

SUNDAY, JUNE 27, 2010

Sunday, June 27, 2010: God's Scorecard

God's Scorecard
Genesis 18: 16 – 33.

I. Introduction.

Do you have an image of what God is like? There's a cute story about a little boy in Sunday School. He was intently drawing a picture. His teacher asked him, "What are you drawing?" He answered, "I am drawing a picture of God." The teacher said, "But no one knows what God looks like." Undaunted, the little boy replied, "Well, they are about to find out."

The Sunday School teacher was right. No one really knows what God looks like. However, that has never stopped us from trying to capture God in images. A popular image for many of us is God as a grandfather figure. He looks old and wise, with long white hair and a long white beard.

Visual images are not the only ways we try to capture God. Some people have an idea that God is like a cosmic watch maker. God made everything in heaven and on earth. He put all the individual pieces together, wound things up, greased the intricate gear works, and set things in motion. God never has to intervene in his creation, because it was made perfectly. All God has to do as the cosmic watch maker is to sit back and enjoy his creation.

Other people imagine God as the grandfather in the sky. And just like our earthly grandfathers, he doesn't have any real authority. He comes into and out of our lives frequently. He never disciplines us. But God as our grandfather in the sky is the perfect person to ask when we want a special gift or blessing that no one else wants to give us.

On the completely opposite extreme is the view of God as a cosmic cop—a police officer in the sky. God walks a beat, and everywhere he looks he sees criminals. Nothing escapes the gaze of God the cosmic cop. He knows everything you have ever done wrong. And, God the cosmic cop has no greater joy than to catch you in your crimes and to punish you in public and humiliating ways.

Another view of God, similar to the cosmic cop, is to think of God as a heavenly scorekeeper. God has a scorecard for every person who has ever lived. The scorecard has your name at the top of the page, and below your name are two columns. On the left hand side of the scorecard is a place for God to record everything you have ever done right—all the good and righteous and religious and pleasing things you have ever done. On the right hand side of the scorecard is a place for God to record all the bad things you have done—all the evil and sinful and hurtful and disappointing things you have ever done.

None of these images really fit the image of God we encounter in the Bible. The Bible teaches us that God is highly involved in his creation. He is not like a detached watch maker, who has set things in motion. God is not a weak grandfather, whose only purpose is to give gifts to his grandchildren. God is not a police officer, who takes delight in catching you and punishing you. God is not even a scorekeeper. Even if God did keep score of all your good and bad deeds...And even if your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds...You still cannot earn your way to forgiveness of sin, relationship with God and eternal life.

God knew you could not earn your salvation, so God intervened. He sent his only Son to live, to die and to rise again. Placing your faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to be saved. Salvation is a free gift from a God who loves you and provided a way for you to be saved.

We see an example of this in the story of Abraham in Genesis 18...

Read Genesis 18: 16 – 33.

Three men came to visit Abraham. The author of Genesis tells us earlier in chapter 18 that one of these three men is the LORD himself. The other two men are more than likely angels.

The reason I think these three visitors are the LORD and two angels is because of what happens in our story today and the story which follows in Genesis 19. The LORD stayed with Abraham. The other two men traveled to Sodom and Gomorrah. When these two men arrived in Sodom and Gomorrah, they discovered a wicked city. Genesis 19 chronicles the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah and the results of that wickedness. The men rescued Abraham's nephew Lot and his family from the wicked city. Then they brought complete destruction...Judgment for sin.

On one hand, these two chapters of Genesis demonstrate for us the consequences of sin. The sin of Sodom is described in several places throughout the rest of the Bible.

Ezekiel 16: 49 – 50, "Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen."

Jude 7, "In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire."

Most of us associate the sin of homosexuality with Sodom and Gomorrah. Jude tells us that is true. But, Ezekiel tells us there were other sins as well...arrogance, overfed, lack of concern for the poor. In both cases, I think we can draw a close parallel between twenty-first century American culture and the culture of Sodom and Gomorrah.

We live in a culture that is engaged in the same kinds of arrogance, over-indulgence, lack of concern and sexual immorality. Sodom and Gomorrah faced the judgment of God for their sins. Perhaps we should be concerned about facing a similar judgment.

On the other hand, Genesis 18 shows us another side of God's character. Abraham and God had a long conversation about the impending destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. It was a prayer. But it reads like a negotiation.

Abraham begs God not to destroy the entire city if there are 50 righteous people living there. God agrees. Abraham asks about 45 righteous people. God agrees. Abraham continues negotiating...50, 45, 40, 30, 20 and 10. Remarkably, God agrees to save Sodom and Gomorrah if only 10 righteous people can be found.

Of course, when the angels visit Sodom and Gomorrah, they cannot find 10 righteous people. They can only find four—and one of those four, Lot's wife, is questionable. So, God did the next best

thing. Since he could not find 10 righteous people to save the city, God saved the four he could find.

Abraham's prayer and God's actions show us that God is more interested in saving people than he is in bringing judgment.

God is not a cosmic cop. God is not a heavenly scorekeeper. God honestly and earnestly wants to save people. That is why God was willing to save the entire city of Sodom and Gomorrah for the sake of 10 righteous people. That is why God rescued Lot and his family. That is why God sent his Son Jesus. God doesn't want to catch you in sin and punish you for your sins. God wants to provide a way for you to be saved.

We need more people in our churches and community who reflect this character of God. We have too many judgmental Christians, who are searching for sins in other people. We have too many Christian cops, who are determined to catch others in their faults and to punish them in the most public and humiliating ways.

Abraham is an example of how God wants us to live...

II. Righteousness.

Genesis 18: 19, "For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."

God did not tell Abraham he could live any way he wanted to live. There are expectations for God's children.

Eventually, the Bible tells us that God gave his people the Law. The Law made ethical and religious demands on God's people. The purpose for this Law was never that people could earn God's favor or salvation by living a certain lifestyle. The purpose of the Law was to define God's people by their ethical behavior.

This is what it means to be righteous. Christians are not perfect people. We are sinners like everyone else. But, we live a life that is different from the rest of the world. We live differently, because God has saved us and changed us. God doesn't save us because we are different from the world.

III. Justice.

God demands both righteousness and justice from his people. There is a fine line between righteousness and justice...But, there is a line...There is a difference.

The best way I know to describe this difference is to say righteousness describes the way we live before God, while justice describes the way we live before other people.

The Old Testament is filled with commands for God's people to take care of the poor. Sometimes it simply tells us to take care of the poor. In other places, it defines clearly who the poor are. God commanded Israel to take care of widows, orphans and foreigners living in their country.

Widows are women without anyone to provide for their needs. Orphans are children without a father to take care of them. Foreigners are the outsiders, who were often overlooked and forgotten

by society in the Ancient Near Eastern World.

God's people are to live righteously before God and show care and concern for the outsiders...Those who are forgotten by others.

IV. Compassion.

Abraham's dialog with God demonstrates that Abraham did not think only of himself. He was concerned for other people...Specifically, Abraham had compassion for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.

It would have been easy and even acceptable for Abraham to think only of himself. After all, God had chosen Abraham to be in an exclusive relationship with God as his Father. Abraham had a covenant with God. Abraham was a saved person. Yet, Abraham cared about the wicked people, who lived outside of God's covenant promises.

This was God's intention when he originally called Abraham. Remember God's call to Abraham in **Genesis 12: 1 – 3**, **"The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."**

Abraham is now putting God's call into practice. He is allowing God to use him to be a blessing to Lot and all the people who live in the wicked city of Sodom and Gomorrah.

V. Conclusion: Intercession.

Abraham demonstrated his righteousness, justice and compassion by praying for the wicked people who lived outside of the covenant with God.

I remember hearing Paul Powell say that most of us spend our prayer time "keeping sick saints out of heaven instead of keeping lost souls out of hell."

When was the last time you prayed for the wicked?

When was the last time you gossiped about the sins of other Christians?

Which of these better describes what God did with Sodom and Gomorrah?

Which of these better reflects the righteousness, justice and compassion God desires for his people?

God is more interested in saving people than destroying sinners. Abraham set an example for us to reflect God's character.