

# A Tale of Two Sinners And God

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Date: 24 September 2017

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[ 0 : 00 ] I'd like you all to open up your Bibles to the book of Genesis again.

! We've been in Genesis actually for quite a while now, for several months. And we're going to be here in Genesis chapter 20 this morning, and then beginning next Sunday we will take a break from our study through the lives of the patriarchs.

We will take a break from that so that we can devote all five Sundays of the month of October to considering what we would call the great doctrines of the Reformation.

And that sentence and that phrasing of itself may cause you to scratch your head or may cause you to think, I have no idea what this guy is going to start talking about next week. But for those of you who do not know, and we'll talk about this much more in the coming weeks, this year marks the 500th anniversary of what we call the Reformation, which really was a recovery of the Gospel.

That's essentially what the Reformation marked. A recovery of the Gospel where God powerfully used individuals, flawed individuals to be sure, but we powerfully used these individuals to call His people back to Himself, to reassert the authority of the Scriptures, to reassert the true Gospel as opposed to a very man-centered Gospel in which man contributes to his salvation.

[ 1 : 30 ] And so we're going to take five weeks to walk through and look at those great doctrines that were recovered, that were reasserted, and that came to the surface again to be put before God's people as an encouragement to us.

We'll do that through October. But this morning, we're still in Genesis looking at the life of Abraham. And so we're in chapter 20 this morning, and we're going to read through this whole chapter, which is not an incredibly long chapter, it's only 18 verses, but I want us to read through it so that we can see the entire story of what happens in the life of Abraham.

So I would invite you all to stand with me in honor of the Word of God as we read together. Starting in verse 1, From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negev, and lived between Kadesh and Shur, and he sojourned in Gerar.

And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister. And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife.

Now Abimelech had not approached her. So he said, Lord, will you kill an innocent people? Did he not himself say to me, She is my sister? And she herself said, He is my brother.

[ 2 : 52 ] In the integrity of my heart, in the innocence of my hands, I have done this. Then God said to him in the dream, Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart. And it was I who kept you from sinning against me.

Therefore, I did not let you touch her. Now then, return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, so that he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not return her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours.

So Abimelech rose early in the morning and called all his servants and told them all these things.

And the men were very much afraid. Then Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, What have you done to us?

And how have I sinned against you? That you have brought on me in my kingdom a great sin. You have done to me things that ought not to be done. And Abimelech said to Abraham, What did you see that you did this thing?

Abraham said, I did it because I thought, There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife. Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father, though not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife.

[ 4 : 03 ] And when God calls me to wander from my father's house, I said to her, This is the kindness you must do for me. At every place to which you come, say of me, He is my brother. Then Abimelech took sheep and oxen and male servants and female servants and gave them to Abraham and returned Sarah his wife to him.

And Abimelech said, Behold, my land is before you. Dwell where it pleases you. To Sarah he said, Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver. It is a sign of your innocence in the eyes of all who are with you, and before everyone you are vindicated.

Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children. For the Lord had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.

Father, we thank you that you inspired Moses to record these events from the life of Abraham. And we thank you that in these words you reveal much about who you are so that we living centuries, even millennia later, can learn so that we can be taught about you.

So help us to see wonderful things in your word, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. You guys take a seat. Charles Dickens' famous novel, A Tale of Two Cities, starts with the words that you probably know.

[ 5 : 36 ] It was the best of times. It was the worst of times. And I don't know about you, but as we've been walking through these chapters from chapter 12 on in the book of Genesis, at times I've felt like we're reading in a chapter or in a portion of Abraham's life where we might see, we might describe it over the words, this is the best of Abraham.

And then there are other chapters where we might think this is the worst of Abraham. We see both sides of this patriarch. We see him in faithfulness to God, moving in obedience, and doing what God requires of him.

We see him taking a stand and defending his nephew Lot and doing incredible things. But we also see him at times making foolish decisions, doing sinful things, living in a way that we would question and wonder where is Abraham's faith in this moment, at this period in his life?

Where is his faith in the great promises of God? So he's back and forth, much like we are oftentimes. He is back and forth. And here we are in chapter 20 and it's one of those chapters that you would have to describe as this is the worst of Abraham.

This is Abraham not at his best. This is Abraham making a foolish decision and doing a foolish thing. But I think what we're also seeing in this particular chapter though is a focus not just upon Abraham, but a focus upon someone outside of the covenant people of God who is affected by Abraham's decisions, by Abraham's foolishness.

[ 7 : 10 ] We have this king who suddenly comes on the scene named Abimelech. He's going to pop up again at the end of the next chapter, but we don't know a lot about him.

He's a little bit of a mysterious figure, but he's on the scene now because at the very beginning of this chapter, we learn that Abraham leaves the place where he was. He leaves the place where he was when he looked down and saw the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

He leaves the place where he had been living and dwelling there near the oaks of Mamre for quite some time. He leaves there now and takes a journey toward the south and stops at a place near the kingdom of Abimelech.

It's an interesting move by Abraham. We're never told why Abraham moves. We're never told why he heads south. We're never told anything about those things. We simply read at the very beginning from there, Abraham journeyed toward the territory of Negev.

That's the southernmost portion of the land of Canaan. He travels toward the Negev and he lives between Kadesh and Shur. So he temporarily sets up camp at Kadesh and Shur, but it appears as if that's going to be a little bit more than temporary.

[ 8 : 21 ] That this is going to become his new home base of operations much like his place near the oaks of Mamre where before further in the north. Now he's going to be here for a little while.

But even while he's here, he finds himself at times going to other places because he's still a nomad. He still lives in tents. He still travels despite the great wealth that he's accumulated, despite all the ways in which God has blessed him.

He does not build a permanent home for himself. He's still migrant. He's still moving about. So he comes and he lives. He dwells between Kadesh and Shur, but then we're told that he sojourns in this land called Gerar.

Sojourn means that he goes there temporarily. He's just going there for a small portion of time. And it's there that he has this conflict, that he runs into this man named Abimelech.

Now a few things just to get some things out there so that we kind of know what we're dealing with and get our bearings in this chapter. First of all, Gerar was a region at this time occupied by the Philistines.

[ 9 : 27 ] And that's significant because the Philistines later in the history of Abraham's descendants are one of Israel's most important enemies. These particular Philistines may not be the exact same Philistines that the Israelites meet later on because Philistine was sort of a catch-all term for people who came across the sea in these various migrations to the land of Canaan.

But they were all sort of loosely connected together, especially in the minds of the people of Israel. So that you have Abimelech who is a king over the Philistine people, a future foe of the people of Israel.

That's significant. But you also have this land of Gerar down toward the south. It's not as far away as Egypt. It's a place that you would have to pass through to get to the land of Egypt.

When we read about a very similar account, when Abraham does something very similar to what he does here back in chapter 12, Abraham moves all the way down into Egypt. This time he doesn't go all the way to Egypt.

He stops short of Egypt in a place called Gerar, north of Egypt but south of the places in Canaan where Abraham has thus far been living. And as we move through this story, we see the interactions between Abraham and Abimelech.

[ 10 : 39 ] And then we see the interaction between Abimelech and Sarah at the end of the chapter. So we might be tempted to think that this story of Abraham and Abimelech really is a story that's intended to relate to us the events of their lives.

But in reality, that's not the main thing being communicated in this chapter. This chapter is not mainly about Abraham, nor is it mainly about Abimelech, nor is it mainly about Sarah.

This chapter is mainly about God. In fact, the entire Bible is mainly about God. When we read through the book of Genesis or other portions of the Old Testament, we are tempted because we feel ourselves so far removed from these events, we are tempted to try often to sort of moralize these stories, to come up with a very clear moral that the story might teach so that we might walk away with something that feels like it connects us back to the story.

And there's some good reason for doing that. Paul looks back on the Old Testament and says, these things were written down as examples for us, the new covenant people of God.

So there are clear moral examples and moral lessons that we are intended to draw at times from the lives of the patriarchs or the life of David or other great Old Testament heroes. But that doesn't mean that these are stories mainly about those individuals or the moral lessons that we might glean from their lives.

[ 12 : 02 ] The Old Testament and the book of Genesis in particular is a story about God and about who God is and about what God wants us to know about Himself. So what are we learning about God here?

That's the question I want to ask this morning. What is it precisely that we are seeing put on display more than perhaps other characteristics of God but what characteristic of God comes to the fore here and is put on display for us so that we might see clearly what God wants us to see clearly in the text.

And I think you could summarize very easily the attribute of God most highlighted in this chapter as God's lordship. His lordship. Which one theologian helpfully summarizes as God's authority God's control and God's presence.

And in fact we see all three of those elements present in this particular story. We see God's authority. We see God in sovereign control over the events that unfold but we also see God's presence God's mercy and kindness toward the various people that appear in the story.

So what I want to do this morning is very simple. I want us to look for the signs of these three attributes of God's lordship as they come to the fore in this particular story.

[ 13 : 23 ] So first of all let's consider the issue of God's authority. To speak of God's authority means that God has the right. He has the right to command and He in fact does command and He issues laws and He sets boundaries and parameters for humanity.

And that is true not only for the people of God but that is true for all people because all of us are created in God's image and all of us are therefore accountable to God.

Even this foreign king even this Philistine king named Abimelech is accountable to God Himself. We see that come to the surface in a few places.

We see it first when God encounters Abimelech He comes to him in a dream. Notice what we read here. Verse 3 But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him Behold you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken for she is a man's wife.

Now God doesn't only pronounce judgment on Abimelech for what He's done but He spells out very clearly what Abimelech has done and expects Abimelech to understand and know that that is in fact wrong.

[ 14 : 36 ] He doesn't give a lengthy explanation He simply says she is another man's wife. In other words you've attempted you've moved in the direction of committing adultery.

You have violated the basic moral law that I have put in place. And Abimelech does not respond by saying so who cares? No Abimelech understands and knows that what he's doing is a violation of some divine law that rules over his life and indeed over everyone's life.

If you look down a little further in the story as Abimelech comes to Abraham and begins to confront Abraham over putting him in this circumstance in this situation Abimelech asks him a question in verse 9 he says how have I sinned against you that you have brought on me in my kingdom a great sin?

So Abimelech recognizes that if he were to have gone through if he were to have actually sealed the marriage that he had with Sarah if he had slept with her that would have been a great sin it would have been adultery he recognizes that he knows that to be the case this Philistine foreign king knows he knows that some things are outside the boundaries of what's acceptable and I think that's a very important thing to note especially coming on the heels of the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah in chapter 19 because you could read through the story of Sodom and Gomorrah and you could think to yourself God's judgment seems to be pretty harsh upon them how are they supposed to know what God required how are they supposed to know that these things were wrong it's not as if the law of Moses had even been written yet and even when it was written it wasn't given to them so how would they know why is God's judgment so strict and so harsh and then you come to chapter 20 and you realize and you recognize that these foreign nations they had an innate kind of knowledge of right and wrong they may have not have had an in-depth knowledge of who God is and all the things that God requires of his people but they had written and engraved upon their hearts they had a basic knowledge of the moral boundaries that God has set for humanity that reality

I think is borne out when we move to the New Testament I want you to hold your place in Genesis and turn to the book of Romans where Paul explains in detail both the fact that God has made known to all people the basic moral laws that govern the world that he has created and the judgment that ought to come on those who violate those laws in Romans chapter 1 verse 30 God speaking in general of the Gentile nations as a whole he says they are gossips slanderers haters of God insolent haughty boastful inventors of evil disobedient to parents foolish faithless heartless ruthless all of these are general sins that people commit and they're not all on the catalog of the worst possible sins that we might be tempted to put together I mean he has things like being disobedient to your parents he has things like being boastful he has things like being ruthless or a slanderer these are not things that we would put on the list of say like murder you know adultery we would have these sort of catalogs these are the really bad things we expect people to follow but Paul lists things and he expects all people to understand and know that these things are wrong and he pronounces judgment on them for not following these moral boundaries that

[ 18 : 20 ] God has put in place verse 32 though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them so Paul comes down pretty hard on these Gentile nations who do not have the written word of God and says they know that these things are wrong and because they know that these things are wrong they know that they deserve to die for having done these very things if you turn over to chapter 2 you'll see why they know these things are wrong chapter 2 verse 14 Paul says for when Gentiles who do not have the law the law of Moses the written law of God they do not have the law when they by nature do what the law requires so he acknowledges here that this list is not describing all the sins of every individual that sometimes even people who do not possess the law

of God sometimes in some areas of their life they obey the law of God not everyone is a murderer not everyone is an adulterer not everyone is a thief he acknowledges that for when the Gentiles who do not have the law by nature do what the law requires they are a law to themselves even though they do not have the law now notice verse 15 they show that the work of the law is written on their hearts while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when according to my gospel God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus so Paul says the judgment comes upon them because they know because the law of God the basic moral requirements that God has put in place to govern the world are engraven upon the hearts of all people they know and we are seeing evidence of that here in Genesis chapter 20 God confronts Abimelech and he simply states the sin that he has almost committed and when Abimelech confronts Abraham Abimelech says you almost made me commit a great great sin it's understood it's a given that God has a kind of authority that extends! to all people all people are accountable to live according to the standards that God himself has put in place even when those people do not recognize who God is or know who the true God is there is no indication throughout this story that Abimelech actually understands and fully knows who Abraham's God is that he is in fact the God who created all things according to Genesis chapter 1 that he is the one to whom all of us owe our absolute allegiance and worship that he is the only true God there is no indication that Abimelech knows that but he does know that the God of Abraham possesses authority notice how Abimelech addresses God in verse 4 it says now Abimelech had not approached her so he said Lord will you kill an innocent people he addresses him as Lord and the word here means sovereign one it's not it's not a name that would be God's name Yahweh which is written as Lord but always with all capital letters here here it's lowercase letters following the L which means it is simply the word Adonai which means sovereign one it's a recognition of the authority to the one to whom you are speaking human kings were even called this it is simply a recognition of authority Abimelech recognizes the authority of the God of Abraham and says will you kill an innocent people he recognizes that Lord will you do this thing and if you're paying close attention you'll notice two things from his statement there first of all the word innocent is the word righteous it is the same word that Abraham uses in chapter 18 when he intercedes on behalf of the people of Sodom and says for this many righteous people will you destroy the city for this many people will you destroy righteous people will you destroy the city over and over as he intercedes on behalf Abraham is pleading with God if there are any righteous people that is if there are any people who have not done these great and grievous sins for which you are holding them accountable will you save the whole city on their account and now Abimelech says my people are innocent they've not done anything they've not done this great sin we've not gone there we recognize you have authority but we're calling upon you as the one who has authority not to judge us because we haven't actually done anything and the word for people here is the general word for nation it's actually the word that's oftentimes translated as Gentile so Abimelech Abimelech here is crying out to God to recognize that even among these Gentile people even among his own people a nation outside of Abraham will you spare us because we've not done this thing you have the authority but because you have the authority you're also the judge would you as the judge would you bring your judgment upon those who have not done the thing that would bring your judgment upon them he recognizes God's authority to give the law God's authority to judge and God's authority to decide who ought to be judged he recognizes all of these things the lordship of God is on display even in the way in which this

[ 23 : 55 ] Gentile Philistine king interacts with God himself his authority is on display but as God responds God makes it clear that not only does he have the authority but God also is sovereign that is God is in control of the things of events as they unfold God's not a passive observer waiting to see what Abimelech will do waiting to see what will happen so that he can then respond to all of these things no God makes it very clear that he is in control of things the entire time look at what God says verse 6 after Abimelech has proclaimed his innocence God says yes I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart and it was I who kept you from sinning against me therefore I did not let you touch her I did this you want to proclaim your innocence but I protected you

I guarded you I kept you from sinning against her I built a wall and you couldn't get through that wall I am in control of all of these things see it even even just as clearly toward the end of the passage verse 17 Abraham prayed to God and God healed Abimelech he healed his wife and female slaves

so that they bore children for the Lord had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah in other words God God not only prevents Abimelech from committing a sin with Sarah but he also he also brings upon the house of Abimelech a curse in the form of preventing his wife or any of the other women in his household to become pregnant God is able to say because of these things happening I will not allow this to happen God is in control I mean he prevents Abimelech from sinning he closes the wombs of these women he's demonstrating his control over all things in these events he is sovereign sometimes we think of God's sovereignty as if

God well he has the right to intervene if he wants to intervene and God he can control things if he wants to but for the most part he's hands off but that's not the picture of God that we see either here or in the rest of the scriptures the picture that we see of God is a God who exercises absolute sovereignty and control over all peoples and all things in fact ironically later in the Old Testament we are given a description of God's sovereignty by another Gentile king turn to the book of Daniel I want you to see this because it is one of the clearest statements of the extent of God's control of his sovereignty over the world in Daniel chapter 4 Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon having been humbled by God he says this at the end of the days verse 34 at the end of the days I

Nebuchadnezzar lifted my eyes to heaven and my reason returned to me and I blessed the most high and praised and honored him who lives forever for his dominion is an everlasting dominion and his kingdom endures from generation to generation all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth and none can stay his hand or say to him what have you done

God does what God wants to do not only in heaven but on the earth among the inhabitants of the earth and no one can look at God and prevent him can say to him what have you done no one can look at God and prevent God's hand from moving in the direction in which God wills it to move God is absolutely sovereign and in control of all things if you look in the book of Ephesians the apostle Paul makes a statement in Ephesians chapter 1 verse 11 where he describes God as him who works all things according to the counsel of his will all things God works according to the counsel of his will which means that Abraham did not arrive in Gerar by happenstance and Sarah was not taken in the household of Abimelech by accident and God did not just one time intervene in history to rescue Sarah and then step back out of the picture no all things

God is working according to the purpose of his will all the details of this story and every other story in the scriptures and the details of our own lives are being overseen and managed by God himself he works all things according to the counsel of his will not some things not occasional things not just the important things but all things God works according to the counsel of his will and that's what he's doing here in this story he's working all these things according to his plan we wonder sometimes how can we be sure how can we be sure that Sarah was safe if her own husband didn't protect her if her own husband didn't step in and stand up for her how can we know that she was in any way protected in any way guarded from immorality and the answer is given to us clearly God himself oversees God is in control God prevents

[ 29 : 37 ] Abimelech from sinning with Sarah and guards and protects her even when Abraham does not he has the authority to command he has the authority to judge all those who violate his commands he exercises sovereign control over all things but then we also see throughout this chapter an emphasis upon what you might call God's presence what we have referred to elsewhere as God's commitment to his covenant promises or his covenant faithfulness God never abandons the covenant God never steps away from his promises God never leaves anything undone he's always there to hold out his end of the bargain God is faithful to his covenant promises throughout this story and he demonstrates that not only in his protection of Sarah but in the reasons that he gives for his protection of Sarah move down toward the end of the chapter verse 18 which we read a moment ago the Lord had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of

Sarah Abraham's wife because of Sarah God had done these things but it's noted because of Sarah Abraham's wife over and over throughout the chapter there's this emphasis on the reality that Sarah is Abraham's wife and I think that's for two reasons one it's because she's being presumed by Abimelech and others not to be Abraham's wife and Moses repeatedly tells us this is Abraham's wife as if to emphasize just how wrong Abraham is in presenting her as his sister even though he tries to sort of wiggle out of it in a technicality even though he does that Moses wants us to constantly be reminded this is Abraham's wife this is Abraham's wife and so when he comes to Abimelech he reminds Abimelech that you've taken another man's wife but what's significant is the

identity of the other man verse 7 now then

God says to Abimelech return the man's wife for he is a prophet that's who he is he is a prophet not only that but he will pray for you and because of his prayers you will live Abraham is significant not just because he's singled out through the book of Genesis Abraham is significant because he's the one that God chose Abraham is the one that God plucked out of Ur of the Chaldeans to say I'm putting my name upon you I'm calling you out it is through you and your descendants that all the nations of the earth will be blessed those who bless you will in turn be blessed those who curse you will in turn be cursed!

Abraham that's in fact what God says about Abraham in chapter 18 when God is deliberating over whether or not to reveal to Abraham what he's going to do at Sodom he says shall we not tell Abraham about these things because I have chosen him literally because I have known him because I chose him out because I set my covenant love upon him he stands above all others and I am going to give him special knowledge and special revelation because of who he is now there are some ways in which as we look at the life of Abraham we have to step back and say that's unique to Abraham I mean after all Abraham is uniquely the one with whom God made a covenant in Genesis chapter 15 with whom he confirmed that covenant in Genesis chapter 17 and the covenant is passed down to Abraham descendants and we get to be included in the covenant promises through faith yet we are not

Abraham we are not we are not to look at ourselves and assume that God is going to do for us everything that he did for Abraham we are not Abraham but then on the other hand as I mentioned earlier these things are written as examples to us and there are ourselves and our role in relation to God's covenant promises reflected in the life of Abraham and I think in this statement for he is a prophet and he will pray to you we are seeing both of those things we can't identify ourselves necessarily as a prophet the way that Abraham was identified by God himself but we can like Abraham intercede on behalf of others that was the point of the lot and the city of Sodom and the surrounding cities Abraham goes to God and he prays for them and God actually answers the prayers of Abraham he will answer our prayers

[ 34 : 51 ] God says to Abimelech go to Abraham go to Abraham and have Abraham pray for you why not simply say will Abimelech ask me and I will heal you why not say that why does he have to go through Abraham because Abimelech is not a part of the covenant people of God because Abimelech does not have direct access to God you say what do you mean he doesn't have direct access God is appearing to him in a dream no he does not have one who intercedes on his behalf and brings his cares and concerns to God the Father we do the apostle Paul tells us that Jesus is our mediator and he himself intercedes for us constantly he is ever constantly interceding on our behalf therefore we intercede on behalf of others and Abraham could pray with confidence for this very same reason we don't see in the

Old Testament a different object of faith we don't see in the Old Testament an entirely different religion what we see is in seed form what will come to fruition in Christ himself Abraham was not saved in some way other than the way in which we today are saved neither was Moses or David or any other great heroes of the Old Testament they were saved by faith in the promises of God but for the patriarchs for Abraham himself those promises lay in the future he was looking forward to the fulfillment of the promises but he trusted in those promises that found their fulfillment in Christ and now we look back and we trust in the promises of God that find their fulfillment in Christ so that Abraham was enabled to pray and intercede on behalf of others because he trusted in promises that pointed ahead to one who currently was his mediator and his intercessor and we can look back and we can see one who stood in our place who took the wrath of God in our place who bore our sins and who now stands as our mediator and that means that like Abraham we can intercede on behalf of others and we're not shackled and tied down to only pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ oh no we are to be those interceding on behalf of the world what does Paul say to Timothy he says that he wants people to pray for kings and for all who are in authority in other words the apostle Paul expects the people of God to be vigilantly in prayer for their leaders who were not believers it's not as if the Roman authorities had trusted in Christ and therefore as fellow believers Paul is saying I want you to pray for them no he's saying I want you to pray for all people especially for kings and those who are in authority I want you praying for them I want you interceding on behalf of them so that as Abraham intercedes and prays on behalf of this Philistine king so we also are to intercede and pray on behalf of even those around us who do not know Christ your neighbor who is

lost but not only lost but now in a time of desperate need and crisis they need your prayers your co-worker who doesn't know Christ and is facing a difficult time of life perhaps a divorce or the loss of a loved one they need your prayers on their behalf they need us interceding for them God didn't simply say Abimelech just pray to me and you can take care of yourself no he says go to Abraham and have him pray and we like Abraham ought to be willing and ready at all times to intercede on behalf of the lost people around us praying not only that God might save them and deliver them from their sins but praying specifically for the things that weigh them down in the present moments and saying God would you intervene here and rescue them from these circumstances that's what Abraham actually does we learn in verse 17 that Abraham prays and God heals Abimelech it's an interesting set of circumstances because apparently God had prevented Abimelech from sinning with Sarah by in some way bringing some illness upon Abimelech himself was it the same illness that led to the closing of the wombs of all the women of Abimelech's house we don't know we are not given all of the details in fact as we first read through here

God simply says I prevented you and he doesn't tell us how he prevented him he just says I prevented you now we learn toward the end that it was through an illness through something that Abimelech needed to be healed of God used that to prevent and keep Abimelech from sinning to protect Sarah herself all the while what are we seeing yes God's control over the events but we're seeing evidence of God's presence we're seeing evidence of God's mercy and grace mainly toward Abraham and Sarah mainly toward the covenant people and yet we're also seeing that there is a kind of grace that issues forth even for those outside the covenant family now theologians call that common grace it's not saving grace it's not the kind of special grace that those who are in Christ have received but there is a kind of grace and mercy that extends even to those outside of [ 40 : 53 ] Christ it will not deliver them from their sins but every day God is showering mercy and grace upon the entire world and you might look around at the world and think I don't think so because I'm reading about earthquakes and I'm reading about more storms that are hitting other places I'm seeing devastation all over the globe and I'm not sure that I'm seeing this common grace that you're talking about but the mere fact that we can identify specific locations and say there's been a disaster here and that we don't have to cover the entire world and say there's been a disaster here and they've all been wiped out that fact alone shows you that God's grace is extending all over the place all over the world because all of us immediately deserve being sinners immediately deserve the judgment of God we all immediately deserve to be like Sodom and Gomorrah and yet the mercy and grace of God is extending it extends here to

Abimelech to Abimelech's household and ultimately to the entire nation of Gerar to this entire nation of Philistine people that's why Abimelech cries out to God and says are you going to do this to an innocent nation to an innocent kingdom are you going to do this to all of us because he understood that if God's judgment came upon him it would impact all of the people under his rule and under his authority so God's mercy extending to Abimelech is an extension of mercy to all the people of Gerar the mercy of God is on display and not just his saving mercy and not just his saving grace but the common grace of God that goes out even toward those who do not know Christ and are outside of the covenant people of God Abraham's actions in Genesis chapter 20 are they're indefensible you can't defend them you can't point to them and say well it's okay because of this Abraham tries that he tries to give a weak defense to say oh but God oh but Abimelech she really is my sister she's my half sister and that's why I said that oh I was afraid because you were a godless people I was afraid because you were great sinners and I thought you would do something to me his actions are inexcusable despite all the excuses that he offers and yet and yet God is at work through foolish faithless Abraham to display his lordship over both his covenant people and those outside the covenant God is at work to show that he is lord of all and our response as followers of Christ our response as those who are within the covenant as those who have trusted in the seed of Abraham

Jesus Christ our response ought to be to say I will not like Abraham make excuses I will not like Abraham put the people around me in danger and in jeopardy but instead I will do what Abraham does at the end and what he should have done all along I will pray for those around me what if Abraham had fully trusted in God as he arrived in Gerar knowing that the people there are wicked and evil but what if he had fallen on his knees and said God you have the power so protect me from them and protect them from themselves that's exactly what God does throughout the chapter what

if Abraham at the very beginning had simply knelt and prayed and asked for that rather than having to be told by a pagan gentile king to do what's right what if he had and what if we rather than waiting for the world to point out the things that we ought to do what if we were continually on our knees praying for the world around us interceding on their behalf and calling to them that through faith in Christ they too might be incorporated into the people of God let's pray do