

Faith in God's Judgement and Salvation

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[0:00] Given the passage that's before us, how about I lead us in prayer? Let's pray. Gracious Father, we do thank you for your word. Although we meet some pretty full-on things in it, we pray, Father, that you might help us to understand it, because we know that you continue to speak to us through it and by your Spirit.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, people seem to have all sorts of views of God. Even kids. So, for example, Gabby, age 7, on the next slide, thinks God is all-hearing, and so she drew God with big ears.

And then on the next slide, Michaela, age 11, thinks God is all-seeing with his U-Butte full-on surveillance iCloud system, hence all the TV screens.

But, of course, some people's view of God is a lot less positive. They think if God is all-hearing and if God is all-seeing, why is God doing nothing about the justice and evil in the world?

For example, the Myanmar army has slaughtered many of the Muslim Rohingya people over the last year. I'm sure many of you have heard about this. This has made the news. And yet the army goes unpunished.

[1:19] In fact, a couple of months ago, on the next slide, the UN put them on the list of shame because they used rape as a weapon. And in this article by the Human Rights Movement, on the next slide, as you can't read it too well, but I'll read it out for you, it says, Or what about Christians?

We are God's people. We are counted right in God's sight because of Jesus. And therefore, we assume things would be okay for us. And yet it's the righteous, God's people, who suffer and it's the wicked who seem to prosper.

A few days ago, on the next slide, there was a report about Muslim mobs burning churches in Ethiopia just earlier this month. Or last April, Muslim extremists on motorbikes rode past the church as Christians were leaving in open fire.

They killed just four. They weren't happy with that. So they came back two weeks later and did it again. And yet, as far as I know, they've gone unpunished.

Where is God's justice? Well, today we learn that God's justice and judgment are coming. They are coming. And God's justice means he will judge the wicked.

[2:50] But he will also save the righteous. But we also know that from today that God is merciful. He longs to save the righteous, not because they've become righteous in themselves, but by his grace through the righteousness of another person.

And that's what we've been seeing last week when God told Abraham what he was about to do. God told Abraham in chapter 18 that he was about to come and judge Sodom because all nations would be blessed through him.

Chapter 18, verse 17 and 18. You see, God wants Abraham to know what it means for people to be blessed through him. And it means to be saved from the coming judgment that people deserve, saved by grace through Abraham and his descendants, ultimately through Jesus.

And so we might remember from last week when Abraham pleads for the city of Sodom. He learns two things about God. Firstly, he learns that God is just, that he will not wipe away the righteous with the wicked.

He won't treat them the same. Verse 25 and 26, chapter 18. And secondly, he also learns that God is willing to save even the wicked for just 10 righteous people.

[4:11] In other words, God is willing to use righteous people to save those who are not righteous. And we saw that that's exactly what Christ does with us. You know, the righteous one died for us, the unrighteous, to bring us to God.

And so today we'll see those two things. God's justice, where he will judge the wicked but save the righteous. He won't treat them the same. And we'll also see God's mercy, where he uses righteous people to save some.

So let's have a look at chapter 19, verse 1. Abraham's left God in the end of chapter 18, and he's gone home after praying for Sodom. And then the angels, two of the angels that were with Abraham and the angel of the Lord, presumably the angel of the Lord who represents God, cannot go into Sodom.

It's too wicked. He's too holy. So it's just the two angels that go. And they arrive at nighttime. And we read in verse 1, And the two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening. And Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city.

When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. And my lords, he said, please turn aside to your servant's house. You can wash your feet and spend the night there and be on your way early in the morning.

[5:22] No, they answered. We'll spend the night in the public square. But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. And he prepared a meal or literally a feast for them, baking bread without yeast.

And they ate. Here we see Lot's hospitality. And really, he's acting quite righteously, isn't he? It's a good thing to show hospitality, particularly to try and save these men from what Lot knows about his townsfolk.

See, Lot rightly offers hospitality to his guests. And in fact, he acts very similarly to his uncle Abraham at the beginning of chapter 18. And so on the next slide, I've got a comparison.

These are just some of the comparisons. Both Abraham and Lot sit at the entrance of their tent or city. And then they both bow to the ground when they meet the men.

They both offer their guests water to wash their feet. And they both offer their guests something to eat. And so there's this deliberate comparison by our author between Lot and Abraham.

[6:28] And the comparison suggests, among other things, that Lot's righteous attitudes and actions here is probably what he learnt from his uncle. He's following in his uncle's footsteps, if you like.

In other words, Lot is righteous here because of Abraham. And the reason I say that is because by the end of the chapter in verse 29, it is clear that Lot is saved as one of God's righteous people because he remembered Abraham.

In other words, it seems like it's because of Abraham that God counts Lot as one of his righteous people. That's why in our second reading from 2 Peter, Lot is called righteous three times despite the kind of guy we heard he was.

He didn't sound very righteous in the rest of the chapter, did he? And yet Peter can call him righteous because of Abraham. And so Lot is regarded righteous and even shows signs of righteousness.

For he shows hospitality and seeks to save these men from Sodom's depravity. See verse 4? Verse 4 says, Here is Sodom's wicked depravity.

[7:52] It's homosexual rape, which is wrong at so many different levels. Sodom's wickedness is total depravity. And did you notice in verse 4, it's also the total city.

Verse 4 says, All the men from every part, both young and old. There are not even ten righteous people in this city.

Not even one except for Lot. And he doesn't act all that righteously, does he? See verse 6? Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind them and said, No, my brothers, don't do this wicked thing.

Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you and you can do whatever you like with them. But don't do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof.

Lot rightly seeks to protect his guests. Lot rightly calls their behavior wicked. But he wrongly offers his daughters to be effectively raped.

[8:53] Which is horrific, isn't it? I mean, can you imagine giving your child to do that? I've got two daughters and it's incomprehensible. Incomprehensible. Now, I know scholars say it was a different world back then.

That's true. And hospitality was very important. Yes, that's true. And you're meant to protect your guests as much as you can. Yeah, that's true. But were not his daughters also under the protection of his roof?

I think it's clear that Lot goes too far here. It seems as though some of Sodom's values have made their way into Lot's life. And I wonder if there's a subtle warning here for us.

You see, back in chapter 13, Lot chose to live in Sodom, away from the promised land. And even back in chapter 13, we were told that the sin of Sodom was great.

They were sinning greatly against the Lord. This was about 13 years ago. And yet Lot didn't move out of Sodom. He stayed because it was a wealthy and comfortable place.

[9:52] And no doubt, because he immersed himself in such a wicked place, it started to seep through. And the warning, I wonder, is whether we allow ourselves to be filled with stuff that's wicked.

I know it's not a word we normally use except, oh, cool, wicked, that kind of thing. But I wonder if we, I mean, what do we fill our eyes with? What do we fill our ears with? We've got to be careful because if it's always not of God, if we immerse ourselves in the wrong TV shows, books and so on, it will start to have an effect.

I remember growing up, I was banned from watching karate movies with my brother because we'd watch them. And you know what? We'd start doing karate chops on each other. What we fill ourselves with has an effect.

And it seems that's what happens here with Lot. But if you're not convinced by Sodom's wickedness yet, we see more of it in verse 9. He says, Here the men try and break down the door.

In order to rape these other men. That's how bad it is. Actually, it's worse. Verse 11 literally says on the next slide.

[11:25] So next one. Sorry, Paul. Verse 7. He struck with a blindness so that they wearied themselves trying to find the door.

In other words, they were struck with blindness but did not give up trying to rape these guys. They only gave up when they got tired of trying. Do you see how wicked this place is?

How deserving of judgment it is? And so God has not only heard the outcry against them. He is now seeing their wickedness firsthand by his angel. I mean, he's already seen it before.

And now he's going to do something about it. His patience is up. He will destroy the city, which is what they deserve. So point two. God's justice and mercy. Verse 12.

Now here we see God's justice in two ways.

- [12 : 35] Firstly, he will judge the wicked because they deserve it. That's justice, isn't it? But secondly, he's also going to save his righteous person, Lot.

He's not going to treat the righteous and the wicked the same. And so the angel tells Lot to get out of the city so that he will be saved. Because that is also righteous and just.

And yet, we know that Lot is not all that righteous himself, is he? And so we also see God's mercy here. Because God mercifully counts Lot as one of his righteous people and saves him by grace.

Because of not himself, but his uncle Abraham. This mercy and grace is what we now see highlighted in the rest of the chapter. So verse 14.

Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law who were pledged to be married to his daughters. He said, hurry and get out of this place because the Lord is about to destroy the city. But his sons-in-law thought he was joking.

- [13 : 40] And now we'll come back to their response in a moment. But do you realize what an act of grace this is? I didn't quite realize it at first until someone at Bible study last week pointed it out to me. But who were the men in verse 4 that came to rape the other men?

It was all, every young and old. Which would have included the future sons-in-law. It's incredible, isn't it? I mean, it shows very poor judgment on Lot and his daughter's behalf.

But it also shows an extraordinary act of grace that God would then willingly send Lot through his angels to offer them salvation. It's extraordinary grace, isn't it?

And this grace continues, or mercy continues. Verse 15. With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, hurry, take your wife and your two daughters out of here, or you'll be swept away when the city is punished.

And when he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the Lord was merciful to them.

- [14 : 49] And as soon as they brought them out, one of them said, flee for your lives, don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the plain. Flee to the mountains, or you will be swept away.

Do you see God's mercy there? I mean, it's quite clear, isn't it? The author makes it quite clear for us. Despite being told to hurry, Lot lingers. He hesitates.

Oh, can I really give up my Sodom? And yet, by God's grace, the angels grab him by the scruff of the neck, as it were, and drag him out of the city.

It's a great act of mercy, isn't it? And in case that's not enough, we see God's grace and mercy a third time in verse 18. But Lot said to them, No, my lords, please, your servant has found favor or literally grace in your eyes, and you have shown great loving kindness to me in saving my life.

But I can't flee to the mountains. This disaster will overtake me, and I'll die. Look, there is a town near enough to run to, and it's small. Let me flee to it. It's very small, isn't it?

- [15 : 52] Then my life will be spared. And he said to him, Very well, I will grant this request too. I will not overthrow the town you are speaking of, but flee there quickly, because I cannot do anything until you reach it.

That is why the town was called Zohar, which means small. Lot's pathetic, really, isn't he? I mean, he acknowledges he's just been saved by God's grace and favor, but it's not enough.

The hills are too far for my little legs to go. Oh, there's a little city all over there. Okay, there's just a little city all over there. It's pathetic, isn't it? And yet, God's grace and mercy, okay, you can go there.

It's extraordinary. I mean, if it was me, I'd be saying, Oh, that's it, Lot. I've had enough. You're getting done. It's amazing grace and extraordinary mercy.

And so Lot believes their word and flees to Zohar without looking back, but his wife disobeys and so discards her salvation. Verse 23.

[17:02] By the time Lot reached Zohar, the sun had risen over the land. Then the Lord rang down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah from the Lord out of the heavens.

Thus he overthrew the cities and the entire plain, destroying all those living in the cities. And also the vegetation in the land. But Lot's wife looked back and she became a pillar of salt.

Now, some people have problems with this. If God created the world, this sort of thing is easy. But even still, you think of Pompeii and how people were petrified because of the volcanic ash and then so on.

And even today, when people go to the Dead Sea, which is around where Sodom and Gomorrah are, they kind of complain about the stench of sulfur. I saw on one blog people saying, how do I get the stench of sulfur out of my bathers?

Because it stinks. And so it's quite possible that this happened. Not quite possible. It did happen. And yet Lot's wife didn't believe.

[18:03] She disobeys the word and looks back. It seems she was not willing to let go of Sodom. John Wesley, brother of Charles Wesley, the hymn writer, John wrote of Lot's wife, looking back, spoke of her inclination to go back.

That's what it was, wasn't it? And in doing so, she discards her salvation for the sake of Sodom. And so is then caught up in its judgment. But Lot is saved, not because of his righteousness, but I hope you've seen, by God's grace time and time again, and through his righteous uncle.

For it is through Abraham that people will be blessed. And we made this clear in verse 27 to 29. Early the next morning, Abraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood before the Lord before.

He looked down towards Sodom and Gomorrah, towards all the land of the plain, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace. So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham.

And so he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived. You see that Lot is saved by grace through his uncle Abraham.

[19:19] That is what God is trying to get Abraham to understand. This is how nations will be blessed. This little picture of Lot is a demonstration of both God's justice, that he won't sweep away the righteous with the wicked, and God's mercy at the same time, that he'll work by grace through the righteousness of another to save Lot, indeed count Lot as righteous himself.

Now, of course, for God to remain truly just, someone has to still pay for Lot's sin, doesn't he? I mean, God cannot simply regard him as righteous and then forget about how he treated his daughters and forget about how he complained and was whingy and so on.

Someone still has to pay for that sin. Someone still has to pay for our sin, yours and mine. Abraham doesn't deal with it. But, of course, as you know, Abraham's truly righteous descendant, Jesus, does, doesn't he?

Jesus pays for Lot's sin, for your sin, for mine. And so God can now justly have mercy. That is, he can be just dealing with sin and then still have mercy on us and count us righteous.

We read that in Romans 3, but let me just illustrate it by way of a story. Many of you know of Billy Graham, who passed away earlier this year.

[20:44] But when he was a young minister, he was driving through a small southern town in the US when he was stopped by a policeman for speeding. Now, he got a ticket, and Billy Graham admitted his guilt.

And the officer said, look, you've got to go and pay your fine at the local court. You've got to appear before the judge and pay the fine there. That's how we do it. And so that's where he went. The judge asked, guilty or not guilty?

Graham pleaded guilty. And the judge replied, that'll be \$10, \$1 for every mile over the limit you went. If only speeding fines were that cheap today. Actually, just don't speed, you know.

But suddenly the judge recognised this famous minister, and then he said, you have violated the law, and the fine therefore must be paid, but I'll pay it for you. And so the judge took a \$10 note from his own wallet, attached it to the ticket, and then declared Billy Graham right with the law.

He then took Billy out for a steak dinner afterwards. True story, apparently. You see, for there to be justice, someone has to pay for the fine or for the sin.

[21:51] And so God pays for our sin in his son, Jesus. That way justice is done, and we can still receive mercy.

We can still be counted as righteous, and be saved from God's coming judgment. Because God's judgment is coming. In fact, Jesus himself uses this episode of Sodom and Gomorrah to make that point.

So on Luke 17, next slide, Paul. Next one. We'll keep going. Here we go. Jesus says, It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building.

But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rang down from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed.

When Jesus returns, judgment day. You see, life will go on, but one day God's patience with the wicked in our world will run out. And he will send his son to return to judge as he must.

[22:57] And he will judge the living and the dead. And so how are you going to respond to God's coming judgment? Lot's sons-in-law laughed, and people do that today, don't they?

They kind of laugh and snigger. You know, think it's old-fashioned or downright ridiculous. I've had that experience before. I was teaching that SRI class, and I mentioned to the kids that Jesus would return and put the world right.

The teacher was in the back of the classroom marking some papers, and she kind of sniggered. Now, it could have been a hilarious joke one of her students wrote in the paper just at that point, but I doubt it.

But you see, God is not joking, nor was Lot, nor was Jesus, and neither am I. God's judgment will one day come.

How are you going to respond? It's no joke. And so if you are here this morning, and you don't yet believe in Jesus, then can I urge you, you really need to.

[24 : 00] For it's only by believing in Him that God can declare you right with Him, and free you from His coming judgment, which is just.

And for us who do, then we need to keep praying and sharing the gospel when we have opportunities, because God's judgment is no joke.

We heard about this last week, so I'm just going to mention it this week. Do keep praying for your non-Christian friends and family. Pray for opportunities. Pray for others who might come alongside them because they won't listen to you anymore, or whatever it is.

Keep praying. Keep sharing. And secondly, don't look back. On the next slide, Jesus continues, we'll go to Luke 17 again.

I think that's, yeah, that's it. Jesus continues by saying, on that day, no one who's on the housetop with possessions inside should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for them.

[25 : 04] Remember Lot's wife. Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it. See, Lot's wife did not want to let go of her life in Sodom, and so she looked back and forsook her salvation.

And so Jesus says, remember Lot's wife. Don't look back. Don't go back to your old life. I'm sure we could all think of people who started off calling themselves Christians, and then for me, one, it was money, and for another, it was friends and family.

The pull was too great, and so they looked back, and now they don't call themselves Christians anymore. I mean, God can do anything, I realize, but here, Jesus is warning. So firstly, pray and share the gospel, but secondly, don't look back.

And thirdly, rather look forward to the day when Jesus will return. He will judge the wicked righteously, rightly, and he will save us completely.

And so, 2 Peter chapter 2 then, we read this from our second reading. He said, In other words, God will one day judge those wicked.

[26 : 30] Even if those who slaughtered the Rohingya and murdered Christians are never brought to justice in this life, they will in the next. For when they die, God will hold them for punishment on the day of judgment.

For God is a God of justice. But as we've seen in this passage, he longs to show mercy. That's his plan, through Abraham, and Abraham's descendant, Jesus.

And so, he will show mercy and rescue us completely. In fact, we've already been declared right with him. And so, we know we're already safe on judgment day.

And he will bring us home to the new creation. And so, keep living for him, remembering his grace to us. Our last hymn is, When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.

And the last line is, Love so amazing, love so divine, it demands my life, my soul, you know the rest? My all. Let's pray.

[27 : 32] Gracious Father, we thank you for this rather solemn passage this morning. We think he reminds us that you are a just God, but also a merciful God. That you long to show mercy to people through Abraham's righteous descendant, Jesus.

And so, Father, we pray that you would help us to pray and share the gospel with others. Help us not to look back, but to look forward to the day when Christ returns to put all things right and to welcome us to our home of righteousness.

Keep us persevering until that day, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.