

GRACE FOR SODOM AND GOMORRAH

GENESIS 18:20-33

20 And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; 21 I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know. 22 And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the Lord. 23 And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? 24 Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? 25 That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? 26 And the Lord said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.

27 And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes: 28 Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And he said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it. 29 And he spake unto him yet again, and said, Peradventure there shall be forty found there. And he said, I will not do it for forty's sake. 30 And he said unto him, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Peradventure there shall thirty be found there. And he said, I will not do it, if I find thirty there. 31 And he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord: Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for twenty's sake. 32 And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake. 33 And the Lord went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place.

ESV

Introduction

In order to appreciate the central message of this passage we must understand God's call of Abram (later changed to Abraham). Abram was living with his father, brother and wife in Ur of the Chaldees. God called Abram and made a covenant with him.

Genesis 12:1 Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: 2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: 3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Abram took his wife, Sarai and his nephew Lot and traveled to the land that the LORD had promised him. Abram and Lot had many cattle and Lot decided he would separate from Abram. Abram told him he could choose any location in the land and he chose the fertile land of the plain of Jordan that was well watered and much like the Garden of Eden (Genesis 13:10). There were two main cities on the north end of the sea named Sodom (it name means to “scorch” or burnt) and Gomorrah (its name means “a ruined heap). Both cities sat near the Sea of the Arabah (later known as the Dead Sea or the Salt Sea).

The story goes on that Lot *pitched his tent toward Sodom* (Genesis 13:12). With all of its beauty and great for farming and raising livestock, there was one big problem; the men of Sodom were *wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly* (Genesis 13:13).

Time passes and we find Abram living a great life in the Land of Canaan. But for Lot, things were not going so well for him and his family.

I believe that most of you have heard the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah. The general thought is that both of these towns are so wicked that God has pronounced judgment and decided to destroy them. But I think there is so much more to this story as we shall see.

20 And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; 21 I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know. 22 And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the Lord.

This passage follows the introduction that Abraham and Sarah will have a male child in their old age (Genesis 18:9-15). Abraham and Jehovah are talking when the LORD let’s Abraham in on the secret; they are there to search out and destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Two of the men get up and began walking to Sodom.

*23 And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?
24 Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein?*

Being the kind of man that Abraham is, I believe his thoughts turn to his nephew Lot, his wife, two daughters and two sons in law. Abraham is so at ease with communing with the LORD, that he does something incredibly bold. He intercedes on behalf of the people in Sodom and Gomorrah, people that he is likely to have never met. This is evidence of the character of Abraham, that the LORD chose him to be the leader of His people.

It is clear from this exchange that Abraham is aware of the wickedness in those cities, even before the LORD notified him of the impending judgment. Abraham asks, “*Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?*” Abraham’s thought is that there might be righteous people living in the city. So Abraham does something unique in all of scripture. He begins to bargain with the LORD for the souls of men in the two cities.

25 That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? 26 And the Lord said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.

Abraham’s boldness to me is not the story. The greater story is not in Abraham’s requests to save some in the cities, but how the LORD will respond. Abraham asks God to relent from destroying the cities because of their wickedness if 50 righteous could be found, and the LORD hears his request and grants it.

In ancient Near Eastern culture they believe in *guilt by association*. I raised my three children in this thought as well. We encouraged our children to choose their friends wisely. I would quote the English proverb by saying, “One bad apple spoils the whole bunch.” Or “You are known by the company you keep.” They got the message and we rarely had to intervene.

Abraham is asking God if the lives of 50 righteous, outweigh the wickedness of the cities. And God’s response is yes, “*If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.*”

Abraham continues to narrow the window by asking God to spare the cities if there are 45 (28), 40 (29), 30 (30), 20 (31) and finally 10 (32). I believe that upon the LORD’s acceptance of 50 righteous people, he faced the horrible thought of “what if there aren’t fifty righteous people in the two cities? What if the message of Jehovah had not reached 50, then there was a problem with his request and Abraham continued to ask the LORD to spare the cities evil wickedness for a few righteous.

Notice with me the response of God in each of these requests:

50 - Genesis 18:26 “*If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.*”

45 - Genesis 18:28 “If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy *it*.”

40 - Genesis 18:29 “I will not do *it* for forty's sake.”

30 - Genesis 18:30 “I will not do *it*, if I find thirty there.”

20 - Genesis 18:31 “I will not destroy *it* for twenty's sake.”

10 - Genesis 18:32 “I will not destroy *it* for ten's sake.”

The bidding ends at 10. “*And the LORD went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place.*” (Genesis 18:33)

The key in this passage is that the LORD and Abraham were “communing.” They were not only having a dialog, but they were talking and exchanging thoughts and ideas. Isn't that a beautiful thought?

Well, we all know what happens next. The LORD did not find 10 righteous people in the city and God destroys the city. Why or why, didn't Abraham continue by suggesting if there were but one righteous person, would God restrain from the destruction of the city? I believe, looking at the grace that the LORD was willing to bestow upon the cities at Abraham's bidding, he would have spared them.

You get the sense from the story that Abraham could have said, “God, will You save this city on behalf of five?” And God would have said, “Sure.” “Will You save the whole place on behalf of one righteous?” You get the sense that God would have said, “Yes.” Why didn't Abraham keep asking?

He realized one of the central truths in Scripture

one of the most amazing truths

one of the scariest truths in Scripture

and one of the most awesome truths in Scripture:

The Apostle Peter fully understood this fact. God is longsuffering and does not want any to perish.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

God is willing to not punish sinners if there is one righteous that can be found among them, but the simple truth is, none of us are righteous.

In Romans 3:10 (ESV), Paul talks about this very truth.

Romans 3:10 - As it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.'

Conclusion

The love and grace of God is interweaved within this wonderful story. The cities deserved to be destroyed and yet God was “...*not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*”

All it took was one person who understood what was at stake. The entire population of the areas surrounding Sodom and Gomorrah were to be destroyed...every man, woman, child. The results of God's rightful judgment was more than Abraham could contemplate. Therefore, because Abraham was so concerned over the death of so many, he entreated God.

And so, what is our hope? Our only hope to be pardoned for sin, because none of us are righteous, is that God will send to us One who is. What's so amazing about God's grace toward us is not that we were so wonderful. It's not that we were so worth it that God died for us and took our place. What's so amazing about grace is that we were so messed up and that we were so *not* worth it, and God came and died for us and took our place.

When you stand before God the eternal Judge and He asks you, “Why should I pardon you, sinner?” you'd better not say, “Because I was worth it.” Instead, you point to the right hand of the Father. “God, why should You pardon me? Because of Jesus. And God, I know You pardon sinners if one righteous can be found. He was found righteous.”

Bob Crowder