

Following the Biblical Stream:

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Part LXXXVIII

We ended our last segment talking about how the angels had taken Lot and his family out of Sodom and Gomorrah to the extent that no one else could stop them from fleeing the area, but it was still up to them to take the journey into the mountains in order to escape. The angels' instructions in this matter also included the stipulation they not even turn back, which is a point that becomes very relevant later in the story. We talked about how this was not about performing a ritual, but how just about anything can be looked at as a ritual if one wants to see it that way. However, the real point in doing anything we do should be to obey God's voice instead of following our own desires. This brought us through Genesis chapter 19 verse 17, and we are now ready to start verse 18.

In spite of what we talked about last time, concerning Lot and his family needing to obey the voice of God in order to escape without hesitating, Lot's words in verse 18 sadly illustrates how resistant we can be to following God without question. Lot takes on the all too familiar attitude that God's grace in saving us from one thing somehow opens the door for us to ask for more. The truth here is that for all he and his family had just experienced, Lot simply does not want to go into the mountains where the angels had told them to flee to. In verse 19 he begins his dissertation about how he understood what mercy he had already been given, but if he had found grace in their eyes, he desired not to go into the mountains. If that in and of itself was not enough of a request to make, he really shows a disrespect for God in that he brings up the excuse about how he's afraid there are physical dangers there. Then he shows us why he is really saying all this, by asking he instead be allowed to go on down the valley to the city of Zoar.

In verse 20 Lot brings up his other excuse in this matter, which is that the city is just a small one. In doing this he would seem to be indicating it would not have the same kind of entrapment as the cities they just came from. However, it seems pretty clear the real reason he wanted to go there was because it had at least some of the same "comforts" they were walking away from. Verse 21 begins God's response to this request, and it shows again the longsuffering God shows us which we do not deserve. Lot's attitude is very much the same as what the children of Israel showed on more than one occasion when coming out of Egypt, for they said it

would be better to have died in Egypt than to have come into the wilderness to die. At times they even went so far as to claim Moses brought them out of Egypt just to kill them in the wilderness. Lot does not say this precisely, but it's indicated in his request. This is quite insulting because why would God save them from Sodom and Gomorrah only to send them into harm's way in the mountains? Even if it was dangerous, why would God spare you and then fail to protect you from whatever dangers might be there?

We refuse to believe God knows what He is doing and that what He asks of us is best no matter what we might think or want. Even if we believe and know in our heart we should just trust God or that it makes no sense to request such a thing, we many times make the request to go a different direction or just end up going in the direction we want anyway. This brings us back to the point of what the flesh wants is almost never what our spirit knows we need! Surely after seeing what they had just seen in Sodom, the thought the city of Zoar was going to be better, at the very least in the long term, had to be something Lot knew very good and well wasn't going to be the case. He simply could not let go of his desire to live the life a city provides. In this, God, once again, illustrates how much He saves us when we do not deserve saving. It is only by His grace that we are saved, and even the relationship we have with God is not something we deserve credit for, because it is God Who has offered it in the first place and continues to expand as we show willingness to allow it. (Eph. 2:8-10)

The allowing part is what's important in that God will not force us to do something, and that's shown many times in this story, but let's remember something we covered in our last segment. When we look at other people and see their life seeming to be going so smoothly, this truth is why that doesn't necessarily mean those people are on the right track. If people resist God's will enough, God will simply allow them their way, and certain people will end up with a significant amount of comfort in this life. The question is, what are you living for? This life and just what you can get here, or the next life where God has promised those who listen to His voice will be freed from all the sorrows and pains even the people with the best life here still experience on many occasions? At this point Lot was in that category of being grateful to God for sparing his life, but still wished to live for this life and what it could offer. This is why he chose to come into this valley in the first place,

and this is why he still wanted to stay in a city after having to flee the wickedness of the one he was living in.

All this brings us to some very interesting words in verse 21. First, the angel telling Lot God's decision in this situation, says Lot's request has been "accepted"; and second, it is pointed out God would not overthrow that city as part of the destruction He was bringing on Sodom and Gomorrah. Not to put the cart before the horse, but focusing on the second point to start with, I find these words interesting in that they indicate Zoar was likely slated to be destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah. I say likely because one could interpret the words here as meaning God would refrain from destroying it in the near future as it became corrupted to its height. That being said, I don't think that's what we're talking about here. What we are told in Scripture is that Abraham was the real reason Lot was spared, and what the angel said is because God allowed Lot to go there He would not overthrow Zoar. This is related to the point Abraham was making in his conversation with God about whether Sodom and Gomorrah could be spared or not. Remember, Abraham's request had to do with if a certain amount of individuals for whom there was still hope could be found in the cities - would God spare them? To this God answers yes each time. Here Lot points out Zoar is a small city. Thus, if God was willing to spare the entire region for the sake of only ten people, how small a number would that have to be for the same kind of percentage to be true of Zoar alone?

One might still argue that even one person in the city couldn't be found, but that would change if Lot went there. This shows us how much God acts on the basis of our choices! Lot, as wrong as he was in his mind, was a man for whom there was still hope of salvation or God would not have spared him even for Abraham's sake. Thus, if he entered Zoar, he alone would be that one person who could fulfill Abraham's point, at least for that city. God wanted Lot and his family to flee to the mountains, and as we talked about last time, even the smallest stumble might have meant not making it out of harm's way in time because God intended to utterly destroy the entire valley and its inhabitants. Lot alone would not be worth saving the entire valley's inhabitants for, but he would be enough to save Zoar. This shows us incredible grace and mercy on God's part, but also another one of those extremely complex choices only God could make!

God's intent in destroying these people was similar to why He sent the flood in Noah's day, but more so related to why He confounded the language at the

Tower of Babel. As we have talked about earlier in this study, the sinfulness of these places was outpacing the rest of the region. Like a sinful cancer, these people, if allowed to continue, would corrupt the land of Canaan in a way that would spread even outside the land quickly. Another factor was that of timing in God's chosen nation being given this land. God was going to give Abraham's descendants this land because the time to destroy the people in it would come at the same time God said the timing for bringing forth a chosen nation was right. If the sin of these cities had spread, that would all be thrown off. In asking to go to Zoar, Lot was standing in the way of God completely wiping this blight from the land, meaning the corruption would potentially be worse than God initially wanted it to be before He was ready to bring the chosen nation as the tool to destroy it. This brings us to the first point the angel made to Lot, which was that his proposal had been "accepted."

The Hebrew word "accepted" is translated from in this verse is a prime root word. This means it can have variations in its meaning. Saying that might not be looked at in the right way for those of us who speak a weak language of today, so hopefully I can clarify it a bit. It is not to say the word is in any way ambiguous! What it means is that the root word was intentionally used without any of the variants that could have been used to change it to a more specific aspect. God could have used a word that emphasized He was accepting Lot's request but with a lot of reservations. He could have indicated it was a very displeasing thing but would go ahead and do it. God also could have went the other way and indicated that it was perfectly fine if that's what Lot wanted; but He didn't. Why? Well, when it comes to giving Lot an indication God thought it was perfectly fine is answered in the fact the angel went on to say God would refrain from overthrowing that city. If God wanted to overthrow it, doing this for Lot was obviously not a good thing.

However, the question remains as to why God didn't indicate His displeasure, and that again has to do with God allowing us to make our choices even when God has made His will clear in a matter. God was telling Lot it was his life to ruin. Lot did not have to take it that way due to the word that is used here, so, again, why did God not make it clearer? The answer to that is, using the root word in combination with the following statement about not overthrowing the city, Lot was given that clarity to the extent God intended to give it. At the same time, the root word can also be interpreted as "forgiven." This is an interesting aspect to the matter! God was saying it was Lot's life to ruin if that's what he chose,



because he shouldn't have doubted he was going right from one bad place into another. Thus, in even asking instead of simply following the angel's initial instructions, Lot had revealed his fleshly desires overriding his will to follow God in the matter. However, in granting the request God was also saying, "I forgive you!"

I don't know about you, but as much as this speaks to God's grace, this conversation should chill one to the bone! Another issue we touched on last time is the fact we far too often lean on the fact God is always there to help us when we fall. We do this in that we don't care to pay attention to if we are going to fall, but instead stumble along knowing God is there to help. This attitude is far too widespread in the church and its teachings today. The Bible explaining to us, just as it has here in these verses, how much we serve a God of grace, has to do with helping those who feel convicted of the wrong they have done in life and doubting God could or would ever save them. Rest assured this is an unmovable fact! No matter what you have done, no matter how much others are unwilling to forgive you for it, God's grace is sufficient if we are truly sorry in our hearts and fall upon His grace! (II Cor. 12:9) People have asked me about the point of knowing when God turns you over to a reprobate mind, and the short answer is that if you are still worried it might have happened to you, it hasn't happened or you wouldn't be asking.

All that being true, there is a difference between coming to God as the unrighteous individual you are and asking His forgiveness believing He rewards those who diligently seek Him, and believing that not continuing to diligently seek Him is alright! (Heb. 11:6) God may still forgive you when you choose not to follow His instructions, but you're walking out into the cold once again. You are walking away from, not toward the reward God has planned for you. It's not about how far or how fast you further your righteousness, but whether you are walking with God or walking away, which is shown continually by your willingness to seek Him! Not understanding what God is asking can be a problem, and God will work with you on that, but only if you continue to seek. If you are going your own way without regard to if you are doing the right thing or not, you give God no chance to correct your mindset, which needs to be done even for things that have already done damage that cannot be reversed in this life. This means you may have fallen but you're not getting back up!

This is the place Lot was in by being told God had accepted his proposal. Lot had plenty of facts

surrounding him which, especially to the outside observer, made it clear he was choosing the wrong path, but we can not judge him on the basis of it. Why? Because he might open his eyes at some point and return to righteousness. This is why God wanted us to know He had already forgiven Lot! However, we can harshly judge his actions. Why? Because as it relates to our lives, we should see this as a lesson that the best way to get on your feet is to get on your knees. A broken and contrite heart God will not despise. (Ps. 51:17) In the heat of the moment it might have seemed to Lot an almost unbearable thought to go from living in the city environment he had known for so long and back to the "primitive" life and hard work of rebuilding his life in the mountains, but once the angel indicated in his words that God had forgiven him for even asking to go to Zoar, Lot should have humbled himself in the sight of The Lord. (James 4:10) We find ourselves in these kinds of situations both great and small, and as I will just keep saying, whether we can, in the moment or even later on at some point, realize our mistake or not all comes down to our faith. Will we allow God to show us the mistakes we have made or do we believe it doesn't matter because we are already forgiven?

Basically what we're discussing here is the difference between forgiveness and salvation. You see, without forgiveness there can be no salvation, but just because you are forgiven does not mean you will be saved! You don't hear many ministers teaching this truth anymore, and it's a little too hard to put on a bumper sticker for the mainstream "churches" to latch onto. However, that doesn't diminish the truthfulness of the statement! Living for God is not a democracy. People will tell you the blood of Christ covers all sin, and this is true, but will you reap the benefits of what that means? Your sins are already washed away, but do you care? Unfortunately, we live in a day and age where many churches love to teach the truth you are forgiven but they are not leading people to salvation. By continually putting the emphasis on a simple fact of our existence, they are leading people away from salvation! Our relationship with God, which is our faith, is what will lead to salvation. God's forgiveness is the reason we can have faith, and Jesus dying for our sins was God proving His forgiveness. God raising Jesus from the dead was God proving faith has value! (Rom. 10:8-11) The problem is that most people, just as Lot was showing here, do not care to walk everyday in faith, they only want what makes their flesh comfortable. Lot might have chosen what he thought was better for him, but the Psalmist said, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help." Psalms 121:1

Moving on to verse 22, the angel told Lot to hurry and do what he desired to do, which was go to that city, because God could not do what He intended to do until Lot had escaped. At first glance this might seem to be saying Lot was of such importance God was obligated to wait for Lot to get out of the way before acting, and we have talked in this study about how necessary it was for Lot to act or he would be consumed along with the destruction. Thus, let's look at the words a little closer here. Lot is still told to "Hasten" in order to "escape." In these two words he is not just being told God wanted him to hurry, but that he needed to hurry if he wanted to escape. So why does the angel say he cannot do anything until Lot got away? It all comes down to the same thing as when they were told to head to the mountains. God had told Lot he could go to the other city and God would not destroy it. This did obligate God to give Lot the same chance to get to the city as he had been given to get up into the mountains. However, to get out of the path of destruction by staying in the valley at all was going to take longer than climbing to safety!

Basically, the angel was giving Lot an assurance that he would be given the extra time, but God was only giving him the extra time not a free pass to linger anymore than he had been given when told to get into the mountains. This is also an indication that, yes, God intended to destroy the entire valley. Lot and his family would need to get all the way to the city before they would be safe. God would spare that city, but it would be the only safe haven in the valley region! This fact is also why the verse ends by telling us it was for this reason the city came to be called Zoar. Zoar means "smallness," and this is not just an allusion to the fact Lot had given its size as the main reason it would be no trouble for him to go there. It is talking about the truth God would make this a fact in all but destroying the heart of the city itself. In the time period we're talking about cities were not just the main conglomeration of buildings, but the farmlands with their houses and other structures used for agricultural purposes, as well as some other industries. When God was done, Lot likely found Zoar was not as comfortable a place as he had hoped!

Many people who live in cities, especially in what is considered "developed" counties, are more and more losing track of how much their comfort is dependent on someone somewhere doing the agricultural work needed to supply those comforts. They are also dependent on things such as mining operations to provide raw materials the factories use to produce the products that bring them comforts. You can complain

about country people, miners, and the like, along with their lifestyles all you want, but the further away you drive such activities from where you live, the further away those things you need to survive will have to be shipped from. At times this will drive up costs, which is something not appreciated in our day of mass production. At times it might actually be cheaper, but the further away things such as fresh fruits, vegetables, milk, eggs, etc. have to come, the lower quality they will be. In Lot's day there was not the ability to transport things over great distances with any speed, and this meant most every city was directly dependent on the agricultural activities nearby. Once God destroyed the valley and all that was left was the city itself, food and supplies were going to get thin. Zoar was going to be set back in a way that truly made it a little place!

Verse 23 tells us it took until sunrise for Lot to make it to Zoar, and when he did the destruction came. The next verses make it very clear that what we just discussed was true, because while Sodom and Gomorrah were the focus, God rained down brimstone and fire that destroyed the cities' infrastructure; the surrounding infrastructure of the valley; all the people who lived in this area; and the vegetation as well. Basically, there was nothing left but scorched earth! It is then in verse 26 we are informed the stipulation about not turning back did not change once Lot was granted his request they go to Zoar, for his wife did turn back and was turned to a pillar of salt. Not only is this one of the best known facts of the Bible, but the reason why this is true is that it probably seems to be one of the strangest! When one only hears the story, especially as a child, it seems more like other mystical tales people tell children. Stories about people disappearing in the woods when they do not make it out before the sun rises, or being turned into animals or even inanimate objects by curses, spells, doing something wrong, etc. These tales abound in pagan cultures and survive to this very day.

However, when one looks at it in context of the story and region, it is not so mystical. The valley area we keep talking about is not just the Jordan Valley so much as the more southern end where the Dead Sea is located. Another name for the Dead Sea is the Salt Sea. This is because the Dead Sea is truly a dead end for all the water that makes it to that area. This also means, in higher concentrations than we find in the oceans of the world, all the minerals that get washed along with the water also end up here. This makes this body of water much more "salty" than the ocean, but it is not just the body of water itself that is affected. The reason the water cannot get out of this area is that it literally is below sea level. Until this



entire valley could fill to a point above sea level there is no way for any of the water to flow onward to the ocean. If it could fill to such a point, there would just be a big body of water and no valley at all. This doesn't happen because there is not enough water that makes it to this spot for it to happen. This, along with environmental truths such as evaporation make this so; and today even more of the water is used out of the Jordan and other feeder rivers long before it gets there. The Dead Sea and the valley are also being mined for the rich mineral content, and in these days it's at an industrial level man was not capable of in ancient times.

What the truth of this area means is that it is not just the water which is salty, but minerals abound throughout the valley. In other passages of the Bible and other ancient text we are even told of tar pits that exist in certain areas of this valley to the south. (Gen. 14:10) This made the valley a valuable place and a dangerous place all at the same time. However, getting back to Lot's wife, God had said if they hurried, He would give them the time to escape the destruction which would come; but in the thinking of men there is high value placed on the body even after death. I mean no disrespect to the ideas that have to do with showing respect in disposing of a human body with more dignity than other refuse we throw out, but many cultures go overboard in the way they do it. Obvious ancient examples are places such as Egypt where people believed the preservation of the body was critical to the afterlife. While that is not so much the case in modern times, the ideology still exists in many people's minds, even Christians. This is why people believe in grave sleeping and the like. My point here is that as hard as it had to be for Lot to realize at some point his wife had looked back and therefore did not make it, leaving her body just lay where it fell would have made the matter even harder.

We don't know if Lot was behind her or in front of her when this took place. If it happened behind him, he still might have looked behind to see her without violating the stipulation he not look back at the cities themselves, because as one takes a journey on foot of any distance, it is impossible to believe family members would never look behind them to others in concern for if everyone was still together. God's instruction they not look back had nothing to do with not helping a family member who might have sprained an ankle or slipped and fell at some point. Lot's wife did not suffer her fate due to doing something so simple. Lot's wife took the time to stop, and with intent look back at what had been her home. It was really the compulsion in her heart to

look at what she was leaving behind that compelled her to take the action which brought the punishment, and it's unlikely the others in the family were not aware of when it took place.

While they obviously did not violate the don't look back stipulation themselves, it would have been a similar looking back violation to worry about leaving a family member's body who had violated the rule. Due to this, God left them nothing to worry about. Lot and his daughters could do nothing with what was left of her. She turned into a pillar which tells us she did not simply become indistinguishable from the ground upon which they were walking, but because she had become a substance no different than what the valley is just full of, there was no reason to bury or do anything else with what remained. She, as much as if she had been buried in the ground, became a part of what was the landscape and what would be left of it once the destruction took place. Thus, Lot with his two daughters would go on as God had instructed them to!

Verse 27 makes it clear Abraham had not lost interest in the events of what was to happen to the cities after that conversation he had with God about possibly sparing them. He got up in the morning and, first thing, went back to the same spot where he had had that conversation, to look for himself. His observation confirms again, the entire valley had been destroyed in this event, and most of what he could see was the smoke that rose up as if the entire valley was on fire; and the truth was, that's what was going on. It is verse 28 where we find the fact, saving Lot had to do with remembering Abraham. God had determined He would not do this without forewarning Abraham about it. God gave Abraham a chance to talk about it, and ultimately God had sent His angels to save what Abraham treasured most out of this place, that being his nephew Lot whom Abraham had cared for like a father in days gone by!

Until next time, Shalom!

