Genesis 18:20 Then the Lord said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.”

Did you see that little “then” at the beginning of our text? Remember last week when we spoke of the three visitors to Abraham, the Lord and two angels and I told you that there were two reason I believe that history was recorded for us. The first reason was the strengthening of the faith of Sarah, to reassure her that the promise of a son would be fulfilled and was in the power of God. The second reason I spoke to you about was that the Lord was going to give Abraham a chance to exercise and strengthen his faith as the Lord turned his attention to the issue at hand in Sodom and Gomorrah. It is an interesting text and well worth considering for the lessons we can learn. Let’s just jump in under the theme: **A STUDY OF GOD’S GOODNESS.**

That first verse that I highlighted, you had better make sure you contemplate it before you move on to anything else in this section. It says, **“Then the Lord said, ‘The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.’”** Dear people, do you honestly think that God doesn’t know exactly who, what, when and where in this situation. What we have before us is an “anthropopathic” statement, that is, a statement alerting us to the fact that God is going to act and move in our world. The term literally means “man’s emotions” which tells us that Scripture is going to attribute to God man’s emotions and actions because in truth, it is the only way we can comprehend God. What is most clear here, is that God is announcing to Abraham his coming action and in that coming action inviting Abraham to an open discussion on the subject. Note this please: This is not happening so that we can learn something about Abraham, but rather so that we can learn something about the Lord our God! Pay attention to that: we are learning about God.

So what is clear is that God already knows everything going on and the outcry that is happening. At this point we are not told specifically what the problem is and yet the problem is described with terms like **“great outcry, sin so grievous”** and **“bad.”** All of this lets us grasp that to the Lord, and that’s what counts here, the situation is dire and calls for His righteous judgment.

Next verse. **“The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the Lord.”** Even though our text says that God is going **“to go down”** notice that the Lord our God sends his angels. We learn in chapter 19 that these two men are really angels, the eyes and ears of the Lord. It suggests to us that what the angels see, God sees, what they hear, God hears. The term “angels” is one that simple means “messengers”. The angels are messengers of God. Do they really need to go to this city to judge the wickedness of the people? No, they don’t. So why do they go? In reality, since God already knows everything these angels are not sent as judges or to get a firsthand knowledge of sin, God knows everything already! They are sent for the purpose of delivering Lot and his family from the coming judgment of God! In the process of their doing that, we are clearly given a picture of the absolute wickedness that is going on there. Again important to grasp. We can see, by how these people behave that there is absolute wickedness.

I guess this is just as good a place as any to address just what the sin was. I am not as quick as most to simply condemn homosexuality as the main culprit here. That such was a factor, yes, just read chapter 19 and you will see. But note that Lot also offers his two virgin daughters to the evil crowd rather than hand over the two men that I believe Lot knew were angels. Note also that Lot himself is not attacked nor molested, hard pressed, roughed up but not molested. If anything, I would tell you that I believe the problem to simply be “rampant, uncontrolled, do what you want sexuality.” The people seemed to have an attitude of viciousness and “we will do what we please” to guests and visitors to our town. What is clear is that such uncontrolled sin, such a disobedience to the will of God is the major factor here. That doesn’t dismiss the homosexual sin here but helps us to grasp the sin was much deeper. In truth, the problem is rampant unbelief, a total disregard for the Lord and his will. And by the way, if you read chapter 19, don’t miss verse 9, the wicked crowd of men speaking to Lot. It says, **“Get out of our way! This fellow came here as an alien and now he wants to play the judge! We’ll treat you worse than them.”** All you have to do is listen to today’s rhetoric from those who practice such disregard for God’s will and you will realize that not much has changed! It is the old, “either you agree with us or we will make you miserable and sorry attitude.” Unbelief is still a problem!

Now back to our words. As the two men depart to rescue Lot and family, Abraham does indeed take up a discussion with the Lord. His words are driven by the Spirit the Lord has clearly given this man. A spirit of compassion and care. A spirit of concern and love for his fellow man. Abraham starts this way, **“Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of fifty righteous people in it?”** Remember that Abraham is going to bargain this down to ten! He is courteous and humble, but who wouldn’t be before the Lord God? It is what we learn in this process that is so awesome and what we are going to learn about is the Lord.

Again, remember, we are learning about the Lord. Notice that clearly God has revealed much more to Abraham than we are initially told. Abraham is aware that the city is going to be swept away, that is, destroyed and Abraham is concerned with how this judgment will look to the people of the world. So Abraham bargains, actually discusses the issue of “righteous souls.” Abraham is concerned for the righteous, that they not perish with the ungodly. Here is the Christian attitude. Concern for souls. I believe Abraham knew what was going on in those cities, after all his nephew foolishly lived there. Abraham did not want the godly unjustly dealt with. So he speaks up for them. And yes, I believe Abraham in talking about “the righteous” is talking about those who are believers. If there are 50, 45, 40, 30, 20 or 10 believers will you spare them? Note that God, in grace and love always say, “I will spare the city for the sake of as few as 10 righteous souls.”

What is righteous? Those who believe in the Lord. I think at this point that Lot and his daughters are believers, those who trust and put their confidence in the Lord. Living in that city will take its toll on their faith in the long run, but as of right now note that God is going to deliver them, more than that, God is not going to destroy one of the 5 cities (you do recall that 5 cities were being looked at, not just two!) just for the sake of Lot! Now, have you learned anything about God?

I have! God is gracious and good and yet God is also very just. God makes no mistakes in his judgements, but rather judges with compassion and care for the souls of the world. In the situation of these cities, 5 cities initially with 4 being destroyed, please note that God could not even find 10 righteous, that is, 10 believing people! What God found was 3…Lot and his two daughters. Note that Lot’s wife, though initially saved, disobeyed the Lord and looked back, bringing about her destruction. In 4 cities there were only 3 believers! And God saw to it that the 3 were rescued. The rest, as is clear from God’s Word, got what they wanted. They didn’t want the goodness and love of God. They didn’t want the foundation of God’s morals and behaviors. They wanted things their way, if you would a kind of living hellishness and wickedness and God granted them their wish….eternally!

Again, some food for thought. Just how bad was their hatred of what was good and right? Please note that even once they were struck blind, the Scripture indicates that instead of being humbled and fearful in this blindness, instead of being motivated to repentance, the people struck blind were still looking for Lot’s door to bring their evil upon Lot’s guests! That is truly a blindness of exceptional darkness. As you contemplate that, there is no way you can proclaim that God is unjust!

Why doesn’t Abraham bargain down some more? I think because Abraham now knew and understood the uniqueness and compassion of the Lord God. Abraham knew that God would save the righteous, that God would not be unjust and bring down the believing. Such is the nature of God. For that matter, if you really want to grasp the true nature of God, then please contemplate Jesus.

God so loved the world that He sent his one and only Son. Even though the world is by and large wicked and enemies to God and his truth, please note that God still sends His Son as the Savior. Jesus came to pay the price of sin for us, that is, to take upon himself the hell and damnation that the righteousness of God demands because of sin. Jesus paid the price. For us, well, for everyone! I believe Jesus even died for the sins of those in Sodom and Gomorrah, just as he has died for the sins of those who today grievously sin against the Lord. Jesus died for the sins of all of mankind, past, present and future. Forgiveness of sin and eternal life can be anyone’s. All God asks is that you put your trust and faith in Jesus.

But be careful. It is not trust and faith to declare sin good and right. It is not trust and faith to decide you can do what you want and God will just have to accept it. No, we need to grasp and accept God’s Word. God, in faith, calls us to repent of sin. That means we fight against the lure and horror of sin. That means when we falter (we will) and do sin, we turn to the Lord our God and plead for his grace and love…grace and love He always extends to us. But we then renew our battle against sin! We fight and wrestle to do what is good and right before the Lord! And when we do fall again, please note that God will forgive us again. The difference is that as God’s children and believers we will again repent, again turn to the mercy of God, and again believe in the forgiveness that Jesus has won for us. That’s the Christian life. Not that we are holy and perfect, but that we are sinful, lost and enemies of God by nature, but we know that, we in Jesus are forgiven by grace and that this grace grants us a living faith where we strive to do God’s will. And God will bless us.

Such is the love of God. God is gracious and good. He does and asks only what is just and right. He forgives us and guides us. He cares for us and loves us. He grants us His Word that we know his wonder and marvel and that we understand what it means to be a child of God! This lesson is about the grace and wonder of God and yet also about the justice of God. It is one of the earliest glimpses of how God deals with the sinner. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, whoever does not believe will be condemned. God does not change. Hear and believe in him. Amen.