

“What a Friend We Have in Jesus” is definitely a favorite hymn for a lot of people. Not only does it remind us how Jesus bore all our sins on the cross and helps us to bear all of our everyday griefs, but it also reminds us of the wonderful, comforting privilege we have in bringing everything to God in prayer through our Friend, Jesus. In John chapter 15, Jesus, calls us His friends. So how is your relationship with your friend, Jesus, the Son of God? Maybe you’d say, ‘Fine, fine.’ “So, do you ever talk to Him? Do you ever pray?” ‘Oh sure. In church. Before I eat, sometimes. And when I’m in trouble. That’s about it. That’s enough praying, right?’ Well....

The truth is God, like any good friend, wants us to take time out of our lives to really talk to Him, to have a conversation with Him, to really and truly pray. So how is your prayer-life with God, the very best friend anyone could ever have? What’s a prayer-life with Him *supposed* to look like?

In our Old Testament Reading we meet a man who, to say the least, had a very interesting prayer life, and that man is Abraham. Now, you might remember that before this the Bible says Abraham had found favor in God’s eyes. Why? Was it because Abraham had led a perfect life? Not at all! The Bible makes that clear. But what the Bible also tells us is that God promised Abraham that someday the Savior of the whole world would come from Abraham’s descendants and that through him all peoples on Earth would be blessed. Abraham believed God’s promises and God credited that to him as righteousness.

So God had a close relationship with Abraham and here in Genesis chapter 18, we see how one day God and two of His angels pay a surprise visit to Abraham. And after spending some time with him, God told Abraham what He was about to do. And that’s where our text picks up: Verse 20: “Then the Lord said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.”” God told Abraham that He was getting ready to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, those two cities infamous for their wickedness. God told Abraham this because he was giving Abraham a chance to pray, to talk with Him.

Abraham knew full well about those cities and the reputation they had. Abraham also knew that his nephew, Lot and his family, lived there. Lot, was a believer, and maybe there were others like him. Abraham didn’t want his nephew and those other believers to be swept away in God’s judgment. So Abraham prayed to God. Do you see how gutsy his prayer is? He says to God,

“Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? You’re not going to treat them the same, are you? What if there are 50 believers in those cities?” That’s a pretty bold prayer on Abraham’s part, isn’t it? Abraham could have said to himself, “It won’t matter if I pray. It won’t matter what I say. Who am I to pray anyway? God will do whatever He wants to do.” But Abraham does just the opposite of that – he prays and he prays *courageously*.

And what’s even more amazing is that God actually *listens* to Abraham. God says to him, “I’ll spare the whole place if I find 50 righteous people.” That’s the grace of God right there; that He’s listening to Abraham. God could have said, “Abraham, it doesn’t matter what you say – I’m going to do what I want to do. I’m God, and you have no idea what’s going on in the world, but I do, because I’m God. So just be quiet. Let me do my thing.” But that’s not what God does here. God wanted Abraham to pray to Him. God wanted to listen. God wanted to change His plans, for the sake of Abraham’s prayer.

If the story ended there, that would be incredible enough. But the story goes on. In verse 27, Abraham admits that he knows he’s “pushing his luck.” He says, “I’ve been bold to speak to the Lord, even though I am dust and ashes.” Yes, Abraham is very bold, but he’s also very humble. He asks God to spare those cities if only 45 believers are found there. And once again, God listens! Then, Abraham talks God down to 30, and then to 20, and finally, after apologizing and asking God not to get angry, he talks God all the way down to 10. I am always amazed when I read this story, amazed at how bold Abraham was as he prayed to God.

I’m also amazed at how God goes along with this. God goes down to Abraham’s level. He plays Abraham’s game. He listens to Abraham. He agrees to Abraham’s requests. He doesn’t have to – He’s the almighty God. But this shows us how our God is filled with so much grace and mercy, so much compassion, that He bends down and listens to prayers like this one, and not only listens, but *responds*.

When you read this story, do you think to yourself, “Why don’t I pray to God this way?” Often times, this isn’t the way we pray, is it? Often times, when we pray, we don’t have the boldness and confidence of Abraham. “It won’t matter if I pray. It won’t matter what I say. Who am I to pray anyway? God will do whatever He wants to do. So, why bother?” Isn’t that often the case?

Our country seems to be promoting immorality, more and more – we’re becoming a modern-day version of Sodom and Gomorrah, if you think about it. I know I should pray about this to God, but why bother? It won’t make a difference.

Or what about you, personally? If you have problems in your life that are related to health, or to finances, to your loved ones or to other personal things, maybe you pray to God a little about it, but really, why bother? It's not really going to matter, is it? Whatever happens, happens, whether you pray or not. Is this sometimes our approach to prayer?

Often times, you **and I** are guilty of listening to that voice that says, "Why bother?" "What's the use?" "What will be, will be." But, God tells us to be bold, to pray to Him often and never give up. And we say, "Why bother?" That's our sin. But what's amazing, is that God forgives us of that sin. "I forgive you," God says, "And now, I invite you to be bold, and to pray to Me." Just as God went down to Abraham's level, God comes down to us – He comes to us and speaks to us through His Word. He comes to us and speaks to us through His Sacraments – the Lord's Supper and Baptism – and what does He say to us here? God says to you, "Because my Son, laid down His perfect life for you on the cross, I forgive you for thinking, 'why bother?' Now come to Me, be bold, and pray to Me."

Aren't you amazed at the grace of God, that He forgives you of **all** of your sins, and that He invites you to come to Him in prayer? Jesus was teaching His disciples this in our Gospel lesson for today, when He told them to "ask, and it will be given to you, seek, and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives, and he who seeks, finds, and to him who knocks, the door will be opened." God not only takes away your sins, He also promises you that every time you pray to Him, every time, He will listen to you, and He will answer you. This is His promise to you!

Do you know how God answered Abraham's prayer? The next morning, we're told that Abraham got up very early – he probably couldn't sleep after talking to God. He walked back to the spot where he had prayed so courageously. He looked out over the valley to see what would happen to Sodom and Gomorrah. And do you know what he saw? The Bible tells us that he looked, and he saw dense smoke, rising from where Sodom and Gomorrah used to be.

But God listened to Abraham's prayer, because right before he destroyed those cities, two angels rescued Abraham's nephew and family. God listened to Abraham's prayer, and modified His plans, rescuing Abraham's relatives. God answered Abraham, just not the exact way Abraham was hoping for.

This is how God answers your prayers too. Because of His love for you through His Son Jesus, He listens to what you have to say. And He responds. Sometimes He changes His plans or modifies them, to take into account what

you are asking Him for. Often times, God answers in a way that's not exactly what you were expecting – but God always answers, 100% of the time.

I once heard the story of a Scottish preacher who prayed in the morning service, while the sun was shining, that it would rain in the afternoon for the farmers. As he went back to church in the afternoon, his little daughter said, "Here is your umbrella, Papa." "What do we need that for," he asked. "You prayed for rain this morning," his daughter said. "Don't you expect God to send it?" And so they carried the umbrella on that sun-shiny afternoon to church, and when they came home they were glad they had it, because a storm popped up out of nowhere and drenched the area with a hard rain.

The point is, God is listening to you, and God promises to answer you. I pray that God will give you the boldness of Abraham, to pray, boldly, that God would change your life and change the world, according to your prayer. And I pray that God will give you the faith of that little child, the faith that expects that God will always answer every prayer. I would encourage you, this morning, that if you haven't yet gotten into the habit of praying, then start today.

Also, starting next Sunday we have a short, but very helpful, four week Bible Study on the subject of Prayer. We'll meet in the Fellowship center for that in-between services. I invite you to come because prayer **does** matter. God **is** listening. And God will modify or change His plans. He does this because He is a gracious God who, for the sake of His love for us shown through His Son, Jesus Christ, loves to honor the prayers of His people. He is a God who loves to amaze you with the way He answers your prayers. Amen.