

Christ in All

Genesis 18:22-19:38 | Jonathan K. Dodson | September 6, 2015

It's impossible to talk about "all things" in a single sermon series, but I'm going to try. I'd like us to start *by looking at all things through the prism of the city*. The city is a microcosm of everything. It's a hotbed of culture, work, relationships, and need (we'll look at all four), which means the city can be endlessly fascinating *and* incredibly overwhelming. How do we live here? St. Paul says by seeking Christ in all, whatever you do whether you eat or drink. On the precipice of the busiest time of the year, school starting up, a new fiscal year, festivals coming, will you live a Christ in all life or life as usual? Promise of the City, Place in the City, and a City in a city.

Promise of the City

This summer I spent two weeks in the breath-taking mountains of Colorado. I went on long walks in the cool mountain air, looked out across the Avon valley and marveled at the way the mountains seem to shape shift under the weather. I sat in the quiet and read book after book. I got lost in play with my kids, and almost lost a kid in a rodeo. It's so different from the city.

Now we're in Austin and it's full of energy and pace. It's not quiet or serene, but it's teeming with life. In many ways the modern city is a matrix of all things. Over half the global population lives in cities. In forty more years, two-thirds of the world will be urban. This means that most, if not all *cultures* are represented in cities around the world, all *disciplines* are studied and applied in cities. World economies are impacted by cities, some more significant than entire countries. *People move to cities because of their promise for a better life.* Yet, despite all its promise, city living can be incredibly hard. Different things pull at us. The pace of life/school, the pressure to perform/work, the latest cultural experience, and with 150 people moving in a day, city infrastructure and housing are under constant stress, gentrification, marginalization of the poor. So why do it? Why live in the city? City Life Church exists to renew cities. That's our vision: spiritually, socially, culturally reinvigorate the city. That's inspiring and demanding. Come November we'll be pining for the peace of the mountains... **unless we find our place in the city.** Do you know your place? It's easy to get lost. Genesis 18 shows us three different places to live in the city.

Place in the City

In our **opening scene** we find Abraham, who will father a nation, standing on a hill *praying for a city*. He's not praying against it; he's asking God to spare it. The city is Sodom. When we hear "Sodom" today we often think of God judging it for its homosexuality but that's not entirely accurate (Jude 7; Luke 17:28-29). God does come down to judge the city, but not mainly for its sexual depravity. Rather, he comes in response to an "outcry" in the city. The word outcry is used in the OT as a cry for justice. Ezekiel, a later prophet confirms: "*Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy*" (Eze 16:49). God judges the city, not for a single sin, but for the whole mountain of sins. God judges the city for the same reason he judges all of us—*for curving in on itself*. Judging, especially divine judgment, isn't really popular today. Instead, *Austinites tend to think of themselves as non-judgmental, that we should be free to do whatever we think to be right, not have outside judgment imposed on us*. But is that really how we live? Everyone in Austin fits in, but those who insist there is no judgment actually live as if there is a Judge. Let me explain. If someone hits your car, do you leave it to their judgment to decide who's responsible? When our child comes home with a

bloody lip or from being bullied do we suspend judgment? No, I want go out there give the kid a whipping. I want his parent to come down on him. School shootings, racism, rape. “No judgment?!” If there’s no judgment, then there can be no outrage. But if you have outrage, you’re showing you believe in a Judge. Only the sense of cosmic justice keeps us from ripping the bully’s head off or falling into depression over world events. Judgment is good for the city, but Sodom acted like there was no Judge. It used its power and privilege to serve itself. Abraham stands in stark contrast. He uses his power to seek the good of the city. He appeals to God as the “just Judge of all the earth” asking, “*will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?*” Notice he doesn’t claim the moral high ground, calling for its destruction. But he also doesn’t turn a blind eye to all its injustices. He *intercedes*. Why? Because he believes in a just Judge. He appeals to God. He prays for it, *persistently*, asking if 50, 45, 40, 30, 20, 10, righteous are found would God spare the city? **Do you pray for the city?** Do you intercede for the injustices of the city? God hears him out and agrees to spare the city if 10 are found. The **next scene** takes us down the hills into the city, where we find Lot. Lot is the nephew of Abraham, who parted ways with Abraham to live in the lush valley of Canaan.

Angelic men are sent by God to Sodom to judge it. They find Lot “sitting at the city gates.” How do you sit in a gate? In the ancient world the city gates served as a kind of civic center, where a tower was erected, and inside a long bench could be found where important people sat to deliberate and make decisions for the city. Lot has risen up the ranks, settled down, has a family, a career, and enough wealth to throw his guests a feast. Culturally affluent. But notice how different he is from Abraham. *Lot is using the city not praying for the city.* He fawns over it, what it can give him, status, comfort, prestige. Is your place with Lot or Abraham? Maybe neither? Well, this isn't the only Lot. There are two. **Scene.** God destroys the city after finding less than 10 righteous and Lot is permitted to relocate in a little city called Zoar. But after living there for a while his view of the city changes. Instead of fawning it, he fears it. It's not the kind of place he wants to raise his daughters: morally repugnant and unsafe. He looks down on it. So he does what any sane person would do. He moves his family into a cave. He plummets from the height of cultural affluence to depths of urban escape. From inundated with the city to isolated from the city. From wanting a better house and more money to pining for a piece of land in the country. Who are you more like? Lot 1 or Lot 2? Blending in or

sticking out? In Lot there are two places to live in the city: in the gates or in the cave, using the city, squeezing it for meaning, or abandoning the city, meaning by looking down on its values, infrastructure and crime. *Perhaps most of us live between Lot 1 and Lot 2, which is what makes urban living hard. Pressure from both sides. We feel spiritual pressure and cultural pressure, to be holy and to be hip. Or vocational pressure from one side and moral pressure from the other. Work demands late nights, early mornings. Moral pressure: take the big client out and get loaded or go to a strip bar. Or maybe you feel Lot 1/Lot2 pressure with your kids in the neighborhood. You want them to find friends and love indiscriminately, but then there are the kids who expose your children to things that ruin their innocence.* There's this pressure isn't there? And if we don't find our place in the city, the pressure will drive you nuts. You'll find yourself contemplating moving out of the city where you have land and quiet, or ejecting from responsibility with "getaways." Where are you this morning? Lot1/Lot 2? Somewhere in between? If you don't find a better place to live, you'll go crazy or harden into Lot 1/Lot 2. When we do, we won't renew the city. Do you know why? Because our identity is tied to the city. Maybe you wouldn't say this is who you are, but if you find yourself hungering for more

experience, more notoriety, more escape, more anger, more anonymity, then you're defined by your love/hate of city.

The City in the city

So how do we find a sane place in the city? A place that frees us to bless, renew, transform to live with Christ in all? You have to **get out** of the city! You have wriggle free of its clutches. You have to confront its claim on you. Or you have to get out of the cave. Escape from your escape. When Lot tries to push the city out they yell: "*Stand back! This fellow came here as a foreigner, and now he wants to play the judge! We'll treat you worse than them*" (19:9). As he tries to wriggle free, the city judges him.

They drop him like a hot rock. Sometimes getting out of the city is painful. I think of men in this church who have walked away from money and promotions because they refused to find their place in the city. Or women who because they insisted on the uniqueness of Christ as the only way to the Father were rejected by friends. *So how do you get out?* How did Abraham do it? "*By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance...For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God*" (Heb 11:8,10). He got out, not like I physically got

out to Colorado; he got out *spiritually*. “By faith”. **To have faith is to put your trust in the judgment of another.** If your friend says, You should try this restaurant; it’s a little expensive but it’s worth it, and you go, you go by faith, faith in their judgment. When you live for what the city/cave offers, you trust its judgment, *on what you’re made for*. Abraham *gets out* by putting his *faith* in what God says he’s made for. **And when he did, his Judge became Reward.** How? An Architect and a city. Take the **city**. The city he was living for has unshakeable foundations. It’s a really good place to live. Reliable. It doesn’t drop you like a hot rock. It’s firm, stable, and when you live in it you live in peace. When you stray from it you live in anxiety. Revelation 21 shows us this city, rich with cultural diversity populated by a new humanity. The city is the people of God under the reign of Christ, where Christ is all in all. It’s the city you were made to live in, where God’s judgment secures never-ending peace and justice. It’s a place that lives up to your faith. How? Second part of the reward. The city, the **architect**. The architect is in the center of the city, sitting on a throne as “God and the Lamb.” A strange image, but it’s how the **Judge becomes your Reward**. God the Judge is true. He holds up a mirror. We are unfit to come in, broken and unclean. Can you imagine what we would do to

paradise? Do you know what the price is to get in, to gain everything? Nothing! In his reflections on faith, CSL says something very interesting. He says Christ offers *everything for nothing*. That in a sense the whole Christian life consists in accepting that remarkable offer. But the trick is acknowledging that we have nothing, done nothing can contribute to the price of admission into the city of God. **The Judge is there to show it, and the Lamb is there to pay it.** In one sense it costs everything, your life. In another sense, it costs nothing because Christ gave his life for you. Jesus judged; we're set free. The Lams slain so he could offer *everything for nothing*. The Judge is the Reward. **The Builder of the city an Architect of grace.** And from his throne flows a river of unending love, flooding the city with eternal joy. How do we get in? By **getting out**, out of the city of Man and into the city of God. How do we get there? Everything for nothing. But you have to accept it. You have to say, **Christ be my all before you can live for Christ in all.** Will you trust the Builder, who knows what you're made for, where you are made to live. He has a place for you in the city of God! Or will you fear/fawn the city of Man? When Christ becomes all we are free to bless all through a thousand acts of worship: prayer meetings, communion with God, self-denying service, radical

generosity, compassionate care for the poor, thoughtful faith, and concern for injustice. Less Sodom, more Zion. **When Christ is all to us, we seek Christ in all of life.** When we have everything, we clamor for nothing. Like Abraham, we find ourselves pleading with God in broken-hearted prayer for the city. Let's seek Christ in all. Let's be the city of God in the city of Man that Christ be all in all.