

The Moral Meltdown of a Believer

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn now to Genesis chapter 19, looking at the main points of teaching in this chapter today as we go through with our studies in the life of Abraham.

We've come to this point that refers to Sodom and the cities of the plain and Lot's participation in the events that took place with regard to these cities.

Now, it's important that we understand the kind of world that Abraham lived in because sometimes we may get the feeling that these men had a fairly easygoing, simple kind of life in which to live and exercise their life of faith and that Abraham may have been somewhat shielded from the most difficult aspects of life.

Well, that, of course, is not the case because Abraham didn't live very far from Sodom and Gomorrah, the cities of the plain, which had been chosen by Lot as the area that he would settle in. We'll see the devastating effects of that in the study today. But Abraham was really living in a world that had much in it of what's described in this chapter to do with Lot and the cities of Sodom, Gomorrah and the other cities of the plain there.

[1 : 21] It wasn't an easy place in which to live consistently as someone that followed the teaching that God had given him and the lifestyle that that actually had with it.

And as you look at this chapter and the profile it gives us of the conditions and also of the life of Lot himself, it's a very difficult passage of the Bible to deal with.

But that's one of the beauties of doing a study like we're doing when you have to take account of all the passages that fit into the whole life of Abraham.

Or if we're doing a study of any book of the Bible, you cannot just skip over the difficult parts as sometimes you might be tempted to do if you're not doing that sort of study.

And in your own Bible reading as well, it's important that you just take as much time as you need over the difficult parts, over the unpalatable things that the Bible gives us.

[2 : 27] In the passages that like here to do with Lot have a description of things that are really very unseemly and in fact almost, not just almost, but are really quite sordid and seedy and horrible just even to read.

But are there in the Bible. You see, if this book was anything other than God's book, then written under the direction of God, you wouldn't expect people writing about the life and the lifestyle of these men in the Bible as women in the Bible.

You'd airbrush. You'd actually take out the worst bits. You wouldn't really, even if you mentioned them, you wouldn't go into all the details of it. But God's not like that. The Bible is not like that.

His Word is not like that. It gives us these accounts just in all the graphic details that are necessary so that you and I will know this is really how it is.

This is how life is. This is what we must face up to. Today we're looking at Sodom, what we're calling the number one sin city.

[3 : 36] But we're looking mostly at Lot. And what the Bible tells us about Lot. And we've called that a believer in moral meltdown.

In other words, you can really trace very easily in these passages about Lot from chapter 13 where he chose the vicinity of Sodom as his dwelling place where he was going to raise and bring up a family.

From that time onwards, he's in meltdown. He's in moral meltdown. His life really begins to decay and it ends up such a sordid mess in the passage that closes this chapter.

All fits together in the way the Bible tells us about what happened to this man and how it came about from making the wrong choice and continuing to fulfill and live out the implications of that choice.

Sodom, number one sin city. These two angels, going back to the previous chapter where we saw last time their meeting with Abraham, they carried on. They came to Sodom in the evening as Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom.

[4 : 46] This really, in a sense, is God's inspection committee. Remember last time we said that we saw the end of the chapter that he was saying that he was going down to look at Sodom and Gomorrah in verse 20, 21, to see if they have done all together according to the outcome.

Not that God didn't know, but he wanted Abraham to be sure and everybody to be sure that when he comes to exercise his judgment, he doesn't do it in a way that hasn't taken account of everything about the place.

In other words, when the judgment comes, God is saying, I know it's deserved. I know it's something that has been brought upon that place for its wickedness, for its gross wickedness. He's measured it. He's examined it. He's taken account of what it is and what it's like and what it's doing and every detail of it has been entered into his examination.

That's really what he's saying. They came to Sodom in the evening. And Lot, being the man he was, he was hospitable, at least he was, to meet them. And he bowed himself with his face to the earth.

[5 : 50] He must have recognized they were something rather different to the usual. And he invited them to his house to give them hospitality. No, they said, we will spend the night in the town square.

Now, these were angels. And they're really beginning to test Lot from that moment that he met with them just to see what his reaction would be. And Lot, who knew Sodom so well, said as he appealed to them, no, he pressed them strongly.

Come to thy house. Because he knew what Sodom was like. And so they came to his house and he made them a meal. And then you find this commotion.

From verse 4, described as the men of Sodom, both young and old, they surrounded his house. They called to Lot, where are the men who came to you tonight? And bring them out to us so that we may know them.

So that we may have sexual relations with them. That's what it means. Let's call a spade a spade. That's what it says. We can't airbrush this out of the record.

[6 : 54] God has given it to us as it is. And that's for a purpose. That's what they were about. They were seeking that those two men, two visitors, two strangers, would actually be brought out to them.

So that they would commit what effectively is homosexual rape. That's what Sodom was like. That's the kind of place Sodom was. And Lot, of course, then was horrified at the prospect.

So he offered his two daughters, which wasn't such a good thing, of course. He's in a predicament. What's he going to do? In any case, what happened, of course, was that the angels, being angels, intervened.

And then they took charge of the situation. They exercised their powers. They smote all of these men outside the door with blindness. The word in Hebrew means to be dazzled.

It's just like somebody shining a massive searchlight into your eyes. And you just lose your vision and your sense of orientation. And that's the kind of action they took just so as to take charge of the situation.

[8 : 11] And all the men outside the door, as they were groping around, they lost their way. And that's how the incident really was ended. That's how the angels took charge of it and stopped it in that way.

But just think of what Sodom was like. Just think of the kind of thing that these men were actually looking for and demanding. The Bible specifies, now this was not the only sin of Sodom.

This action, this homosexual activity was not the only sin of Sodom. But it's at the top of the pile. And it's at the top of the pile because the Bible here and elsewhere, as it mentions it, as a heinous sin, as a sin that God finds distasteful above most sins.

Leviticus chapter 18, Romans 1.26, 1 Corinthians 1, 1 Corinthians 6. These references are to this kind of thing.

And all the way down through history, especially in more recent times, there have been attempts to mitigate this kind of thing, as if it's not really what it seems to be and seems to see.

[9 : 30] And it's very difficult in today's society to denounce this kind of thing to a people who don't recognize the authority of the Bible, who really have no time for the Bible, for whom the Bible just intervenes in a lifestyle that they want to choose for themselves.

And however much pity, and however much you want to help people with that kind of problem, with that kind of lifestyle, however much as Christians we're required to extend mercy and love and understanding and compassion, as we are, to actually say, when we say this is what the Bible teaches about this particular sin, to be then given the name of being homophobic, or being bigoted, or whatever, well, if that's what it takes, then that's what it has to be.

But that's not what we're about. We're not here in the business of hating people. We're not in the business of denouncing people's own freedom to choose.

What we're saying is, this is how God sees it. This is how God describes it. This is why it is serious. Because God mentions it specifically in His Word, as a heinous sin. At the top of the pile of sin that Sodom was, and the sinful behavior of Sodom, in all its grotesqueness, is capped by this one.

[11:04] And that's why it's serious. And that's why we have to mention it. And that's why we have to be aware of it.

And that's why we have to keep countering the argument that says, ah yeah, but that's a way, way back in history. And people understand things better now. And even the days of Paul, when he wrote 1 Corinthians 6.

Things have moved on since then. We don't really take all of these things now literally. Well, it's like this. You either believe the Bible to be God's Word or not.

You either believe this as God's opinion and God's conclusion or not. You can choose not to believe it if you like. You can choose to throw out the Bible if you like. You can tear up these pages out of it, even if you don't like them and think they're outmoted.

But it still stands. It's not going to change God's opinion just because human beings decide it's no longer relevant.

[12:10] Sodom is number one sin city because God declares it to be so. And the sin that he mentions here particularly is a sin that is still heinous in the sight of God.

But not unforgivable. Not something that people have to live with and buckle under and not have dealt with.

Sin is forgivable because Christ is a great Savior. And what people sadly don't want is that their lifestyle will interfere with their own choice.

The lifestyle of a Christian will interfere with their own choice and their own understanding of the Bible and what it is. That's the context in which Abraham lived his life or surrounded at least in the cities of the plain or near to where he lived.

That's the context in which Lot was placed. This is what he chose for himself. This is where his family were brought up. Now we have to look at the effects of that in Lot's own life because the Bible here gives us some detail about what happened to him and what he was like.

[13:30] Lot, the believer in moral meltdown. The first thing you notice about him is that he was a believer who was not taken seriously. And that's really itself such an important thing.

You and I as Christians, as believers have to ask ourselves am I taken seriously? Does the world really take me seriously for what I say I am? Well if I'm not living consistently if I'm not living in accordance with the standard that I know a Christian must live by don't expect to be taken seriously. Because Lot wasn't taken seriously and we'll see in a moment the reason why is because he didn't live his life seriously in obedience to God. You see he wasn't taken seriously look at verses 12 to 14.

When he came to the men that his daughters were planning to marry he came to them and said that the Lord was about to destroy this place so get up, get out of this place.

The Lord is about to destroy this city. But he seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting to be just joking to be not serious. Why did he seem to his sons-in-law to be jesting?

[14:44] It says a lot about them I'm sure that they weren't prepared to take his word but the reason they thought he was jesting is that for all the time that they knew him they knew he wasn't really serious about his religion.

They knew he wasn't serious about living in obedience to God. They knew that although he was important in a sense in Sodom he wasn't really respected as a believer in Sodom.

He was just someone that had come to live there had come to take part in the affairs of the city. You see at the beginning they met the angels met Lord he was sitting in the gate of Sodom.

That means that he was part of the civic administrative set up in Sodom. Probably something like you would call a city councilor nowadays. Yes he didn't join in with Sodom's sins.

He didn't actually himself become embroiled actively in the sins of Sodom but he didn't denounce it. He didn't oppose it. He didn't stand up against that. He didn't show in his lifestyle that he was entirely different in the way that he saw life.

[15 : 49] He didn't actually show in his obedience to God how bad Sodom really was. He just blended into the life of Sodom. What a serious thing that is.

For a man of God for someone that God has saved for somebody who has an uncle like Abraham for somebody who has known the benefits that Lot has had. He's just blended into the sinful lifestyle of Sodom.

You can't even see him very clearly. Against the dark background of Sodom he doesn't appear there like a bright light. It's just a very dim glow of anything.

And you can hardly distinguish it from the darkness that's around him. And that's why he is not taken seriously. He has no moral influence whatsoever in that society.

He doesn't even have an influence as we'll see in a minute in his own household over his own daughter. But in the place in which he lives in Sodom he just does not count because he did not live seriously.

[16 : 50] seriously he wasn't taken seriously either. You can find the same thing mentioned elsewhere as well in verse 9 for example when he came out to the men that had surrounded the door they said stand back this fellow came to sojourn and he has become the judge now we will deal worse with you than with them.

If he'd had moral standing and any clout in that society they would have at least listened to what he had to say when he appealed to them not to do what they were planning to do but they just brushed it aside.

He had no respect. He wasn't taken seriously. He had no moral influence and you know these words in verse 9 actually say something else.

They just despised him. They despised him. He counted nothing. In their society. It was an advantage to them that he became a counsellor. Maybe they could control him more and just keep him quiet.

It was certainly an advantage to Lot. He could get on with the business of his life with a commercial business with all of these things to do with his worldly employment his worldly business and that I'm sure advanced significantly.

[18 : 14] It was an advantage to him to have this liaison with the people of Sodom. It was an advantage to them to have this lot on board with them in the city council but actually they despised him.

You try as a Christian to just live like the world and claim to be a Christian and the world will despise you. The world will see through it. The world will know you're not being genuine to your convictions to your convictions to the things that you say are the basis of your life the foundation of your life as a Christian.

Every time somebody who says they are a believer they are a Christian and compromises unforgivably with the world like Lot they will find the world would take advantage of it but they'll really deep down despise you for it because they know you're not true to yourself as somebody who follows God.

Now there's a question that I have to put to myself today as a Christian minister as a Christian believer as an individual Christian am I taken seriously by those that know my life?

You have to put that to yourself as well here you are you belong to the church it's not that you're not necessarily a confessing Christian in the sense that your name is on the communion roll but you're here today you're a Christian in the sense you belong to the church you come to worship God you know the gospel you have that teaching you know the basics of what a Christian life is about and to that sense you are actually adhering to that you're putting your amen to it you're saying this is really part of my life it's important to me am I taken seriously is the world seeing something else in me by which they know I'm not really genuine when I say that I'm a Christian at all there's a huge challenge none of us is going to be perfect we're all flawed individuals we all have things that we know are not right in our lives we all make mistakes we all say the wrong things we always sometimes do things that we know were not right we regret them afterwards that's not what we're talking about we're talking about here a man who consistently lived like the world and said that he was a believer and he's not taken seriously and it's not surprising secondly he's a believer as we said who's not living seriously now that's why he wasn't taken seriously because here was the only

time that you really find Lot acting decisively as it were is when he chose the area of Sodom for himself in chapter 13 but apart from that you could say that what you find in verse there in verse 16 he lingered in such a serious situation it says there one sentence but he lingered that's an excellent name for Lot

[21 : 35] Lot the lingerer he just didn't act decisively when it came to following God and honoring God and living in obedience to God he lingered he just didn't bother applying these things the right way and to the right extent in his life compared to his uncle Abraham that's part of the exercise of going through these passages contrast him with Abraham yes he had his failures as well but in most of the time he lives close to God he lives in obedience to God his life shows that he really is serious about his relationship with God not Lot he wasn't serious about God or his word or his promises and every time he lingers over important decisions spiritually or morally he's really adding to his weakness this is the terrible thing about a Lot about a person and moral meltdown the more it goes on the more the decay increases every decision that Lot took of a lingering type when he hesitated about really applying himself seriously to living as a believer every decision he took like that really just added another stage another level to his decay to his moral and spiritual breakdown it really weakens his sense of conviction his courage his willingness to stand for his God and you know even now in verse 16 in this serious situation as these men as the angel seized him and his wife he's lingering and this catastrophe that they're going to bring on

Sodom is just really about to burst out of the heavens and he's lingering he's still lingering even in that serious situation he's lingering and when he comes to move after being dragged on by the angels what does he say escape for your life they said and they said oh no my lord before your servant has found favour in your sight you have shown me great kindness but I cannot escape to the hills for I'm afraid there that I will die and then he speaks about this little city that came to be called Zoar will I not will you not allow me to escape there for if I don't go there I'm afraid if I go out to the hills that I'll die there what is that really saying to us it's saying that Lot has become emotionally attached to the city life to the life of Sodom to the kind of life that Sodom that he had in Sodom and he is just not even now with facing the judgment of God not prepared to let go of it let me just have a little

Sodom that I can escape into let me keep this kind of environment Lord otherwise I'm afraid I'll die he has become emotionally dependent on Sodom's lifestyle and Sodom's commerce and Sodom's activity at least to the extent that that's where the roots of his everyday life are and he just has such a lot of fear about leaving that maybe it's like that indeed it is like that for many of us if not most of us we may never have God forbid that we should ever have become involved in the likes of what was in Sodom but nevertheless when God says to us you know in order to be a Christian you have to leave that sort of thing out of your lifestyle or this other kind of thing out of your lifestyle you're no longer expected to engage in that kind of worldly activity consistently there's the question again to yourself and myself if God is saying to you today there are certain things that you must put behind you and no longer be involved with if you're going to be true to me are you and

I so emotionally attached to certain things in our lives that we just cannot think of living without them God is saying to us whatever it is we need to put behind us in order to be saved in order to be right with God in order to actually have God's approval we have to detach ourselves from them it may be difficult we have fears about it nevertheless God is saying it's either that or live without me and if you live without me you live under my judgment the effect on himself was devastating that he lived without seriously reckoning with God with his word with eternity with judgment with God's justice with all the things really that you would say should mark him as a believer but secondly he was a believer not living seriously because it had an effect on his family too

I want to just finish with this point when you go to the last scene of this chapter it's the last scene of Lot's life you imagine having a book written about you or a chapter about you in a book this is the last thing that's written about you this squalid sordid Sodom like incident where his two daughters come to be with child come to be pregnant through this activity that's described what a horrible horrible final chapter in Lot's life what does that say about the man it says that he didn't live seriously so he didn't take his family seriously you see there's absolutely nothing there in either of his daughters that shows any respect for their father that has any regard of honoring their father as their father it's just a complete breakdown and moral meltdown coming to its final stage everything is now just a mess living in a cave engaged in the sordid activity no resistance from Lot himself he just gets drunk and this is the outcome and the two children that are born

[28 : 12] Moab and Ben-Ami the father of the Ammonites they became some of Israel's chief enemies down through history they were filled with hatred for the people of Israel the descendants of Abraham this was their beginning now that that really brings home to us the fact that moral disintegration in family and in family settings really is indicative of the moral disintegration of our society I'm going to read to you something that was written quite some time ago by a man called Carl Zimmerman who was an American sociologist in Harvard University and he wrote a book called Family and Civilization he did a study of the breakdown of empires in history and especially the way that families and family life had been involved in the breakdown of these civilizations or these empires and he said that there were five things that he discovered were found in each case of the breakdown whether it was the

Greek empire the Roman empire whatever empire he looked at but there were five things he found that were consistently involved in this breakdown first of all one marriage lost its sacredness divorce became commonplace and alternative forms of marriage were accepted two feminist movements undermined complementary and cooperative roles as women lost interest in mothering and pursued personal power three parenting became increasingly difficult public disrespect for parents and authority increased and delinquency and promiscuity became more commonplace four adultery was celebrated not punished people who broke their marriage vow were admired five there was increased tolerance for incestuous and homosexual sex with an increase in sex related crimes does it sound familiar of course it does it's a mark of western society it's a mark of a society there are marks of a society immoral breakdown that was written by him in 1947 but he could have been describing the world as it is today in the western world at least statistics recently even for under 13 children are shocking when it comes to the amount of pornography that they have access to and frequently access online or in some form this is the next generation of minds and they're already polluted what is the next generation really going to be like if that's what their minds are being fed on even before they've reached the age of puberty now you and I have to remember this for our own homes whatever homes are like around us and as people involved in the gospel we are of course involved we hope in reaching out to people people not interested in the gospel people who live a different lifestyle to a

Christian lifestyle but for every home in this place today for every home that can be said to be a church home and yours is a church home if you belong to the church in whatever form you belong to it remember this the teaching of your children belongs to you and not to the church primarily and as Chuck Swindle an American preacher put it what you bury in your homes the church will not be able to resurrect if you bury in your homes moral and spiritual values if you say let's lead that to the church the church will not resurrect it and your contribution and mine if that's how we are will really be not that far short of Lot's total lack of involvement in the moral teaching of his children friends this is serious it isn't just serious for our present generation for ourselves now it's serious for the next one what kind of generation will our children be what values will they hold to well you teach them this take

God seriously take faith seriously take living for Christ seriously take eternity seriously take the Bible seriously take belonging to the church seriously don't be a lingerer and end up like Lot don't let your children become lingerers and end up without Christ without faith without following him without an interest in the things of Jesus that's why we have to look at these passages they're difficult they really get to your heart they're hard to explain because they're they're just so filled with horrible things and the devil would persuade you therefore just don't spend too much time there that's what he does with all the things that are of crucial importance let's not linger in our spiritual lives let's be an

Abraham rather than a Lord let's pray Lord again we thank you for the light and the direction of your word we thank you for the warnings it gives us as well as the promises and we thank you for the way that you take our best interests into account when you give us your word we pray that you bless it to us today and that you would help us throughout this day to ponder the things that your word brings to us here as we pray for Jesus sake Amen