

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Psalm 127 begins: **Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.**

Abraham and Sarah found this out when they thought to use Hagar as a surrogate mother instead of waiting on the Lord's promise and timing.

Ishmael, Abraham's son by Hagar, would not be Abraham's heir, nor the ancestor of Christ. The Lord had promised that this would be through Isaac.

Psalm 127 continues: **Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.**^[v.1]

Joseph experienced this truth when the Father sent an angel to tell him to flee with Mary and Jesus.

How would Joseph ever have assumed or even watched for King Herod's murderous plot?

The Lord was also watching over His people in the text for our meditation this morning.

Lot and his family lived in Sodom, a city of great wickedness, which God was to condemn.

Unbeknownst to Abraham, the Lord already had a plan in motion to protect Lot,

but this didn't stop God from desiring or hearing or answering Abraham's prayers on their behalf.

... We read as follows in Jesus' name:

Then the Lord said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to Me. And if not, I will know."

...Then Abraham drew near and said, "Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?...Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it." And the Lord went His way, when He had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place. ^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. ^(John 17:17)

Behold, the divine patience of God!

Abraham sets out to plead to the Lord on behalf of the city of Sodom, wicked though they were.

His request is to spare them if 50 righteous people can be found there.

Naturally, Abraham is considering his nephew Lot and his family who live in Sodom.

But as Abraham pleads, he calls it unjust for the "Judge of all the earth" to let the "righteous" (believers) suffer the same death as those God was condemning.

Of course, who is a sinful, corrupted man to make such an accusation against the perfect Judge?

If God had done such a thing, it would have been perfectly within His right to do it.

But none-the-less, the Lord acquiesces to Abraham's requests and promises not to, for the sake of those potential 50 righteous people.

Again, behold, the divine patience of God!

That He would stand there with Abraham to hear and answer no less than 6 requests, each asking for more and more of God's grace to be shown in His justice.

...If a child came to you in such a fashion, would you have such patience?

Or, after the 2nd or 3rd time, would you give them some sort of spurning remark?

If you already knew what the child was going to ask for, would you continue to let him ask?

Or would you, in self-satisfaction and/or impatience, pre-empt his requests and tell him

that you already have it taken care of... don't worry about it?

And yet, how do we see God respond to Abraham?

He listened to each prayer, and He answered each prayer willingly.

He did not grow impatient, even as Abraham thought that He might.

In fact, we even see the Lord setting Abraham up for these requests

when He warns him about Sodom's coming judgment and condemnation.

He said, "**Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do... For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice.**"

It is as if the Lord wanted Abraham to pray to Him on their behalf. And truly He did.

Here was an opportunity for Abraham to learn for himself about the severity of God's judgement against sin and so then teach His future children *to fear God's wrath and do nothing against His commandments.* (SC: Conclusion to the 10 Commandments)

But even more importantly, it was an opportunity for the Lord to teach Abraham (ibid.) about the Lord's eagerness *to show mercy upon the 1,000s who love Him and keep His commandments.*

As eager as Abraham was that the people of Sodom would be saved, God was also eager.

In fact, having Lot in that city was an opportunity for Sodom to hear of God's justice and grace as Lot sat in the gate of the city as an elder, giving judgements.

But they would not be influenced by Lot, as their response to him in Genesis 19[:9] shows.

Instead, we see how Lot let down his spiritual watch and how Sodom was influencing them.

While the angels came to rescue Lot, they finally had to physically pull him out of the city to leave. Lot's wife, longing for what they were leaving in Sodom, turned back to see the destruction, and became a pillar of salt.

Lot's daughters, influenced no doubt by the morally debased corruption they had grown up with, plotted and carried out incestuous trysts with their father.

By destroying Sodom and Gomorrah, the Lord was protecting other people.

By doing so, He immediately stopped the wickedness happening in those cities at that time.

He also stopped the immediate spread of their offensive injustice and debauchery to others, as we see happening even in our day as people become more bold and defiant in their sin.

But also, by having this lesson recorded in Scripture, He has warned His faithful people to keep watch over their souls and their lives from such shameful sin and vice.

Sometimes the Lord's protection is worked completely on His own,

such as when He told Joseph to flee to Egypt to protect Jesus from dying under Herod's hand.

Such as when He promised and sent His Son to earth to take on human flesh and blood so that He could suffer and die for the sins of the whole world.

God does not need our prayers in order to act, as if we can manipulate Him.

Adam and Eve did not request a Savior. God simply promised and acted to protect His creation.

But this does not mean that God does not desire or nor command us to pray.

In fact, through prayer, He invites us to take part in the protection that He gives and administers for His Church and even the world.

Like with Abraham, He promises to hear our prayers and willingly responds to them. Through difficulties and trials, whether directly in our own life, or in the lives of others, He even sets us up for opportunities to pray to Him, trusting that He will do what is best, what is just, right, and gracious for the good of His house, His people. And so He has put each of us in our specific places in life, in the specific circumstances in life, whether we would consider them good, bad or difficult, *to pray for ourselves and on behalf of others*, our classmates, our co-workers, our family members, congregation and community members, *those things that are necessary for our life and salvation*.

But it often happens that we neglect these opportunities. We fail to pray and take part in God's protecting hand. We try to save ourselves or be the savior of others in times of trouble. We fail to love our neighbors and to bring their needs and their burdens before the one true God. Sometimes this failure is because our love has grown cold toward a certain person or people. They have wronged us. They hate us. They have hurt those we love. We see them, as Abraham easily could have seen the Sodomites, as worthless wretches, so enslaved to their sins that we, in our finite and corrupted will deem them beyond salvation. And yet, Jesus commands us to **love your enemies, and pray for those that persecute you.** ^{Mt.5:44}

But He not only commanded, He also fulfilled His own commands. When Jesus walked this earth, He prayed constantly and fervently to His Father. Of all people, God Himself, He would not have needed to but what do we find Him doing? He prayed at His Baptism, before the sermon on the Mount, before calling His disciples, before the feeding of the 4 and 5 thousands. We even hear Him teaching His disciples (and us) to pray "**Our Father, who art in heaven...**" and thus uniting our prayer with His intercessions for us at the right hand of God. And we see Him praying before and during His passion and crucifixion, prayers for His disciples, for you, who would believe His Word through them, even in love for His enemies as He begs for their forgiveness as He dies on the cross to earn it.

Jesus, in His perfect knowledge, justice, and mercy did not consider you beyond salvation, but through the prayers and work of others has sent His Holy Spirit to you to bring you to repentance, to Baptism, to life, and to salvation. Your sins, too, separated you from God, as Abraham's did, as Lot's did, as Sodom's did. By His prayers, Jesus has asked for and received the forgiveness of your cold, loveless ways and neglect in His gracious gift of prayer. God now protects you from eternal death through the atoning death of His Son, Jesus Christ. He gives you protection from the power of the devil and this evil world by Jesus' righteous life.

And what is more, the Holy Spirit watches over you and gathers you into His Church by baptism to protect your faith so that the world may not unduly influence you away from Christ. In the Church, He also unites your prayers with Christ's as the Church prays for the good and welfare of all people: For the Church herself, her ministers, even for her enemies, for our country and government, for the widows and orphans, those in need, distress, and persecutions. And as we pray, *Lord, have mercy*, throughout the Divine Service, we're forming the habit of prayer,

learning who to pray for, and acquiring the language that God Himself has taught us to pray. You are also learning to gain a heart of wisdom and love as you first receive Christ's love and then respond to that love in kind, desiring others around you to benefit from it as well. You are taking part in His divine protection of your neighbors, praying for them, as well as growing in your desire to be used by God to protect them, body and soul, from sin and its accompanying guilt, and from eternal damnation.

Let us pray: Dear Father in heaven, who bids us to pray in our need and promises to protect us from all harm and danger, forgive our neglect and thoughtlessness in prayer, forgive our lovelessness toward our neighbors. In Christ, wash away these sins of ours and teach us by Your own love for us in Christ to love, serve, and pray for those around us, that they may come under Your gracious forgiveness and protection and at last obtain Your eternal inheritance with us and all the faithful, through time and eternity. In Christ's name we pray. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria