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## WHO WILL RESCUE ME?

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You might have heard of the wonderful stories of Uncle Remus when you were growing up. Unfortunately, generations of children are being cut off from an important part of our rich literary heritage. I would think that we could all enjoy of the wonderful stories of Brer Rabbit and learn from the lessons those stories teach.

One of those stories is the story of the Tar Baby. Brer Fox created the Tar Baby to trap Brer Rabbit. Sure enough, as Brer Rabbit stopped to talk to the Tar Baby, he became upset that she wouldn't respond to him. He got upset and tried to teach her a lesson in respect; but in doing so, his hand became stuck to the Tar Baby. He lashed out with the other hand, then both feet, trying to get a response, but got more and more stuck with each strike. Finally he head-butted the Tar Baby, and, you guessed it, his head became instantly and totally stuck. When Brer Rabbit was totally stuck, Brer Fox appeared, laughing and threatening. That is how the term "Tar Baby" has come to mean an inextricable predicament.

Unfortunately, rather than cherish this story, any reference to a "Tar Baby" has now become a "Tar Baby" in and of itself. Politicians who have used it have instantly found themselves buried under a mountain of criticism and cries of "Racism!" As for me, I would think we could all look to these stories with pride in our cultural heritage and the richness we can gain from them.

To the point, though: how many of us would look at Brer Rabbit and say, "Well, you got what you deserved!" Perhaps we might say, "I can't help you, because I'd get stuck, too!" We might just shrug it off, saying, "I've got my own problems; I'm too busy to help you right now." There are all manner of responses we might give to the person who has gotten himself stuck in such a way that he cannot escape on his own.

Such is the case with Lot, as we will read in Genesis 14. This particular story might not have even appeared in the scriptural record but for the words, "And they took Lot." This story is interesting enough on its own, but there is a larger lesson for us that we will address shortly. Let's read Genesis 14:1-12:

*And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations;*

*That these made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, which is Zoar.*

*All these were joined together in the vale of Siddim, which is the salt sea.*

*Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, and in the thirteenth year they rebelled.*

*And in the fourteenth year came Chedorlaomer, and the kings that were with him, and smote the Rephaims in Ashteroth Karnaim, and the Zuzims in Ham, and the Emims in Shaveh Kiriathaim,*

*And the Horites in their mount Seir, unto Elparan, which is by the wilderness.*

*And they returned, and came to Enmishpat, which is Kadesh, and smote all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites, that dwelt in Hazezontamar.*

*And there went out the king of Sodom, and the king of Gomorrah, and the king of Admah, and the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (the same is Zoar;) and they joined battle with them in the vale of Siddim;*

*With Chedorlaomer the king of Elam, and with Tidal king of nations, and Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar; four kings with five.*

*And the vale of Siddim was full of slimepits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and fell there; and they that remained fled to the mountain.*

*And they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their victuals, and went their way.*

*And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.*

The basic story here is that four powerful kings from Mesopotamia to Anatolia (eastern Asia Minor) subjugated five cities near the Dead Sea, including the city of Sodom. For twelve years, these five cities paid tribute; but in the thirteenth year, they formed a coalition and rebelled. The response was swift and terrible: the four oppressors formed up their armies and marched southward on the east side of the Jordan, gutting and looting every city in their path. These folks weren't even involved! They just happened to be inconveniently placed along the way. The four invading kings got to a certain point, turned around, and started heading back north toward the Dead Sea where the five rebel cities lay. Those five rebel cities set arrayed their armies against their oppressors, and lost. The men who survived ran to the mountains. It was a rout, not a retreat. The oppressors then looted Sodom and Gomorrah, taking all the goods, food and captives that they wanted. There was no one to stop them. Then they made their way north along the western side of the Jordan River, heading toward Damascus and then to their homes.

On an historical note, I must tell you that there was a time when this account was considered by skeptics to be an invented story, made up long, long after the events were supposed to have happened. However, now scholars recognize the rightful place this has as accurate history. In fact, at one point many scholars even came to believe that one of these kings was the famous Hammurabi, and it was recorded as such in *Encyclopedia Britannica* as such. We now know that this story happened before Hammurabi's time, but we do seem to have excellent historical attestation to the names of at least two of the kings; and in any case, we also know beyond doubt that the cities recorded as destroyed here in Abram's day were destroyed in this manner and by these people groups.<sup>1</sup> The Bible's account has been absolutely reinforced by archeology. Dr. Nelson Glueck, an archaeologist who studied the ruins of these ancient cities, writes as follows:

Centuries earlier, another civilization of high achievement had flourished between the 21st and 19th centuries B.C., till it was savagely liquidated by the kings of the East. According to the Biblical statements, which have been borne out by archaeological evidence, they gutted every city and village at the end of that period from Ashtaroth-Karnaim in southern Syria through all of Trans-Jordan and the Negev to Kadesh-Barnea in Sinai.<sup>2</sup>

We have this amazing account, as I've said, because of one small fact: "and they took Lot." Lot was

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1 Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2006), 312-314.

2 Nelson Glueck, *Rivers in the Desert* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Cudahy, 1959), 11. Quoted in Morris, 312.

living in Sodom at the time. Apparently pitching his tent toward Sodom wasn't enough; and folks, it never, ever is! You can't put just one foot into the world. It draws us in and holds us fast, just like that Tar Baby. Isn't interesting that the whole valley of Sodom and Gomorrah is filled with these tar pits? What a picture for us! We enter the worldly mindset for its temporary pleasures and luxuries, only to find that we are ensnared. Lot was in trouble, big trouble, but avoidable trouble, all because he wanted to have that close connection to the worldly mindset. "They took Lot"—and there wasn't a thing he could do about it! He was in the wrong place at the wrong time for the wrong reason.

You would think that at the sign of danger, Lot would have left, wouldn't you? I mean, it was no secret that Sodom had rebelled against the overlord states. It was no secret that the oppressors were sending an army that no one else had been able to stop. It was no secret that Sodom and the other cities were marshaling their armies. I guess Lot just assumed that the armies of Sodom and its allies would win; in which case there would be a flood of spoils in the city. Maybe that temptation was just too great. I do not know why he stayed, but he did, and he was beyond helping himself when things went wrong.

Maybe you can relate to that. Maybe there is a time in your life that you can recall being totally stuck and having to rely on someone else. As most of you know, I used to be the groundskeeper here at the church and at the academy. The two organizations shared a large, commercial grade lawnmower. It was actually kind of fun to drive around. The hard part of the work was the hedge trimming and the weed trimming and the blowing and the edging; but riding the mower was great, even on that big hill back there behind the church. As long as you mowed across it sideways, everything was fine. You wouldn't dare try to mow down the hill, though! Well, one day the grass was wet, and as I mowed across the hill, the tires slipped, and down I went! The mower was stuck in the ditch at the bottom of the hill. I couldn't push it out, couldn't pull it out, couldn't do anything on my own to get it out. Fortunately, our church has a neighbor that I'd come to know during that time. Mr. Pitts observed my trouble, brought his truck around to our parking lot, and supplied some rope to pull the mower free. It was really, really hard to get the mower out, but we did it together. I was totally incapable of freeing the mower without his help.

Maybe your problem was more serious. The very word "addiction" describes the sort of problem that we can get ourselves into but not out of. Addiction is big business, my friends. Why do you suppose pushers go around offering free samples of narcotics to our middle school kids? You know why—because if a kid takes the bait, the pusher has a customer practically forever after that. Cigarette companies used to have a milder form of that, running ad campaigns such as, "This is the brand most smoked by doctors." Alcohol companies can cover for themselves by saying, "Please drink responsibly," but all the while people are destroying their own lives and the lives of others. The same can be said for the Georgia Lottery, which sagely reminds us, "Please play responsibly." The fact is that there's *nothing* responsible about an addiction. It draws us, it binds us, it has the mastery over us. That is why pornography is also strangling our society. You'd be surprised to know how many kids have cable access in their bedroom, including HBO and Showtime. As a teacher, I'd sometimes ask my class about that, and I was always surprised to see that so many of them had easy access to such godless programming. Any of these things I've mentioned can become addicting; it's by far best just to leave such things alone. If we are addicted, then we're not going to be able to break free alone. We're going to need help. We are going to need someone to rescue us.

That's where the man of faith comes in. Let's continue reading in Genesis 14, verses 13-16:

*And there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the Hebrew; for he dwelt in the plain of*

*Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner: and these were confederate with Abram.*

*And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan.*

*And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus.*

*And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people.*

When last we heard of Abram, he was worshiping God. He is being spiritually prepared. Folks, please understand that it's too late to prepare once a crisis is upon us! That's one of the reasons we go to church regularly and we meet with God's people. We need to be in a constant state of readiness for whatever lies ahead, whether it be adversity or prosperity. The key is being in constant fellowship with God.

On this particular occasion, then, an escaped captive, probably haggard and hungry, stumbles into Abram's camp. He tells Abram the story, and I'm sure Abram questioned him intently, trying to discern news of his nephew Lot. Sure enough, he finds out that Lot is among the captives. That's all Abram needs to hear! He prepares for battle.

It is from this story that we first find out just how extensive Abram's household is. Who could have imagined that he would have 318 male servants of fighting age? Not only that, but he has enough store of arms to make them combat ready on short notice. Abram takes his personal army of 318 along with those of his three allies and begins a forced march toward Damascus. In all he's going to march over 120 miles northward in pursuit of these four oppressive kings!

He arrives, splits his army, attacks the probably complacent enemy from two sides, causing maximum confusion in the ranks. The enemy flees northward, pursued by Abram. Abram continues the chase until he has freed the captives and recovered the stolen goods.

I want you to think about this: what did Abram put on the line to rescue Lot? He put everything on the line! He put his servants and himself on the line, obviously, in immediate danger; but he's also in danger of making very, very powerful enemies. All of his health and his livelihood are at stake; yet we find that he did not even hesitate.

What would we do? We might say, "Well, it serves him right! He took the best for himself, he went where he shouldn't have gone, and now he's getting his just desserts!" We might say, "You know, I'd love to help, but there's really nothing I can do. I just don't have the time, the energy, the resources, to do anything about this. He's on his own." All too often, that's the way we Christians respond. Oh, we are so quick to shoot our wounded! We heap judgment on the suffering. The only help we offer is our criticism. But that is not the way of the man of faith. Lot was a brother, a fallen brother, who needed help that only Abram could give. Abram was willing to sacrifice and do what was necessary to rescue him.

Notice also that in helping Lot he helped many others as well. Lot was not the only one rescued! How many people from those wicked cities were rescued that night by the man of faith? How many people

came to understand that, when they were beyond help, a servant of the Living God intervened and effected their escape? Only eternity can tell; but this I know: the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were certainly exposed to the truth and the love of God at this point. What they decided to do with that knowledge is another matter.

My friends, each of us share in this story. We, like Lot, were unsaved, unable to rescue ourselves; but then Jesus came—and He used a man or woman of faith as His instrument in sharing the gospel. I hope today that you have all been rescued by Jesus, but if you haven't been, if you're still mired in sin, why not let Him rescue you today?

Romans 5:7-8:

*For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.*

*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

Friends, God loves you and wants to rescue you. Christians, you've been rescued; now reach out to others! Do not go back into the mire of sin, the addictions of this world. You be that man of faith, that woman of faith, who takes God's love to the lost, to the brokenhearted. May God help us be the answer to the question, "Who will rescue me?"