

GENESIS 18:16-19:38

WHERE WICKEDNESS RULES

This is the familiar story of God's judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah. As I began preparing this lesson something besides God's judgment jumped out at me. I would like to focus today's lesson on that. It is the contrast between two different men whom the Bible calls "righteous." They were both God-fearers, but otherwise were quite different. The two men are Abraham and Lot. We know from the lesson two weeks ago that Abraham was reckoned as, was counted as, was considered to be righteous by God because he believed God (Genesis 15:6). As for Lot, he does not come out looking very good in our lesson today. Yet Peter calls Lot "righteous" in 2 Peter 2:7.

- "just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked" (KJV)
- "righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked" (ESV)
- "righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men" (NASB)
- "Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless" (NIV)

Abraham and Lot had the same family ties that went back to their days living in Ur of the Chaldees. Lot's father, Haran, who was Abraham's brother, died. So Lot went to live with his uncle Abraham. When God called Abraham to move to a land that He would show him, being a part of Abraham's family, Lot moved with him. They sojourned together. They shared the same family business of raising livestock. The two men were close. God blessed both Abraham and Lot with a large number of flocks, herds and tents (Genesis 13:5-6). Because their possessions were so great they could not go on living side by side. So, for practical reasons, there came a time when they had to go their separate ways.

There is this scene where Abraham and Lot are standing up on a mountain looking out over the land. Lot looks out toward the Jordan River

valley with the highlands of the Transjordan in the background. There is this lush green area. Then you look back toward Hebron and the Negev where the grasslands are. They are overlooking the whole panoramic scene and Abraham says, "Lot you choose. If you go west, I'll go east. If you go east, then I will go west."

Genesis 13:10 says, "Lot looked up and saw..." He viewed the lush, green, well-watered Jordan River valley and saw how good that land looked and so he chose to head east toward the green valley. Abraham headed west toward Hebron. Genesis 13:12 says that Lot pitched his tents next to Sodom. And that same passage tells us that, even back then, Sodom was extremely wicked.

In Genesis Chapter 14 some rogue kings banded together and they passed through the region and took all the possessions and food from Sodom and Gomorrah. They captured some of the people of Sodom including Lot and his family and headed north. When Abraham was told what happened to his nephew and the people, he mobilized 318 of his trained servants and went after them to rescue them. Abraham in fairly short order defeated the kings and took back all the people and possessions, including Lot and his family.

As Abraham returned home victorious, he was greeted by a priest of the Most High God, Melchizedek. The priest recognized that God's hand was upon Abraham and he blessed him: "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" Abraham responded by worshipping God. And standing there that wonderful day were the king of Sodom and many of that city's residents whom Abraham had rescued. These Sodomites had witnessed first-hand what Abraham's God could do and they knew that God had blessed Abraham. So it is not like they had never heard of the one true God. They had!

What I found interesting while I was studying this lesson and what is almost overlooked in this story is the little phrase in Genesis 14:12 "for Lot

was living in Sodom.” Just one chapter earlier, after Lot had parted ways with Abraham, the Bible says that Lot “set up his tents near Sodom.” So apparently in the meantime Lot sold all his flocks and had moved into the city where he was living fat and happy. What you need to see is that it didn’t take Lot and his family long at all, once they left Abraham’s godly influence, to become attached to the material things of the world, the garbage of the wicked city of Sodom.

First John 2:16 reminds us about the things this world has to offer: “For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.” If we are not careful the pull of this world, like a dangerous riptide, will pull us further and further away from God.

Three messengers from God, identified in the text as “men” appear to Abraham in Genesis Chapter 18. He is sitting in his tent by the oaks of Mamre near Hebron. This is the same place where later Abraham would buy a cave to bury Sarah. Abraham recognizes them as being from God and he runs to meet them and bows himself to the earth. They accept Abraham’s invitation to dine with him. Abraham prepares a feast and they eat. The men confirm to Abraham that he and Sarah are going to have a baby within one year. Sarah overhears them and she laughs to herself. One of the men confronts Sarah about her laughing and asks her, “Is anything too hard for the LORD?” (Genesis 18:14).

READ Genesis 18:16-19

Notice the close communication that God has with Abraham. It is not God’s messengers that tell Abraham about what is going to happen to Sodom. It is God Himself. Why does God tell Abraham? Because of who Abraham is – the father of a great nation who will teach righteousness and justice to his descendants. He is God’s man. He knew if Abraham knew about His plan to destroy Sodom that Abraham would intercede for his nephew Lot and his family because he cared. So God tells him...

READ Genesis 18:20-21

What was the outcry? Who did it come from? It came from the victims of rape, incest and other horrible crimes that were being committed. God knows what is going on. There are no secret sins in Sodom or anywhere else.

READ Genesis 18:22-33

Abraham appeals to God's justice to relent from destroying these cities for the sake of a righteous few. Abraham implores God on behalf of Lot and a remnant of the righteous who may be living there. That was the heart of Abraham. Notice Abraham's boldness, yet his reverent attitude as He speaks to God. It's no wonder Abraham is called a friend of God in James 2:23 ("God called Abraham His friend") and in Isaiah 41:8 ("My friend Abraham").

Well, we all know the rest of the story from this chapter. As it turns out there are not even 10 righteous people in that whole city, are there? No, not even 10! One website I looked at while preparing this lesson [www.accuracyingenesis.com] claims the estimated population of Sodom at the time of destruction was between 600-1200 people. We don't really know but that's probably a reasonable guess. The fact that God could not find just 10 righteous people out of a population of 600-plus gives you an idea of the rampant evil being practiced by all of Sodom's adult citizens. No wonder the name Sodom has become synonymous with unnatural sexual sins. It was a terribly evil place – it was no place for someone like Lot, a supposed God fearer, to be raising his family!

READ Genesis 19:1

Notice where Lot is seated when the two men approach. By the way, now we are told that they are angels. Lot is sitting in the gate of Sodom. John Phillips in his commentary on Genesis conjectures that Lot has become one of the city's high officials. He has risen to prominence. Lot rises to meet the angels and bows. Like Abraham, he recognizes they are

messengers from God, but unlike Abraham, Lot does not appear eager to hear from them.

READ Genesis 19:2-4

Notice that the messengers from God initially turn down Lot's invitation to come stay with him in his house. Contrast that with their willingness to accept Abraham's invitation to stay for a little while with him. "What fellowship has light with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14). Only after Lot presses them strongly, knowing the great danger they would be in outside at night, do they agree to enter his house. But soon here comes the reprobate mob...

READ Genesis 19:5-8

The ESV states with political correctness so as not to offend its readers what the mob's intention was – the NASB gives it to us straight: "Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them." These were homosexuals who intended to gang rape Lot's visitors. That is sick! Notice how Lot responds to these deviant thugs. Like a politician he calls them "my brothers." What? Brothers? And then, instead of telling them to go home, that what they are doing is wrong, try to reason with them, Lot...it's almost unimaginable...offers his own two daughters as a substitute for their lustful actions. "Do with them as you please." What a loving father! Contrast Lot's relationship with his two daughters with Abraham's relationship with Ishmael and later Isaac (wanting the best for them). His action shows how far Lot, a believer, has slipped morally. Unfortunately the world far too often influences Christians to become more like them than we influence them to become more like Christ. Anyway the situation only gets worse...

READ Genesis 19:9-12

Only divine intervention spares Lot from personal disaster. Notice how little they respect Lot when they don't get what they want from him. By the way, the world will put their arm around you and call you their friend until

you don't do things their way and play by their rules – then you become expendable, nothing to them.

READ Genesis 19:13-16

The angels tell Lot about God's plan to destroy Sodom. Lot urges his sons in law to leave but – that God was going to destroy Sodom – but Lot had no credibility with them. A Christian who lives like the world has effectively lost their witness. Notice the apparent affection Lot and his family have for this wicked place. Lot lingers and he, his wife and his two daughters have to be forcibly led out of the city by the messengers of God! God is merciful even as they fight Him and His plan.

READ Genesis 19:17-21

OK, your life and your family's life has just been spared. Why not just do what the angels, the messengers of God have just told you to do? But no, not Lot. He argues. He wants to do things his way! His reasoning makes absolutely no sense. Does Lot really believe that God would spare his and his family's life just to have him killed in the mountains? Really, Lot? Is your idea of God that twisted? God, however, shows Lot grace and grants his request to go to that little insignificant city. Contrast Lot's unwillingness to follow God's direction and trust Him with Abraham's obedience. Every time Abraham received direction from God, he believed and obeyed without argument.

READ Genesis 19:22-26

The name Zoar means "insignificant." How appropriate it is that Lot's desire is to head toward that which is insignificant rather than to the place God told him to go. In the process, however, the entire city of Zoar is spared from the destruction that befalls Sodom and Gomorrah! We conclude then that God spared that entire city for the sake of 4 righteous people (Lot and his family).

Let's talk about what happened to Lot's wife. What happened to her serves as a warning to those whose heart is divided between this world and God. In Luke Chapter 17 Jesus teaches that we cannot have divided loyalties. We either choose to follow Him or to follow after this world. You cannot do both. Jesus says, "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32). She looked longingly back toward the garbage heap of Sodom rather than looking ahead with eager anticipation at the bright future, the blessing, that could have been hers as a follower of God. She received a curse rather than a blessing!

READ Genesis 19:27-38

As we see things do not end well for Lot and his daughters. Lot, instead of being part of the Abrahamic Covenant – a great nation with a land promise and a blessing to the world – instead, he becomes the father of the Ammonites and Moabites. What a tragedy!

One application from this lesson: God's promise to Abraham and his descendants to make them a great nation with a promising future was unconditional. Likewise, when we accept Christ, God's promises to secure us, give us the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, and the hope of heaven, are unconditional. His plans and purposes will not be thwarted. However, sadly, we will not realize all the blessings that could be ours in Christ as long as we live in willful disobedient to Him. God must deal with our rebellion as a loving father deals with His disobedient children. Eternally secure, yes, but not enjoying all that could be ours in Christ. That is the contrast before us in the lives of Abraham and Lot.