

**"Good? Yep! Safe? Nope."**

**Genesis 19:15-29**

**5 May 2024**

In the *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, four children (Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy) pass through the wardrobe's portal to find the kingdom of Narnia imprisoned under the spell of the White Witch. Aslan the lion, who is the king of Narnia- *and who represents King Jesus*- is nowhere to be found. Although rumor has it, "*He is on the move*," he appears to have abandoned his kingdom to the White Witch, who spends her leisure time turning the inhabitants of Narnia into statues.

\* INSERT NARNIA PIC

So, Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy set out to explore this strange and somewhat frightening new country that is locked under the White Witch's spell. And, they stumble upon Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, who assure the children that Aslan is about to return to set things right.

Upon hearing about Aslan, the kids want to know what Aslan is like.

*"Is—is he a man?" asked Lucy.*

*"Aslan a man!" said Mr. Beaver sternly. "Certainly not. I tell you he is the King of the wood and the son of the great Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea. Don't you know who is the King of Beasts? Aslan is a lion—the lion, the great Lion."*

*"Ooh!" said Susan, "I'd thought he was a man. Is he—quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."*

*"That you will, dearie, and no mistake," said Mrs. Beaver; "if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly."*

*"Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy.*

*"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver; "don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."*

C.S. Lewis is describing King Jesus. And, so is Genesis 19. And what we'll see today in God's word is what Mr. Beaver said-

### **GOD IS NOT SAFE, BUT HE IS GOOD.**

God is not safe...*because He is holy*. He is infinitely glorious. And, He hates sin. I mean, He *really* hates sin. Just ask Sodom and Gomorrah. But, sometimes we don't like to think of God this way, do we? And for some Christians, that's all they talk about. All they ever talk about is how angry God is at sin, and if you watch them closely, you'll discover that they are very angry, too! They are angry disciples! Most of the "angry Christians" that I have met have a high view of themselves, everybody else is wrong and in need of correction, and they tend to over-emphasize God's anger, and that's what they become: *angry Christians*.

But, then, others only ever talk about God's love. They seem to think that God's main job is to give them the warm fuzzies and affirm any choices they make. They never talk about God's anger, never talk about judgement, never talk about sin. Those are the 2 extremes that the church must avoid.

Paul Tripp said something about God that certainly applies to what's happening here in Genesis 19. He said-

*"God is angry. God will not forsake His holy cause. He will not allow us to be in the way of what He has planned for His universe. He will not abide our 'No's.' But it's not the anger of a vengeful, evil person who is out of control and wants to harm. It's the anger of grace. It is an anger of a God who is full of zeal for His holy cause, who will not lose His own... We must quit looking at the anger of God as the embarrassing uncle of Christian Theology. We'd rather kind of hide it. It makes us uncomfortable and embarrasses us. Listen, in a world where evil exists, the anger of God is your hope. You don't want a God who looks at the fallenness of this world, you don't want a God who looks at human rebellion, you don't want a God who looks at all the brokenness around us and says, 'It's okay,' because it's not okay. You want a God who will stand up and say, 'I will stand against that which stands against my holy will.' That anger is the hope of the universe. And because God is who He is, that anger is never a contradiction of His love. It's never a contradiction of His grace because in the magnificence of His holiness, His anger and His grace kiss."*

In other words-

### **GOD IS NOT SAFE, BUT HE IS GOOD.**

And, we'll see both in Genesis 19. Turn there in you Bibles.

LOOK AT VERSE 15...

*As morning dawned, 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, Yahweh 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." And Lot said to them, "Oh, no, my lords. Behold, your servant has found favor 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 favor 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.*

So, as the sun begins to rise and Lot is about to drink his coffee, the angels grab him by the shirt collar and tell him and his family to get out of Dodge. And, we are shocked when we read in verse 16 that Lot lingered! He was just told that if he didn't leave, then he'd be toast, along with with the rest of the city. But, we don't know why Lot lingered. The commentaries all give their ideas, but maybe he was just in shock? Maybe he was packin' up his prized baseball card collection? Maybe he couldn't find one of his shoes? Whatever the reason, he *did* linger and the angels yank Lot and Co. out of the house and take them outside the city.

But, it wasn't just a grab-Lot-by-the-collar moment. This was *mercy*. Verse 16 tells us that Yahweh was being *merciful* to Lot. This Hebrew word (*hemla*) carries this idea of an "emotional response which results in action to remove the object from impending difficulty" (TWOT). So, what we actually have here is the heart of God on display. There is this emotional response from Yahweh whereby He loves Lot and his family and is moved to compassion for them, and that compassion, that mercy then causes the Lord to rescue Lot and his family from the impending firestorm. It's the heart of God beating for Lot before Sodom took a beating.

Understand this: Sometimes the mercy and compassion and beating heart of God has to grab you by the scruff of your neck and drag your sorry self out of harm's way. How many times has Jesus done this for us? Too many to count! We have absolutely no idea how many times we were dawdling in sin and carelessness and Jesus came and grabbed us by the scruff of the neck and brought us to His green pastures and still waters.

It's all mercy. And, it ought to cause you to fall down on your knees and sing the words to that old hymn *Sweet Heart of Jesus, Fount of Love and Mercy*-

*Sweet Heart of Jesus! Fount of love and mercy,  
Today we come thy blessings to implore;  
Oh touch our hearts so cold and so ungrateful,  
And make them Lord, thine own for evermore.  
Sweet Heart of Jesus! We implore,  
Oh, make us love thee, more and more.*

And, you thought Genesis 19 was all fire and brimstone? No, no, my friends. There's a lot of love and mercy here, too. The burning heart of God for His people should be the first thing we think of when we think of Genesis 19. I get it. We all tend to equate Genesis 19 with the fire and brimstone that gets rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah. I certainly do that. But, after spending some time in this chapter, what if the heart of God was the first thing that came to mind? Are we *that* allergic to grace that we can't even fathom this chapter highlighting the heart of God for His people instead of the destruction of Sodom?

So, Lot freezes, and we don't know why, but then the Lord shows up- the Lord's heart shows up!- and there's this emotional response, if you will, in the very heart of God, that moves Him to rescue Lot and his family from the coming onslaught of fire raining down on the cities.

Who knew? Genesis 19, which smells like smoke, could actually be a chapter that causes your heart to cry out to your Savior and sing, "*Sweet Heart of Jesus! We implore, Oh, make us love thee, more and more.*"

And, people think the Old Testament is boring? No way. This is the very heart of our Savior shining out with 16,000 watts of mercy, love, compassion, pity for Lot. And, you, like Lot and Co., can be on the receiving end of it if you look to Christ alone to be saved. 16,000 watts of God's love, shown at the cross, to warm your soul and give you peace like you've never known. It's like what Mr. Beaver said, "He's good. He's the King, I tell you," and Genesis 19 backs up that claim.

Okay. So, Lot and his family are standing outside the city, clutching what little belongings they had time to gather, and now reality is setting in. Everything that they knew before is about to be gone. Their lives have been turned

upside down. And, Lot looks up and sees the city of Zoar off in the distance, and he asks the 2 angels if he and his family can flee there. Lot is afraid that the coming disaster will "overtake" him. The Hebrew word for "overtake" usually means "to stick to, to cleave, to join." It's the same word used in Genesis 2 of Adam and Eve, when it says that a man shall "cleave" to his wife.

Lot is basically saying, *"I can't run that fast. I've got bad knees. If I run to the hills, I'm gonna cleave to, I'm gonna become 'one' with one the Lord's fireballs that He rains down on the city. I don't want to cleave to a fireball, so can I mosey over to that little city over there?"* Lot is afraid that he cannot outrun the coming calamity. So, the angels grant his request. And, as soon as Lot books a room in Zoar's Motel 6, the Lord begins to rain down fire, and Sodom's meteorologists never saw this coming!

LOOK AT VERSE 23...

*The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar. Then Yahweh rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from Yahweh 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.*

So, as soon as Lot gets checked in to his hotel, the Lord rains down sulfur and fire out of Heaven. We don't know exactly what this was like. Some scholars suggest an earthquake ignited the various gases from the bitumen pits, which are mentioned in Genesis 14:10. Could be. But, it could be that giant fire balls came crashing down to earth! Who knows? Well, the inhabitants of Sodom know, but we can't ask them. So, let's just go with giant fireballs. And, everything gets wiped out by them: people, cattle, corn, you name it. Gone.

But, don't get hung up on the "How?" of the fire and brimstone. Move from "How?" To "Wow!" Wow! God is serious about sin, serious about sexual sin. Wow! God is serious about homosexuality. But, then move to "Wow! God saves sinners who turn to Him for salvation and flee to Him for safety." How God rained down fire and sulfur, we don't know. But, what we do know is that God saved Lot and his family. At least 3 of them, anyway, because Lot's wife does the unthinkable. She looked back! And, she ended up a pillar of salt, whatever that is. Did she become a salt statue, like something the White Witch in Narnia would do? We don't know. We simply don't know what she actually looked like. All I know is that whatever it was, you don't want to be that!

The Hebrew word for "looked" that used of Lot's wife means "to look intently, to gaze." It's the same word used by the Lord in Genesis 15 when he told Abraham to look to Heaven and number the stars. Lot's wife didn't just glance, she *stared*. And, not just that. Verses 23-24 tell us that Yahweh did not start sending fireballs down until Lot and family landed at Zoar. So, most likely what happened is this: Lot's wife walked back toward Sodom to see what was happening, she stared a long time, and she actually got taken out by one of the flaming fireballs. She went back, stared at the destruction, and got taken out by a flaming fireball. She got too close. I think that's most likely what happened.

But, here's *why* she died: she disobeyed the angels' command in verse 17! I don't think necessarily that Lot's wife longed for the immorality and perversion of Sodom and that's why she walked back. A lot of scholars and commentators and preachers say that, and they might be right. But, I think she just looked back. She was curious. She got too close. It was that simple. But, it wasn't just a curious look. Curiosity got the cat. She *disobeyed* God's word. And, that's tragic. It's always tragic to disobey God's word.

Of course, we may object. We might say, *"It was just a glance. She didn't deserve to become a pillar of salt."* But, the message of the text is very clear: you dare not trifle with a God who is both real and holy and powerful. If Genesis 19 tells us anything it's that Jesus is not your neat, warm, fuzzy friend in the sky. Sometimes disciples can forget what sort of God they serve.

And, in case you think this is just how God rolled in the Old Testament, just ask Ananias and Sapphira in Acts chapter 5. That's in the New Testament, after Jesus lived, died, and rose. This is early church stuff. Ananias and Sapphira lied and fell over dead in church. And, then the boys in the youth group had to carry their dead bodies out of the fellowship hall. So, when you read Genesis 19, you have two options: you can gripe about it, or you can tremble at God's judgement. The latter is obviously the better choice.

The holy God of Genesis 19, who rained down fire and sulfur on Sodom and all its suburbs because of the sin of homosexuality, ought to sober us. It ought to make us stop and think about the God we serve. It ought to remind us that He is not like us. And, then finally, it ought to amaze us. Listen, if it's been a while since you were flat out amazed at His grace, the smell of smoke in this chapter ought to do it. God saves sinners. Never get over that.

Jesus actually talks about Sodom in Matthew 11. There were cities that saw His miracles, but they did not repent. And, Jesus had strong words for them. His words might actually be for someone here, too.

Matthew 11:23-24

*"And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you."*

Jesus is saying that you can be in church, recite the catechism, sing the songs, hear the sermon, and still miss it. You have what Sodom did not have. If they would have had what you have, Jesus says that they would have repented. That's sobering.

Ralph Davis says, *"Imagine if some of the fellows from Sodom could come into this church service tonight. Oh, you'd probably pull your kids a little closer to you. Can you imagine one of them stopping at your pew and pulling out a hymnbook, leafing through it, finding the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Shorter Catechism in the back of it. He might say, 'My, we didn't have this.' He might pull out one of those ESV pew Bibles, flip through it, turn to you and ask, 'You have this in your own language, no less?' True, they did not repent of their twisted sexual perversions and heartlessness. But what of you? You have what they never had. You have the full data on Jesus and yet you refuse to lay hold of him! It will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you. How the Bible shudders over -and under- divine judgment."*

Let me ask you: Have you repented? That just means that you turn, you have a change of mind, and you turn to Jesus in faith, trusting only Him for forgiveness and salvation. What's interesting is that after mentioning Sodom, shortly after this Jesus says some of, if not the most magnificent words, in the Bible:

Matthew 11:28-30

*"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

Will you come? Jesus is waiting for you with open arms. Not giant, flaming fireballs. No. He has a hug with your name on it. Will you come?

Well, the smell of smoke in Genesis 19, and this invitation from Jesus Himself in Matthew 11, is a reminder that-

**GOD IS NOT SAFE, BUT HE IS GOOD.**

So, good that He remembered Abraham's nagging prayer from the day before.

LOOK AT VERSE 27...

*And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before Yahweh. And he looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the valley, and he looked and, behold, the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace. So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow when he overthrew the cities in which Lot had lived.*

So, Abraham gets up in the morning and there's smoke in the air. He went to the spot where he had a "quiet time" with Yahweh the day before, and now he sees that Sodom and its suburbs are gone. He knows the character of Yahweh, so I think he knows that Lot must have survived. Verse 29 says that Yahweh "remembered" Abraham. In other words, the Lord spared the righteous in the city, as Abraham had prayed. Of course, Abraham prayed that if there were 10 righteous, God should spare the city. We know that there were only 3 righteous people saved- 4 if you count Lot's wife, pre her turning into a *Morton's* can of salt.

Yahweh saved the righteous, even though they didn't meet the 10-person quota. He's like that. He's good. Lot and Co. experienced this goodness while the rest of the metroplex experienced giant fireballs. So, what does God want to say to us from this chapter? Something like this: If you want to challenge Him by your lifestyle, He's not safe. If you want to make up the rules and ignore His commands, He's not safe. But, if you turn to Him for mercy, He's good. If you turn to Him in repentance, He's good. He's merciful. He's gracious.

So, as His people, as the church, we must quit looking at the anger of God as the embarrassing uncle of Christian theology. We'd rather kind of hide it, right? It makes us uncomfortable and embarrasses us. But in a world where evil exists, in a world full of perverted people, the anger of God is your hope. You don't want a God who looks at the fallenness of this world, you don't want a God who looks at human rebellion, you don't want a God who looks at the Sodom's of this world, you don't want a God who looks at all the brokenness around us and says, "Meh. It's okay," because it's not okay.

You want a God who will stand up and say, *"I will stand against that which stands against My holy will. I will stand against any person, place, or thing that tries to stop My plans or harm My church."* That holy anger is the hope of the universe! And, because God is who He is, that anger is never a contradiction of His love. It's never a

contradiction of His grace because in the magnificence of His holiness, His anger and His grace kiss. And we see this most clearly at the cross where Jesus died- God's anger and His grace kiss at the cross.

And, when you understand that, passages like Genesis 19 make sense. And, then you will be amazed at His grace, and you'll fall down and worship. You'll be like Rat and Mole in *The Wind in the Willows*. In the story, when Rat and Mole go looking for the baby otter, they stumble into the presence of God:

*Suddenly the Mole felt a great Awe fall upon him, an awe that turned his muscles to water, bowed his head, and rooted his feet to the ground. It was no panic terror—indeed, he felt wonderfully at peace and happy...*

*"Rat!" he found breath to whisper, shaking. "Are you afraid?"*

*"Afraid?" murmured the Rat, his eyes shining with unutterable love.*

*"Afraid! Of Him? O, never, never! And yet—and yet—O, Mole, I am afraid!"*

*Then the two animals, crouching to the earth, bowed their heads and did worship.* (Kenneth Grahame, *The Wind in the Willows*, pp. 180-182)

Rat and mole, along with Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, remind us that-  
**GOD IS NOT SAFE, BUT HE IS GOOD.**

Here's some good news for, y'all. Jesus welcomes you today- *with a smile*. His anger and grace kissed at the cross. So come. Crouch to the earth. Bow your head. And worship.

There is no god like Him. Jesus actually stoops down to sinners! Think about that! He is high and lifted up, infinitely glorious, all-knowing, all-seeing, omnipresent, all-powerful, all-wise, and He humbles Himself and comes down to us because He wants to have a relationship with His people. Amazing!

That ought to make you fall to your knees. And why bend down like that? Because Jesus paid it all. Because He humbled Himself and bore our sins on the cross so that we could stand in God's presence. He took our blame. He was punished for us so that we could forever sit under the smile of our heavenly Father.

In fact, we do our best Lord's Supper on our knees! Think about that! We do our best Lord's Supper on our knees. This table should humble us. On the cross, Jesus took the blame for all the shame-filled things that we do and have done. The cross is all the proof that you need that-

**GOD IS NOT SAFE, BUT HE IS GOOD.**

So, when we come to this table, to celebrate the Lord's Supper, Jesus comes to us and He says, "*You bring your internet history and I'll bring the bread and wine.*" Isn't that great? That's what we celebrate here today with the Lord's Supper. You bring your internet history, you bring your shameful past, you bring your sexual history, you bring the list of idols that you worship, you bring the list of all the "idols" that have captured your heart, you bring all the bad things you have done, and Jesus brings the bread and wine (or, grape juice, in our case!).

You bring your past- that thing that haunts you and that you just can't seem to shake- and Jesus brings the bread and wine. You bring all the things that you've done in Sodom and San Francisco, you bring how you yelled at your kids as you got ready for church this morning and Jesus brings the bread and wine. You bring that bitterness that is eating away at you, that hatred, that jealousy, that resentment, and Jesus brings the bread and wine and He says to you, "*You are forgiven. You are loved. You are blameless. You are clean.*"

Let's pray-

*"Sweet Heart of Jesus! Fount of love and mercy,  
Today we come thy blessings to implore;  
Oh touch our hearts so cold and so ungrateful,  
And make them Lord, thine own for evermore.  
Sweet Heart of Jesus! We implore,  
Oh, make us love thee, more and more."*

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"Good? Yep! Safe? Nope."  
Genesis 19:15-29  
Sermon Study Questions

1. Discuss the big idea: God is not safe, but He is good. Why do some Christians go to either extreme?

2. Discuss what Paul Tripp said:

*We must quit looking at the anger of God as the embarrassing uncle of Christian Theology. We'd rather kind of hide it. It makes us uncomfortable and embarrasses us. Listen, in a world where evil exists, the anger of God is your hope. You don't want a God who looks at the fallenness of this world, you don't want a God who looks at human rebellion, you don't want a God who looks at all the brokenness around us and says, 'It's okay,' because it's not okay. You want a God who will stand up and say, 'I will stand against that which stands against my holy will.' That anger is the hope of the universe.*

3. What first comes to your mind when you read Genesis 19? For most of us, it's judgement against homosexuality. But, maybe mercy should come to mind *first*. READ Genesis 19:16 and discuss the idea of mercy:

*Verse 16 tells us that Yahweh was being merciful to Lot. This Hebrew word (hemla) carries this idea of an "emotional response which results in action to remove the object from impending difficulty" (TWOT). So, what we actually have here is the heart of God on display. There is this emotional response from Yahweh whereby He loves Lot and his family and is moved to compassion for them, and that compassion, that mercy then causes the Lord to rescue Lot and his family from the impending firestorm.*

4. Discuss this thought from the sermon about Lot's wife:

*But, here's why she died: she disobeyed the angels' command in verse 17! I don't think necessarily that Lot's wife longed for the immorality and perversion of Sodom and that's why she walked back. A lot of scholars and commentators and preachers say that, and they might be right. But, I think she just looked back. She was curious. She got too close. It was that simple. But, it wasn't just a curious look. Curiosity got the cat. She disobeyed God's word. And, that's tragic. It's always tragic to disobey God's word.*

*Of course, we may object. We might say, "It was just a glance. She didn't deserve to become a pillar of salt." But, the message of the text is very clear: you dare not trifle with a God who is both real and holy and powerful. If Genesis 19 tells us anything it's that Jesus is not your neat, warm, fuzzy friend in the sky. Sometimes disciples can forget what sort of God they serve.*

5. Discuss this section from *The Wind in the Willows* when Rat and Mole go looking for the baby otter and they stumble into the presence of God:

*Suddenly the Mole felt a great Awe fall upon him, an awe that turned his muscles to water, bowed his head, and rooted his feet to the ground. It was no panic terror—indeed, he felt wonderfully at peace and happy...*

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