

LIVING IN SODOM AND GOMORRAH

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Luke 17:26-30¹

A columnist reports that college teachers are perplexed with large numbers of students who cannot feel moral outrage at anything evil.² For example, they don't like the Holocaust that took place in Nazi Germany, but they won't say that killing millions of people was wrong. Between 10 and 20% of these students say that killing these millions of people was "a matter of taste or personal taste or preference, not moral judgment." "Of course I dislike the Nazis,' one student told Prof. Robert Simon, 'but who is to say that they are morally wrong?'"

Some students also refuse to condemn human sacrifice, because, they say, the Aztecs did it, and who is to judge them morally? Slavery is unfortunate, they add, but we can't say it's wrong! They have been educated to believe that "no one has the right to criticize the moral views of another group or culture." Another teacher asked the class if human sacrifice was wrong. One woman said, "I really don't know. If it was a religion of long standing . . ." Shades of paganism! The teacher was stunned at this lack of moral outrage about anything.

¹ #8 "We Gather Together"; #604 "We Know Not the Hour."

² John Leo wrote in the *U. S. News & World Report*

To those who know we are living in the time of the end, this sad news is not surprising. We are repeating the days of Noah before the Flood. But somewhere there should be an ark of safety where right is clearly distinguished from wrong, where truth is clearly distinguished from error.

That ark of safety is the remnant church. It should be a place where truth is positively, firmly confessed. But the same nihilism that is permeating society is trying to permeate the church so that many members have no firm convictions about the truths that made this church to be what it is. Anything can be "truth," for it's relative.

Jesus said positively, "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). But if we can't tell the difference between truth and error, or don't think the difference is important, how can we be "free"? And how can we help the world that needs to know? But there's good news: truth will triumph in that remnant church!

If you knew for certain that Jesus Christ Himself, the true Christ, was going to speak in the town square at a certain time, I am sure you would cancel all other appointments and go and listen. (Of course, we know that someday the false christ will maybe speak in your town square—don't go to hear him!). But what I mean is, deep in your heart you would like to hear what Jesus says to us today in our modern world.

Luke, who wrote the third Gospel in our New Testament, allows us to hear Jesus' last-days message just as clearly as if He were speaking on TV or the radio now. And we can trust what Luke

says more than we can trust any imposter who manages to get on TV or radio!

In Luke chapter 17 Jesus opens a curtain and reveals truth about the time in which we live now today. He exposes the reality of mysterious things that are happening around us. Unless we know what Jesus says about our times today, we are left in darkness, confused, bewildered, discouraged. Let's pay attention to what Luke reports that Jesus said:

First, Jesus said that the world in our day has become like the world was in the days just before the Flood of Noah: "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man" (Luke 17:26). When He says "the days of the Son of man" He is speaking of the time just before His second coming. He says further, "They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all" (vs. 27).

In order to understand what Jesus says, we must go back and look at what happened "in the days of Noah." Genesis chapters 6 through 9 describe that tremendous time. "The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth" (Gen. 6:11, 12).

That's a very sad picture. "All the earth"! Wickedness had spread so badly, that everyone was taking part in it. As Jesus says in Luke 17, people were all-absorbed in selfish pleasure. The

things they were doing weren't bad in themselves—it's not wrong to eat, it's not wrong to marry; but these people just before the Flood were crowding righteousness out of the world. Everywhere you turned, it was selfishness, getting ahead, no matter if that meant walking all over your neighbor. "Me, me, me"—that was everybody's cry. Buying things, keeping up with the neighbors, getting rich, enjoying selfish pleasure—this was what was on everybody's mind all the time. And it's that way now!

And to make bad matters worse, this extreme selfishness became so bad that "the earth was filled with violence."

Does anything about that Bible record remind you of what you see every day in the newspapers and see on TV and hear on radio? All around us is this incessant materialism and selfish pleasure-seeking. And what does it all lead to? Yes, you're right. It leads to violence. Murder, thefts, oppression of the poor, and wars.

God had to do something, or the world itself would be a vast cesspool, making it impossible for anyone to live here and be clean and righteous. Because God loved you and me and all the generations of human beings yet to live on planet earth, he decided He must destroy that ancient world and all those wicked people who had gone so far in evil that even God knew no way to change their evil minds and heart.

In all the world among its huge population, there was only one man (with his family) that was right with God, who cared more for righteousness than he did for pleasure or riches—and that man was

Noah. Hebrews 11 describes him as a man who “condemned the world” because he was not afraid to be different from the world. He let it be known that he condemned the evil that was in the world. He wasn’t afraid to be different than everybody else even if people laughed at him. And because he was loyal to God and to His holy law, we read that he “became heir of the righteousness which is by faith” (Heb. 11:7).

Think of the inestimable riches of truth that Noah became “heir” to! The wicked world despised him, but God honored him. Not only was his life spared when the Flood came—he “inherited” great honor for all of time to come and for eternity as well.

If you are a student in school and the students laugh at you because you are loyal to God and to His holy law, don’t be afraid to be different than “everybody else.” You too will “inherit” everlasting righteousness. Nothing on earth can equal that in value.

Second, Peter tells us a lot when he says that Noah was “a preacher of righteousness” (2 Peter 2:5). That means that Noah was far more than a mere boat-builder who built the ark. Doubtless Noah traveled all over the earth giving lectures about the coming Flood, answering questions, seeking to turn people away from their judgment-bound sins. He proclaimed the pure, true gospel of righteousness by faith. He did for his world what this broadcast is seeking to do for our world today—lifting up the Savior of the world as our only hope as we face our future.

We don’t know how many people received his message during the 120 years of his ministry, but when the Flood came, only eight people were safe with him inside the ark; every other person on earth had in some way rejected the message. It was an advance play-out of the final crisis of “the mark of the beast” and “the seal of God,” which the Book of Revelation says again will catalyze humanity just before the return of Christ in the clouds of heaven.

Luke reports to us in his chapter 17 what Jesus said about our end-times today. The people carried on their pleasure-seeking “until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all” (17:27). To those people, the Flood came suddenly, even though Noah had faithfully warned them for 120 years. Right up until “the day” when the door of the ark was shut, there the people were outside the ark—defying God, insulting Him, trampling upon His holy law. And what does Jesus say? “As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be in the days of the Son of man.”

But Jesus said more: “Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot: they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all” (Luke 17:28, 29).

We don’t read that Lot was “a preacher of righteousness” as Noah was, but he is spoken of as “a just man” who was “vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked; (for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their

unlawful deeds)” (2 Pet 2:6-8). It’s not hard to imagine what Sodom-life was like that Lot was forced to observe. Jude says that those people in “Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, [gave] themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh” (Jude 7).

It’s the same today! Daily, our TV and radio and newspapers are filled with the same evil. People “give themselves over” to the clamors of the flesh, fornication, and “going after strange flesh” just as it was in the days of Lot. If Lot was “vexed in his soul” by all this, it means that he hated to watch this corruption.

If they had had TV or radio or DVD’s in his day, he would have turned them off or walked away, to show how he was “vexed” by it all. He may not have preached, but by his quiet life of righteousness he bore witness to the people of his faith. But sad to say, again they all turned him down and they perished. Even Lot himself barely escaped destruction by a hair. Even his wife was corrupted.

Jesus tells us, “Remember Lot’s wife.” She was the lady who really didn’t want to leave the doomed city; her heart was there with all its beautiful dresses and its sensual, selfish pleasure. But she was Mrs. Lot, and her husband had often conducted family worship in their home; so she to some extent “feared the Lord,” but when the angel took her by the hand to lead her out of the doomed city to a safe distance away, she couldn’t stop herself crying. Instead of saying, “Thank You for saving my soul!” and gladly obeying the divine command, “Don’t look back!” she resented the

angel holding her by the hand. She wrenched herself free from Him, and turned to look longingly at the beautiful but sinful city.

As she stood there lamenting that she had to leave her wicked neighborhood, saying in her heart, “God is not fair!” the fire and brimstone fell, and the intense sudden heat as of a nuclear explosion turned her into an eternal pillar of solidified chemical substances.

Suppose a child forgets and starts to run out into a city street full of busy traffic: would the mom or dad try to stop the child?

Yes, because they love with all their hearts.

Suppose someone whom the Lord loves (and that’s everybody!) gets going on the road that leads to being lost at last; do you think the Lord would try to stop him?

Yes! If we get into the wrong way, don’t you think He would try His best to save us from going on and being lost at last? Yes!

We learned in another story how the Lord loved poor Saul of Tarsus when he was on the wrong road, and hindered him. It’s not that He actually stops someone from going on down the wrong road; He gives freedom of choice to all of us. Anyone who is totally determined to be lost can resist the Lord’s love to the bitter end. Judas Iscariot did that, and we don’t want to, do we?

How actively the Holy Spirit works to put every hindrance in the way of someone who doesn’t understand and goes the wrong way. The bottom line is: God loves us more than we ever thought He does!

One time when God's people were fighting against Him, He said, "Oh Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself!" (Hosea 13:9, KJV). God has made it very hard for people to commit suicide, even when they're discouraged; and He has made it hard for people to destroy themselves spiritually, too. Jesus says, "My yoke is easy" (Matthew 11:30).

Somehow most children and youth have picked up somewhere the idea that it's hard to be saved. The idea seems to be that God is trying to do what high school students sometimes think their teacher is doing—flunk them if he can.

The idea behind such thinking is not true about our heavenly Father!

Think a moment: if that idea were true, wouldn't that mean that He is a Meanie? Here He tells the world that He loves us all, then He turns around and makes it as hard as possible for us to be saved!

This is exactly the lie that Satan wants us to believe. Jesus makes things clear: "The world will make you suffer. But be brave! I have defeated the world!" (John 16:33).

You have a job to do, so make up your mind to do it: believe that God's character is love; He is fair; He loves you. And let Him hold you by your hand (Isaiah 41:13) and lead you all the way into heaven.

And Jesus kindly yet solemnly warns us: "Remember Lot's wife. Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it" (Luke 17:32, 33). The way Mark tells this same incident, Jesus added, "Whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it" (Mark 8:35). So it's

not that there is any virtue in dying for nothing—sadly lots of people do that; what's important is giving your life for the One who died for you; then your sacrifice is not wasted.

And that does not mean merely being burned alive at the stake, as many faithful people of God were martyred in the Dark Ages by priests at the Inquisition—the Bible says the martyrs will have their special reward of glory. But "losing one's life for Christ's sake and the gospel's" can mean a constant, daily life of self-sacrifice for Christ, even through a long lifetime. It's living as Jesus lived. He said: "I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me." "I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me" (Jn. 5:30; 6:38).

Today we await "the latter rain." That self-propagating gospel at Pentecost accompanied Christ's beginning work in heaven as High Priest. Now His closing work in the cosmic Day of Atonement will be accompanied by a fully developed "everlasting gospel" that will "lighten the earth with glory." The same cross-exalting motivation will fuel that final burst of soul-winning.

Says John in Revelation: "I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, 'Babylon the great is fallen.' . . . And I heard another voice from heaven saying, 'Come out of her, my people . . .'" (18:1-4). The call will be accompanied by a second-time-in-history power—the first, at Pentecost.

Ellen White in vision witnessed what will happen this second time around: “The light that was shed upon the waiting ones penetrated everywhere, and those in the churches who had any light . . . obeyed the call. . . . A *compelling* power moved the honest.

“Servants of God, endowed with power from on high, with their faces lighted up, and shining with holy consecration, went forth to proclaim the message from heaven. Souls that were scattered all through the religious bodies answered to the call, and the precious were hurried out of the doomed churches, as Lot was hurried out of Sodom before her destruction” (*Early Writings*, pp. 278, 279).

In 1888 the Lord “sent” us “the beginning” of that message. Ellen White called it “the light which will lighten the earth with its glory? Had it been accepted, “then the strong, clear light of that other angel who comes down from heaven having great power, *would* have filled the earth with his glory . . . Heavenly messengers have grieved, impatient at the delay. . . . Angels of heaven were seeking to communicate through human agencies justification by faith, the righteousness of Christ.” “The loud cry of the third angel has already begun in the revelation of the righteousness of Christ” (*1888 Materials*, pp. 673, 1070-1073, emphasis supplied).

Shall the Seventh-day Adventist Church disregard the authenticated “beginning” of that final message, which was “in a great degree” rejected and “kept away from the world”? (*Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 234, 235).

That same writer tells how the first Pentecost relates to the future second one: “A work is to be accomplished in the earth similar to that which took place at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the days of the early disciples, when they preached Jesus and Him crucified. Many will be converted in a day; for the message will go with power. . . . The theme that attracts the heart of the sinner is Christ, and Him crucified. On the cross of Calvary, Jesus stands revealed to the world in unparalleled love [*agape*]. Present Him thus to the hungry multitudes, and the light of His love will win men from darkness to light, from transgression to obedience and true holiness. Beholding Jesus upon the cross of Calvary arouses the conscience to the heinous character of sin as nothing else can do” (*1888 Materials*, pp. 1073, 1074).

What feature of the message constitutes its self-propagating, “compelling” power?

It meets exactly the heart-longing of every honest-hearted soul in “Babylon” (and there are many!), so that “the truth is seen in its clearness, and the honest children of God sever the bands which have held them. Family connections, church relations, are powerless to stay them now. Truth is more precious than all besides. Notwithstanding the agencies combined against the truth, a large number [will] take their stand upon the Lord’s side” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 612).

Several outstanding truths will be featured in that final message:

A clearer view of what happened on the cross. This is reasonable, for if the sacrifice of the cross

was the heart of “the former rain” message of Pentecost, it must also be the heart of “the latter rain” message when it finally comes. It will not be “doctrine #29” but an illumination that will permeate or vitalize all “28” present doctrines.

The central theme of the Book of Revelation (emphasized twenty-five times) is Christ’s role as “the Lamb.” While a healthy fear will of course be a part of the final message, its *real* motivation that will grip people’s hearts and “compel” them to action will be “the unparalleled love of Christ.” “Those who eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of God will bring from the books of Daniel and Revelation truth that is inspired by the Holy Spirit. They will start into action forces that *cannot be repressed*” (*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 116).

Only a self-propagating message of Good News can overcome all those “forces” that now “repress” honest-hearted souls “bound” in Babylon. Laity and youth will join heart-to-heart with professionals (whose “bright lights” have not gone out) in communicating the explosive, liberating Good News. Their zeal will not be pressured by high-tech promotion, but by that heart-melting appreciation of what it cost “the Lamb” to save sinners such as we.

The phrase “the unparalleled love of Christ” suggests how “the Lamb” will be the central feature of the prophecies. The extent of Christ’s sacrifice will be shown in the kind of death He died—the equivalent of the second death, the ultimate one of all lost mankind. But all who believe the natural immortality of the soul are fog bound, unable to grasp this unique idea of love (*agape*). It’s virtually

absent from Roman Catholic and popular Protestant (even Evangelical) thought. The idea finds some expression in Ellen White’s writings, but has never been featured generally in our ministry to the public. The Bible evidence suggests:

(a) The Father “laid on [Christ] the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6). The implications are staggering: the “all” is the human race. Therefore, He does not lay that iniquity upon *them*.

(b) Instead of imputing the “trespasses” of the human race onto themselves, He imputed those onto Christ: “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them” (2 Cor. 5:19). Thus He treats “all men” with unmerited kindness, with grace as though they had never sinned (Titus 2:11). If this were not true, not one could exist.

(c) The reason for this grace is that Christ “tasted death [the second] for everyone” (Heb. 2:9). Scripture cannot be broken: *the full debt was paid for every sinner who has ever lived*. Therefore the only reason any one can be lost at last is his/her unbelief. The rejecter has taken that debt back upon himself. “He that believeth not is condemned. . . . This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light” (John 3:18, 19). God does not put sinners in double jeopardy. They do it to themselves.

(d) “Through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life” (Rom. 5:18). Some versions render it, “a judicial verdict . . . of acquittal . . . for all men.”

(e) This “gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ abounded to [the] many,” the Greek expression that means “to everyone” (vs. 15).

(f) Not only did Christ’s “grace . . . much more abound” than the sin of the entire human race, it brought with it a “gift” so that there are two entities: “grace” and its “gift” that it gives (vss. 20, 15, 16; the word “offers” is not there).

(g) That “gift” is justification which “came upon all men,” like “the grace that encircles the world with an atmosphere as real as the air which circulates around the globe” (vs. 18; *Steps to Christ*, p. 68). The miracle is not magic; the truth penetrates the heart. The sinner grasps the horror of the hell from which he has been delivered, so that he senses how he is “alive from the dead,” a death that would be eternal (Rom. 6:13). No joy can be deep and lasting which has not been built upon that foundation of joyous contrition. “If one died for all, then all died.” *You die*, so that now you say, “I am crucified with Christ” (Gal. 2:20). The identity is real, not theoretical. You sense that every breath you draw, every meal you eat, is the purchase of His blood. All sadness at the thought of sacrifice for Him is forgotten; you are like a dungeon-bound, death-row prisoner set free into the sunshine. You know what Paul meant, “God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal. 6:14).

(h) Thus what Christ accomplished was the reversal of the judicial “condemnation” that the first Adam brought on the entire human race. It is a

“judicial . . . verdict . . . of acquittal” on the same human race (vs. 16, NEB). “He who comes down from heaven . . . gives life *unto the world*. . . . The bread that I will give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life *of the world*” (John 6:33, 51).

(i) That “life” is more than the physical existence which the animals have. “I am come that they may have life, . . . more abundantly” (John 10:10). What happiness believers or unbelievers have ever enjoyed is the result of His sacrifice: “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows . . . The chastisement of our peace was upon Him” (Isa. 53:4, 5). Think of what “grief,” “sorrow,” and “chastisement” you have been spared! No one will then have to pressure you into giving yourself to Jesus, or sacrificing for His sake.

(j) The message of Pentecost declared forgiveness for the entire human race, particularly for the involvement of “all” in the murder of the Son of God. “All” are “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:6). When the Father declared at the baptism of Christ, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,” He was embracing the entire human race “in Him” (Matt. 3:17; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 113).

Living for Jesus, serving Him daily, ministering the Good News of the Gospel to others—this is what it means to prepare for Jesus’ soon coming.

Noah and Lot encourage us down through the millennia. And just as the Lord’s angel took Mrs. Lot by the hand to lead her out of the doomed city of Sodom, so He takes you by the hand today to lead you out of doomed “Babylon.” He says, “Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partakers of her

sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues” (Rev. 18:4).

Oh, thank God for that loving call to be saved! Won't you say “Yes!” right now and say, “Thank You, Lord, for saving me!”