

Genesis 18:20-33 & Luke 11:1-13 – July 24, 2022

There's an old song that goes, "I fought the law and the law won." And as the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah learned in our Old Testament lesson, when it comes to God's law that's *always* the case. There is no fighting with God. There is no fighting his law. It cannot be ignored. It cannot be appealed to a higher judge. There are no loopholes to be found in it.

You accept it or you will find fire raining from the sky. You accept it or you will find yourself turned into a pillar of salt. You accept or you will die. Not just in this life. You will die eternally. You will find yourself spending eternity in the place where dead things are put and where the ruler of death resides.

You cannot fight God's law and win. You cannot deny its existence or power over you. But you can beg for clemency from it. You can beg for mercy. Which is exactly what Abraham did. Successfully, in fact. If only ten righteous people had been found in the cities, God would have spared their inhabitants entirely. Ten people out of hundreds or thousands. That's a pretty lenient deal all things considered. Assuming, of course, that there had been even ten righteous people to be found... which there weren't.

But it still shows us a glimpse into the character of God. God's law is unyielding. But God himself is not. God's law is unbreakable and unchanging and inescapable. But God himself is compassionate. And caring. And is perfectly willing to change his mind. In fact, I would go so far as to say that God likes to change his mind. That's the very nature of salvation, after all.

We're born and God has one very strong opinion of us. Sinner. Criminal. Unclean. But we're baptized, we hear his Word, he brings us to faith, and that opinion completely changes. So that now he sees us as righteous. Holy. Innocent.

God likes when we change his mind. He likes when we ask him for less than the law demands. "Fifty, no forty-five, no forty, no thirty, twenty, ten! Ten, Lord! Just ten." In fact, I think Abraham's only mistake there was not going low enough. I think Abraham underestimated exactly how much mercy God would show for, perhaps, only one man of faith. We'll never know.

What we do know is that prayer works. Pleading to God for help, pleading to Him for mercy, is effective. The Bible shows us that time and time again. Every single great man or woman of faith in the Bible is also a man or woman of prayer. So when Jesus himself stands up and says, "This is how you should pray," we ought to take notice. Here is the greatest of the men of faith telling us how to plead with God like Abraham did.

And like Abraham, it is a plea that does not attempt to fight God's law. On the contrary, the Lord's Prayer is supremely based in God's law. In fact, you could even consider the Lord's Prayer a direct response to the Ten Commandments. That's largely how Luther views it in his Large Catechism. Every petition of the Lord's Prayer is, in its own way, a petition to fulfill a commandment of God, or a petition for clemency when we fail that commandment.

Take the very opening words: "Our Father in heaven." We respect God's authority over us as children are to respect the authority of their parents in the Third Commandment. We honor "our Father" by turning to him in our time of need.

As Luther put it, we turn to him as dear children ask their dear Father. Knowing that he will not give us something harmful to us. He will not give us a snake if we ask for a fish. He will not give us a scorpion if we ask for an egg. In fact, he won't even give us a snake if we ask for a snake or a scorpion if we ask for a scorpion. Like any good parent, he knows our needs. He knows what is good for us and what is harmful to us. And he only gives us good things.

"Hallowed be your name... Holy be your name." We call upon your name not in vanity, not in abuse of it, not cursing or swearing by it, but in the best, most holy way that it is to be spoken. In prayer. In a heartfelt petition to one who's name is above every name.

We call upon it in every trouble, in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. The name of God is holy. We want it to be used in holiness among us. And we are asking to be holy people doing holy things and bearing God's holy name in a holy way.

“Your kingdom come. Your will be done.” Not our will. Not our priorities. Not our desires. Not the false gods that we surround ourselves with. Not the human kingdoms based on frailty and sin and death. No, the kingdom of this sinful world has already come. The will of our flesh is already acutely evident everywhere we look in this world.

We need a different kingdom to come among us. A different will to replace our sinful will. We need the Holy Spirit to show us a new kingdom and teach us a new will. So that the Kingdom of our Father comes among us and the will of our Father is our will.

“Give us our daily bread.” Give us the peace of mind that you are in control of all things. That we may work and work and work to put food on the table and clothes on our backs for six days, but on that seventh day we stop and we rest and we turn to God and say, “I know its going to be OK because you are the creator and you are the giver of every good thing.”

We ask God so often for physical stuff. Food and clothes and shelter and money. But do you notice how Jesus ends this passage. *“If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”*

We think we need stuff. But what we really need is the Holy Spirit to give us faith. To teach us not to covet the things of this world, but give us contentment with what we have. To give us peace that God will supply the bread we need, each and every day.

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive others.” Forgive us when we hate and murder our brother in our heart. Forgive us when we look with lust and impurity. Forgive us when we are consumed by greed and desire for the wealth of others.

And teach us to forgive. To see others as you see us. To love our neighbor as ourselves. To give good gifts to them, though they may not deserve it, just as you give good gifts to us, who definitely don't deserve it.

“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” Rescue us from the temptations of this world. Put an end to the evil that surrounds. Come, Lord Jesus, and deliver us from this valley of death. Deliver us from this sinful flesh and this corrupt world. Give us something better. Fulfill our hope in you.

The Lord's Prayer is every Christian's way of saying to God, “I know your law is good and right. I know I have not kept it. I know I am too weak to ever keep it on my own. But for the sake of your Son who taught me this very prayer... be merciful to me. Have clemency on me. And teach me how to live as the child of God you would have me to be.”

Because God wants to hear us change his mind. And there is no better way to change God's mind than to do it in the very words of his beloved son. There is no better way to claim your privileged status as a baptized child of God than to pray the prayer that God's first-born child once also prayed. There is no better way to proclaim, “I am a disciple of Jesus Christ,” than to pray the way that Jesus taught his first disciples.

Great men of faith pray. Great women of faith pray. God's church prays. And when God's church prays, God listens. God answers. God acts. It may not be the way we want him to answer. It may not be the way we expect him to answer.

But he has listened and he has acted and he has done what is most merciful and what is most compassionate and what is most loving for us. For he is our Father. In the beginning, he made us. In Christ, he redeemed us. In the water and the Word, he delivers his salvation to us.

A God overflowing with that much love is not simply going to abandon us to the flames, like Sodom and Gomorrah. No, ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you. For he is abundant in his blessings and gracious in all his gifts. Amen.