

“In the Cave of Catastrophe”
 Sermon for 29 September 2019
 Text: Genesis 19:30-38

When we approach an elevator, we typically face a set of buttons with arrows for up and arrows for down. Depending on your destination, you choose one or the other! And so we have in Genesis 17-19, a portion of the Abrahamic saga. We are focused on the concluding portion of Genesis 19 verses 30-38 in particular. It details for us the concluding chapter of the life of Lot, Abraham's benighted nephew. I say that because Lot is an orphan. And because unlike Abraham who lives by faith, Lot actually lives by fear—Abraham has belief in God, walks before God and therefore operates out of a basic trust. Lot, lacking that trust, looks to the creature for his needs to be met. He is a sensual man and that side of him is on display in this appalling episode of drunkenness, obliviousness and familiar incest. Most readers of this episode are struck with its vileness, its despicableness. We want to keep that reaction of disgust alive because it is most appropriate. So, we are at the elevator. Before us lies the option of the upward life of faith (a movement driven by faith, by growth in holiness, and by the electing love of God—Abraham is seeking justice, interceding for the wicked!) or the downward spiral of Lot's spiritual self-destruction (he is living out of fear, getting drunk and committing sexual immorality with his daughters). That is the big picture.

Here's the moral dilemma: life is not a question of whether one can get drunk, or a question of whether one can engage in sexual immorality. The options for sinning are numerous, varied and available. Life can be lived poorly, or life can be lived well—by which I mean, morally, in conformity to the word and the will of God. So, the real question is not can I, but ought I. Ought I get drunk? Ought I to fornicate? The daughters scheme to perpetuate their father's line, outside the bounds of marriage to their own husbands, is a gross act of conscious, premeditated sin. How they got there is enlightening. First, we must acknowledge that they have been through a lot. They have been traumatized by the loss of their mother, the obliteration of their former home in Sodom along with friends, neighbors and their betrothed husbands! The whole cultural underpinning of their lives, their entire social fabric has been rent asunder. People who have lost their homes to flooding, or fire, or acts of war can relate to the turmoil of such devastation. Some people are so traumatized that they ever struggle to recover from the nightmares, the insecurity and the fear. I do not mention these things to justify their sin—nothing can do that!—rather I mention this as backdrop to my conclusion that they do not engage in the best of thinking. They are responding out of fear, they are in a reactive mode. And, this is critical, they make decisions based on their habits, their upbringing.

For instance, culturally, the two women are acting out what they believe to be their primary function: preserve the family line. They have a reproductive responsibility to their father, their family and their culture. Biological and social extinction faces those who do not procreate. If you think this way, their scheme is rational, reasonable perhaps; but it remains sinful. What does that mean in a time of dire extremity? Does it mean, “This is bad, we shouldn't sin in this way?” Or is the matter more nuanced: “This sinful path is prohibited, therefore there must be a better, more God-pleasing way to achieve the same objectives.” We know which way they chose. They could have chosen better! And not only they, but we . . . we could choose better than we do. And

choosing better requires walking by faith, walking before God, talking with God all the time—as opposed to just in the critical now, to the present crisis of our lives. *If you only talk to God when you perceive yourself to be in trouble, only in times of crisis, whether real or imagined, your ability to choose well will be inhibited, constricted truly harmed.* Sin, which upon deeper reflection might be averted, becomes your default option, and you begin to justify doing what you want¹ over what you ought to do.

Lot and his two daughters are refugees from the wrath of God revealed from heaven (a vivid instance of Romans 1:18). They have abandoned Zoar, the city that Lot requested to be spared and a second favor² for the Lord (first came the saving of his life and then came the sparing of Zoar). Lot does not respond to these favors with increased trust—and his gratitude is very tepid. He builds no altars, does not fall on his face and isn't moved to worship and neither do his daughters. Abraham does much better in this realm than Lot. **Now Lot went up out of Zoar and lived in the hills with his two daughters, for he was afraid to live in Zoar. So he lived in a cave with his two daughters.** (v. 30) How did Lot end up in, a cave, *a hole in a mountain*? We see him as homeless and houseless. Can I suggest that while Abraham adopted Lot, Lot did not adopt Abraham? Are you aware that you can make the same choice: God has adopted you, but have you reciprocated and adopted God as your Father? Lot did not choose faith over fear. He ran, he panicked and he hid. It is tragic, but too painfully common. He did not choose to walk before God. But we can choose faith! We, however, can make a different choice, obtain a different trajectory and gain a better outcome.

One might think that Lot's decision to move up into the hills, the place of refuge originally provided to him by God, signaled obedience—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.** (v. 17) Paying close attention, we visualize that the original foursome, being rescued, **led by the hand . . . and set outside the city**, heard these *vital* instructions together! Obey and prosper, disobey and perish! (Deut. 28:63) Subsequently Lot's wife chose to disobey and she perished on the spot—there are several biblical instances of like judgment (Ananias and Sapphira, the sons of Aaron). Luke had this judgment in mind when he penned the words:

Luke 17:32 **Remember Lot's wife! 33 Whoever tries to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it.**

She died. Lot was widowed by that self-same judgment of God. We could say that he was widowed by her disobedience and be remind that just as Eve took and ate the apple, Lot's wife looked back! The rest fled to Zoar and survived the **overthrow** of Sodom which destroyed it and three other wicked cities.

¹ "If you're drunk, supposedly, you forget who you are. You forget who your spouses are, who you daughters are. Everything is reduced to the LCD while lust dissolves out boundaries and our better selves dissolve in the solvent of our desires. *Why risk it all? Why?*"

² The Lord was merciful (Gen 19:16), showed mercy in saving his life (v. 19) and God spared Zoar (v. 21). By contrast we have the picture of Abraham returning reverently to the **place where he had stood before the Lord** to survey the burning cities (v.27)

Let's assume shall we that Lot and his wife loved each other. Her sudden loss, this grievous consequence of her rebellion, was both terrible and swift—as swift and terrible as an overdose to be sure. Or death by suicide, or violence or murder. *The time frame is very compressed here.* We don't know when, or how, or even if he and his daughters mourned her loss. There is no record of that! However, he also lost his wealth, his property, his friends, neighbors and adopted culture all at the same time! That is why I used the word *catastrophe* in my sermon title.

Lot's losses parallel Abraham's sacrifice. All that Abraham was challenged earlier to leave behind (by his call to faith) voluntarily and he does by faith Lot suffers the like loss of twice, involuntarily and in fear. The first time, when he and his were carried off, as the plunder of imperial wars and secondly, now, through obliteration in the fires of judgment, Lot loses everything except his life and daughters. **So Lot was orphaned, then adopted, then widowed**—in that order. Humanly speaking, such a sequence of loss has to be very painful, as difficult a series of losses as we might imagine possible. This is what I meant by the downward spiral of his family life. It falls apart abruptly, beginning with the visit of the two angels to his adopted city, Sodom. He is suddenly a widower. His extended family is shattered.

His previous failure to bond with Abraham, his would-be adoptive father, means that now Lot is a fatherless man whose family is disintegrating. He doesn't have the maturity, the faith, or the skill sets necessary to father his family, or to have been a husband to his wife, now deceased. He is incapable of leading. Why? Has he reverted to an orphan state? Or did Lot simply never grow up, never mature into godly manhood? Or, a combination of all three? Despite being plundered, reduced and restored . . . and now, spared his very life, one might think Lot would be truly grateful and encouraged.

I am afraid that Lot, in pursuit of material wealth, had spiritually abandoned the family of God provided for him with Abraham. He remains a sensual everlasting boy who does nothing manly, only that which is selfish and self-indulgent. Lot serves Lot, not others, not even his family. He never dies to self, and only appears to live for stuff. This is sociologically and spiritually familiar territory. Abraham's family is thriving. Lot's family is dying. How did Lot end up in a hole in a mountain? *Can I suggest again that while Abraham adopted Lot, Lot did not adopt Abraham?* Lot never chose faith over fear. He ran, and hid. It is tragic, but all too painfully common—many potential fathers are on the run today. Afraid because he did not choose to walk before God. But we can make that choice! There is still time. We can make a different choice, obtain a different trajectory and gain a different outcome beginning today.

In Genesis 19, Lot went from relative prosperity and a *seemingly* robust family life (giving his daughters in marriage and so forth) in Sodom to the poverty of a man in a cave, in flight from the wrath of God. His fear-pocked course of life is set before us. **Fear was his first mistake!** He did not respond to the angels saving his life with trust and faith. **I cannot escape to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me and I die** (v. 19) he exclaimed. There is hopelessness here. And also there is willful defiance—let me choose my own refuge, secure my own safety **this city is near enough to flee to** (meaning, Zoar). Perhaps he had in mind continuing in his materialistic pursuits as a city dweller in Zoar. And, perhaps, upon arriving there, he realized that Zoar, being

near to the wicked cities, was also infected with moral depravity. In the best of constructions, Lot may have realized his own sin and was driven from Zoar by inner anxiety over the lusts of his own flesh and fled. We learn that the danger, however much we fantasize, is never just out there; we can never outrun the danger which indwells the fearful heart.

That is why relocation, or flight is insufficient. We must put our lusts to death—not nourish them, not put them onto others—but put them to death.

Perhaps there was a culture of lasciviousness and of fornication in Zoar rather too close to what God judged in Sodom for Lot to feel safe staying there. Rather too like the culture which the sexual revolution has spawned around us! **He was afraid to live there.** (v.30) Maybe it was the impiety and wickedness of paganism that moved Lot out of Zoar. Apparently his daughters were not so conscientious, or “righteous.” We aren’t told explicitly what *he feared* but civic immorality—which I have suggested—sounds less speculative than some other things I’ve heard proposed for Zoar.

Perhaps, family incest was practiced openly in Zoar and drunkenness, too,—so that his daughters, infected by those public vices, brought them with them into the cave. O those lusty lads of Zoar! This they surely did, regardless of the sin’s source. *It is important to note that a culture of fornication supplies the soil in which a rape culture can take root and prosper.* A little depravity always grows, always gets bigger unless, by radical action, its course is disrupted. Tragically, Lot’s family became like the people who surrounded them rather than the other way around. And preventing that is a father’s parental responsibility³!

The daughters, we observe, are fear-driven as well. **Their father is old**—what will become of his line? What will become of us? **There is not a man on earth** to copulate with us and impregnate us. Marriage isn’t on the table—are they too brokenhearted (possible), or just desperate (apparent)?

Fear causes us not to think the best.

So the daughters hatch their plan to incapacitate their father (the wine) and have intercourse with him **that we may preserve offspring from our father!** (v.32) Like I said, very vile. They foolishly assume that there are *no men available*—Zoar probably had dozens! And they overlook the plain fact that any of their children would preserve the line of Lot legitimately without their father’s sinful involvement! That’s the way it works. They were survivalistic in their outlook, fearful that they would die out, simply cease to be. They feared childlessness more than they feared God and we’ve been paying for it ever since.

Why didn’t Lot flee to the mountains westward? Why did he apparently flee *away from Abraham* and into the mountains east of Jordan? Why didn’t he value family enough to seek it actively and emulate his uncle? Lead his family? Did his retreat to a

³ One danger we face is that the church family is also subject to pressures to conform—to embrace sinful patterns as *normal* and then marshal our resources to teach people new ways—to enable people to sin safely!

cave better reflect personal shame, defeat, despair? Did he fear rejection? Did the cave symbolize his sin condition?

How could he explain losing everything again, especially to the man who had once restored it all already?

How did they come by a supply of wine unless it was either their habit, or their chosen means of treating stress, pain and sorrow? Were they self-medicating?

There's a lot here isn't there!

Let's rejoice that it was the angels who sought Lot, found Lot and led him out'

The angels overcame many obstacles: pride, laziness, worldliness, unbelief, self-sufficiency, procrastination and delay. They still have that ministry today. Lot chose Sodom for material advantage and maybe Zoar as well; but he appears to have learned something along the way. He leaves Zoar quickly. But when it came to sexual sin, Lot didn't leave quite quickly enough.

We should seek to improve on that. Trust the angels sent to help.

Amen