

THE JOURNEY FROM BARRENNESS TO HOPE

Part IX – No Room for Sin

My first culture jolt when I visited Hong Kong for the first time was my subway experience. I could not believe how many people could fit into a subway cab! Literally there is no such thing as personal space; people are close to one another, bodies touching other bodies. If you are lucky, you can get one of the limited coveted seats; but, if you are too slow entering the train, which I was always, you are out of luck. You then have to stand with everybody else, trying very hard to keep whatever space you have for yourself and trying not to touch anybody else (though this was impossible). I remember one time the subway was so crowded that one guy was physically leaning on me just to keep his balance. This made me lean on another person for support; I supposed that was how all of us were standing up. And here is the kicker: even though there is no space left, people getting into the train will still try to squeeze in, making everything even tighter than before.

My subway experience reminds me about how we accept sin into our lives. For some reason we think that there is room for sin to exist in us. We somehow convince ourselves that sin has the right to dwell in us. If there is any opening in our hearts sin can have that space. But, God has a completely opposite view on this. In God's eyes there is no room for sin at all. In fact, sin should never exist anywhere in our journey from barrenness to hope. This is evidently seen in the text today. How does God deal with sin when sin interferes in our experience of hope? The story centers on Lot, Abraham's nephew. From his life story we will understand why in hope there is no room whatsoever for sin to operate.

Text: Genesis 19:1-28 (NLT)

¹That evening the two angels came to the entrance of the city of Sodom, and Lot was sitting there as they arrived. When he saw them, he stood up to meet them. Then he welcomed them and bowed low to the ground. ²"My lords," he said, "come to my home to wash your feet, and be my guests for the night. You may then get up in the morning as early as you like and be on your way again."

"Oh no," they said, "we'll just spend the night out here in the city square."

³But Lot insisted, so at last they went home with him. He set a great feast before them, complete with fresh bread made without yeast. After the meal, ⁴as they were preparing to retire for the night, all the men of Sodom, young and old, came from all over the city and surrounded the house. ⁵They shouted to Lot, "Where are the men who came to spend the night with you? Bring them out so we can have sex with them." ⁶Lot stepped outside to talk to them, shutting the door behind him. ⁷"Please, my brothers," he begged, "don't do such a wicked thing. ⁸Look--I have two virgin daughters. Do with them as you wish, but leave these men alone, for they are under my protection."

⁹"Stand back!" they shouted. "Who do you think you are? We let you settle among us, and now you are trying to tell us what to do! We'll treat you far worse than those other men!" And they lunged at Lot and began breaking down the door. ¹⁰But the two angels reached out and pulled Lot in and bolted the door. ¹¹Then they blinded the men of Sodom so they couldn't find the doorway.

¹²"Do you have any other relatives here in the city?" the angels asked. "Get them out of this place--sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone else. ¹³For we will destroy the city completely. The stench of the place has reached the LORD, and he has sent us to destroy it."

¹⁴So Lot rushed out to tell his daughters' fiances, "Quick, get out of the city! The LORD is going to destroy it." But the young men thought he was only joking.

¹⁵At dawn the next morning the angels became insistent. "Hurry," they said to Lot. "Take your wife and your two daughters who are here. Get out of here right now, or you will be caught in the destruction of the city."

¹⁶When Lot still hesitated, the angels seized his hand and the hands of his wife and two daughters and rushed them to safety outside the city, for the LORD was merciful. ¹⁷"Run for your lives!" the angels warned. "Do not stop anywhere in the valley. And don't look back! Escape to the mountains, or you will die."

¹⁸"Oh no, my lords, please," Lot begged. ¹⁹"You have been so kind to me and saved my life, and you have granted me such mercy. But I cannot go to the mountains. Disaster would catch up to me there, and I would soon die. ²⁰See, there is a small village nearby. Please let me go there instead; don't you see how small it is? Then my life will be saved."

²¹"All right," the angel said, "I will grant your request. I will not destroy that little village. ²²But hurry! For I can do nothing until you are there." From that time on, that village was known as Zoar.

²³The sun was rising as Lot reached the village. ²⁴Then the LORD rained down fire and burning sulfur from the heavens on Sodom and Gomorrah. ²⁵He utterly destroyed them, along with the other cities and villages of the plain, eliminating all life--people, plants, and animals alike. ²⁶But Lot's wife looked back as she was following along behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.

²⁷The next morning Abraham was up early and hurried out to the place where he had stood in the LORD's presence. ²⁸He looked out across the plain to Sodom and Gomorrah and saw columns of smoke and fumes, as from a furnace, rising from the cities there. ²⁹But God had listened to Abraham's request and kept Lot safe, removing him from the disaster that engulfed the cities on the plain.

1. We cannot live out hope when sin engulfs our whole life. (vv. 1-8)

- ...*all the men* of Sodom, young and old, came from *all over the city* and *surrounded* the house...

The story makes it obviously clear the power sin has over us. We tend to think that sin can only touch certain areas of our lives, and only areas in which we allow it to impact. It is almost as if we have authority over what sin can or cannot do.

But, that is not what sin is all about. Sin has authority that will consume our very soul. The writer of this story is emphasizing this very point with words like *all* and *surround* to describe the evilness of sin. I am reminded again of the fires that devastated San Diego County a couple of years ago. From small flames come large fires that quickly destroyed land, homes, and lives. That is what sin is. We think our sins are small things that we have a grasp on; but in reality the power of sin will overwhelm us and end up controlling our lives.

With all-consuming effect, sinful passions lead to sinful destruction:

2. Sin only invites hostility and ruin. (vv. 9-11)

- Sin only promotes human control and desire.

"Stand back!" they shouted. "Who do you think you are? We let you settle among us, and now you are trying to tell us what to do! We'll treat you far worse than those other men!"

You see, sin pushes God out of the picture. And with that, sin also pushes hope away from our lives. Instead, we allow our human desires to dictate how our lives should be lived out. Everything is about *us* rather than about *God* and his righteous values. Unfortunately, this only leads to brokenness and barrenness.

- Sin always goes against God's purpose and plan.

The men of Sodom unabashedly questioned Lot's identity by shouting to him, "Who do you think you are"? The ironic thing here is that they should have turned that question onto themselves. You see, sin blinds us in not believing that we are children of God. Sin deceives us into believing that our plans, and not God's, are worthy to be lived out. Sin tricks us to think that we are better than God. How can hope exist in such a desolate spiritual environment? In sin, we do not allow God to tell us what to do, how to live righteous lives that would usher in hope and blessing.

- Sin reflects aggressive violence that destroys relationships.

*And they lunged at Lot and began **breaking down** the door.*

When we tolerate sin and give sin space to maneuver in us, the fruits will be one of hostility and ruin. Sin will never cultivate fruits of blessings and transformation. Sin will always propagate corruption, destruction, and separation. Relationships will always remain shattered, lives will drown in barrenness. Hope and sin cannot co-exist together. Our journeys towards hope will sputter to a complete stop because sin never yearns for hope; it only craves for emptiness.

3. God **never allows the existence of hope and sin together.** (vv. 23-26)

- Note the seriousness of God’s hatred, and thus judgment, against sin and those who live it out

*Then the LORD rained down **fire and burning sulfur** from the heavens on Sodom and Gomorrah. He **utterly destroyed** them, along with the other cities and villages of the plain, **eliminating** all life-- people, plants, and animals alike.*

Because of his righteous nature, God does not permit sin to grow alongside hope. In fact, it is impossible for sin and hope to exist side by side. When sin tries to crowd in, God automatically severs the ties by completely annihilating sin. Hope will always increase in God’s eyes; sin, on the other hand, will face its own doom.

God never gives sin a second chance. In fact, God does not even give sin a fighting chance. In God’s court sin has no voice to defend itself because sin never reflects the character of God. In the story God hails absolute destruction upon sin and its evil behavior to tell us his strong disdain against it. “There is no room for sin,” God is exhorting us; we should never even entertain the thought that sin can lead us to hope. The only road that sin takes us to is utter devastation.

4. Hope is enacted **when people choose to live righteously before God.** (v. 29)

- Lot’s life was spared because of Abraham’s obedience to God (see Genesis 18:16-33)

In Genesis 18 Abraham petitioned God to have mercy for anybody who was righteous in Sodom and Gomorrah. God heard Abraham’s request and followed through on it by sparing Lot and his daughters. Hope is experienced when we choose to live righteous lives before God. God sees our obedience towards him and he will protect us from despair even when the world around us is crumbling down. Lot was surrounded by sin’s treacherous ways, but he held onto God’s commands and did not fall into sinister deceit. Because of that, God spared Lot’s life and ushered new hope for Lot to connect with.

In conclusion, when we journey in the direction towards hope we must not be swayed away by the lure of sin. Sin prevents us from fully experiencing the hope of God in our lives. Sin dupes us to believe that our plans are greater than God’s. In sin we become in control over our lives, but this only leads us to sure destruction. We must choose to submit our whole lives under the authority of God, trusting in his protection and provision. Sin cannot destroy us when we are in the embrace of divine hope. But, the divine will destroy us when we are in the grasp of sin. Let our choices be right – leave no room in our lives for sin to develop.

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