

---

**PODCAST START:**

Brian: Welcome to the Queer Theology podcast!

Fr. Shay: Where each episode, we take a queer look at the week's lectionary readings. We're the co-founders of QueerTheology.com and the hosts for this podcast. I'm Father Shay Kearns

B: And I'm Brian G. Murphy.

FS: Hello and welcome back to the Queer Theology podcast. This is Sunday, July 28th and we are going to look at a doozy of a passage today, Genesis 18:20-32. You can find that in the show notes at [QueerTheology.com/287](http://QueerTheology.com/287), but I'm also going to go ahead and read it for us now. So this is Genesis 18:20-32.

Then the Lord said, "The cries of injustice from Sodom and Gomorrah are countless, and their sin is very serious! I will go down now to examine the cries of injustice that have reached me. Have they really done all this? If not, I want to know."

The men turned away and walked toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing in front of the Lord. Abraham approached and said, "Will you really sweep away the innocent with the guilty? What if there are fifty innocent people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not save the place for the sake of the fifty innocent people in it? It's not like you to do this, killing the innocent with the guilty as if there were no difference. It's not like you! Will the judge of all the earth not act justly?"

The Lord said, "If I find fifty innocent people in the city of Sodom, I will save it because of them."

Abraham responded, "Since I've already decided to speak with my Lord, even though I'm just soil and ash, what if there are five fewer innocent people than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city over just five?"

The Lord said, "If I find forty-five there, I won't destroy it."

Once again Abraham spoke, "What if forty are there?"

The Lord said, "For the sake of forty, I will do nothing."

He said, "Don't be angry with me, my Lord, but let me speak. What if thirty are there?"

The Lord said, "I won't do it if I find thirty there."

---

Abraham said, "Since I've already decided to speak with my Lord, what if twenty are there?"

The Lord said, "I won't do it, for the sake of twenty."

Abraham said, "Don't be angry with me, my Lord, but let me speak just once more. What if there are ten?"

And the Lord said, "I will not destroy it because of those ten."

B: I'm so excited!!!

FS: Yes! What do you make of this? What do you do with this?

B: Yeah! So obviously, this is the start of the story of Sodom & Gomorrah which LGBTQ people are intimately aware with, and honestly, at this point probably, most people are aware of it because it's just become so ingrained in our culture. Sodomy is a word that has come to mean: non-PIV sex right? It derives from this story and I think there are all sorts of takes on why that's maybe not accurate and we will perhaps get into some of that today. But what struck me today, and I think I said this last week, I just love coming back to texts over and over again because each time you see something different. And so, when we picked this text I was, "Oh! We're gonna talk Sodom & Gomorrah. We are going to talk about homosexuality in the Bible. And we're gonna talk about how you can know it's okay and this doesn't really say what people say that it says." All that definitely happening. Today prisons came up, particularly the death penalty, but prisons in general, and so often we need to punish people for their crimes and what about innocent folks who get swept up in this. Here God is saying, let's just assume for the sake of this argument that all of the city of Sodom really is terrible people. God is like, I'm not gonna destroy that. I'm gonna let go and pardon an entire city full of terrible people just so that I don't destroy ten innocent people. And I think what would our approach to criminal justice, incarceration, and in particular, the death penalty look like if we were like: just one person is too many to be punished? And what does a graceful approach to crime and punishment look like? I think, obviously, the story ends with Sodom & Gomorrah being destroyed, so not a perfect analogy. But at least for me, it prompts a moment of introspection around that. In the past, we've talked about how prison-justice is both a queer issue and a Christian issue, and you can learn more about that at [QueerTheology.com/prisons](http://QueerTheology.com/prisons), but that's like my prison and crime and punishment weird aside on Sodom & Gomorrah.

Shay, what comes up for you in this passage?

FS: Yeah, it's funny because you started off by saying that this is a passage that people know really intimately. I think there's a yes-and there, right? We have this sense that we know

July 28, 2019

**Sodom & Gomorrah**  
**Genesis 18:20-32**

3/4

the passage, but every time I read it, I find new things. I find things that we don't talk about when we talk about these passages. Even this passage, the very first sentence says, "The cries of injustice from Sodom and Gomorrah are countless..." and I think that there was a lot of butt sex in Sodom and Gomorrah and I'm pissed. The injustice is so serious that I have to do something about it. That's the first takeaway.

The other takeaway is that this passage is really funny, right? This back and forth between Abraham and the Lord is hysterical to me because Abraham is doing this fake deference thing and God is like playing into it. The two of them are going back and forth and Abraham is like, well, if I got him to agree to 50, maybe I can get him to agree to 45. It's like this barter. And again, we see this sense of a God who is willing to change God's mind, willing to be badgered down to ten people, willing to not smite the person who is arguing. I think that we often have this sense, especially, people talk about the old testament God and we have pushed back about that in hundreds of other podcasts. So we won't do that again here. The sense here is that God is wanting to be compassionate and also, unwilling for injustice to continue to exist. I think that's an important piece of this story. God is wanting to protect the innocent, wanting to take care of them, and also is not willing to let oppressors go free and do their thing. And so, I think that this story should be terrifying, not to queer folks, but to people who are invested in systems of power. And really, I'll speak for myself as a white American, that's me and I think all of us who are in the systems where oppression and injustice is still occurring. To me, that's the message of this story. You recorded this great video talking about how you are a sodomite and I think that's huge, that's a great video and it's important to pay attention to that, and we'll put that in the show notes. I think that's the message that this story continues to speak and it's more important that we grapple with that and less important than we say, well Sodom & Gomorrah wasn't really about gay people --- it wasn't. And also, it's more important that we do the work about where's the injustice in our world and how are we being a part of the change than it is to do linguistic things around homosexuality in the Bible.

B: Yeah! I am a sodomite, but it's not because I like to suck dick and have butt-sex, but because I like, participate, in the injustice in the world. I think that this idea of justice and injustice is so central to our understanding of this, and as people who, Christianity is this dominant religion in America and in much of the world, especially for folks that grew up in a church which are surrounded by Bible stories and church stories. And so, it's really easy like you were saying to think that we know what it means. It's really important on approaching a text to be paying attention to what is actually here and what isn't. The injustice happening in Sodom & Gomorrah is only about gay people if you bring that prejudice and bias to the text. But if you look at how the Hebrew and the Christian Bibles: what does God call injustice or what did God's people call injustice? It's very clear that it's political abuse, by hoarding of wealth, neglecting poor folks, mistreating women, not taking care of immigrants, right? The Bible makes clear what injustice is and even Ezekiel talks about specifically Sodom & Gomorrah, saying: the sin your

July 28, 2019

## Sodom & Gomorrah

Genesis 18:20-32

---

4/4

sister Sodom they were arrogant, overfed, unconcerned. They did not help the poor and needy, right? This passage is convicting, but not in the ways that it's been used against us in the past.

If you still have lingering questions about is it okay to be LGBTQ Christian, we put together a 7-day email series that walks you through all of that. You can get that at [QueerTheology.com/is-it-ok](http://QueerTheology.com/is-it-ok). We will start sending those over to you.

[outro music plays]

B: The Queer Theology podcast is just one of many things that we do at [QueerTheology.com](http://QueerTheology.com) which provides resources, community, and inspiration for LGBTQ Christians and straight cisgender supporters.

FS: To dive into more of the action, visit us at [QueerTheology.com](http://QueerTheology.com). You can also connect with us online: on Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, and Instagram.

B: We'll see you next week.

**PODCAST END**