

PASTOR DOUG'S FAVORITE BIBLE VERSES

Genesis 18:25c

I have been speaking to you the past couple of months on my favorite Bible verses. Two weeks from today, Burning Hearts member Tim Martin is going to be speaking. As his field of expertise is the cults (Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Christian Scientism, Scientology, the Prosperity Gospel, and so forth) Tim asked me what I thought we would all think if he spoke on his **favorite verse in the Book of Mormon!** I laughed and suggested he "go for it." But he let me know he was only kidding. But wouldn't that possibly get some interest if we put that out on the church sign:

TIM MARTIN SPEAKING JULY 28 ON HIS FAVORITE VERSE IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

Yes, I'm sure that would get at least a bit of attention!

Well, TODAY we will be sticking with the Bible. And I want to speak to you from a little line that occurs in Genesis chapter 18, verse 25. The context of this verse is Abraham's attempt to intercede on behalf of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. So let's read the narrative and deal with that before actually dealing with this single line of scripture...

Genesis 18

Now, if you know the scriptures you know the rest of the story...about how two angels approached the city of Sodom and there met Lot who offered to give them housing. The men of the city were attracted by these two angels (whom the men of the city believed were men) and they made an incredibly strong attempt to take the two angels by force so as to "do to them as they pleased" (meaning to sexually molest them). The angels blinded the men who were literally breaking down Lot's door and then led Lot, lot's wife and lot's two daughters out of the city before God rained down on the city fire and sulfur (or fire and brimstone). And so the two cities were destroyed along with all who remained in them.

Now WHY Abraham would be so concerned about these two cities is unclear. Granted, his nephew Lot was there, along with Lot's family. So we of course understand Abraham's care for his relatives. But the narrative that surrounds our verse for the day seems to suggest that Abraham had a concern for the entire city: longing to see the city spared if even there were as few as 10 righteous people in it.

There is much we can say about all of this. For example,

1. One could easily preach a sermon on how the righteous often find themselves living in the midst of an unbelieving community. This is true for Christian students who go off to college at a secular university, or, depending on the neighborhood, for simply moving into a particular area. Missionaries, of course, are known for doing EXACTLY that. That's why missionary C.T. Studd once penned the words,

Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell;

I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell.

But be it by choice or circumstance, every Christian, sooner or later, is likely to find his or her self in the very midst of unbelief. And how any of us handle that will be the challenge. Lot, **by choice**, had placed himself and his family in that godless kind of place. It was not a wise choice. And the fact that Lot had literally risen to the place – often noted in scripture – of sitting at the city gates (the place of the elders or overseers of the city), while the city was

known for nothing good, is a great mystery. This is particularly so when Peter, in 2 Peter 2:7, calls Lot, of all things, "righteous Lot" suggesting that Lot's soul was being tormented by the wickedness that Lot saw around him.

But, anyway, a sermon on living as a stranger and alien in an ungodly world could certainly be crafted from this text.

2. Or one could certainly preach about how Sodom and Gomorrah serve as examples to us as to how and when the judgment of God may strike.

Now I want to warn you, if you have not already become aware, that there are some out there who will try and make the case that God's wrath was poured out on these two cities not because of any sexual deviance but because they were self-centered showing little care for the poor among them. For support of this idea, Ezekiel 16:49 is referenced. Let's turn to that...

Ezekiel 16:49. And so the argument is made that God's overthrowing of Sodom and Gomorrah had nothing to do with any sort of sexual sin, homosexuality, or any kind of sexual abomination. Rather it was because the people were UNCARING for the poor.

The answer to that kind of suggestion is to read Genesis chapter 19 and see what truly precipitated the destruction of the city. After that one must consider that of the 46 OTHER references to Sodom and Gomorrah in the Bible not one of them mentions their lack of concern for the poor as being a factor in their destruction. Ezekiel is the only one to mention this at all.

And then, on top of that, we have Jude verse 7 that speaks of how these two cities serve as an example to us today...

Jude 7

So even if the cities were self-centered, lacking in care for the poor, it was also known (even as is suggested back in Genesis)

- that **its inhabitants were WICKED** (not merely uncaring)
- that **its inhabitants were involved in "abominations"** (Ezekiel 16:50) – a term generally used in scripture to speak of SEXUAL SINS, and
- that **God saw their sexual immoralities as the basis for using them as an example** of what will happen to such cities: having undergone a punishment of eternal fire (Jude 7)

Yes, in this day and age, that would seem like a suitable sermon.

3. Or, one could preach from this Genesis 18 chapter a sermon on showing compassion and care for the ungodly.

The book of Jonah tells the story of how Jonah, instead of obeying God and going to Ninevah – a very large and important city – and there telling the people to repent, Jonah attempted to go in the opposite direction. I need not retell the story for you know it already. But in the end, following Jonah's preaching in Ninevah, the people there repented and because of that God changed his mind about destroying that great city. Jonah, as the short book of Jonah records, became upset over it all, got himself into a huff, and became angry at God for letting the city go unpunished. The brief book of Jonah ends with God reminding Jonah that it was only fitting that God should have pity

on such a place where so many were still ignorant of him and where there were so many innocent animals.

Listen to me now...It is more than ironic how often we Christians, having been saved by God's grace out of the depths of sin and despair, so often become so condemning of those still in the depths of sin and despair. John Newton, the former slave trader become preacher, author, abolitionist, and composer of the famous hymn *Amazing Grace*, remarked about that. He said that we should think of ourselves as being like blind Bartimeus, who while after being made able to see by Jesus, was certainly so grateful for the grace shown to us. But instead, he said, we who were formally blind begin beating all those around us **who are still blind** with a stick! How quickly we forget our former state!

God had shown mercy to Abraham – in effect plucking him out of fire of pagan unbelief and revealing himself to him. So does it not follow from that simple fact that Abraham would desire to see God's mercy also be shown to those still caught in the sin of unbelief?

Well, I could go on with still other sermons that **might be DRAWN OUT** of this Genesis 18 narrative about Abraham's intercession for the corrupt cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. But instead I would have us deal with this single verse – and actually only part of a verse: Genesis 18:25c.

Now, as noted, Abraham is here trying to make a case for God to show mercy on the two wicked cities. And part of his case before God is that it would not be like God to destroy the righteous with the wicked. But the truth of the matter is, **God OFTEN has done exactly that.**

- During the days of Elijah there was a great famine that came over all the land. It was during that general time that God told Elijah (who was bemoaning how he was the only really righteous man left in the land) that there were still 7,000 that had not bent the knee before the false god Baal. The point being that the famine struck the lives and homes of those righteous 7,000 right along with all the wicked that were living in Israel at the time.
- During wars both ancient and modern, many righteous men and women have died. Some of your own relatives were wounded or killed in such wars. And some of these were truly righteous people.
- Or consider the number of floods, earthquakes, hurricanes and typhoons that regularly strike the earth. When Hurricane Katrina struck Louisiana and parts of the south back in 2005, the church that I was involved in used a church building – that was itself near the heart of all the destruction – as a central home base of operation. Many righteous people lost their homes, and many church buildings were wiped off the map during that storm.

So, Abraham's comment "Far be it from you...to slay the righteous with the wicked. Far be it from you." **seems somewhat ignorant of the facts.** For whether one wants to call such events "acts of Mother Nature," "quirks of nature," or "acts of God," the fact is, **GOD IS BEHIND THESE DESTRUCTIONS and TRAGEDIES.** Indeed, there are **MANY** verses in the scriptures that say **EXACTLY** that (Ex. 4:11; Dt.32:39; Job 5:18; Amos 3:6; Lamentations 3:38; Isaiah 31:2; Micah 1:12 and 2:3; Zechariah 8:14a, Isaiah 45:7 and Isaiah 60:10, to name a few).

- We may not **understand this**, but there is no way of getting around it.
- And while we may not **like this**, that doesn't change it one bit.

So I would mark Abraham's earlier comment up to ignorance.

But in Genesis 18:25c we have what I believe is a GREAT statement...a statement that I fall back upon often and have often used in counseling sessions.

"Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just?" Or, as some versions read, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is right?"

You see, how DOES one address the issue of a fire that destroys one's home?

- If one were living a godless, hedonistic, narcissistic life, one might think, "Ah, that fire is the penalty due me for my sins. This is the JUST judgment of God come upon me!"
- But what are the righteous to think when **their homes** go up in flames? I have known TWO families – both named Sensenig by the way – good and godly families, whose homes burned to the ground. What were they to think? Or what should you or I think should that happen to one of us?

Some **fool**, having bought into the error of the prosperity gospel might suggest that the flames were God's judgment against our sins...sins so deep that obviously we were not willing to deal with them. But is that how we are to view every calamity? Are we to view the person who gets cancer as a sinner due the wrath of God? And what of the baby who dies in infancy? Was that child somehow getting his or her just deserts? That's where the Prosperity Gospel will lead you but certainly that cannot be correct.

Or how am I – a minister of the good news of Christ – to speak to parents whose 10-year-old son has just died from Leukemia? The Prosperity Gospel advocates would take me back to the place of the disciples who asked about the man born blind, "Tell us, master, who sinned: this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

The fact is **we cannot always find a CAUSE and EFFECT sort of answer to life's tragedies**. SOMETIMES it is evident. The drunk who kills himself while driving is regrettable, but understandable. But that he **also took out a church youth group's van**, driving in the opposite direction, killing all on board, is **NOT UNDERSTANDABLE**. And what does one say at that time?

Genesis 18:25c has been among the best verses I can offer up or at least think upon at such times. That is,

- because I believe God is sovereign over ALL the affairs of mankind, and
- because I believe that nothing happens by mere accident or chance, and
- because I believe that sometimes the righteous DO PERISH right alongside the unrighteous (contrary to what Abraham suggested), and
- because I believe God is truly GOOD (all the time), and WISE, and OMNIPOTENT and OMNISCIENT...
- Because I believe all that, Genesis 18:25c answers for me as much as I really **need to know** and that is that the judge of all the earth WILL DO WHAT IS RIGHT...WHAT IS JUST. And so I have learned to just leave it with him.

And what I have learned about leaving it with God I now pass on to you hoping that you too may be able to do the same.

It doesn't answer all the questions we may have. But it expresses a trust in a God that knows what is right, or good or just or best. We can trust in him that there ARE good reasons for all that takes place, even if we cannot begin to understand it at the time.