

Undeserved Mercy

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Our scripture reading this morning is taken from Genesis 14, verses 1 through 24.!

In the days of Amraphel, king of Shinar, Ariok, king of Elisar, Kedah, king of Elisar, and Tidal, king of Goyim, these kings made war with Bera, king of Sodom, Bersha, king of Gomorrah, Shanab, king of Admar, Shemeba, king of Zebuim, and the king of Bela, that is Zoar.

And all these joined forces in the valley of Sidim, that is the Salt Sea. Twelve years they had served Kedah-la-Omar, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled.

In the fourteenth year, Kedah-la-Omar and the kings who were with him came out and defeated the Rafaim in Ashtaroth, Kanaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Em-em in Shave, Kariathim, and the Horites in their hill country of Seir, as far as El-Paran on the border of the wilderness.

Then they turned back and came to En-Mishpat, that is Kadesh, and defeated all the country of the Amalekites and all the Amorites who were dwelling in Hazazon, Tamar.

[1 : 25] Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admar, the king of Zebuim, and the king of Bela, that is Zoar, went out and they joined battle in the valley of Sidim.

With Kedah-la-Omar, king of Elam, Tidal, king of Goyim, Amraphel, king of Shinar, and Ariok, king of El-Asar, four kings against five.

Now the valley of Sidim was full of bitumen pits, and as the king of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some fell into them, and the rest fled to the hill country. So the enemy took all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their provisions and went their way.

They also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who was dwelling in Sodom, and his possessions, and went their way. Then one who escaped came and told Abram, the Hebrew, who was living by the oaks of Mamre, the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and of Aner.

They were allies of Abram. When Abram heard that his kinsmen had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, 318 of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan.

[2 : 39] And he divided his forces against them by night. He and his servants and defeated them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus. Then he brought back all the possessions and also brought back his kinsmen, Lot, with his possessions and the women and the people.

After his return from the defeat of Ketur Laoma and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Sheba, that is the king's valley.

And Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God most high, and he blessed him and said, blessed be Abram by God most high, possessor of heaven and earth, and blessed be God most high, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.

And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. And the king of Sodom said to Abram, give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself. But Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lifted my hand to the Lord God most high, possessor of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, I have made Abram rich.

I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me, that Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre take their share. The word of the Lord.

[4 : 01] Amen. Thank you very much, David, for reading and reading some very tough names.

I'm thinking if you ever want Bahamians-like unique names, so if you want to be unique names for your kids, this is a good place to start.

Well, this morning we are continuing our sermon series in the book of Genesis. We took a break for Easter, and now we are returning to the sermon series.

And this morning we are picking up in chapter 14, and those of you who recall what happened in chapter 13 will no doubt, I believe, find the situation in chapter 14 quite surprising.

In fact, here in Genesis 14, there are two big surprises. And this morning I want us to consider them in our remaining time.

[5 : 13] But first let's pray. Father, we bow our hearts in this moment, expressing our need for you. Lord, I need you in the proclamation of your word, so I pray that you would come by your spirit.

And Lord, we need you in the hearing and in the application of your word. And likewise, we ask that you would help us by your Holy Spirit. Lord, most of all, we pray that in all that is said and done this morning, your name and your name alone will be glorified.

And so we ask these things in Christ's name. Amen. So what are the two big surprises that we see in Genesis 14?

Before I point them out, let me just take a moment to summarize what happened in Genesis 13. In Genesis 13, we saw that because of their great possessions, they had a lot of herd, and they had a lot of herdsmen, there was a strife between Lot, between the herdsmen of Lot and the herdsmen of Abram.

They couldn't get together, they couldn't get along on the same area of land. And so Abram took the initiative and he said to his nephew Lot, he said, we need to separate for peace.

[6 : 40] He said, if you go to the left, I'll go to the right. If you go to the right, I'll go to the left. And Lot arrogantly took his uncle's proposal, giving him first choice, and he chose what was obviously the best part of the land for himself.

He chose the land in the Jordan Valley. Land that was well watered everywhere and was described as being like the Garden of Eden.

It was so prized as a possession. And so we're told that Lot journeyed and he settled in Sodom. And one of the things we're told is that Sodom, the men of Sodom were very wicked and they were great sinners against the Lord. And Genesis 13 ends with these words in verse 18.

I think to appreciate this, we have to remember that Abram is an old man.

[8 : 03] And Lot is his dead brother's son that he has taken along and he has been caring for him. And to see that Lot would choose to take the preferential position and he would take the best land for himself without regard for his uncle who had the same needs as he did.

They all had herds. They all had families they needed to care for. And he took the best land that was well watered. He settled in Jordan and Abram settled in Hebron.

If you know anything about the geography, Hebron was more in the mountains and wasn't as suited as the Jordan Valley was for raising a lot of animals.

And I think you would agree that based on the fact that the Jordan described as the Garden of the Lord or watered like the Garden of the Lord, that this nondescript area called Hebron, and the fact that there were oaks there, really was not the best part of the land to raise animals.

And so when we come to Genesis 14, we actually encounter two very big surprises. The first surprise that we encounter we can call a surprising result.

[9 : 28] A surprising result. The surprising result is that things did not turn out the way Lot thought they would. The surprising result is that the land that Lot chose for himself was not really the best choice after all.

And the reason is that the land that Lot chose for himself was land located in Sodom, and it ended up being embroiled in a regional war between two groups of kings.

In Genesis 14, we see recorded for the first time, wars among nations. And remember, as we're working our way through Genesis, we are understanding how things came to be in the world as they are.

And some of you should remember, when we were in Genesis 11, we looked at the Tower of Babylon and how the nations were uniting in rebellion against God and how God scattered them over the earth.

And now we have in Genesis 14, we see nations at war, we see nations aligning together, and they are fighting and making people subjects of powerful kings.

[10 : 51] And all of this is the outworking of sin. All of this is the outworking of sin. And all of this flows from the disobedience of Adam and Eve.

And you can imagine what it must have been like in those days. I mean, there was no body that set the rules of war and said how you should conduct yourself in war and take care of prisons of wars. No, this was really, you did what you felt like doing. There were no rules. The only rule was might. The mighty kings did as they saw fit.

And so nations were joining together and they were subjugating others to them, taking advantage of them economically and otherwise, making them pay tribute.

And so what we see here in Genesis 14 is four powerful kings allied together, led by Cedar Leomer, and they waged war against five weaker kings, one of whom was the king of Sodom, the land where Lot chose to live.

[12:04] And the four more powerful kings subjugated the five weaker kings and made them pay tribute. And in those days, the tribute was whatever they decided it would be. Gold, silver, animals, agricultural produce, whatever else was of value that the powerful kings wanted.

And we're told in verse four that the five kings served the four kings for 12 years, but in the 13th year, they rebelled and they refused to serve them anymore.

And so in the 14th year, King Cedar Leomer and the other kings allied with him decided to bring them back into subjugation. And they went out to wage war against them.

But what they did was in the process of going to them to bring them back into subjugation, they defeated all the other nations in their path, some four different nations.

No doubt to put fear in the heart of these five kings who they wanted to bring under subjugation again. We're told in verse eight that the five rebellious kings were not afraid.

[13:22] And sometimes when you've been subjugated for a long period of time, you could really say, you know, enough of that. But they were not afraid. They went out to meet the four powerful kings in the valley of Siddam.

We're told in verse 10 that the powerful kings defeated the five weaker kings. And the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, when they were trying to escape, apparently this area of Siddam, we're told it had bitumen pits or would be called tar.

And you can imagine, you get your feet in tar, you can't move. And so as the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah were trying to escape, they fell in these pits and they couldn't escape.

And the four more powerful kings defeated them. The other three escaped. There were five of them aligned against four. Three escaped, but these two were captured.

And we're told in verse 11 that the four kings took all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their provisions and went their way.

[14:29] In verse 12, we read, they also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who was dwelling in Sodom and his possessions, and went their way.

The big surprise is that Lot's well-watered land didn't turn out to be the best land at all. It was now ravaged by war and Lot himself was a prisoner of war and he lost everything, including his family. Brothers and sisters, Lot's story is a repeated story. Like Lot, we oftentimes choose for ourselves, by ourselves, according to what we see with our eyes with no reference to God.

Like Lot, not only do we not gain what we hope to gain, but we even lose what we already had. And the reason is clear, because we chose by ourselves, for ourselves.

We acted selfishly. We acted without the interests of others in mind. And so going from the best piece of land in the entire area with a great number of herdsman and herds to a prisoner of war in a foreign land is a surprising result for Lot.

[16:04] No doubt, Lot thought he got the long end of the stick in the arrangement with Abram. But he didn't realize that not only did he not get the long end of the stick, he got the short end of the stick and the short end of the stick was also rotten.

And the grass, if he thought was green, was filled with thorns and thistles that he could not see because his greed and his selfishness blinded him to them. And humanly speaking, this was supposed to be the end of Lot.

Humanly speaking, Lot's name should not have been mentioned anymore in the pages of Scripture. But we read in verse 13 that in the providence of God, someone escaped.

Someone escaped. And not just someone, someone who obviously knew Abram and knew Lot and knew that Lot was Abram's nephew.

And this person went and told Abram what happened. Look again at what it says in verse 13. Then one who had escaped came and told Abram, the Hebrew, who was living by the oaks of Mamre, the Amorite, brother of Escol and of Aner.

[17:29] These were allies of Abram. As a side note, this is the first time that we encountered this word Hebrew. Abram is called a Hebrew and the Jews become known as Hebrews because they are from Abram's lineage.

But this is the first time that we encountered the word that's associated with Abram. No doubt this person, again, who escaped, wanted Abram to know what happened to his nephew.

And this brings us to the second surprise in this passage. The second surprise is Abram's response.

Abram's response is a surprising response. And I believe as we consider it, we will see why it is. But this is my second and final point. Look at what it says in verse 14. When Abram heard that his kinsmen had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men born in his house, 318 of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan.

[18 : 52] These 318 men who had been trained for war, this gives us a window into how difficult it must have been to live at that time. You have to have your own security. And yet, they have allies too.

Abram had allies. He had allies in Aner and Eshcol in Mamre. And they went with him in the battle. And they obviously took men with them as well. And so together with his trained men and with his allies and the men they had, Abram goes and he pursues lots of captives.

Now, we're not told how many men that Abram's little rescue band had. But I think it's reasonable to conclude that he had far less than these four kings.

I think these four kings had reasonable armies. And I think Abram and his band were really outnumbered.

And I think the fact that Abram had to use the cover of night seems to suggest that he needed the element of surprise to be able to win the battle.

[20 : 06] But we're told that Abram and those with him defeated the four kings. And in verse 16 we're told that he brought back all the possessions as well as his kinsman Lot with his possessions and the women and the people.

Abram's decision to risk his life to fight four powerful ruthless kings who were a law unto themselves was a surprising response.

It was a very surprising response to the news that his nephew had been captured. Now why was it surprising? It was surprising for two obvious reasons.

First of all Lot was a selfish greedy nephew whose selfishness and greed landed him in the trouble he was in. He chose the best land for himself had no regard or respect for his elderly uncle and Abram could have chosen to just let Lot stew in this situation.

he didn't have to choose to risk his life and the lives of the men in his house and his allies in rescuing this selfish greedy short-sighted nephew of his.

[21 : 36] And I think many of us would admit this morning or maybe not many of us but some of us would admit this morning that that would be our natural response. not wanting to incur any risk or sacrifice to help people who are selfish and who have shown that they don't care about anyone but themselves.

That's not the right response but I think some of us would agree this morning that's a natural response. It's easy to say to such people you make your bed up hard you lay down hard.

That's the first reason but the second reason that Abram's response is surprising and those of you who remember what happened back in Genesis 12 would agree that this is very surprising to see Abram acting in this way.

Abram was not a man who was marked by courage. He was marked by cowardice. He was not a man who was marked by sacrifice.

He was a man who was marked by selfishness. Back in Genesis 12 Abram was willing to let his wife sleep with Pharaoh out of fear for his own well-being.

[22 : 59] He lied and said Sarai was not his wife because he was afraid that the Egyptians might kill him if he said that she was his wife.

And so although Abram was unwilling to tell the truth and say his wife was indeed his wife and then do whatever he could to protect her, Abram in this situation risks his very life in an even greater way to rescue his nephew Lot.

and the point is very obvious. If you think about it, there was far more certain danger in going to fight against those four kings who had shown by example what they were capable of, defeating whole nations versus telling the truth and then maybe you'll be spared.

so clearly the risk in rescuing Lot was far greater than telling the truth and simply saying to the Egyptians that Sarai was his wife.

in rescuing Lot, Abram gave Lot undeserved mercy.

[24 : 22] He gave him undeserved mercy. He did for Lot what Lot did not deserve. And the obvious question is why?

Why would he do that? I believe Abram gave Lot mercy he didn't deserve by rescuing him because God had given Abram mercy he didn't deserve by rescuing him.

Remember back in Genesis 12 again how Abram left Negev. He ran down to Egypt in a time of famine without any indication that he prayed and sought the Lord concerning it.

he lied to Pharaoh told Pharaoh that Sarai was his sister when she was his wife and in doing so he put her at risk of sexual violation by Pharaoh.

And there Abram was in Egypt collecting gifts of sheep and oxen and male and female donkeys and camels and male and female servants.

[25 : 32] he was getting all these things from Pharaoh while his wife was in Pharaoh's household at risk of being sexually violated.

But God had mercy on Abram and Sarai and God rescued them out of Egypt. God afflicted Pharaoh and his household with great plagues we're told and Pharaoh sent Abram and Sarai away out of Egypt.

It's insightful to read the account at the end of Genesis 12 of the encounter between Pharaoh and Abram when Pharaoh confronts him.

Pharaoh challenges him and he says what is this that you have done? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say she was my sister so that I took her for my wife?

And Pharaoh asked Abram three very clear questions. And you know what Abram's response was? Utter silence. No doubt embarrassed and ashamed Abram was silent.

[26 : 59] we're told that Abram left Egypt and he went right back to that same place still in famine where he left the Negev.

He went there. The famine wasn't over and God mercifully took care of Abram and Sarah in the midst of that famine just as he would if they had never left.

And then in the opening verses of Genesis 13 we see Abram journeying from Negev to Bethel. And he goes to this place where he had built an altar and the Bible says there he called upon the name of the Lord.

We're not given the details of the prayer that Abram prayed but I imagine it was a prayer filled with repentance and pouring out his soul to God for his selfishness and for his cowardice and putting his wife in harm's way.

As Brother Lyndon reminded us when he preached in Genesis 13 a few weeks ago, Abram no doubt renewed his faith in the Lord saying that he would trust the Lord to bring his promises to pass no matter what the odds looked like.

[28 : 29] Brothers and sisters, this experience of Abram receiving undeserved mercy and being rescued out of the jam that he placed himself in and his wife was no doubt the reason that Abram was able to give Lot undeserved mercy.

God's undeserved mercy to Abram rescuing him out of his dilemma in Egypt. There's no doubt the greatest factor at work in his heart that moved him to rescue Lot who didn't deserve mercy.

Humanly speaking, he didn't deserve mercy to be rescued out of the dilemma that his selfishness and his greed put him in. Abram received undeserved mercy from God.

He gave undeserved mercy to Lot. At the end of Genesis 14, we're able to see further evidence that Abram's act of rescuing Lot was purely motivated by mercy, not self-interest.

In verse 21, the king of Sodom gives Abram a proposal. And he says to Abram, you keep all the property for yourself, all the spoils of war, you keep it for yourself, but give me all the people, give me all the souls.

[30 : 05] And Abram, the man who was happy to be made rich by Pharaoh while his wife was at risk of being sexually violated, rebukes the king of Sodom. look at what he says to him in verses 21 to 24.

But Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lifted my hand to the Lord, God most high, possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, I have made Abram rich.

I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten and the share of the men who went with me, let Aner, Escol, and Mamre take their share.

Abram was clear. There was zero personal benefit for him going to rescue Lot and the others and recovering their possessions and putting his own life at risk.

Abram said, I don't want anything of it. He had no self-interest in it. This was purely an act of mercy. It was motivated by mercy, not by self-interest.

[31 : 26] In essence, what he was saying was, I have a right to the spoils, just as Aner does, just as Escol does, just as Mamre does. But I don't want anything.

Let them take what they take, but I don't want anything. Brothers and sisters in Christ, the story of Abram rescuing Lot should remind us of our own story.

We who belong to Christ have received undeserved mercy. We deserve judgment and wrath because of our many sins.

grace. But God has given us mercy and grace, undeserved mercy and grace. And the undeserved mercy and grace that we receive from God is far greater than the undeserved mercy that Lot received from Abram.

Abram rescued Lot in a jam in war, but God rescued us out of death and sin. We were dead in trespasses and sins. We were beyond help.

[32 : 43] We were hopeless and helpless. And God pitied us and he rescued us by sending his son to live on this earth, to live a perfect life that none of us could live.

love. And then to die as our substitute to pay the penalty for our sins so that we could be forgiven and we could be put in right standing with God.

And when we consider Abram's risk, when we consider what Abram did in giving Lot undeserved mercy, Abraham risked his life.

But Christ, in giving us undeserved mercy, didn't just risk his life. He sacrificed his life. He gave his life on a cruel Roman cross, dying the death of a criminal, dying the death that we deserve to die. the death of a criminal who rebelled against a holy and loving God, who deserved no mercy. And on top of that, on top of the mercy that God has given to us in salvation, I think all of us who have lived long enough can attest to the mercy that God has given to us in life, rescuing us out of all kinds of situations that our blindness and our selfishness and our disregard for God and others has landed in all kinds of dilemmas.

[34 : 29] And he has been kind and he has given us mercy and rescued us out of our dilemmas. Perhaps some of us can reflect to this very week where we receive mercy from God, undeserved mercy, for situations we put ourselves in.

some of the most precious verses in scripture to me are Psalm 103 verses 8 to 10.

The psalmist writes, the Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.

in short, what he does is he gives us undeserved mercy. We should all be grateful for this because we're always in need of mercy.

[35 : 46] If God dealt with us according to what our sins deserve, if he truly gave us what our sins deserve, brothers and sisters, none of us could stand.

we'd all be dead. But thank God for this God who is merciful and gracious and slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

And who doesn't deal with us according to what our sins deserve. we should all be grateful for this God.

We should all thank the Lord for undeserved mercy which he gave us in Jesus Christ and which he continues to give us as we live life on this earth.

And I say to us this morning, let us be careful that we do not receive God's mercy in vain. As merciful as God is, as long suffering and patient as he is, it is possible for us to receive his mercy in vain.

[37 : 16] First, we who have received God's mercy must show mercy. mercy. We who have received mercy from God must show mercy to others.

This includes those who have wronged us and disregarded us and acted selfishly towards us as Lot did to Abram. And second, we must live our lives as debtors to God's mercy.

Not only do we live mindful that we need to give the mercy that we receive from God to others, but we need to live mindful that we are debtors to the mercy of God.

We can never pay the Lord for his mercy. We can't pay him for the mercy he has given us in Christ. We cannot pay him for the mercy he gives us in life.

But a proper response to the great mercy that we have received in Christ is a life laid down in his service and in obedience to him. That's the proper response to the mercy that we have received from God in Jesus Christ.

[38 : 35] A proper response is the Apostle Paul says, he says, I beseech you brothers, in view of God's mercy, that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is the most logical thing you can do.

It's the reasonable service that you have. This is a proper response to one who is aware that he has received undeserved mercy from God.

This obviously includes turning away from our sins. This obviously includes living godly and holy lives before the Lord. It includes that. brothers and sisters, it's more than that.

It's more than not doing all the outward sinful things. It is truly living before the Lord with hearts filled with gratitude in service and obedience to him, being his servant.

Lord, whatever you would have me do, serving him wherever he has us in life, whatever station, whatever circumstances, to recognize that we are there living in God's service.

[39 : 58] And brothers and sisters in Christ, if you don't see that living, if you're not living your life in service and obedience to Christ, and if you don't see that as a proper response to having received his mercy and salvation, either you don't understand the mercy that you've received in Christ, what God has really done for you, or perhaps you're not saved at all.

if we could receive this great mercy that Scripture teaches that we have received, if we could have this unpayable debt forgiven, this debt of sin forgiven by God, and we're able to live our lives without any reference to God, any gratitude to God, laying our lives down in service to God, if we're able to live in that way, brothers and sisters, we don't understand what God has done, or perhaps he's not done anything in our hearts at all.

And I know these are sobering words, these are not light words, these are sobering words, and it calls us all to do some introspection and to consider how we are living in light of the profession that we have on our lips that we belong to Christ and that we are serving Christ.

And if you find yourself in this situation this morning where you're professing Christ, but you're not living your life in service to him and obedience to him, then perhaps you need to survey afresh the wondrous cross.

you perhaps need to meditate afresh on the glorious gospel and consider how you have been rescued from your sins and translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his dear son.

[42 : 14] Or perhaps it is that although you profess Christ, you do not possess Christ. Christ. And the consequences are eternal and so we should all take the time to evaluate these things and to think through these things and pray through these things.

If you find yourself in that situation this morning where you're professing Christ, but you would acknowledge, I'm not living a life in service and obedience to the one who I claim has rescued me from the kingdom of darkness and brought me into the kingdom of his own son.

And there is no motivation in my heart to give mercy to those who need mercy from me even though I've received mercy from God.

God, then again I urge you to, with the help of the Holy Spirit, consider what is the issue?

What is the reason? And certainly by all means, I will make myself available for anyone who feel you need to think through these particular issues.

[43 : 30] I would make myself available to sit with you, to talk with you, to pray with you, that you may settle this important issue. Brothers and sisters in Christ, we have all received undeserved mercy.

We receive it again and again and again and again. We received it in Christ, we receive it in life again and again. In a couple of chapters, we're going to encounter Abram going in circles again, putting his wife at risk again and needing mercy that he didn't deserve.

That just seems to be the story of God's people on this earth. That seems to be our story until the day we are brought finally home.

But thank God for a God who gives undeserved mercy. Thank God for a God who does not deal with us according to our sins, what our sins deserve.

Thank God for a God who rescues us out of the many dilemmas that our sins take us in.

[44 : 56] God. I end by saying to us again this morning, because we have received undeserved mercy from God, let us give undeserved mercy to others, just as Abram did to Lot.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the mercy and grace that you give to repentant sinners in Jesus Christ.

And I pray this morning that you convict all of our hearts, all of us who profess to know Christ, that the reasonable response to having received and deserved mercy is a life laid down in your service and obedience to you.

And it's also reflected in a heart that is motivated to give that same undeserved mercy to others who need it.

Father, I also pray this morning for those who have yet to come to know your mercy through Jesus Christ. Oh, Father God, would you open blind eyes, would you convict hearts of sin, and would you bring sinners to yourself this morning.

[46 : 41] And may they taste of the mercy of God God, to the undeserving. Father, would you do the work that only you can this morning, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.