

THE SINS THAT INVITE GOD'S JUDGMENT ON A CULTURE
GENESIS 19
EZEKIEL 16:46-50

Simon Peter calls the destruction of Sodom and Gormorrah an example of divine judgment. We know the story of that destructive visitation upon the cities of Sodom and Gormorrah from the inspired record in Genesis. They first appear on the pages of Holy Scripture because of their prosperity and their wickedness. Our first introduction to these two cities was in the choice that Lot made to move toward Sodom. He moved in that direction because of the apparent material prosperity of the cities. The sins that brought about the destruction of the city are the sins of the prosperous. They were already obvious before Lot moved his family in that direction.

In a prophetic denunciation of the sins of Jerusalem, the prophet Ezekiel called attention to God's judgment upon Sodom. He lists the sins of Sodom to demonstrate that the sins of Jerusalem had exceeded the sins of Sodom. They had exceeded the sins of Sodom because they had been the recipients of greater light and greater opportunity. Jesus called attention to Sodom in the same kind of application.

The frightening thing about these passages is that our culture is enjoying an unparalleled period of prosperity in the history of the world. And yet, we want more! There is little indication that we have reached a level of contentment with the prosperity that we enjoy. Prosperity always creates a danger for a society. The sins that invite divine judgment are

more likely to be bred in an atmosphere of prosperity than they are in an atmosphere of adversity.

The prophet Ezekiel surprises us with his list of sins that brought about the destruction of Sodom. He does not list first the sin that we most often associate with Sodom. Sodomy was only one of the sins of Sodom and was produced by an array of other sins that characterized the city. Since we are much like the cities of the plains in the prosperity that we enjoy, let's review the sins that invite the judgment of God upon a culture. We could also label them the sins of the prosperous. What are they?

I. THE SIN OF PRIDE.

The first sin that Ezekiel lists against the city of Sodom is that of pride. The New International Version translates the word "arrogance." This sin is commonly found in a prosperous city or culture.

This sin of pride involves taking personal credit for the prosperity that is enjoyed. These proud folks relate to the prosperity as though it was totally the product of their intelligence and efforts. It is a matter of historical record that the prosperity of Sodom was directly related to the rich natural resources that she enjoyed. She was strategically located and had the things that were necessary physically to bring about prosperity. But instead of giving God His proper acknowledgement for the prosperity they enjoyed, they choose rather to claim credit for themselves.

This pride kept them from bowing before the creator God in worship and put barriers between them and their fellowmen. Pride always does this. It will always affect the relationship with God negatively. It will also destroy your relationship with your fellowman.

We could well remember the words of Abraham Lincoln who spoke to the heart of the nation, “We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us and have vainly imagined in the deceitfulness of our hearts that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own.” Can you remember the last time you heard a national leader give God the credit for the safety and the prosperity of our nation? Can you remember the last time you heard a state leader acknowledge that God is the giver of every good and every perfect gift? The sin of Sodom was the sin of pride – taking credit to self for what only God can do.

II. THE SIN OF GLUTTONY.

The New International Version translates it “over fed and unconcerned.” Another contemporary translation translates it “gluttony.” The sin of Sodom was that of becoming an indulgent people. Their lifestyle was characterized by indulgence. They indulged themselves by building larger and larger houses. They indulged themselves by accumulating things that made life luxurious. They indulged themselves by becoming very selective in what they would eat or not eat. Their lifestyle became that of the

materialist. God indicates that this is one of the sins that expose a nation to the judgment of God.

I must confess that though I have been in the ministry more than forty years I have never devoted a sermon to the sin of gluttony. It has become a rather acceptable sin in our society. You and I live in a community that leads the state in the number of restaurants that we have available to us. We are famous for how often we eat out.

I read about an over weight businessman who was having a hard time shedding the excess pounds that he had picked up. He took his new diet seriously, even changing his driving route to avoid his favorite bakery. One morning, however, he arrived at work carrying a gigantic coffeecake. The people in his office scolded him, but his smile remained fixed. “This is a very special coffee cake” he explained. “I accidentally drove by the bakery this morning and there in the window was a host of goodies. I felt this was no accident, so I prayed, Lord if you want me to have one of these delicious coffeecakes let me know by having a parking place directly in front of the bakery. And sure enough,” he continued, “the eighth time around the block, there it was!”

I think the case can be made rather quickly that we are an indulgent people. This has to be rather obvious to us as we have just come through the most indulgent season of the year – the Christmas and New Year season. Do we realize this is one of the sins that expose a culture to the judgment of God?

III. THE SIN OF INDIFFERENCE TO THE POOR AND HELPLESS.

The third sin that exposed Sodom to the judgment of God is simply called “unconcern: they did not help the poor and needy.” Moffett translates it “careless ease: she never lent a hand to the weak and wretched.” This sin is rather obvious. They had their wherewithal to help the poor and needy among them, but they choose rather to spend it on themselves. Their hearts became callused toward those around them who were struggling and suffering in life. This hardness of heart is a sin of the prosperous.

It is a matter of record that the poor in our own nation give more percentage wise to charity than do the rich. There is every indication that as prosperity goes up compassion goes down. That is not to deny that there are some among us who are rich in this world’s goods and are still tender hearted and compassionate toward the poor. But they are generally the exception rather than the rule.

Dr. Sam Shoemaker tells of a day when he sat in the rear of a church room while an official of a ladies organization told some forty women who were present how they might operate a church pantry, bringing in jams and jellies for the support of an orphanage and some other benevolent institutions in which they were interested. That very day, over the dining table, Dr. Shoemaker asked the lady who had given the “pep” talk how many of the ladies of her organization ever got out and did something for the street-women in the notorious Southern part of that city. She said, “You know, it is curious. There are several of those girls of the street in the hospital, and only yesterday I called up fourteen of our ladies to see if some of them would not go down and visit these girls, but they all

declined.” In telling the story Dr. Shoemaker applied the fiery lash as he said in conclusion: “Orange marmalade is a good deal easier to make than Christians.”

While we as a church have made measurable progress in this area of our church life over the last few years, we must not assume that we have arrived. There is still a lot of indifference among us toward the poor and the hurting in our society. We may not be as uncompassionate as the photography that Dewitt Jones told about. This photographer came upon a man who was choking as he walked down the street. What a picture he thought. This says it all: a man, alone, in need. What a message! He fumbled with his camera and light meter until the poor fellow choking realized that help was not near. He grabbed the photographer’s arm and whispered, “I am turning blue!”

“That’s alright,” said the photographer, patting the fellow’s hand, “I’m shooting color film.” We may not be quite that indifferent to the need about us. But are we actively involved in lifting the burden from the shoulder of the poor?

Our society has had a strong reaction against welfare programs. We must not allow our disdain for welfare programs to turn into indifference toward people who need welfare. It was never God’s intention that the needs of the suffering of society be met by welfare systems. It was always His intention that the needs of society be met through the compassion of His people. Indifference to human need is one of the sins that invite the judgment of God.

There may be an indication in this text that they were not only indifferent to human need, but that the rich were actually guilty of taking advantage of the poor. This happens in times of prosperity. The rich become richer at the expense of the poor. The Old Testament prophets were constantly denouncing the abuse of the poor by the rich and the powerful. There are those in our own society both in government and out of government who have used the plight of the poor as a means of enhancing their own financial position. This, too, is among those sins of indifference that invite the judgment of God upon a culture.

IV. THE SIN OF MORAL DEPRAVITY.

The last sin listed by the prophet, Ezekiel, is the one we might have expected to be first. “They were haughty and did detestable things before me.” These detestable things doubtlessly include the homosexuality that is so well remembered in connection with Sodom. The men of the city knocked on Lot’s door late into the night seeking an opportunity to have a sexual relationship with the angels who were spending the night in Lot’s house. They mistakenly thought these angels were men. Did they ever make a mistake! They were lusting after angelic beings who had taken on a human appearance in order to make their visit to the city of Sodom. They were there in order to evaluate the moral climate of that city and the men of that city gave them all the evidence they would ever need to call for condemnation upon the city.

Our generation has had lengthy discussions about the causes for homosexuality. This context may say something to us about the causes of homosexuality. Homosexuality may be more likely to express itself in a society that has become indulgent and prosperous. At

least it has expressed itself in a public way in our own society during this period of our history. It also became a dominant thing in the nation of Rome before the fall of the empire when Rome was exceedingly prosperous. When she became a powerful and prosperous people then sexual perversions became more common in the life of the nation.

However, the thing the prophets seem to be emphasizing in this text is that in Sodom they became arrogant about their deviant sexual behavior. You will notice that the prophet says, “they were haughty and did detestable things before me.” It was not that just there was this moral corruption among them but they became haughty about it. They flaunted it. They were proud of it! Could it be that they had brought it out of the closet and had made it a publicly accepted way of life.

This is the thing that should concern us about our own culture. We should be concerned that there is homosexuality among us, but our greater concern should be that we have developed a culture that is flaunting its perversion. Instead of being ashamed of this kind of behavior we have made it a badge of acceptability. We now make it the theme of popular television programs. We’ve now made it politically incorrect to even speak as I am speaking about this problem. But we need to hear the word of God! The word of God declares that such abominable behavior is one of the sins that invite divine judgment upon a culture.

This passage of scripture ought to sober us. We do not need to go on a crusade against materialism and homosexuality. Rather we need to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God and seek the face of God that He might show mercy upon our culture. If

there had been ten God-fearing brokenhearted, humble, servants of God in those two cities of the plains, God would have spared them. We can save our society without changing our society if we will infiltrate it with a broken heart and humble spirit and an upright walk. Who knows, the God of Abraham may show mercy upon our land. May God develop in us such a response so that we can indeed be the salt that preserves the culture in which we live.