

The LORD Was Being Merciful to Him

Genesis 19:1-29

Do you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving his displeasure, and without hope save in his sovereign mercy?

That is the first question that every communing member of this church must embrace. These are the issues in our text today. And these are the issues that face each one of us. Our sinfulness. God's displeasure. Sovereign mercy.

We finished Genesis 18 with Abraham interceding for Sodom. Now, two of the three visitors have reached Sodom and are at the gates of the city.

Read Genesis 19:1-29.

When the two angels arrive at Sodom it is already evening. Lot is sitting at the gate, which probably indicates that he had some sort of official position in Sodom. Lot does not hesitate to invite the two men into his home. His hospitality reminds us of the hospitality of Abraham. Lot is a good host. His treatment of these men is one factor that distinguishes him as a man of righteousness. Lot is also very aware of the wickedness of his fellow citizens. When the visitors suggest that they simply stay in the town square, Lot is adamant that they come into the shelter of his home. He knows what would happen to them if they stayed out in the open.

During dinner, the news of his guests spreads throughout the city, and a mob surrounds Lot's house. We are told that "all the people" "to the last man" "both young and old" are included in the mob. The mob demands that Lot give the men over so that they may "know" them. This is the same word that is used of Adam and Eve in Genesis 1, and it is an idiomatic expression for sex. There is no question that their intent is that of "homosexual gang rape." When we read this, we are to be shocked and revolted. The level of wickedness is so terrible that we should not even want to hear about it. The fact that the entire city wants to participate in this activity makes very clear that they are deserving of God's wrath.

Some crimes are so terrible that even the most forgiving heart cries out, "That person must be punished!" Horrors like this occur in the world today, more often than we would like to admit. But it is hard to imagine the entire population of a city engaging in such activity. There is no calling the police because the police were in the mob! The wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah is set up as the paradigm by which every other

wickedness is to be judged. But the intense and pervasive wickedness of Sodom presents for us some questions.

Are we to conclude that only the most wicked will be judged by God? Are we to comfort ourselves that we will not be judged because we are not as evil as Sodom? It is true that next to the holiness of God any sin is enough to condemn us to an eternal hell. Adam's one act of disobedience brings death into the world. But the picture here at Sodom is that God brings His wrath on pure evil. And when we look around there are many people that we do not see as "pure evil." And yet, God's wrath will be poured out on all who are not in Christ.

The evil of the men of Sodom reflects the evil that lives in every heart. The seeds of every evil live in every heart. That is not easy to believe.

We read of this atrocity and feel in our heart that we could never commit such acts of evil. I am thankful that you feel this way. I do as well. But if you think that you could not "ever" stoop so low, you do not really understand the corruption of your old heart or the grace of God in your life.

Only the grace of God has prevented you from following your sinful heart to such awful depths. And what most people do not realize is that one of the realities of hell is that people will not only be as bad as they are in this life, but they will be devoid of the restraining force of God's goodness altogether. All who dwell in hell will look like the men of Sodom and Gomorrah, or even worse if that is possible.

It is entirely possible that you may not believe what I am saying. You might think that some people are simply better than others. It is normal to think this way. We naturally want to attribute goodness to ourselves. It makes it easier to feel true hatred for the evil in others.

It is hard to accept that we could ever be "that" evil. But this is the case that the Bible makes.

God has chosen Abraham to command those coming after him to do righteousness. We saw that last week. And so, it might be natural to assume that Abraham's offspring would be better than Sodom and Gomorrah. After all, they were God's chosen people.

It would be unthinkable for God's people to ever become as bad as the men of Sodom, right? Wrong!

In our Scripture reading today (Judges 19), we see one tribe of Israel acting just as wickedly as the men of Sodom. In fact, the way the story is written is intended to make us recall Sodom and Gomorrah.

The clear message is that the depth of evil that occurred in Sodom was now occurring among God's chosen people. Who would have ever thought that God's people could have become so bad? And yet, they did.

But God knows the propensity of our own heart to argue our own goodness over the wickedness of others. A Jew during the time of the Judges might conclude that the Benjamites were one bad apple in the bunch.

Fast forward to the days when God casts his people out of the Promised Land. Turn to Jeremiah 23:14. Jeremiah is not only speaking of the evil of one of the tribes. He is speaking to the evil of the whole nation.

Jeremiah 23:14 ¹⁴ But in the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: they commit adultery and walk in lies; they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from his evil; all of them have become like Sodom to me, and its inhabitants like Gomorrah."

The entire history of Israel, from the time of Moses leading them out of Egypt to the time of the Exile is a lesson in the corruption of the heart of man. Apart from God's Sovereign and supernatural grace, man will become like Sodom and Gomorrah.

Is this not the point of the first three chapters of the book of Romans? It is not that some people are evil. It is that there is "no one who is good, no, not one." All men fall terribly short of the glory of God and are deserving of God's displeasure.

You may not be as evil as the men of Sodom. But do not comfort yourself that because you are not "that bad" that you need not fear God's wrath.

Jesus gives the same warning in Luke 13. Eighteen people had recently perished when the tower in Siloam fell on them. Many of the Jews felt that these 18 must have been "worse sinners" because they suffered in this way. Jesus tells them that they were not. But that unless they repented, they would perish as well.

We do not escape the Judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah because we are better than Sodom and Gomorrah. The Pharisees did not fear the judgment because they believed themselves better than most. And they looked down upon people who were more sinful than themselves. But we do not escape the judgment by being better than the person next to us.

Luke 18:9-14 ⁹ He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰ "Two

men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' ¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

Lot is not rescued from Sodom because he is better than the rest of the citizens of Sodom. Even though I would argue that he is, comparatively speaking, better than them. Be appalled at the wickedness of the world around you. Feel sick in your stomach about the stories of evil that you hear and see. But do not think that you will be rescued because you are comparatively better than the worst of the worst. God does not grade on a curve.

Why then does God rescue Lot? I would argue that there are two reasons and they are found in v. 16 and v. 29. Yahweh was being merciful to Lot. V. 16. "the LORD was being merciful to him." God remembered Abraham. V. 29. "God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out..."

As we walk through the rescue of Lot, it is very unlikely that you will be impressed with him. Peter calls Lot righteous, but it is difficult to see.

2 Peter 2:7-8 ⁷ and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked ⁸ (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);

Peter cannot be wrong. Lot must have possessed a new heart. I think this is what Peter means by saying that he had a "righteous soul." There must have been a spark of life that God had planted in Lot that caused Lot to be "tormented" by the evil around him. And dare I say, the evil in him. Without the new heart, we are not tormented by sin. Our corrupt nature loves sin. I accept that Lot must have had a new heart.

Even though, I find that his behavior is not very righteous and causes me great angst in my soul.

⁶ Lot went out to the men at the entrance,

shut the door after him,
7 and
 said,
 "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly.
8 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."

Lot is right to call the behavior of the men of Sodom wicked. It is wicked, terribly wicked. But, at the very moment that he is rightfully condemning the wickedness of others, Lot is committing his own. How is it that Lot protects the visitors? He offers his daughters to them instead!? At worst, Lot is reflecting an attitude that women are treated like animals, with very little value. I am not convinced that this is Lot's motivation. But even if it is not, Lot is failing to lay his own life down in defense of his daughters and his guests. In offering his daughters, Lot is likely trying to show the crowd the wickedness of their actions.

His daughters are betrothed to two men of the city. Those men are very likely in the crowd outside. By offering his daughters, Lot is challenging these two men to rise up in their defense. And these men have families that hopefully would cringe at the thought of raping the betrothed of their sons. This does not exonerate Lot from evil.

No matter how you slice it, Lot is disappointing. And what is more, his efforts are not effective. It is the response of the townsmen to Lot's offer that convinces me that he was not simply trying to appease them.

They are angry at him and accuse him of being "self-righteous". "Who are you to judge us?" And it seems that they are ready to do with Lot what they intended with the visitors, or worse! If the angels do not intervene, the men of the city would likely abuse or even kill Lot. Lot was trying to protect them, but it is really they who are protecting him.

The angels buy time by causing blindness to fall on the mob. Once they have Lot back inside the house, they explain the rescue plan.

12 Then the men said to Lot,

"Have you anyone else here?
 Sons-in-law,
 sons,
 daughters,
 or
 anyone you have in the city,
 bring them out of the place.
 13 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."
 14 So Lot went out
 and
 said to his sons-in-law,
 who were to marry his daughters,
 "Up! Get out of this place,
 for the LORD is about to destroy the city."
 But
 he seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting.

The angels ask Lot if he “has” anyone else in the city. This must be a reference to those who are under Lot’s household of protection. The question we must ask is whether Lot’s household protection will result in the salvation of those in his household. There is a covenant headship of protection. But as we will see this is not an ultimate protection.

Lot’s daughters are betrothed to two men of Sodom. But because their marriage has not been consummated, Lot’s daughters are not living with them, but are still with Lot.

Lot goes to these two men specifically and pleads with them to be rescued with him. These two men are given more grace than the whole town. How do the sons-in-law respond to Lot? They think he is joking. It does sound unbelievable. “The thought of the judgment of God is only a joke to them.” Belcher 144.

If there is a parallel with our world, this is it. Very few people take the threat of God’s wrath seriously. They may mock Christianity. They may even mock God because

they believe God is only the creation of man. But they do not really have a fear of the wrath of God. Not a strong enough fear that they would flee from their sin.

There is a degree of grace that these two men receive because of their connection with Lot. But this does not deny their need to personally repent and believe if they want to be saved. And these men would rather be parted from their betrothed than part with their sin.

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."

16 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.

17 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."

What will happen if Lot and his wife do not hurry? They will be swept away in the coming judgment.

Does it seem odd that Lot, who is being saved, is told this? We never do away with our responsibility. As believers in Jesus, we are called to be alert for the Return of Christ. We are not to be lax concerning the judgment because we believe in Jesus. We are to take very seriously the need to flee the evil of this world.

If you believe this, then what we see in the next verse is both confusing and scary.

16 But he lingered.

I do not know about you, but I expect these words to be follow up with, "... and he was destroyed with Sodom." But that is not what happens.

We are not told why Lot lingers. Maybe he still felt security in his home. Maybe the thought of the unknown made him hesitate. Maybe he was more attached to the sinful pleasures of Sodom than he realized.

Even though we want to go to heaven, do we not struggle to let go of the things of this world? And are we not all slow in throwing off the sins of the flesh? But rather than bringing wrath down upon Lot for his lingering, what do the angels do? They forcefully bring him outside the city. And why are we told that the angels do this? "The LORD was being merciful to him."

God had every right to judge Lot with Sodom because he lingered. The reason given for the angels' forceful removal of Lot is that the LORD was being merciful to him. We have here a good picture of God's sovereign mercy.

When we stand in glory, I suspect that we will all have some stories of God's sovereign mercy when we were lingering. But while our hope is in mercy alone, we must be careful to not "presume upon mercy." To presume upon God's mercy is to willfully disobey God because we presume that God will give us mercy. It is to say, "God won't punish me so I can go on doing what I want." It is never safe to presume upon God's grace.

17 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."

The angels give another warning, "Do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley." Or what? You will be swept away. As readers we ask, "What will happen this time? Is there any substantial difference between "lingering" and "looking back"? If there is, I have not yet found the line between the two. Lot does not now linger or look back, but he does plead for the work of leaving to not be so difficult.

How does Lot view the task of fleeing to the hills? It is too difficult. It is too scary. What is it that Lot is afraid of? He is afraid of disaster in the hills. He has grown accustomed to the security of the city. Lot has not learned how to depend upon the security that comes from God alone.

Can you see the irrationality of his unbelief? Lot has just been miraculously protected and yet he still doubts God's protection. What is it that Lot wants the angels to do? He wants their permission to flee to a nearby little city. Is this a foolish request? Yes, it goes directly against what God has just commanded. Why do you think the angel grants the request?

God understands our weak faith. God is truly gracious to his people. God loves to answer prayer – Just as with Abraham in chapter 18.

What cannot happen until Lot is safely away? The Judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah. God's wrath upon Sodom is not a judgment on people alone. The land returns to a state of being formless and void. Do you remember how "good" Sodom looked when Lot first looked at her. (Gen. 13:10)

26 But
 Lot's wife, behind him, looked back,
 and she became a pillar of salt.

What choice does Lot's wife make? She turns around and looks back. What can we learn about her from this choice? She loved Sodom more than God; she longed for what she left behind. She was probably from Sodom (Lot had no wife when he moved there). She didn't believe the word of the angel.

Lot's wife is a warning to never presume upon grace. She may have reasoned to herself. Lot lingered and God gave him mercy. Surely God will give me the same mercy even if I look back.

27 And
Abraham went early in the morning
 to the place where he had stood before the LORD.

28 And
he looked down
 toward 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.

29 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.

Why do we return to Abraham? The whole scene with Lot occurs because of Abraham's intercession. What does it mean that God remembered Abraham? Abraham is the covenant head. Lot is a beneficiary. But even Abraham is not our true covenant head. We know our true covenant head is Christ.

Our salvation occurs because God remembers Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, the One who has laid down His life for His sheep, now risen to the right hand of the Father, intercedes for us.

This does not negate personal responsibility. We must take seriously the threat of judgment place our hope in Jesus Christ. We must flee and not look back.

Applying the message of Sodom and Gomorrah requires putting ourselves into the story in real time. If we only look back on the characters from the end of their lives, we do not properly feel the tensions those characters must have felt walking through the events.

Our family went to the Titanic Museum in Pigeon Forge several years ago. It was a very worthwhile experience. One way in which they bring you into the whole experience

is to give you a name and description of one of the passengers of the Titanic. But they do not tell you at the beginning if your passenger lives or dies. So, the whole time that you are walking through the museum, you are wondering, will “I” (my passenger), live or die? Only at the end do you find out.

We should do something similar in reading Genesis 19. Consider the various characters.

The townspeople in general = clearly under the wrath of God.

Lot = clearly under God’s sovereign mercy.

But what about everyone else?

The betrothed men of Lot’s daughters = they are given more warning than the rest but fail to respond.

Lot’s wife = she makes it all the way out of the city, and yet perishes with Sodom.

Are you Lot? Or are you Lot’s wife? Or are you the betrothed of Lot’s daughters? Do you think the judgment of God is a clever construction of man to keep us under control? If you do, you will never repent of your sin and cast yourself on the mercy of God.

Are you Lot? Then you are one, not hoping in your own righteousness, but relying wholly on the mercy of God found in Jesus Christ. You may recognize times in your life when you have lingered and God has been merciful. But this does not cause you to grow lethargic. You take God’s command to flee seriously. And although you fall short, you press on “with fear and trembling”, knowing that it is God who works in you to will and to work according to His good purpose.

But we all should examine our hearts and ask, “Am I Lot’s wife?” Do I use God’s mercy as an excuse to not sincerely fight against my sin? Before Lot’s wife turns, I would have assumed that she was saved. Her destiny scares me. I do not want to be like her. Nor should you. Fix your eyes on Jesus.

Paul gives the right balance between confidence that we are in Christ and heartfelt commitment to put sin to death.

Colossians 3:1-10 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life appears,

then you also will appear with him in glory. ⁵ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸ But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

Our hope is not in our repentance. But without a repentant heart, we are not ready to meet Jesus. Continue to work out your salvation because you are convinced that He is continuing to work in you salvation.

Pursue Christ wholeheartedly. Strive to put to death sin. But always finish with Christ. Lean not on your own righteousness, but wholly on God's sovereign mercy given to all who trust in Jesus Christ.