

Text: Genesis 19:15-38

Title: "The Compassionate God Who Destroyed Sodom"

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Introduction: Have you ever been pleasantly surprised to find a good thing where you were expecting to find only something far worse? State Farm is a mutual insurance company, and on a very rare occasion they actually pay a dividend to their customers. So opening the envelope that looks like another bill for car insurance actually yields a dividend check. That is a pleasant surprise.

As we come to the second part of Genesis 19, we do so expecting to read about sin, fire, brimstone, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. That expectation is not disappointed, for all these elements are here. But what surprised me as I studied the passage this week was the emphasis that I found in the text on God's compassion (vv. 16, 19). It turns out that the chapter that tells us about God's judgment on Sodom also emphasizes the fact our God, the God of the Bible, is a God of love. I was pleasantly surprised by this, and I want you to be too. So this morning, I want us to learn four things this morning about "The compassionate God who destroyed Sodom."

I. God demonstrates the compassion of His patience with sinners (vv. 15-22).

Application: There are some survivors on the plains of the Jordan in spite of the fire and brimstone that fell there: Lot, Lot's daughters, the city of Zoar, and initially Lot's wife. Each of these survivors owes his survival to the compassionate patience of God with sinners. God demonstrates His compassion for sinners in two ways according to this passage.

A. God's compassion sees the urgency of the sinner's need (vv. 15-16).

Illustration: There is nothing academic about compassion when danger is near. My wife feels great compassion for her family, and when she sits on the passenger's side of our minivan full of her precious kids and perceives that the driver (who shall go unnamed) is headed for a disaster of some kind, she does not silently sit back and theorize about how nice it would be if this pending disaster could be avoided. No, she shouts out, "Kevin, watch out!" This is the urgency of compassion in the face of danger.

Application: The angels told Lot to hurry out of the city because the Lord had compassion on him and his family. If we have the compassion that God has for sinners, we are going to feel some of the urgency these angels felt as they tried to get Lot out of the city. In the words of Paul in 1 Cor. 15:34 we need to "Awake unto righteousness and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame!" Lot hesitated when it came time to leave Sodom behind (v. 16). Hesitation when it comes to leaving the Sodom of the world behind is antithetical to compassion for sinners. Lot cared little for saving anyone else, because he had a lust for Sodom rather than the compassion of the Lord in him. The angels demonstrate the freedom from Sodom that it takes to urge others to leave it in the love of Christ.

B. God's compassion waits while sinners make excuses (vv. 17-22).

Illustration: Waiting is not easy to do when the situation is urgent and people are making excuses. When Kent was smaller he managed to lodge a fairly long needle into the flesh of his foot just under his toes. He was in a lot of pain, and I wanted to do something to help him, so I drove him to the nearest pediatrician for help. I carried Kent to the front door of the doctor's office and found it locked. The door had a large window, and when I looked in the window I saw that a nurse and doctor were there in the lobby, so I shouted through the closed

door an explanation of what had happened and a request for their help. They shouted back explaining that it was after 5 o'clock, they were closed, and I would have to take Kent to the emergency room at the hospital. The emergency room had a long line, and so I finally took Kent home and got the needle out with a pair of pliers. But it was very frustrating to listen to the excuses of those medical professionals, and I do not remember handling the situation very well at all.

Application: God is not like that. Faced with delays and excuses in a time of great urgency, God holds back his judgment while sinners make excuses. Note, however, that Lot's delays and excuses undoubtedly contributed to the death of his wife (v. 26). Evidently, she lingered in the valley too close to the disaster, was killed by the vapors, and in time became a pillar of salt. The Lord Jesus tells us to remember Lot's wife (Luke 17:32). The fate of Lot's wife teaches us that God will not wait forever while sinners make excuses. His patience has a rightful limit, as the song "God's Final Call" reminds us:

"Some day you'll hear God's final call to you to take His offer of salvation true, This could be it, my friend, if you but knew: God's final call, God's final call.

"How can you live another day in sin, thinking some day with Christ you will begin? O will you hear, above the world's loud din God's final call, God's final call?

"If you reject God's final call of grace, you'll have no chance your footsteps to retrace. All hope will then be gone, and doom you'll face: O hear his call, God's final call."

II. God demonstrates the compassion of His judgment of sinners (vv. 23-28).

Illustration: An oxymoron is defined as a combination of contradictory or incongruous words. This point sounds like an oxymoron as I try to combine God's compassion and God's judgment. Yet I think we do see God's compassion in His judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah in two important respects.

A. Delay of judgment is an immediate act of compassion (v. 23).

Illustration: The following is a poem written by Judge Roy Moore from Alabama. He was sued by the ACLU for displaying the Ten Commandments in his courtroom foyer. He has been stripped of his judgeship and now they are trying to strip his right to practice law in Alabama. The judge's poem sums it up quite well.

"America the beautiful, or so you used to be.  
Land of the Pilgrims' pride; I'm glad they'll never see.  
Babies piled in dumpsters, Abortion on demand,  
Oh, sweet land of liberty; your house is on the sand.

Our children wander aimlessly poisoned by cocaine,  
choosing to indulge their lusts, when God has said abstain.  
From sea to shining sea, our Nation turns away  
From the teaching of God's love and a need to always pray.

We've kept God in our temples, how callous we have grown.  
When earth is but His footstool, and Heaven is His throne.  
We've voted in a government that's rotting at the core,  
Appointing Godless Judges; who throw reason out the door,

Too soft to place a killer in a well deserved tomb,  
But brave enough to kill a baby before he leaves the womb.  
You think that God's not angry, that our land's a moral slum?  
How much longer will He wait before His judgment comes?

How are we to face our God, from Whom we cannot hide?  
What then is left for us to do, but stem this evil tide?  
If we who are His children, will humbly turn and pray;  
Seek His holy face and mend our evil way:

Then God will hear from Heaven; and forgive us of our sins,  
He'll heal our sickly land and those who live within.

But, America the Beautiful, If you don't - then you will see,  
A sad but Holy God withdraw His hand from Thee."

B. The execution of judgment is an ultimate act of compassion (vv. 24-28).

Illustration: "Scientists uncover Sodom's fiery end: How British artist John Martin imagined the cities' end," by the BBC's Andrew Craig.

"British scientists believe they may have found evidence to support the Bible's account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. But they think a natural cause, rather than God's anger, lay behind the calamity.

"The Bible describes how the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed in a storm of fire and brimstone - a punishment from God because of their people's depravity. But now a retired British geologist, Graham Harris, believes he may have proved that the two cities really existed, and may have explained why they perished.

"Unstable area. Dr Harris thinks Sodom and Gomorrah were built on the shores of the Dead Sea so that they could trade in naturally-occurring asphalt. This tarry substance was used in ancient times to waterproof boats and to hold stones together in buildings. But the ground next to the Dead Sea is very unstable, lying on the joint between two of the Earth's tectonic plates which are moving in opposite directions. The area is vulnerable to earthquakes.

"Flammable methane. Geological and archaeological evidence suggest that a huge [earthquake] took place about four-and-a-half thousand years ago - the time of the Biblical destruction. Flammable methane pockets lie under the Dead Sea shores; the earthquake would have ignited them, the ground would have turned to quicksand, and a massive landslide would have swept the cities into the water.

“Experiments carried out at Cambridge University have backed up this account. But more conclusive evidence is still needed; not unless the remains of Sodom and Gomorrah are found under the Dead Sea's salty waters will the theory be proved.”

Application: Verse 24 emphasizes that Yahweh, the God of the Bible, did this. He may have used natural or supernatural means to execute this plan, but this does not mean that He did not do it. In fact, some see evidence for the Trinity here. Luther said of the repetition of “Yahweh” in v. 24: “This expression indicates two persons in the Godhead.”

So here we see the compassionate God of the Bible rendering final and violent judgment on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Some criticize the God of the Old Testament for this, but can you imagine a world in which sin went entirely unpunished, a world of criminals with no police, judges, or prisons?

Sodom and Gomorrah were removed from the land of promise, and this was ultimately an act of compassion on the land of promise. The demise of Adolf Hitler was an act of compassion for the Jews, the Allies, and ultimately for the German people themselves. God executes His fierce judgment upon sin as both a holy God and a God of great compassion. The judgment of sin is ultimately an act of a compassionate God.

III. God demonstrates the compassion of His answers to prayer (v. 27-29).

Application: Note three quick lessons on prayer from this passage.

A. We ought to have a place we arise early to go meet the Lord (v. 27). Ps. 5:3, “My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning I shall direct my prayer to thee, and will look up.” Is that our commitment before the Lord?

B. We ought to be faithful people of prayer even when it seems as though God has not answered as we had hoped (v. 28). Abraham must have thought that the entire city was destroyed in spite of his prayers, yet God had done more than Abraham even asked for, saving Lot in spite of the fact that his family numbered less than 10.

C. We ought never to underestimate what our prayers can do (v. 29). God remembered Abraham, the man who had prayed. James 5:16, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." This we can know for sure. The converse, of course, is equally true: the man who fails to pray fails to avail all that his prayers could have done. When God acts among men, does He remember our prayers for them?

IV. Man demonstrates the consequences of rejecting God's compassion (vv. 30-38).

Illustration: Pinocchio is the beloved story of a wooden doll that became a boy but rejected a father's love and nearly became a donkey instead. The rejection of true love is a tragic phenomenon. The name *Pinocchio* means *eyes of wood*, and it refers to eyes that are unable to see a father's compassion.

Application: Lot and his daughters have eyes like this in their rejection of God's compassion. This rejection led to two great tragedies in their lives.

A. Rejecting God's compassion leads to finding your own way to assuage your pain. Wine is still often the substitute for God's compassion, as it is in this passage. It is, of course, a poor substitute—a mocker and deceiver. Proverbs 31:4-7, "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted. Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his

poverty, and remember his misery no more. The best argument for Christian abstinence from alcohol is the simple truth that we are a royal priesthood. Wine is not for kings. Wine is not for those who appreciate the riches of God's compassion abundantly poured out upon them in Christ.

B. Rejecting God's compassion leads to finding your own way to face the problems of life (the cave was the best Lot could do; Lot was the best his daughters could do). Our own solutions to the problems we face are both pitifully inadequate and incredibly tragic in view of the compassion of the Lord for us. He could do so much more for us, if only we turned our hearts and our lives over to Him in response to His compassion.

Conclusion: How will you and I respond to the compassionate God who destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah? Lot's lust for the pleasures and possessions of Sodom caused him to fail the God who loved him so. May that same love that the Lord has for us as His children find in us a better response this morning.

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*