

# Sodom and Gomorrah

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Father, sometimes your word says things to us which are hard for us to get our mind around, not so much because we can't understand them, but because we recoil to some extent from these teachings and do not like them. They threaten us. Maybe they even seem wrong. And so, Father, we come to one of those Bible passages today. We know, Father, that even when you confront us, you confront us to connect. And you know, Father, what we're like. You know the different ways that we evade your truth and your word. So we ask that you would have mercy upon us who are gathered here and those who are watching online and participating online, that the Holy Spirit would fall with might and power and deep conviction upon us so that we might receive your word, Father, that we might once again fall in love with you, with your beauty, your grace, your mercy, your kindness, and that we would once again rediscover the wonder of the gospel, that it would form us and shape us.

And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. Amen. This morning, we're going to discuss, we're going to look at the text that describes the destruction by God of Sodom and Gomorrah. I was talking to somebody this week, about several people this week about it. And one of them said that he wasn't, couldn't quite remember what happened in that text. And I just told him that it's a text that you get the word sodomy from.

And it's also the text that foreshadows hell. And he went, oh, but that is the text that we're going to look at this morning. I'm also very conscious that it's Pride Month. And I just want to say to anybody who's here or anybody who might be watching online, that we didn't, I didn't pick, Daniel Avitan and I didn't pick this text just to sort of say there to those who are celebrating Pride Month. Those of you who know me, I actually have a hard enough time remembering that Christmas is coming or that Mother's Day is coming up or anything like that. We just try to pick texts that are going to be, nurture the congregation. And part of what we want to do here is we want to preach the whole books of the Bible. And we want to, I also want to make sure that we both look at Old Testament texts and New Testament texts throughout the course of the year. And we just decided it would be good to go through the story of Abraham, sort of not really thinking that Sodom and Gomorrah would be the story that we would look at during Pride Month. And I know some people would say that it's not a good time to look at Pride Month during, looking at the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah during Pride Month.

And I guess all I would say is that people who would say that to us would also say that it's never a good time to look at the text. So we're going to look at the text. So if you have your Bibles, the text will be on the screen, but if you have your Bibles, it's always good. You can check as well. And normally I don't give you an outline of where I'm going, but I'm going to give you a very brief outline of what's going to happen this morning as we look at the text. First, we're going to look at the story so that the story is clear. Second, we're going to look at the issue of the sins that are involved. Then we're going to look at the problem of God's judgment. And then we're going to look at the gospel and the hope that it brings. So that's where we're going. So let's go.

Get your Bibles. And if you turn in them to Genesis chapter 19, verse 1, and we're going to go through this. I'm going to pretend that there are scenes in a play or a movie or a story. So scene 1, verses 1 to 3 is scene 1, and its title is Foreboding. Here's how it goes.

[ 4 : 0 0 ] 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 your way. They said, No, we'll spend the night in the town square.

But Lot pressed them very strongly. So they turned aside to him and entered his house. And Lot made them a feast and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.

Now, just a couple of things very briefly about that. First of all, as I talked about it just a tiny bit last week, because this story of Sodom and Gomorrah is in a sense a two-part story, and we looked at the first part last week. Probably the best way to understand angels, and sometimes they're called men, is they're angels. In a sense, they have avatars, so to speak.

The angels have avatars. They appear and are, to all intents and purposes, men, but they're like an avatar. Those of you who know games and stuff like that, that's maybe a way to help it, and movies, but they're angels. The second is not as immediately obvious in English, but in the original language, there's clear foreboding. Lot is terrified. He's worried when he sees the men come in. He knows what's going to happen. And so in the original language, he can't, he's really urging them to not spend the night in the square. And even when he says you can eat and then leave early in the morning, he's hoping that the two men can come in, nobody notices, and they can leave so early in the morning that nobody notices. So there's a sense of deep foreboding in the first scene. Scene two, verses four to five, the city sins. Look at verse four. But before they lay down, right, so they've all eaten. 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. In other words, that we may have sex with them.

You'll notice here in the text that it'd make a great emphasis to make it clear that it's all men. And as I interpreted, know it, it's to have, to sexually know them. It's not clear in the text whether it's going to be rape, or whether it's going to be just that you can party, because isn't this how everybody would like to live their lives? And some of you probably now start to see some types of ways that this text is, should maybe be sort of interpreted in different ways. We're going to talk about that when I get to sins at the end of the, at the end of the story. Scene three, the sinful alternative. In fact, we could even say the shocking sinful alternative, verses six to eight.

[ 7 : 12 ] Lot went out to the men at the entrance. He shut the door after him and 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.

Now you have to pause. This is a, I mean, there's a smidgen of courage, but what Lot is suggesting is a terrible evil. But some might say, you know, George, here's a second here. Aren't you sort of, like, the text doesn't say that Lot's like an evil guy. Like, aren't you sort of trying to impose your moral framework on it? Like, doesn't the Bible text valorize or make Lot into a type of a hero?

There is a certain amount of courage to what he did, which the Bible, in a sense, would give credit to, but very, very little. But it's going to be very clear by the end of the story that he falls under God's judgment as well. It's a different type of judgment than the judgment that happens to Sodom and Gomorrah, but it's very clearly a judgment from God. The other thing is, is if the Bible ended at Genesis 19, so that all you knew was Genesis chapter 1 to Genesis 19, then in fact, you'd have to conclude that the Bible is giving us this narrative as something to show that Lot did a good thing. But the Bible doesn't end at Genesis 19. And in fact, at a literary level, as I've shared before, the Lord of the Rings is made up of six books. And if you just read book one and then didn't read the rest of it and interpreted the Lord of the Rings just from having read the first book, you wouldn't understand the book. You have to read all six books. And if you read all five books that make up this story, you'll see that what Lot has described, or what he is offering to do, is very, very, very clearly denounced as evil in the other books.

[ 9 : 29 ] The other thing is, as at the end you're going to see that Lot is spared, this particular judgment, this should be something that worries us. Because it is, in fact, a text that foreshadows the fuller biblical doctrine of hell, of the fact that every human being will appear before the judgment is the fuller biblical doctrine of the human being will appear before the human being will appear.

But on the way to that final judgment, there can be, in a sense, more proximate judgments. And if Lot is spared, that shows the bar is very low.

Like really, really, really, really, really, really, really low. And this doesn't show anything about God's indifference to evil.

It does communicate to us something of his great mercy and patience. You're going to hear me say this several times throughout the sermon, because it's, in fact, a very important way to understand the text.

There's a wonderful part in the introduction to morning prayer, which is just a summary of three different Bibles. It's said three times in the book of Ezekiel, and it's summarized in morning prayer. And it goes like this, God takes no delight in the death of a sinner, but rather that they will turn from their wickedness and live.

[10:51] That's what gives God delight, is that when we turn from our wickedness and live. And that's going to be how you have to understand what's going on in this particular text. But scene four is verse nine, and the title for scene four is Canadians are present, which might be a bit of a surprise to you, but look at what happens in verse nine.

So Lot has offered his daughters, and in verse nine, the men around the house say, verse nine, stand back.

No, sorry, but they said, stand back. In other words, Lot, get out of the way. And they said, now they yell out, this fellow came to sojourn with us, and he 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. That's the very Canadian response, isn't it?

How dare you judge me? Like, how dare you use your morals to judge me? How dare you? How dare you?

[12:02] Like, I'm the average Canadian. Like, what are you guys doing? You're the ones who are hateful. You're the ones who don't believe in diversity. You're the ones who don't believe in inclusion. You're the ones who don't believe.

How dare you? And that's exactly what they say in the text. Canadians are present. Average Canadians. Scene five.

Deliverance and explanation. Verses, to begin at verse 10. But the men, the men slash angels, 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, 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.

[13:09] Now, the word blinding is a lone word from another language, not from Hebrew. And what the lone word means is blindness.

So some of you who watch certain types of movies and read certain types of books and maybe who've had certain experiences are familiar with flashbang grenades, where there's a very, very bright light and a loud noise which temporarily stops people from being able to function, and it confuses them.

And it's a similar type of idea here in this word. The idea is that there's been an exceptionally bright light that blinds them with the light. It's very interesting. They're in darkness and they're blinded by the light.

And because they're blinded by the light, they're not able to find the door and pursue the evil that they want to pursue. We also see here the explanation of God's judgment.

And there's something that's important that you need to know. Those of you who aren't familiar or don't remember what happened in the story just before this, the story that happened just before this is very significant for two things.

[14:15] I mean, more than two things, but two things for the point of view of what we're doing here is that in the story before this, the Lord and Abraham have a conversation. The Lord decides to reveal to Abraham that he's heard that there's great evil in Sodom.

And so that the Lord is coming down to Sodom to see for himself, so to speak, whether in fact the great evil is there. And it's very important because it's communicating that the Lord isn't like anger driven.

He's not thin-skinned. He doesn't have temper tantrums, that he's driven by justice and truth. And so he goes down to see whether in fact it's true because he's not going to do, if he was to judge and they weren't really guilty, then he would be guilty of injustice.

But God is driven by justice and by truth. And at the same time, the dialogue between Abraham and God, because in the story, Abraham intercedes for the city. God says to Abraham, I'm going down to see how bad, whether or not Sodom and Gomorrah are as bad as they say.

And Abraham instantly knows that if God goes down, Sodom and Gomorrah is doomed. And so Abraham intercedes for Sodom and Gomorrah.

[15:28] And, but now we see that they've come and seen for themselves. In a sense, it's the straw that broke the camel's back. And they announce that there's going to be God's judgment and that therefore they have to leave.

Scene six, more Canadians are met in the story. Look at verse 14. 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.

But he seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting. Now, why is this more Canadians? I don't watch a whole lot of Netflix comedy specials, but from what I know, if I was doing a special, I got up to the front and said, how many of you were worried about the last judgment?

And everybody would laugh. Right? I'm sort of thinking a lot about how God's going to judge everybody and we're all going to go to hell. Everybody would laugh. That's the Canadian response. And part of the story is, it's a very profound part of the story, if you think about it, because it, and this is going to be this and the next little bits are very important things for us to think about.

[16:44] All in the story, the story forms us for this. I mean, gosh, the world just seems so stable, doesn't it? And how could something suddenly happen?

I mean, you know, you think about it, that night, as these two men slash angels entered the town, the townsmen and others were thinking about how they were going to put their kids to bed.

They were maybe counting the rest of the day's take. They were making their supper. They were thinking of the party. Maybe they're thinking of the trip they're going to do tomorrow. They're thinking of the business deal. Life is going on as normal.

The powerful are powerful. The weak are weak. The city is right there. It seems very, very stable. Life is going to go on. And the idea that something could happen that would end all human life just in a moment, it seems completely and utterly preposterous, as it does to us.

A couple of Saturdays ago, 70% of Ottawa people didn't think that by the end of the day they would be without power. And for those of us who lost power for an extended period of time, it's unsettling at a very psychic level for the world not to be stable.

[18:07] Scene 7, Difficulties in Believing. Look at verse 15. 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 Lot 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. Lot had difficulties believing it.

He sort of believed it at night. I mean, good grief. He's... He... You think about it. It's dark in the house. There's men screaming and howling. They're probably cursing and they can't find and they're banging and they're making lots of noise.

And he's... And it's dark. And these two men did this weird thing with this blinding light that blinded people. And it's...

[19:15] And the cursing and the unsettledness goes on for a long time and it's night and you feel very, very fragile and it's easy to believe in something like the judgment. But then daylight comes. And you look at your favorite tree and you look at your garden and you look at your walls.

And if any of you have ever been to the Holy Land, even those parts of the Holy Land that are most dry and desolate, there's a beauty to them and you look out and it just looks like everything's very stable and it's hard to believe.

It would be as if by the end of this sermon you feel a bit convicted about the reality of hell, but it's hard to maintain that reality. You go outside, you get a coffee, you drive your car, the roads are stable.

It's hard to continue believing such doctrines. It's very psychologically true. Scene 8. Mercy to the blind.

Verse 16. Sorry, verse 18, I should say. Verse 18. And Lot said to them, O no, my lords, behold, your servant has found favor 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.

[ 20 : 33 ] Behold, this city is near enough to flee to and it's a little one. Let me escape there. Is it not a little one and my life will be saved? One of the angels said to him, Behold, I grant you this favor also that I will not overthrow the city to which you have spoken.

Escape there quickly for I can do nothing until you arrive there. Therefore, the name of the city was called Zoar. It's a very, very subtle thing, but in verse 16, if you look, you'll see that what's happening to Lot is purely because of God's mercy.

But in verse 19, Lot thinks it's because he's found favor. As if something about him, I mean, how could God judge me?

You know, like, you know, like, you know, I'm married, you know, I have a degree, I'm Canadian, you know, I'm a good guy. How could God judge me? I found favor. I could see how you can judge, you know, those bad people, you know, I don't know, the guys who vote for Trump or, you know, some of those, like, you know, billionaire tech giants or something like that.

I could see how you could judge them, but look at me. And so there's a fundamental blindness about Lot, and it's even seen in the difference between Abraham. I mean, Lot doesn't realize that his standing, the mercy comes because of Abraham's intercession for him.

[ 21 : 52 ] And Abraham intercedes for the whole city that God would spare it. But what Lot does is whine because he doesn't want to be inconvenienced.

And so he's blind, but God still shows mercy. He doesn't show mercy because Lot's going to get a pass. Lot's going to be judged. See, God takes no delight in the death of a sinner, but rather that he might turn from his wickedness and live.

A season of not being judged is because God desires us to repent. The reason texts like this are in the Bible is because God desires us to turn to him for mercy and hear that he has provided a savior. Now a very sobering part, scene nine, the judgment of the Lord. Verse 23. The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar.

Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur or brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven.

[ 23 : 03 ] And the Lord 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.

The language is communicating that it's not just that, it's not as if God is cruel and Lot's wife just happened to glance over her shoulder and then bam.

No, no, no. She's not walking towards freedom. She's not in the city for protection. She's standing outside of the protection looking back.

Probably thinking my husband, Lot, is a fool to believe these people. Like, look how beautiful everything is. Like, nothing's going to happen.

Like, I don't want to live in this crappy little city. Like, I have this wonderful house. I have servants. We have wealth. We have possessions. We had to leave it all behind. And so she's not in the city.

[ 24 : 05 ] And the destruction and the judgment of God comes upon her. Scene 10. Mercy and answered prayer. Look at verses 27 to 29.

And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the Lord. That's in the chapter just before. And Abraham looked down towards 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.

Almost always in the Old Testament, when you see the word remembered, it means receive mercy. And it was God showing mercy to Abraham and Abraham's intercession for Lot that Lot was spared the destruction of the brimstone and the fire.

So you see Lot's answered prayer. You see God's mercy. Scene 11. Destabilizing fear.

[ 25 : 25 ] Verse 30. Now Lot went up out of Zoar and lived in the hills with his two daughters. For he was afraid to live in Zoar, so he lived in a cave with his two daughters.

So what's going on here? One moment. Didn't Lot just say, I'm afraid to go to the hills, let me live in the city, and now he's afraid to live in the city, so he goes to live in the hills?

It's not an inconsistency in the text. It's the destabilizing, the lack of, you see, you see, one of the, you know, a couple of years ago we went through the book of Proverbs, and I suggested to the staff

that we called our sermon series How to Be Square.

They didn't like it. That's fine. They were wiser than me. But the fact of the matter is that the Bible will teach you how to be square. It won't teach you how to be hip. It won't teach you how to be cool. It won't teach you how to be popular. It's going to teach you how to be square. How to be a square. But that's where you have stability from the Bible. An ability to assess the world, to be wise, to see what's what, to deal with reality, to roll up your sleeves and deal with the real world, to not be confused by the arrogance of the proud and the claims of the unjust, and not to be mistaken by moral relativism when we need moral clarity, and not to be afraid of every bump in the night.

[ 26 : 51 ] That's why there's a constant message in the Bible that to come to the Lord and to know His mercy is to be delivered from fear. That even the fear of the Lord, the knowledge of who God is and a clarity about knowing who He is, the effect of that is to minimize your fear and anxiety that you have in life.

And so Lot, and this is going to fit in with the other type of thing which is about to happen, which is very tragic, and then we'll get to some of the other things, is that Lot is, Lot is just, he's not safe, he's not happy in the city, he's not happy in the hills, he's just not happy. He's afraid in the hills, he's afraid in the city, he's just afraid. And then in conclusion, the Lord's other judgment.

Verses 31 and following. So Lot's in the cave with his two daughters and the firstborn daughter 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.

[ 28 : 09 ] 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 day of the book, this book was written.

The younger also bore a son and called his name Ben-Ami and he is the father of the Ammonites to this day. The Moabites and the Ammonites became the ancient enemies of Israel.

The Moabites worship the god Moloch where you sacrifice your infant to the god. This is also the lord's judgment.

[ 29 : 25 ] One of the ways that sometimes the lord judges us here on earth or we start to begin to experience the lord's judgment is that the common grace that he bestows that stops us from our worst desires that pulls us back from that that God, the image it's found in the New Testament, the image is if there's a constant current that we have and it's like a boat on a river with a current and the boat is securely tied to the dock and the river is like our sinful passions, our passions to be like God, to do whatever we please, to not have anybody judge us, to just be narcissistic, to be selfish and there's this constant pressure, this constant flow but common grace keeps the boat stable and tied to the dock and one thing that sometimes happens is it's as if God unties the ropes that ties the boat which is you to the dock and allows the current to take you and batter you and that's what's seen here in this text and it's a judgment from God.

Now, some of you might have said, George, you know, that's a very interesting story. It's a terrible story. In some ways, George, I think you should be ashamed that you would even believe it or uphold it.

You know, George, I think you read a story like that and it encourages violence against the LGBTQ plus community and gets homophobic and frankly, George, I think you and others are misinterpreting it.

It's very obvious that the men are either bisexual, they're not homosexual, it's not talking about lesbianism, it's in fact, George, probably what it is, it's heterosexual men desiring to do something like this and, you know, we know better today, we know better about orientation and stability and health and just everything about this text, George, is just wrong.

A couple of things in response very briefly. The same-sex sexual knowing in the text is definitely not the only sin in the text, but it is one of them.

[ 31 : 43 ] The rest of the Bible, because it's, this text is commented on in Isaiah, it's commented on in Jeremiah, it's commented on in Ezekiel and it's commented on in the New Testament and from these other places we see that it's, there's this, this among the other sins of Sodom and Gomorrah are a lack of hospitality, of rape, of oppression, of adultery, of making lying seen as a virtue, of acting in a way to enable crime, of arrogance, of being unrepentant, and of oppression of the poor.

But in that list, the same-sex sexual knowing is also present. It is one of the sins that led to the judgment of the city.

And then some people might say, but George, you see, this is the whole problem. You know, George, why is it that the Bible thinks that things like that are like the worst sin and you're just giving heterosexuals and others a pass because, you know, like, but I'm just going to, those are all, in a sense, good comebacks, but they're mistaken.

In fact, the matter is that the Bible never says that same-sex sexual knowing is the worst sin. In fact, actually, the Bible does tell you what the worst sin is. Right? Those of us who know our Bible, what often causes a problem of conscience in the New Testament is the unforgivable sin is the sin against the Holy Spirit.

not same-sex sexual knowing. And what that sin is a person who's become so proud that they never repent.

[ 33 : 21 ] They're completely immune to whatever God tries to do. They're immune to the truth. They're immune to conscience in such a way that they're just immune and they can no longer repent.

They can no longer hear the truth. And that's the worst sin. In fact, actually, in ancient Christian teaching, which would still be the mainstream of Christian teaching, sort of summarized in the seven deadly sins.

In the seven deadly sins, the sexual sins are the least deadly. And the most deadly is pride. But it's still a deadly sin. But it's definitely not making any claim that it's the worst sin.

And anybody who says it is a Christian that just doesn't know anything about it. And then some might say, but George, you know, we know way more about it. We know about identity and we know about stable identities and we know that we have to do types of things that help us to define, help us to be stable in our identity.

And I guess I'll say this just very briefly, and if you want to know more about it, I highly recommend you read the writings of Sam Albury or Rosaria Butterfield or my friend Christopher Yuan.

[ 34 : 23 ] But the fact of the matter is that the Bible is not reductionistic. It's a very hard thing for the world to understand. The world is always trying to reduce us. And the Bible is not reductionistic.

Human beings aren't reduced to their sexual desire. The Bible never reduces human beings. They don't reduce human beings to their race. That's not even a biblical concept.

They don't reduce human beings to economic forces. The Bible never reduces human beings to how much money you have. It never reduces human beings to your sexual desire.

or politics. It doesn't reduce you. The Bible upholds the fact that human beings are angular and made in the image of God.

And we sing and we dance and we have friends and we make money and we have businesses and we listen. And the Bible celebrates that.

[ 35 : 20 ] The Bible never reduces us to define us in categories of... Heterosexual is not a biblical concept. In fact, it's against the Bible. Heterosexual is an attempt to define you by your sexual desire.

It's an attempt to reduce you to what you desire sexually. The Bible doesn't accept that for a moment. The Bible's not reductionistic. And does this text teach you that we should hate the LGBTQ plus community?

It teaches the exact opposite. What's the heart of the text is that Abraham intercedes for the city. What the text is teaching you is to intercede for people.

For me to intercede to people. Not to hate them but to have compassion and love them and to pray for them. The people that from whatever your point of view you think are farthest from God and if you have a sense in your spirit that some people are really far from God that's also a leading of the Holy Spirit for you to intercede for them.

The text shows the model in the text is Abraham's intercession. The opposite of hatred. And does the text pick on the LGBTQ?

[ 36 : 41 ] Plus community? No it doesn't. My friend Christopher Yuan is very very brilliant on this. And I just have to talk about it very very briefly. But the Bible points that there is two paths to holiness for human beings.

And holiness isn't the same thing as barrenness. It doesn't mean being sterile. It's the holiness is holiness conveys the idea of purity.

I see God is this all pleasure comes from God. Joy comes from God. Beauty, love, truth, justice, mercy, creativity.

They all come from God. Holiness is to become more and more gods. Not to become more like a god but to belong to the triune god. To get closer to the triune god.

So holiness provides this idea of purity, of holiness, of integrity, of dignity, of freedom, of wholeness, of being truly yourself because you're truly now one with God.

[ 37 : 46 ] It's an image of beauty and of grace, of life and of love, of truth and of goodness, of justice and of mercy. And the Bible says there's two paths to holiness. And one path is a path that every single human being walks on.

and it's a path of singleness. That there's a way of being single which is a way of beauty and of freedom and holiness and loveliness and creativity and compassion.

And most people don't choose to be single for their whole life or even for a large chunk of their life. Some people do but many just discover that the path of singleness which is a way towards holiness is the way that they will walk till they die.

And others like me, I was single for a long season. I've been married. That's the other path to holiness of one biological male married to one biological female.

It's another path to holiness. And unless that married couple die in a car accident at the same time, there will be a season where they will once again, one of them at least, will continue on that path to holiness.

[ 39 : 01 ] But God provides two paths to holiness. The Bible text here makes it very clear that God does not call you to heterosexuality because there's very clearly heterosexual sin.

I'm not called to heterosexuality. I am called to love Louise. Louise. That's what I'm called to. To love Louise and be one with her. And it's a beautiful path. It's the path to holiness.

What about hell and judgment? There's not God I mean, God shouldn't judge.

It's unworthy of God. It's hateful of God. George, I don't even understand how you could ever even believe in a text like this. George, you should, this text is horrific.

[ 40 : 07 ] The God that's revealed in here is horrific. It's a whole other sermon, but I want to say a couple of points. The first is that when we feel this about God, what is revealed is not what's true about God, but the fact that we're confused.

Why am I saying is it revealed that you're confused? You make moral judgments. You make moral judgments about all sorts of things.

If you can make moral judgments, why can't God? And if you refuse to make moral judgments, if you refuse to allow God to make judgments, is that because you think that you're God?

And what about punishment? You want justice and you want people to be punished. Like, you know, you think about it, and let's even take a very good couple, let's say there's two people and they're both two people very high up in Shopify or some high tech thing and they're both making a quarter of a million dollars and so they're making very, very good money.

I'm guessing more than anybody here in the room, but maybe there's somebody here this morning or watching who's making more than half a million dollars a year. And if you had some street person come in and steal your watch and your watch was worth, let's say, \$20,000, would you want to have them prosecuted?

[ 41 : 38 ] Would you, you know, I mean, you're making half a million dollars a year and they steal a \$20,000 watch? That's a lot of money for me, but not a lot of money for you. But wouldn't you and most people even agree that you'd be right to try to have that person be arrested and put in jail?

So why is it that you believe that people can be punished, but you don't believe that God can punish people? Like, how do we have an actual honest conversation when you don't even realize that you think you can do something, but God can't do what you can do?

And this text is making very clear that in fact, God, unlike you, is never going to be anger-driven or thin-skinned or jump to conclusions, but he's actually going to have a just judgment. Or even consider this, that many people will say to me, many, many people say to me, I can't believe in a God that just allows evil to go on and it's not stopped and it's not judged. And then the very next day they might say, especially after they hear a text like this, is I can't believe in a God that judges evil. Well, one moment, you can't have both. If you don't want to believe in a God that doesn't judge evil, and then you don't want to believe in a God that does judge evil, it means you just don't want to believe in God.

[ 42 : 49 ] You don't want God. You just don't want him. Pick one, and let's have a conversation. And most importantly, what if it's real?

I mean, a lot of our emotional reaction to this is as if we're just inventing things. It would be as if this theater was completely and utterly packed to the gills, maybe even beyond what the fire marshal would allow, and then somebody all of a sudden yells fire, and there is no fire, but they yell fire, and they yell it and they get all hysterical, and we all get hysterical, and everybody's completely and utterly, and for many people, we look at a text like this and we just think it's just religious, it's not real, and so to talk like this is just like yelling fire in a crowded theater, all it does is cause death and destruction, but what if it's not like this?

What if it's more like you're hiking in an area where the roads are very narrow, and you hike up and you see that there's, you feel a bit of a trevor, but it doesn't do anything to you, and you look down and you see that the bridge has collapsed, and you see that it's a straight way and the cars are going to go down and they're going to come to that edge of the bridge and they're going to go over the bridge to their death, and so you run, you get down the hill as fast as you can and you go on the road and you stand on the road waving your arms trying to get cars to stop, because you don't want them to go over the edge of the bridge to their death.

I want to share with you, friends, this text is not about yelling fire in a crowded room, this text is claiming that it's real. There is a God that does exist, that you and I will be judged. And in fact, actually, just as if you discovered that there were hikers who could have gone down to the road and stopped cars from going over to their doom, they didn't do it, and you would think they were terrible, evil people, so at the end of the day, if there is in fact a judgment of God, and I as a pastor never warned people about it, I would in fact be a terrible, evil man.

[ 44 : 51 ] Just in closing, George, you're talking like this as if it's just going to be something for other people. You're sort of like, you know, Boris Johnson in the UK telling everybody not to, you know, not to see families and not to gather.

Meanwhile, you know, they're all having big parties. One rule for you, for me, and a different rule for you, and you sort of know I want to tell you this, and I'm going to include Shane, I didn't warn him about this.

Shane's the guy, the good-looking guy who's leading the service. We're both ordained, and I want to tell you, and I know Shane would say amen. There's nothing about either Shane or me that would mean that God favors us.

We deserve God's judgment. We would not stand in the judgment day. Neither of us would. The only hope that Shane and I have in the judgment day is that God came down amidst our human race, Emmanuel, God with us.

And he came to be my representative, and he identified with me. And he came to be my substitute, and he came to offer an exchange. And the only hope that Shane has, or I have, on the judgment day is Jesus.

[ 46 : 20 ] I have no other hope than that. There is no other hope than that. There is no other hope than that. And those paths to holiness, you might say, George, I don't know, those paths to holiness, you sort of make them sound good, but they're too hard.

And let me tell you, they are too hard. And paths to holiness, that's not the gospel. The gospel is that you have Jesus, who is your representative, who is identified with you completely, who knows you completely, who's your substitute, your exchange.

He dies in your place. He offers you a connection with God. That's the gospel. But I can also tell you this, that it's God's intention that there are paths to holiness, and there are paths to holiness. One path is a path of singleness.

The other was a path for a season of marriage. And with Christ, you don't walk it alone. There's a presence on the path.

And there's the hope and promise at the end. And it's all a gift from our Savior. I'm going to invite you to stand. As we draw to a close, if you are here or if you are watching and you have never given your life to Christ, there is no better time than now to give your life to Christ.

[ 47 : 42 ] There's no better time than to say to Jesus, I have never really thought before that I will one day appear before you in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah as a foretaste of God's judgment of all human beings.

God, I know that I can't stand before you in judgment. I know that I need your mercy. And I thank you, Father, that you have provided mercy in the person of your Son.

And I ask, Father, that Jesus would be my Savior and my Lord. Lord, I give myself to him and I ask that he would take me and that he would never let me go.

And I thank you for your promise that he will take me and he will never let me go. And for us who are Christians, it's a time to recommit.

Not that we should spend all of our time thinking about just the last judgment or hell, but it is an important real truth about the real world. And it's so wonderful that we can remember this on a day when we will receive the Lord's Supper, where we are reminded that Jesus' death upon the cross was inaugurating a new covenant.

[ 49 : 13 ] To remember his blood shed and his body pierced and dying. And that we can receive him as our Savior and Lord. And the Lord's Supper is not only a time to receive more grace from him, but to recommit to him.

And to remember that he will never let us go or forsake us. That he is our Savior. And asking him to be our Lord. Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father, I ask that you would gently but powerfully pour out the Holy Spirit upon us.

We have looked at things which are hard for us to look at, that our mind and our heart rebels at. But Father, we can see in this that you are reminding us of what the real world is like.

That you are in fact God. That you are in fact Lord. That there is a justice. There is a day when we will be judged. And there is a judgment. And that our only hope is Christ.

And that people need to know Christ. They need to have him as their Savior and their Lord. And Father, that you have not called us to hate people, but you have called us, Father, to have compassion.

[ 50 : 16 ] And intercede. And we ask, Father, that you would make us a congregation. Father, a congregation which shows forth your holiness, your beauty, your justice, your love, your compassion, your mercy, your kindness, and your intercession for others.

And that you would help us to put to death all self-righteousness and instead make us people who are gripped by what Christ has done for us in the gospel. And that that will be the basis by which we see the world.

And that as your gospel becomes more dear to our heart, that we are shaped for compassion. We are shaped for mercy. And so, Father, we ask that you would do this wonderful ongoing work in our lives.

And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior, and all God's people said, Amen.