

# OpenTheo

## January 19th: Genesis 19 & John 9

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Lot and the destruction of Sodom. The healing of the man blind from birth.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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## **Transcript**

Genesis 19. The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed himself with his face to the earth and said, My lords, please turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night and wash your feet.

Then you may rise up early and go on your way. They said, No, we will spend the night in the town square. But he pressed them strongly, so they turned aside to him and entered his house.

He made them a feast and baked unleavened bread and they ate. But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house. And they called to Lot, Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them.

Lot said, I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Behold, I have two daughters who have not known any man. Let me bring them out to you and do to them as you please.

Only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof. But they said, Stand back. And they said, This fellow came to Sojón and has become the judge.

Now we will deal worse with you than with them. Then they pressed hard against the man Lot and drew near to break the door down. But the men reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them and shut the door.

And they struck with blindness the men who were at the entrance of the house, both small and great, so that they wore themselves out, groping for the door. Then the men said to Lot, Have you anyone else here, sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone you have in the city? Bring them out of the place, for we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the Lord, and the Lord has sent us to destroy it. So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, Up, get out of this place, for the Lord is about to destroy the city.

They seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting. As morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, Up, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be swept away in the punishment of the city. But he lingered.

So the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the Lord being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city. And as they brought them out, one said, Escape for your life. Do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley.

Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away. And Lot said to them, O no, my lords, behold, your servant has found favour in your sight, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life, but I cannot escape to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me and I die. Behold, this city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one.

Let me escape there, is it not a little one? And my life will be saved. He said to him, Behold, I grant you this favour also, that I will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken. Escape there quickly, for I can do nothing till you arrive there.

Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar. The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar. Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven.

And he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. But Lot's wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt. And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the Lord.

And he looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the valley. And he looked, and behold, the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace. So it was that when God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot had lived.

Now Lot went up out of Zoar and lived in the hills with his two daughters. But he was afraid to live in Zoar. So he lived in a cave with his two daughters.

And the firstborn said to the younger, Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come into us after the manner of all the earth. Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve offspring from our father. So they made their father drink wine that night.

And the firstborn went in and lay with her father. He did not know when she lay down or when she arose. The next day the firstborn said to the younger, Behold, I lay last night with my father.

Let us make him drink wine tonight also, then you go in and lie with him, that we may preserve offspring from our father. So they made their father drink wine that night also. And the younger arose and lay with him.

And he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. Thus both the daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father. The firstborn bore a son and called his name Moab.

He is the father of the Moabites to this day. The younger also bore a son and called his name Ben-Ammi. He is the father of the Ammonites to this day.

Genesis chapter 19 is a challenging and a troubling story. It begins with two angels arriving in Sodom. The two angels are two of the three characters that meet Abraham in chapter 18.

The third of the figures that meets Abraham there is the Lord, who goes his way at the end of the chapter after Abraham has interceded for Sodom. The beginning of chapter 19 has a great number of similarities with the beginning of 18. You have the visitors arriving.

You have Lot in the gate of the city as Abraham was in the tent door. Significant time of the day. It's the evening, the earlier time it was in the heat of the day.

And there is a greeting and an invitation to have a meal and an insistence that they come in and enjoy hospitality. In both of these cases we're seeing then a pattern playing out which invites us to hold these two stories alongside each other, to juxtapose, to compare and contrast, to see the different elements and what we might learn by holding them alongside each other. They're both stories of hospitality in some way.

Hospitality and in the second case in chapter 19, failed hospitality. Lot makes a meal of unleavened bread. The details of this meal are significant.

The details are connected later on with the Passover meal or the celebration of the Passover and the feast of unleavened bread. Israel is brought out of Egypt and unleavened bread is an important part of that story. You have two visitors coming to the city or to the civilization to inspect it.

Moses and Aaron and there's judgment. And then there's a destruction of the city or destruction of the nation in the case of Egypt. They are led out, brought to the mountain and a new covenant is formed in the story of the Exodus.

Here there is an Exodus pattern but it does not actually arrive at a good solution. At the very end we find Lot in a cave, not on the mountain as he should have been. Reading the story of Lot against the backdrop of the Exodus helps us to pick out certain details that we might otherwise miss.

For instance, why is there such an emphasis upon the threat at the doorway? In the story of the Exodus, the people have to be gathered within the house to celebrate the Passover feast. They have to put blood on the lintels and doorposts and there is judgment upon those outside. Here we see the same thing.

People must be brought inside the house for safety. If they are left outside, they will be destroyed, they will be judged. And so these are Exodus themes pervading this chapter.

Another thing to do is to read it against the backdrop of the previous chapter where there is again an emphasis upon doorways. Abraham is seated in the tent door. Sarah hears the news or the statement of the Lord in the tent door.

And there the tent door is associated with birth and blessing. It is associated with bringing forth a new son. In the story of Lot in Sodom, it is a different thing.

The doorway is associated with death. It is the doorway that represents that boundary between the realm of destruction and the realm of temporary safety. It is the doorway through which he seems to be willing to cast his daughters.

And so he is prepared almost to lose his children for the sake of his life. Whereas in the case of Abraham, in the doorway there is a promise of new birth. The story of Lot moves towards a position where his wife becomes a pillar of salt, barren as a pillar of salt.

In the story of Abraham, Sarah is made fruitful. Holding these stories alongside each other then will help us to understand them. This is something that we see on many occasions in scripture.

Scripture has certain patterns that play out. And the patterns help us to recognise both

significant similarities and significant differences. So it's not just playing out the same pattern again and again and again without variation.

There are all these significant variations. And as we read the story of Lot against the backdrop of the previous story with Abraham and against the backdrop of the Exodus pattern, we will see a number of details that will help us to understand what's going on. The men of Sodom are wicked.

They are characterised by a rapacious and cruel character. They seek to rape the visitors that come to the city. Now the purpose of this is not primarily to satisfy their sexual desires, but as an expression of their power and dominance over these people who have come into the city.

This is a society that's turned in hostility towards anyone that needs help. These are people who are opposed to the outside, the foreigner, to the stranger. And Lot, although he has dwelt among them for a while and has begun to sit in the gate, he's someone who seems to have exercised some authority in the city, he ends up falling foul of them too.

He's taken in these people, these visitors, shown them hospitality, and now he is threatened on that account. If Lot is going to save this city, he has to be secure within the city. If they cast him out, then they will be destroyed.

And also, on the other hand, if Lot casts out people within his house, the city won't be saved either. Against the events of chapter 18, we can see that there is a concern here. Can ten people be found? Can Lot's house be sufficient to save this city? Will the city retain Lot's house within it or will they destroy Lot's house or cast them out? And can Lot hold his household together? And in both cases, we see that the answer is no.

There is a crisis moment where there is not hospitality shown to the righteous within the city, and the righteous are failing. They're falling into the patterns of the city round about them, and they're giving way, and the ground is slipping, and there must be an escape at that point. And so the angels, with a great urgency, call Lot to gather his family together and to flee from the city.

But yet Lot is not believed. When he speaks to his sons-in-law, they ridicule him. Now, the sons-in-law may suggest that the daughters were not in the house.

Later on, it says that the daughters have been found. Now, that may be a suggestion that there was a ploy that he did not actually have his daughters with him, and he wasn't going to cast them out. It was just a means to gain a few moments of time.

That's an interesting theory. There may be some truth to it. I'm not entirely convinced one way or another.

They're told to escape, and as he escapes, he pleads that he might go into the small city of Zoar. And the city is named according to this. The other thing that's interesting about this is Lot is interceding for a city.

Abraham interceded for a city. Sodom, the previous chapter. And so, again, we're seeing parallels between the two stories.

But something goes wrong. Lot can't stay in Zoar. He comes to Zoar, the sun rises on the earth, and the city of Sodom and the city of Gomorrah are destroyed with sulfur and fire from heaven.

But Lot ends up moving on from Zoar. He can't stay there. And he ends up living in the hills with his two daughters as he's afraid.

And he lives in a cave, isolated from everyone else, cut off from society. This is a great apocalypse that has occurred. And he doesn't go to be with Abraham again.

That's one thing he could have done. Maybe he thinks that Abraham is dead. One way or another, he goes off to live in this cave with his daughters by themselves.

And in that context, we see the other tragic twist of this tale. The daughters that seemingly he was prepared to throw out to the crowd to have their way with them, now they have their way with him when he's unaware of what's happening. So there is a plot between the two daughters.

The firstborn seems to be the instigator, saying to the younger, our father is old, there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of all the earth. Note again the parallels with the case of Abraham. Abraham is old and Sarah is old, they're not going to bear children.

And it's a similar situation here. And so it's an attempt, last-ditch attempt, to maintain the family line, to make sure that not everything dies out with Lot. And so the daughters lie with Lot, they make their father drink wine and uncover their father's nakedness in some sense.

We can see the parallels between this and the story of Ham. And there I think it's important to notice that the children that arise from this are associated with the Canaanites in various ways. The ways that the daughters act is characterised by Canaanite practices, by the same sort of relationship to sexuality that we see within Sodom.

Now why was Lot and his wife and his family told not to look back? In part because they had grown so close to the society of Sodom. They'd become so entangled and enmeshed within it that if they looked back they would be too closely associated with it and they would fall under its judgement. The story of Lot's wife is a warning for this reason.

That Lot's wife, looking back, had too close of an association with the city. Only by making that radical, extreme break and not looking back for a moment would they be able to be saved from its destruction. We can think about the way that we can so often be drawn back into the ways of the world.

And like Lot, sometimes we may be led by the hand, instructed never to look back in any way at all and to flee from our lives, like Christian for instance, from the city of destruction. This story then is one that is used in many occasions in the Old Testament as an example of a great judgement, a signal judgement. Something that anticipates final judgement and the danger of being found unprepared or too entangled in the things of the world when the day of judgement arises.

The plan between the two daughters is something that maybe has similarities with the story of Tamar and the way that she takes the initiative in raising up seed for Judah. We see a similar thing in the background of the story of Ruth, the Moabites, who plays a similar sort of pattern in the relationship to Boaz. Plays it out but doesn't actually enact it in the same way but recalls the events surrounding Lot and her foremother who slept with her father.

There are ways in which we see this history being recalled and redeemed in that story of Ruth as an ancestor of Boaz is Judah and an ancestress of Ruth is the mother of Moab. These two people brought together are redeeming the legacy of their forefathers and foremothers. Two questions.

First, looking at the story that ends this chapter with the two daughters of Lot we can see similarities but also differences between the two daughters. What are some of the ways in which we can see differences between the older and the younger daughter and the way that they speak about their relationship with their father? The second question, the story of Abraham and the story of Lot are entangled until this point in Genesis. There are many ways in which they are playing off each other as characters.

We can see that Lot is the nephew of Abraham early on. He's the one who seems to be bearing the legacy of him. He's the one that's most well situated to making his name great.

At other points he's described as if he's the brother of Abraham. At this point we see the last appearance of Lot within the story. There is, once again, a key relationship with Abraham that's being explored.

A juxtaposition between the two. Reflect upon some of the ways in which the contrast and the similarity between Lot and Abraham helps us to understand the key details and character of both persons' lives. John chapter 9 Jesus answered, Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva.

Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud and said to him, So he went and washed and came back seeing. The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, Some said, Others said, He kept saying, So they said to him, He answered, So I went and washed and received my sight. They said to him, They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind.

Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, Some of the Pharisees said, But others said, And there was a division among them.

So they said again to the blind man, He said, The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, His parents answered, His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, He answered, They said to him, He answered them, And they reviled him saying, The man answered, We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshipper of God and does his will, God listens to him. Never since this world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind.

If this man were not from God, he could do nothing. They answered him, And they cast him out. Jesus heard that they had cast him out and having found him, he said, He answered, Jesus said to him, He said, Jesus said, And for judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.

Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things and said to him, Jesus said to them, John chapter 9 is the sixth of the signs that Jesus performs in his ministry in the Gospel of John. In the Gospel of John, the first half of the book has often been described as the book of signs. It's the book in which we see a series of significant events and actions that Jesus performs that help us to understand who he is, the character of his mission.

Now the purpose of a sign is not merely the pyrotechnics of a wonderful miracle or healing or exorcism or something of that kind. The purpose of a sign is to gesture towards something greater than the initial surface meaning of the event to help us to recognise something of the truth of who Christ is. So we can think about the story of the feeding of the five thousand, which is connected with the discourse concerning the manna.

Jesus wants the people who witnessed the feeding of the five thousand to see more than just some miraculous act of power over nature. To see within that a sign that he is the true prophet that was to come and not just one who's providing physical food, but one who is himself the bread from heaven. Similar ways in the first sign, the turning of the water into wine at the wedding in Cana, Jesus wants people to see that he is the true



bridegroom, that he is the one who has come for the bride.

This is something that continues in the book of Revelation and at many different points these bride and bridegroom themes crop up. So the sign is never just about the event considered just as a physical miraculous act. It's a sign that points to something greater and this helps us to understand some of the strange details about these events.

For instance, the manna of the healing in chapter nine is strange. Jesus has two different stages. He spits on the ground, makes mud with the saliva, anoints the man's eyes with the mud, and then says go wash in the pool of Siloam.

So he washes and comes back seeing. It seems strange. Why doesn't Christ just immediately heal him of his blindness? Why does it take two stages? Now if we recognise that this is a sign, it may help us to recognise why Jesus does this.

Another thing to notice is the amount of the space of the signs that is given to recording conversations that occurred afterwards. The conversations that occur afterwards are an important part of the signifying purpose of the signs themselves. The conversations unpack something of the meaning and help us to see the true nature of the sign.

One thing that we do see is the importance of words. That Christ performs his signs not primarily directly through great acts of power, but through giving instructions that are obeyed. Whether those are the instructions given to the servants in chapter two, or the instruction given to the nobleman in chapter four, the instruction given to the man who is told to take up his bed and walk in chapter five, or the instruction given to the disciples to hand out the bread and to divide it up in chapter six.

In all of these cases we're seeing that the miracle is found as people obey Christ, as they accept his word. The power is found in the word, not so much in some direct physical or miraculous action that Christ does in relationship to a person. It's about faith.

The response to the sign that is absolutely crucial is faith. Now the faith doesn't actually make the sign work. What makes the sign work is the power of Christ's word.

But as people believe Christ's word, these signs are fulfilled for them. And in this case we see another example. If someone came up to you and you were blind from birth, would you, merely because they anointed your eyes with mud and saliva, would you follow their instruction to go to a pool and wash yourself? It seems a strange instruction in the story of Naaman the Syrian.

He questions the calling that he's given to go and wash in the Jordan. Why can't I wash in one of the places in my own land, which seem far more apt for the purpose, far better rivers, far grander, whatever it is. And in this case the man believes and obeys Christ's word, and as a result he's healed.

The story is also one that can be paralleled with the events of chapter 5. In both cases there's a healing on the Sabbath. In both cases there are instructions to a person to go or to do something particular. In both cases there's a healing pool.

In both cases there is conflict with the Jews that arises from the event. So we can see these two events maybe should be held alongside each other. The other thing to notice is that this character is in many ways paradigmatic for the believer.

Christ declares himself to be the light of the world and immediately opens someone's eyes to see the light. And as the story progresses we'll see that this theme plays out in different ways. Eyes being opened, light, blindness and seeing.

These are all themes that are entangled together but they're functioning on different levels. So we have the physical sight, the man who has received his physical sight again. But we also have spiritual sight, that by the end of this chapter he's not just able to see with his physical eyes.

He's able to perceive something of Christ's identity. There's a spiritual sight that he enjoys. The conflict that he has with the Jewish leaders is characterized by irony and humor.

There is a great playfulness to it where he can't be recognized at first. Is this the man? Is this someone else? Is it someone that just looks like him? Look for his parents. Can they confirm his identity? Now all of this fits in with themes that we've already been seeing within this gospel.

Which concern a failure to recognize, a failure to understand where Christ has come from. What his identity is. Some say that the Messiah, when he comes, no one will know where he comes from.

Others say, oh he must come from Bethlehem and this man is from Nazareth. In these cases we're seeing the misidentifications and the failures of recognition that are applied to Christ elsewhere in the gospel applying to someone who's been healed by Christ. The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it but you do not know where it comes from and where it goes.

So it is with everyone who's born of the Spirit. This is a man who's been reborn. The healing takes the form first of all with the anointing of his eyes with mud made with saliva.

That creating of clay and the anointing of a man's eyes with it, it might remind you of the story of man's creation. Where man was originally formed from the clay. Here's a man being newly created and then he's sent to the pool to wash.

That pool that he's sent to wash in might have a connection as we see elsewhere in the

gospel of John with the practices of the church. There's a symbolic pattern playing out here and we see this also in Luke's work. In the gospel of Luke we have Jesus meeting the men on the road to Emmaus.

They go to Emmaus and there in the breaking of bread, in something that speaks of the celebration of the Eucharist, Christ is revealed to them and the words suddenly make sense. It's a liturgical pattern that's playing out. We see the same thing again in the story of the Ethiopian eunuch.

As the word is opened to him and then he arrives at a pool and is baptised. There is a liturgical pattern playing out there. And again another journey narrative in Luke as Paul or Saul of Tarsus receives this vision.

He's blinded. He's brought by the hand into the city and he waits there in the house and then Ananias comes to him and scales as it were, fall off his eyes and he's baptised. This is the same pattern playing out here.

The blind man is a paradigmatic believer. He's someone who's brought to new awareness. Christ deals with him, sends him and he is as it were, baptised and brought into the body of Christ's disciples.

Now then he experiences conflict with the Jews. The Jews can't accept that this healing has taken place on the Sabbath. But the problem is a healing has obviously taken place and yet God shouldn't hear the voice of someone who's wicked.

So something is seriously wrong. Now the conflict that they have with him, the way they cast him out of the synagogue. This is what would happen to believers in Christ in the early church.

They would be cast out of their synagogues. They would lose family ties as their families were afraid of the Jews. And these sorts of conflicts are playing out in this paradigmatic character who stands also in juxtaposition with the character of chapter 5. Jesus then is giving a sign of light.

He brings light to the world. He opens eyes. He helps people to see.

He gives the ability to perceive not just physically but spiritually. And on the other hand he brings blindness upon those who reject him. And as this story goes on we see that this person rises to true faith.

That he perceives. He says, Lord I believe and he worships Christ. That worshipping is again a significant indicator of Christ's status within John's Gospel.

That Christ is not just a great teacher. He is the Son of God. He is the one who has come from heaven.

Who is to be worshipped. He's not just an angel. He's not just a messiah or a leader of the people.

He's not just a king or even just a prophet. He's one to be worshipped. To recognise his status is to have true sight.

And this pattern is one that should help us as we think about our lives. We are those who also have had our eyes open to perceive the truth. We were once in blindness and now have been given sight.

We are those who are called to wash ourselves. And to identify with Christ. To be those who are marked out as his people.

As those who belong to his family. And as a result we will face the sorts of conflicts that this man faced. But in this sign we see Christ's creation of a new man.

We go through the story of the Gospel. And we see each one of the signs can be corresponding to a particular day. This is the sixth sign.

And it could connect with the sixth day. The creation of man. Here is a man who has been created anew.

And as a result is able to see things. Is able to act in particular ways that others cannot. People do not understand him.

They fail to understand where he comes from. Who he is. He takes on the characteristics of the spirit.

Light and eyes go together. The eyes of the lamp of the body. The person with the good eye is illumined in the entirety of their person.

The blind man who can see Jesus. Even though he is blind. And not physically seeing him is one such person.

And then he is someone who is an example of the person who has not yet seen but has believed. And then as he believes and obeys Christ's instruction. He perceives on a new level.

He sees Christ face to face. One question to conclude with. Think about the ways in which this chapter uses humour, sarcasm and irony to express its point.

Think about the way that the blind man or the formerly blind man interacts with the Pharisees. And the way that his conversation reveals something about the character of faith in contrast to unbelief.