

The Strange Case Of Lot

“Lot also, who went with Abram, had flocks and herds and tents. Now the land was not able to support them, that they might dwell together, for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together. And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram’s livestock and the herdsmen of Lot’s livestock. The Canaanites and the Perizzites then dwelt in the land. So Abram said to Lot, “Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren.”

-Genesis 13:5-8

One of the things that I love most about the Bible is how real and complex the figures within it are. When many people think about the Bible, they think that it is essentially a fairy tale or myth, and assume that it contains pandering stories with one dimensional characters, suited only for teaching lessons to small children. When you actually read the Bible though, you can see very quickly how false this sentiment is. The figures in the Bible are incredibly nuanced. They are not clearly good or bad, they have complex motivations, and because of this, even though the events of the Bible are long past, each figure within the Bible can teach us much about our own nature and motives.

Among all the people in the Bible, Lot has to be one of the most interesting ones that we read about. We aren’t told much about him, but I will give a quick overview of his life, so that we can better study him and learn from him the lessons that God would desire for us. Lot was born in a major city called Ur of the Chaldeans with Abram. He was the son of Haran, Abram’s uncle, and when Haran died, Terah, Abram’s father, took Lot with them when they left Ur of the Chaldeans. After Abram receives his call from God to go to Israel, Abram takes Lot with them where they live together for several years. In the above chapter, Lot and Abram become so wealthy that they can no longer dwell together on the land that they occupied. In order to keep the peace, Abram offers Lot his choice of land and Lot ends up going towards the land of Sodom, even though Sodom had a notorious reputation for depravity.

From then on, Lot’s life is one of tragedy. He is taken captive during a territorial dispute between some local warlords and is rescued by Abram. He then goes back to Sodom and seemingly imbibes a good deal of the depravity within that city, since he is described as “sitting in the gate of Sodom” (Genesis 19:1), which was a phrase that indicated a type of political office. He has to be forcibly taken out of the city as God judges it for its extreme wickedness and Lot ends up living out the rest of his days in a cave with his two remaining daughters. These daughters had been corrupted by the

immorality of the city, and both of them get their father drunk and are impregnated by him. His children then become the leaders of two tribes, the Moabites and the Ammonites, who are both antagonistic towards the Israelites.

Looking at his life at a glance, it would be easy to simply write Lot off as an entitled and depraved man. One who was consumed by wickedness and was only spared by the grace of God. While this is partially true, Lot's story is a little more complex than that. Even though Lot fell into much depravity and compromise, we are told by the Apostle Peter that Lot was nevertheless a "righteous man" (2 Peter 2:8). In this paper I wanted to use the story of Lot to explore the Biblical notions of righteousness, the pull of sin, and the faithfulness of God.

A Righteous Man

"...and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)—then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment..."

-2 Peter 2:6-9

"Righteous" is a bit of an old fashioned word that you don't hear too often nowadays, but from a Biblical perspective, "righteous" essentially means right, good, just, or virtuous, and it is predominantly used in a legal context, meaning "innocent before the law". After going through the story of Lot, it is almost inconceivable that Peter would call Lot righteous. We are not told of any virtuous or heroic acts of Lot, he seems driven by pride and selfishness, and he seemingly died without repenting to God or reconciling with Abram. And yet, the words of Peter should give us pause and cause us to reflect on Lot's case. If Lot can be considered a "righteous man" then we have to ask, what is a righteous man?

Righteousness and Faith

"And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness."

-Genesis 15:6

In this passage, Abram who had already been called by God, was accounted as righteous, not through his works of faithfulness towards God, but simply in his belief in

God's faithfulness towards him. This is an incredibly important passage because it shows us that, since God is perfect, nothing but perfect righteousness would be enough to make us righteous before Him. Instead of giving Abram a law, God instead calls Abram to follow Him, and it is Abram's willingness to trust God in all circumstances that causes God to call him righteous.

"But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..."

-Romans 3:21-23

It is this simple truth that gives us the means to understand the gospel. If righteousness before God was possible through a set of rules or commandments, the call of Abram would have begun with a law. Instead, God doesn't give Abram any specific law to follow, and only gives him one sacrament, circumcision, after He had already declared him righteous. What this meant to the New Testament authors was that God had set up Abram as an example of righteousness through faith and not through obedience to the law. But, since God is perfectly just, He had to reconcile us to Himself even though we were incapable of keeping His commands. The solution to this problem comes through the cross of Christ. Jesus becomes a man, lives the truly righteous life, and lays it down as a sacrifice for those who have failed to do so.

Even though Abram lived so long before the cross, his life exemplifies this reality. Abram doesn't boast in his worthiness before God. Because of this, he never makes demands of God or considers himself to be superior to anyone else, he merely acts in faithfulness towards God's commands and trusts that God is the One who will provide for him.

"What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt."

-Romans 4:1-4

As Christians, we walk in the footsteps of Abram and follow his example. We must humbly accept that we have no means of becoming righteous in our own strength. If we are to be accepted by God, it will be through His faithfulness towards us, not in our faithfulness towards Him. However, this does not mean that we live without works, only that we are justified first by faith that we might serve God in righteousness not to

achieve it. To trust in God for our righteousness means that we believe in His word above all else. It makes no sense to say that you trust in the righteousness of God but then make no effort to follow after His commands.

“But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say? “Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: “He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock. “But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great.”

-Luke 6:46-49

“I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.”

-Galatians 2:21

Putting all this together we see that the righteous man is the one who desires God and, recognizing his unworthiness, trusts in God’s provision to make him righteous and to come after Him. When we understand this, we can begin to understand why Peter calls Lot righteous. He is not making a statement about Lot’s behavior, but in Lot’s faith. Lot could have remained with Terah in the land of Haran, but instead he followed Abram to the promised land. Since Peter calls Lot righteous, we can infer that Lot made this decision, not out of mere selfishness, but because he genuinely believed in God’s call on Abram’s life. So when Lot followed Abram to Canaan, he was following after God by following after the man called by God.

The Pull Of Sin

“And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar. Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other. Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom. But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the LORD.”

-Genesis 13:10-13

If this is true, then how did Lot lose his way? We see here that, much like Abram in the previous chapter, the events surrounding Lot’s failure were largely out of his control. We

are told directly that the land could not support them, and that it was the herdsmen who were quarreling and not Lot and Abram themselves. However, once Abram made the way for peace, we see Lot's lust get the better of him. When Lot sees the plain of the Jordan, he is immediately allured by the beauty of the land. This in itself is not bad, but the narrator informs us that the wickedness of Sodom was known to Lot. Because of this, Lot doesn't go to Sodom, but merely pitches his tent "as far as Sodom".

Deceitful Lust

"...that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts..."

-Ephesians 4:22

We need to remember that Lot's failure was not a sin of apostasy. Meaning that Lot did not sin brazenly against the Lord and denounce his faith. Instead, Lot was well meaning, but nonetheless lured by his lust and fell to temptation. What most forget is that sin has a gravity to it. It allures us and draws us. Beyond that, sin is cloaked in self-deception.

Even as Christians, we have a dual nature to us. The above passage comes from a longer discussion from the Apostle Paul on this strange juxtaposition. He calls it the "old man" and the "new man" here, but in other passages he calls it "the flesh" and "the spirit". But when he talks about "the spirit" in the believer, or "the new man" he is referencing is the part of the believer that is made in the image of God and desires to run after God in faith. It is this part of us that was raised in newness of life when we put our faith in Jesus Christ and became righteous before Him. When he speaks of "the flesh" of the believer, or "the old man", he is talking about our fallen nature that is corrupt and passing away. It is this part of us that rebels against the Law of God and is tempted by sin.

It would be nice if that part of us died when we came to faith in Christ, but, unfortunately, this isn't the case. The life of the believer is one of spiritual warfare, not merely against principalities and powers, but most importantly, one against the desires of our own hearts.

"But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."

-James 1:14-15

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

The reason why I entitled this paper, “The Strange Case of Lot” was to allude to the Robert Louis Stevenson novel, “The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde”. In this famous work the dual nature of man is shown in the juxtaposition between Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Throughout the novel, a dangerous and malicious character named Mr. Hyde terrorizes a community. The strange thing is that he is shown to have an unknown connection to an upstanding member of the community, Dr. Jekyll.

When the novel ends, the famous twist was that they were the same person. Dr. Jekyll recognized that he had dark desires, but also had desires to live a good and decent life. He found that these conflicting desires made him miserable, and since he couldn't figure out which desires were inherent to him, he created a formula that would allow for both parts of his character to live in, what he saw as, peaceable separation. The novel ends with his death and him leaving a note that explains all this, in it he says:

“With every day and from both sides of my intelligence, the moral and intellectual, I thus drew steadily to that truth by whose partial discovery I have been doomed to such a dreadful shipwreck: that man is not truly one, but truly two... I learned to recognize the thorough and primitive duality of man;... if I could rightly be said to be either, it was only because I was radically both.”

-Robert Louis Stevenson - “The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde”

This duality of man is something that the Bible teaches as well.

“For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.”

-Romans 7:15-19

Passages like this show us that the righteousness of Lot is not at odds with his sin. Instead, when Peter declares Lot as “righteous” he says that Lot's righteousness was shown in his internal torment that he experienced when he was surrounded by sin. It is this internal conflict that Paul is describing in the passage above, and it is one that we can all relate to. We find in ourselves warring factions. At one end, we desire to fulfill the law of God and to behave in good and virtuous ways. Yet, we also find in ourselves desires to go against the laws of God. We are drawn to sin and enticed to follow after our flesh. Being a Christian doesn't remove this warfare, in fact it makes it more

pronounced. In this same passage, Paul laments that it was through him coming to know the law that his desire to transgress the law increased.

Like Paul, and Lot, we are all tempted by sin, however, we are not all tempted by the same things. Each one of us struggles against various temptations that draw us away from God and towards sin. Because we are secretly drawn to these temptations by a corruption within our own souls, we often deceive ourselves into thinking that our intentions are innocent when they are really wicked. A section of Scripture that I believe most clearly lays this out is Proverbs 7. In this passage a man walks by the house of a prostitute and is lured in by her advances. As the passage ends it says this:

“With her enticing speech she caused him to yield, With her flattering lips she seduced him. Immediately he went after her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, Or as a fool to the correction of the stocks, Till an arrow struck his liver. As a bird hastens to the snare, He did not know it would cost his life.”

-Proverbs 7:21-23

He believed in his heart that he was walking by her home in innocence, when in reality there was a corrupt part of him that wanted to be enticed by her and to sin with her. Lot probably believed that he was only going towards Sodom to enjoy the fertile plains outside the city, but there was a part of him that was drawn to the city itself. Because he failed to recognize the pull of his flesh, he unwittingly put himself into a situation where he was brought under the power of his own deceitful lust. And as James warns us *“when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”*

Truth In Community

“Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”

-Hebrews 3:12-13

Lot's biggest mistake in all of this was not his decision to go towards Sodom, though this was a supremely foolish decision, instead it was to go away from his uncle. There were practical reasons why they needed distance between them, but from this moment onwards, Lot and Abram are not seen in fellowship again. The reason why this matters is because, if lust has the greatest power over me through self-deception, I will never find freedom unless I allow another person into my struggles.

When the above passage tells us as believers to “exhort one another daily... lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” It is telling us that through the exhortation of other believers, the lies of our own hearts can be exposed. It is through true community that I can be shown by others the deception of my own heart, without this insight, I am doomed to spiritual blindness. This is difficult for most of us though. True accountability with other believers requires us to be vulnerable and intimate with other people. It is much easier to stick to ourselves and to attempt righteousness in our own power. Unfortunately, this is not possible.

For years of my life I hid my struggles with lust and pornography because of internal shame. I thought that if I simply tried harder in my own strength I could break free from my sin and not have to embarrass myself through confession. But I didn't realize that only in confession and accountability could other believers show what I was missing. Through accountability I was shown practical steps that actually helped me combat my sin much more effectively. And through this same accountability, that I continue to practice to this day, that I am kept vigilant against the pull of my sin.

The scary reality of Lot's story is that his fall didn't happen in an instant, he fell through slow steps of compromise that brought him to calamity. This is what the author of Hebrews is warning us about when he speaks of the “hardening” effect of sin. Just like calluses, the more pressure we put upon our consciences, the more hardened it becomes. Until something that would seem unthinkable in the past now becomes realistic to us in the present. When Lot began, he wouldn't even set foot in Sodom, but in the end of his story, he is “sitting in the gate”. We need to learn the importance of vigilance from Lot's life so that we too don't fall for the deception of sin.

The Faithfulness of God

“If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.”

-2 Timothy 2:13

The above promise is both a beautiful truth, as well as a sobering one. When a Christian acts in faithlessness, as Lot did, one would expect that God would deny this person and separate Himself from them. But what we see from Lot, is that this isn't the case. God continues to be faithful to Lot even when Lot has turned his back on God. Even in the midst of Lot's depravity, God provides a means of rescue through Abram in Genesis 14, and when He is about to judge Sodom, He again rescues Lot from his fate. God's love and faithfulness to His people is such that even when we fail Him, He won't fail us. Even when we turn our backs on Him, He continues to pursue us.

Hosea

One of the most powerful stories in the Bible that illustrates this is the book of Hosea. In this book, God calls the prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute, Gomer. Even though Hosea is faithful to his wife, she continuously cheats on him until she eventually abandons him to go back into her life of harlotry. Throughout this time though, God ministers to Hosea and explains to him that this is what the people of Israel had been to Him. Even though He loved them and chose them from among the nations, they had continued to be unfaithful to Him and pursued other gods. So, even though Hosea wanted to be done with his wife, God tells him:

“Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the love of the LORD for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans.”

-Hosea 3:1

Godly Conviction

Even in the most intense part of my own backsliding, this is the message that I got from God. Every time I failed I was waiting for God to be done with me, but He never was. He continued to love me in my failure, and continued to call me to repentance. Which is the sobering part of this promise. When God says that when we are faithless He remains faithful, that means that the conscience of the Christian can't be silenced.

“(for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)”

-2 Peter 2:8

As stated before, even though Lot was living in the depravity of Sodom, he never really became one of them. This meant that he lived a life of compromise and shame. Peter tells us that in the end, the main expression of Lot's righteousness was torment in “his righteous soul”. When a Christian backslides, the presence of God is still within them. They will only feel moderate pleasure in their sin, because their soul will cry out in torment as they rebel. When I backslid, I wasn't happy. I left my faith so that I could pursue sin, but in all of this, I was miserable. Every time I fell to my sin, I felt a pang of guilt within my soul and was constantly afflicted by shame. But this shame is not meant to crush us, but to call us to repentance.

“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.”

-Romans 7:24-25

Going back to our earlier discussion about the dual nature of the Christian, the question that can defeat us is, which desires are the real us? In “The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” the main character is destroyed because he can’t figure out which desires are the “real” him. When we are falling to sin, it is easy to believe that our sin is actually who we really are and our desires to be good are a deception. This thought leads us to despair and to ultimately stay defeated by our sin. This is unfortunately what ultimately happens to Lot. But what Paul expresses in the above passage is the opposite. If we feel the warfare within our souls this is evidence that we are a new creation in Christ Jesus.

The truly wicked and depraved feel no such conflict. They sin and enter into depravity without feeling this godly conviction. The whole reason why we feel bad about our sin is because we belong to God, and He is using this conviction to call us back to Him. Beyond this, when Paul describes his flesh as a “body of death” he isn’t just using a graphic metaphor for the repulsive nature of his flesh, he is also commenting on the mortal nature of his flesh. Because of the work of Christ, our flesh, no matter how powerful, is dying. Eventually it will die completely and all that will be left is the part of us that yearns for God. No matter how much we might fall to the pull of our flesh, this is not who we really are, we really do belong to God, and in this knowledge we can continue to fight our sin.

“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

-1 John 3:2-3

Lot unfortunately never learns this lesson. Instead, he spends the rest of his days consumed by his guilt. He can’t bring himself to face his uncle after the destruction of Sodom, and so he lives in a cave with his two daughters where he becomes a drunk. And it is in his drunkenness that he has illicit affairs with his own daughters. However, this is not what God wanted for Lot. God wanted Lot to respond to his own guilt by turning away from his sin. Lot should have recognized his misery and cried out for salvation. Instead, he tried to hide from his shame and spent the rest of his life in torment.

“For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.”

-2 Corinthians 7:10

In our self-deception, we can see the conviction of God as a sign that God is wrathful towards us and wants to punish us. This is untrue. The conviction of God is to produce in us “godly sorrow” and this sorrow ought to lead us to repentance and then to salvation. When we feel pangs of guilt over our wrong-doing, this is God trying to reach out to us by His Spirit. He is calling us out of our sin, and into newness of life. But we need to heed His call. We need to humble ourselves before His conviction and seek out help that we might repent of our sin. It is a difficult thing to come to another believer in humility and ask for counsel and prayer to help us repent of our sin, it is even harder to approach those that we have wronged in our sin and ask for forgiveness and seek to make amends with them. But this is what we are called to do.

“For a righteous man may fall seven times And rise again, But the wicked shall fall by calamity.”

-Proverbs 24:16

The main difference between Abram and Lot is not that Abram didn't fail but Lot did. The difference between them is that when Abram failed, he repented and went back to land that God had called him to. It is unfortunate that Lot's life ended in tragedy, but his life can nonetheless be an example for us that we can learn from. These lessons are more of a cautionary tale, but they still serve a purpose for our own sanctification and faithfulness towards God. Lot was a man who started well, but ended poorly, but what we can learn from him is that his story didn't have to end this way. Lot could have repented from his sin and had a beautiful ending to his story. Let us not be filled with pride, but instead to know that no matter how far we may have fallen, we can always repent and come back to God.

“Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?”

-Romans 2:4