

## Intercession for a Lost World

Genesis 18:16-33

By [Dr. Douglas F. Kelly](#)

I want to talk to you a little bit about intercession for the lost, praying for a lost world, and that is from Genesis 18:16-33. I'm not going to read all of the passage, but it is Genesis 18:16-33, and it is the story of these mysterious figures, no doubt holy angels. Some feel it was a pre-incarnate appearance of the Lord amongst them. That may be right. I can't say. But anyway, these holy angels come and tell Abraham that they're going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because of their sin. And naturally we all know that Abraham had a nephew living there, and his wife and some children. So God's holy determination to blot out wickedness has been righteously announced, and then Abraham begins interceding for these sinners, for a lost world condemned to destruction, and rightly so because of the sins. I don't need to go into that.

And so Abraham prays this way. This is verse 23...just reading a few verses:

"...Wilt Thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for fifty righteous...? That would be far from thee to do ...after that manner...Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

He's appealing to God's holiness, mercy, and so forth; not asking God to contradict His character, but that mercy would not contradict it but spread His honor. It's the best way to pray. And so the Lord says all right then, and Abraham says, what if it's just 45, would You do it for that? Yes...on and on and on...and then he finally gets Him down to ten. Would You spare this whole city? It must have been...I mean, two of them — Sodom and Gomorrah must have been rather large cities. Would God spare them for ten righteous men? And the Lord said yes, I will do that.

Some have said, "Well, why did Abraham stop with ten?" I don't know. Some have thought the later Jewish custom - and to this day in rabbinic Judaism you have to have ten men to start a synagogue - could that be a reflection of this? I don't know. I would say that Abraham had regard for the holiness of God, and so he stops at ten because he does want God's honor and integrity lifted up, even though he is vastly concerned for the salvation of the lost.

You might say, “Well, you’re using that as a text about praying for the lost, but after all, it didn't work, because they couldn't find ten righteous men.” Well, at least keep this in mind. It did spare Lot and his two daughters, and they came out alive. God spared them, and that no doubt was in answer to the intercession of Uncle Abraham.

Now. I like to think of the church over the years as an army...a strange army. It goes forward on its knees. I have a cousin in Dillon, South Carolina, a distant cousin, and he was talking a while back about one of the old Kelly homes...not my great-great-grandfather's, but his brother's...a large number of children. And in the evenings they would call in the tenants for evening worship, and they met in a room where there was a large fireplace and a wooden floor. They had no carpet in that particular room. And he said they'd be sitting in chairs, and the head of the family would read Scripture, and then everybody would drop to their knees for prayer. And maybe there'd be 30-35 people. And he said when the knees hit the floor to go down for the evening prayer — Scottish Highland custom — it would sound like the waves breaking on the shore of the Atlantic, that many knees hitting the floor! And I've often thought, “Now, that is what is happening when you have major advancement in mission, both in our own culture and our own country, and in the hard places and the wicked places, and far abroad. The knees hit the floor.” It's like the waves off the shore rolling in, and there are going to be profound, real, spiritual results of that possibly not too far off.

Now this kind of intercession that Abraham was praying for Sodom and Gomorrah is taken up as one of the major ways of expanding the kingdom of Christ, of spreading salvation — gospel salvation. And that's taken up in Psalm 2, a Messianic Psalm - Psalm 2:7-8:

“I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.”

And then this:

“Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.”

Now that very promise in the Messianic context, Christ is the Son of God, eternal Son of God. He became flesh, and He has the prerogative through His death for sinners and His resurrection and His pouring out of the Holy Spirit, He has the prerogative to answer the requests of His church, and He said ‘I'm giving you a command. I'm giving the church a command on the basis of My crucifixion, resurrection, and continuing intercession, that you would ask Me for the heathen and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession, and I will give them to you. But you've got to ask.’ It is a command.

Now, this Psalm, Psalm 2, is turned into prayer at an apostolic prayer meeting.

I'm not going to read it, but in Acts 4:23-31, this very Psalm is quoted after some of the apostles, including Simon Peter, had been beaten for their witness to Christ, and lots of the Jews in Jerusalem are being converted. And they come back, and there's a big prayer meeting after their beating. It's a praise meeting, believe it or not, and they quote Psalm 2, these very verses, that the people are going to be given to Christ. And so they turn Psalm 2 into a praise and a prayer meeting — this glorious promise: “Ask of Me, and I will give thee the heathen as thine inheritance.” The church got to their knees, and the knees, like in the old Kelly house hit the wooden floor, all those knees and the waves are breaking in — the church, the feet are getting ready to march out, and hard hearts will be broken open and become flesh, and the Holy Spirit will be moving out, in answer to the prayers.

Let me just mention three or four illustrations of how intercession is always at the basis of every missionary movement, as far as we're able to find out, over the ages. Obviously there's the apostolic prayer meeting in Acts 4, and we have Paul saying in more than one epistle, “Brethren, pray for me that I may be given utterance, and that hindrances be removed from the gospel.” Imagine the Apostle Paul asking for prayer! Yes, he did. He knew that his preaching, apostle that he was, having been into the heaven of the heavens, it would not be effective without the prayers of God's people bringing down forces of wickedness, undoing Satan, and spreading the message. You know, that's always it. “Ask of Me the heathen...the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession, and I will give them.”

We tend to think of Europe as having always been Christian—I mean, you know, until a hundred years ago. But the Middle Ages were a time of tremendous mission that we tend to forget. We remember the Reformation, and rightly so. I'm very proud of the Reformation; thank God for it. But there were tremendous years and centuries of amazing Christian missions in Europe, and one of the greatest missionary churches is what we call the Celtic church: Scotland, Ireland, Wales...kind of the fringes of the British Isles...a very powerful form of Christianity was quite missionary minded.

And there was a wonderful book written in the 1950's by a lady named Diana Letham entitled — I believe it's entitled *Celtic Sunrise* — and it's about the life, the beliefs, the art, and particularly the missions of the Celtic church. And a lot of it was by monks and nuns, although the Celtic church allowed the monks and nuns to be married and to have children. But they lived in communities, religious communities dedicated totally to mission. And what is not often reported is these Irish and Scottish and Welsh and Cornish brothers and sisters are among the main ones that were used to convert what we now call Poland. Chaplin's talking about Czechoslovakia...Czechoslovakia and so much of Central Europe was converted by those very consecrated monks and nuns, those Celtic missionaries from the Celtic realm in Britain.

Now. They went out all into Europe. It was very pagan. Many parts of it were actually... cannibalism was practiced. Pretty tough place to go. But they had prayer meetings going on all the time. You look in Diana Letham's book, and they prayed...they had prayer teams praying day and night, and in order to keep the prayer teams awake, they would stand in the cold streams of Scotland day and night; taking turns, the better to stay awake so they would not be interrupted in their prayers for the safety and effectiveness of their missionaries in Central Europe. And how mightily God answered! "Ask of Me the heathen for thine inheritance, and I will give them." And Abraham pleading, 'Lord, even if You can get it down to ten...' He couldn't get it to ten, but He did save three. That kind of praying.

And then secondly, there was a time much later that the Moravian movement in Germany — now called Bohemia...Germany...Count von Zinzendorf and so forth...started a prayer meeting that lasted 100 years, and it's the basis of the modern missionary movement. It started in August of 1727 in Germany. And without a break these Moravians prayed for over 100 solid years for world missions, particularly because Count von Zinzendorf, a German nobleman had been touched. He saw this moving painting of Christ suffering, and the painting said the words of Christ in Latin, but translated into English: "I have done all for thee; what hast thou done for Me?" And his heart was smitten and he knew he had to go all the way. And so anyway things happened in his life, and this prayer meeting starts and lasts from August 1727 to well over 100 years, and that is when the missionary movement as we know in the modern world got going, in the last half of the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century, empowered by the people, by an army on its knees.

Now, the 1859 revival in Scotland — it happened in this country in 1858-59, I won't go into that — but let me just talk about it in Scotland. It started in this country and then jumped the North Atlantic to our mother countries in Great Britain. And out of that revival there was a tremendous impetus to missions, particularly to India and China and Africa. I won't go into how missions were furthered by the 1859 revival in Scotland, but they were.

But let me just talk about the praying that lay behind that 1859 revival. I'm going to read a paragraph from Dr. J. Edwin Ower, *The Second Evangelical Awakening*. There's a chapter of the awakening in Scotland, and it's talking about 1859-60, and it says:

"The three main branches of the dominant Presbyterianism of Scotland, whose adherence formed seventy percent of the population, declared in no uncertain way that Scotland was experiencing a revival of religion as striking as the movement in neighboring Ulster."

Anyway, there had been many preparations for revival, particularly because revival had started in the United States — New York, Charleston, South Carolina,

all up and down the east coast. Many were getting saved, and newspaper reports went back to the British Isles and they got concerned, and prayer meetings formed all over Scotland to ask God to repeat in Scotland what was happening on the east coast of the United States. Let me just read this. Dr. Ower went through newspaper statistics and drew this out:

An example of the measure of prayer and preparation of heart for revival is found in the official report of the United Presbyterian Church: that one in every four of its 162,305 communicants was attending its regular prayer meetings, an average of 40,549 meetings at prayer in 1205 regular meetings [that's every week, praying for revival]; 129 new prayer meetings and an increase of 16,000 regular attenders developed in 1859.

I don't take the time to read all this, but it gives the statistics that seventy percent of Scotland at that time was Presbyterian, and of that seventy percent, one fourth of them were at weekday night prayer meeting for revival; and God heard them, and the nation was shaken and moved from hell to heaven in a tremendous way, and out of that came a great outburst of missionary activity.

Now let's bring it to ourselves. You might say, "Well, it may have been easier back then, and look at the complication of the situation we're in. Look at the complication of dealing with Islam. Isn't this harder?" Of course not. There's not any difference. Revival and missions, being touched in missions is as simple as raising the dead! You can have a Presbyterian dead, a Muslim dead, a Baptist dead, a secularist, atheist dead, a Republican, a Democrat dead. It takes a mighty supernatural power of God to raise the dead in newness of life. Regeneration is a sovereign act of the blessed Holy Spirit, so it's never any easier, never any harder at any particular time in history, at any particular culture, for God to raise the dead. We can't do it. But He said "Ask of Me...Ask of Me the heathen...the spiritually dead...for thine inheritance. I will give them."

I'll say this and close with this. Now this may not fit the framework of any of us, but it's true. Obviously there's a lot of praying going on for Islam right now. And I can give you one illustration of it. Just one. And...is this being recorded or not? OK. Well, then, I will not give you some of the details. I will give you the truth, but I will cover up some details for good reasons.

A very fine family I know in Scotland — many of you would know who they are...solid conservative Presbyterians from way back, excellent and well-known in God's work and in business and so forth and so on — one of the nephews of that family goes a lot to Iran. Well, he was in a certain city, I won't say which one, in New Zealand about five years ago. And he went to...he was in a hotel on a Sunday morning. New Zealand's very liberal and for modernists...but he asked in the hotel, "Is there some church around here that would preach the gospel?" And believe it or not, the hotel understood enough of what he meant and said yes, there's a (I won't say the denomination) such-and-such a church. It's easily in

walking distance, and yes, they preach like that. So this man from Scotland, who was telling me in my house in South Carolina a while back, went to that church. And he looked in the congregation and there were — I can't remember the exact number — 50-60 people he immediately recognized: "Those people are Iranian." — because he'd been in Iran only two or three weeks before. He was amazed. They were participating in the worship like anybody else. It was an evangelical church. So he waited until the service was over and the minister was at the door shaking hands, and this man went to him and said, "Aren't those Iranians?" He said, "Yes, they are. Why don't you wait and let them tell you their story." And of course he did. He was all ears! And he went up to one of the leaders of the group, who happened to be a medical doctor, and he said, "I go to Iran a lot, and I was interested that you're here and glad that you're here. Could you tell me a little bit about your story?" And the man said, "Well, we came here two years ago from Iran because most of us are in the medical realm." Several of them were medical doctors, some were nurses, one a surgeon...they were very well-trained professional people, and it was a chance to advance, so they came to New Zealand and had no trouble getting what we call a "green card." They were very anti-Western. They certainly were not terrorists in any way, but they disliked anything they knew about Christianity in the West, but they liked the money and the opportunities. So they came. And believe this or not, one night, somewhere during the night, all whatever it was — 50 or 60 — had this dream...the same dream: They were drowning. Everyone was choking to death, drowning in the water. And something like an arm of light reaches down and pulls them up and says, "Seek My Son." Every last one! The children, the professional men that were 50, 40 whatever... "Seek My Son." They were shaken to the core. And so the sort of functional leader of the group, the surgeon, asked some of his colleagues in this particular hospital in a certain city in New Zealand, "Where would be somebody that could tell me about the Son of God? I need to know about Him." And he said, OK, and he happened to know such-and-such a church, which was the one that my buddy from Inverness attended. So the leader, this distinguished doctor, went down to the church and arranged the meeting with the minister, who explained to him the gospel; and then he brought the other 50 or 60 in, and they trained them, and in a certain period of time they were baptized and joined that church.

Now, we say...I'll leave you with that. Explain it? I don't explain it. Except that God is sovereign and can do what He wants to, particularly in answer to prayer. When the knees hit the floor, things start happening. Some knees hit the floor for Iran.

We're going to have to pray like we've never prayed for the situation with Islam. Reverend William Still, one of my fathers in the faith in Aberdeen, Scotland, used to say right after the Berlin Wall came down and the USSR unraveled in 1991, he said it took approximately 45 years, and in some parts of Europe, and 70 years in Russia, to pray down Communism. Seventy years of suffering and praying...the church on her knees, and down it came, largely bloodless. He said, "If the church

will take it seriously and go to her knees another 70 years, we might break open Islam, and the people would be liberated and come to God.” I make no such prediction, but I'm saying God gave us a big promise, and He doesn't seem to be embarrassed by giving big promises. “Ask of Me the heathen for thine inheritance, the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession, and I will; give them.”

God help us to hear it. God help us to turn this into prayer, and we're going to see a movement like we've never seen in our lifetime. And I think we're in...great things are afoot, and I'm glad to be alive now. I want to spend whatever time the Lord gives me alive, I want to spend it pushing this mission to the end of the earth, until I'm promoted to a better place. Amen.

Lord God, we say what the disciples said to our Lord Jesus Christ, and we say it, we mean it, and we feel it deeply: Lord, teach us to pray. And dismiss us with Thy blessing. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

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