

Two Hearts – Two Passions

A sermon by Pr. David Johnson

Today's Old Testament lesson picks up where last week's left off (*kind of*); at the point where the angels are trying to deliver Lot's family from the impending destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. For now, we'll simply summarize the horrors of the evening before:

- * All the men of the city (*...the men of the city...both young and old, all the people from every quarter...*) attack Lot trying to get to the male visitors in his house.
- * Lot pleads that the attack stop (*...do not act wickedly*).
- * Lot offers his two virgin daughters as appeasement.
- * The mass of men continue their attack, but on Lot.
- * The men refuse to cease their assault; the visitors rescue Lot and strike the immoral masses with blindness, who persistently continue to grope for the door.

Oh, how sad and shocking is this picture! Sin, as they say, has no end to its downward spiral. Once the line is crossed, and the course towards destruction is set, the only question remaining is one of how far will God let me go? How much rope will God give me before I hang myself? Well, in this sad case, judgment was on its way.

I couldn't help but consider how powerful Lot's example is, especially when compared with this week's New Testament lesson from Luke chapter 5. Let's begin by looking at Lot and his family in Gen.19:

Genesis 19:15-16 When morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Up, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away in the punishment of the city." ^{16a} But he hesitated....

"Morning dawned;" the sun starts to break over the horizon. This isn't the middle of the night, when normal folks should be asleep. God allowed Lot and his family to rest, and then didn't send them out until they could make their way in daylight.

We then see that Lot and his family had to be "urged" to leave. The angels were standing in Lot's living room, effectively calling "fire," and Lot wasn't feeling any sense of urgency. In fact, the next verse tells us Lot's reaction exactly: (16a) "*But he hesitated.*"

Can you imagine? Your town is completely immersed in sin, immorality, and violence. You're told by a heavenly messenger that the whole region is about to be torched to the ground, along with everyone in it. And you aren't sure if you want to get out.

This reminds me of the days and weeks preceding the eruption of Mount St. Helens in Washington State. I was attending Bible School at the time in Seattle. Reports about the coming eruption were all over the news. Law enforcement and Forestry Rangers were covering the area, warning residents to get out of their homes and move to safer locations. But still, I was amazed how many hesitated or refused to listen to the warnings, and were in fact, wiped out when the mountain did eventually blow.

God should have just let him stay. After all, he had already shown that he was a greedy little buzzard to begin with (*Gen. 13:8-13*). God could have let Lot and his family stay and get wiped out in the deluge of hellfire; and He would have been just in doing so. But He didn't.

Genesis 19:16b ...So the men seized his hand and the hand of his wife and the hands of his two daughters, for the compassion of the Lord was upon him; and they brought him out, and put him outside the city.

The angels had to grab the hands of Lot, his wife, and their two daughters; and then pull them out of the city. Lot's hesitation wasn't just a momentary pause, a brief delay brought on by a second of nostalgia; like someone pausing at the front door before leaving their childhood home for the last time. The angels had to grab their hands and "bring them out." Lot's family had to be "put outside the city!"

So, if this was Lot's attitude and that of his family, why didn't God just let them fry in the hellfire and brimstone? We see God's motivation in verse 16 and again in verse 29.

Gen 19:16 ... for the compassion of the LORD {was} upon him; and they brought him out, and put him outside the city.

Gen 19:29 ...when God destroyed the cities of the valley, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in which Lot lived.

God's amazing compassion, and His commitment to His servant Abraham, are the only things that saved Lot from that horrendous devastation. Even so, Lot didn't escape without one more instruction.

Genesis 19:17 When they had brought them outside, one said, "Escape for your life! Do not look behind you, and do not stay anywhere in the valley; escape to the mountains, or you will be swept away."

You'd think that Lot would get the message; "God's judgment is coming, and you'd better get out of here." My feet would be flying and I'd be looking for the nearest hillside cave to dive into. But not Lot! Instead, he decides to question the angels as to the possibility of a shortcut.

Genesis 19:18-21 But Lot said to them, "Oh no, my lords! ¹⁹ Now behold, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have magnified your lovingkindness, which you have shown me by saving my life; but I cannot escape to the mountains, for the disaster will overtake me and I will die; ²⁰ now behold, this town is near enough to flee to, and it is small. Please, let me escape there (is it not small?) that my life may be saved." ²¹ He said to him, "Behold, I grant you this request also, not to overthrow the town of which you have spoken.

Having just experienced God's compassion by being escorted out of Sodom, Lot appeals to God's mercy for yet another miraculous favor. He begs God both for time and for the salvation of the city of Zoar (*It is implied that the city had originally been slated for destruction. By going there, it would have to be spared*).

Now think about these excuses for a second. Lot's appeal is truly remarkable:

1. "*I won't get to the mountains before destruction hits.*"
Lot implies that after going to all this trouble to save him,

God would then forget where he is and wipe his family out with some kind of “friendly fire.” This also shows us Lot’s lack of true commitment to leave the area. Like Lot, many of us want to get just outside the threat of punishment, but stay close enough to our former lives.

2. Lot’s appeal is that Zoar is a small town (*He states this twice*). His assumption is that small equates to “not so bad.” Zoar is a small town, so its sins must be small. Lot’s inference is that only the big, urban cities have the kind of vile wickedness that deserves obliteration. Right? Wrong!

Anywhere the heart of man is present, there is the potential for great atrocities. Sodom and Gomorrah (and the rest of those cities destroyed) weren’t destroyed because their sins were bigger than the next worst cities. They were destroyed because all righteousness had departed from their lives and the accompanying lifestyles could no longer be left unpunished. They were destroyed so this cancer of self-absorbed hedonism would stop its destructive metastasizing. Size is no measurement of spiritual health!

But even in the face of these flimsy excuses, God still shows his amazing mercy and patience; to a point.

Genesis 19:22-26 *Hurry, escape there, for I cannot do anything until you arrive there.*” Therefore the name of the town was called Zoar. ²³ The sun had risen over the earth when Lot came to Zoar. ²⁴ Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone 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 his wife, from behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

Commentator Matthew Henry made this observation:

“Lot lingered; he trifled...The salvation of the most righteous men is of God’s mercy, not by their own merit. We are saved by grace. God’s power also must be acknowledged in bringing souls out of a sinful state. If God had not been merciful to us, our lingering had been our ruin. Lot must flee for his life. He must not hanker after Sodom. Such commands as these are given to those who, through grace, are delivered out of a sinful state and condition. Return not to sin and Satan. Rest not in self and the world. Reach toward Christ and heaven, for that is escaping to the mountain, short of which we must not stop.”

God, restrained by His great compassion, held off the destructive forces of fire and brimstone until Lot arrived at Zoar. What an amazing phrase, “I cannot do anything until you arrive there.” What undeserved favor; what grace. But it isn’t cheap grace that can be played with and manipulated; as Lot’s wife found out.

Our Gospel lesson from Luke 5 is such a different snapshot of a human response to a divine challenge.

Luke 5:1-3 *Now it happened that while the crowd was pressing around Him and listening to the word of God, He was standing by the lake of Gennesaret; ² and He saw two boats lying at the edge of the lake; but the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets. ³ And He got into one of the boats, which was Simon’s, and asked him to put out a little way from the land. And He sat down and began teaching the people from the boat.*

Jesus, seeing that the fishermen had finished for the day, gets into a boat on the shore and simply asks Simon to take Him out a little ways so He can preach more effectively (*sound travels well over water*). The implied result is that Simon simply did as Jesus asked; “*And He sat down and began teaching the people from the boat.*”

Simon’s unquestioning obedience allowed Jesus to minister to those who followed Him. But even so, Simon wasn’t sure he trusted Jesus’ knowledge or techniques.

Luke 5:4-5 *When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” ⁵ Simon answered and said, “Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets.”*

Simon played along with Jesus’ first request. But now Jesus was on Simon’s turf; fishing. This is what he knew and understood. But something inside Simon drove him to listen to this seemingly confused man. And in the end, it was Simon who would receive the blessing.

Luke 5:6-7 *When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break; ⁷ so they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink.*

In that moment, Simon was challenged by Jesus to, as C.S. Lewis once wrote, “*Come further up, come further in!*” We don’t know why Simon responded in faith, other than the working of the Holy Spirit. But we do know that his obedience, weary as it was, was rewarded miraculously. Simon Peter was changed.

Luke 5:8-10 *But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus’ feet, saying, “Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!” ⁹ For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken; ¹⁰ and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men.”*

In a moment, Simon Peter was transformed into a true worshipper; one who worships in Spirit and in truth. He acknowledged who God was, and who he was; and fell at Jesus’ feet in humble remorse. As a result, Jesus gave him a promotion, which the whole company accepted in turn with great joy.

Luke 5:10b-11 *“Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men.” ¹¹ When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him.*

None of them knew what lay ahead, but they committed themselves to follow Jesus, come what may. May God keep us from the reluctance and regret that undermined Lot and his wife. And may Simon’s committed response be our own.