

Judgment and Deliverance: Genesis 18-19  
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Sunday morning, September 16, 2007

We're going to look at Genesis 18-19 this morning, and the message of this passage is very similar to the message of the Flood that we studied back in Genesis 6-9. Do you remember the message that we must all learn from the story of the Flood? The unrighteous will be judged, and the righteous will be delivered. The title of the sermon this morning is "Judgment and Deliverance." In the story of Noah and the Flood we see that the wicked were judged. They were all swept away in the terrible flood that God brought upon the earth. But Noah, who was righteous by faith, was delivered. God rescued him from destruction.

The same message of judgment and deliverance is seen in our passage this morning, which tells of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and Lot's deliverance.

Before we get to that story, though, I want to quickly summarize the events in the first part of Genesis 18. In chapter 17 God promised to Abraham, "I will give you a son by [Sarah]" (v. 16). Abraham was 100 years old. Sarah was 90. So when Abraham heard this crazy promise, he fell on his face and laughed (v. 17). Well, in chapter 18 we see Sarah's response to this promise, and it's very similar.

In chapter 18 the Lord appears to Abraham in a unique way. Abraham was sitting at the door of his tent in the heat of the day, and he looked up and there were three men standing in front of him. And as we read the passage, we realize that one of these men was the Lord, Himself. The other two men were angels, the angels who in chapter 19 go to Sodom.

Abraham and Sarah worked quickly to prepare a meal for the three visitors, and then while the men sat and ate they said, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And Abraham said, "She is in the tent." Then in verse 10 the Lord said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son." Look at Sarah's response in verse 12, "So Sarah laughed to herself, saying 'After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?'" Sarah has the same response of astonishment and unbelief that Abraham had in the previous chapter. She has come to accept the fact that she is too old to bear children. She no longer has any hope that her dream will come true. So she laughs when the Lord promises that she will have a baby.

The Lord questions her response. He asks Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh?" Then He makes this wonderful statement in verse 14, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" And He reaffirms the promise, "At the appointed time I will return to you about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son."

Brothers and sisters, that is a promise to hold on to. Is anything too hard for the Lord? Of course, the answer is a resounding NO! Nothing is too hard for the Lord. There is no heart that is so hard, the Lord cannot soften it. There is no job situation, family situation, financial situation that is so difficult, the Lord cannot use it for your good. In fact, He is the One who controls every detail of that situation, and if you are in Christ, then He has ordained those very circumstances for your good. There is no illness or injury that the Lord cannot heal. And there is no illness or injury that God cannot give you the faith and the strength to endure. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. Trust in Him. Trust in His power and sovereignty, and His ability to keep all His promises.

The narrative moves on in verse 16 as the men head out toward Sodom. And Abraham goes with them. And the Lord reveals to Abraham that there has been a great outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah.

By the way, verse 21 may raise some questions in your mind. The Lord says, “I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know.” If you’re like me, you scratch your head at that point and say, I thought God already knew all things. Why would He have to go see? Doesn’t He already see? And isn’t He already everywhere? So why would He have to go and see? I think what this passage teaches us is that God is personal. He is near to us. There is a very personal and intimate relationship between God and His creation. He is not an impersonal, fatalistic force. The Bible IS clear that God knows all things. And it would be wrong for us to conclude from this passage that He is ignorant concerning the state of affairs in Sodom and Gomorrah. But God is personal. He interacts with His creation. And here He is coming, in bodily form, to see the depravity of these cities before He destroys them.

Next we read of this interesting interaction between Abraham and the Lord, where Abraham is kind of bartering with the Lord. He started with 50. “Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it?” And then he goes down to 45, then 40, 30, 20, and finally 10. And the Lord agreed, “For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.” But look at verse 25, which is near the beginning of Abraham’s questions. This is the heart of Abraham’s concern. “Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?”

That’s a relevant question, isn’t it? That’s a question that we will all ask. Is the Lord just? Will He do what is right? Will He destroy everyone indiscriminately, or will He judge the wicked and deliver the righteous? In our own way of thinking, we ask this question and we assume that most people deserve to be delivered. Most of us are pretty good people, we think to ourselves, and therefore God will certainly reward us for our good deeds. The terrorists, though, and the murderers and the pedophiles and the corrupt politicians, they should be judged. Fire should come down from heaven and burn them up. Without the truth of God’s Word and the illumination of the Holy Spirit, that’s how we would distinguish the wicked from the righteous. We tend to begin by assuming that I’m righteous. And those who do things that I disapprove of are wicked.

Well, then it’s a rude awakening when we begin to read the Bible and see that we’re not righteous. None of us are, apart from God’s grace. From God’s perspective, when He categorizes mankind, we all fall into the category of wicked. Romans 3 says, “None is righteous, no, not one.” And that means it’s not just the terrorist who deserves hell, but you and me and everyone. Everyone except Jesus Christ. He is the one righteous person. The one person who deserves deliverance. The one person who deserves reward. The Good News of the Gospel is that hell-deserving sinners can be incorporated into Christ so that we, too, are delivered. We are counted righteous, not because we ARE righteous, but because we are united to Christ by faith.

With this biblical understanding of our sinfulness and God’s grace, we can better understand God’s justice, and we can have confidence that God will judge rightly. Everyone who goes to hell will deserve to be there. We all deserve to be there. Every

person who does not trust in Jesus Christ as their only hope of deliverance and pridefully refuses to bow the knee; they will be cast into hell forever. But those who recognize their desperate need for a Savior and see the glory of the cross, they will be delivered. We will escape judgment. Even though we deserve judgment, we will be delivered from judgment because Jesus Christ took our punishment on the cross.

The judge of the all the earth will most certainly do what is right. We can trust Him and know that the wicked will be judged. And by an amazing display of His glorious grace, many are counted righteous in Christ and are delivered from judgment.

Now let's go to chapter 19 and look at this account of Lot in Sodom. This is so similar to Noah and the Flood. Destruction comes upon the wicked, and a righteous one is delivered. Noah and Lot were both very imperfect people. But they were righteous by faith. Especially in the life of Lot, we're going to see some very disturbing things, things that we're alarmed to see in the Bible. But in spite of his own wicked heart, he was called righteous. In other words, he is just like any of us. Wicked by nature, and that wickedness continues to manifest itself. But also counted righteous because of God's grace through Jesus Christ.

So as we think about the shocking wickedness in Sodom, and the wickedness that is also very evident in Lot's life, think about the wickedness in your heart. We can be so good at justifying our actions and blinding ourselves to our own sin, but we're no better than the detestable characters in this chapter. And we're no less deserving of God's wrath.

It was in chapter 13 that Abraham and Lot went their separate ways, and Lot "moved his tent as far as Sodom." And even in chapter 13 the text clues us in to the problems in Sodom. It says, "Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord." Chapter 19, then, explicitly describes the nature of their wickedness. It was sexual in nature, and it was a perverted sexuality. It was also widespread. Verse 4 says that "all the people to the last man" were involved in this horrible offense, and what they clearly wanted was to have sexual relations with the two men staying at Lot's house. Verse 5, "Bring them out to us, that we may know them." Homosexuality was at least one of the sins that had overtaken Sodom.

This issue is a lightning rod of controversy in our culture. We have become like Sodom in many ways. The media portrays homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle. Gay and lesbian groups are active in schools, on college campuses, in politics, and even in churches! Denominations are debating the issue of whether or not openly gay ministers can serve in their churches.

Our culture, and much of the church along with it, has blatantly rejected the biblical teaching about God's plan for human sexuality. God created sex as an exquisite pleasure and delight to be enjoyed between a husband and wife. It is a beautiful thing as God designed it. And any deviation from God's plan is sin. Pre-marital sex, extramarital affairs, any homosexual relations, this is all clearly against God's will.

Let me read a few verses that specifically speak against homosexuality. In Leviticus 18:22 the Lord says, "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination." In the New Testament, Paul says in Romans 1 "Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this

reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.”

When we engage in any kind of sexual immorality, we are exchanging the truth about God for a lie, and we are worshipping and serving the creature rather than the Creator. Sexual sin will steal your joy, and it will plunge you into the depths of depression and despair and guilt and shame. Because it is a desperate way of searching for pleasure while running away from the only source of true pleasure. God is the only One who satisfies. He holds out the words of life. He gives us commands that will lead us to deep and enduring joy. And yet because of our sinful hearts we are so inclined to flee in the opposite direction and rush headlong into destruction.

This is what had happened in Sodom. Jude 7, in the New Testament, comments on this: “just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.”

As I think about the issue of homosexuality in our culture, and how we ought to respond to it as believers, my hope is that we can speak the truth in love. There are Christians who act in hateful ways toward homosexuals. That shouldn’t be the case. We should treat all with love and respect. We should act humbly, knowing that my sins are no less offensive to God than anybody else’s sins.

On the other end of the spectrum there are Christians who are scared to speak out against homosexuality. Many are unwilling to call sin what the Bible calls sin. We have to speak the truth. We have to acknowledge that homosexuality is a sin against God, it is against His will, and it will bring harm to those who practice it and to the society in which it becomes an accepted norm. At the same time we need to show love to those who identify themselves as homosexuals. We need to believe that God can change their hearts and bring them out of that lifestyle. Is anything too hard for the Lord! He has rescued us from our sin, and He is slowly conforming us to His image, and He can do the same for others who are entangled in different sins. May we speak the truth in love.

Many appalling things happen in this passage. Not only the depraved request of the Sodomite men, but also Lot’s response. He was doing all he could to protect his guests, but it is sickening to think that he offered his daughters to this mob. We breathe a sigh of relief when the angels step in and strike the men with blindness so they cannot carry out their dark plans.

Beginning in verse 12 the angels warn Lot of the destruction that will soon come on Sodom, and they tell him to flee. Look at these warnings, and as we do apply these warnings to yourself. Are you clinging to the world like Lot was? Do you hear the warning of the coming judgment? Look at how the angels instructed him. In verse 13, “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.” Then verse 15, “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. He was so attached to his lifestyle in the sinful city of Sodom, the angels had to seize him and his family and take them out of the city. And don’t miss that important phrase in the middle of verse 16, “the Lord being

merciful to him.” This was all God’s mercy. Left to himself, Lot would have been destroyed. He certainly deserved to be destroyed. But God had mercy on him.

Hear these warnings, brothers and sisters, because they are meant for us as well. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is a foreshadowing of the final destruction that will come when Jesus Christ returns. Judgment is coming, and we must flee from the wickedness of our culture. We need to flee from the sexual immorality of our age, from the moral compromise of our society, from materialism and crude entertainment and immodesty and dishonest business practices. Flee from these things! Don’t linger. Don’t hesitate. Don’t compromise. Don’t settle into this culture and become comfortable with it. We need to be in the world but not of it, as Jesus prayed for us in John 17.

So I’m not saying you have to pack up and get out of Pittsburgh. Because wherever you go, you’ll find the same kind of depravity. The point for us is not that we need to flee geographically, but morally. We remain in the world, but we must flee from the worldly lifestyle that is all around us.

In verse 24 the destruction finally comes, and it is fierce. “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.” That was God’s just punishment on those cities. They deserved that judgment, just like we deserve that judgment. And as horrific as this incident may seem, it is just a small foretaste of the global, cataclysmic judgment that will come when Jesus Christ returns.

Lot and his two daughters barely escape destruction. Lot’s wife, though, is destroyed because she looks back. She became a pillar of salt. Lot’s actions throughout life, his decisions about where to live, and the compromises he made with the culture around him, it had a lasting impact (and a devastating impact) on his loved ones. His wife had developed such an attachment to their life in Sodom, she could not help but gaze back at her beloved city.

The final section of chapter 19 illustrates the corrupting impact that Sodom had on Lot’s two daughters. This is another appalling detail of Lot’s life. The three of them lived in the hills, and the daughters realized that there was no way for them to conceive children. There weren’t any men around. So one night they decided to get their father drunk, and the older daughter slept with him. The next night the younger daughter did the same. And they each became pregnant by their father. The moral laxity of their upbringing is evident in the fact that they would even consider committing incest with their father. It is despicable, wicked, sinful. And it is part of how Lot’s family is remembered down through the ages. May we be warned through this not only to flee the depravity of this world, but also to train our children to live in the world without being of it.

Fathers, I encourage you especially to be mindful of the influences that are entering your home. Who is shaping your children’s convictions? And what are your children learning from you about how to interact with the culture around you? Are they learning to compromise the truth? Are they learning to accommodate the spirit of the age? Are they learning from you how to go to church on Sunday, but live like the world the rest of the week? Or are they learning how to be in the world but not of it?

I'll close with two New Testament passages that comment on Genesis 19. The first is in 2 Peter 2, where Peter writes, "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 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."

I've commented on some of the dreadful shortcomings of Lot's life, but we must also realize that he was a righteous man, as Peter says. By God's grace, he did not fall headlong into the sins of Sodom. His morals were compromised, to the great detriment of his family. But he maintained his faith in God and was distressed by the perversity surrounding him.

The main point to see here in 2 Peter, though, is that God will judge the ungodly and rescue the godly. That's the point I want you to take from this message. Judgment and Deliverance. Apart from Christ, you will suffer God's judgment. But if you are righteous in Christ, if you flee from sin and run to Christ, then you will be delivered. You will escape destruction.

The other passage is Luke 17:28-30, where Jesus is talking to the Pharisees about the coming of the kingdom of God. He says, "Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot—they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all—so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed." Then in verse 32 Jesus says, "Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it."

This is a clear warning that judgment is coming. Don't be like Lot's sons-in-law who thought he was joking when he warned them of the judgment. Don't be like Lot who lingered. Don't be like Lot's wife, who looked back. Flee from sin. Flee to Christ, and you will be delivered from judgment.