

When God's Judgment Falls

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[0:00] Now, some of you will know that I recently had to do jury duty. And it's been a while since I've been in a courtroom. I'm not a lawyer, but I think I've visited once or twice back in the past.

And I remember looking as I went in at the accused in the dock, which is, I don't know whether you can tell me whether this used to be the case, but the dock is now at the back of the courtroom, no longer at the front.

So anyway, he was at the back. And I remember looking at him and feeling just terrified for him. Now, I had no idea whether he was guilty or not. But as I heard the charges being read, I thought, wow, if he's guilty, then he sure is in big trouble.

He's going to be put away for a long time. And I remember putting myself in his shoes and having goosebumps just thinking about it. And I thought, if it's this scary being in front of a human judge, what would it be like to front up to an all-knowing and powerful God?

Scary thought, isn't it? Well, last week we saw Abraham call the Lord the judge of all the earth. And we discovered that judgment was about to come to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

[1:10] So let's pick up the story here in Genesis 19. As night falls, the angels are sent by the Lord and they arrive at the city of Sodom. Here we notice some similarities between the opening of this chapter and of the last.

So Lot too is sitting, but this time at the gateway to the city. And on seeing the angels, he gets up to meet them. And like his uncle Abraham, he bows low to the ground.

He also invites them to his house and calls himself their servant. All these are similar to Abraham's actions. Initially, though, the men refused to go. Instead, they said they were going to spend the night in the square instead.

And here's where we start to suspect that all is not right. Because Lot objects so strongly that the text actually says he manhandles them into the house. A simple meal then is prepared by Lot, bread without yeast, done quickly.

But it's not too long before the men of the city turn up at his door. And as we read verse 4, just look at it with me. It's simply frightening, isn't it, when you think about it.

[2:18] It says, All the men from every part of the city, both young and old, surrounded the house. These two angels, probably quite handsome, I think, had aroused the evil desires of everyone, every man in the entire city.

This is depravity of breathtaking proportions. And I wonder if you remember Abraham's final request from last week, where he asked the Lord, What if only 10 righteous people can be found?

Will you still destroy the city? Well, we don't have to go very far, do we? But I think we know the answer to that question. But I want to pause and consider the true nature of Sodom's sin.

Much is often made of the sexual sin, and without doubt, it's absolutely horrible what is happening here. But we need to realize that there's more that's grievous that's going on here. Because the outcry against them isn't confined to this sin.

Rather, the word outcry, if you read the rest of the Bible, often refers to the cries of the oppressed. It was used last week in chapter 18, verses 20 and 21, and it's used here again in verse 13.

[3:28] In other words, although it's not spelled out in this chapter, there are great injustices and exploitations that are going on in the city. The sexual exploitation which we see in this chapter is merely one manifestation.

And as we read on, we actually see the root cause of this exploitation. It is because they refuse to submit to any moral authority.

So just consider their response when Lot attempts to protect the angels. Now in verse 6, Lot's objection is pretty feeble as it is, desperate almost. I mean, the fact that he offers his daughters is

stomach-churning.

And yet, even though this is simply replacing one perversion with another, the men are incensed. How dare Lord impose his morality on us, is what they're saying.

See verse 9, it says, This fellow came as a foreigner, and now he wants to play the judge. We'll treat you worse than them. And so their absolute rejection of all moral responsibility and accountability is very clear, isn't it?

[4 : 36] And ultimately, this rejection is a rejection of God's authority as well. And so their sexual sins, horrible as it is, as they are, are merely symptoms for something worse.

What is truly grievous to God is their rejection of Him. And that in turn leads to all this wanton exploitation and oppression. And I think this is probably the story that Paul would have had in his mind as he wrote Romans chapter 1.

It was our New Testament reading, verse 21. You don't have to turn to it again, I'll read it. It might be even on screen. Yes, it is actually. Paul says this, For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God, nor gave thanks to Him.

And then verse 24, Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. You know what Paul is saying?

That the sexual sins are not the cause, but the result of something worse. Paul would have seen it happening even in his day. And I think we do too as well, don't we?

[5 : 42] Whether it's the rampant growth in online pornography or sexual harassment, whatever the form it still takes, or the push to keep redefining what is acceptable sexual behavior.

These are actually just symptoms of a deeper problem in our society. It shows a rejection of God's moral authority. As a society, we now want to set our own laws.

We want to determine what is right and what is wrong, regardless of what God thinks. Now the sad thing, of course, is that the angels came to give them one last chance to repent, I think.

There was one final opportunity, depending on how they reacted to the angels, to avert the coming judgment. The fact that they knew what was right and wrong is seen in their response to Lot.

They knew that what they were doing was wicked, and yet they refused to accept being told what to do. Anyway, if that wasn't bad enough, you would have thought that perhaps when the Lord struck them with blindness, that would have been the wake-up call that they needed.

[6 : 50] But no, instead of stopping them in their tracks, what happens, verse 11 the Bible tells us, is that they kept trying to find the door. It didn't stop them. It was both a tragic and comic sight.

And then finally, their final rejection of salvation can be seen in the response of Lot's sons-in-law. So here are two representative men of the city. I take it that they were the ones outside, begging to get in.

And they refused to listen to Lot's plea for them to leave. Instead, even though they are blind, they laughed. They dismissed Lot's plea as a joke. And so, can you see, at every turn, with every warning, Sodom rejects all offers of salvation.

Now, I'm not proud to admit this, but I've gotten a few speeding tickets in my time. Do I have to resign now? Now, when I first got them, my reaction was one of indignation and self-righteous anger, actually.

You see, I had reason to speed. It was the rush to make the school pick up. It was only 65 in a 60 zone.

[8 : 06] So, what's the big deal? And we all know that this, you know, this is just the Victorian government's way of raising revenue, right? It's not about really modifying driving behavior.

Anyway, I finally woke up to the fact that, if I didn't change my behavior, I could end up killing someone one day, couldn't I?

On the roads. And then where would I be? You see, I finally realized that those fines were actually warnings that might actually save me from a bigger judgment.

They're warnings to change before it's too late. Now, we don't particularly like these warnings, do we? Setbacks when we do wrong, you know, whether it's financial, relational, emotional, whatever they are.

And sometimes in our anger, we take it out on others. We might even blame God. But really, these setbacks are wake-up calls for us, stopping us from heading down the road to destruction, just like Sodom.

[9 : 04] The real question is whether we actually take notice of them. Do we repent before it's too late? Do we repent before our conscience is seared and we become blind to them? You see, God will judge all evil, whether it's big or small sins, whether one way or another, whether it's in this life or next.

God will judge. He's the judge of all the earth. And so we would do well to repent and do so before it's too late. Well, unfortunately, it was indeed too late for Sodom and Gomorrah.

The Lord decided enough was enough. He's prompted to act because He wants to stop the oppression. People are suffering and enough was enough. Sodom could not go on anymore. Now, caught up in all of this is our friend Lot.

And thankfully, the Lord had not forgotten about him. Just like Noah, God is about to save Lot, snatch him to safety, as it were, before the judgment fell. But I have to say, Lot's character is very complex, isn't it?

Now, if we read the Bible, particularly if we read 2 Peter 2, verse 7, we know that Lot was a righteous man. It says there on the screen, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless.

[10 : 13] For that righteous man, living among them day by day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard. So Peter, actually three times, refers to him as righteous.

Which is not to say that he was perfect or sinless, but rather that he was a man of faith in God. And yet, notwithstanding this glowing assessment, if you look at Genesis, then there's not a lot of Lot's behavior to bear that out, is it?

If you've been with us, you would remember how he chose, first of all, to live on the plains of Sodom and Gomorrah, because it was well watered. He chose to do that, even though he knew at the time that Sodom was wicked.

So at first, he pitched his tent near Sodom. But by the time, you remember, the five superpower kings came to raid Sodom, the Bible said that Lot had moved into the city.

And even though Abraham then rescued him from the kings, he chose to return to Sodom. Now in Genesis 19, Lot isn't just living in the city, it says that he's seated at the gates of it.

[11 : 17] Now those of you who don't know, the gates signify where important men gathered to do their business. In other words, even though Lot may have abstained from their vices, and he might still have been considered a foreigner, Lot was actually a person of influence in the city.

And so now in verse 15, as dawn was coming, the angels urged Lot to hurry and flee, or he too will be destroyed. And yet, if you look with me at verse 16, what does Lot do?

Somebody tell me, what does Lot do? He hesitated. Can you believe that? I mean, Lot was actually in two minds. God has clearly shown by blinding the men and then through the warning of the angels that he meant business.

And here was Lot hesitating. God has clearly provided for Lot's salvation, and yet he's having second thoughts. Now why would that be?

Well, I think it's because he's still hooked onto the comforts of the city, its riches and prosperity, his influence in it, the easy life. Yes, God will save Lot.

[12 : 28] He knows that. But he's thinking in his head, but I'll lose everything else. I'll lose my house. I'll lose my wealth. He can't take anything of that with him. But in what is God's great kindness, he saves Lot despite his reluctance.

For you see, the angels grab his hand, the hands of his wife and his two daughters, and then lead them safely out of the city. And if you look at the end of verse 16, it's actually quite moving.

It says that the angels did this, for the Lord was merciful to them. The angels did this, for the Lord was merciful to them. It sort of reminds me of C.S. Lewis' own conversion, which he records in this Little Testament, surprised by joy.

In it, Lewis records his struggle to believe in God, his intellectual doubts, and then ultimately his unwillingness to surrender his life to God. But at the end, and I'll read a bit of this, he writes this, you must picture me alone in that room at Magdalene, that's the college, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet.

That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity term of 1929, I gave in and admitted that God was God and knelt and prayed.

[13:57] Perhaps that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England. I did not then see what is now the most shining and obvious thing, the divine humility which will accept a convert even on such terms.

The prodigal son at least walked home on his feet. But who can duly adore that love which will open the high gates to a prodigal who is brought in kicking, struggling, resentful and darting his eyes in every direction for a chance to escape.

And then he ends, the hardness of God is kinder than the softness of man and his compulsion is our liberation. I am sure some of you have had similar conversion experiences.

We know that God loves us so much that he would save us despite our reluctance kicking and screaming into heaven. Now going hand in hand with Lord's reluctance is the fact that Lord's salvation is totally undeserving.

So that is the next point. And even though Lord is said to be a righteous man, as I said, we are hard pushed really to see his faith rise above his fears, his love for God rise above his love for this world.

[15:14] And so now see what happens when they're safely out of the city. One of the angels now tells them, flee for your lives, don't look back, don't stop anywhere in the plain, flee to the mountains or you will be swept away.

Now people have tried to work out how Sodom and Gomorrah were actually destroyed. So yes, we know God was responsible, but geologically, what happened that caused this destruction? And one possible theory is that the earth, that there was an earth earthquake that occurred.

So Sodom and Gomorrah lies in the Jordan Valley, which is along the great Syrian-African rift. And so one possibility is that an earthquake opened up a fissure, releasing the gases, which then set the sulfur, the rich sulfur and petroleum deposits alight.

That's just one theory. But if that's true, then the angels' warning does make sense, doesn't it? Because they're asked to flee to the mountains, because otherwise the fire and the toxic gases would spread across the plain.

But amazingly, Lot tries one more request on the Lord. To his credit, he does say that God's favor is beyond what he deserves. But then in verse 19, he says, don't ask me to flee to the mountains.

[16:21] Now, again, we're not sure why. Maybe he thinks he can't run fast or far enough. Or more likely, perhaps he doesn't trust God to help him to survive in the mountains. So he picks this small town close by, possibly a place which still had the mod cons of a city, a mini Sodom, if you like.

And he asks for the town to be spared so that he can go there instead. And amazingly, amazingly, the angel grants him that request. And as we know, the town is called Zoar, which is little in Hebrew.

Now, there is one more further judgment in this story, and it's of Lot's wife in verse 26. The Bible tells us that she looked back and became a pillar of salt. And many of you know this story, and the popular version of this story is that Lot's wife simply took a sort of split-second backward glance, and instantly, as if by magic, she turned into a pillar of salt.

In fact, they even found a rock formation near the Dead Sea. This is actually called Lot's wife. It's along the King's Highway or something. I don't know whether that is or not, whether it's to scale or looks too big or too small.

But I think the actual events might be somewhat different. Why do I say that? Well, notice the details of verse 22. The angel promised that he would do nothing until Lot reached Zoar.

[17:41] So what must have happened is that Lot's wife fell behind. Not because she was slow, because otherwise I think Lot would have waited for her, but rather she lingered. She lingered because she couldn't bear to leave.

And then eventually Lot had no choice but to leave her behind. So I think when the angels warned them not to look back, it's not just simply about physical looking. It's about spiritual looking as well. What Lot's wife was guilty of was being unwilling to let go of the life that she had in Sodom. And in fact, Jesus gives us a clue in Luke 17 verse 31.

For he says, On that day, that is the day of judgment, not that day, back in the past, but on that day, no one who is on the housetop with possessions inside should go down and get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back to the house for anything, for their possessions.

And then he says, remember Lot's wife. Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it. And so Jesus is clear what her problem was.

[18 : 43] She was hooked on materialism. She wanted to preserve her so-called good life, and that's why she looked back and lingered instead of fleeing. And so what might have happened was that the salfa would have rained down and she was still there on the plains, maybe overcome by the fumes, and then her dead body become encrusted with the salt and the debris around her.

But the way I look at it, very little actually separates Lot and his wife. Because if you look at it, Lot too showed all the same signs of materialism that his wife did, didn't he?

And yet, the Lord spared Lot and not his wife. I think it's to remind us and to remind Lot of how undeserving he was. Lot would have ended the same way as his wife if not for God's grace.

And in fact, he nearly did. The other reason too, I think, is that God extended his grace to Lot because of the intercession of Abraham. For if you look at verse 29, what happens is early the next morning, Abraham returned to where he stood before the Lord on the top of the hill and as he looked down upon the smoldering ruins, this is what the Bible said.

So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived. In other words, God saved Lot because of Abraham, because this righteous man whom God chose prayed for his nephew Lot.

[20 : 13] And so brothers and sisters, I do want to encourage us to remember this as we pray for our friends and family. Don't give up on them even though they may be reluctant, even though they may be undeserving. Remember what God did for Abraham.

Well lastly, we go to the final point and if only the story sort of ended here, at least there would have been some positive note for Lot. But sadly, there's a postscript, isn't there, to Lot's life in verses 30 to 38 and it doesn't make for pretty reading.

As one commentator puts it, Lot and his daughters may have left Sodom but Sodom hasn't left them. Lot may have left Sodom but Sodom remained in his heart.

And ironically, soon after the destruction, Lot and his daughters actually leave Zohar. So like, I don't want to go to the mountains and then they go to the mountains, the very place that he feared to go in the first place. Anyway, this time around they go there without God's say-so and so they end up in a cave.

Hardly the ending that Lot was looking for, is it? And there, his daughters, isolated from the world, feared that they would die without having a family and so they resort to wine, deceit, and incest to rectify the problem.

[21 : 28] Now we know, we can tell that what they did is wrong. How? Because like their mother, Lot's daughters aren't given the honor of being named in the Bible.

Instead, their sons are named. But both their names are actually witness to the shameful act. So Moab, if you look at the notes, means from my father.

And Ben-Ami means son of my paternal relations. You don't marry your paternal relations, so you don't have a son from your paternal relations. It's sad, isn't it?

As for Lot, some say he wasn't culpable because he was drunk, but I actually think, I beg to defer actually, because I take the analogy that if drunkenness today is no excuse for rape, which I take it is not, then it shouldn't excuse Lot for his sexual act either.

Physiologically, you have to be semi-aware to be able to do what he did. And remember, he was tricked once, not once, but twice. So I think Lot was culpable.

[22 : 33] And so we're left with this sour ending. The Lord may have saved Lot from physical destruction, but it wasn't itself a complete salvation, was it? Sin still lingered in the hearts of Lot and his daughter.

And of course, as Christians, we know that complete salvation only comes in Jesus. He's the one who died for our sin. He's the one who frees us from our rebellion against God's moral authority. As we look at this story of Sodom and Gomorrah, we might be shocked at the description, but the Bible actually says that there is a day coming when God's judgment is actually going to be more fearful than this.

I actually had two New Testament readings today, but I think we only allowed one. So anyway, here's the second one. It's from 2 Peter 3. You don't have to turn to it. It's a description of this coming judgment, but I'm going to get our in-house deep voice reader, Jeff Hall, to stand up and loudly read it for us.

Amen. The day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar. The elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth, and everything done in it will be laid there.

[23 : 50] Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people want you to be? You want to live holy lives, holy and bodily lives, as you look forward to the day of God and speak to you.

That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will be mounted in it. But in keeping with His promise, we are looking forward to a new path, a new earth, where we are just listening to us.

Thanks, Jeff. Our friends, how do we react when we hear words like these? Do we just laugh them off, like the sons-in-law of Lot?

Or do we think, oh, here the church and the pastors going in, making things scary for us, so that they'll do, you know, we'll do what they want? Well, I'm sorry to say, I didn't make these words up. They came straight from God's Word, the Bible. And if you read the Gospel, Jesus Himself talks about the reality of judgment. So friends, if any of you are hearing this for the first time, then let me encourage you, turn to Christ, repent, before it's too late.

[25 : 03] Or perhaps, we may be like Lot. Yes, we believe, we come to church, and yet, we hesitate. We look back at Sodom. We harbor it in our lives.

Maybe it's materialism, you know, flashy clothes or cars, a comfortable lifestyle. Maybe it's popularity, wanting to be with a cool crowd all the time, whether it's at work or uni, you're big into networking, or greed, constantly watching the stock of property markets, or lust, whether it's at the nightclubs, picking up goals, or online with pornography, or even on TV.

Friends, God's grace is bigger than all these things. He saved Lot even though He didn't deserve it. God's salvation is always more than we deserve. But we mustn't abuse God's mercy.

Rather, we need to face up to these things. If they are still in our hearts being harbored, then we need to confess them, admit them, and together help each other to live holy and godly lives, as the Apostle Peter says, as we look forward to the coming day of God, which is going to be a coming day of judgment, as well as salvation, and speed its coming.

And let us also be like Abraham, interceding for others, so that they too will be saved from this day of judgment. Well friends, I think we're going to do that right now.

[26 : 34] We're going to spend some time praying and confessing. Perhaps you have people in your life that you want to pray for, or perhaps you need to confess about being like Lot.

So why don't we spend the next minute or two doing that, and then we'll close our time together in corporate confession. together. This prayer of confession that should be on the screen. Just wait for shooting to turn it over. Together.

Heavenly Father, you have loved us with an everlasting love, but we have broken your holy laws and have left undone what we ought to have done. We are sorry for our sins and turn away from them.

For the sake of your Son who died for us, forgive us, cleanse us, and change us. By your Holy Spirit, enable us to live for you. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen.