

Sodom

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[0 : 00] I'm going to pray and ask God to help us as we've sung hear God's word well let's pray. Our Father in heaven thank you that you've given us your life-giving word and thank you that in your scriptures all things are written that we might come to be made wise to salvation, to be taught and corrected and rebuked and trained in righteousness.

Please help us to hear your word well this morning and to act appropriately having heard it. We pray it in Jesus' name, Amen.

Well what comes to your mind when you read this passage, the account of God's dealing with Sodom and Gomorrah? It's been a few chapters coming now, I wonder what your attitude is towards this part of God's word.

I've got a couple of aims as we come to it this morning and number one is to understand it well as always, the second is to help us all to speak well of the judgment of God and also another third aim is to help us see the incredible mercy of God that's been shown to us and then fourthly to respond in ways which are honouring God and his word.

And so my question is, for us to ponder at one level to start with, do you want justice or do you want mercy? Which one would you prefer and can you have them both?

[1 : 35] When you come to Genesis chapter 19, that is one of the big questions before us, the question of justice and the question of mercy. And to help us in that deliberation, I want to just explore a couple of big pictures.

First, the big picture of the Bible. The big picture of the Bible's story goes something like this. It goes from the creation to the new creation. That's where it's going, right?

From the garden of Eden to the city, the new heavenly city of God. So Genesis chapter 1, we start off in the garden, then we get to Babel in chapter 11, and then we get to Sodom here, and we get to Nineveh, and we get to Jerusalem, where all mankind is arraigned against God in all their absolute worst.

And then we get to Jerusalem, the new heavenly Jerusalem, where we see the new city of God, and God's pure and perfect. So we go from garden to city, and cities are good places, and cities are bad places.

The second picture I want to picture for you is the need for justice, a cry for judgment, a cry for justice. You and I both want justice. We all do.

[2 : 47] Society wants justice. Justice requires someone who's going to be a judge making a just judgment. And we recognise that, you know, vigilante groups, as much as you hear about it coming in Australia, are dangerous.

Taking into your own law, in your own hands, the law can be very bad, and grave injustices can happen. As much as people want to actually take action about youth crime, we want to make sure it's not done by vigilante groups.

We want appropriate bodies to convict, to know the facts, all the facts. In fact, all the facts. Only God knows that.

And then convict rightly. A holy God knows all the facts and can convict rightly. And we know, though, that if there's no justice, right, if there's no justice in society, society itself just can't function. Those who are weak are the ones who get trampled down and suffer. And those who are the strong rise up and oppress them. And then there's no services and there's no economy and there's no investment and there's no rule of law.

[3 : 57] There's none of those things. And what happens is that the mighty get richer and it becomes, they feed on the poor and there's no society at all. And when we want, when we're wronged, we want justice, don't we?

I don't want that person to get away with thieving that stuff out of my house. The flip side, though, is this, isn't it? The flip side goes like this.

When I commit a wrong, when I do wrong, I don't want justice. No. That would be costly. That would be painful. What I want is mercy.

And so the question is, where can you have justice and mercy meet in our world, in society?

And the third picture I want to pick before you as we come to Genesis 19 is a picture of the character of God, right? We haven't got time to do justice to the character of God. That's the whole scriptures, really.

[5 : 02] But our world has a distorted view of God. I want to just try and write that a little bit for us this morning. See, at one extreme, our world has God as a dictatorial tyrant, right?

Vindictive, delighting to destroy and do bad things, right? That's people's view of God. At the other end of the extreme is a God who is a doting, impotent grandfather in the clouds, who is oblivious to wickedness going on.

The true and living God of the scriptures, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is neither, right?

God is the God who does not delight in the death of a sinner.

So, Ezekiel, chapter 33, verse 11. Ezekiel is speaking about the character of God. He says, That is God's heart.

But not just for Israel either, right? Jonah is sent to Nineveh, remember? The city of a foreign nation, a wicked and evil nation, an enemy of Israel, to warn the people of the impending judgment to come.

[6 : 40] They listened. They repented. God relented. And spared that city from destruction. Now, God is patient and kind.

Not desiring to swat people like flies. But nor is he the doting grandfather. He's not going to allow wickedness to continue forever.

He can't do that. He will not allow mankind to rebel against him forever. God will not allow mankind to sin against him forever. God takes sin seriously. And deals with it righteously.

As is the account of Babel. Scattering the nations. As is the account of Noah and the flood. As is the account of Sodom and Gomorrah.

God is omnipotent. He has punished him in the past. And it would be immoral for him to allow evil and wickedness to continue without consequences in defiance of his rule forever.

[7 : 49] And my problem is this. By nature, I am someone who sins.

Just ask my wife. Just ask my daughter. And if you're honest. You confess that you are someone who sins as well.

And so what do we deserve? The question is then, how can God maintain his righteousness in being just?

And how can he be merciful at the same time? So with those caveats, let's try and address Genesis 19.

There's two angels. The two angels came up to Sodom in the evening. Now we met these angels in question last week in Genesis chapter 18, as Josh explained it to us.

[8 : 56] These two angels and the angel of the Lord first met Abraham at the Oaks of Mamre, back in chapter 18, verse 1. They had been treated by Abraham well.

Sarah's again promised a child the following year. And then in chapter 18, verse 20 and 21, the Lord said, because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I'll go down to see whether they've done according to the outcry that's come to me.

And if not, I'll know. So the three men head off, set off towards Sodom to investigate the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham discusses God's plan to sweep away the city because of the great wickedness of the city.

And the closing words of chapter 18 are these. The Lord went his way and when he finished speaking to Abraham and Abraham returned to his place.

All right. Then the two angels, but he's gone back to the Oaks of Mamre. Now the two angels then, chapter 19, verse 1, the two angels then proceed to Sodom.

[10 : 08] Now we know that they are heavenly angels, right? But Lot first only knows them as two travelling men. And the men met Lot, the nephew of Abraham, sitting in the gate.

And that's the place where the respected elders of a city would sit and judge matters brought to them. That's what they would do at the gate. Now politically, Lot has risen to a place of influence in

society of Sodom.

And the place he had chose to live is when he'd given the choice. He'd been given the choice to go where he wanted to go and he'd chosen to go there. Which from the vantage point, which from him, in Genesis chapter 13, was like Eden.

Like the garden of the Lord. Beautiful place. Fantastic and prosperous. And Lot insists though, that these men, these men stay at his house.

Offering them both safety and hospitality. Like Abraham, he makes a feast for them. And he doesn't want them to stay the night sleeping rough in the square.

[11 : 25] And he presses them strongly. Knowing that it's just not safe to stay in the square.

Because the city of Sodom, while appearing physically like the garden of Eden, is actually morally more like hell.

And so we come to Sodom's sin. Now, if there's a few things in the Bible that people in the world know about, they will know of Sodom, they will know the words at least, Sodom and Gomorrah.

They're vaguely aware that this is in the Bible. Now, before these two men, we know who are angels, messengers of God, get to bed, have a look at verse 4.

The men of the city of Sodom. The young men, literally. The old men, literally.

All the people, to the last man, surrounded the house. They've come to the house of Lot, where the angels are.

[12 : 39] It's emphatic, right? It's emphatic. It's all the men of Sodom, who are outside the household of Lot, have come to the house. And things get grim indeed. The mob demand that Lot brings the men out, so that...

Now, brothers and sisters, there's no other way to say this than this, right? The men of Sodom want to homosexually pack-rape these male angels.

angels. To know is a very common euphemism for having sexual intercourse. And we see in verse 7 that this is wicked, right?

That is what Lot says, what God says. Lot goes out and tells and begs him, call him in and Sodom to his brothers, don't act so wickedly.

For that's what it is. Wickedness. They have degraded God's good intention for sexual intimacy, reserved for marriage between a man and a woman, to the lowest level of sexual intercourse, rape of the body.

[13 : 51] Lusting after homosexual sex, trivialising the holy union of marriage, making wickedness the norm of the day. Now, if things couldn't get much worse, really, but we're here of Lot's plan.

Now, here is a tormented man, right? Tormented, have to be. How can he appease the lust of the mob to defile his guests? If he hands over his guests, well, then he participates in the sin of Sodom.

If he hands himself over, what guarantee would there be that they would stop there? And so he offers to give them his daughters who've been pledged in marriage.

I can't imagine to even begin to imagine how he could suggest that in this situation.

But even that wouldn't satisfy the mob. See verse 9? They abandon, they reject Lot's offer.

[15 : 03] And so, are also rejecting Lot's verdict on them as being wicked men. Failing to repent of their original plans and desires.

And so, Lot himself is about to be treated worse than the two angels than the two angels were going to be treated. If that was at all possible.

Until, verse 10, the men, the angels, the guests, rescue Lot and strike the mob with blindness.

The idea is that of blinding, dazzling light that renders them unable to see. And then what do they do? They grope around like zombies scraping that door. Now, brothers and sisters, before we become too familiar with this passage and get it wrong and think that this is the only sin in view here in Sodom, think again.

Let me push us further into the passage. Into the sin of Sodom. For this is the account of Genesis, but there's layer upon layer upon layer of sin going on in Sodom, which mounts up to condemn them.

[16 : 38] And this, at one level, is the straw that brings on God's righteous wrath. For their sin has reached its limit in God's patience and forbearance.

Jeremiah, chapter 23, verse 14, the weeping prophet, right, speaks about adulteries and lies being the character of life in Sodom.

That's there for you to check out later on. But come to Ezekiel, chapter 16, verse 48. I mean, turn your Bibles over there now, please. So it's not me saying this, it's actually the Bible saying this. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel. I know you're flipping your phones, but paper's good. Ezekiel, chapter 16, pick it up at verse 48, there's plenty to read there.

In this passage, God's speaking about how he loved and cherished Israel as his beautiful daughter, comparing her to Sodom, who he says is her sister.

[17:44] Right? Listen to what he says in verse 48. Genesis, sorry, Exodus, Ezekiel, sorry, chapter 16, verse 48. As I live, declares the Lord God, your sister Sodom and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done.

Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom. Listen up. She and her daughters had pride, excess of food and prosperous ease and did not aid the poor and needy.

They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them when I saw it. So Mary has not committed half your sins.

You've committed more abominations than they and have made your sisters appear righteous by all the abominations that you've committed. Bear your disgrace, you also, for you have intervened on behalf of your sisters because of your sins in which you acted more abominably than they.

They are more in the right than you. Hear the scope of Sodom's sin, right? You ready? Pride, excess of food, prosperous ease, didn't care for the poor and needy, haughty, that is arrogant, right?

[19:08] Abominations, well, if you read Jeremiah 32, that is rejecting God, worshipping idols, worshipping Moloch and the child's sacrifice that went on with it.

Jude chapter 7 speaks clearly about the nature of the sin as well. everything that we in our modern city can be proud of our own achievements, thinking we're great, failing to recognise that it's God who's given us all that we have, fattened on the excess of food and gluttony, having more and more ourselves while others starve, prosperous ease, so rich that we sit back, take it easy, building bigger barns while others slave for us to make it so it can be so.

Having no regard for the poor and needy, true religion we're told in James is this, to visit orphans and widows in their afflictions and to keep oneself unstained from the world. Child sacrifice, abortion on demand, late term abortion, as good as infanticide, just because a child might be inconvenient, unplanned, sexual immorality of every kind.

the sin of Sodom cries out to the Lord. The sin itself is what is crying out to God.

James chapter 5 verse 4 speaks about the sin itself cries out. The sin of Sodom is evidence itself before God. The sin needs to be dealt with by God who sees it to be just righteous.

[21:26] To ignore it will be immoral. Cannot overlook it. Cannot say it doesn't matter. Now, while cities are wonderful places, the cities can promote the very same wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah.

There's layer upon layer of sin mounting up and mounting up until it cries out, I dare say it, in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, New York, Amsterdam, Hong Kong, Beijing, Bangkok, Manila, and any other city you care to speak of today, you name them, our world is as guilty of the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah then as it is now.

Our society today is as guilty of the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was then and is so now. Rebelling against God's good way of living and our society is made up of people, our neighbours, our friends, you and me.

Rebelling against God's good way of living in so many ways. But come back to the passage with me. In God's mercy, Lot and those close to Lot are blessed.

Come back to Genesis 19, you'll see it. Because they are the family of Abraham. It's a blessing to be of the same family of Abraham. Verse 12, the visitors, the angels, the men said to Lot, have you anyone else here?

[23:05] Sons, daughters, daughters-in-law, sons-in-laws, any other family? Bring them out of this place. We're about to destroy the place because the outcry against his people has become great before the Lord and the Lord has sent us to destroy it.

Lot tells his sons-in-laws what's about to come. Next day or so it's going to happen, get ready. But notice the response. Verse 14, but it seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting.

When you were warned about the judgment of God to come and then refused to believe the warning, there isn't much chance for you, is there? What more can God do? Notice is given, it's

time to believe, time to repent, time to flee the wrath to come.

But it sounds like a joke. And when we warn our world of the judgment to come, how will they respond? How do they respond? What kind of response do you expect?

I mean, have I warned anyone lately about it? People die.

[24 : 24] Denying the judgment of God to come. And people today mock the whole idea of a righteous God coming to destroy the world. Think we're joking.

now it may be that some here today who are rejecting the whole idea of a righteous God who's coming to judge the world.

But on what basis can you do that? Now I can't imagine Lot gloating over the fact that these sons-in-laws didn't believe.

if you know that you are being graciously delivered from destruction and the doom that awaits the rest of the city, it's not something you'll rejoice over.

It's something that you'll weep about. And since we believe that God is going to return to judge the world, it's something that we won't be gloating about, won't be rejoicing in, thinking this is a wonderful thing that God's going to come.

[25 : 26] And we won't be rubbing in the face of those we believe will be facing the wrath of God and shut out from his presence for all eternity. That won't be our heart, won't be our attitude.

It's something that we'll be desperately warning people about, urging people around us to flee the world, to flee the city, to repent of ignoring God and to submit to his son for deliverance.

That's what we'll be doing. And so Lot was saved, Lot's delivered along with his daughters, but not his wife.

This is getting harder and harder all the time. Verses 15 to 22, his wife's not. Hear the urgency and feel the reluctance of Lot to leave.

Lot, his wife and two daughters have to be dragged out of Sodom by the hand. And notice, this is the Lord being merciful to them, verse 16.

[26 : 27] God is being merciful to them, saying get out of the city, don't stay there, move now.

While they deserve to be left in the city at one level, God takes the initiative to drag them, kicking and screaming at one level, out of the city, delivering them from the wrath to come.

And even then, Lot bargains, well hang on a second God, not too far, that little city over there will do, it's just only little cities, don't get a little bit of sin in it maybe, just a little bit, just I'll get that far. And so that city with Lot in it is spared.

destruction comes, verse 23 to 29, the Lord brings down sulfur and fire, verse 24.

It's a cataclysmic just judgment and punishment of God. Everyone, notice the encompassing of it all, everyone, everything, all people, cataclysmic punishment of God.

The fertile plain that resembled the garden of Eden is now destroyed, ruined, never to be productive again. Everyone and everything in the cities of the plain are destroyed.

[27 : 53] And Lot's wife, who looked back, herself suffered the wrath of God as well. As she looks back to the city and all it stood for, looking back not to say I casually saw it, not that idea.

It's a longing for the things that she's left behind. It's an unwillingness to let go the things of Sodom of her world. It's a demonstrating of half-baked repentance, possibly doubting that God would even destroy the place after being dragged out by the angels.

God's love. Luke chapter 17 verse 32, Jesus reminds us of Lot's wife and her misplaced values.

He's talking about people living in the last days, oblivious to the impending judgment of God and thinking that judgment is just a joke, failing to repent and so facing the coming wrath of God.

And Lot's wife is turned to a pillar of salt. She stands for a perpetual sign of condemnation and desolation for those who long for the things this world's ways rather than the things of the Lord's.

And finally, Abraham, he comes to the place where he stood and looked with the Lord, looking down the plain and the place is burnt to a crisp with smoke rising up from the devastation.

[29 : 22] God did it. It wasn't an accident. After careful deliberation and close investigation, after years and years of cities getting more and more debauched, after warning Lot and his sons, it was God's considered deliberate action.

But, in God's kindness to Abraham, God keeps his covenant with Abraham to be his God and to bring blessing on the world through him and Lot is rescued a second time from calamity.

Okay, there's the passage. Let's push forward now through the Bible. moving from Genesis to the time of Jesus.

The Lord himself comes into the world and his disciples were his angels at one level. Matthew chapter 10 and chapter 11, Jesus sends out his disciples ahead of him into the towns to prepare them for him to come.

And he tells them to announce that the kingdom of God is near. This is Matthew chapter 10 and Matthew chapter 11. And if people accept him and welcome them and say their message, those peoples, those towns will be blessed.

[30 : 55] But if the people they meet in those towns reject their message, we are told, listen to this, it will be better for Sodom than for that town.

When the kingdom of God comes fully and finally, Sodom will be better off than the town that rejects the message of Jesus as Lord.

Jesus the Lord has come into the world and in coming, God calls all people everywhere to repent. For he set a day when he will judge the world with justice and he's given evidence of this by raising his son, the Lord Jesus, from the grave.

That's Acts chapter 17 if you didn't remember. Now repent means change your mind. mind. We always have to be changing our mind in line with the truth of the scriptures.

Changing your mind, your way of thinking, that will then change the way that we live. It should change the way that we live.

[32 : 08] God calls all people, no matter of nationality, demographic, wealth, sexuality, perceived status in life, without exception to repent, all of us, all the time, to turn from their sinful ways, their rejection of Jesus as Lord, which leads to sins of all kinds of ways, damages ourselves, damages our world, damages each other and damages those around about us, our neighbours as well.

And he calls us to live under his righteous rule or else face the considered righteous deliberate just measured righteous judgment of God.

He cannot and he will not allow sin to go on unpunished forever for he is just. And as we speak about the great judgment to come, we're not going to do it triumphantly are we?

We're going to do it in humility, we'll do it in ways which are showing the great pain that comes with it. We'll not be doing it in a pharisaic, self-righteous way for we know that rightly we deserve no different.

We are deserving of God's wrath, I am deserving of God's wrath. sin. We are not going to be as public as others. Our sin might even be seen as acceptable to others in the eyes of those around about us.

[34 : 01] No, no, that would be no way to speak about the judgment of God. There's three tears that we need to be crying when it comes to this subject.

tears of sorrow for those facing it. For we know that we rightly are horrified by the reality of the fate waiting for our loved ones who are yet to believe.

Our children, our parents, our God children, our relatives, our colleagues, our husbands, our wives, who have not yet bowed the knee to the Lord Jesus, we will be crying for them.

As we speak about the judgment, we come to the cross, don't we? We have to. On which the innocent one suffered God's judgment in my place.

And so I'll have tears of remorse for my sin that brought him to it, that he suffered in my place for my sin, the righteous one who deserved not the wrath of God, for the unrighteous one, me, who did.

[35 : 31] Bearing what I deserved for my sin at the cross, bearing the wrath of God, that we all deserve for our sins at the cross.

And it's at the cross that we see the mercy of God, don't we? He bears our sin in our place. We should rightly be facing the same fate as Sodom, sin, but at the cross there is justice for punishment for my sin, the wrath of God is satisfied on Christ, Jesus, and mercy, for I get what I don't deserve, forgiveness, welcome into the family of Abraham, welcome into the kingdom of God, new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The cross is where justice and mercy meets perfectly in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so that will lead me to tears of joy, won't it?

Joy for knowing sins forgiven, for the forgiveness I have received, freedom from the burden and the guilt and the shame of sin, joy in assurance of hope beyond the grave, entry into the perfect city of God, where there is no sin, no death, no crying, no mourning, no pain, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city to come, all that Eden was meant to be and more in Christ, comes to me.

And so we need to respond rightly, don't we? 2 Peter chapter 3 tells us that God is patient, delaying this day, holding it back, not bringing about, while the sin of the city continues to layer up and layer up, God is holding back his judgment so that it doesn't come just yet.

[37 : 40] But we're one day closer, one day closer. we're told that one day closer when the Lord brings about the promised destruction of the world by fire and the renewal of all things, the flood of Noah, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah are evidence that God can and will do it.

And our appropriate response needs to be one of repentance. repentance. for some in this room this morning my plea is to come out of the city, repent from living in rebellion to God thinking you can do it in your own strength, denying he exists, saying there will be no judgment.

Receive the mercy of God, he's been very patient, he's grabbing you by the hand and saying come out of the city now before it's too late. He has done everything, don't be like the sons in law of Lot who think he's just joking.

And for others who believed God and believed the warning who have been rescued can I say to us all stay out of the city.

The temptation is to always look back, look back to be no different to the city. We mustn't do that.

[39 : 15] We must not desire the sin of the city, the sex of the city, the ease of the city, the wealth of the city, the excess of the city, the values of the city, the child sacrifice of the city.

We have turned our back on that and we look to the city to come, the perfect righteous city of God where we'll live in righteous praise of the one who saved us in glorious perfection forever.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, you are the righteous and loving and kind and merciful and just and perfect heavenly Father.

Please help us to hear your word and to heed the warning and respond appropriately. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.