

Title: “For the Sake of Ten...”

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Gen 18:32b

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Service Readings: Gen 18:17-33, Col 2:6-15, Luke 11:1-13

“For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.” This was the conversation with Abraham. But God did destroy the city after rescuing Lot for he found none righteous. But this is not an isolated event for God looked upon the whole earth and found none righteous. However, instead of destroying it, he saved it through his son, Jesus.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Scripture alone.... If you have hung out with Lutherans long enough you have undoubtedly heard this phrase, and if you have *been* a Lutheran long enough you have probably uttered these words yourself! And if you are a *lifelong* Lutheran.... you probably even know the phrase in Latin! Sola Scriptura. Scripture alone. We stand firm on this foundational statement and sometimes even use it as a rallying cry when in mixed circles of those “non-Lutheran denominations!”

Luther once said that “Scripture alone is the true lord and master of all writings and doctrine on earth. If that is not granted, what is Scripture good for?” And Paul, in his letter to Timothy writes something similar. He says “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:16-17)”

We Lutherans hold fast to scripture; we *cling* to scripture because we recognize that in, with, and under the letters printed on the page we can find God’s power and God’s grace. But we also recognize that within these pages we can also learn about God: who he is and what he has done for us. Every word of scripture teaches us something about; it reveals to us something about him but sometimes that lesson is not quite obvious. And I think that today’s Old Testament reading is one such example. What is being revealed about God in these verses? Listen again to the second section, starting in verse 27. We are in the middle of the conversation that Abraham is having with God about saving the city.

²⁷ Abraham answered and said, “Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. ²⁸ Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking. Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?” And he said, “I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.” ²⁹ Again he spoke to him and said, “Suppose forty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of forty I will not do it.” ³⁰ Then he said, “Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there.” He answered, “I will not do it, if I find thirty there.” ³¹ He said, “Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it.” ³² Then he said, “Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of ten I will not destroy

it.”³³ And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place.

What have we learned about God just now? Is it that he a God that demands justice? A God that seeks it out and releases it on those who won't submit to his authority? Or maybe we have learned that we have a God whose decisions can be influenced by the petitions of man. These are true, but is there more that is hidden within these passages? Is there something else that we can learn about him this morning? I believe that there is.

As this scene plays out, we can almost hear the desperation in Abraham's voice as he pleads for the lives of the righteous. Will God *really* count them among his enemies? Abraham knows that Lot and his family reside there and so there is urgency in his negotiation. "For the sake of ten," Abraham pleads. He recognizes this as a life and death situation for those he loves. And God. He is a God of anger, a God that has come to pour out his judgement on the people of these cities. His voice is thunderous, determined. The time has come; the time is now. Judgement *will* be handed down. The only question is to whom it will be given. The people of the city deserve God's justice, don't they? They have wronged God and so isn't it proper to demand justice in response? We demand justice when someone wrongs us. Can there be more tension, any more stress, that can be added to these moments? The cup of judgement is in his right hand and Sodom and Gomorrah are about to drink from it. Hearts are pumping. Adrenaline is rushing. Emotions are rising. It's like a climax to an action movie, but this time it is not fiction. There is no leaving the movie theater with the peacefulness that this was all made up. People are going to die. Real people. And people are going to spend eternity in hell. Real people. Can it get any more climatic than this?

But there is something else that is hidden behind the thunderous voice of God and the anxious cries of Abraham. There is something that is quietly hiding in the background, waiting in the wings, so to speak. It is something that is just as powerful a lesson, strike that, something that is even more powerful a lesson for us but it is a something that we can easily miss if we don't look for it. What could be so powerful, so important, yet be overwhelmed by the actions playing out in the foreground of the world's stage? And why would God seemingly *hide* it from us?

Ah! But you see, what we find hidden, what we find subdued only appears this way when portions of scripture are read in isolation of each other. This passage is one such example. When we extract it from the story of God, when we read it as just an independent event, we lose master storyline. And when that happens, the things of God become hidden from us. And so if we believe what Paul says, that "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" then we must read *all* scripture for it is *there*, in the *complete* word of God, that he makes himself known.

And so I want to place this account within the context of this master story because when I do, that which seems to be hidden becomes something so obvious as to be inescapable. It is something that is louder than the thunderous voice of God and more peaceful than the anxious pleas of Abraham. For you see, when this account is placed along side all other accounts of God, there can be no denial that what God reveals about himself in all of scripture is his compassion. Over and above all, he reveals his unmeasurable compassion for his creation.

“For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.” This is what God said. He would have compassion on even ten people who turned their faces to him. He would destroy the rest but have compassion on them. And this wasn’t the first time he sought those who sought him. In the first garden, after the fall, he searched the hearts of Adam and Eve. And even though he found them sinful, he found them still looking upon him. And it was the same during the time of Noah. You see, time and again, we find God searching for those who search for him. And time and again, we find God pouring out his compassion on those who turn to him. But even all of these accounts are not the complete story but just a foretaste for the ultimate act of God’s compassion.

You see, even though the cup of judgement was in God’s hand and even though Sodom and Gomorrah drank from it, the judgement of the cities were only but a drop from that cup. Even in this act, God showed compassion by withholding all of his wrath on those who had rejected and turned away from him. That cup was still full after he had destroyed the cities, and it would stay full until his son would hang from the cross and drink its contents completely.

This is the compassion of God: that he would withhold his *full* judgement from us and instead pour it out completely on the only one who could consume it. The wrath of God, shown in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was only a foretaste of the destruction that we deserve to be released upon us. But that destruction, that which was due us, was instead handed over to his son who received in in our place.

This is the God of scripture. This is who is revealed to us. A God of compassion. A God of mercy. A God who will pour out his judgement on his own son instead of pouring it out on us. Do you recognize *this* God? You only will through scripture alone.

Please pray with me.

Lord,

It is through your word that you reveal to us who you are. You are a God who loves, who redeems, who saves. We pray you continue to shine your face upon us that we would remain turned towards you in all our days, and in all our ways.

Amen.