

Genesis 19: The Six Deadly Sins of Sodom Gen 19:1-23, Ezekiel 16:49-50

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These previous months, as together we have traveled through "*All the Stories of the Bible*" some sad, some joyous, I have often reminded you that these stories were included for a purpose: not just as a historic record but in order that we might learn from them a cautionary moral by which to live our lives and surprisingly according to the Bible to even give us "hope" (Romans 15:4). This of course is what I am also hoping for today as we consider one of the saddest stories in our Bible: the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Now you may be thinking that such a tale is perhaps inappropriate for a holiday weekend honoring all those who gave their lives so that America might live as a free nation. But please reconsider, because today's message brings us a warning of those privileges and freedoms – for which our forebears so dearly fought and died – which we as a nation now stand to lose by our own increasingly godless lifestyle.

Everyone knows the basic story about how the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah had a reputation for being among the most wicked people in history (Genesis 13:13). By Abraham's day, morality in the two cities had gotten so bad that God personally sent a pair of angels into town to investigate whether or not to cleanse these two cities from the face of the earth. Their fate was sealed that evening when "*all the men of the town both young and old to the last man*" surrounded the home of Abraham's nephew Lot, attempting to gang rape the two angels who were staying as guests under his roof (19:4-6). The next morning, after extracting Lot and family, God rained "fire and brimstone" down on both cities as well as the surrounding plains, sparing only the small town of Zoar where Lot had taken refuge. If you were to go looking for the ruins of Sodom and Gomorrah today you won't find them, because – according to archeologists' best guess they now sit on the bottom of the Dead Sea.

To this day, while the very name of "Sodom" still refers to acts of sexual deviancy, more than what you learned in Sunday School is that this was not the only sin which brought about these cities ultimate destruction. The rest of their story can be found in Ezekiel, chapter 16, where the prophet compares Jerusalem's increasing immorality not to just one but to the **six deadly sins of Sodom**.

Sodom had pride, excess of food, prosperous ease , but did not aid the poor . They were haughty , and did abominable things before me Ezekiel 16:49-50

This was the guilt of Sodom: she ... had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty, and did abominable things before me; therefore I removed them when I saw it (Ezekiel 16:49-50). Did you notice that sexual

deviancy was actually the last of six listed sins that eventually brought down such extreme judgment upon these cities?

There is another very important lesson that families especially need to learn from the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. In 2016, I shared this lesson in a message titled *The Risk of Sitting at the Gates of Sodom*, pointed directly to parents of young children, describing the price that Lot paid for deciding to settle his family in this town. It has been included on our website in the hopes that you might also read and share with it other parents.

For today then, let's spend some time carefully considering what were and how we might avoid *The Six Deadly Sins of Sodom*; the first of which was **PRIDE**. The Bible tells us that...

*"God opposes the proud,
but gives grace to the humble"*

James 4:6.

According to this verse, God doesn't just NOT LIKE proud people, He ACTIVELY opposes them. He deliberately works against them. His intention is to remove them from the board.

But what is so bad about pride? A lot of people are "proud" of things in their lives. They're proud of their family/ car/ home/ job/ accomplishments. But that's not the kind of pride God is talking about here.

If I say I'm proud of my children, I'm saying I'm pleased they're part of my life. In fact, I'm so pleased that I want YOU to know how blessed I am. I'll show you their pictures, I'll tell stories about what they've said and what they've done and I'll tell you what they want to do with their lives. I'll brag about them every chance I get and that wouldn't necessarily be a BAD thing, however annoying it might be. Because that's just ME telling YOU how blessed I am to have THEM in my life.

So if that's not a bad thing, what kind of pride is God talking about here? The key to understanding this sin is in the verse: "*God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*" What's a humble PERSON known for? They don't brag about themselves. They're not all wrapped up in themselves. In Biblical language, *they don't think of themselves more highly than they ought* (Romans 12:14).

C.S. Lewis noted that the sin of "*pride is a telescope turned the wrong way. It magnifies self and makes the heavens small.*" In other words, a proud person is more focused on themselves than they are on God. As the Psalms tell us "*In his pride the*

wicked man does not seek [God]; in all his thoughts there is no room for God" (10:4 NIV)

Why would a proud person not seek God? Well ... WHY SHOULD THEY? They don't need God or anyone else. They consider themselves quite capable of doing everything for themselves by themselves.

Such a person was G. Gordon Liddy of Watergate Scandal fame. Shortly after his release from prison Liddy said, *"I have found within myself all I need and all I shall ever need. I am a man of great faith, but my faith is in George Gordon Liddy. I have never failed me."*

A proud person is usually a godless person. Now, that doesn't mean they don't believe in God... they just don't need Him. For example, the **Pharisees** were very religious... but they weren't Godly people. Jesus once accused them: *"Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me'" (Mark 7:6).* Their hearts were FAR from God. They were literally godless people. In their "self-righteousness" these folks considered they did not need God. If anything, God needs them. God should be grateful that they even bothered to show up at church.

Thus, the first sin of Sodom, their **PROUD** belief that they had no need for God, was actually related to another of their deadly sins: they were **HAUGHTY**.

Now, "haughty" is an interesting word. Its modern definition would be, *"to behave in a superior, condescending, or arrogant way,"* in that sense it is very similar to the sin of pride that we just looked at. But, thinking of that word according to its Hebrew meaning -- which is, "lofty", "high", "exalted," or "acting like god" -- can help you understand how this attitude in a human could be deadly.

Scripture often uses this word to describe God's relationship to His creation. When Isaiah had a vision of God in the Temple he said *"I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, HIGH AND LIFTED UP; and the train of his robe filled the temple" (Isaiah 6:1).* And then when God spoke of His way of doing things, He said *"For as the heavens are HIGHER than the earth, so are my ways HIGHER than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9).*

This idea of God being HIGH and LIFTED UP is an extremely important one, because unless we understand that God is higher than we are, and that His ways and thoughts are ABOVE ours, we have no foundation for morality in our lives and in our society. Without a God who is higher and more exalted, we are free to make up our own rules, our own morality. This was clearly illustrated in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah.

In response to the people's demand to turn the angels over to them, Lot steps out the front door pleading with them, *I beg you **my brothers** do not act so wickedly.* Their response was, *"get out of our way. You came here as alien [you are not one of us], **and now you would play our judge?** Now we will deal worse with you than with them"* (Genesis 19:9). Had not the angels then rescued Lot and blinded his attackers the mob certainly would have killed both him and his family along with their heavenly visitors.

That was the kind of haughtiness that ruled in the hearts and minds of Sodom. Refusing to acknowledge God, they followed their own standard of what was right and what was wrong. I am sure that whatever gods/idols they may have worshipped, those gods approved of what Sodom wanted to do.

PRIDE combined with HAUGHTINESS, two of Sodom's deadly sins, was in living as if they had no need for any higher help or authority like God, especially if He was going to tell them what they could or could not do. **Does this not sound like growing sentiments in our own culture today which has intentionally removed the Ten Commandments from public view and as well as making laws criminalizing any privately held moral standards that conflict with public legalities?** Whenever some Christian seeks to remind the public square of a Biblical principle, the reply is now: ***What right have you to judge us?***

This attitude of **"intending to live only by one's own standards"** first entered mainstream America with the ongoing debate over the morality versus legality of abortion on demand. The 1999 film, **Cider House Rules** – which intentionally vilified the pro-life standard in the abortion debate – codified our current attitude towards rule making with the phrase, *"those who live in the cider house should make the rules for the cider house."* They certainly would have approved of this rule in Sodom and Gomorrah.

The next question you might want to ask, would be what earlier circumstances in the life of Sodom and Gomorrah brought them to such self-sufficient, self-governing attitudes thinking that they need only live their own standards? The next two deadly sins of Sodom give us a good clue: ***they had an excess of food, and prosperous ease.*** Which is also what originally attracted Lot to move there, he saw that *the plain of Jordan was well watered everywhere like the garden of the lord* (Genesis 13:10). In other words the countryside around Sodom and Gomorrah was so lush, and so productive that it reminded Lot of stories he had heard of the Garden in Eden; who wouldn't want to live there.

Sodom and Gomorrah was also located on a main trade route making this one of the most prosperous towns in the region. In Sodom and Gomorrah life was easy because everyone was rich and well fed. **They had more than what they needed, not only in wealth but also in time to do with as they wished...** without any moral base to guide what they should be doing with their excess of wealth and time. Again does that not

sound like the current lifestyle of the rich and famous and the would be rich and famous in America today?

Let's also add the next deadly sin to these two as well – because it is an attitude that often grows out of a life of wealth unharnessed by any moral convictions. Even while having *an excess of food and prosperous ease*, the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah **did not aid the poor and needy**. Meaning they had no concern for those less fortunate than themselves, no desire to share from their abundance.

Pride and wealth combined with a life of leisure lived by one's own standards with no sense of obligation to anyone else, higher or lower. Think of how many novels have been written around this deadly combination? Think also of how many people Jesus met having such attitudes and how many stories he told about such attitudes? Perhaps the most worrisome for us being the story of the **"Rich Man and Lazarus,"** because while most of Jesus' stories He identified as parables – as being made up – but He didn't call this story a parable and He also, unlike the rest of His stories, gave these characters names.... leaving us to wonder if perhaps this time Jesus was referring to an actual event.

"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.' He said, 'Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house— for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.' Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.' He said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'" Luke 16:19-31

Anthony Campolo made an interesting observation about this story: *The rich man, at least, was worried about his brothers. He may not have been all that bad, in the way we view "badness." His sin was not that he broke any of the Ten Commandments. He*

wasn't sleeping around, he wasn't a thief, he hadn't killed anyone. And in all probability, he came by his money through hard work. He hadn't done anything "bad" by the understanding of "badness" in our culture. The sin of the rich man was that he enjoyed the "Good life", while being unconcerned about those around him who desperately needed help.

Sharing with the poor and needy is a very important issue for God. He had ordered the nation of Israel:

Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land
(Deuteronomy 15:11).

Everywhere else you read in the Bible, from the books of law, to the proverbs, to the warnings of the prophets along with the sayings of Jesus – about how he will one day separate the sheep from the goats ... almost every page returns to this mandate to share with those poorer than you. But my favorite of all these is found in Proverbs: **"Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed."** (19:17 ESV). Here is God telling us that when we help the poor we LEND to Him and He promises to pay us back. Its obvious God has a very high regard for those who reach out to the needy and poor and He doesn't think much of those who don't think to do so.

Which brings us to the final deadly sin of Sodom: they did **abominable things**; to which God concluded; *therefore I removed them when I saw it.* Though modern theologians might wish to discount or explain away Biblical teachings on sexual purity versus deviance, the Bible is very clear that any sexual act outside of the marriage of a man to a woman is an abomination to the Lord. If you don't believe me, read Leviticus chapter 18.

Where does popular American culture now stand on this matter of sexuality? Currently, there are people in Washington working very hard to brand the statements I just made, perhaps this whole sermon, as illegal "hate speech" for which I could be arrested and fined; as has been the law in Canada for several years now. But there is no escaping this truth as it was also taught by the Apostle Paul (Romans 1:18-32) that **when you refuse to acknowledge God as God, when you begin to worship yourself and live by your own standards, with too much wealth and time on your hands, you will inevitably not only end up with sexual deviancy in all its forms, but you will cheer on the people who live like you while viciously attacking those who would - no matter how lovingly -**

call you back to repentance. Lot tried to appeal to the citizens of Sodom as “brothers.” They spit back, *you are not one of us and now we will deal worse with you.*

The saying is true, **“When you value things over people, you will begin to treat people like things.”** Sodom was infamous for sexual sin, but that was not its only sin. Though perhaps this was the last straw in a string of downward leading sins which began innocently enough with having too much wealth and too much leisure time with little concern for what is right or wrong or for those who were less fortunate.

What kind of warning does the story of Sodom and Gomorrah give us in America today?

Yes America even with all its faults, as a nation, seems to have been abundantly blessed by God. Contrary to what some people have tried to teach, America is never mentioned in the Bible. Unlike Israel we have no unique role – that we know of -- to play in God’s future plan for the ages. While there have been plenty of cultures throughout history who have thrived while even being more evil, more immoral, more dysfunctional than we are today, yet eventually they all faced some form of divine judgment. So what’s to stop God from rendering a similar judgment on us as a nation?

Perhaps He needs to set another more modern example from which another country might learn and be warned?

That is what makes this a very pertinent and pressing Memorial Day message. As we remember the Christian ideals upon which our nation was founded, as we remember those who fought and died to defend our way of life, let us take to heart that line from the Battle Hymn of the Republic, *as Christ died to make men holy, let us live to make men free, while God is marching on.* We have been left here to let our light shine and by doing good deeds to cause people to glorify God in heaven (1 Peter 2:12).

Let’s pray that God can always find 10, 50, 500, or more, righteous people still living in our land, working to bring it back to repentance and godliness, so for their sakes He might spare us.

Lets pray about this.