

Following the Biblical Stream:

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Part LXXXVII

In our last segment, we began our look at chapter 19 of the book of Genesis and the story where the two angels came to Sodom in order to give Lot and his family a chance to escape the destruction of the cities. We talked about how the angels did not come to evangelize the cities because of the deep corruption that had already set in, which is shown that evening as the men of Sodom come to demand Lot hand over the two angels. All this led us into a conversation about the ways in which Lot had justified not just coming to live in this place, but continue even to this point knowing what a sin-filled place it was. In talking about the specific events of what the men of Sodom demanded and how Lot responded to them, we came through verse 8, and we are now ready to start verse 9 of Genesis chapter 19.

Verse 9, of course, puts us a bit in the middle of this story, but that's fine because we have already covered the fact Lot should have turned to the angels for help instead of trying to rely on his own ability to appease the men of the city. We talked about how Lot seemed to understand what a sinful place he was in along with how much that had corrupted his mind, which is shown in that he offers to give them his daughters if they would leave the angels alone. While I keep referring to them as angels in order to keep things straight in our minds, let us not forget that these angels appeared to be just men. Lot may have maintained the discernment to know from the start they were more than that, but the men of the city only cared that they were strangers who could possibly be taken advantage of. They show the depths of their depraved minds as in verse 9 they do not desire Lot's daughters, but continue their demand Lot hand over these strangers.

Verse 9 is also where the emphasis lays for what we touched on in our last segment about how much these men did not see Lot as one of them! Lot may have lived in this place for some time now, and if we remember how Abraham had once saved Sodom's and Gomorrah's people from invading kings, which their own kings could not do, we see how much even that incident did not cause Lot to be held in any high regard. These people also did not fear Abraham's wrath for anything they might do to Lot. In fact, they make it clear that just the delay in getting what they wanted, which Lot had caused in trying to talk them into leaving the angels alone, led to the men of the city informing Lot he had stepped over a

line and they would do more to him than they desired to do to the two strangers in his house. After making this threat, they showed they were through talking and would enter the house by force to take the men for themselves.

Verse 10 is where we see the miraculous intervention of the angels to save Lot's life in this situation, and we should be careful not to miss the point Lot still does not cry out to them or God Himself for help. If it had not been for the angels taking action on their own, Lot himself would not have been saved. This shows us how much God is there doing things for us, even when we don't have the wisdom to ask, which speaks to how much we literally push God out of our lives by refusing to follow His direction. This entire story stands in sharp contrast to the typical thinking of those who claim to believe in God because we tend to believe God only acts when we plea for His help. We often find ourselves even trying to appease God or satisfy some ritual we think will cause Him to act on our behalf. However, this is not the right thought. We should live our lives with the understanding God wants to act in our personal lives and even in our world as a whole. He has given us a free will that He will not violate, but the desire to help is always there. This is why Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:8 that God knows what we have need of before we ever ask.

We take such instructions with the thought God, of course, is all knowing; but what we do not stop to think about is the dynamics of how this works. James tells us we have not because we ask not, and at times we don't have because we ask amiss. (James 4:1-3) That "amiss" word is not about us not knowing how to ask, but about us not knowing what we need. You see, God knows what we have need of, but if we are not in tune with the ways of God we do not know what to ask for. This is the lack of faith the Bible tells us of. At other times it's as simple as the fact we do not concur and believe we need other things in spite of what we know or don't know. God will sometimes hinder us or in ways attempt to persuade us from what is a wrong choice, but if it is what we insist on, He will not ultimately stop us unless there are other people we stand to harm which He is protecting in some way. It's a complex thing only God can orchestrate properly, but that is why we must trust Him and be in tune with His will as much as we can. It only stands to reason God is not going to give us something or help us obtain the circumstances we desire when He knows we need something else. That would be

foolish, and while thinking about how foolish such a thing would be for God to do, one should consider how much this means some ritual or the like, and/or us being in some position we feel entitles us to what we ask for is never going to get us anything.

What Jesus said over and over to people whom He healed was that their faith had made them whole. They may not have had the faith to know the ways to live everyday with God. They may not have had a very close relationship with God or one to speak of at all, but something about the fact we are God's children caused them to come to Jesus and know there was healing in His touch and words. One can argue, of course, someone who is sick will run to anyone they think might be able to help them; thus, this is fairly meaningless. However, Jesus said faith the size of a mustard seed could move mountains. (Matt. 17:20) If that is the case, how little faith do you think it takes in order to receive something God desires to do for us before we even ask? Now, I understand better than many people how much it hurts to live year after year of your life in bad physical health and not see God heal, so it might seem a bit strange to others that I would say such a thing. I have no doubt for many who suffer such things this sounds very discouraging. It is easy to fall into the devil's lie of believing your faith is so small you can't even receive healing God wants to do, but there are some facts we must keep in mind when thinking about what I just said.

First is the fact that when Jesus walked this earth, it was an opportunity like no other for those willing to go to Him. Jesus was here to fulfill prophecy that showed Him to be The Messiah. In doing this, there almost was not a time healing would not flow through Him for those who came; because in convincing us God can do all things, Jesus was here to show He lacked nothing in His ability to do something so simple as to provide healing or even raise the dead. On the other hand, God not choosing to heal some of us in the state we are in now is no different than the fact Jesus did not heal everyone on earth while He was here. Jesus was walking as a man but showing Himself to be God in the flesh. This is why some of the people He healed were even said to have been in need of it so as to be used to glorify God. (John 9:1-7) Lazarus was even allowed to die so Jesus could raise him from the grave in sight of those making their final choice as to Who Jesus was. (John 11:1-11) God really can work with us to bring us through in the way that is best for our lives and the Kingdom of Heaven. This can be very hard to accept at times. Believe me, I know! However, I have to admit there are ways I can see how much my own personal

desire to do things would have easily gotten in the way of me doing what God really wanted me to do if health issues had not held me back. Those many years ago, when I started into the ministry, I certainly would never have seen my ministry work as being the writing I do now. However, it would seem obvious at this point that is what God wanted.

I will also admit people like me are very blessed, in that we can at least see some logic behind why God may have allowed us to suffer many things in order to keep us in what had always been God's plan. Speaking for myself alone, I know it has always been my deeper desire to serve God in my life than have other things, and in that way God has answered my prayers. The fact I had conflicting desires is the only reason it's harder to see. Thus, do not become discouraged if you have not had the opportunity to see through the dark glass to some degree, but if you can in any way, thank The Lord for the opportunity to suffer if that is what it took to keep you in the right circumstances to do the work of The Lord, or even just to save your own soul. (I Cor. 13:9-13) Could it have been easier if I had been willing to listen and follow without the sickness? Yes, but keep in mind that doing things such as fasting, which is the depriving of one's most basic physical desire, even need, in order to spend time in prayer and/or the work of The Lord is something we do because the spirit is often willing but the flesh is weak. (Matt. 26:41) That is to say the flesh is weak in wanting to put forth the effort to do the work of God, while it is very forceful in getting the things it desires. When we dampen the flesh's ability, we can more easily see what the spirit has often known all along!

While I can see ways in which God turned my life in better directions than I would have followed by allowing me to be in poor health, I also see how the mistakes in my desires have put me in a less advantaged state than I could have been in. In all this, we see how sinful we are and how much sin makes faith a very complex relationship. That is why we must work every day, not to find ways to doubt God, but to understand how much He is the far better partner in the relationship. The more we can keep our fleshly desires under control in order to allow His will to be what works through our lives to change our lives as well as reach to those around us, the more we can accomplish for the Kingdom of God. In growing our own lives to be what God created us to be as individuals, we are doing the very thing God wanted to have humans around to do. The fact certain people are sick and others are not does not necessarily mean they have done better in this area of faith, but it can just as easily mean they have rejected God's true

direction for their lives even to the point God allowing them to be ill would still not have changed their direction.

The fact all things can cut both ways emphasizes how much we must not look at others but focus on being what God wants us to be, and try to do what God wants us to do by correcting our course as God shows us what is right and what is wrong. Satan will try to convince us of the ways to see everything in a bad light as much as he can, but we must ignore him and thank God that He is longsuffering with us. We should thank God that as long as we do not reject His moving in our lives, He is willing to help us even when we don't have the wisdom to ask for the help or take the right actions. This one simple example in Lot's life shows us that fact. He had continued to try on his own to protect angels who did not need his protection, and when it came to the moment where Lot was in too deep to do anything more, the angels literally pulled him out of danger and back into the house. What is interesting is that we are told the men of the city wanted to break down the door, which would indicate it was closed behind Lot. However, after we are told the angels pulled Lot back into the house, the wording seems to make clear they then shut the door. This is one of those things I believe loses a little in our weak English language and simply needs further consideration.

I for one believe it is true the door was shut behind Lot, and that is why they were willing to push past him and/or through him to break it down. At the same time, I do not think the angels opened the door to pull Lot inside. Now, I get the fact they could have easily held the men back while they did such a thing; but when you consider the order of what is done here, I believe God is giving these people every chance to turn back on their own. Lot had done what a man, even a man giving things he should never have been willing to give, could possibly do to turn the men of Sodom back from their wicked intent. When that did not work, the angels showed themselves to be more than just two strangers passing through town! The men of the city were going to do worse to Lot than they intended to do with the angels, and what happened is that one moment they virtually had Lot by the throat, and in the next moment Lot had been pulled out of their reach and back into the house. This should have left the men of Sodom with something to be stunned about and maybe given a second thought about what they did next!

It would seem it did not because they had already determined to break down the door, and I believe they went forward in their blind rage to attempt to do just

that. What the words here mean when we are told the angels shut the door is not just that the door was open and they shut it, but they made the door unbreakable. Now the men of the city had two things to think about. One, Lot had somehow been taken back into the house without the door being left vulnerable for even a second; and two, a door that should have been fairly easy to break through was suddenly like a brick wall as they tried to break in. This shows how insistent they were on their evil ways, and illustrates again that fact of why God did not send His angels into the city to attempt to evangelize or warn them. These people were truly of a reprobate mind, and not even physical proof they were dealing with no ordinary men inside that house fazed them, or gave them a moment of pause in their determination to do evil!

Because these men were still not deterred in any way, verse 11 tells us the angels took yet another step and struck each of them on a very personal level. The men would become blind, and this would leave the men of Sodom in confusion as to where the door they were attempting to break down even was. Here again, let's not miss the words, for we are told they "...wearied themselves to find the door." What does that tell us? Well, one can interpret it as you like, but I believe the wording is clear on the fact, even this blindness, which very well may have been just as much a disorientation as it was lack of sight, did not totally stop them. They still attempted to find the door, but in spite of the fact that at this point it just wasn't possible for them to do so, they still wore themselves out trying. If this was not a sequence to give them a step by step chance to walk away, why did the angels not just blind them in the first place? That would have stopped them from abusing Lot, and their inability to find him or the door would have allowed Lot to simply go back inside. At that point there would have been no real urgency to secure the door, and thus no need to point out the angels specifically did so. Because God already knew the people were too far gone to save, and He gave us the chance to see this by allowing Abraham to ask what any incredibly merciful person might have asked if given the chance. This now leaves us with the truth, there should be no doubt that this sequence of stopping the evil at Lot's house was also not done for the men of Sodom's sake as much as it was for the sake of Lot and his family to see the same thing firsthand, as well as make the point to us, once again.

There was no logical reason after this incident for Lot or his wife - and one would certainly think his daughters - to ask the same kind of thing Abraham asked. Did the cities really need to be destroyed? Were they



really that beyond hope? Yes! Should there be any desire to stay here any longer? Could there be any excuse for thinking God was being unjust in taking this action? No! This is where we are when we come to verse 11, and that is why the angels ask Lot if there is any other family members he would like to attempt to get out of the cities before God destroyed them. Lot should have had the clearest of mind at this point as to why this question was asked; why the angels explained in verse 13 the sin of the cities had caused God to send the angels to destroy them; and why he should act upon getting things in order with urgency. Verse 14 tells us that is exactly what Lot did. Obviously, trusting the angels had taken care of any fear he need have about going out and finding them, Lot goes to his sons-in-law to tell them they needed to leave because of what God was about to do. We don't know how many daughters Lot had, but he obviously had more than one that had already married men of this place. Now Lot and those daughters would pay for the mistake of intermixing with sinful people.

We are told his sons-in-law took Lot's warning as if he had lost his mind. We don't know for sure where in the cities they lived, but if they were not part of the mob that came to Lot's house that evening, one would think the word of such an incident would have spread quickly. Maybe they had not had time to hear of it, but they were married to Lot's daughters, and one would think someone would have been eager to tell them, of all people in the cities. In any case, they had what was left of that night to think about Lot's words and make a decision. When morning came, the angels told Lot to get up and take his wife and two daughters who were in the house with him and get out of the cities without concern to whether the others had reconsidered or not. This speaks to how much this is true in our lives on this earth. We will likely not be faced with such a direct physical event from which we need to warn those we care about to flee from, but we do find ourselves caring deeply about those we believe still are not living for God. We obviously hope they might change their minds before it's too late. However, we can only do what we can do, and sacrificing our own lives because they choose not to heed the word is only a way for all lives involved to be lost!

The end of verse 15 leaves no doubt as to the fact that Lot staying in the city would not have saved it. He was told if he stayed he too would simply be destroyed along with it. You can't save this world by becoming part of its iniquity. You can't walk, talk, and act like those of this world as a way to lead others to the saving knowledge of Christ. You must do as God

instructs, and those who refuse to listen will have to pay for their own choices. This was something Lot and his family had trouble with in this situation in spite of what had happened the night before. Verse 16 tells us they lingered and, once again, God would show His mercy toward them in doing something they did not ask Him to do but which they needed. The angels would take them all by the hand and whether through miraculous means of transport or physically leading and protecting them on foot, the angels made sure the family made it outside the cities. Would they continue to walk on or would they turn back? God had given them every chance to take the right path. The choice was simply up to them now!

This point is emphasized again in verse 17, as it is at this time the angels give them the specific instructions they were still to flee for their lives. This means they were not far enough away to escape but far enough away no one but themselves could stop them from escaping. This is important, as a later verse tells us it was very much for the mercy of God upon Abraham that Lot was saved. In spite of that, we see in this an example of how God will only go so far. God had done a great deal to bring this family safely out of the destruction, but they would have to go into the mountains for themselves if they wanted to be safe. This verse is also where we are told they were given the instruction not to even look back, and this is where we see God showing us another important detail. I like to talk a lot about how ritual and ceremony will not save one's soul in the end. I do this because people think when you teach so much about the ceremonial Laws and observances God gave to Israel in the Law that you believe these are somehow necessary for salvation, and they are not. I also emphasize this over and over, because in spite of how much people of our day seem to reject the notion that following God's ceremonial Laws are necessary, even something Jews should totally abandon, so many are blind to the fact they are following some kind of formula they believe will save them, which they came up with on their own.

Now, I'll be the first to admit we each must work out our own salvation and not simply follow others. This makes the fact we came up with these formulas for ourselves a good thing. However, we need to be aware of how much our formula is likely based on the fact those groups of people you would like to be a part of believe such things, and/or you think your formula puts you in the majority. Call it a formula or simply what you believe, the point is there is no merit in believing something if it is not the truth. This is made clear in the story of Lot's family being spared. Four people certainly



does not constitute a majority in any way! That aside, the cities would be destroyed, and only those who followed God's actual instructions for their lives at that moment were going to be saved. If that doesn't emphasize how much we should pray without ceasing, I don't know what does! (I Thes. 5:17) God had warned them; given them a chance to see how hopeless the situation of the people in the cities was; allowed them to warn others; and taken them the first steps they might not have been able to take in order to escape on their own. Now, they stood with a simple ritual to follow. I know many would say it's a stretch to call it a ritual, but keep in mind it can be as hard as being expected to crawl up some stony path to a temple of some kind on your hands and knees until they are bloody, or it can be as simple as fleeing into the mountains. Both can be formulated things people believe will save them, but only what God actually instructs us has value.

In this case, fleeing to the mountains should have seemed a small price to pay for their lives and one a person would easily follow if for no other reason than to be safe rather than sorry. Thus, what God asks of them is one more specific thing that would reveal the truth in their hearts, and that instruction was not a ritual of something they were to do, it truly was a simple instruction about what not to do. This is one of those perfect examples of how much if we put our focus on the things we should be doing, we will not find ourselves with the opportunity to do the things we should not! We often think God is so hard on us, telling us not to do this and not to do that, but none of it is to take something from us, at least not something which shouldn't be in our lives to begin with. Such instructions are given so we will turn our eyes to the tasks that are edifying to our growth in the ways of God, which is the true path that leads to salvation. Lot and his family were simply told not to look back but to go on in the direction that would save their lives from the destruction the sinful people of Sodom and Gomorrah had brought upon themselves. Looking back was only a way to impede that progress. We can be concerned about others, and we should be, but if we are instructed to come out of this world and not look back lest we be consumed by the same destruction they would not begin to listen to God enough to keep from bringing upon themselves in the first place, then we can only afford to do so to a certain point!

We pass stages in this life, and Lot's experience shows us some of those stages. I go again to the idea so many who claim to be Christians have about intentionally mingling with the world for the sake of reaching others, but there are points of no return we need

to understand. There may be a point in our beginning walk with God when we do not understand how damaging to our walk it is to involve ourselves in one activity or another, but as we grow to learn about the danger, we need to get those things out of our lives. Lot had the chance to warn the rest of his family before the angels took them out of the cities, and I'm sure his emphatic way of conveying this news, along with the urgency of the need to heed it, added to why his sons-in-law believed him to be mad. Nonetheless, when the time came to leave, they could wait no longer for them to change their minds. Once they stood there on the outskirts of the cities, there was nothing but damage to themselves to be had by attempting to run back one last time and try to reason with them. Lot, his wife, and their daughters could go on with their lives, but not if they clung to what they had been freed from no matter the excuse for doing so.

The time had come to make hast and flee into the mountains. They are even specifically told not to stay anywhere in the lower lands where Lot had originally desired to be when he parted from Abraham. The family was to head for higher ground. There was not even a reason to look back because that could cause them to stumble by not keeping an eye on where they were going. That one stumble could not be afforded; and when I think about this, I think about how much we become accustom to stumbling. God loves us and He will reach for us when we fall, but more and more those who claim to believe in God take too much comfort in that fact. We can't do anything about the times we have stumbled in the past, but we cannot say that about the future. Avoiding all the falls we can is something we should be focused on, not the excuse that if we do it's no big deal because God is there to pick us up. The time for Lot and his family to be convinced of this and move on from the cities had come, and that is why they were told not to even look back!

Until next time, Shalom!

