

A Friend of God

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- [0 : 00] If you've got a Bible, please keep it open at Genesis chapter 18. We're going to work through that chapter together just now. Having friends in life, I think it's one of the best things that we can enjoy.
- It's good fun to have friends, people in your life that have chosen to be a part of your life. People who have chosen to stay in your life, to care about you.
- And when people call you their friend, there's something nice about that, something heartwarming about it. I find it quite special when someone introduces me to someone else and says, this is my friend, James.
- Maybe that's because I've not got many friends, it just feels nice. But I think there is something nice about that. Maybe there's people in your head you're thinking about, friends, close friends, just now. Just people you're glad that you're friends with.
- People you're glad to have in your life. As we think about friendship, there is one person in the Old Testament who was known as the friend of God.
- [1 : 07] That's a special term, the friend of God. And that man was Abraham. He was known as God's friend. In Isaiah chapter 41, there the Lord himself is speaking.
- In verse 8, he says, But you, Israel, my servant Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend.
- And God speaks of Abraham. And he says, my friend. It's an incredible thought. The creator of the entire universe calls Abraham his friend.
- Now, Abraham, if you've been here with us, even just this far into the series, you'll know that Abraham wasn't a perfect man. Abraham was a man who struggled with doubts, with fears.
- He was a man who messed up time and again. And yet, that very man was known as the friend of God.
- [2 : 18] There's a lot going on in that chapter. There's a long chapter. But I think at the heart of what's going on is this close, intimate friendship between the Lord and Abraham.
- And what that friendship was like. If you were here last week, Ali was preaching from Genesis 17. It was all about God's covenant with Abraham. Where he promised to be Abraham's God.
- And that he'd be the God of Abraham's descendants. And put really simply, the result, the outworking of that covenant was to be for a genuine relationship. A real friendship between God and Abraham and his descendants.
- And so it makes sense then that the following chapter, straight after that, we see that outworking of the covenant as Abraham in this chapter so clearly enjoys his friendship with the Lord.
- I'm going to work through the chapter in three sections. And we're going to focus on this idea of friendship with the Lord. And so firstly, in the first eight verses, we see that the Lord draws near to his friends.

- [3 : 29] The Lord draws near to his friends. The chapter, it opens, telling us that the Lord appeared to Abraham. While he was sitting at the entrance of his tent.
- Then as Abraham looked up, he saw three men standing nearby. And the narrative goes on to make clear that these three men, they're in fact the Lord himself and two angels.
- We read in verse 22 that the men went towards Sodom, but the Lord remained with Abraham. And then in chapter 19, verse 1, those men that headed towards Sodom, they are referred to there as two angels who then arrived in Sodom.
- There's a lot of debate, you can imagine, discussion around all of that and what's going on. But I think the Bible is really clear here that in some way, the Lord visited his friend Abraham.
- He drew near to him. If we look on to verse 10, it makes it abundantly clear that the third man was the Lord himself.
- [4 : 42] As it tells us that the Lord began speaking to Abraham. And the word there for Lord is in capital, which means it's God's personal covenant name that's used, Yahweh.
- The Lord himself has drawn near to Abraham. And as you would expect from any good friend, Abraham gives a kind welcome.
- He offers the finest hospitality. That gives the impression that he's delighted to welcome him, welcome these men to his home. It's not a bother.
- It's not a hassle. He's not overly fast that he's been interrupted from his midday siesta. I'm sure we can relate to that. Imagine that friend you thought of at the start turns up at your door.
- You dearly love them. You're delighted by their arrival. You're glad to see them. You invite them in. You ask them to stay for dinner. You offer them somewhere to sleep for the night if they need it.
- [5 : 47] Showing hospitality to a true friend. It's a delight. It's not a hassle. So we see here Abraham delighting to show good hospitality to the Lord, to his friend.
- Now he brings water out so that they can wash their feet. He gets them into the shade or away from the beating sun. He tells them that you'll go and get them food.
- And he doesn't just go into the house and grab whatever is lying about. He doesn't try and get something quick and easy. He gives them the full treatment. Speaks to Sarah.
- He says, bake cakes. He goes and selects his choice calf. He gets his servant to prepare it. He brings it out with curds and milk and the calf.
- No half measures from Abraham here. He knows how to show hospitality to his friends. Then he stands by them as they eat.
- [6 : 46] And I think here there's something reminiscent in these verses of Genesis chapter 2. Remember, but before the fall, that close, untainted relationship between man and God.
- Where God walked and talked with them. But we see again here, not perfectly. Still, the world is tainted by sin. But we do see, I think, something reminiscent of that relationship between man and God.
- As the Lord draws near to his friend. This covenant leads to friendship with the Lord. And it shows us so much of what the Lord himself is like.
- He doesn't want to be a God who is far off. Who is uninvolved in our lives. He wants to draw near to his friends.
- We know that to be true. Because he's kept his promises. And although it was only Abraham who was known in the Old Testament as the friend of God. Well, God now calls each of us.

[7 : 52] His friends. Everyone who has trusted in the Lord Jesus for forgiveness. God looks at us. And God sees a friend.

He draws near to us by the work of his spirit. And by the transforming work of his spirit. That we seek then to keep God's commandments. As a response to God's saving work in our lives.

And what does John 15 verse 14 say about that? Well, Jesus says there that you are my friends if you do what I command you. As we respond to the saving work of Jesus.

By trusting in it and in him. We desire to live how he commands. And he says that that makes us his friends. If we truly love Jesus.

You read in verse John 14 verse 23. That him and the father they will come. And they will make their home with us. They will draw near to their friends.

[9 : 03] Not because of us. But because of him. Because of what he has done. To make this friendship possible for us. The Lord himself draws near to his friends.

And now secondly. The Lord reassures his friends. That's verse 9 through to verse 15. The Lord reassures his friends.

We've had this promise reaffirmed already. Of Sarah who will bear a son. And through whom the line of blessing.

The line of promise is going to continue. And here in these verses. God again reminds Abraham of that great promise.

Many years. They've passed since God first made that promise. But God himself. He never forgets his promises. And he never fails to keep his promises.

[10 : 08] And here. He reassures Abraham and Sarah. That this promise. It will come to fruition. God says that Sarah is in fact going to conceive.

Very soon. Verse 10. Then the Lord said. I will surely return to you. About this time next year. And Sarah your wife. Will have a son.

God says. The waiting. Is over. The time has now come. You're going to have this son. But the reality was.

That for Sarah to bear a child. It was impossible. She was past the age of childbearing. And some commentators at this point.

They're pretty harsh on Sarah here. We read that Sarah laughs to herself. As she overhears what the Lord says to Abraham. Perhaps she did lack faith.

[11 : 14] Perhaps she was doubting. But this is a woman. Who has longed. For decades.

To have. A child. I think we can understand. Her struggle here. I think we can understand. Her laughing.

And disbelief. I think we can almost hear pain. In that laugh. She then goes on. She tries to deny.

Having laughed. She's embarrassed. She's afraid. But the Lord. I think deals kindly. With Sarah here. And so I think that we should.

As well. Although she. She laughed to herself. And thought to herself. That it wasn't possible. The Lord. He heard her thoughts.

[12 : 11] And he questioned Abraham. About them. And this here. This really is the Lord. Being near. To his friend. And reassuring. His friend.

And here's where we see. His kindness to Sarah. And the powerful reassurance. That the Lord gives. To his friends. Rather than simply rebuking her. The Lord says.

Verse 14. Is anything. Too hard. For the Lord. I will return. To you. At the appointed time.

Next year. And Sarah will have. A son. The Lord reassures.! Them. Of who he is. He is the Lord.

He is the maker of heaven. And of earth. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Is too hard. For him. Sarah. In one sense. Is.

[13 : 06] Is right. To laugh. Humanly speaking. It was impossible. But the Lord. Reassures. It is him.

Who will miraculously. Bring about. This child. The Lord says. Trust me. When I return. At the appointed time.

You will. Have a son. You will have a son. Sometimes. The Lord's promises. Can be hard. To believe.

They can seem. So unlikely. From a human perspective. As was the case here. And yet he does keep this promise. But I wonder if some of us.

Can relate to. To Sarah here. As she doubted. God's promise to her. For. And I know I can relate. To that. Some people.

[14 : 01] Laugh. Think of the promise. That God can. Forgive. Even the most wicked. Offender. If they trust in Jesus. People laugh at that. Reality. I don't actually laugh at that.

I believe that. I rejoice. In that truth. But at the same time. There's been so many occasions. In my own life. When I've stopped.

And I've looked at my own heart. When I've stopped. And I've reflected on things. That I've done. Things that I've said.

Things that I've thought. And I've been driven. To think. There's no way. The Lord. Could forgive me.

There's no way. And I don't imagine. That I'll be the only person. That struggled. To trust that promise. At times. And so if.

[15 : 00] If you're like me. If you have struggled with that. If you do at times. Struggle with that reality. With doubts. With thoughts like that. Well then to us. The Lord himself.

Whispers. Quietly. Into our ears. Is. Anything. Too hard. For the Lord. He is there.

To reassure. His people. Of. His promises. Is anything. Too hard. For the Lord. He reassures us.

His friends. Because he loves us. And all. Through the scriptures. We find. Reminders. We find. Encouragements. That he forgives.

To the uttermost. That our friendship. With him. Is. Is completely. Secure. And that nothing. That we have done. Nothing. That we have thought.

[15 : 53] Nothing. That we have said. Will ever. And could ever. Separate us. Could ever. Ruin that friendship. That has been secured. Through Christ.

Christ. The Lord. Draws near. To his friends. The Lord. Reassures. His friends. And now. Thirdly.

And finally. Here. We see. The Lord. Listens. To his friends. Verse 16. Through. To verse 33. The Lord.

Listens. To his friends. This section. Here. Begins. With Abraham's. Visitors. Leaving. And he walks. With them.

And the Lord. Affirms. That Abraham. Will be a great. And powerful. Nation. Through whom. All nations of the earth. Will be blessed. And God.

[16 : 49] Then. In verse 20. And 21. Speaks of Sodom. And Gomorrah. He speaks of. Of their awful sin. And he says. That he will go. And he'll see. If things are as bad.

As the outcry. That he has heard. That has come to him. And now. Of course. The Lord. Knew exactly. How bad things were. He wasn't going to just go.

And try and check things out. He knew. But I think. By saying this. He. He's inviting. Abraham. To speak. He's inviting. Abraham. To respond.

That's why. The two others. Go on their way. Towards Sodom. First. But the Lord. The Lord. Stays. With Abraham. The Lord. Stays. And listens. To his friend.

Abraham. We see here. I think. That God. Himself. He enjoys. To interact. With his friends. To hear. From his friends. And so.

[17 : 43] Abraham. Responds. By saying. In verse 23 and 24. Will you sweep away. The righteous. With the wicked. What if there are.

50 righteous people. In the city. Will you really. Sweep it away. And not spare the place. For the sake of. 50 righteous people.

In it. Which then leads. To Abraham saying. Will not the judge. Of all the earth. Do right. It's a bold statement.

From Abraham. But I think it demonstrates. The way that he cares. For those. In the city. Of course. Abraham's nephew. Lot.

Was in the city. And. We could say. That he. He had a. Vested interest. But he doesn't specify. That he wants. Lot. And his family.

[18 : 35] To be saved. He pleads. On behalf. Of the entire city. The whole city. He. He intercedes. On behalf. Of them.

In a sense. Abraham. Plays the role. Of a priest here. Going between. God. And the people. Interceding. Praying. For them. And for their good.

And God. Listens. To his friend. And he confirms. In verse 26. For the sake of. 50 righteous. He will spare. The whole city.

But Abraham's not. He's not satisfied. Yet. He speaks up again. Here we see. Abraham's humility. He says in verse 27. That he's only dust. And ashes. Yet he's bold.

He's bold to speak up. And he pleads. Pleads again. On behalf. Of Sodom. What if there was. Five lacking. From the 50 righteous. Will you destroy the city.

[19 : 33] For the sake. Of it lacking five. And then this. This pattern. It continues. That Abraham. Says. What about 40 righteous. And God says.

For the sake of 40. I'll not do it. Then he says. What about 30 righteous. God says. If I find 30 there. I will not do it. Abraham says. What about 20.

For the sake of 20. I will not destroy it. Then Abraham. Pleads permission. To speak. Just one more time. Asking. What if only 10.

Righteous. Can be found. And the Lord. Says. For the sake of 10. I will not. Destroy it. We'll come to. Chapter 19.

Next week. And we'll see how. How all of this. Plays out. But for now. We're going to stay in chapter 18. We're going to think about. These verses. There's. There's a principle.

[20 : 27] Being set out. In these verses. Through Abraham's. Intercession. Intercession. We are seeing. That the presence. Of the righteous.

Can. In some way. Shield. The wicked. From the judgment. Of the Lord. We're seeing. That in some way. The righteous.

Being present. Can shield. The wicked. From the judgment. Of the Lord. The logic. Of. Abraham's.

Intercession. If it continues. The way it was going. It's. It's. Pointing. In the direction. That if it got down. To one. Righteous. Would the Lord. Have spared the city. It implies.

That he would have. But the principle. Stands regardless. Based on the righteousness. Of another. The wicked. Can be shielded. From the Lord's judgment.

[21 : 23] And it's a principle. That is. That is filled out. Much more fully. Throughout. The rest. Of scripture. And although. These. These verses. Here. Perhaps.

Quietly. Whisper. That great truth. It is a truth. That is eventually. Not whispered. But it's a truth. That from the cross. Of Calvary.

Is shouted. Is. Is exclaimed. It's a truth. There. That is. That is seen. In all of its. Glory. As the son of man. As he who knew.

No sin. The righteous. Became sin. On behalf. Of the wicked. The one. Righteous man. Who. Who shields. Us.

The wicked. From the wrath. Of God. The one. Through whom. We can become. Friends. With. The living God. As we receive. The righteousness. Of Christ. In place.

[22 : 18] Of our filthy. Racks. That. That is what. These verses. Here. Are. Are pointing. Towards. The righteous one. The shield.

For the wicked. Jesus Christ. Our great. High priest. Not only. Does he offer. His life. In place of ours. Not only.

Does he shield us. From the judgment. That we deserve. But he's now. At the right hand. Of the father. He is there. Interceding.

On our behalf. For our good. How encouraging. Is it. In this life. When we hear. That. That friends. Are praying.

For us. Where we're struggling. Where we're going through. A tough time. A hard time. It encourages us. To know that. Then it has to be. All the more encouraging.

[23 : 12] To know that. Jesus Christ. The friend. Of sinners. Is pleading. On our behalf. Is speaking. Our name.

Into the father's ear. Seeking. Our good. And just as the Lord. Listens to Abraham here. Just as he listens.

To Jesus. As he pleads. On our behalf. We are told. That we too. Are like priests. Because of our faith. In Christ. And so the Lord.

Also listens. To us. And so I think. This question. As well. Has been an amazing. Encouragement. This pastor. Sorry. As well. As being an amazing. Encouragement.

It also. Challenges us. It questions us. Do we plead. Like Abraham. For those. That we know.

[24 : 05] Are not able. Yet to call themselves. Friends. Of God. Do we bear. Their names up. Boldly. Before the living God. Or do we say.

In our hearts. They'll never trust. In Jesus. Do we say. I've prayed for them. For years. For decades. It's never going to happen.

There's no point. Well if we say. Those things. In our hearts. If we have those doubts. In our hearts. The Lord says again. To us.

Is anything. Too hard. For the Lord. Is anything. Too hard. For the Lord. The Lord draws near.

To his friends. The Lord reassures. His friends. And the Lord. Listens. To his friends. I'm just going to finish by.

[25 : 07] Telling a story. That my old minister. Used to. Often tell. I wish I'd listened more. Carefully. Because I was kind of. Little bits of it. I can't quite remember.

But. You get the gist of it. I think it's really helpful. On the back of. Of what we're thinking about. This morning. The story. Goes. That.

Many years ago. There was a Persian. Ruler. Who had a custom. That he would. Strip himself. Strip himself. Of all of his royal ropes. All of his royal. Attire.

And he would dress. Like everyone else. So he could then. Walk around the place. Going. Completely unnoticed. No one would be able. To recognize. That it was this. Great ruler.

And he would go about. Speaking. To different people. As though he was just. An average guy. And one time. He came across. The man. Whose job it was. To look after. The fire.

[26 : 02] And as he approached them. The man was busy. Stoking the fire. And they began to speak. And over time. The two of them. They grew. They grew closer. And closer.

Even to the point. That this man. Invited the great ruler. To his home. He ate. With his family. Spent time. Got to know. The man's family. And the ruler.

He appreciated. This man's kindness. So much. And eventually. The ruler. Came clean. He said to the man. Who he was. He revealed. His true.

Identity. And because he loved. This man so much. He said that he would. Give him. Anything that he wanted. Ask for it. And it will be yours. Just had to name it. And the man.

Responded. To this. Lavish. Offer. From the ruler. Saying. Saying. May you give. To others. The gift.

[26 : 58] Of fame. And fortune. But for me. I ask. That you never. Take away. Your greatest gift.

The friendship. That you. Have given me. Through Jesus. Through Jesus. We have. An everlasting.

Friendship. With the living God. A friendship. That is far more precious. Any fame. Any fortune. That this world.

Can offer. It's the greatest gift. That we will ever receive. And the great. Promise keeper. Assures us. That it's a gift. That we cannot lose.

If we trust in Jesus. We are friends. With the living God. Today. Tomorrow. And forever. Let's pray.

[27 : 56] Together. As we rejoice. In that great truth. Father God. We. Give you thanks. For.

Your kindness. To us. Your people. We give you thanks. That. Though we. Don't deserve. This relationship. This friendship.

With you. You were not satisfied. To be a God. Who was far off. From his people. But you. Came near. In the person. Of your son. Our Lord Jesus. And that it's through him.

And through his work. That. We are able to be friends. With you again. We are able to be known as. Friends. Of God. We thank you. For the example.

That Abraham. Sets to us. And we thank you. For the encouragement. It is to read of him. And his life. And we thank you. For the way this chapter. Most of all. Points to our Lord Jesus.

[28 : 51] To the one. Who was righteous. To the one. Who is able to shield the wicked. From the wrath. That they deserve. We pray you'd help us.

To trust completely. And wholeheartedly. In that reality. But also. To desire. To see many others. Come to know that truth. In their lives as well.

Help us. To have confidence. Help us. When we doubt. To remember. That encouragement. That reassurance. That you gave. To Sarah. And to Abraham. Is anything.

Too hard. For the Lord. We thank you. That it's not. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen.