

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

Abraham stepped forward and said, "Will You really sweep away the righteous with the wicked? What if there are 50 righteous people in the city? Will You really sweep it away instead of sparing the place for the sake of the 50 righteous people who are in it? You could not possibly do such a thing: to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. You could not possibly do that! Won't the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" – Genesis 18:23-25 HCSB

God revealed to Abraham His plan to destroy Sodom and its surrounding area. Abraham's shocked reply in essence was, "Are you really going to lump the righteous and the unrighteous, the good, the bad and the ugly together in this?" In other words, "Doesn't the fact that there seem to be degrees of wickedness and evil matter? Shouldn't this be a more selective, surgical strike?"

We tend to think of our personal righteousness (I am referring to our Christian walk – our lifestyle – as opposed to our standing in Christ), as being some kind of insurance against calamity. If we behave, God will bless us with good stuff and if we misbehave, God will curse us with bad stuff. Sweet system, but "it don't work that way."

What shocked Abraham was that all people are equal in the eyes of the Almighty. If there is no difference between the righteous and the unrighteous, what's the advantage of trying to be holy?

It seems that most of God's people have struggled with this issue for the entire sad course of human history. Job struggled with it. The apostles were shocked when Jesus said that rich people have a tough time getting into the kingdom. "Then who can?" they object. To this very day you'll find people who say, "If you follow these principles, you can be wealthy. If you tithe God, will pay you back with interest (as if God could ever be indebted to us)." "If you have enough faith, you too will be healthy," they proclaim to their legions of hopeful marks.

But when Jesus asked for the cup of suffering to pass Him, He was denied. Do we have more faith than the Christ? When Paul asked three times for healing, he was denied. Do we have more faith than Paul?

God sends rain on both the just and the unjust.¹ He shows no partiality – welcoming anyone who fears Him and does what is right.² He is the farmer who sows His seed indiscriminately.³ And before we get too upset about this concept, we need to remember that it worked in our favor. It worked in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.⁴ What if He'd waited till we were righteous? What if He'd waited till we were worth it?

¹ Matthew 5:45

² Acts 10:34-35

³ Matthew 13:3-9

⁴ Romans 5:8