

# Judgement & Mercy

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning, everyone. So the reading is from 2 Peter, chapter 2, verses 1 to 10. But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them, the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed, they will exploit you with false words.

Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and the destruction is not asleep. For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment, if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly, if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly, and if he rescued the righteous lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked, for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard. Then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.

Father, we thank you for all of your word. We love going through a book section by section, and it means we don't skip over the difficult bits.

So I pray, as we come today, that we humbly sit under your word, trusting that we need to hear Genesis 19, that it's not just people out there in the world, but we, we, your people, need to hear this.

So please bless us in ways, more ways than we can even expect, by sitting under your word now. Give us minds that understand and hearts that believe. In Jesus' name, Amen.

[ 2 : 30 ] Amen. Well, many put off Christianity because of the fire and brimstone judgment that we're about to see in Genesis 19.

Many would prefer the vision of a loving society of acceptance, you do you, live and let live. This whole fire judgment stuff, it seems distasteful.

But is it really a loving society if there is no justice? I want to read a quote from a prominent atheist, Richard Dawkins.

He once wrote this, The universe, still the quoting, The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is at bottom no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference.

And yet, isn't there something in all of us that when we see or hear an atrocity, we want to call it what it is.

[ 4 : 21 ] After the Bondi attack last year, our state premier and our prime minister reached for a word to describe that. They said it was evil.

It wasn't enough to say it was a crime. They reached for that word. It's evil. There's something in us, isn't there?

I don't care whether you believe in God or not. There's something in us that wants to call it what it is. That's wrong. And if this universe is just blind physical forces, if there's no absolute right and wrong that sits over every culture and every single person, on what basis can you fight for justice? If someone is being trampled by the powerful, what are you going to appeal to to say you shouldn't be doing that? And if there's only blind, pitiless indifference, you can't give anyone hope who's grieving and oppressed.

There will be justice in the end. We need justice. We need it if we're going to have a truly loving world.

[ 5 : 44 ] Now, God's promise to Abraham, we see in Genesis, is of a love-filled world. He wants to restore the whole world.

He says, through Abraham, all the nations of the earth will be blessed, fully blessed from Abraham's family line. So that's the hope we have.

As we continue the story, can I encourage you to have your Bibles open to Genesis 19. I'm going to walk us through the story and then I want to finish with three lessons for us today.

So in Genesis 18, we heard that the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great. And the Lord is visiting.

He's coming down to see the evidence firsthand. And Abraham, in his unique relationship, covenant relationship, he's interceding.

[ 6 : 49 ] He's praying. Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is right, do what is just? Far be it from you to sweep the righteous away with the wicked, with the guilty.

And he goes further still and he asks, instead of the sin of the many coming onto the few righteous, could it work the other way around? Lord, can the few righteous, can you spare the wicked on their account?

Are you the kind of God who will spare the many sinners for the sake of the few righteous? 50, 40, 30, 20, 10. And the repeated answer is, yes, I'm that kind of God.

I will spare Sodom, even if I find 10. Just 10. So, as we come into the story, we should be asking, is the judge of all the earth right?

Is he just in his judgment? So, verses 1 to 3. The two angels came to Sodom in the evening and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom.

[ 7 : 59 ] 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 on your way.

They said, No, we will spend the night in the town square. But he pressed them strongly, so they turned aside to him and entered his house. And he made them a feast and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.

Now, the way Lot receives the heavenly visitors, it should remind you, I think, remind us of what we saw last week. He receives them as a humble servant, like we saw with Abraham.

He's bowing to the earth, giving them a meal. But there's something else in the mix here, isn't there? With Abraham, it's just peace and fellowship. Something else is going on here.

The visitors want to spend the night in the town square behind the safety of the city gates. But then Lot presses them strongly.

[ 9 : 04 ] Now, that word we're going to see later in verse 9, the whole town is going to be pressing against Lot. Something is going on. Lot knows they are in danger. What we're about to read is not a one-off event.

He knows the character of this town. He's trying to protect them. So, as we continue, verse 4. Lot went out to the men of the entrance, shut the door after him, and said, Lot, where are the men who came to you tonight?

Bring them out to us, that we may know them. Lot went out to the men of the entrance, 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.

But they said, stand back. And they said, this fellow came to sojourn, 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.

[ 10 : 31 ] But the men 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.

It's a scary scene. We once had two drunks bang on our front door late at night. They thought it was their house.

And they were trying to convince me it was their house. Now let me tell you, I was not opening that front door. It was scary. I had my phone, I was just about to call the police because they weren't listening.

This is a scary scene. There is no police. The whole town is there. This is a scary scene. It is in bold and underlined italics.

The men of the entire city, young and old. All the people, the last man, surrounding the house. And what do they want? They want to know them. Now to know, usually, in the Old Testament, means how we use the word.

[11:43] Get acquainted with someone. Understand who they are. So there's some Christians who want to paint a positive picture of homosexuality.

And they say, it's not sexual here. What's really going on is that the town is offended that Lot, a foreigner, has taken in these visitors and they haven't, he hasn't run it by the town to vet them.

Should they stay or not? And they're offended. And then they get violent. Now context.

Context always helps us understand the meaning of a word. Verse 8. We got the word no again. Lot's solution to this is disturbing, is it not?

He offers his daughters clearly in a sexual sense. They have known no man. He's offering his daughters sexually.

[12:48] And that explanation, does that really deserve fire coming down in judgment as we're about to hear?

Appeal is made to Ezekiel 16:49 because Ezekiel says this, Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom, pride, excess of food and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy.

But we should expect a sick society to be sick in different ways. And when you combine Ezekiel with what we're reading in Genesis, it's disturbingly close to our Western culture.

Prosperous ease. And I know there's costs of living crisis, but compared to the rest of the world, prosperous ease.

Not helping the poor. Flaunting sexual so-called freedom. It's a sick society in many ways.

[14:00] Sort of. The word no here, what's going on, we all know what's happening here. It's an attempt at gang rape. Now, I'm sorry if that's triggering to anyone.

I just want to call it what it is. Sometimes you need to call evil for what it is. Now, they're given an opportunity to repent.

Lot goes out. I beg you, my brothers. He's identifying. My brothers do not act so wickedly.

Who are you to judge? They overrule any feelings of shame.

Who are you to judge? But by rejecting Lot, they're really despising God's authority. They're trying to ease their own conscience.

[15:16] They're rejecting that there is a judge of all the earth who has the right to tell all of us what is right and wrong, and who has the power to enforce it. There is a judge who hears the cries.

They're given an opportunity to repent. Who are you to judge? They're even given a partial judgment. They're blinded. Now, it's probably a blinding light. Now, what do they do?

Do they try and make their way home? No, they wear themselves out, groping for the door. They're so intent on gratifying their desire.

Look, we all intuitively know you don't need the Ten Commandments. God's law is written on all of our hearts. This isn't just a crime.

This is evil. This is wrong. The judge is just. He sees the evidence before acting. He gives opportunity to repent, even partial judgment before final.

[16:38] But he will avenge all the cries that Sodom has caused. Well, verse 12.

Then the men said to Lot, the angels that is, Have you anyone else here? Sons-in-law, sons, 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. 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 jest. Now, I think there's every reason to imagine that these men were in the crowd.

We're told all the men were gathered at the door. They don't deserve this warning. But see the Lord's desire to save anyone associated with Lot.

[ 17 : 54 ] Go warn them. And you'd expect their future father-in-law would have some respect in their eyes. But life was still normal, as Bo introduced the morning.

It's a normal night. It's a normal day. The idea of God's coming judgment, it's ridiculous to them. It's not something to fear. They make a joke of it.

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 he 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. And Lot said to them, Oh no, my lords.

[ 19 : 01 ] 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. Behold, this city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one.

Let me escape there. Is it not a little one? And my life will be saved. He said to him, Behold, I grant you this favor also, that I will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken.

Escape there quickly, for I can do nothing till you arrive there. Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar. Five times here we've got the word escape, flee.

But Lot lingers. Now, is he overwhelmed? Like his whole world is coming crashing down. Like did he just freeze?

I'm not sure. Because of his requests that he makes, I think it's more likely he's in two minds.

There's a part of him that doesn't want to leave. He chose to live in Sodom.

[ 20 : 07 ] He still loves Sodom to some extent. The angels had to grab them by the hand and basically drag them out.

And they give a clear command, Escape for your life. This is a life and death moment. I was once skiing in Thredbo and it had been raining for days and I stopped by this path where water was coming over so I couldn't keep going.

And the sound of rushing waters, it was terrifying. It was a hillside and water and snow just got mixed up. I don't know, I think avalanche is the right word. And it went within metres of me.

Like I have no idea. Time slowed down. I think maybe five seconds. It was life and death. I had a quick decision to make.

Now what do we see Lot asking for here? It is a life and death moment. Can I have this little city? What's he doing?

[ 21 : 27 ] He's trying to bargain. He's told that the entire valley will be destroyed. The entire valley is part of this sin of Sodom.

And he's asking, just give me a little city. I think he's still in love with Sodom. He's still clinging to the life he knows.

And they are incredibly patient, full of mercy, and they even grant him that request. Verse 23.

The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar. Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven. And he 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. Lot, in the end, he does believe.

[ 22 : 40 ] He does flee. But the moment he steps into Zoar, the Lord does nothing until he reaches safety. Whatever the fire is, whether it's natural, if there's natural causes or supernatural, you can go research it if you want to look into that.

But it doesn't really matter. The point here is the Lord himself is the source. That's very clear.

Yahweh rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven.

The Lord's judgment is sudden. It is severe. He is the source of it. He is the judge.

But not a second before he rescues his people. He gets them out first. But why does Lot's wife not escape?

Emma and I got to visit Pompeii and Herculaneum, the volcanic eruption of 79 AD. And there's bodies that were covered in ash and they could make cast moulds out of them because they were preserved.

[ 24 : 07 ] And it's really disturbing looking at those cast moulds because it's just so human. You've got someone covering a child. You've got someone covering their face.

It was... I just thought it would be, I don't know, lava or debris hitting them, but it's the pyroclastic flow. It's this above 300 degrees Celsius travelling at over 100 kilometres an hour just gone. Now I have no idea what happened to Lot's wife but she became a pillar. Her corpse stands in Scripture as a warning of a willful decision to turn back.

I don't think we should be imagining that she was running and she heard noise and she glanced. This was a direct defiance of what the angel said.

Lot and her daughters ahead running and she stopped and turned, looked back. Now for whatever reason, she's leaving behind her hometown, she's leaving behind their home and their prosperity.

[ 25 : 28 ] She turned back. What's shocking about this rescue is how reluctant the whole family is to leave.

To leave. The sons-in-law laugh it off. Lot's wife changes her mind. Lot himself lingers.

He hesitates and he's bargaining to keep some of it. They're all reluctant to leave. Well, given how compromised Lot is, he's a mixed character.

Why was he saved? Why did he survive? Verse 27 to 29. And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the Lord and he 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.

[ 26 : 55 ] On purpose, we're reminded of the scene we saw last week of Abraham standing, interceding for sinners. Lot is saved in spite of Lot.

He is a mixed character. In chapter 12, he leaves with Abraham out of their hometown. He follows God's call on Abraham out. And yet chapter 13, he picks Sodom.

They've got a reputation. He sees the prosperity there and he pitches his tent there. To Peter, in our earlier reading, says his righteous soul was tormented.

He still had a morality about him. Everything he heard and saw around him troubled him. He was still shocked. But he never left Sodom.

Now, I might be reading into the text here. Why did he stay there if he was tormented? He's a mixed picture.

[ 28 : 05 ] We're told why he is saved and if you go to the fundamental reason why, it's nothing to do with Lot. God remembered his covenant with Abraham and so he was merciful.

I think Abraham here is a type of Christ. Brothers and sisters, our deliverance on that final day of judgment, I'm a mixed picture.

I think we're all a mixed picture. The fundamental reason anyone is shown mercy on that final day is simply, it's outside of ourselves.

It's because we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ by faith. God will remember Jesus and so we're shown mercy.

Now, I'd love to finish the story there but unfortunately, we've got a revolting epilogue. Here's the last thing we learn about Lot's story.

[ 29 : 21 ] Verse 30. Now, Lot went up out of Zohar and lived in the hills with his two daughters for he was afraid to live in Zohar. So he lived in a cave with his two daughters.

And the firstborn said to the younger, our father is old and there is not a man on earth to come into us after the menna 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. He did not know when she lay down or when she rose. 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, called his name Moab. He is the father of the Moabites to this day. The younger also bore a son and called his name Ben-Ami.

[ 30 : 30 ] He is the father of the Ammonites to this day. I have no idea why Lot doesn't return to Abraham. Whatever the case, the daughters wanting to preserve the family come up with an awful

solution rather than waiting for the Lord to provide.

They take matters into their own hands. Now, I think this story would have been a warning to Israel. Moabites and Ammonites were their nearest neighbours.

Moabites worshipped the fertility gods where worship was, it was sexual. Ammonites worshipped Molech that demanded child sacrifice.

Here we see Lot's influence on the next generation. The daughters don't seek Lot's consent just as he didn't seek their consent when he offered them.

Him getting so drunk that he doesn't agree to this, I don't think it exonerates him. What is he doing getting so plastered?

[ 31 : 53 ] Twice. I think he's like Noah. After the destruction, it's what we saw with Noah too. I think overall what we're meant to be seeing here is as one commentator puts it, the rebirth of Sodom in the cave.

Sin continued after Noah's flood. Sin continues after Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed. it lives on in the world.

Well, there's a story. I want to draw out three lessons for us today. Sorry, I saw Ches just breathe out. You're probably all feeling that.

The first lesson for us is God's justice is coming.

Sodom and Gomorrah stands as a warning through history of God's certain judgment on immorality. when Abraham stood and watched that smoke just go up like a bushfire, he knew he was called to command his children after him to follow the way of the Lord to be different from the rest of the world.

[ 33 : 28 ] Be in the world but not of the world. How did they do? If there's a competition for the most disturbing passage in the Bible, this is pretty up there for one of the most disturbing chapters.

I think one of them, another one, just creeps in front and it's Judges 19. It's Abraham's descendants, they've been freed from Egypt, they've got the law of Moses, they're in the land and a traveller comes to the town square, a man invites him in, gives him a meal, gives him rest.

The men of the city surround the house demanding to know him. The host goes out, almost identical words to the lot, saying don't do this wickedness.

He offers his daughter and a concubine, he forces the concubine outside and I really don't want to finish the story. I'll let you go and read it, it is disgusting.

Here's one of the opening verses of the prophet Isaiah, hear the word of the Lord you rulers of Sodom, give ear to the teaching of our God you people of Gomorrah.

[ 34 : 56 ] Sodom stood as a warning to Abraham's descendants and it still stands as a warning to us today as we heard in 2 Peter 2, universal judgment is coming and it will be just.

we've got even more certainty that it's coming. We don't just have the smoke of Sodom.

When the eternal Son of God came and visited us, look what mankind did in receiving him. When we see him hanging on the cross, if that's what it took to drink the cup of God's wrath, we can know for sure God cares about justice.

We can know for certain God's judgment is coming. So that's the first lesson for us, it is coming.

The second lesson for us is Lot's wife.

Jesus uses Lot's wife wife. As a warning in Luke 17, as we wait for him to visit a second time, remember Lot's wife.

[ 36 : 09 ] Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it. It doesn't take long in your Christian walk before you know someone who you would say, I never would have thought that Christian would have looked back.

Whether it's the allure of wealth, or some lover, or they just want to give full vent their passions and desires, they don't want to struggle against sin anymore.

We all know Christians who have made a willful decision, I just, I don't believe judgment is coming anymore, I can't believe this fire and brimstone stuff.

Lot's wife, she willfully changes her mind because she loves the world. now there's a difference between Lot and Lot's wife, he's a contradiction like me, horrified at wickedness and yet reluctant to let go of it.

There's something I still love about this world, I'm reluctant to let go of it. but he does believe, he does run.

[ 37 : 52 ] But Lot's wife, she willfully decides to turn back. now this is going to, I think it's going to speak to us differently so I just want to ask a question because I think it'll hit us all differently.

What compromise are you letting creep into your faith, to your morality, to your effectiveness as salt and light, because you're reluctant to leave.

You're reluctant to leave what this world offers you. Remember Lot's wife. So one final lesson, we see here why someone is saved.

there's one little phrase in verse 16, it is the heart of this story, it's just a dark, it's like a jeweller putting a diamond on a black cloth, this whole chapter is just black and there's this little diamond and you could easily miss it.

Verse 16, the Lord being merciful to him and he drags him out. Lot had to be dragged out by the Lord.

[ 39 : 25 ] Lot isn't ultimately saved because he was hospitable to the guests or he tried to tell his sons-in-law to flee and be saved. He's saved because he belonged to Abraham.

We are saved simply because we belong to Jesus. we've got no room for boasting.

If you believe today it's because God has grabbed you and dragged you out. We would have all laughed at such a message on our own.

We would have all lingered in love with this world. We are saved by God's mercy alone that he's grabbed hold of us. I just want to finish by reading a bit of Ephesians 2 because it has really warmed my heart afresh this week so I want to share it.

Let me open to it. And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked following the course of this world following the prince of the power of the air the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh carrying out the desires of the body and the mind and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind but God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses made us alive together with Christ by grace you have been saved and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in

[ 41 : 32 ] Christ Jesus so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus for by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not your own doing it is the gift of God not a result of works so that no one may boast for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them well praise be to his mercy let's let's pray father i just want to praise you for your mercy that you would send your son to sinners who don't deserve what you've given us we thank you that you've grabbed us while we were dead in sin and blind to the truth and you grabbed us and made us alive with

Christ father i pray that you would help us to be salt and light in this world walking in the good works by your spirit now help us to be praising your mercy not arrogant as if we are better than the world but just praising you that you grabbed us and saved us pray this in Jesus name amen that