

## **“A FAMILY ADRIFT” (Genesis 19:30-38)**

This week I thought about a speaker I heard at Men’s Roundup one year named Steve Farrar, who talked about a book he had just written called *Anchor Man*. In the book Farrar talks about the time as a kid his dad took him to see the USS Eisenhower – one of the of the largest ships in the world and that is still in operation today. The gigantic aircraft carrier is over three football fields long, weighs 95,000 tons, has a flight deck comprised of 4 ½ acres, and carries over 6,000 sailors. What Farrar found most fascinating about the ship was its two anchors, each of which weighed 60,000 pounds. Each anchor was attached to a chain that weighed 665,000 pounds and stretched to a full length of 1,082 feet. Each link in the chain weighed 365 pounds. If just one of those links should happen to break, the ship would be set adrift.

Farrar went on to say that God has designed the family to be the anchor of society – as the family goes, so goes society. Each individual family is a link in a very long chain that stretches out for hundreds, and even thousands, of years. Each man, he said, is responsible to take care of his link and keep it anchored on God.

British anthropologist John Unwin conducted a groundbreaking study of eighty civilizations that have come and gone over the last 4000 years and discovered that a common thread ran through all of them. In each instance, they started with strong moral values and a heavy emphasis on the family. As each civilization became prosperous it became increasingly lax in its standards of sexual morality and as a result the family began to fracture and nation lost its cohesion and purpose. Every one of these eighty civilizations fell within one generation of the collapse of their family structures.

For the past sixty years we’ve witnessed the breakdown of the family and the fallout has been enormous. When politicians and pundits talk about the social issues of the day like crime and poverty and addiction and suicide, no one wants to talk about the fracturing of the family. Yet study after study reveals the impact that divorce and fatherlessness have on children, who often grow up to repeat the same cycle and pass it on the next generation.

This morning in Genesis 19 we’re going to look a very dysfunctional family, and see how one broken link set a family adrift for generations to come. For the past two weeks we’ve been looking at chapter 19 and the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, but it’s really about the story of Lot. Verses 30-38 record what happens to Lot and his family following the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and it’s not a happy ending. It’s dark, depressing, and shocking. But if you hang on with me, there is some really good news at the end that gives hope to every family.

I’m going to start by just reading the entire passage, and then go back and see what God has for us to learn. Genesis 19:30-38 says...

“Lot and his two daughters left Zoar and settled in the mountains, for he was afraid to stay in Zoar. He and his two daughters lived in a cave. One day the older daughter said to the younger, ‘Our father is old, and there is no man around here to give us children—as is the custom all over the earth. Let’s get our father to drink wine and then sleep with him and preserve our family line through our father.’

That night they got their father to drink wine, and the older daughter went in and slept with him. He was not aware of it when she lay down or when she got up.

The next day the older daughter said to the younger, ‘Last night I slept with my father. Let’s get him to drink wine again tonight, and you go in and sleep with him so we can preserve our family line through our father.’ So they got their father to drink wine that night also, and the younger daughter went in and slept with him. Again he was not aware of it when she lay down or when she got up.

So both of Lot’s daughters became pregnant by their father. The older daughter had a son, and she named him Moab; he is the father of the Moabites of today. The younger daughter also had a son, and she named him Ben-Ammi; he is the father of the Ammonites of today.”

This is the kind of passage that we’re tempted to skip over, but if we believe that all scripture is profitable, then we must ask, “Why did God see fit to have this story – of all stories – included in the Bible?” We’ll unpack this as we move through the passage, but these verses, I believe, are intended to show a distinction between the family line of Abraham – which is anchored – and the family line of Lot – which is adrift – and in this story we see how Lot’s choices affect his family for generations to follow.

We first read about Lot in chapter 13 where he is a part of Abraham’s family and the covenant community of God. Having no children of his own, it’s likely that Abraham viewed his nephew Lot as his heir. But Lot decided to part ways with Abraham and moves, very foolishly, to Sodom. He was attracted to the beauty and wealth of the area, but didn’t stop to think about the ramifications of moving his family to one of the most wicked cities in history.

When it comes time for God to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot has to be dragged out of Sodom by the two angels. He’d become so comfortable with all the wealth and trappings of the city that even with the threat of fire and brimstone raining down on the city, he hesitated to leave. Lot’s wife was also hesitant to leave, and turned to a pillar of salt when she looked back.

The angels tell Lot to flee to the mountains, but instead Lot goes to live in the nearby town of Zoar. He wants cling to the fringes of what’s left of the valley. But we read in verse 30 that he eventually leaves Zoar because he’s afraid. We’re not told what he’s afraid of, but he probably sees that the people in Zoar are not much different than the people of Sodom, and that the city will soon fall under God’s judgment as well. So he does what he should have done in the first place – he heads for the hills.

What can’t be missed is the fact that Lot does not rejoin Abraham. Abraham lives less than thirty miles to the west in Hebron. Now that Lot has nothing but the shirt on his back, why doesn’t he go back to his uncle and the covenant relationship he has with God? Instead, Lot goes east – which in the Bible is symbolic of moving away from God – he goes east and along with his two daughters lives in a cave.

Living in a cave was not what Lot envisioned when he moved to Sodom. He saw a nice, comfortable life – a place where he could become wealthy and powerful. Unlike his uncle Abraham, who walked by faith and lived as a pilgrim looking forward to his eternal home in heaven – Lot walked by sight, sinking his roots into the temporary comforts and pleasures of the world.

Jesus said, “If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it” (Luke 9:24). Lot invested everything in Sodom, only to lose it all – he lost his wife, he lost his home, he lost his wealth, he lost his status and power, and now he is living in a cave. He tried to hang on to his life, but lost it.

The story now shifts to the next generation and the plan of Lot's daughters to keep their family name intact. When Lot moved to the Jordan River Valley, he didn't think about – or chose to ignore – what living in Sodom would mean for his family. He knew what living a righteous life was like by living with Abraham, but the wicked lifestyle of Sodom was all his daughters knew.

Psalm 1:1 says, “Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers.” Lot was placing his family in the midst of wickedness and it led to ruin. I can't help but think of all the child actors you read about who grew up in Hollywood and nearly every one of the, without exception, say it ruined them – they ended up in rehab, had a string of failed marriages, and became alienated from their families. Hollywood looked good from a distance, but it chewed them up and spit them out.

God knows what the world will do to us, and that's why He tells us to separate ourselves from the values and morals of the world. He wants to bless us. When we were raising our kids, I could feel the intense draw the world had on them and their peers, and how easy it was to be absorbed into the crowd. I couldn't control what happened outside my home, but I was determined – by God's grace – to control what happened in my home.

Ephesians 6:4 commands fathers to bring up their children in the training and instruction of the Lord – to teach them right from wrong – to teach them God's order and design for life and impress upon them the wisdom of living in harmony with His plan. Children do not come out of the womb knowing God's commands – they need to be taught and instructed. Deuteronomy 6 says the best way to do that is through everyday example and modeling – it better caught than taught.

One of Norman Rockwell's famous paintings, drawn in 1959, shows a suburban family going off to church, led by the oldest sister followed by Mom who is followed by the younger sister. All three women are dressed for church. Following them is a young boy who appears to be going with some reluctance. At the center of the painting is dad slumped in a chair, in his pajamas, reading the paper with a cigarette in his hand. As junior walks by he casts a longing eye at his father. He's going to church but he'd clearly rather be with his father.

Actions speak louder than our words, and the spiritual training and instruction of children is less about being a program and more about the spiritual atmosphere you create in your home. You lead by example. Proverbs 22:6 says, “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” This verse doesn't guarantee that your children will live according to your values – God gives every person, including children, the ability to make their own choices. But it does mean that they will never be able to get away from what you have impressed upon them. Even if they depart from God's ways when they are older, they will never be able to escape your life and testimony.

I heard someone say that godly parents can tip the scales in the right direction. We can't guarantee what our children will do but we can provide an atmosphere of commitment that makes it easier to choose Christ than to choose the way of the world.

Now we move on to the sordid part of the story. Lot's daughters want to have children. They've just lost their fiancés in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and they look around and say, “Where are we ever going to find a man to marry up in these hills, living in a cave?” In ancient culture preserving the family line was extremely important, and a woman's worth and purpose was wrapped up in having children. With no other men around, they see their father as their only hope of having children.

Nearly everyone agrees that incest is deplorable and crosses a moral line, but it raises an interesting question: Why is it wrong? What makes something morally acceptable or unacceptable? Where do you draw the line? For the past sixty years our secular culture has adopted a philosophy known as moral relativism. Moral relativism says that there is no global, absolute moral law that applies to all people, all times, and all places. Instead, morality is relative or situational to the times and circumstances – and no behavior can be defined as absolutely right or wrong – issues of morality are left up to the individual. You have your moral line and I have my moral line, and no one can claim that their standard is right. This way of thinking has led us to moral chaos we see today – where things once thought unthinkable and wrong are now cheered and celebrated.

In contrast, God has given an objective standard of morality – we don't have to guess what's right or wrong – God's order and design for the universe is revealed in the Bible, and whenever His order and design is embraced and honored, cultures thrive. God's laws protect us from harm and enhance our enjoyment of life. That's why David said, "I delight in your law – it preserves me and makes me wise – it keeps me on the right path."

Lot's daughters, tragically, are products of morally relative culture. They no longer live in Sodom, but Sodom still lives in them. Because they grew up in culture with no moral guardrails, they don't even think twice about having a child with their father. But they know that their father would never go along with their idea – he's no saint but he knows the difference between right and wrong. So they hatch a plan to get him drunk – not once, but twice – and on successive nights each daughter sleeps with their drunk father and gets pregnant.

It's easy to view Lot as the innocent party, but he's really reaping the bitter harvest of what he's sown. You'll remember that earlier in chapter 19 Lot was willing to give his daughters over to the mob to be raped, and now his daughters in essence rape him. Lot's daughters do not have a moral anchor and continue in the same dysfunction with which they were raised.

What's more, Lot's daughters do not pour wine down his throat – he knowingly drinks it – and whenever someone gets drunk it increases the chances of bad things happening. We saw the same kind of thing happen in Genesis 9 when Noah gets drunk and passes out naked in his tent and is ridiculed by his son.

In the Bible wine is pictured as a sign of God's blessing, and Psalms says it "gladdens the hearts of men" (Psalm 104:15). But the Bible also warns of the moral dangers associated with wine. Proverbs 20:1 says, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise." Being intoxicated lowers inhibitions and causes people to do and say things they never would if they were sober.

God's will for every believer is that we practice self-control, one of the fruits of the Spirit. Paul says, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). Getting drunk causes you to lose control, but being filled with the Spirit leads to self-control and keeps you from doing things you later regret.

Lot's drunkenness sets off a chain reaction of consequences that affects his family for generations to come. Both daughters have a son by their father – the oldest daughter names her son Moab, which means "son of our father," and the youngest daughter names her son Ben-Ammi, which means "son of my father's people." Both names show that the daughters feel no shame having a child with their father – they let the whole world know where their sons came from.

Earlier I asked, “What is this story doing in the Bible?” and the answer is to show the end result of Lot’s decision to move to Sodom, and how his choices set his family adrift for generations. Whenever a Jewish person read this story, they would immediately recognize the names of Moab and Ben-Ammi – both of whom became the father of two powerful nations – the Moabites and the Ammonites – and both of these nations would become thorns in the side of Israel for many centuries. The Moabites and Ammonites lived just to the east of Israel on the other side of the Jordan River, and would often attack Israel.

The full ramifications of Lot’s decision to move to Sodom was exposed by the character of these two nations. Moab and Ammon were often denounced in the Old Testament for their pagan, idolatrous ways, and God warned the people of Israel to have nothing to do with them. The Moabites and Ammonites were known as lawless and evil people – so wicked that they sacrificed their children in fire to their pagan gods.

And not surprising, given their heritage, they were sexually permissive and immoral. This is especially seen in Numbers 25 when the Children of Israel are about to reenter the Promised Land and Balak – the king of Moab – wants to stop them. He can’t defeat them militarily, so he thinks of a way to defeat them spiritually. He hires a soothsayer named Balaam to curse Israel, and when that doesn’t work, Balaam devises a plan for Israel to bring a curse upon themselves. He says to Balak, “Get your women to lure the men of Israel over to their camp to engage in sexual immorality and bow down to your gods. If you can’t beat them, have them join you.” This sounds exactly like what Lot’s daughters did – and the men of Israel fell right into their trap, and the result was disaster as God sent a plague upon Israel and 24,000 died.

In Psalm 108 God referred to Moab as His “washbasin.” He says, “Judah my scepter (a royal symbol); Moab is my washbasin (a place to wash your feet, a symbol of contempt)” (Psalm 108:8-9). God was disrespectful of Moab because they were disrespectful of Him. Moab was a cruel, vicious, wicked nation that had no regard for human life.

God knows what the world would do to His people, and that’s why He told Israel over and over, “Don’t have anything to do with these nations. Don’t intermingle with them or intermarry with them because bad company corrupts good character.”

The Moabites and Ammonites did not become wicked in a vacuum. They were the products of Sodom – they were the sons of Lot and his daughters – they came from a family adrift and continued the same cycle of dysfunction they came from.

Exodus 20:5-6 says, “I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.” This verse does not mean that your kids and grandkids will be punished for your sins – the emphasis in the Bible is always on personal responsibility. What it does mean is that the choices you make – whether good or bad – have a direct impact on the lives of your children and grandchildren. Children of parents who are abusive, who are alcoholics, who are promiscuous – often follow in the same footsteps. On the positive side, those who love God and live according to His order and design, bless the lives of a thousand generations.

I said earlier that there is some good news in this tragic story, and it comes some 600 years later in the book of Ruth. Ruth was a Moabite – a descendant Lot and his daughter – yet in God’s providence she was led to the land of Israel during a famine where she met Boaz, a Jew, and married him. She converted to the true and living God, and comes into the covenant community of Israel – the same covenant community that Lot left centuries earlier.

Ruth has a son named Obed. Obed has a son named Jesse, and Jesse has a son named David. Have you heard of him? From David's line, of course, came Jesus – and Ruth, the Moabite, becomes part of the family tree of Jesus in Matthew 1. The story of Ruth illustrates how a family cycle of dysfunction – which in this case had gone on for hundreds of years – that cycle can be broken by belonging to the covenant family of Abraham. The fulfillment of all of God's promises to Abraham is Jesus – his direct descendant, and all those who renounce sin and trust Jesus as their Savior become sons of Abraham and are given a clean slate and a fresh start.

Maybe you come from a family that was not anchored to God and a pattern of dysfunction was passed on from generation to generation. That pattern can be broken through Christ, who broke the power of sin through His death and resurrection. When you renounce your sin and turn to God by trusting Christ as your Savior from sin, you are forgiven and set free to live a new life – and you can set your family on a new trajectory – one that is anchored in God and His will for your life.

I remember reading about a former senator from the state of Michigan who said, “In my first term of Congress, I wanted to save the world. In my second term, I wanted to save the United States. In my third term, I wanted to save Michigan. Now at the end of my fourth term, if I can just save those sand dunes on Lake Michigan, I'll be a happy man.” I like that – you may not be able to save the world, but you can do something to save your own family – you can be a link that keeps your family connected to the anchor – and each family that is anchored to God has an impact on bringing other families to Christ.