

Four Questions for Lot

Genesis 19

The 19th chapter of Genesis is one of the most fascinating in all of Scripture. It's got all of the ingredients to capture nearly anyone's attention – a salacious storyline, supernatural intrigue, Hollywood special effects, wanton destruction, and a tragic ending. Even some of those most unfamiliar with the Bible, are fascinated by the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The plight of Lot's family as doom rains down on his depraved city and the reasons for its destruction have placed this story under the microscope of history.

We are fascinated by this story in much the same way as we are by a car accident . We love to rubberneck, trying to catch a glimpse of the carnage, yet when we spot blood or body we are repulsed. It reminds me of one time when I was with my father traveling back to Kansas City from Alabama. We were held up for more than an hour on 1-70, once we got moving again, we drove by the remains of an accident involving two semis and a car. We saw a full-size car crumpled like aluminum foil to a width of no more than this. It was one of those scenes that you knew no one lived through it. It was a morbid sight that gave you a sinking feeling, with an acute awareness of your own mortality. Yet you do not look away, or close your eyes. And the scene sticks with you forever. Sodom and Gomorrah is one of the great car crashes of history.

Body:

But this passage isn't in the Bible just for our morbid curiosity. It has received much attention in recent years because of its focus on homosexuality. Some turn to it to affirm that same-sex relations are indeed a perversion, while others contort all common sense and understanding of the original Hebrew to say that homosexuality had nothing to do with God's righteous anger being poured out. It is popular among gay activists to say that the sin of Sodom was a violation of hospitality. While sexual perversion was far from Sodom's only sin, this explanation is ludicrous on its face. Jude 7 states, *"In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire."*

However, I believe this story has more to teach us than to just be a warning of the danger of a society that first tolerates, then accepts, and finally encourages sexual perversion. Though, if our culture continues to ignore these truths, she does so only to her destruction.

I believe as Christians living at the beginning of the 21st century we can learn much from the life of Lot, especially in contrast to the life of Abraham, which we have been looking at. We have seen that Abraham's faith was a flawed faith, but we also saw that a flawed faith is not a failed faith. We have seen Abraham grow through his failure and sin. His trust in God has matured through his trials.

Lot too has a flawed faith. But instead of growing through his failures, he got caught up in them. Instead of learning from his mistakes, Lot was pulled further in. Lot provides for us an example of someone who knows God but loves the world too much. He portrays for us the danger of a believer who tries at the same time to maintain their faith, and yet indulge in what the sinful world has to offer.

Our story begins all the way back in the 13th chapter of Genesis. This is where Abraham and Lot arrive in the Promised Land and find that there is not enough room for both of their flocks. So Abraham let Lot choose which land he wanted. We jump in on verse 10.

Gen 13:10-12

¹⁰ *Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, toward Zoar. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.)* ¹¹ *So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company:* ¹² *Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom.*

Notice that Lot based his decision entirely on material and earthly concerns. He didn't weigh the spiritual impact. He wasn't bothered by how the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah might affect him or his family. Surely, Lot wasn't planning of compromising his faith, but he was looking at only earthly factors in making his decision.

Also notice where he placed his tents, "near Sodom." He didn't actually go in. He just got close. He wanted a nice acreage in the country, but a short drive to mall. Sometimes we want to get as close as we can to sin without being polluted by it. We want to get close enough to experience some of its pleasure, without getting caught in its trap.

I just get a little buzzed. I don't really get drunk. I didn't break the law technically. It's common practice. Everyone does it. It's just a little porn. It's not the hardcore stuff. It's not like I'm actually doing anything. It's okay, because we're in love. It's okay, because doesn't God want me to be happy. We convince ourselves we can take it all the way to the edge and not go over.

I remember in sixth grade a time I got in trouble with two other boys because we were seeing how far we could push the lever on an out-of-order toilet without flushing it. Now what do you think was the end result of such behavior? When we try to push the lever in our spiritual lives the same thing happens. This is exactly what happens to Lot, and he's barely able to escape when it begins to overflow in Sodom. Now we turn to chp. 19.

Gen 19:1-4

The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. 2 "My lords," he said, "Please turn aside to your servant's house. You can wash your feet and spend

the night and then go on your way early in the morning." "No," they answered, "We will spend the night in the square." But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate.

Remember where Lot started? He pitched his tents *near* Sodom. Where do we find him now? Sitting at the city gate. That doesn't mean he was just lounging around there taking it easy. This was an official position. The city gate was where city business was conducted. It was like city hall. Those who "*sat at the gate*" were the elders or the magistrates of the city. To say that Lot was sitting at the gate shows that he held an official position with the city.

He has come a long way from merely pitching his tent near the city. Now he lives in a house within the walls of the city. He is thoroughly entrenched in the life of the city and involved in its affairs. He has achieved a position of notoriety and prominence. In pure earthly terms, Lot is a success. And yet what has he compromised to get there. Why did he insist so strongly that these visitors stay with him and not in the city square, which was customary in the ancient world? Because he knew what Sodom was like. He knew they wouldn't be safe.

I would like to ask four questions of Lot. I want to give all due credit to Ray Stedman for these questions. I think these questions will reveal how much Lot really gained or lost in Sodom. They expose the true cost of Lot's cultural compromise with Sodom.

I. How Has the Choice of Life in Sodom Affected Your Inner Life? (4-11)

The first question we could ask Lot is this, "Lot, how has your choice to live in Sodom affected your inner life?" What has been the price spiritually?

By going to Sodom, Lot was seeking the best of both worlds. He thought he could maintain his walk with God, while getting the best of what the world has to offer. We know of Lot's earthly success, but how did life in Sodom affect him spiritually? How did it affect his heart and mind? What did it do to his goals, his motives, his thoughts and feelings? Let's read Gen 19:4-11:

⁴ *Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom — both young and old — surrounded the house.* ⁵ *They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them."*

⁶ *Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him* ⁷ *and said, "No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing.* ⁸ *Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don't do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof"*

⁹ *"Get out of our way," they replied. And they said, "This fellow came here as an alien, and now he wants to play the judge! We'll treat you worse than them." They kept bringing pressure on Lot and moved forward to break down the door.*

¹⁰ *But the men inside reached out and pulled Lot back into the house and shut the door.* ¹¹

Then they struck the men who were at the door of the house, young and old, with blindness so that they could not find the door. NIV

Notice the extent of the evil in this city. In verse 4 it says that “*all*” the men of the city were involved. Young and old surrounded the house in a public display of lewdness and perversion. They were so filled with lust that even being struck blind didn't stop them. This kind of behavior was common and ordinary in the city.

He knows what they want is wicked. It is so depraved that offering his virgin daughters in exchange seems more preferable to him. We read an interesting description in 2 Pt. 2:7-8. Peter tells us that Lot, “*was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men.*” The word here literally means to be *worn out* or *made sick by continuing pain*. In verse 8 he goes on to say that Lot, living among them day after day, “*was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard.*” This was a word used for torture

Living in Sodom was a pain and torture to Lot's heart. Lot was sickened by this. He was pained by this, but he didn't do anything about it. Lot had tasted enough of the good things of God to never be satisfied with the obscene and lewd things of Sodom. Yet he still accepts it. He has no peace of heart? He has no joy of the Lord? There is no comfort in God's presence? Ray Stedman asks an insightful question here, “*What good is it to have luxuries and wealth and every material gain if the heart is continually filled with a great distress?*” Or as our Lord Jesus asks, “*What is it to gain the world, yet lose your soul?*”

Yet, despite all the trouble Sodom caused him, Lot had a fondness for the city. He found it hard to let it go. We will see in verses 15 and 16 that Lot had to be literally dragged from the city. In the end, Lot's choice to live in Sodom compromised his heart and faith.

II. How Has Your Choice of Life In Sodom Influenced that City for Good? (12-14)

A second question we would be wise to ask Lot would be this, “*Lot, how has your choice of life in Sodom influenced that city for good?*” What difference have you made? What positive impact have you had?

It's not wrong to be involved in the world. In fact as Christians we are not to withdraw from the world, but we are to go out into it, but to be salt and light. We are to bring the flavor and illumination of Christ to a putrid and dark world. We must be in the world, but not of it. A boat is to be in the water, the water isn't to be in the boat. As long as we are boats in the water, then our involvement with the world is good. But when the water begins to leak in the boat, we are in trouble.

I praise God for all of our Christian teachers serving in public schools. What a sight that was a couple of weeks ago to see our students praying for their teachers in school. I am thankful for people like

Pat who serves on the school board, and Benjamin Berkstresser who is our county prosecutor. We need people of faith, who can sit at the city gate if you will and be salt and light, an influence for righteousness.

A righteous person in a wicked world is a good thing if the righteous person can influence that world for good. It is apparent that Lot could have had influence in the city. He was one of the city leaders. He was successful. He had quickly risen through the ranks of the city. But with that prominent position of political influence, what kind of spiritual impact did Lot have on the city? How many did he win? How many did he lead to God? Again we read:

Gen 19:12-14

12 The two men said to Lot, "Do you have anyone else here — sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here, 13 because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the LORD against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it."

14 So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were pledged to marry his daughters. He said, "Hurry and get out of this place, because the LORD is about to destroy the city!" But his sons-in-law thought he was joking. NIV

What a profound statement! Notice what the angels asked him, do you have anyone else in the city? Anyone he had a godly influence with? Anyone with whom he'd made an impact for righteousness? There was absolutely no one. He didn't even have any influence with his own sons-in-law. They thought he was only joking. Abraham had prayed for only 10 righteous men, but Lot, starting with his own family, couldn't even influence one. The reason there weren't 10 righteous people in Sodom, is because Lot had zero spiritual impact. Lot's political and financial impact was great, but his spiritual influence was nothing.

There is no doubt that we live in a sinful world. Maybe it's our neighbors. Maybe it's our co-workers. Maybe it's our classmates. Maybe it's some of our friends. Maybe it's someone in our own family. The question we need to ask ourselves is: who is influencing whom? Are we influencing them for good, or are they influencing us for bad? Are the only successes we can count earthly ones? Are our only victories material?

We need to pray that the Lord would make us salty, and not like Lot's wife. If we are hiding our lights under a basket, we need to throw it off, and put that light in a prominent place in our lives. We cannot leave our faith in the den, when we go out to talk to our neighbors. We cannot put it in the desk drawer at work. We cannot put it in our lockers at school. We must let it shine!

III. How Much Earthly Gain Did You Really Make in Sodom (15-29)

A third question we need to ask Lot is this: How much earthly gain did you really make in Sodom? You seemed to have achieved a lot in Sodom. You climbed the ladder of success. You had a

home in the city. You had an influential position at the city gate, but what did that really get you? Was it really worth it? At the end of it all, Lot, what do you really have to show for your years in Sodom?

Let's read the record

²⁴ *Then the Lord rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the Lord out of the heavens.* ²⁵ *Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, destroying all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land.*

If you want to know how much Lot made in Sodom, go to Israel today and take a look at the area around the Dead Sea. It is a lifeless, dead place. In the sea, there is no living thing. There are no fish, shellfish, or seaweed. The banks are desolate and bare. The remains of Sodom and Gomorrah that have been uncovered reveal a layer of destruction that is three feet thick. Embedded in the ruins are burnt balls of sulfur and asphalt, or what the Bible calls brimstone. There are remains of buildings that burnt from the roof down. Archaeologists tell of an awesome catastrophe that turned what was once a rich, luxurious, fertile plain into a desolate wasteland. They have found evidence of earthquakes and volcanoes of catastrophic proportions.

Ultimately, Lot gained nothing in Sodom. By compromising his faith, Lot lost not only his peace, his joy, and his influence, eventually, he lost all he had. He even lost his wife. Her heart was so attached to Sodom that even as she was being dragged away, she longed for Sodom and lingered to look until she was caught up in the destruction and was turned into a pillar of salt.

Friends, when we face the day of reckoning in our own lives, whether it comes at the end of our natural lives, or like in the case of Sodom some impending doom here and now, or if Jesus returns before then, we must ask ourselves: what have I really gained? Too many Christians sacrifice the true treasures of life to gain the trinkets of the world. We sacrifice marriages for more prestige in our careers. We sacrifice our children for a nicer car. We sacrifice our character for a few fleeting moments of pleasure. We sacrifice our souls for what moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal. We give up what lasts to get what fades.

What are you gaining in this life that you can take with you into the next one? What are you striving for that will matter ten years from now? Five years from now?

IV. How has this impacted your family?

The last question we would ask Lot would simply be this: Lot, how has this choice impacted your family? We can talk about what this meant for you spiritually or materially, but this wasn't just an individual choice. Your whole family has been exposed to the influence of Sodom. How did it affect them? What did it do to your wife? What did it do for your daughters?

We have already seen how Lot lost his wife to Sodom. Her heart was so knit to the lusts and pleasures of the city that she was consumed in its destruction. There are times when we know we should flee the temptations of the world, but we can't really leave them behind. We linger as long as we can. We plan on getting out before it's too late. "I'll quit porn before it consumes me." "It's just harmless, flirtatious banter with that guy in the office. I'm sure it won't go anywhere. I can reign in my temper before I do something stupid. I can stop it before it goes over the line."

But before we can escape we are caught up in the consequences. Like Lot's wife, we are overwhelmed in the aftermath. Friends you can't dance in the fire without getting burned.

Lot's daughters made it out of Sodom with their lives, but they didn't make it out with their fiancés. They lost their loves. They may have also lost their hearts. Look what happens to them after they left Sodom. Look at verses 31 and 32.

³¹ *One day the older daughter said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is no man around here to give us children—as is the custom all over the earth. ³² Let's get our father to drink wine and then sleep with him and preserve our family line through our father."*

That's exactly what they did. They took turns with him. They were merely living out the perversion and polluted thinking they had been immersed in while living in Sodom. They may have been virgins in body, but they were thoroughly perverted in thinking. They were so accustomed to the obscenity and unrestrained luridness of Sodom that a drunken orgy of incest seemed like a good idea.

What happens when we get too close and too comfortable with sin we lower our own standards. Lot lowered his own standards, and in turn it lowered the standards of his daughters. Lot's closeness to Sodom cost him his family.

I said this morning we had four questions for Lot, but they are not just questions for Lot. They are questions we must ask ourselves. Questions about the choices we have made. How have the choices I have made about how I live my life affect my inner life? How have your choices affected your heart and soul? What have your choices meant for your influence? Do you influence the world around you, and does your world shape you? What are you really gaining in life? Are you just living for earthly success, at the expense of eternal victory? Finally, how have your choices affected your family, and those you love? We love to excuse our sin by saying, "I'm not really hurting anyone." But that's just a lie we tell ourselves. There are always repercussions to our sin. It always hurts those around us. Ask any family member of someone who has a problem controlling their anger, someone who lies all the time and is constantly embellishing the truth, ask someone whose spouse is hooked on porn.