

Divine Deliverance

Gen 19:1-29

Call: Ps 34:8, 15-18, 8a ESV

Scripture: 2 Pet 2:6-10 NIV

I. Intro

In our culture, preachers are advised to not talk about sin, evil judgment or death, if they want people to come to their church. This speaks to the fact that our culture does not want to admit to the reality of life in our fallen world. That is, until they read the everyday headlines containing heartbreaking stories of sin, evil and death. It is at that point then, that everyone cries out for justice. How *are* we to understand sin, evil, judgment and death? Well, today, we get to talk about it because our text takes us there.

We come to chapter 19 in Genesis today. Chapters 18 and 19 deal with Abraham's nephew Lot. Lot lives within the wicked city of Sodom. And, last week in chapter 18, we saw that God showed up to Abraham as three strangers. Abraham showed extravagant hospitality to these strangers. But, Abraham's tent was not the destination for these strangers. They were on their way to Sodom to investigate the wickedness there. In the final scene from chapter 18, two of the men, called angels in today's passage, went to Sodom to investigate, while Abraham interceded for the people of Sodom. Abraham discovers that this merciful God will spare the entire city of Sodom, possibly thousands of people, for the sake of 10 righteous. So will God find ten righteous people there?

I invite you into the text, a disturbing text, Genesis chapter 19, verse 1.

II. The Angels Arrive (1-11)

1 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 2 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." 3 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. 4 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. 5 And they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them." 6 Lot went out to the men at the entrance, shut the door after him, 7 and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. 8 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." 9 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. 10 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. (ESV)

A. The Angels Meet Lot

It is one of the most disturbing texts in all of scripture. The narrator sets a foreboding scene: the sun is setting as the angels arrive at Sodom for their investigation. They are entering a very dark place. And, Lot is there, sitting at the front gate of the city. At that time, the city gate was the place where legal matters were adjudicated and civil life was discussed. The front gate is the place for politics. Lot is there, which implies two things. First, he is alone, implying no one else cares about the good of the city. And, secondly, it implies that Lot has now become a leader in the city, maybe the leader of the city. If this is so, Lot went from choosing the fertile land of prosperous Sodom, to moving his tent near Sodom, to living in Sodom, to now being a leading citizen of the city. As we read in our scripture reading, Lot began righteous but was “worn down” by the filthy lives of the people of Sodom, with his soul being perpetually tortured (2 Pet 2:6-9). This is what wickedness inevitably will do to us if we choose to live in darkness. We will be worn down.

In many ways, this scene mirrors last week’s scene when the three visitors appear at Abraham’s tent. Abraham is shown to be the supreme model of hospitality, as he hurries here and there extending his heart and hands to the three strangers. Abraham was overly generous in every way. Here Lot shows hospitality, but the rest of Sodom do not. The men of Sodom are the supreme model of inhospitality, showing no care for strangers, even desiring to abuse them.

The angels want to stay in the square, but Lot hurries them to his house, probably because he knows the danger they are in. He prepares a feast and they eat. After dinner, the narrator says *all* the people to the last man of the city surround the house, literally “from every end of the city.” It is *all* the men. This description is necessary to show that the judgment to come will be just.

B. The Sin of Sodom

Sodom had become irredeemably wicked. Now we typically associate Sodom with sexual sin, and from archaeological digs, this sexual sin is well known in ancient Canaanite life. But, the word “outcry” which was used in last chapter and is used in verse 13 coming up, implies a whole host of wrongdoing. We limit our view of this text if we only focus on sexual sin. Indeed, the Sodom references throughout the rest of scripture make clear that the sins of Sodom were much more than sexual.

Isaiah says that the people of Sodom were an unrepentant people, for they trumpeted their sin (3:9). Jeremiah says that their leaders were liars and promoted evil (23:14). Ezekiel says the sins of Sodom were pride, excess of food and prosperity, while not looking out for the poor and needy, a very contemporary description (16:49-50a). Even Jesus refers to Sodom, but not for sexual sin, but rather for a lack of hospitality (Matt 10:9-15; Luke 10:8-12). Sodom was irredeemably wicked and it was a pervasive wickedness.

C. True Freedom

The words above the gates of Sodom and Gomorrah were these: No one tells us how to live! It is a dangerous place to be when it comes to that. The people of Sodom have chosen to live as they wish, throwing off all restraints. They have chosen to live totally free, according to their desires and impulses, refusing to submit to any outside influence or standard.

Freedom. You know freedom is a big word in our country, and yes, freedom is a great thing about our country. But, we need to be careful with what we mean by freedom in our personal life. In our enlightened culture, freedom means autonomy with no restraints. As one writer has said, "Many times, we refuse to believe that the life of servanthood is the blessed life. And so we prattle endlessly about the freedom of man, and what we really mean is that we want to be our own gods" (Achtemeier, 178). No one tells me how to live my life!

And, here's the really dangerous part, it's been shown repeatedly that if we choose to be our own God in one area of life, that mentality very easily seeps into virtually every other area of life. This is what happened to Sodom. First, no one tells me how to spend my money. Then, no one tells me how to live out my sexuality. Then, no one tells me how to live any area of my life!

The truth is true freedom is not found in autonomous living; it is found in obedience to God. For if no one is going to tell me how to live my life, I will simply end up like Sodom, enslaved to my desires and impulses, to my lust and my greed to name a few. True freedom is found in simple obedience, because that frees us from being enslaved to our fleshly desires and impulses. Martin Luther said it this way, "True freedom is being free to love God and others out of gratitude and obedience" (Stackhouse, 29). Loving God and others is summed up in scripture like this, "Be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy" (Lev 19:2). And, simple obedience is the pathway to holiness.

D. The Choice

Lot protects the two men and tries to reason with the locals. Notice he does recognize wickedness. He does know right from wrong. And, he is presented with an awful choice. On the one hand, he must protect his home and his family. On the other hand, he has the obligation to protect his guests, who have come under the protection of his home. It's an awful choice. Whatever he does will be wrong. But, he offers up his daughters. As a father, his choice is beyond reprehensible to me.

But, the men continue to press against Lot accusing him of playing judge. No one is going to tell them how to live. The two angels pull Lot into the house to safety, and blind the men outside.

III. The Angel's Revelation (12-14)

[12](#) Then the men said to Lot, "Have you anyone else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone you have in the city, bring them out of the place. [13](#) For we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the LORD, and the LORD has sent us to destroy it." [14](#) So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his

daughters, “Up! Get out of this place, for the LORD is about to destroy the city.” But he seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting. (ESV)

The angels have seen enough, and reveal to Lot the plan to destroy the city, using many of the same words here as in the flood narrative. They have validated and confirmed the outcry. But, notice the grace. As with Noah and his family in chapter seven, God is concerned to save the entire family, even the sons-in-law.

Lot tries to save them, but we get more laughing. The sons-in-law laugh in jest at him. No one is going to tell them what to do. Lot has no persuasive power. Could it be that Lot has not been trustworthy, that he has a reputation for not speaking truth?

IV. The Angelic Deliverance (15-22)

15 As morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, “Up! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be swept away in the punishment of the city.” 16 But he lingered. So the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city. 17 And as they brought them out, one said, “Escape for your life. Do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away.” 18 And Lot said to them, “Oh, no, my lords. 19 Behold, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life. But I cannot escape to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me and I die. 20 Behold, this city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one. Let me escape there—is it not a little one?—and my life will be saved!” 21 He said to him, “Behold, I grant you this favor also, that I will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken. 22 Escape there quickly, for I can do nothing till you arrive there.” Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar.

A. Divine Deliverance

The morning dawns. The blackness and darkness of Sodom was coming to an end with the sunrise. The curious thing is that Lot lingers. He is reluctant to leave. Sin and darkness are hard to run from! (Read the last scene of this chapter, which we will not cover, to see how pervasive the sin is in Lot.) So, the angels have to grab the family by the hands and run! You can see them make a mad dash through the streets and out of the city. Notice, it is solely the result of God’s mercy and compassion. The narrator is very clear that Lot and his family’s deliverance is not due to their own righteousness, but due to God’s mercy (Titus 3:5). Their deliverance was entirely undeserved.

B. Lot’s Speech

I imagine them running and running, and getting outside the city. Then Lot bends over out of breath, which gives the angels a chance to tell them to escape to the hills and don’t look back. Yet, Lot responds curiously again, apparently out of fear. God has sent messengers to save him, yet he still fears for his life. His speech wastes precious time as he questions where to go. He doesn’t want to go to the hills, he wants to go to a little city called Zoar, which means “little.” His reasoning seems to be that because it is a small town, the sin won’t be as great, and therefore, it won’t get destroyed. As Derek Kidner says, “Not even brimstone will make a

pilgrim of him. He must have his little Sodom again if life is to be supportable” (Kidner, 135). Isn't God amazing? God's accommodation to Lot's request is beyond amazing. God, full of grace, mercy and compassion, grants Lot's request. He even spares Zoar on account of Lot.

V. The Divine Judgment (23-29)

23 The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar. 24 Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the LORD out of heaven. 25 And he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. 26 But Lot's wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

27 And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the LORD. 28 And he looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the valley, and he looked and, behold, the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace.

29 So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow when he overthrew the cities in which Lot had lived. (ESV)

A. Divine Judgment

The sun rises, which in ancient times is the symbolic time for holding court. And, the judge of the universe pronounces his sentence: judgment. He could not find ten righteous in the city. The narrator makes sure we know this is the Lord's doing. The judgment began with God, was decided by God and was carried out by God. The fertile, well-watered land that drew Lot had become a graveyard.

B. Holy God

“Be holy, for I, the lord your God, am holy.” The living God is not morally neutral or morally relativistic. God is altogether holy. As one person says, The God that comes to us in Jesus is not “a sweet-smiling cosmic guru, sitting in a bed of delicate roses, freely dispensing daisies in a stupor, oblivious to the sin of the world and its ruin upon the world” (Johnson MP3). That kind of God would be powerless against sin and evil and death. No, this God is altogether holy. And his holiness naturally recoils against all that distorts his design for this planet. God abhors evil! Which is good news for us. It means human beings matter, and what human beings do matters to the living God. When God is no longer angry with our sin anymore, it means he doesn't care. And, the living God takes himself and us very seriously.

God has to bring judgment. But, how do we understand this judgment? This judgment is simply giving Sodom the natural consequences of their choices. God gives Sodom what they wanted. John 3 says that the light came into the world, but the world loved the darkness rather than the light (3:19). The people of Sodom loved the darkness, so God gives them darkness. God simply gives Sodom what Sodom wanted. JI Packer says it this way, “Nobody stands under the wrath of God except those who have chosen to do so. The essence of God's action in wrath is to give men what they choose, in all its implications: nothing more, and equally nothing less... God's wrath is not the capricious, arbitrary, bad-tempered and conceited anger which pagans

attribute to their gods. It is not the sinful, resentful, malicious, infantile anger which we find among humans. It is a function of [his] holiness" (Packer, 184). No one is going to tell Sodom how to live, so God honors their choice, giving them darkness.

As we heard in our scripture reading today, the New Testament uses the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah as a paradigm for future judgment and deliverance on the last day. All of us will be held accountable for our deeds, and judgment will fall on those who reject Jesus, while deliverance will come to those who trust Jesus. As with Sodom and Gomorrah, God will simply give us the consequences of our choices.

C. Lot's Wife

How about Lot's wife? She provides a specific example of Sodom's enslavement. She looks back, apparently unable to let go of her identification with Sodom, and suffers the same judgment. Sin and darkness are indeed hard to run from! The writer says she became a pillar of salt. What does that mean and what did that look like? I don't know. But, more importantly, most writers suggest that she didn't just linger as Lot did, she went back, which is what Jesus suggests in Luke 17.

D. The Profound Paradox

Jesus says, "31 On that day, let the one who is on the housetop, with his goods in the house, not come down to take them away, and likewise let the one who is in the field not turn back. 32 Remember Lot's wife. 33 Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it."

Lot's wife was enslaved by her greed. No one is going to tell her how to spend her money. She could not imagine life without her possessions. Can you? Can I? She was so caught up in the good life of prosperity that her things got in the way of true life and true freedom. Her heart was tethered to the earth, and she receives the same judgment as everyone else. She thought she was preserving her life; in reality, she was losing it.

This is the profound paradox of the Christian life. We lose in order to win. We give our life away in order to have life eternal. And why? Because our Lord gave his life away. It's inherent in our faith. As Bonhoeffer said, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die" (Bonhoeffer, loc 1137). Die to self. Lose your life and keep it for eternity. Dying to self is painful and runs absolutely counter to our "selfie" culture and to our fallen nature. But, when we do it – when we lose our life by dying to self, it frees us to trust him. It frees us to throw our entire weight upon him in obedience, the pathway to holiness.

E. Abraham's Response

After the destruction, there is silence. The next morning Abraham views the scene in silence, and his silence speaks volumes. His intercession couldn't even turn around the wickedness. Not even ten were found. Notice the narrator brings us back to the same place where Abraham interceded, and we hear the echo of his question, "*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?*" (Gen 18:25). And, the answer to the question is a resounding yes. For the narrator

tells us: [29](#) *So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow when he overthrew the cities in which Lot had lived.* Righteous Lot, as Peter calls him, as conflicted and compromised as he was, was delivered, not because of anything he did, but because of the grace, mercy and compassion of the living God, effected through Abraham's intercession.

VI. Conclusion

That's our text today. We did talk about the gravity of sin, evil and death. Firstly, because it was in the text, but secondly, because it is a daily reality in my life. Sin is a daily reality in my life. Sometimes my anger gets the best of me. I've been known to attack umpires (years ago). Nowadays I've been known to attack cars on my bike when they cut me off. And, sometimes I can't imagine life without my possessions. Sin and darkness are indeed hard to run from. I feel like Paul when he says, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death" (Rom 7:24)?

But, the truth is we are all in this sin stuff. And, we are in way deeper than we'd like to admit, for the wages of life on this fallen planet is sin, and the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23, Rutledge, 177). Sin is not something we do. It's something we're in. And, we're in far deeper than we'd like to admit. The truth is the sin of Sodom is in all of us, for none of us like being told how to live. And, the sobering truth is we are also absolutely powerless to deliver ourselves. Although the advertisements tell us to look inside ourselves, or get more education, or begin a revolution, or try some new age technique, none of that will work. We're in far too deep, and we need a power outside of ourselves to deliver us from this body of death. How does Paul finish his thought? "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom 7:25).

Out of God's grace, mercy and compassion, Jesus comes not to preserve his life, but to lose it, and to give it as a ransom for all (1 Tim 2:6). The word ransom means to loosen or to set free. In the first century, it was mostly used in terms of freeing slaves by paying a ransom, by paying the redemption price. Jesus paid that price for us. Jesus paid the price to set us free. We have been bought with a price. He hasn't completely demolished sin and death yet! But, for now, he's freed us from its claim and power. Sin and evil and death no longer have the last words in our lives. Anger no longer has the last word. Bitterness no longer has the last word. Greed no longer has the last word. Addiction no longer has the last word. Jesus does.

So, why don't we walk in greater freedom? Well, probably for many reasons, but here are three. Maybe we don't take sin and evil serious enough? Or maybe we don't feel the need to fully embrace the Gospel? Or maybe we continue to choose, as Lot's wife did, enslavement to our things and to our lifestyle? Yet, Jesus did everything that needs to be done in order for us to walk in the freedom of obedience (with the help of his indwelling Spirit).

Yes, we had to talk about the gravity of sin, evil and death today, because it was in the text and because it's a daily reality for all of us. But, also because we know the remedy. "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 7:25). Amen.

Benediction

Jesus has set you free, therefore you are free indeed (John 8:36). Now to him who is able to strengthen you to bring about the obedience of faith, according to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the indwelling witness of the Spirit, for the glory of God forevermore through Jesus Christ of Lord! Amen (Romans 16:25–27; 2 Cor 5).

Resources

Achtemeier, Elizabeth. *Preaching from the Old Testament*

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Cost of Discipleship*

Freitheim, Terence. *Abraham: Trials of Family and Faith*

Johnson, Darrell W. *Regent MP3 3690H*

Kidner, Derek. *Genesis, An Introduction and Commentary.*

Packer, J.I. *Knowing God.*

Rutledge, Fleming. *Help My Unbelief*

Stackhouse, John G. *Why You're Here*

Waltke, Bruce. *Genesis: A Commentary*