

A Tale of Two Towns

I have been reading about Jesus being in a house at Capernaum when the door was surrounded by sick people, and he healed them all (1). It must have been the most wonderful evening, full of great rejoicing. I wish I had been there to see it.

The scene reminded me of another town where angels visited, and the town people all came to the door – Sodom. On that occasion, they were calling on Lot to bring the visitors out so that they could abuse them. When Lot tried to say no gently, they made to tear down the door, but their plot was foiled by the angels (2). Two very different responses to the divine presence.

This was the proof God had been looking for that the town was evil, and it was destroyed next day. Sodom has been a byword for evil ever since.

What happened to Capernaum? Here we have a real shock. Later on, Jesus roundly condemned the town, and declared that they would fare worse than Sodom on the day of judgement (3).

How so? This is extraordinary. Hadn't the people welcomed him and responded to him?

It seems not. Jesus said it was their failure to repent that led to their descending to Hades.

When it comes to being accepted by God, the issue therefore is not how good or bad we may appear in our own eyes, but whether we are willing to humble ourselves and repent. None of us gets accepted on the basis of our own merit, and none of us is excluded by our own past wrong doing, no matter how awful that may have been.

As the song put it: "There's a way back to God from the dark paths of sin:/ there's a door that is open and you may go in./ At Calvary's cross is where you begin/ when you come as a sinner to Jesus (4)." How encouraging is that?

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(1). Mark 1:32-34

(2). Genesis 19

(3). Matthew 11:20-24

(4). Hymn by E H Swinstead