



Bible Study

April 13, 2016

Genesis 18:20-33

Isaiah 42:5-16

Proverbs 16:17-17:17

Genesis 18:20-33 (NKJV) -

And the Lord said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know." Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the Lord. And Abraham came near and said, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it? Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" So the Lord said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes." Then Abraham answered and said, "Indeed now, I who am but dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: Suppose there were five less than the fifty righteous; would You destroy all of the city for lack of five?" So He said, "If I find there forty-five, I will not destroy it." And he spoke to Him yet again and said, "Suppose there should be forty found there?" So He said, "I will not do it for the sake of forty." Then he said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Suppose thirty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." And he said, "Indeed now, I have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: Suppose twenty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of twenty." Then he said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak but once more: Suppose ten should be found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of ten." So the Lord went His way as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.

Proverbs 16:17-17:17 (NKJV) - The highway of the upright is to depart from evil; he who keeps his way preserves his soul. Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud. He who heeds the word wisely will find good, and whoever trusts in the Lord, happy is he. The wise in heart will be called prudent, and sweetness of the lips increases learning. Understanding is a wellspring of life to him who has it. but the correction of fools is folly. The heart of the wise teaches his mouth, and adds learning to his lips. Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones. There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death. The person who labors, labors for

himself, or his hungry mouth drives him on. An ungodly man digs up evil, and it is on his lips like a burning fire, a perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends. A violent man entices his neighbor, and leads him in a way that is not good. He winks his eye to devise perverse things; He purses his lips and brings about evil. The silver-haired head is a crown of glory, if it is found in the way of righteousness. He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city. The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord. Better is a dry morsel with quietness, than a house full of feasting with strife. A wise servant will rule over a son who causes shame, and will share an inheritance among the brothers. The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the liar listens eagerly to a spiteful tongue. Who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker; He who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished. Children's children are the crown of old men, and the glory of children is their father. Excellent speech is not becoming to a fool, much less lying lips to a prince. A present is a precious stone in the eyes of its possessor; wherever he turns, he prospers. He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates friends. Rebuke is more effective for a wise man than a hundred blows on a fool. An evil man seeks only rebellion; therefore a cruel messenger will be sent against him. Let a man meet a bear robbed of her cubs, father than a fool in his folly. Whoever rewards evil for good, evil will not depart from his house. The beginning of strife is like releasing water; therefore stop contention before a quarrel starts. He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just, either of them alike are an abomination to the Lord. Why is there in the hand of a fool the purchase price of wisdom, since he has no heart for it? A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

Isaiah 42:5-16 (NKJV) - Thus says God the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it, and spirit to those who walk on it: "I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house. I am the Lord, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to carved images. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them." Sing to the Lord a new song, and His praise from the ends of the earth, you who go down to the sea, and all that is in it, you and you inhabitants of them! Let the wilderness and its cities lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar inhabits let the inhabitants of Sela sing, let them shout from the top of the mountains. Let them give glory to the Lord, and declare His praise in the coastlands. The Lord shall go forth like a mighty man; He shall stir up His zeal like a man of war. He shall cry out, yes, shout aloud; He shall prevail against His enemies. "I have held My peace a long time, I have I will cry like a woman in labor, I will pant and gasp at once. I will lay waste the mountains and hills, and dry up all their vegetation; I will make the rivers coastlands, and I will dry up the pools. I will bring the blind by a way they did not know; I will lead them in paths they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight. These things I will do for them, and not forsake them."

Commentary -

Today's readings from the Old Testament Scriptures give us a balanced view of the God whom we worship. This balanced view is critically important to our knowledge of God, and to our salvation. As sinful human beings, we are prone to distort our view of God to fit our own desires of what we might want Him to be at any given point, but we do so to our detriment. To whatever degree we distort our image of God, to that extent we fail also to know Him. One area in which we are particularly prone to distort God's character is in our understanding, or the lack thereof, of His justice and His mercy, and

how they relate to one another.

On the one hand, there is a distorted view of God in which He seems to be concerned with little other than wrath. These types of views are based around the truth that God has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ to be the righteous judge, who will one day judge the living and the dead. This truth rightly invites us to fear the Lord, not in the sense of being terrified, but in inspiring awe and respect, and further moving us to repentance as we prepare ourselves for that Day of Judgment. When this is separated out from the rest of God's character as revealed in Christ, however, it becomes distorted, and this fear becomes not the respect of a child for a Father or even a subject toward a King, but rather a slavish kind of fear shown in the face of bullies and tyrants. This creates a kind of fear that rather than drawing us back to Christ in repentance, pushes us farther away from Him as we fall into despair at our own unworthiness.

Over against this type of distortion, we have the today's reading from the book of Genesis, as Abraham haggles with God over the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. These cities are wicked, and notice that Abraham makes no excuse for, nor does he ever deny, their wickedness and evil. Indeed, immediately after this story we see the depth of their evil when the angels sent to rescue Lot and his family, rather than being shown hospitality as strangers and visitors in the city, are very nearly victims of sexual assault. Despite their evil, Abraham has pity on them, and pleads with God to show the same mercy and compassion on them that Abraham feels. What Abraham learns is that God already has that same mercy and compassion, and more, as unable to find even ten righteous in the two cities, He still makes provision that Lot and his family, at least, would not suffer along with the wicked. The truth is that God desires that none should perish or come under condemnation, and even as He prepares, in His righteousness, to judge the world, He makes provision for us in Christ that we might find Life rather than death.

The opposite distortion of God's character, however, can be equally damaging to our salvation. There is another distorted view of God, based on God's revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ as perfect Love. We, however, as sinful people have a distorted view of what 'love' is, and have distorted it to be unconditional acceptance and support, even of evil and destructive behavior. It is true that Christ loved each of us, even at the moment of our deepest sinfulness and wickedness, that He was willing to lay down His life on our behalf. This does not, however, show us that He does not take our sin and wickedness seriously, that He does not care what we choose to do, that He does not care for and love also those whom we may hurt and victimize with our own sinfulness. Rather, the sufferings of Christ, His brutal passion and death, show us just how seriously indeed He does take our sin, and just what price He was willing to pay for us in the currency of His blood. Christ loves even the vilest of sinners, but He also loves the orphan, the widow, the weak, the poor, the homeless, the stranger, and the powerless, and He loves them enough to have guaranteed them justice, and as today's reading from Isaiah tells us plainly, though He keeps His peace for a long time, the time of reckoning will come, and it is up to us to make things right before He does.

When we keep these truths regarding who God is, who He has revealed Himself to be in Jesus Christ, we can come to truly know the true God. The true God is one who loves human persons, and desires that none of us should perish in our sinfulness, but that each of us should repent of our sins, return to Him, and find eternal life. This is not just some passive longing on God's part, but Jesus Christ laid down His life, suffered death on the Cross, to make a way for us to make such a return. This does nothing, however, to change the reality that the consequence of sin is death, and that one day each and every one of us will stand accountable for what we have done in this life, and if we failed to repent, receive the wages of our evil labors. As we come closer now to the conclusion of Great Lent, it is not too late if we have not started to repent. Each moment which God gives to us to live upon this earth is another opportunity to turn and live. Let us not allow these opportunities to slip through our fingers.

Questions to Ponder -

- 1) In today's reading from Genesis, we see Abraham essentially haggle with God to ask him to spare the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah. What is revealed is that once again, God does not desire to see the deaths even of the wicked, and that He will not destroy the righteous with the wicked, but makes provision for them, to save them out of the midst of evil. It is further revealed, however, that Abraham has this same heart. How do you react when sickness or suffering or other forms of correction befall people who have done evil to you? Does it make you happy when people who have hurt you are hurt in return? Do you hope that people who have wronged you will someday be punished? Or can you, like Abraham, intercede for those people before God, that He would forgive and not destroy them? Can you find a way to pray that God would forgive people for sins they have committed against you?
- 2) Today's reading from Proverbs contains several warnings regarding how we use our speech. Specifically, the way in which gossip and untruth can destroy us and those around us. If God is in the business not of condemning us in our sins, but of reconciling us to Himself and to each other, then gossip, as it divides people and turns them against each other, is a grave sin. When gossip finds its way to you, do you seek to stop and bury it, or do you delight in hearing it and eagerly pass it on? When you speak, particularly about others, are your words aimed to help them and to build them up, or to find fault and take delight in their misfortunes?
- 3) Isaiah reminds us that though God is long-suffering and patient, and desires that all of us would turn back to Him and repent of our sins and find life, that there will one day be reckoning, when we will stand before Him and give account for our actions. In addition to being willing to overlook and forgive the sins of others directed toward us, do you seek to make right sins that you have committed against others? Do you attempt to correct problems or hurt which you may have caused, or do you just expect people whom you may have sinned against to 'get over it' and be forgiving? If our Lord returned at this moment to settle all disputes, would there be anyone with a complaint against you that He would need to resolve? Is there any way you could work to resolve that situation yourself now?

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