

GENESIS 19:15-26

A LITTLE BIT OF SIN

“The angels urged Lot, saying, ‘Up! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be swept away in the punishment of the city.’ But he lingered. So the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city. And as they brought them out, one said, ‘Escape for your life. Do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away.’ Lot said to them, ‘Oh, no, my lords. Behold, your servant has found favour in your sight, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life. But I cannot escape to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me and I die. Behold, this city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one. Let me escape there—is it not a little one?—and my life will be saved!’ He said to him, ‘Behold, I grant you this favour also, that I will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken. Escape there quickly, for I can do nothing till you arrive there.’ Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar.

“The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar. Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulphur and fire from the LORD out of heaven. And he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. But Lot’s wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.”¹

Lot built his life on compromise. In this, he was not unlike many contemporary Christians. Even while the world as he knew it was moving inexorably to a catastrophic conclusion, he attempted to compromise his values and his life as a worshipper of the Living God. The text before us exposes his effort to preserve life as he wanted it to be; it also reminds us of the high cost of compromise. Christians can learn a great lesson through reviewing Lot’s compromise and what it cost him.

FORCED EVACUATION — Recently, forest fires in Kelowna have forced many families to leave their homes on very short notice. Some people reported that they had two minutes to evacuate.² Forced evacuations are painful for those who must leave everything—often on extremely short notice—to flee for their lives. Lives are disrupted, security is threatened, the emotional toll is great. As we read the account of the forced evacuation for Lot and his family, we are at first moved with a sense of compassion, knowing the disruption and emotional trauma they were experiencing. However, it is difficult to continue such generous feelings toward Lot when we remember that he placed himself in jeopardy; the divine intervention was a mark of mercy for one who had refused to accept responsibility for doing what was right and honourable.

That Lot tarried, even after the danger was evident, is apparent from even a casual reading of the text. After the threat from hostile townspeople and his rescue by the angels dispatched to the city, Lot was told the purpose of their visit. “We are about to destroy this place,” they announced, “because the outcry against its people has become great before the LORD, and the LORD has sent us to destroy it” [GENESIS 19:13]. Accordingly, Lot was told to warn any family members to leave with him.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version**, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Global Television News Report, July 22, 2009

Perhaps Lot was moved in part by the peril he had just faced, but he urged the men pledged to his daughters, “Up! Get out of this place, for the LORD is about to destroy the city” [GENESIS 19:14]. I must wonder whether his future sons-in-law had been part of the mob that had threatened Lot the night before, since the divine text is quite specific that “all the people to the last man” [GENESIS 19:4] compassed his house during the night. It is likely that not all the men of the city were homosexual, but all approved, at least tacitly, of the practise, and we must concede that Lot’s daughters’ fiancés were probably included in the pack that stalked the visitors on the evening before. Nevertheless, to his sons-in-law, Lot appeared to be joking [GENESIS 19:14b].

He was sufficiently agitated during the night that he pleaded with the men pledged to his daughters, yet, when the morning dawned the angels were compelled to urge Lot once more to leave. “Up! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be swept away in the punishment of the city” [GENESIS 19:15]. The divine text pointedly notes, “But he lingered” [GENESIS 19:16a]. Moreover, Lot’s indecision had an impact on his wife and daughters, for the angels seized him together with his wife and two daughters [GENESIS 19:16a], apparently dragging them outside the city. The text suggests that they used force to compel them to leave the city.

This forcible evacuation was a mark of the LORD’s mercy [GENESIS 19:16], though it compelled the angels to override Lot’s resistance. As they were pushing and dragging the four reluctant evacuees out of the city, one of the angels said, “Escape for your life. Do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away” [GENESIS 19:17]. The situation was desperate as judgement for the city was pending, held back only by Lot’s presence.

As an aside, we need to realise that when God ignores our protests and compels us to act, it is not an evidence of lack of concern for us. Though we fail to recognise what He is doing, when God ignores our desires, it is a mark of His divine mercy. Were God to give us all our wants, He would be irresponsible. There is one instance that stands out in Scripture when God gave His people what they craved, but the result was not what they thought it would be. The account, found in the Psalms, provides an analysis of an event that occurred during the Exodus.

The incident in view is recorded in NUMBERS 11:4-35. The biblical account relates how “the rabble” that accompanied Israel out of Egypt were craving meat. Their incessant complaining spread—as complaining often does spread—until the former slaves were also complaining. Though God had fed the entire group in the desert, they did not like what God provided, and so they complained. Ultimately, the continual carping drove Moses to the point of utter frustration, and upon presenting his worry to the Lord in prayer, God intervened.

The LORD did send the people meat in the form of quail flying low above the camp as a strong wind blew them along; and apparently when exhausted, the birds fell beside the camp. All the people were able to kill quail, and each person gathered at least six bushels of birds. However, the grumbling had displeased the Lord, and he killed many of those who complained. The divine text reads: “While the meat was yet between their teeth, before it was consumed, the anger of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD struck down the people with a very great plague” [NUMBERS 11:33].

The event made an indelible impression on the survivors; they named the place where all this had occurred “Kibroth-hattaavah”—graves of craving [NUMBERS 11:34]. Of the people’s demands and God giving them what they asked, the Psalmist wrote:

“He gave them what they asked,
but sent a wasting disease among them.”

[PSALM 106:14]

The impression was imprinted permanently on the mind of the Israelites; in the **78th PSALM** Asaph gives an extended warning based on the same incident.

“[Israel] sinned still more against [the LORD],
rebelling against the Most High in the desert.
They tested God in their heart
by demanding the food they craved.
They spoke against God, saying,
‘Can God spread a table in the wilderness?
He struck the rock so that water gushed out
and streams overflowed.
Can He also give bread
or provide meat for His people?’

“Therefore, when the LORD heard, He was full of wrath;
a fire was kindled against Jacob;
His anger rose against Israel,
because they did not believe in God
and did not trust His saving power.
Yet He commanded the skies above
and opened the doors of heaven,
and He rained down on them manna to eat
and gave them the grain of heaven.
Man ate of the bread of the angels;
He sent them food in abundance.
He caused the east wind to blow in the heavens,
and by His power He led out the south wind;
He rained meat on them like dust,
winged birds like the sand of the seas;
He let them fall in the midst of their camp,
all around their dwellings.
And they ate and were well filled,
for He gave them what they craved.
But before they had satisfied their craving,
while the food was still in their mouths,
the anger of God rose against them,
and He killed the strongest of them
and laid low the young men of Israel.”

[**PSALM 78:17-31**]

Before moving on, I want to focus for a moment on something that the divine author says in verse 16. That verse reads, “[Lot] lingered. So the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, *the LORD being merciful to him.*” Despite the family’s refusal to obey immediately the command of the LORD, God was merciful. God is always merciful, though we often forget that truth as we resist His mercy in order to pursue our own desires.

When we are told that the LORD was merciful to Lot, we realise that the mercy extended to him was mercy because he had become just like the people of Sodom. The implication is that Lot deserved to die with the people among whom he lived. He had become so habituated to their sinful lifestyle that he had become practically indistinguishable from them. It was because of Abraham's plea that Lot received God's consideration and was spared [GENESIS 19:29] despite his complete compromise with the world.

Tragically, many of God's people are shown great mercy, only to waste the goodness of God by insisting that He concede to their desires. We need to remember John's warning to believers. "Don't love the world's ways. Don't love the world's goods. Love of the world squeezes out love for the Father. Practically everything that goes on in the world—wanting your own way, wanting everything for yourself, wanting to appear important—has nothing to do with the Father. It just isolates you from him. The world and all its wanting, wanting, wanting is on the way out—but whoever does what God wants is set for eternity" [1 JOHN 2:15-17].³

It is important to note that God was merciful not only to Lot and his family, but God was also merciful to the Sodomites. "How so," you may ask. God was willing to entertain Abraham's plea for the people of that wicked city, agreeing to spare the city from judgement is so few as ten righteous people were found. Though God did not find ten righteous people, He did spare Lot and his family. Surely, this is a mark of His mercy and His kindness.

Moreover, God had endured the sinful acts and attitudes of the cities of the plain for a long time, giving them ample time to repent of their wickedness and sufficient opportunity to turn from the evil they were doing. According to God's own Word, the Lord is patient, "not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" [2 PETER 3:9].

In a similar way, God is merciful to sinners today. We are taught that "He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" [MATTHEW 5:45]. Also, God does not immediately judge us because of the evil deeds that we do or for the wicked attitudes that we harbour. Rather, He gives us opportunity to repent and to turn from pursuing evil. Nevertheless, if we do not repent, we must know that there comes a day when God will at last say, "Enough!" Peter continues his instruction by warning readers that "The day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed" [2 PETER 3:10].

Here is the tragic truth: God is merciful, giving mankind ample time to repent of evil. However, as the wise man has noted, "Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil" [ECCLESIASTES 8:11]. God is merciful, but for many—perhaps even for most of mankind—God's mercy is misconstrued as inability; and they see His delay as opportunity to continue to act wickedly.

DEMANDING OUR OWN WAY DESPITE DELIVERANCE — It is astonishing to realise that there are vast numbers of Christians who attempt to live in two worlds, just as Lot did. They want to live lives that are indistinguishable from those inhabiting this darkened world; at the same time, they want the benefits of righteousness. They want to be a follower of Jesus Christ, and yet control their own lives. It is not that they want to renounce Christ. In fact, they profess their faith and are quite active in fulfilling religious responsibilities. However, they do not live wholeheartedly for the Lord, either. They have their jobs to think about, or they are concerned for their friends, or they want a good time, or simply to get ahead in the world.

³ Eugene H. Peterson, **The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language** (NavPress, Colorado Spring, CO 2002)

Lot exemplifies an attitude that is commonplace among many of God's professed saints. Though Sodom was doomed, and though God had warned Lot to escape for his life, he lingered. The picture is dramatic—the angels were dragging him, his wife and his daughters, pulling them away from Sodom so that judgement could begin. In spite of this, Lot argued with the angels: ““Oh, no, my lords. Behold, your servant has found favour in your sight, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life. But I cannot escape to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me and I die. Behold, this city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one. Let me escape there—is it not a little one?—and my life will be saved” [GENESIS 19:18, 19]!

Don't you find it incredible that Lot would argue with the very people who rescued him? Reduced to its simplest form, Lot argued that he didn't have time to make it to the hills, and therefore he needed more time! Lot's cry was, “I can't.” However, that plea is disingenuous. Like many of the saints to this day, Lot's “I can't” was actually “I won't.” God repeatedly promised through His angels that they would not bring down judgement until Lot was delivered. Lot was given ample time to escape, and yet he made excuses for his delay. Isn't that true of many of the professed saints of God? God says to live righteously, and they whinge, “I can't.” God commands us to be bold in our witness, and we moan, “I can't.” God says to eschew the wickedness of this world, and many whine, “I can't.”

Without question, living a godly life and being obedient to the Living God is demanding. The real issue for many of us is that when we complain that we are unable, actually we are complaining to the Master, “I won't.” When we cry, “I can't,” really we are blaming God for our troubles. Certainly, that was true in the case of Lot.

Lot presented three arguments against God's mercy. Lot began his excuse by saying, “Behold, your servant has found favour in your sight, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life.” In effect, he pleaded that since God had been good enough to spare his life, He should now be good enough to permit him to go on sinning. “God, You delivered me despite my compromise with wickedness, You should permit me to continue living a life of compromise!”

Then, he argued that he was physically incapable of reaching the safety of the mountains. “I cannot escape to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me and I die.” Imagine the audacity! God had already shown him such great mercy as to deliver him from the city, and now he expresses doubt that God will be able to keep Him safe! His argument is not unlike that spoken by many who say that they believe God has saved them, but they must maintain their salvation. Such people imagine that they must keep themselves saved. Like the Israelites wandering in the wilderness during the Exodus, despite God's miraculous deliverance, they complain that God will now let them die. The Israelites complained to Moses, “Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians?’ For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness” [EXODUS 14:11, 12].

Seeing that he was not prevailing in the first two arguments, Lot presented yet a third: “Behold, this city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one. Let me escape there—is it not a little one?—and my life will be saved!” He argued that he should be allowed to escape to another town also destined for destruction; and he specified a nearby town which, he claimed, was only a small community. Imagine that! Lot is arguing with his rescuers to be allowed to sin just a little bit. He is arguing for the privilege of continued compromise of his service to God. Like so many professing Christians in this day, Lot was actually categorising sin, and his own sins were minimised so they were not at all like the awful sins of the Sodomites.

When you review the text, it is apparent that Lot was petitioning the Lord. However, his prayer was appalling, shameful, contemptible. Undoubtedly Lot was in earnest, but the essence of his prayer was insistence that he have his own way. Though he did represent himself in his prayer as the Lord's servant [GENESIS 19:19], there is no evidence of a humble attitude that prays, "Not my will, but Yours, be done." All that we see is a focus on Lot's own fallen desires.

Perhaps you are thinking that Lot did not act all that badly in this prayer. After all, God did grant his request, permitting him to escape to Zoar. However, if you are thinking in this way, you are missing the point. Lot demanded his own way, and he got it. Lot asked that he be allowed to sin just a little bit, and his actions demonstrate that believers can sin just a little bit. And therein lies a grave danger for those who know God—we *can* engage in a little bit of sin! There would be no danger to our spiritual life if God always intervened to keep us from sinning; but God does not always step in to keep us from a little bit of sin. Though there are sins that God will not permit, it is nevertheless true that God will permit us to sin—for a little while!

God permitted the Jews to construct a golden calf [EXODUS 32:1-35]. He did not intervene when David committed adultery and then murdered Bathsheba's husband [2 SAMUEL 11:1-26]. God did not keep Jehoshaphat from forming an alliance with Ahab [2 CHRONICLES 18:1-34]. Without doubt, God permits His people to sin, but there are always consequences. You can sin, but there are consequences because you are God's child and accountable to Him. Lot could sin, demanding his own way and charting his own course, but the consequences were awful indeed.

All that Lot held dear was sacrificed because he had his own way. He lost the "permanent" home that he sought in Sodom. He lost the prestige and status that he valued so much in that corrupt society. All that he had accumulated was swept away in the judgement on the city. This but a vivid demonstration of divine truth written centuries later. "The world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave" [1 JOHN 2:16, 17a].⁴

There is another problem with little sins—they grow up. James warns that, "Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death" [JAMES 1:14, 15]. The author of the Letter to Hebrew Christians warns against permitting a "root of bitterness" to grow, for when tolerated, it "springs up and causes trouble," ultimately defiling the lives that are touched [HEBREWS 12:15]. Lot's life following his escape from Sodom pictures this dreadful condition, and serves as a warning against playing with sin. Though we may rest assured that we are saved by God's grace if we have faith in the Risen Son of God, we cannot sin with impunity. What happened to Lot should serve as sufficient warning not to think that we can sin just a little bit.

It is a terrible thing to lose all of one's possessions. Certainly, our hearts go out to families that have lost their home and belongings in a fire, to a flood, or as result of tornados. However, people that have experienced such loss are frequently heard to repeat a theme, "At least we are alive. At least we have each other." Undoubtedly, these unfortunate people grieve the loss of their possessions, the destruction of their houses and the devastation that has been visited on them. Nevertheless, things can be replaced. Lives, however, are precious, and relationships are to be valued above things. Ultimately, even the loss of loved ones and friends can be tolerated and life can again be productive. However, should a person lose their character, it is doubtful that anything of value is left for the individual. And that was the case for Lot and at last even for his wife and daughters.

⁴ Holy Bible: New Living Translation, 2nd ed. (Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, IL 2004)

His wife, infected with the same awful virus of wanting what the world offers, looked back despite the warning from the angels, and she was turned into a pillar of salt. Though Lot and his daughters did make it to Zoar, just as he had requested, they did not remain there long. Perhaps he now realised that his presence would be odious to the townspeople. Perhaps he feared that they, also, would soon be judged. Whatever the reason, he was fearful and so he left Zoar soon after arriving there [GENESIS 19:30].

At last Lot fled to the hills, where he lived with his daughters. There, the final degradation occurred as his character was at last laid in the dust through an incestuous relationship with his daughters [GENESIS 19:31-38]. God records a dark sentence concerning Lot that should dissuade every believer from pursuing their own way. “Thus both the daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father” [GENESIS 19:36].

No doubt Lot’s choice—when he first looked with longing at Sodom—seemed innocuous, perhaps even beneficial to him; but it hurt him, and it hurt his family. Jesus warned, “Remember Lot’s wife” [LUKE 17:32]. I am confident that Lot’s choice dictated his wife’s bent, and she followed his lead. Husbands provide the spiritual lead in their family, whether through default or intentionally. Either men guide their families, or they permit them to do as they wish. When judgement at last came, Lot’s wife was unable to tear herself away from what she had possessed in the city, thus demonstrating that she never really owned those things, but rather that she was owned by them. Lot hurt his wife by sinning just a little bit. His daughters were also hurt by his choices. The proof of the harm he did is witnessed in their lax morals that permitted them to initiate an incestuous relationship with their father.

APPLICATIONS FOR OUR LIVES — The account of Lot’s life, and his deliverance, is undoubtedly dramatic. If all we see is a story, however, we gain no benefit from the account of all that happened. Paul informs us that the events that are recorded “were written down for our instruction” [1 CORINTHIANS 10:11]. Thus, we are to apply what is learned in our own lives. There are several applications that seem pertinent to emphasise for each one who listens this day.

SIN WILL BE JUDGED, AND SUDDENLY. The people of God sometimes wonder why God delays judging sin. Wicked people mock God and ridicule the belief that He will judge sin. However, as Peter warns, “The Lord is not slow in doing what he promised—the way some people understand slowness. But God is being patient with you. He does not want anyone to be lost, but he wants all people to change their hearts and lives” [2 PETER 3:9].⁵ Assuredly, anyone who is unsaved must take heed that God will judge sinners, and that includes you because you have not believed on the Name of His one and only Son.

God is merciful to sinners, giving them time to repent. However, we dare not neglect that the same truth holds for those who know God and who are known by God. God does not strike us down immediately when we sin; rather He gives ample opportunity to turn from our sin.

We dare not imagine that we can sin with impunity, for God will discipline His child. We will do well to remember the instruction provided by the author of the Hebrews Letter. “Have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?”

‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reproved by him.
For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives.’

⁵ **The Everyday Bible: New Century Version** (Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, TN 2005)

It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" [HEBREWS 12:5-11].

THERE ARE CONSEQUENCES TO CHOOSING OUR WANTS OVER OBEDIENCE TO THE MASTER. This application is for believers. We are not the centre of our universe, nor dare we imagine that we are free to live as we want. We are set free to live as we ought! We are responsible to glorify God, not to gratify our own desires. If we choose what we want rather than obeying the Lord, then the warning of Amos holds true for us: "Prepare to meet your God" [AMOS 4:12].

It is an axiom of the Faith that how we live determines how we are received by the Lord. If we are obedient, God will be our gracious defender. If we are self-centred, God will let us receive the consequences of our choices. The warnings found in the Proverbs should be sufficient to dissuade any child of God from pursuing his own desires rather than God's will.

"Whoever walks in integrity will be delivered,
but he who is crooked in his ways will suddenly fall."

[PROVERBS 28:18]

Perhaps even more worrisome for the child of God is this saying of the Wise Man:

"He who is often reproved, yet stiffens his neck,
will suddenly be broken beyond healing."

[PROVERBS 29:1]

GOD IS MERCIFUL, EVEN TO SELF-CENTRED SAINTS. Throughout the entire account of the judgement of Sodom, God is revealed as merciful. He was merciful to the cities of the plain, not destroying them immediately when they became utterly degraded through embracing and approving of gross immorality. He withheld judgement for a long time, just as he withholds judgement against the wickedness of our own culture and our own generation.

God was not only longsuffering, but he heeded Abraham's plea, assuring him that He would not judge the city if He found ten righteous people there. That should encourage the people of God to pray for wicked people, and surely that should encourage us to pray for God to continue to show our country His mercy. Even though ten righteous people could not be found, God nevertheless rescued Lot and his family. It is a demonstration of the truth recorded in Romans. "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" [ROMANS 5:20].

Perhaps you are inclined to argue that Lot did not deserve to be rescued. However, do any of us deserve to be rescued from God's pending judgement? The answer is obvious. We are sinners deserving of death. However, God has shown us mercy in granting us repentance that leads to life. Having given us life in His Beloved Son, we know that we will be kept from the hour of judgement that is coming on all the earth. As believers, our whole spirit and soul and body will be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ [see 1 THESSALONIANS 5:23].

I draw the message to its conclusion by pointing to God's mercy and deliverance. Jesus has provided His life as a sacrifice for sin. He "suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God" [**1 PETER 3:18**]. Christ the Lord did not die for good people, because there were none; He died for the "ungodly" [**ROMANS 5:6**] and for "sinners" [**ROMANS 5:8**]. Perhaps we console ourselves that we have not committed the same sins as the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, but we are sinners, just the same. We were under divine sentence, awaiting the judgement of God, when Christ found us and rescued us from death. Judgement is coming to all mankind.

When judgement comes, will you be like Abraham, having no need to worry whether you are accepted by God? Or will you, like Lot, be saved "as through fire." Or like the people of Sodom, will you be destroyed and forever lost? The mercy of God is extended to all people now. The Word of God urges each one to receive the gift of life that is found in receiving Christ Jesus as Lord. It is written, "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' believing in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with the heart that one believes and is declared right with God, and with the mouth that one confesses and is saved." That passage concludes by quoting the promise provided long years before by the Prophet Joel, "Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved" [**ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13**].⁶

Believe, and be saved. You Christians who are walking in your own self-will, as did Lot, take heed and turn again to serve the Lord. Amen.

⁶ Free translation by the author