

Genesis 18:20-33

Selecting members of a jury can be a difficult process, especially in a case that has already grabbed the national headlines. Prospective jurors may already have ideas and opinions formed before they are called upon to serve. You are not a jury today deciding the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah, but if you were, it would be difficult for you to look only at the text before us. You know the full story too well. You know the sin of Sodom, and you know what God did to those cities. Rather than ignore the final outcome, we will look at our text, therefore, with the background of fire and brimstone raining down from heaven.

It's not that they weren't warned. God gave them His Law and His Gospel. The Law came about fifteen years prior when four kings with their armies conquered Sodom and Gomorrah and led their people away into captivity. Lot and his family also were captured. But the Gospel came when God, through Abraham, went after Lot and all the captives, rescued them, and restored them to their homes. And quite possibly, for a while at least, the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were grateful. But if they were, it didn't last long.

Not only did they engage in common sins--thieving, gossiping, murder--they became perverse in their wickedness, committing such detestable acts that put them even lower than the animals. As a rule, animals live within God's design, mating and populating according to His natural laws. But the people of Sodom and Gomorrah went against God's design. They lived in opposition to His natural laws, committing sins that are unnatural. And they rejected the prophets God sent to them.

If you see a striking parallel between Sodom and Gomorrah and our own society today, then you are not blind to the truth. Now before I go any further, I'm going to point out that what I say here may result in repercussions against me. If I was a Muslim speaking out against the so-called "gay lifestyle," (for Muslims are against it), I would be left alone. But since I am a Christian preaching God's Word of Scripture against sin, including homosexual sin, I could face retaliation. This is the direction our nation has gone.

All sin is lawlessness and is an offense to God. Unnatural sins, which are by their very nature perverse, follow the pattern of Sodom and Gomorrah. And the worst thing about such sins, be they natural or unnatural, is when people become stubborn in their sin and harden their hearts against God. This is the line of progression...people turn away from God, rejecting His Word and those He sends to preach; they become captured by their sinful desires; they become so depraved that they throw off all of God's boundaries and fall even into perverse unnatural sins and wickedness. This is what happened with Sodom and Gomorrah. It's a path that our own society is following today.

And yet, in the midst of all this wickedness, and stubbornness, and hard-heartedness, we see Abraham praying for these depraved people. He knows their sin. He knows how perverse their wickedness is. Still, he prays that God would spare them and not bring them to destruction.

We are like Sodom and Gomorrah because we have an Abraham praying for us also. Jesus, hanging from the cross, asks His Father to spare us, to not bring us to destruction, to not give us what our sins deserve. Our Abraham prays, "*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.*" He does not pray only for some. He does not say, "Forgive, Father, those who are trying...or, those who have good intentions but just can't follow through...or, forgive those who at least treat their neighbors with kindness." No, Jesus prays for all sinners when He says, "*Father, forgive them.*" He is our Abraham,

for Abraham, too, did not just pray for his nephew Lot. He did not ask God to rescue Lot and then destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham prayed for everyone who lived in those cities.

Dear members of the jury, as strong an appeal as Abraham made for Sodom and Gomorrah, you are aware that the Heavenly Judge destroyed those cities nonetheless. But God did not reject Abraham's prayer. He listened and He answered. And His answer was not a harsh, "No!" His answer was given in love. For the sake of His church, Sodom and Gomorrah would be destroyed. Out of love for Lot and his family, their wicked and perverse neighbors would come to destruction. God did not just rescue Lot from fire and brimstone; He rescued him from the fire of hell. Had God said, "Yes," to Abraham, and allowed the people of Sodom and Gomorrah to live, how long before Lot, too, would be swept away in their wickedness and lose his eternal soul?

So does God answer our Abraham's prayer? Absolutely, yes! Jesus prays that His Father forgive, and God does forgive. He forgives you and me. He forgives all sinners. Abraham stood praying for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, but Jesus as He prays, dies for those that He prays for. Jesus outdoes Abraham because He accepts the punishment that those He prays for deserve. Abraham did not say to God, "Do not destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, Lord, but punish me, instead, for their wickedness." Abraham did not do this, but Jesus does. Jesus became Sodom and Gomorrah on the cross. Jesus became all the sin in your life and in mine. He suffered the penalty for all wickedness, natural and unnatural. He became the thief, the gossip, the murderer, the homosexual on the cross. Innocent of all wrongdoing, Jesus bowed His head and accepted the burden of sin, and guilt, and punishment of the whole world. That's why God forgives. He forgives you for Jesus' sake.

But Sodom and Gomorrah will be destroyed. As those cities were destroyed by fire, so this earth will be destroyed. But as the Law and Gospel were given to Sodom and Gomorrah, so that same Word of God is being preached all over the world today. It's a word that cries, "*Repent of your sins and turn to the Lord, for He is gracious and merciful!*" It's a word that calls sinners out of their captivity and restores them by giving them forgiveness of their sins. It's the word that came to you with the water of baptism and placed you beneath the cross of your Lord where His blood covers all your sins. It's the word that is preached here that keeps calling you out of Sodom and Gomorrah to live your life in Christ and not follow the pattern of wickedness we see all around us.

And since you belong to Christ, and He lives in you, you become like Abraham as you pray, like he did, for those who are lost and dying in their sin. You become like Abraham as you ask God to show mercy and rescue sinners, as He has rescued you, from the destruction to come.

You may be listening like a jury to all the evidence, and the evidence points out that you and I are just as guilty as everyone who lives in our Sodom and Gomorrah today. But God has taken the case away from the jury. The case has already been settled. Jesus came to be the one accused for you. And so you are free to go. Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. Our present world will also be destroyed. But God has rescued you, as He rescued Lot, and all because of your Abraham who suffered, and died, and rose again for you, and who stands daily praying for you. You, dear jury, are now free to go and live your lives in Him. Amen.