

We are walking through the book of Genesis, and last week we noted that the two angels accompanying the LORD in Genesis 18 had departed to inspect the situation down in the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Following their departure, Abraham intercedes on behalf of even ten righteous people who might remain in that region, and after the LORD concedes that He would spare the cities if even ten righteous souls remained, the LORD departed from Abraham. Let us return now to the narrative as we stand and read together, Genesis 19:1-11:

The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed himself with his face to the earth <sup>2</sup> and said, "My lords, please turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night and wash your feet. Then you may rise up early and go on your way." They said, "No; we will spend the night in the town square." <sup>3</sup> But he pressed them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house. And he made them a feast and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. <sup>4</sup> But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house. <sup>5</sup> And they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them." <sup>6</sup> Lot went out to the men at the entrance, shut the door after him, <sup>7</sup> and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. <sup>8</sup> Behold, I have two daughters who have not known any man. Let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please. Only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof." <sup>9</sup> But they said, "Stand back!" And they said, "This fellow came to sojourn, and he has become the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them." Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and drew near to break the door down. <sup>10</sup> But the men reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them and shut the door. <sup>11</sup> And they struck with blindness the men who were at the entrance of the house, both small and great, so that they wore themselves out groping for the door.

This is a hard story, and there is a lot for us to consider. In fact, we will devote two messages to this story in Genesis 19 because there is simply more here than we can cover in one setting. Hence, my message will fall under three subheadings: 1) 'Righteous' Lot; 2) Contextual Righteousness; 3) Saved By Grace.

### **I. 'Righteous' Lot**

Let me ask you a question: Having just read this story about Lot and the Sodomites, what is your take on Lot? Is this a man who strikes you as particularly 'righteous?' It's easy for us to judge Lot, especially when he offers us up his two virgin daughters to a lustful mob. However, lest we think we are somehow superior to Lot, we must acknowledge that the Apostle Peter three times refers to Lot as "righteous" in 2 Peter 7-9 where he writes: "And if He rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials..."

The fact that Peter three times refers to Lot as "righteous" requires us to look a little deeper into Lot's life and context.

Remember that Lot is Abraham's nephew, the only son of Abraham's brother Haran, who apparently died shortly after Lot was born. Thus, Lot was essentially raised by Abraham and Sarah, and Lot was with Abraham and Sarah for many years following Abraham's call from God to leave their homeland and travel into the land of Canaan.

We should assume, then, that Abraham's influence was foundational in Lot's life through his early adult years, but then we come to Genesis 13. If you recall, following their time in Egypt, both men acquired great herds of sheep and cattle, so their wealth required them to part ways. At the time, Abraham demonstrated tremendous grace to give Lot the first pick of land in

any direction, and it was then that Lot revealed his lust for ‘more.’ Lot chooses to move his assets and relocate his life to the Jordan valley, and specifically to pitch his tent just outside the “sin city” of the ancient world known as Sodom. Remember, we learned then in 13:13 that “the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the LORD.” Later, in 14:12, we learn that Lot moved into Sodom and was dwelling within the city. And as we look to our narrative this morning, we learn in 19:1 that Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom when the two angels arrive into town.

Note the specific descriptions of Lot’s relationship with Sodom. These subtleties would not have been lost on an ancient audience. “Righteous Lot” thought that he could benefit from the luxurious land and assets of Sodom and yet remain set apart from the wickedness of the city. But as is often the case, the allure of luxury was more than Lot could resist. Before long, he built his home in the heart of Sin City, and several years later, Lot is now highly respected and looked upon as a leader in Sodom as indicated by his place at the city gate.

Lot is now a Sodomite. These people of Sodom are his people, those whom he will later refer to as “my brothers.” Sure, the Sodomites are hopelessly wicked in their values and behavior, but Lot has grown accustomed to their wickedness. Sodom has become his new normal.

Now, we might imagine that when Lot was younger and constantly compared to his uncle Abraham, he always felt lacking in terms of morality and faith. But now that Lot lives among the Sodomites, he surely thinks himself to be a very virtuous person in comparison to the rest of the city.

Church, don’t miss the universal and very relevant trajectory of this man, Lot. If ever there was a character that the modern man and woman might relate with, it is Abraham’s nephew. Here we find one who comes from a God-fearing family. When he is old enough, however, he moves away from that family and their influence in order to seek his fortune where ‘all the action is’, naively believing that he can live among the wicked and remain virtuous. The contemporary parallels to this story are limitless. We think of the virtuous high school graduate who goes to the secular college and joins the wildest fraternity on campus. It’s only a matter of months before the party scene dominates his life and his character is compromised beyond recognition. It’s the principled young professional who gets the dream job at the biggest firm in town, but before long the pressure to perform leads her to adapt unethical practices and she soon becomes as those she once detested.

There is a magnetism to luxury that corrupts the human heart. F.B. Meyer observes, “More are ruined by the deceitfulness of riches than by the cares of life.” Lot represents the worldly Christian, a description that would describe many who sit in American churches. Lot represents those who have one foot in God’s kingdom and the other planted firmly in the things of this world. Lot is ‘righteous’ in comparison to his context, but his gradual compromises will limit his influence, compromise his character, and lead to very hard decisions as we will soon see.

As we return to the narrative, Lot’s faithful upbringing under the influence of Abraham is evident in the way he responds to the angelic visitors. We read in vss. 1-3: The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed himself with his face to the earth and said, “My lords, please turn aside to your servant’s house and spend the night and wash your feet. Then you may rise up early and go on your way.” They said, “No; we will spend the

night in the town square.”<sup>3</sup> But he pressed them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house. And he made them a feast and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.

Note the similarities in Lot’s behavior to that of Abraham’s in Genesis 18 when the visitors unexpectedly arrive. Both men get up quickly to greet the visitors, they both bow before them in humble service, and they both extend invitations for the visitors to come in, wash their feet, and stay for dinner. Now, in the ancient Middle Eastern culture, not only would the offer of hospitality have been expected, but also the acceptance of that offer. Such is why we are shocked when the angelic visitors respond, saying, “No; we will spend the night in the town square.” Declining an offer for hospitality is normal in our culture because we don’t want to put people out and, secretly, we hope they will offer again and then maybe we will say YES! However, that was NOT the case in the ancient east. To decline hospitality would have been tremendously offensive to the one offering hospitality.

Now, we are given no explanation as to why the angels decline Lot’s offer of hospitality, but their refusal of hospitality would have been perceived as rude by the ancients. Lot is persistent, however, and he forcefully presses the men into his home. Clearly Lot would be concerned for these visitors to camp out in the city square, knowing how vile the men of Sodom had become. At the same time, the angels may be rightfully concerned about Lot and his family should they accept his invitation to reside at his house. Whatever the case, the men, who are angelic and thus extraordinary in appearance, enter into Lot’s home for dinner, but their presence in Sin City has not gone unnoticed. Word has spread quickly, and not long after dinner, there is a knock on the door. Lot’s contextual righteousness will soon be put to the test. Let us now consider our second subheading...

## **II. Contextual Righteousness**

As we read this story here in Genesis 19, we must constantly compare Lot in Sodom to Abraham in Mamre. These stories are written in a way that begs comparison.

Mamre was a rural area that was set apart from the wickedness of the Sodomites and the surrounding cities. Because Abraham was set apart from those cities, he was not targeted when King Chedorlaomer’s army came through the region, ravaging the luxurious cities along the Jordan River. In fact, because Abraham was set apart for the LORD, he was available and able to pursue and liberate the citizens of Sodom from their captors.

Lot, on the other hand, lives in Sodom. He is not set apart, either geographically or spiritually. Lot has become indistinguishable from the rest of his peers. So, when evil comes knocking with the intent of harming those Lot is bound to protect, Lot will face some very hard decisions with very few options. We read in vs. 4-8: But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house. <sup>5</sup> And they called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them.” <sup>6</sup> Lot went out to the men at the entrance, shut the door after him, <sup>7</sup> and said, “I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. <sup>8</sup> Behold, I have two daughters who have not known any man. Let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please. Only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof.”

Every part of the story is disturbing. Note first the saturation of wickedness in the citizens of Sodom. ALL the men, including the old men and the boys “to the very last man” surrounded

the house and demanded that Lot give them access to the angelic visitors so that they might “know them.” If you are an adult, you know exactly what that means.

Now, in case you think this story is hyperbole, it is a well-known fact of history that the Canaanite people were famous for sexual perversion. We learn later in Leviticus 18 and 20 that the Canaanites indulged in homosexual acts, having sex with their own family members, having sex with animals, and so on. As bad as those perversions may have been, the scene described here in Genesis 19 is even worse. The intent of the crowd is for every man and boy in town to have a shot at “sodomizing” the two angelic men. By the way, you know things are bad when history makes a verb out of your town.

So, how did Sodom become so wicked? The Apostle Paul answers that question in Romans 1:18-32:

<sup>18</sup>For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. <sup>19</sup>For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup>For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. <sup>21</sup>For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup>Claiming to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup>and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

<sup>24</sup>Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, <sup>25</sup>because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

<sup>26</sup>For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; <sup>27</sup>and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

<sup>28</sup>And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. <sup>29</sup>They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, <sup>30</sup>slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, <sup>31</sup>foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. <sup>32</sup>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.

Sodom (and Gomorrah) epitomize Paul’s description of those who are given over to evil. In fact, throughout the scriptures, Sodom will represent the worst kind of evil...a city so saturated with sin that God will utterly destroy the city and remove it from the face of the earth. Sodom also represents what will become of all who suppress the truth and exchange the truth for a lie—which is all of us apart from Christ! We are all those who have sinned and fallen short of God’s righteousness, but some cities (and people!) manage that sinful condition better than others! Some cities are tempered by the presence of the redeemed; but not so with Sodom. Sodom represents the inevitable corruption of sin that goes unchecked and unredeemed. And it’s bad...really bad.

Now, Lot has likely seen the crowds sexually violate visitors in the past, but he didn’t intervene since he was not immediately involved. However, now that the depravity of Sodom has come knocking on his door, the only “righteous man” in town sets himself between the sex-crazed men of Sodom and those he is obligated to protect inside the house. With all the righteous indignation Lot can muster, he states, “I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly.”

Now, we are initially relieved to discover that Lot still has a moral compass. He knows that sexually assaulting these visitors is wrong, and he is willing to call out that behavior as wicked to his friends and neighbors gathered at his door. But note: Lot has been in Sodom for a long time. His moral compass is functional but corrupted, and that corruption becomes immediately apparent when he states: Behold, I have two daughters who have not known any man. Let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please. Only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof.

Sadly, this is what contextual righteousness looks like. Lot thinks himself righteous compared to the other people in Sodom, and he demonstrates a degree of righteousness in the way of hospitality. He is, in fact, the only man in the whole city not interested in violating the angelic visitors; so, in theory, Lot is *more* righteous than the other men in Sodom. At the same time, because Lot lives in Sodom and has grown accustomed to a norm of deviancy, he can no longer perceive the absurdity of offering his own virgin daughters to this sex-hungry mob of men. Lot has likely adopted the Canaanite perspective that women are expendable property for sexual pleasure and of less value than the men he just met. Along with his fellow citizens in Sodom, Lot now views his daughters as currency, even though they are engaged to be married...to men who are currently demanding to sodomize his guests. Is there any wonder as to why God has judged this city?

Note also that 'righteous' Lot does not think to pray and ask God to solve this problem. Lot would have considered himself a believer, but he has long since neglected his relationship with God due to his compromised lifestyle. So, given the decision between bad and worse, Lot's contextual righteousness leads him to offer his virgin daughters to the crowd in place of allowing the mob access to his angelic guests. These are the kinds of morally impossible decisions we can anticipate when we make our home in Sodom.

Church, contextual righteousness will always lead to these kinds of situations. Once we have enmeshed our lifestyle with the unrighteous and become accustomed to wickedness, our moral compass will no longer point to righteousness as opposed to unrighteousness. Instead, we will *feel* righteous when we make a decision for 'bad' as opposed to 'worse.' This tendency holds true for individuals, family units, organizations, and nations.

Now, note the response of the men from Sodom. This is classic and exactly what we would expect. In vs. 9 they say: "Stand back!" And they said, "This fellow came to sojourn, and he has become the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them." Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and drew near to break the door down.

Lot appeals to the men of Sodom as "brothers." In his mind, Lot has established himself in Sodom, and he's banking on the "cool points" he has earned by moving into the community and serving as one of their leaders. Though Lot has never made an effort to be set apart from his neighbors, in his heart he still thinks he's "a good person." But notice, just as soon as Lot calls out the crowd's behavior as 'wicked,' the men of Sodom are offended by his "judgments," and they turn on Lot with a vengeance.

Such is the plight of the pastor who dulls the edge of God's Word to accommodate the cultural norms. His modern audience will think him enlightened, reasonable and full of grace until the perversion of truth finally reaches a point where the pastor judges something (anything) as wicked. Having no tolerance for "feeling judged," the congregants will turn on that pastor in a heartbeat, accusing him of being intolerant and judgmental. As I learned from my former life as a liberal many years ago, you can never be liberal enough.

The same is true for parents who still want to party like they were in college while trying to raise their children to be “good people.” When it comes time to confront their teenagers about their behavior, the parents have no moral ground to stand on...and they know it.

Church, we lose the right to condemn wickedness when our lifestyles become indistinguishable from those who are doing wickedness. We cannot save those drowning in the roaring rapids if our feet are swept away by the same current.

Abraham, on the other hand, the one who honored God by living a life set apart from the wickedness of Sodom, could be used by God to help rescue the Sodomites in Genesis 14 precisely because he was not a Sodomite. His feet were planted on solid ground, so his hand was strong to rescue those swept away by King Chedorlaomer. Not so with Lot. Lot’s compromised integrity has now placed him in harm’s way. His stand for righteousness has infuriated those who see him now as a judgmental hypocrite, and he is about to be devoured by those he thought were his friends. Lot is in no position to save his guests, or his daughters, or even himself. Fortunately for Lot, he has a praying uncle! And that leads us to our third and final subheading...

### **III. Saved by Grace**

In answer to Abraham’s prayers of intercession, the Lord has already determined to deliver Lot from the doom of Sodom. So, right when all seems lost, when the mob of Sodomites close in to devour their own, strong hands from heaven reach through the open door and rescue Lot from his own people. We read in vss. 10-11: But the men reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them and shut the door. 11 And they struck with blindness the men who were at the entrance of the house, both small and great, so that they wore themselves out groping for the door.

Church, note this moment, because it points beyond itself. ‘Righteous’ Lot, who we know is hardly righteous at all, is saved not by his righteousness, but by the unmerited grace of God. According to God’s mercy, Lot is brought in through the open door, and then the door is shut.

We cannot help but remember the words of the Spirit spoken to the church in Philadelphia in Revelation 3:7, where Christ is presented as “...The holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut.”

This moment in Sodom is a picture of God’s unmerited grace that points to the Gospel. Though Lot has taken a stand for his version of righteousness, he has no righteousness in himself. He is doomed for destruction in a city doomed for destruction, but then the door opens. It is a door opened by the ambassadors of heaven who came looking for Lot, and Lot invited them into his home. Consequently, Lot is brought in through the door of salvation. He is saved when he could not save himself. He is saved according to the unmerited grace and providence of God. But then, just as quickly, the hands of heaven shut the door, and all who would seek to open the door are blinded, so that “they wore themselves out, groping for the door.”

Jesus taught in Luke 13:24: Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the Master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us,’ then He will answer you, ‘I do not know where you come from.’ Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.’ But He will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!’

Church, behold, the open door! It is a narrow door that only heaven can open, and no one can shut. But once the Lord shuts the door, it is not possible for anyone to open that door. Even more remarkably, it is a door that we are brought through...it is not a door that we could ever open or choose to walk through. So where is this door? How do we enter through it to be saved?

Jesus said in John 10:9, "I am the Door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved." Can you see it, Church? Jesus is the ambassador from Heaven who came down into our "Sodom" looking for His own. If we will invite Him in, He will bring us through the door of salvation that we might be spared the doom that we rightly deserve.

But unlike the angelic messengers that day in Sodom, Jesus will do something that no one could have ever imagined. He will willingly walk back into Sodom, and He will allow the Sodomites to torture Him and to nail Him to a tree, so that the debt that Sodom owes to God might be paid in full! This is exactly what Paul meant when he wrote in Romans 5:6-8: For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Church, Jesus died for us Sodomites. Jesus loves the worst of sinners; and Jesus loves you very specifically. Because of His death and resurrection, the Door to salvation is now open for all who would enter. But make no mistake: that door will close. A time is coming when the Master will rise up and close the door, and then it will be too late.

Have you found yourself in an impossible situation where your choices are only bad and worse? Have you been trying to live a life with one foot planted in the Kingdom and one in the world? Has evil come knocking on your door, threatening you and your family?

Then repent, call upon the name of Jesus, and be brought in through the Open Door. Be grateful for those who have prayed for your salvation, and know that your salvation is not your own doing—we have been saved by God's unmerited grace, who opened the door and brought us in when we did not deserve to be saved. Let us then bear witness to His grace and spread the good news of the Open Door to those who are perishing. Like Abraham, let us intercede for our children and our loved ones who have made their homes in Sodom; for the time is coming when the Lord will return, and the door will be closed. Now is the day of salvation. Walk through the Open Door, before it is too late. Will you pray with me?