mention him although it must have been surely in his mind but it's an amazing thing is it not here's a man who prays not just for his own but for his enemies his rivals that is what these cities were his rivals it's actually unique you know in the whole Old Testament you read of many many prophets and others interceding with the Lord for Israel but here's a man who prays even for his enemies who shows love for a world lost in its wickedness in its sin its rebellion against God and his word Abraham seems to have learned quite a lot doesn't he from his friend he's bold in his priestly intercession with God and yet he's also humble isn't he verse 27 I am but dust and ashes he says there's no presumption this is not name it and claim it prayer using God for my purposes no no he knows God is sovereign he knows God's justice cannot be trifled with can't be mocked and so he feels his way and seems to know when he's asked enough there's a great ring of reality isn't there about Abraham's prayer there's no fantasy yes nothing is impossible with God but that doesn't mean that God will ever be untrue to himself God won't be mocked and there is an end to his grace and favor and people do harden themselves absolutely against him he will give them over to their heart's desire there is a sin that leads to death we're looking at that last week in 1st John 5 and prayer does then become inappropriate and Abraham knows doesn't he look at verse 32 seems to know when to stop praying we're not sure how but it does seem as if the text rather indicates that God's tone if you like told him when see how the replies get grimmer as he goes on in verse 26 God says I will spare the whole place for 50 righteous verse 29 for the sake of 40 I will not do it verse 30 again for 30 I will not do it but in verse 31 it's it's more somber again isn't it for 20

I will not destroy it verse 32 Abraham seems to know this is the last time just once more and then God answers and leaves actually it's God isn't it who calls an end to the conversation the Lord went on his way verse 33 and of course as we'll see there weren't even 10 righteous in Sodom only Lot in his immediate family and God rescued him by the scruff of his neck but what an extraordinary demonstration of the pressing responsibility that Abraham understood to be his calling he was

called and set apart he and his family after him to be God's friends and therefore to be God's prophets to the world and his priests for the world to bring God's truth to the peoples of the world but to bring the peoples of the world to

[36 : 11] God's throne in interceding prayer and that is what the formation of God's covenant household of circumcision led to passionate mission to a godless civilization why is this here what's it got to do with us well God wants us surely to remember doesn't he what his people through the ages so often have forgotten what it means to be the church of the living God Moses is reminding his people Israel of their calling read Exodus 19 God called them afresh didn't he into a relationship with himself he gave great revelation to them at Sinai and he called them to that pressing responsibility to be a kingdom of priests for the blessing of the peoples of the earth to live for God's glory as his servants to bless the Gentile nations with that light and the knowledge of the one true

God read the prophets they reinforced repeatedly that calling didn't they Isaiah 42 and 43 you are my witnesses says the Lord a light to the nations says Isaiah 49 that my salvation will reach the ends of the earth but so often alas they forgot that calling and worse as Isaiah says God's name was blasphemed among the nations because of them the very opposite and yet at last in the fullness of time the true servant that Isaiah spoke of did come the savior the promised seed of Abraham and Paul calls Jesus notice the servant of the circumcision who interceded with God not just for his natural seed but for a hostile outside world to confirm he says God's promises to the patriarchs and in order that the Gentiles might glorify

God for his mercy Romans 15 verse 8 so do you see Abraham's priestly intercession for a wicked world points doesn't it to one far greater in whom God at last would show how it was possible for him to show mercy to those who deserve only judgment to bring reconciliation through his savior but of course God's new covenant people God's church today share in that same calling don't we to be friends of God and therefore prophets who speak for God and priests interceding to God for others we are the true circumcision says Paul who glory in Christ you are my witnesses said Jesus as he ascended and promised his holy spirit to the whole church what he was saying was what I called my friend Abraham to you as his spiritual offering are now called to and yet your privileges in this age of fulfillment are so great you have even greater responsibilities but also of course you have even greater power because through the coming of the Holy

Spirit on the whole church we've all received that great calling as true heirs of Abraham as friends and as prophets and as priests of the Lord God here on earth just as we come to our close turn with me to John's gospel chapter 15 because Jesus' words here in the upper room are so enlightening of course they were spoken first uniquely to his apostles but Jesus' prayer of blessing in John chapter 17 was clear that it was not just for them only but it was also for all who would come to share their faith and that means that we are inheritors of the same intimate fellowship that the apostles knew with Jesus John is very insistent on that in his first letter as we've been seeing but look what Jesus calls his followers John 15 verse 15 I have called you friends friends of God through Christ into a personal relationship with God and that means verse 15 all that I've heard from my father I have made known to you a profound revelation of God which all who trust the apostles gospel also share and so all believers are true prophets speaking God's truth to men and look at verse 16 he chose them and through their testimony he chose us as he chose Abraham to bear fruit for him as he answers our prayers so that whatever you ask in the father's name he may give it to you as Christ's followers now we have this same pressing responsibility from God of priestly intercession to bring the fruits of his saving mercy to a disobedient world to a godless world just like Sodom isn't that striking

[41 : 31] I find it striking that in Christ we have been made just like Abraham we've been chosen as friends who truly know God himself and as prophets who truly know the words of God the father through Jesus and as priests who know the way to his very heart of love could God really love us enough to want to know us in that extraordinary way seed of Abraham perhaps but of us of me well look there at verse 13 in John 15 he couldn't show greater love could he he laid down his life for us to make us his friends so we know that this is our true calling we can't ever presume on his friendship verse 16 there is very clear we did not choose him he chose us just as he chose Abraham by sheer grace and that grace is all that separates us you and me from

Sodom and Gomorrah that's the truth we can never presume we can only ever be humble utterly humble but we can be bold God chose Abraham to be a blessing and so also he has chosen all the seed of Abraham in Christ today to be a blessing to go and bear fruit and to ask the father to give us

that fruit through the prayer of faith and that is the abiding calling of God's church in the world begun here and continuing until the last day and so I take it that must be our calling here as this church in this city today come back to Genesis chapter 18 look at verse 20 of Genesis 18 the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave can we think that the outcry to God from Glasgow today is not of just as great and grave sin in our city that has long forgotten its motto nobody even knows let

Glasgow flourish by the preaching of his word and the praising of his name look around you think can this city ever flourish again like that and maybe like Sarah we find ourselves just laughing despairingly but friends is anything is anything too hard for the Lord I think often we think many things are too hard for the Lord and so we don't ask him and we don't pray maybe that's because we forget what an extraordinary thing it is for almighty God to have moved heaven and earth just to make us his friends and we have forgotten what it cost him our savior who laid down his own life that we would have life eternal we know don't we because

God has revealed to us in his word we know the future for this city and for the whole world in blessing and in judgment and we're a company of priests here in the heart of this city made so only by the precious blood of the son of God Abraham wrestled with God how much are we willing to give of our time of our talents of our treasures for that mission of his mercy to spare men and women and boys and girls to rescue them from darkness into light I suspect that our boldness in talking to men for God as true prophets and in talking to God for men and women as true priests that our boldness will be in the same measure as our hearts are truly humbled by the sheer wonder of what it really means that in

Christ Jesus the seed of Abraham God himself has called us his true friends so how fitting that tonight we come to this table which proclaims again to us that humbling message of the cross and of the love laid down his own life to make us you and me his friends amen lord you've called us your friends you've shown us such love you've given us such a wonderful revelation of your mercy and your truth and your judgment so help us lord to bear the responsibility that is ours and the privilege of that responsibility to speak to men for you and to go on speaking to you for them that you might yet spare many in this city of ours in this nation of ours indeed in this world of ours help us to share the heart of our friend we pray in Jesus name amen