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THE DARKER THE SIN

2 Peter 2:9

One Main Thing

God's grace is deeper, stronger, wider, and more surprising than we can imagine.

Introduction

Abraham's relative Lot is not a man we associate with grace. Generally, we remember him for bad choices that had tragic consequences. He made the selfish decision to take the well-watered plain of Jordan when Abram offered him his choice of grazing land (Gen 13:5-11). In one of the classic biblical examples of foreshadowing, "he pitched his tent even as far as Sodom" (Gen 13:12). Eventually he chose to live in Sodom (Gen 14:12). This led to his kidnapping and need for rescue by Abram and his servants (Gen 14:13-16). We understand why some view the kidnapping as a message to Lot that he was in the wrong place with the wrong people.

In a sense, Lot was rescued twice by his famous relative. As God informed Abraham of the coming destruction of the cities on the plain, Abraham interceded for those cities with the memorable question, "Would you also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" (Gen 18:22). Not even the Lord's minimum number of ten righteous people could be found. Still, God's angels warned Lot. Lot and two daughters were saved from the fire, but then comes one of the darkest episodes in all of Scripture (Gen 19:30-38). Two of the strongest enemies of ancient Israel originated from those sins. Yet, Lot ultimately stands as a stunning example of the surprising and persistent power of God's grace.

Going Deeper

In Genesis we note several examples of God's favor toward Lot. The Lord blessed both Abram and Lot materially. "…Their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together" (Gen 13:6). The Lord blessed Lot with a magnanimous relative in Abram (Gen 13:9-10). The Lord blessed Lot with safety within "exceedingly wicked" Sodom (Gen 13:13). The Lord blessed Lot with rescue of both his people and his property (Gen 14:16). The Lord blessed Lot and his wife with children, though we neither condone nor understand his proposed action toward those daughters in Genesis 19:8. Lot was blessed to be warned of the coming destruction of Sodom and to be urged out of the city (Gen 19:15-17). The text emphasizes that this was "the Lord being merciful to him." The Lord even granted Lot's request to escape

to the city of Zoar, rather than fleeing directly to the mountains (Gen 19:17-22). Lot received grace after grace from God.

Between his dark episodes, Lot showed grace to others. He knew the danger that the two visitors to Sodom faced, so he "insisted strongly" that they enter the protection and hospitality of his house (Gen 19:1-3). He tried to protect them at personal risk (Gen 19:4-10). Lot cared for the lives of his sons-in-law, even to the point of lingering in Sodom to the cusp of the destruction (Gen 19:14-16).

While we appreciate biblical fairness and balance, the account of Lot in Genesis ends on a terrible note. If that were the end of the biblical account of Lot, we would never think of him as an example of God's grace.

The story of Lot resumes in 2 Peter 2, a chapter that stoutly announces God's certain judgment on false teachers and all who live in rebellion. But 2 Peter 2 also documents God's grace, His ability to save and His record of saving the righteous from the worst of circumstances. The evil world perished in the flood, but Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others were saved (2 Pet 2:5). Sodom and Gomorrah were turned into ashes, but the Lord "delivered righteous Lot" (2 Pet 2:7). For emphasis, Lot is also called "a righteous man" and is described as one of "the godly" (2 Pet 2:8-9). Amazing!

The devil would love for us to misunderstand 2 Peter 2. He would love for us to ignore the whole of Scripture and conclude that Lot's sin never really mattered, that God arbitrarily closed His eyes (Isa 59:1-3, Rom 3:23 and 6:23). He would love for us to doubt the accuracy of Genesis or to view 2 Peter 2 as contradicting it. Short of that, he would love for us to declare the Bible beyond our understanding so that we would abandon its study.

How can 2 Peter 2:4-11 make sense in light of Lot's terrible actions recorded in Genesis? In a word, grace. God did not save Lot in his sin (Ezek 18:27-32). God saved Lot from his sin. Admittedly, the Genesis account does not document Lot's repentance. This stands as a great reminder of the brevity of Scripture. Numerous accounts don't end with the neat closure that we often prefer.

2 Peter 2 offers insight into the reasons Peter, by inspiration, could describe Lot as righteous. Lot was in Sodom, but he was not of Sodom (1 John 2:15-17). Lot did not stop recognizing sin as sin (2 Pet 2:7). Lot was tormented (troubled, grieved, afflicted) by the sins of those around him (2 Pet 2:8). And God delivered Lot from imminent destruction (2 Pet 2:9). In the end, Lot's complicated and often lamentable story documents the triumph of God's grace in the life of a deeply flawed man. Lot's story is our story of the wondrous power of grace.

Application

False applications are easy to list. "All's well that ends well. Despite all his sins, the biblical account of Lot ends on a positive note. His sins were really no big deal." Lot's bad choices put many good people in danger. Lot's sins cost him his wife, his sons-in-law, and his reputation. We have no clue how Lot's daughters could have ever looked him in the eye again. Without Lot's sins, would there have been any Ammonites or Moabites to afflict Israel throughout much of Old Testament history (Num 22-25; Judg 3, 10, 11; 2 Sam 12)? The story of Lot intersects Rom 6:1-2, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not!"

A second false application is the popular claim: "See, I told you that righteousness is relative. All Lot needed to do to be called righteous was to be slightly less bad than the evil people around him." There is no biblical support for this view.

A third false application is the claim that the standard for righteousness changed in the New Testament. "Lot is never called 'righteous' in Genesis; he's only called righteous in the new era where grace covers every sin." That claim runs counter to the point of 2 Peter 2 and to the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 25.

What are the legitimate applications of Lot's story? Grace means that no person need be defined by his

worst acts and decisions. Just as David was forgiven of adultery, lies, and murder, Lot was forgiven by God. Just as Saul was forgiven for persecuting the church, we can be forgiven through grace (Rom 5:6-8). God remains better at forgiving than we are at sinning.

Even the most heinous and embarrassing of sins, from a human perspective, are not beyond the scope of God's grace. Lot's story helps us understand and appreciate 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. Lot helps us avoid the deadly error of declaring ourselves too evil for God to save.

Lot emphasizes a powerful lesson we first learn from Noah in Genesis 6. One person, one family, can choose righteousness even when the world around us rebels against God. We would never claim that this is easy, but we know that it is possible through God's grace (Titus 2:1-14).

Lot reminds us that there are limits to God's grace. One could make the case that Lot stayed in Sodom and became a civic leader because he thought he could make a godly difference (Gen 19:1 and 9 "acting like a judge"). After being warned, Lot lingered—trying to save his sons-in-law, but he could not. Even Abraham could not save the evil cities. When the appointed Day of the Lord comes, whether ultimately or in some partial measure, the door of grace closes (Matt 25:1-13, 2 Cor 5:9-11, 2 Pet 3:1-13). God's kindness in warning us of the deadliness of sin, the brevity of life, and the certainty of judgment stands as a huge act of grace.

Discussion

1. Is it fair to Scripture to describe Lot's story as a story of grace? Has this lesson made the case?
2. Even though grace triumphed, why is it important to remember that Lot bore terrible consequences for his sins?
3. Why would God choose to describe Lot as righteous and godly in 2 Peter 2? Why share this information with us?
4. Why might some over-apply Lot's story to the subject of grace?
5. Why might some be tempted to discount Peter's teachings about the righteousness of Lot?