

GENESIS 18:16-33

PLEADING FOR SODOM

“The men set out from [the oaks of Mamre where Abraham had set up his tent], and they looked down toward 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, 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.’ 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 will know.’

“So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD. Then Abraham drew near and said, ‘Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you 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 fare as 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.’

“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 not the Lord 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, ‘Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. 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.”¹

Do you pray for wicked people? Do you plead for those who have embraced wickedness? Do you ask God to show mercy to those He identifies as being under sentence of death? Are your prayers coupled with eager labour to tell lost people of the Saviour? When you plead for God to show mercy, are you specific in your requests? How far will you go in asking God to show mercy on those who are undeserving of mercy?

God frequently informs His people of His plans before judging evil. The reaction of His people to His announcements demonstrates the divine nature of their character, reflecting God’s glorious presence with them. God is merciful, and He expects His people to reflect that same mercy. In our text, Abraham provides an exemplary model of compassion that encourages the people of God to pray and in particular to pray for mercy—especially pleading for those who do not deserve mercy. Join me in studying the life of Abraham, focusing in particular on this singular demonstration of compassion as he prayed for the city of Sodom.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version**, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

INFORMED OF GOD’S PLAN — After the Lord, together with the two angels that accompanied Him, had been entertained by Abraham, and following their announcement of the miraculous gift of a child to Abraham and Sarah,, the divine emissaries left to go to Sodom. Abraham continued his courtesy to his guests, accompanying them as they left his tent.

God has said in His Word,

“The Lord GOD does nothing
without revealing His secret
to His servants the prophets”

[AMOS 3:7]

Indeed, that was the case in the study before us. Looking down on Sodom from the highlands where Abraham pastured his flocks, we are informed that Yahweh Himself, the Living God, was one of the three guests whom Abraham had been entertaining. God 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, 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” [GENESIS 18:17b-19]. The LORD, whom theologians accept to be a theophany of the preincarnate Son of God, was determined to inform Abraham what was about to happen.

Do not overlook an important truth in the information provided—God communicates His plans to His people. I am not saying that simply claiming a relationship to God permits insight into His plans, nor do I mean to imply that we know precise details of what is going to happen next. Nevertheless, God does communicate with His people, and we should learn from this.

There is a general sense in which every individual possessing even a cursory knowledge of the Bible knows the plan of God. We know that God is holy and that He cannot permit sin to go unchecked. For the moment it may appear that those who sin egregiously do so without consequence; often they seem unchecked in their evil acts. However, anyone who has read the Word of God, even in a perfunctory manner, knows that God will demand an accounting of each individual for his or her actions. Intuitively, we know that there is ultimately an accounting for wickedness—we know that evil people must face God to receive their judgement.

As the world moves toward a climatic conclusion, God informs us that society will become increasingly wicked. In the first letter to a young theologian named Timothy, Paul warns, “The Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth” [1 TIMOTHY 4:1-3]. There will be a wholesale departure from the Faith at the same time new doctrines are invented to provide a façade of religious piety.

This alert accords with another that the Apostle also penned to Timothy, informing us, “The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” [2 TIMOTHY 4:3, 4]. The new piety will have a patina that superficially looks like the old-fashioned Faith, but it is driven by a general demand for “user friendly” religion that affirms people’s feelings rather than providing the Word of God.

Those words which the Apostle wrote were in the context of a society that grows increasingly wicked, and in their wickedness that same society will grow increasingly hostile to the Faith. The Apostle has written, “All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived” [2 TIMOTHY 3:12, 13]. Get the picture! Society will exhibit greater adherence to religion even as it turns from pursuing the Faith that was once delivered to the saints.

In yet another place, Paul wrote to remind those who follow the Saviour to stay alert. “Concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing” [1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-10].

In a general sense, anyone can know what is taking place, for the Word of God informs us. The Master provided similar instruction to those who follow Him. The context of His words deal with events during the days of the Tribulation, but what is important for the purpose of the message is the final caution He states. “There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” [LUKE 21:25-28].

Take special note of the Master’s language. “When these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” He is providing a specific statement describing events so that those living during those times will know precisely what is happening and ready themselves for God’s imminent intervention in history. It seems to me that with these words God is particularly providing encouragement for those who turn in faith during the Great Tribulation so that they can follow hard after the Master despite persecution.

Thus, we may conclude that God provides general knowledge for anyone willing to heed His Word concerning what lies ahead and is coming on the earth. The world will grow increasingly religious even while growing increasingly godless. Those who dare follow the Faith will face increasing opposition from people that consider themselves religious, but who do not want to be overly fussy about the Faith. Restraint will be increasingly cast aside as man convinces himself that he is free to gratify every desire.

There is another piece to the puzzle of knowing God’s will. In the text, it is obvious that the Lord informs Abraham of what is about to happen because he is godly, because he obeys the LORD and follows Him willingly. When God, through Amos, tells us that God does nothing unless He tells His servants the prophets, it is an indication that those who serve God with their whole heart are recipients of divine knowledge. Therefore, we would expect that in a church marked by righteousness and godliness, God will reveal His plan to His people.

Should the people of God become contaminated with the attitude that identifies them with the world, they must know that knowledge of God's workings will cease. Among the proverbs is one which states, "Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint" [PROVERBS 29:18b]. There is a strict corollary between God revealing His plan and obedience to His Word. Where the prophetic message is stifled, knowledge of God's plan is absent. Consequently, where God's plan is not clearly presented, the people "run wild."²

As the world moves toward the inevitable prophesied confrontation with the Creator, prophetic preaching—preaching confronting man with God's call for repentance—will become increasingly rare. The people will demand insipid sermons, as such sermons permit designing a message that suits the people's passions. Consequently, though God has clearly stated what He will do, the people will be unheeding and unconscious of what is about to happen. Therefore, "Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot—they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulphur rained from heaven and destroyed them all—so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed" [LUKE 17:26-30].

Daily life at the end of days will be indistinguishable from the routine that we now know. There will be the every day concerns of preparing meals, mowing lawns, looking for an opportunity to get away to the lake, enduring the daily grind at the job—identical to the present! Factories will continue to turn out consumer goods, goods will be shipped and stores will sell the latest technology, traders will shout out orders on the floor of the world's stock exchanges. Moreover, there will be no particular thought given to the coming of the Lord. Daily cares will crowd out spiritual thoughts, except for Sundays as people go to church services where they will expect to hear a nice message telling them to be nice or instructing them how to be courteous.

Though it appears that the world is growing less concerned with hearing the Word of God, and though it seems that churches are more religious, they are not necessarily righteous—no one can say where we are on God's timetable. There are still godly people in the world who want to know and to do the will of God. I trust that includes you. For those declared righteous through faith in Christ, we know that God condemns the unrighteous and that without faith in the Son of God, an individual is under divine sentence of death.

God has said, "Who believes in [the Son of God] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the Name of the only Son of God" [JOHN 3:18]. God has also said, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him" [JOHN 3:36]. We know that "the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" [ROMANS 6:23]. Hence, we know God's sentence, and we can declare without equivocation the consequence of the individual's refusal to believe the message of life that has been entrusted to us. We also know that the forgiveness of sin and life are offered through faith in the Son of God.

COMPASSION FOR THE WICKED — Knowing the fate of the wicked, and knowing the life that is offered in Christ the Lord, Christians are moved with compassion for the lost. Those who have experienced the mercy of God are compelled to be merciful toward others; they are moved with the compassion of Christ the Lord to show compassion.

² **Holman Christian Standard Bible** (Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, TN 2003)

Sometimes we hear of professing Christians who rejoice in the sorrow of non-Christians. Intuitively, we know that such individuals do not demonstrate the love of God. An example is provided in the disgraceful actions of the Phelps family, who call themselves Westboro Baptist Church of Topeka, Kansas. The actions of this family are incompatible with the grace of God. This “church” of fewer than fifty members has conducted almost 41,000 protests,³ many against homosexuals or those whom they designate as supporting homosexuals. It is difficult to see anything resembling mercy in the attitudes and actions of Fred Phelps and his bitter family.

As extreme as that pitiful example is, it is a tragic truth that some Christians exhibit the same hatred as Fred Phelps, only in a more muted form. To be certain, homosexual activists are generally hateful toward anyone whom they imagine to be opposed to their lifestyle. However, Christians must not adopt their attitude in responding to wickedness. Are those who speak evil of us our enemies? We are taught how to respond to those who are enemies. Jesus taught us, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” [MATTHEW 5:44]. He also taught us to “Do good to those who hate you” [LUKE 6:27].

The Apostle teaches the same truth, providing practical examples of doing good when he writes, “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink” [ROMANS 12:20a]. The reason for this instruction is that Christians must not permit themselves to succumb to evil. We are taught, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” [ROMANS 12:21]. Peter, likewise, warned believers, “Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. For

‘Whoever desires to love life
and see good days,
let him keep his tongue from evil
and his lips from speaking deceit;
let him turn away from evil and do good;
let him seek peace and pursue it.
For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,
and His ears are open to their prayer.
But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.’”

[1 PETER 3:9-12]

A Christian exhibits compassion because that is the divine DNA which defines him. Christ our Lord teaches us, “You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate” [LUKE 6:36].⁴ Indeed, in the Sermon preached on a mountainside that has challenged believers for over two millennia, the Master taught, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy” [MATTHEW 5:7]. Those unequivocal words set the stage for teaching presented by the Apostle, “Be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” [EPHESIANS 5:1, 2]. We must not permit ourselves to grow bitter when we are opposed or when we witness unchecked evil. God warns, “See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled” [HEBREWS 12:15]. Mercy reflects the nature of our Father; to fail to be merciful is to open ourselves to bitterness and finally to trouble.

³ <http://www.westborobaptistchurch.com>, accessed 8 July 2009

⁴ **Holy Bible: New Living Translation** (Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, IL 2004)

If we walk in the love of the Master, and if we are a compassionate people, we are exhibiting wisdom that the world cannot understand and that the world cannot grasp. James says of that wisdom, “The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere” [JAMES 3:17].

Every threat to our fellow man, even when that threat is the result of their own foolish action, will cause the godly person to grieve for the injury the wicked experience. Every judgement against wickedness should make us humble because we know that but for the grace of God we each would receive such judgement. I make a sobering note about the life of the Master. He reserved His harshest and most consistent criticism, not for the “sinners” whom He encountered, but for religious individuals who distorted the grace of God and who through their godless attitudes and actions turned people away from the hope that is offered in the Living God. Sinners are indeed under judgement, and that should elicit compassion because of their situation.

Informed of pending judgement on the city of Sodom, Abraham’s response was to reveal the compassion that marks those who walk with the Living God. Likewise, all who walk with the Living God will be seized with compassion for those who are in danger of judgement. The compassion that is exhibited is nothing short of the love of God shining through the life of His child. The believer who is not walking with God cannot be compassionate. Jonah, though a prophet of God and though mightily used by God, was bitter that God did not destroy Nineveh.

Recall God’s rebuke to Jonah after he pouted and complained that God was merciful. “The LORD said, ‘You pity [a] plant, for which you did not labour, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle’” [JONAH 4:10, 11]?

I have addressed one grave extreme that must not be permitted to contaminate the life of the child of God, and that is rage or bitterness toward the ungodly. However, there is another extreme that I am confident contaminates far more of the professed people of God. Many imagine that by tolerating wickedness they are showing compassion. In fact, Christ never condoned wickedness, nor should His holy people excuse wicked behaviour. It is a mark of love to expose the deeds of darkness. We are warned against participating in evil when the Apostle writes, “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness.” Rather, we who are Christians must “expose them” [EPHESIANS 5:11].

Long years before the Apostle wrote those words, the Holy Spirit guided Moses to write, “You must not hate your brother in your heart. You must surely reprove your fellow citizen so that you do not incur sin on account of him” [LEVITICUS 19:17].⁵ The thrust of the verse is that a godly person is responsible to rebuke his neighbour when sin is evident. The idea is that love leads an individual to speak truthfully with a view to preserving life and establishing justice. Love does not ignore sin, but rather love seeks what is best for the one loved. This is the basis for the apostolic admonition that believers are to be marked as “speaking the truth in love” and thus to “grow up in every way into Him who is the Head, into Christ” [EPHESIANS 4:15].

Compassion and godliness are intertwined. A godly person is a compassionate person. Likewise, a loving person is a holy person. Love leads us to consider what is best for another, and boldly point to that which is best—not that which is most convenient or easiest. Hatred leads us to seek to harm, to injure and to hurt; but love leads us to build, to strengthen, to make better. Because we know the love of the Father, we will of necessity demonstrate that love toward others. And this leads to a vital point that must not be neglected.

⁵ NET Bible (Biblical Studies Press, 2006)

If we reflect God's love we will hate sin and love the sinner. In recent days, homosexual activists have attempted to define the argument by saying that it is impossible to love the sinner if we hate the sin. They have so identified their person with their actions that they insist it is impossible to accept them as people unless we accept their actions, though they are condemned in the Word of God. However, God hates sin; and yet, we know that "God is love" [1 JOHN 4:8]. God loves us enough to redeem us out of our sin, just as we are taught in the Word of God.

"This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again. Anyone who trusts in him is acquitted; anyone who refuses to trust him has long since been under the death sentence without knowing it. And why? Because of that person's failure to believe in the one-of-a-kind Son of God when introduced to him.

"This is the crisis we're in: God-light streamed into the world, but men and women everywhere ran for the darkness. They went for the darkness because they were not really interested in pleasing God. Everyone who makes a practice of doing evil, addicted to denial and illusion, hates God-light and won't come near it, fearing a painful exposure. But anyone working and living in truth and reality welcomes God-light so the work can be seen for the God-work it is" [JOHN 3:16-21].⁶

Jesus Christ is indeed the Saviour of the world. The offer of salvation is extended to whoever is willing to receive the gift of life in the Beloved Son. We are promised in the Word, "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" [ROMANS 6:23]. No one is beyond the ability of God's saving grace. However, what must not be neglected is that God will never leave His child in his or her sin. God saves us so that we may be transformed into pure and holy individuals that reflect the beauty of His salvation.

Christians cannot remain as they once were, for God transforms them by His grace. This is the message that we have received. "We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified" [ROMANS 8:28-30].

SEEKING GOD'S GLORY — When you witness people acting wickedly, how do you react? When people exult in their degradation and demand transformation of the world to reflect their own evil imagination, what is your reaction? Do you instinctively find yourself wishing those wicked people would disappear? Do you wish they would somehow be punished, feeling God's displeasure? This is a common reaction—but it is a sinful reaction. If we react with choler toward the wicked, we assume God's rightful role as judge of all mankind.

Surely, we have heard the teaching of the Master, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" [MATTHEW 5:44]. We have an example of precisely such a reaction in the response of Abraham as he pleaded for Sodom. Nor is this the only time in Scripture that we witness the godly pleading for the unrighteous. As stones pelted him, driving life from his body, Stephen "cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them'" [ACTS 7:60]. His plea reflects the prayer of the Master for those who crucified Him. Suspended between heaven and earth, Jesus cried, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" [LUKE 23:34].

⁶ Eugene H. Peterson, **The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language** (NavPress, Colorado Spring, CO 2002)

Abraham pleaded for Sodom, but he wasn't merely expressing a desire to spare sorrow for the wicked men that populated the city. Abraham pleaded for the righteous who lived in the environs of the city. His plea was, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked" [GENESIS 18:23]? He is reminding God to continue to show mercy to those who have already received mercy. I believe he rightfully anticipated that his nephew and his family would have been at least marginally successful in turning some of the populace to faith.

There is another place in the Word where believers are urged to pray in just this manner. Paul instructed Timothy to pray for all people, and to pray especially for those appointed to lead. "I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savoir, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time" [1 TIMOTHY 2:1-6].

Abraham ceased praying when he gained the LORD's promise that He would spare the city if He found ten righteous people—ten people that knew His Name and worshipped Him. We can only wonder why Abraham stopped pleading at this point. I believe I am correct when I say that his prayer was motivated in part by concern for Lot and his family. Likely, Abraham's decision to cease upping the ante with his prayer was based in part on an assumption that Lot and his family would have induced at least a few others to follow the LORD God. Abraham should have been able to anticipate that Lot would at the least have slowed the spread of wickedness, serving as salt and light. Alas, such was not to be, as we shall shortly see.

One would anticipate that each of God's children will turn at least one other person to faith. It seems a reasonable assumption that each Christian will be successful in bringing someone to faith in the Living God. We recite the Great Commission and agree that it was given to each Christian—"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" [MATTHEW 28:19, 20]. However, multiple studies inform us that it requires scores of Christians to bring even one person to faith on an annualised basis.

Among denominations noted for evangelism is the Southern Baptist Convention; yet Thom Rainer, ninth President of Lifeway Christian Resources, stated shortly after assuming responsibilities with that entity that "on average it takes 86 Southern Baptists per year to bring one person to faith in Jesus Christ."⁷

The figure is far worse for many other denominations. The presiding bishop of one major denomination has recently said it is a "heresy" to believe that an individual can be saved through a sinner's prayer of repentance. She openly stated that "the great Western heresy" is "that we can be saved as individuals, that any of us alone can be in right relationship with God."⁸ Should we be surprised at such a statement when that denomination has jettisoned the Bible as the authority for Faith and practise? Should we be surprised that the denomination is dying rather than growing? You need only review the number of people turned to faith in churches within your ken to realise the veracity of Rainer's statement.

⁷ Chris Turner, "Rainer calls for boldness in a spiritually hungry world," Baptist Press, Feb 9, 2006 (<http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=22621>), accessed 10 July 2009

⁸ "Episcopal Bishop calls individual salvation 'heresy,' 'idolatry,'" Associated Press, 7/9/2009 5:35:00 AM (<http://www.onenewsnow.com/Business/Default.aspx?id=597368>) accessed 10 July 2009

Nevertheless, it stands true that we Christians do a poor job of witnessing, perhaps because our prayers seeking God's glory are so impoverished. We are to pray seeking God's glory. God is glorified through doing what is good for mankind. However, we dare not presume on the grace of God, for He is holy, and His holiness cannot tolerate sin in His presence. Therefore, He must judge all wickedness. Now, He reveals His patience toward all mankind, calling all to repentance and faith, offering life in His Beloved Son. "The Lord is not slow to fulfil His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" [2 PETER 3:9]. Therefore, the greatest good that can be visited on mankind is to give the salvation that is found in Jesus.

When Christians pray, they plead with God for His glory to be revealed. They ask for peace so that they can serve Him without hindrance. They ask God to give wisdom to leaders so that peace will prevail in the land, permitting the spread of the knowledge of Christ the Lord. They ask for wicked people to be saved so that God will be glorified. They plead for God's mercy to be revealed, for they know that some will believe when they witness the mercy of God.

We live in a time when wicked attitudes stride boldly through the land. Politicians pander to godless people as they implement policies that enshrine evil. How should we respond? If we organise a great demonstration or gather signatures on a petition, we have become just another political entity, no different from all the rest. In that case, we have no message of lasting importance and we deserve to be swept from the pages of history. However, if we realise that we are the people of God and that His Spirit has appointed us to be here at this time to represent the True and Living God, we are beginning to realise the significant position that God has entrusted to us. We will make a difference in our world by being godly and by praying for wicked people who now appear to garner attention.

Billy Sunday used to say that if you pray for a bed, say "Amen" with a hammer and a nail. In other words, be willing to be a part of the answer you seek. Thus, if you pray for the lost, say "Amen" by asking God to use you as the answer. Determine that by His grace you will represent Him through a holy life and by being prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks about the hope you possess. Above all, seek God's glory. Seek His glory through praying for wicked people to be turned to righteousness, for that is why He has left you here.

As I have spoken, it may be that you have realised that you are not a Christian. Perhaps you are church member; perhaps you have participated in church rituals and even consider yourself to be religious. However, you know that you are not born from above, and that therefore you are not a Christian. Without the New Birth, you are lost and under sentence of death. The message of God for you is that life is freely offered in the Son of God. He died because of your sin and rose in order to declare you right with the Father.

The Word of God calls each of us to faith in this Living Saviour. "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and thus has righteousness and with the mouth one confesses and thus has salvation. For the scripture says, '**Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.**'" For there is no distinction between the Jew and the Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all, who richly blesses all who call on him. For **everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved**" [ROMANS 10:9-13].⁹

And out prayer is that you will believe, and that believing you will be saved to the glory of God and to the eternal welfare of your soul. Amen.

⁹ NET Bible, op. cit.