

**"It's Been 2,000 Years and God Still Can't Remember Your Sins"**  
**Genesis 18:16-21**  
**14 April 2024**

**GOD KNOWS EVERYTHING ABOUT EVERYTHING, BUT HE CAN'T REMEMBER YOUR SINS.**

How's that for a sermon opening? Forget the canned illustrations about golf or fishing that so many preachers use. Why not start off the sermon with some good news that you could use on Wednesday afternoon this week? That silly golf illustration that some preacher might use ain't gonna help you out Wednesday afternoon when you're weighed down with the guilt and shame of your sin. But, this big idea? Yeah, it'll do just fine when shame comes a knockin'.

**GOD KNOWS EVERYTHING ABOUT EVERYTHING, BUT HE CAN'T REMEMBER YOUR SINS.**

That beats a fishing illustration any day! He knows and He loves us.

R.C. Sproul said, *"To know that God knows everything about me and yet loves me is indeed my ultimate consolation."* At the end of the day, that's our hope. He knows us- knows *everything* about us- and He loves us.

And, you better be glad that God knows everything, because if He didn't, we'd be in a world of trouble. He knows everything about everything. So, you're gonna be okay on Wednesday afternoon, no matter what happens because God knew what would happen on Wednesday of this week way back in eternity past. Nothing surprises Him. And, then it gets better. Thankfully, He can't remember our sins.

Okay. Genesis 18 it is. We're continuing our series "Messy Discipleship" where we are looking at the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob- and their significant others. 'Cause these stories are not just about these 3 men. It's about their wives, too. And, their kids, and their families. And, what we'll see as we continue this journey is that these people are messy, these families are messy...*just like us*.

LOOK AT VERSE 16...

*Then the men set out from there, and they looked down toward Sodom. And Abraham went with them to set them on their way. Yahweh said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of Yahweh by doing righteousness and justice, so that Yahweh may bring to Abraham what he has promised him." Then Yahweh said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know."*

Recall what we saw last week. God and 2 angels showed up unannounced at Abe and Sarah's house. They ate a meal together and rested in the shade. Then, after God and the 2 angels digested the food, they get up and start heading toward Sodom and Gomorrah. Verse 16 says that they looked down toward Sodom. The Hebrew is "they looked down upon *the face* of Sodom." It's as if the city is personified. It's like the face of the city is looking up to God in rebellion, as if they are challenging God with all their sinful, perverted acts.

And, then, in verses 17-19 we have the Lord speaking about His plans for the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Some scholars think that God is doing some kind of self-talk here, that He's talking to Himself, and we just get to eavesdrop on it. Or, it could be that God is speaking out loud to the 2 angels. I think that is most likely what is happening. I think Yahweh is asking the 2 angels if He should let Abraham know what is about to go down with Sodom and its suburbs.

Of course, this does not mean that God needs advice or wisdom. God is not really asking for help from the angels. God is sufficient in Himself. He doesn't need us. He doesn't need angels. The theological term for this is *aseity*.

*Aseity*

*a* = from  
*se* = self

The word *aseity* comes from the Latin word "*a*" (which means *from*) and the word "*se*" (which means *self*), meaning that God exists "*in and of Himself,*" or "*from himself.*"

John Webster says, *"God is from himself, and from himself God gives himself...Aseity is life: God's life from and therefore in himself."* (God without Measure, p. 19.)

So, God's aseity refers to God's independence in His existence, His decrees, His will, and His acts. In other words, God, and only God, determines who God is, what God does, and what God wills. We don't get a say in that matter. Nor do angels. Only God does.

God's aseity means that He is self-existent and self-sufficient. It means that He has life in Himself. It means that He has no needs. Think about that: He is a God of no needs. Matthew Barret says, *"Please brace yourself, because I have something shocking to say: God does not need you. He doesn't need you, he doesn't need me, and he doesn't need anyone or anything in this world. In fact, he doesn't need the world at all. Period. God is not a needy God. It's not as if he was bored, twiddling his thumbs, desperately lonely prior to creating the world. God is not dependent on the world for his existence, nor is he dependent on the world for his happiness and self-fulfillment. Instead, he possesses life in and of himself. More precisely, he is the fullness of life in and of himself."* (None Greater, p.56)

So, God doesn't need the advice of these 2 angels. And, He certainly doesn't need us! We need Him. So, I think the reason we get to eavesdrop on this conversation between God and these 2 angels is to remind us that God *does include us* in His mission, *does include us* in His plans. He doesn't have to, but He uses us, and He uses angels. He invites us into His plans. He could do it all Himself, but He likes to include us, and angels, in His work.

So, Yahweh asks the 2 angels in verse 17, *"Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?"*

I know our tendency is probably to just rush past this verse because we think it has nothing to do with us, and it's just about Abraham, but that would be a mistake! This verse may not give you goosebumps upon first reading, but if you slow down and think about it, it's all about you! It's all about us! When you read verse 17, you supposed to read it this way. This is how I read it:

*"Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth (including Benji Magness) shall be blessed in him?"*

You're supposed to insert your name in there. God is asking whether He should tell Abraham what He is about to do since you would be blessed through him! God was thinking about you, after eating cookies with Abraham and Sarah, as He made His way to Sodom. Fascinating to ponder!

God's logic is this: If I have chosen Abraham to be the father of many nations, and I plan on blessing the nations of the world through him, (and blessing the members of Grace Baptist Church, Santa Maria!), then I ought to tell Abraham that I'm about to wipe out Sodom and its suburbs, especially because Abraham's nephew, Lot, lives there.

And, the reason why Abraham is included in on God's plan is found in verse 19: *For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of Yahweh by doing righteousness and justice...*

God chose Abraham, of His own free will. God could have chosen any other pagan living in Ur of the Chaldeans, but He chose Abraham because He wanted to! And, that choosing- *that grace*- would be what caused Abraham and his family to keep the way of Yahweh. The reason Abraham could keep the way of Yahweh by doing righteousness and justice was because he was *chosen*.

Understand this: It's grace that inspires us to obey and walk in the ways of the Lord. Not fear of punishment, not dread. It's the sheer kindness of God, given to people who would never choose God, that gets down in your pores and makes you want to walk in His ways out of gratitude.

It's the reality of being chosen by God, when He didn't choose others, that causes- *or should cause us!* - to walk in His ways, to do what is right, to seek justice. This Hebrew word for "chosen" is the Hebrew word for "knowing" someone. It implies intimacy. Yahweh has an intimate relationship with Abraham. They are friends, and that's why God is going to share His plans with Abraham.

And, it's this idea of being chosen by God, and being intimately known by Him, that should cause us to walk in His ways. It's grace, it's the Gospel that would cause Abraham and Co. to walk in Yahweh's ways.

So, what motivates obedience in the Christian life? Grace! The Gospel. What motivates us to walk in God's ways? Is it the law? Is it the demands of God's law? Is it the commandments of God? Is it "do more and try harder?" Is it "get your act together?" Is it "pedal faster?" The answer is "No."

Should guilt and shame motivate us to obey God? No! Although some churches and pastors preach this way. Some pastors and churches preach a message of guilt and condemnation, laying burdens on their people that they can't bear. As Steve Brown says-

*"Guilty people make people feel guilty, and you can tell how guilty a person really is by perceiving how guilty you feel in his or her presence... I fear too often the church has become an organization of guilty people with a guilty preacher standing in the pulpit, telling guilty people that they should feel guiltier."* (A Scandalous Freedom: The Radical Nature of the Gospel)

So, grace comes before law. Yahweh redeemed Israel and then He gave them the law. Grace always comes before law. The *indicatives*, the truths of the Gospel, come before the *imperatives*, the commandments. The "done's" come before the "do's." Abraham is chosen, then he is called to walk in Yahweh's ways.

Listen, if we want to see long-term, gospel-motivated obedience, it can only come from resting in what Jesus has already done for us, and not fear of what we must do. Any obedience that is not grounded in or motivated by the good news of the finished work of Christ is just not sustainable.

As Elyse Fitzpatrick says-

*"Long-term, sustained, gospel-motivated obedience can come only from faith in what Jesus has already done, not fear of what we must do. Any obedience not grounded in or motivated by the gospel is unsustainable. No matter how hard you try, how 'radical' you get, any engine that you're depending on for power to obey that is smaller than the gospel will conk out in due time."* (Give Them Grace: Dazzling Your Kids With the Love of Jesus)

So, here's what's happening as Yahweh speaks to these 2 angels: He's laying the groundwork of the Gospel in the life of all disciples that would walk in His ways:

GOSPEL (What God has done)      RESPONSE (What we do)

*For I have chosen him...      →      ...to keep the way...*

So, God is laying the groundwork for obedience in discipleship: it's always a response of gratitude for what God has done for us. Never to earn God's favor, never to get anything from God, but always as a response of gratitude for grace.

And, here's something that should cause gratitude to well up in your heart, resulting in obedience-  
**GOD KNOWS EVERYTHING ABOUT EVERYTHING, BUT HE CAN'T REMEMBER YOUR SINS.**

However, this is not the case with unbelievers. God knows and remembers the sins of those who never turn to Him in faith.

LOOK AT VERSE 20...

*Then Yahweh said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know."*

So, the Lord says that He is going to go down to these 2 cities to see if it's really as bad as He's hearing. Of course, God knows how bad the sins are, and He knows what He's going to do with Sodom and Gomorrah. He is going to destroy those cities because of the sin of homosexuality, which is rampant. So, when we read in verse 21, where God says, *"I'm gonna go down there to see whether it's true or not,"* understand that God already knows it's true. He knows everything about everyone in Sodom and its suburbs.

God is *omniscient*. What's that mean? Let's define this term *omniscient*. It comes from Latin:

*omni* = all  
*sciens* (*scientia*) = to know

Yes, we get our English word *science* from this word. So, when we say that God is omniscient, we mean that God knows all. The Bible makes this very clear. God sees everything. He searches all hearts and observes everyone's ways— in other words, He knows everything about everything and everybody all the time.

Matthew Barrett says-

*What God knows now he has always known, and he has known it perfectly. His knowledge does not develop over time. Can you imagine if it did? How could we ever trust his decisions? Perhaps his decision today is based on knowledge that will improve tomorrow. Thankfully, such is not the case with an eternally omniscient God. He knows everything by one eternal act. Everything is as if it were present to God, even things that have yet to occur in our experience, because he does not grow in his knowledge, knowing something that he did not know before. To*

*be exact, there is no "before" or "future" with God. He knows everything timelessly, eternally.* (None Greater, p. 194)

Listen, God knows how many hairs there are on your head, for crying out loud! Who keeps track of that? Who really wants to know that number? God does. What did Jesus say?

Luke 12:6-7

*Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.*

If God lavishes such concern over the rest of His creation, like sparrows, how much more does He love us! God knows how many hairs there are on your head. What's Jesus' point here? That God actually cares about all kinds of things in our life that we don't even care or think about! Jesus cares about all kinds of things in our lives. Just read Psalm 56!

Psalm 56:8-9

*You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book? Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call. This I know, that God is for me.*

Who not only knows, but keeps track of how many times we toss and turn in our beds at night? Jesus. Who not only knows how many tears we've cried, but collects them in a bottle, because they are so valuable to Him? Jesus. Who not only knows, but has a journal full of all of our problems? Jesus. Does this make Him a weirdo? Counting hairs, counting our tosses and turns at night, and counting our tears? No. It's anthropomorphic and anthropopathic language to show us just how much He cares.

Jesus is the great heart-knower. In fact, 2x in the book of Acts, He is called the "Heart-knower" (Acts 1:24; 15:8). That's the Greek word: *kardiognosta*. You can even hear it in the English.

Acts 1:24

*And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all..."*

Acts 15:8

*And God, who knows the heart...*

The very first name that the early church uses to address God in prayer, in the book of Acts, is "Heart-knower." That's the "nickname" they give God at the beginning of Acts: "Heart-knower." They stress His omniscience when they address God in prayer. Think about that. Jesus is the great Heart-knower. He knows our hearts better than even we do. Wow. That's humbling!

Nothing is hidden from God— past, present, or future —so nothing can surprise or confuse Him. He is never startled. He never learns anything new. He is never caught off guard. He knows the future as much as He knows the past and the present. And He also knows all possible events that could, but never happen. He knows all possible worlds that could have been if He willed them different. He knows all your goings and doings because He determined them. That's omniscience.

That's omniscience. God knows all things. And, that's why He's qualified to give the diagnosis of what's happening in Sodom and Gomorrah. Because He knows the hearts of every single resident there. He knows how bad it is in Sodom. So, this conversation that we get to eavesdrop on in Genesis 18 is for *our benefit*, not God's. We're getting to listen in on the thoughts of God. It's God condescending to us, and coming down to our level, so we can understand who He is and what He is like.

So, yes, God knows what's happening in Sodom. He doesn't need to visit in order to learn something. He has heard the outcry that is coming from the few righteous people in Sodom, which are Lot and his family. There is a cry for divine justice because they are seeing the rampant wickedness, the rampant homosexuality in their city. The sin of Sodom is great and "very grave." The Hebrew word here for "very grave" is actually the Hebrew word for "heavy" (*qavod*).

This isn't some "light" sin- this is "heavy" sin. It goes against God design for marriage: one man and one woman enjoying each intimately. The sin of Sodom, the sin of homosexuality is *heavy* in God's eyes. It's a big deal. It's big enough that He will wipe out several major cities and their suburbs.

So, Yahweh "comes down" which is the *cohortative* verbal form in Hebrew (not that you care!) and it carries the idea of "resolve." Yahweh is determined, He *must* go down and see this for Himself. It's as if God, who knows how wicked and sinful the human heart is, must go down and see if it's as bad as the outcry of the righteous say it is. Of course, it's not that God doesn't know. He does. But it shows us His involvement. He's aware. He's concerned.

He's "all in" on what's happening in His world. He shows up in person when His world is broken. He's got to see if Sodom is as wicked as all the prayers that have come up to Him suggest.

So, He's involved in His world to bring judgment, but also to care. He will end up saving Lot and his daughters. That's His care for His people. God is going to rescue Lot and his daughters because He cares for them. So, this shows us that 2 things about God:

1) He will bring justice to this world, even if we don't see it. He's aware.

2) He will shepherd and care for His people...even if you feel like you're not seeing it. He's aware. God sends the 2 angels to rescue Lot. That's the care of the Lord.

And, where do we see the Lord's care the most? At the cross. In giving up His Son. And, because of the cross, we have this promise:

*"For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more"* (Jeremiah 31:34; Heb. 8:12; 10:1).

God didn't want you to forget this, so He put it in the Bible 3x! But, how can this be true? How can God not remember our sins if He is omniscient, if He really knows everything about everything? Would not our sins be among the things that He simply cannot *not know*?

Well, yes, technically speaking, God knows everything about everything. He could tell you how many and what kinds of sins you committed on any given day of your life. He knows everything about everything about your sin. But, He chooses not to remember! He puts our sin out of His mind! He doesn't deal with us according to our sins!

Psalms 103:10

*He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.*

God- who knows everything about everything about our sin, actually promises to never remember. He will not reflect upon your sin, He will not think about it, He will not contemplate it, He will not analyze it, nor will He ever bring it up again to Himself, to you, or to others.

R.C. Sproul said, *"The sin you committed yesterday and today was forgotten 2,000 years ago."* So, Christian, your judgment day happened 2,000 years ago. At the cross. That's when God brought up and dealt with your sin. When He condemned His own Son in your place. Your judgment day happened 2,000 years ago when you died with Christ.

That means that God will not bring up your sin on that final Day when you stand before Him. Isn't that glorious? Talk about some good news to get you through "hump day" this week! Your judgement Day happened 2,000 years ago. The sin you committed yesterday and today was forgotten 2,000 years ago! You have nothing to dread. The only thing you have to look forward to is hearing God say to you, *"Well done, good and faithful servant! Enter into the joy of the Lord!"*

Not "enter into judgement. Not "enter into condemnation." But, enter into the joy of the Lord.

### **GOD KNOWS EVERYTHING ABOUT EVERYTHING, BUT HE CAN'T REMEMBER YOUR SINS.**

I think that's a great way to end a sermon, too.

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"It's Been 2,000 Years and God Still Can't Remember Your Sins"

Genesis 18:16-21

Sermon Study Questions

1. Discuss: *"To know that God knows everything about me and yet loves me is indeed my ultimate consolation."*  
R.C. Sproul

2. Discuss the *aseity* of God:

*Aseity*

*a = from*

*se = self*

*The word aseity comes from the Latin word "a" (which means from) and the word "se" (which means self), meaning that God exists "in and of Himself," or "from himself."*

*John Webster says, "God is from himself, and from himself God gives himself...Aseity is life: God's life from and therefore in himself." (God without Measure, p. 19.) So, God's aseity refers to God's independence in His existence, His decrees, His will, and His acts. In other words, God, and only God, determines who God is, what God does, and what God wills. We don't get a say in that matter. Nor do angels. Only God does.*

3. READ Genesis 18:19. What motivates obedience in the Christian life? Guilt or grace?

GOSPEL (What God has done)      RESPONSE (What we do)

*For I have chosen him...      →      ...to keep the way...*

*Understand this: It's grace that inspires us to obey and walk in the ways of the Lord. Not fear of punishment, not dread. It's the sheer kindness of God, given to people who would never choose God, that gets down in your pores and makes you want to walk in His ways out of gratitude. It's the reality of being chosen by God, when He didn't choose others, that causes- or should cause us! - to walk in His ways, to do what is right, to seek justice. This Hebrew word for "chosen" is the Hebrew word for "knowing" someone. It implies intimacy. Yahweh has an intimate relationship with Abraham. They are friends, and that's why God is going to share His plans with Abraham.*

4. Discuss God's omniscience:

*omni = all  
sciens (scientia) = to know*

*Matthew Barrett says: What God knows now he has always known, and he has known it perfectly. His knowledge does not develop over time. Can you imagine if it did? How could we ever trust his decisions? Perhaps his decision today is based on knowledge that will improve tomorrow. Thankfully, such is not the case with an eternally omniscient God. He knows everything by one eternal act. Everything is as if it were present to God, even things that have yet to occur in our experience, because he does not grow in his knowledge, knowing something that he did not know before. To be exact, there is no "before" or "future" with God. He knows everything timelessly, eternally. (None Greater, p. 194)*

5. READ Luke 12:6-7. What does this verse tell you about Jesus and your future?

6. Discuss what R.C. Sproul said: *"The sin you committed yesterday and today was forgotten 2,000 years ago."*