

99-02-21a

Let's continue our worship this morning by turning for our scripture reading to the book of Malachi. The book of Malachi. Do you remember what the title of this book means in Hebrew? The word malak, M-A-L-A-K, in Hebrew means messenger.

And you probably are beginning to recognize by now that when you see the E ending on something, malak E, that's the possessive, first person singular possessive, so this literally is my messenger. We're going to be looking closely this morning at the divine visitation to Abraham and to Lot in Genesis 18 and 19. We began last time looking closely at this party of visitors.

If we want to understand the nature of that visit, the reason for it, why God chose to appear and to make his plans known to Abraham and to effect the deliverance of Lot by this particular method, well this is a great place to begin because this book is another example of God delivering a burden or a message, delivering the word of the Lord and it speaks of judgment. You can see in the first verse of this book that it is the burden of the word of the Lord to Israel. This is a burden or an oracle, you may have a note there that says oracle.

It's the burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by malak E, by my messenger. And if you've read through this book in the past, you know that God is contravening, contradicting, showing the lie in Israel's superficial and hypocritical attitude. They believe, they claim that they are worshiping God, that they are doing things in the correct manner and this burden, this word of the Lord by his messenger says that is not so.

They are in line for judgment because of this unthinking, apathetic and hypocritical attitude toward the things of God. This is a burden of the word of the Lord to believers. Chapter 2 in particular addresses itself to the leadership in Israel.

And this is the chapter we want to read this morning. And now, O priests, this commandment is for you, chapter 2 says in Malachi. It says, first of all, the first verse of the first chapter says that this is an oracle to Israel.

Now, specifically in that audience, this is directed to the priests. These are the spiritual leadership. We saw Friday night that God has an order in creation.

He has assigned functions and responsibilities. It has nothing to do with personal value. The fact that you occupy a place of authority means nothing as far as your righteousness or your virtue, your value or your vindication.

If you want to alliterate a little bit with these there, your virtue, your value, your vindication does not rest on the position you have been assigned. It is how well you carry

out that function. So he addresses the priests.

O priests, this commandment is for you. If you will not hear and if you will not take it to heart to give glory to my name, says the Lord of hosts, I will send a curse upon you. And I will curse your blessings.

Yes, I have cursed them already because you do not take it to heart. Behold, I will rebuke your descendants and spread refuse on your faces. The refuse of your solemn feasts.

And one will take you away with it. Then you shall know that I have sent this commandment to you. That my covenant with Levi may continue, says the Lord of hosts.

My covenant was with him, one of life and peace. And I gave them to him that he might fear me. So he feared me and was reverent before my name.

The law of truth was in his mouth and injustice was not found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and equity and turned many away from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge.

And people should seek the law from his mouth. For he is the messenger, the malak, of the Lord of hosts. But you have departed from the way.

You have caused many to stumble at the law. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the Lord of hosts. Therefore I also have made you contemptible and base before all the people.

Because you have not kept my ways but have shown partiality in the law. Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another? By profaning the covenant of the fathers. Judah has dealt treacherously.

And an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the Lord's holy institution which he loves. He has married the daughter of a foreign God.

This is disloyalty. You think again about what we covered Friday night in Colossians chapter 3. Where the wife is to submit herself to the husband. The husband is to love the wife and not vent bitterness toward her.

Here in the same area of the divine order, these men have not loved their wives. The nation as a whole has committed spiritual adultery. May the Lord cut off in verse 12, the tense of Jacob, the man who does this.

Being awake and aware. They know what they are doing and they do it anyway. They justify it.

They rationalize it. They are disregarding their responsibility in the area of marriage at

the literal level. They are disregarding their responsibility to God at the spiritual level.

But they are still bringing an offering to the Lord of hosts. They don't see an incompatibility. They don't acknowledge any violation or any inconsistency.

They come before God and offer their offerings and think everything is fine. Verse 13, this is the second thing you do. You cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and crying.

So he does not regard the offering anymore, nor receive it with good will from your hands. Yet you say, for what reason? Now I would translate verse 13 when it says, so he does not. That's just the Hebrew conjunction, the letter W. And it can be translated, and, so, but, for.

And here it should not be translated so, it should be but. These men cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and crying. But he does not regard their offering anymore.

He does not receive it with good will from your hands. And you say, for what reason? This is God turning a deaf ear to prayer and supplication. They're covering the altar of God with tears.

Why? Because the Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously. Yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant. God is saying, basically, if you are not going to keep your covenants, your covenant with your wife, I am not going to keep my covenant with you.

I promise that when you came to this place, when Solomon dedicated the temple, you go back to Kings, where Solomon prays the prayer and says, Lord, when people come to this place and offer their offerings, then hear from heaven, forgive their sins, and so forth. God says, you're covering my altar with tears and weeping and crying. I'm turning a deaf ear to you because you don't keep your own covenant.

You haven't kept your covenant with your wife. You haven't paid attention to your place in the divine order. You have dealt treacherously with the wife of your youth.

Did he not make them one, in verse 15, having a remnant of the Spirit? There is something holy, there is something from God in the marriage vow. Why does he make them one? He seeks godly offspring. This is a part of the divine order.

Two believers come together in marriage, they produce offspring, and those children are to be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. They are to be taught the law of God when they rise up and when they sit down, when they are in the house and when they are out on the way. You remember those passages in Deuteronomy that we've covered before about child training.

He seeks godly offspring. Therefore, take heed to your spirit, and this refers back to the remnant of the Spirit in verse 15. This is the divine bond that exists between believers who are married.

Take heed to that spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. What he's saying there is your marriage has been sealed by the Spirit of God. When you sin against your marriage, whether it is mentally, whether it is through neglect, through apathy, through disobedience, through indifference or through outright adultery, you are sinning against the Spirit of God who seals that bond, who is the witness of that covenant.

Think about Paul talking to Timothy. He says, I charge you in the sight of God and in the sight of holy witnesses that you keep this charge. Well, God says here the Holy Spirit is the witness.

We're having a little discussion on the break Friday night about what exactly is the point where God considers two people to be married. Does he wait for the pastor to say, I now pronounce you? Is it when one or the other says, I do? Is it when they get engaged? Is it when the marriage is consummated? When does God consider two people to be married? Well, this is one of your clues. God, the Holy Spirit, is the witness.

He is the seal. He is the bond of that union. And to sin against the marriage is to sin directly against the God who seals that union, who makes the two one.

It is as though there is a life in the marriage, just like there is a physical union of two components that creates that new life, that godly offspring. Well, God makes the two one. So God, in effect, performs the marriage.

The Holy Spirit is the witness. And that remnant of the Spirit, God says, take heed to that Spirit. Let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.

And in a larger sense, this is metaphorical for the spiritual life of Israel. God says in other places that he is the husband and Israel is the wife. And there is a marriage involved there.

And in the same way that these leaders in Israel are sinning against their marriage, they are sinning against their covenant with God at the spiritual level. They are not regarding the seal that God has placed on them as his people. Verse 16, For the Lord God of Israel says that he hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts.

Therefore take heed to your spirit that you do not deal treacherously. Now, why does he bring up divorce in this context? Jesus will tell Israel in the New Testament that Moses permitted them to divorce because of hardness of heart. And when it says here that God hates divorce, he is not chiding them because they are divorcing their wives.

He is chiding them because they are creating this circumstance that causes the need for divorce. These hard-hearted individuals who sin against their marriage, who sin against God, create the need for divorce. A godly woman married to a man such as this would have to leave, would have to depart.

It breaks the marriage contract. And in the same way, God says, you have breached your covenant with me and I am going to no longer hold my side of that covenant sacred. It is a conditional covenant.

They cover their garments with violence. Take heed to your spirit that you do not deal treacherously. Verse 17, you have wearied the Lord with your words.

Yet you say, in what way have we wearied him? In that you say, everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord. We see this all around us today. We see bad ideas about Christianity, false views of what it means to live as a believer, to serve the Lord, put forward.

And people do evil. They do violence to relationships. They bait and switch.

They cultivate relationships for the purpose of mentoring and discipling. They sin against their marriage in the name of ministry. There are all kinds of things that go on today that are out of God's will.

And yet people will come and pray to God and cry and cover his altar with tears and then wonder why God does not bless, why their lives go to rack and ruin, why there is no peace in their soul, because there is no peace for the wicked. Everyone who does evil is good. Things that are wrong, things that are improper, are tolerated, are condoned.

People say God delights in this when he does not. Or they say, where is the God of justice? The idea here is that they deny the idea that God is the God of justice. They want to present God only as the God of love, as the God of forgiveness, as the God who answers prayers, as the God who is the solution to every problem and the answer to every need.

And they don't balance that side of God, which is true, with the fact that God is justice. They say, don't talk about judgment and retribution and discipline and the revoking of covenant promises from God. What is this God of justice you're talking about? Well, this is the message from the messenger.

And when you look at verse 3, Behold, I send Malachi, I send my messenger. He will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly or quickly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight.

Behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. Who can serve as a messenger? The priests are the messenger of the law. The author of this book, the prophet, who is actually

unnamed.

His title is My Messenger. His title from God. We don't know who the author of this book is.

His name from birth was not Malachi. Jesus Christ himself is a messenger. It says the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant.

The Lord himself is the messenger of the covenant. The covenant is going to be renewed and restored. Israel is going to be purged and those who have kept faith with God will receive the covenant blessings.

Who can endure the day of his coming and so forth? You listen to Handel's Messiah. A lot of people listen at Christmas time. It's great to listen to any time.

There's a great male voice that sings these verses here. He is like a refiner's fire. When you look at chapter 4 and verse 4, who else can be my messenger? Remember the law of Moses, my servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel.

Moses was Malachi in his generation with the statutes and judgments. He says in verse 5, Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers.

Otherwise, I come and strike the earth with a curse. Again, it puts us in mind of those passages in Ephesians 5 and Colossians where the relationship between parents and children and children and parents are discussed by way of exhortation. We either heed the message of God or judgment will come.

Let's turn now back to Genesis chapter 18 where we pick up once again with this extraordinary manifestation of God's presence. We noted at the beginning of chapter 18 that the Lord appeared to Abraham by the terebinth trees of Mamre. When Abraham looked at this appearance of the Lord, he saw three men.

In verse 2, he bowed himself to the ground. He addressed the central figure and said, My Lord, in the singular, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass on by. He extends hospitality.

We saw the interchange there, the length of the stay where they sit under the shade of the trees for several hours while this meal is prepared. The meat is slaughtered. The bread is baked.

The meal is consumed by these visitors. The promise of a son is reiterated. Sarah laughs.

She is overheard even though she laughs within herself. God, of course, knows the heart.

He rebukes her.

Is anything too hard for the Lord? In verse 14, at the appointed time, I will return. He repeats the promise. She says, I did not laugh because she is concerned with her own prestige, the fact that she has been rebuked.

She is being defensive. Even in the divine presence, she contradicts. One of the things, of course, that I was taught from a very early age as a child is you don't contradict your parents.

If my mother said something, I remember one time distinctly, very distinctly, one of my earliest memories where my mother said something. I don't remember even now what it was, but I remember that she said, you've done such and such. Don't do that anymore.

And I said, I did not. Of course, I had. I said, I did not.

Well, my father was home. It was at the supper table, and I was lofted to a great elevation and reminded that I was not to contradict my mother. From that time forward, that was one of the last things on my mind.

God speaks directly to Sarah through the tent flap and says, no, you did laugh. They have this old expression, don't try to teach your grandma how to suck eggs or something. Don't tell somebody who knows a whole lot more about it than you do what's what.

And she's trying to tell the Lord God what was going on in her soul, and of course He makes an emphatic and direct statement to her, you did laugh. It's important for us to acknowledge, and this is where we ended last time, it's important for us to acknowledge God speaking to us in our souls. We have the Holy Spirit who convinces, who convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment.

That's part of His ministry to us. There's been some confusion, especially in some of the teaching traditions from which many of us have come where the idea of 1 John 1, 9 and confession of sin and being in and out of fellowship, some of these things have not been accurately understood. There has been the idea put forward that when you sin, and you are quote unquote out of fellowship, that the power of the Holy Spirit is negated and departs from you and until you claim 1 John 1, 9 and confess your sins, during that period that you are out of fellowship, you are powerless.

You are exactly in the status of an unbeliever. You have no divine enablement within because God and sin cannot coexist, and while this uncleansed sin is in your soul, the Holy Spirit sort of has to exit stage left. That is absolutely and totally unbiblical.

God, the Holy Spirit, we would never be able to acknowledge our sin because we would never come under conviction. We would never be able to apply the Word of God, these

supernatural things that cannot be understood by the carnal mind. People talk about carnality and spirituality.

When you are out of fellowship, you are carnal and so forth. Well, how would you be able to apply the Word of God and identify this sin and then claim the promise of God for cleansing and confession? It is a circular argument. It is mutually exclusive.

If you are out of fellowship, how could you do these things? It is because the Holy Spirit never leaves us. There is not near as big a line between the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the seal that is placed on us at salvation, and the filling of the Spirit. People say, well, the glass is either full or empty.

He is either filling you or he is gone. That is not the case. God, the Holy Spirit, is at work in us even when we are in a period of failure, even after we have committed sin.

It is only through His enablement that we can cycle the Word of God through our souls, recognize what we have done, reach out and claim the promises and the grace of God, and be cleansed. If God, the Holy Spirit, left the first time you sinned, you would never get Him back. How could you re-enter the light? How could you claim the grace of God without the ministry of God, the Holy Spirit? Do you think that you can reach out in human strength and claim the grace of God? We cannot.

It is only through the provision of God in the Holy Spirit that we can come to salvation. It is only through the grace of God in the person of the Holy Spirit and in the presence of His Word in our soul that we can be restored to that place of walking in the light as He is in the light and having fellowship each with the other. The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, keeps on cleansing us from all sin.

Thank God the Holy Spirit does not jump ship every time we fail. We would have no power at all. So when God says, You laughed.

Why did Sarah laugh? This is the time for acknowledgement. This is the time to start thinking and trying to tune our minds to God's viewpoint, not get into denial and try to excuse or explain away or some other method of avoiding the issue. Then in verse 16, this is where we pick up this morning, The men rose from there and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on the way.

They traveled a distance. I had you look last time at the map. I assume you have maps in the back of your Bible where you can see this geography.

We know that the Oaks of Mamre are located in what would be labeled on the map as Hebron. When you look at Hebron and you find that it is well north and somewhat west of the southern area of the Dead Sea. This creates an interesting situation for us.

As I mentioned last time, if you divide the Dead Sea into thirds and you think about that

first dividing line between the first third and the second third, come down from the northern edge of the Dead Sea one third of the way and then go due west, you come across Hebron. It is probably 10 miles as the crow flies from the shore. It is about one third of the way from the western shore of the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean Sea.

It is well away up there. It is a good 40 miles from there down to the southern tip of the Dead Sea where we assume Sodom and Gomorrah used to be. They have to travel some distance.

It is possible in the Judean hills to travel a little east and south and reach a place where you can see the Dead Sea. You can see the southern tip of the Dead Sea. Sodom was a great city.

I am sure it had cooking fires and a little bit of smoke type pollution that could be viewed on the horizon. Abraham has traveled with this divine visiting party of three and they are standing on a hilltop looking to the southeast and they are gazing out over the area where Sodom is located. In verse 17, the Lord said, now if there was any doubt as to who the central visitor is, we find here in verse 17, the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation.

You get the idea that God is not addressing Abraham directly here because He is speaking of him in the third person. So who is He talking to? Well, He is talking to the two companions and this is obviously a conversation for Abraham's benefit which often takes place. There is an interesting parallel to this at the Mount of Transfiguration where Jesus appears with Moses and Elijah and they are talking together.

Well, obviously it happens at that place and at that time and in the presence of Peter, James and John for a reason. The conversation is for their benefit. We are often given brief glimpses of conversations that take place.

We saw it back when God said, Let us make man in our own image and after our likeness. We saw it in the deliberations that God recorded before the flood, before the Tower of Babel. We will find it later on in the Word of God in various places such as His conversation with Moses where He puts before Moses what He is about to do.

In the Book of Job, you have the conversation recorded between God and Satan. All of these things are written for our benefit. The New Testament explicitly states that.

So, the Lord God, in the person of this central figure, speaks to the other two companions and sort of asks them this question, Shall I hide from Abraham? Should I let Abraham in on what the plan is, on why we are here? And of course, Abraham hears this. Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing? Since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him, for I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that

they keep the way of the Lord to do righteousness and justice. Now, this is an expansion on what we saw back in chapter 17 with the idea of circumcision, isn't it? And it was implicit in that covenant statement that Abraham is righteous and he is to train up his descendants in righteousness.

That they keep the way of the Lord to do righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has spoken to him. This is a conditional covenant. He trains them to keep righteousness and justice so that God can fulfill the command.

That's what we saw in Malachi. When Israel breaks the covenant, God says the deal is off. You're not going to have the land of milk and honey.

You're not going to have blessing. You're not going to have prosperity. And each generation in Israel that failed in this way, the covenant promises are revoked.

It is astonishing to me. I still am in wonderment that in all the theology books, the Abrahamic covenant is labeled as an unconditional covenant. It's not.

And we saw last time also this idea of being known by God. It is so important for us to cultivate our relationship with God, to be known by Him, so that we can come to know Him. When we are known to God because of our righteousness, and our righteousness comes to us by faith, just as Abraham's did.

We believe the promises of God. We claim them. We live our lives in their light.

God can reveal to us what He is about to do. The key to divine guidance, the key to knowing what decisions to make and how to live in this earth and in this life is tied up with knowing God and being known by Him. That is where and how the will of God is revealed.

So we see that here. So that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has spoken to him. Now this is somewhat ironic, isn't it? This is repeated, and it has been repeated two or three times now in the course of documenting Abraham's life, that Abraham, through him, all the nations of the earth are going to be blessed.

Right? Does that include Canaan? Does that include Sodom and Gomorrah and the other cities of the plain? Abraham can be a blessing to them. That's what God has said. Through him, all the nations of the earth are going to be blessed.

You get over in the New Testament and in Adam all die, and Christ also be made alive. And people say, well, all means all. It doesn't mean just some.

It means all. Well, here God said all the nations of the earth are going to be blessed through Abraham. Sodom has already been blessed through Abraham once, hasn't it? Abraham went and rescued them and all their stuff from the coalition kings that came

down from the north and raided and took them all off captive.

And they were blessed through Abraham. But do you remember the reaction of the king of Sodom? He begrudgingly offers things to Abraham. Abraham says, I don't even want a shoelace from you because I know what you'll say.

You'll say that you enriched me. And I don't want there to be any confusion about the fact that it is God who granted this victory. So Abraham says, great, fine, go back, take your stuff with you.

But Abraham maintains separation. He doesn't take anything. He doesn't say, well, we're friends.

We're allies. It reminds me of a movie I saw one time where there's a policeman and a prisoner and they have this conversation over and over again in the movie. We're not friends.

We're not buddies. Just because we're together here, just because we've had this common experience doesn't mean there's anything between us. That's kind of what Abraham says to the king of Sodom.

Well, God said, all the nations of the earth will be blessed through Abraham. Sodom has received a blessing, right? Well, are they about to receive another blessing through Abraham? Not exactly. The Lord says in verse 20, the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great.

And because their sin is very grave, I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to me. And if not, I will know. God puts a situation before Abraham, doesn't he? God pictures himself as sitting in his temple, on his throne, wherever God's normal location is.

He pictures himself in the guise of an earthly potentate, an earthly king, who is ruling over a large domain, who can't be every place at once, who doesn't know everything at once. God pictures himself in this way and says, I have gotten intelligence reports. My minions, my subordinates, have come to me and have reported that there are awful things going on in Sodom.

There is an outcry against it. There is a cry for justice. There is a plea for an end to what's going on in this city.

It has reached a level where I am going to go see for myself. Is this in fact the actual case? Does God need to take on physical form and go down and look? Does God need to have messengers and subordinates, his reconnaissance forces, go out and bring him word of what's going on in his universe? On the one hand, you have God sitting in front of the tent flap who knows the innermost thoughts of Sarah's heart, but yet he presents

himself to Abraham as located perhaps in his throne room and receiving these reports and the outcry reaching the point where he's got to pack up and travel and see for himself. It's kind of an odd thing when you think about our view of God.

We're so immersed in the essence box of all of the omnis, sovereignty, righteousness, justice, love, eternal life, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, immutability, veracity. We think of God constantly in his all-knowingness, in his all-powerfulness. God here has to walk to get from one place to another.

He has to stop and rest. He partakes of nourishment. All of these militate against our idea of God in this absolute, infinite, and utterly unknowable form.

Why does God do this? Well, why did God do it later on in the person of Jesus Christ who emptied himself and took on the form of a servant and was tested in all points like as we are? He experienced hunger. He experienced temptation. He experienced rejection.

He experienced fatigue. He was so tired that he fell asleep in the back of the boat and one of the biggest storms that ever hit the Sea of Galilee didn't wake him up. He was wearied.

He cried. John 11.35, one of the easiest verses in the Bible to memorize, Jesus wept. He was grieved in his heart.

He stood on the hill overlooking Jerusalem and stretched out his arm and wept over it and said, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I would have gathered you under my wings like a hen gathers its chicks. This is the human side, if you will, of God and God more often in the Word presents himself in that way. Anger, joy, sorrow, compassion, the realm of emotions and impressions and reactions that we are accustomed to and God ultimately communicated himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ who embodies all the fullness of deity and we want to be careful about making God so far in the realm of other a lot of times and even in theology God is the otherness of God, how different he is from us.

The Word of God constantly brings us back to the similarity. We are created in the image of God after his likeness. As believers, and again we saw this in our Colossians study, when we put on the new man restored in knowledge, we're putting on Christ.

The new man is Christ. He is the image of God. We are restored to the image of God.

We are Christ-like. It's where our name Christian comes from. We ought to be the Christ-like ones.

The word Christian has lost so much of its force. The idea is that God is reducing himself to understandable terms on our behalf and he's putting this situation before Abraham. If God was so bent on communicating his otherness, there would just be a voice from

heaven saying stand back Abraham, I'm about to obliterate Sodom and away it would go.

God comes down in human form. He sits under the tree for hours. He partakes of a meal.

He takes a walk with Abraham. He needs to stand on top of a hill to see Sodom. It's a wonderful picture of the grace, the faithfulness, the love that God has for his people.

Look at the lengths to which God goes to face Abraham with a situation. All of this is done for Abraham's benefit. If Abraham didn't live in Mamre, if he wasn't there, this party of three would have never arrived.

There would have never been the meal, the rest under the shade, the trip to Sodom and so forth. All of this takes place for Abraham. I have known him.

It speaks to us. It just gives us an inkling of the blessings that are available and the ways that God will reveal himself to those who love him, those who are called according to his purpose. We have wonderful things in store that mind has not conceived of.

Eye has not seen. Ear has not heard. It hasn't even entered into the heart of man the things that God has for those who love him.

And you see the honor that is done to Abraham here, a personal, divine, physical visit. And then this conversation that he has. He speaks to the two companions with the knowledge and the idea that Abraham is to overhear it and respond.

God says in verse 21, I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to me. If not, I will know. So God says I'm on a fact-finding mission here.

I'm on a reconnaissance. I'm going to go look and see if I need to take action as this outcry says I do. I'm going to check the facts before I obliterate these people.

Of course, this opens up the opportunity and plants the idea in Abraham's mind that God is open to input as to what he is going to do in this situation. This is exactly what happens for us in our walk through life, our interaction with other believers. Circumstances come into view either in our own lives or in the lives of others that give us the impression that things could go one way or the other.

God has not yet made a final decision about how things are going to go. Someone has been an unbeliever and hasn't responded to the word of God for year after year, but they're still here. They haven't died.

It's not a closed issue. People face tests and challenges or they have great blessings that come into their life. There's the opportunity for progress.

There's the opportunity for distraction, not only in our periphery, but in the lives of those

around us. And it makes an issue in our soul. What are we going to say to God about these things? God puts them in our way.

These people are in our periphery for a reason. Circumstances come into our lives for a reason. It calls for a response.

And this is the main idea. If you don't remember anything else out of the middle of this chapter, God confronts Abraham to get Abraham's reaction. All of this is to place a situation before Abraham and elicit a response.

What is Abraham going to do with this knowledge? Is he going to stand back and say, That's Sodom. I've been sick of that town. Those unrighteous, ungodly sinners.

Amen, Lord. Blow them away. Oh, let me tell you what I heard, Lord.

A little caravan passed by here the other day and they were telling me the atrocities taking place in that town. I don't think you need to bother going down there. Blow it away.

How is Abraham going to respond to the knowledge that God is about to evaluate and judge that region? That's the issue. And that's the issue for us. How do we react? Are we awake and aware of the divine view of what's going on around us? What about our nation? What about the friends and the relatives and the people within our own periphery where there are issues? Do we know enough of the divine will and the divine purpose to know what God is likely to do? Do we intercede? Or are we completely self-centered and worried about our own outcomes and our own circumstances? These things are opportunities to apply the Word of God.

They are practical exercises beyond our own decisions. What can God do? What would we like to see God do? What would be an expression of God's character in these situations? That can be the content of our prayer just as it will be for Abraham here. Let's pause and take our break.

When we come back, we're going to see the dialogue, this fascinating conversation. Have you ever thought, would you have the spunk or the intestinal fortitude to actually engage the Lord God in conversation and tell Him what He ought to do? This is what we do when we pray. How is it done? That's where we'll resume when we come back.