

Faith in God's judgment and salvation

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[0 : 00] Well, make sure you keep Genesis 19 open in front of you because we're going to work through the details of this story to feel its full impact. And of course, a sermon outline, as always, is available if that helps you.

So let's also pray and let's ask God for his help. Heavenly Father, I just pray, Lord, that you would really help us to feel the full wake of this passage, that we might not take you lightly, not take you for granted, but indeed cry out that you are the holy God who saves.

So please, Holy Spirit, be at work this morning. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Smoking, eating unhealthy food, drinking too much, a sedentary lifestyle, looking at your phone every few minutes. We know these things aren't good for us. But why do we keep doing them? Because they feel like paradise. I just imagine you had a long, hard week and now that it's Friday night, what do you do? You reach for that cigarette or bottle or switch on the laptop to binge on Netflix or get on the sofa to scroll through Instagram or Lazada. Why? Because they're comforting.

[1 : 15] After all, when we're stressed by work, feeling the strain of relationships or just plain unsettled by this pandemic, we just want to escape whatever feels hellish.

We want to go to wherever feels like paradise. Even when we know that thing isn't paradise, really. A Lord doesn't have cigarettes or smartphones, but he too looks for paradise.

Don't forget, in Genesis 13, he's stressed out about the conflict that his herdsmen are having with Abraham's herdsmen. And so he looks at the whole plain of the Jordan Valley and he saw Sodom. But he didn't just see Sodom, he saw the garden of the Lord. He saw paradise. I suppose those of us who are familiar with the Bible can't help but think negatively of Sodom today.

But don't forget, it was like Egypt. That's like saying today it's like Melbourne or Vancouver, which is often in the top five most livable places of the world.

[2 : 16] He saw paradise and he set out for it. But it's one issue and it's a big one. You see, what happens when we go where God isn't present?

Back in Genesis 12, God had already promised a land he would give to Abraham and his descendants. And that land wasn't Sodom. And Lot knows that.

In fact, Genesis 13 has already warned us that Sodom is a godless place. But Lot headed there anyway, even though he knows it's not a good idea. Why?

Because it feels like paradise. It looks like paradise. But as one person I've heard so nicely puts it, it's paradise without Christ.

It's the garden of the Lord without the Lord being there. And how long will a paradise without Christ remain a paradise? That's a really important question because one day, if not today, you and I will be tempted just like Lot.

[3 : 20] You and I will be tempted to draw comfort from the things that are not of God, that are even opposed to God because they feel like paradise. But in today's passage, God is going to say, don't go there.

Get out of there. Because paradise without Christ will end up more like hell. And that's what we're going to see in the first part of today's sermon, which I think will probably take up the majority of our time.

We'll trace through what happens when we get too comfortable in the paradise of Sodom. And then we'll think about what we should do instead. And so firstly, what happens when we get too comfortable in Sodom?

Let's pick up the story from verse 1. Two of the three men from Genesis 18, now identified more specifically as divine messengers, arrive in Sodom.

It's evening, so it's already turning dark, an ominous sign for the events that follow. And after a break of a few chapters, we meet Lot once again, sitting in the gateway of the city.

[4 : 29] That's significant. You might remember Genesis 13, that he moved to the edge of Sodom. And by chapter 14, he was in Sodom itself. And now Genesis 19, he's located at the city gate.

In ancient cities, the gateway functioned as the public square. It's where the community leaders sat, where they presided over public meetings, where legal cases were heard, where they discussed trade with others.

And if Lot is sitting here, that means he's become deeply embedded within the community. Maybe he's even become a leading figure. You could say, not only is he in Sodom, but Sodom is now in him.

And now, like any good Middle Easterner, he tries to show hospitality. He gets up to meet this man. He bows down. He speaks respectfully to them.

Then he invites them to lodge with him. Don't forget, there were no holiday inns or marriott hotels at that time. And so it was standard for the host to extend this invitation.

[5 : 34] And Lot appears to be playing the part of a good host. But take a closer look, and you begin to see that there's something wrong. You see, in verses 1 to 4, the narrator is inviting us to compare Lot with Abraham.

For if we were to look back at Genesis 18 verse 1, we'll also find Abraham sitting at the entrance, like Lot here, and when this man appear.

But that's where the hospitality of the two men begin to diverge. Lot receives them at night, whereas Abraham receives them in the day.

Lot gets up when he sees them, but Abraham runs all the way to them. In 19 verse 2, Lot simply says to the man to go wash feet on your own. But earlier in 18 verse 3, Abraham actually brings out the water for them to wash their feet.

In Genesis 19 verse 1 to 4, Lot's wife is not mentioned at all, suggesting her unavailability. Whereas in Genesis 18, Sarah is right there serving the guests with Abraham.

[6 : 44] Perhaps most damningly, in Genesis 18 verse 6 to 8, Abraham prepares a royal feast for his guests, the best calf, and so on.

But Lot makes do by baking bread without yeast, 19 verse 3. Some of you might know that in Exodus, as the Israelites were getting ready to leave Egypt, they had to bake bread without yeast. Because that's the one thing that can be prepared quickly. But it's an inferior meal, prepared for people about to go on the run, not for people ready to have a rest.

And so the picture we're getting here is of a lack of readiness on Lot's part. There's a kind of lethargy that has crept into him.

A slowness, a downness, a kind of inertia. That means he's unprepared when divine figures show up at his doorstep. It's what later theologians, especially monastic theologians, would call slothful.

[7 : 47] Now, contrary to popular belief, sloth, theologically speaking, isn't idleness. It isn't quite the same as what we would call today slacking off.

You can be busy and full of activity and still be slothful. Because being slothful is really about a particular form of laziness.

It's about being lazy in love. It's the tida apa attitude that says, I'm not really invested in loving other people. So I'm not going to go all out.

Just let me do the minimum to stay comfortable, okay? Or as one contemporary writer beautifully puts it, Sloth is resisting the demands of love, especially in relation to our God.

That's the picture of Lot we get here. Now, Lot does try to show hospitality. He's not being rude. But now that Sodom is in him, he's no longer as attentive to what's required of him.

[8 : 52] He doesn't give his awe in response to divine visitation because he's just not ready. And that's what happens to us too. Whenever we get too comfortable being away from God in our Sodom, whatever that might be.

When you let yourself be captured by other loves, you begin to forget what God is really like. You don't pursue him. You might remember all the benefits of being in a relationship with God or the comfort and happiness that it brings.

But you've not allowed that same relationship to change and challenge you, to keep you sharp spiritually. Our slothful people don't pray, avoid scripture, forget church, neglect repentance, shun service, evade Christian reflection.

So when God does show up, it comes as a big surprise. And we're not prepared to meet him. What happens when we get too comfortable in Sodom?

We become dull to the things of God. We become slothful. But let's keep looking on at this passage. And as we do, we notice more things that make us uneasy.

[10:10] After all, did you notice one thing that's pretty strange about this entourage that shows up at Sodom? There are only two men. We know that there are three men in Genesis 18. So why have only two shown up so far?

And what is just as strange is their initial refusal of Lot's offer. Just as it was standard for hosts to offer lodging, as Lot does here, it would have been standard for guests to accept.

So why do they say no? It's like they know something bad is coming their way. And Lot's reaction in verse 3 heightens our sense of unease.

After they refuse, he says, no, no, no, no, no. You must come and stay with me. This isn't just Asian-style politeness. The phrase you see in verse 3 in your NIV, insisted so strongly, is actually the same word translated at the end of verse 9 as bringing pressure.

One commentator even suggests translating verse 3 as Lot twisting their arms. It's as if Lot is scared that something bad will happen if they stay out in the square.

[11:25] That's a kind of desperation in his insistence. And in verse 4, it becomes clear what Lot is worried about.

Neal spreads quickly in Sodom, and before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom, both young and old, surrounded the house.

Notice the pains the narrator has gone to show that this is all of Sodom. All the men from every part, young and old.

And this is their request, verse 5. We want sex. We want a homosexual orgy. Doesn't matter what our guests want, actually. We'll gang rape them if we have to.

This is a deeply shocking request. But it also highlights the nature of Sodom. Remember last week what Abraham asked?

[12:27] God, if there are 10 righteous men in Sodom, will you spare it? And God said, yes. Yes, I will. But verse 5 makes clear, there are not even 10 such men.

This is a place that corrupts everything it touches. Remember how great Sodom looked? It offers great security, well-watered and all that.

Perfect for Lot's herds. But spiritually speaking, it's the least secure place to be if this incident is any indication.

And as we keep reading in this passage, we'll see later how Sodom's corrupting influence has touched each one of Lot's family members. But for now, let's look at how the tentacles of Sodom's corruption has touched Lot himself.

Now, we must be fair to Lot. In verse 7, he clearly attempts to do the right thing. He pleads with the men not to proceed with their wicked act. And he acts like a good host.

[13:37] In that culture, the most important thing as a host is to protect your guests. That's like the number one thing you must do. And verse 6 is the one time in this passage that we can give Lot our admiration.

He bravely goes out to meet the mob alone, and he even shuts the door behind him, revealing that the welfare of his guests are his utmost concern.

Having made a bad start with his hospitality, it looks like things are on the up. But Sodom is still in him. And so, verse 8, he makes a shocking offer.

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

Lot makes a trade. Why don't I offer you what is most precious to me, my daughters, so that my honor and my guests can be protected?

[14:42] Now, you have to wonder, what has happened to his moral compass? Yes, guests are important. Hospitality is important. Honor is important.

But at the expense of his own children? Later on in Israel's history, when the law was handed down, this is what it said, Leviticus 19, verse 29, Do not degrade your daughters by making her a prostitute, or the land will turn to prostitution and be filled with wickedness.

And here you can say the inverse has happened. The land is already filled with wickedness, such that it has corrupted Lot into degrading his own daughters.

This is what happens when you stay in Sodom too long. Sodom gets into you. You can't escape its corrupting influence. You see, sin does not look like sin if it is not corrected or avoided by anybody. And as Lot stayed in the fishbowl of Sodom, he began to adopt its viewpoint, its perspective, its way of doing things, such that he can trade one godless sexual action for another.

[16:02] Godless actions have become normalized. But it's the same with us. When we consistently draw our understanding from worldly sources, when we look up to worldly role models in our workplaces and social circles, when that's where we're drawing our comfort and our value from, we begin to do things we might never have dreamt of previously.

Consider this example. No one ever intends to sacrifice their family. But when one imitates others by beginning to become a total workaholic in pursuit of career, just like the people around them, such that they become an absentee father, they are sacrificing their family, even when they are justifying it as providing for the family.

Well, that's the subtlety of sin. It takes one worthy goal and allows it to twist other things and bend everything out of shape. Well, that's what happens when we get too comfortable in Sodom.

We become corrupted. Now, we might feel some sympathy for Lot here. He seems to be caught in between a rock and a hard place.

Don't offer his daughters, his guests wouldn't be protected. Offer his daughters, and he's also doing something wrong. So how? But actually, there is a way out of this.

[17:34] Let's come back to the passage and see what happens next. In verse 9, Lot's offer is not accepted. Get out of the way, the mock cries. They mock Lot.

You think you're one of us, but you're not really. We will deal with you later. But that's what counterfeit paradisers do in the end, don't they? They make us think that we belong, but they then make a fool out of us and then they consume us.

And Lot is now in danger of being consumed. As the mob closes in. But notice what happens next. The host is supposed to protect the guests, but now the guests protect Lot.

In verses 10 and 11, the angels grab Lot, pull him inside, shut the door, and now strike the mob blind. And in verses 12 and 13, they tell him to begin plotting an escape route because they are going to carry out the Lord's will.

They're going to destroy the place in judgment. But they show him the path to salvation. But here's the irony of the whole situation.

[18:47] Remember how I just said that Lot seems to be caught in between a rock and a hard place? But the way out is actually quite clear. If only he had eyes to see.

You see, it's not just the mob who is blind. Lot has been blind all this while. He has not realized that his guests are actually angels sent by God.

Powerful beings who are more than capable of looking after themselves. If he had realized that, he wouldn't need to resort to the kind of immoral offer that he had just made.

He could have just trusted God to get him out of this. After all, he had angels in his house. But he didn't see. He was just as blind as the other man in Sodom.

And that's what happens when Sodom gets into you. We become blinded. We can have God standing right in front of us, showing us his mighty power and the way of salvation.

[19:56] And we don't realize it. Instead, we rely on our own schemes. But God doesn't need our schemes. He certainly doesn't need our immoral ones.

Yet when we get comfortable in Sodom, we become blinded. Anyway, it's time to go. Lot goes over to his son-in-laws and warns them.

But they don't take him seriously. They too, like all the other men in Sodom, are blind to the reality of impending judgment. But the time is near.

Verse 15 tells us night is coming to an end. And dawn is approaching. The third of the three men, God himself, is on his way.

Darkness is about to be swept away. Notice how often the angels convey a sense of urgency to Lot. Hurry, they say in verse 15.

[20:55] Flee, they say in verse 17. Don't look back. Don't stop anywhere. Flee to the mountains. Go, go, go. And so you'll have thought that Lot, his wife, and his two daughters would be racing to get out of the city as soon as possible.

But watch how Lot behaves. In verse 16, he hesitates. Some English translation says he lingers. He delays.

He thinks twice. And in verse 19, he even enters negotiating mode. What he says is quite incredible. Thanks, but no thanks is basically the gist of it.

Thanks for sparing my life, but I can't flee to the mountains. This disaster will overtake me, and I'll die, he says. Now notice what Lot is really saying.

He doesn't really think God will save him. He thinks disaster will overtake him. And he prefers, verse 20, to hatch his own escape route rather than God's.

[22 : 02] He's faithless. It's quite amazing, isn't it? Judgment is coming. God is offering a way out. And yet Lot is still taking his sweet time and trying to negotiate his own terms.

For Sodom is still in him. He's so comfortable in Sodom that he acts foolishly. We might shake our heads at him, but actually, we're the same, are we not?

We know judgment is coming. We know salvation is waiting. But we say to God, can I take this?

Can I not let go of that? Can that come with me into your kingdom?

Can I wait till this lines up with that? And then only then, then I'll come to you. We linger, look around, and enter into negotiating mode.

We still think that this paradise is better than Christ. We don't really think Jesus is better. When we've gotten too comfortable in Sodom, we become foolish.

[23 : 11] And indeed, we'll be foolish if we respond to Genesis 19 as a whole in a self-righteous way. That's the temptation, isn't it?

Oh my goodness, homosexual gang rape. I would never be like that. Those terrible people, thank God, I am not like that. But one of the most interesting things is that if we look through the rest of the Bible, and we ask the question, who is most likely to be just like Sodom and Gomorrah? What is the Bible's answer? It's not the Canaanites. It's not the people out there. It's not the non-Christians. It's the people of God.

It's us. And so, for example, in Ezekiel 16, what charge does the prophet bring against Jerusalem, the place of God's people?

He says, you behave in such a way that Sodom is like your sister. You share the same DNA. In fact, you behave so badly that you make Sodom look more righteous.

[24 : 26] And just as an aside, interestingly, Ezekiel tells us that Sodom's sin isn't just homosexuality, but also arrogance, greed, and pride. We shouldn't identify the sin of Sodom exclusively with homosexuality and let ourselves off the hook that way.

And Jesus himself brings a similar charge against the Jewish town of Capernaum. Your unrepentance makes Sodom look good, he says, Matthew 11, verse 23 to 24.

As a result, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day.

But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you because they did not turn to God. And that is a stunning thing for Jesus to say.

Because what happened to Sodom? Look at verse 24. Judgment. Then the Lord rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah from the Lord out of the heavens.

[25 : 40] Verse 24 makes clear that it is God himself who brings it. The Lord has heard the outcry against Sodom and the judge of the earth will do what is right.

He brings judgment. And Jesus says, although there might be no homosexual gang rapes or any such other such outrageous acts happening in Capernaum or in Kuching, the judge of the earth still does what is right today.

And if you keep living your everyday lives without God in the picture, even when the Son of God himself has come to reveal him to you, judgment day for you will similarly be a fearsome thing indeed because that is what is right.

We are meant to take this seriously. So what should we do then? Now on one level, the answer is very simple.

Flee! Don't get too comfortable in Sodom. That's what the angels say. And that's what we should do. Don't put yourself in a place where you know will constantly push you to go against God's ways.

[26 : 55] Don't put yourself in a situation where you'll constantly be tempted to drift away. And don't let your affections be captured by something other than God.

Do not love the world. Lot's wife failed to do precisely that. Famously in verse 26, she looked back.

Sodom was still very much in her still. She loves Sodom still. And that's where her heart was. And so she looked back. And that was her undoing.

And that's why Jesus draws this application in Luke 17, verses 31 to 33. On that day, no one who is on the housetop with possessions inside should go down to get them.

Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. Remember Lot's wife. Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it. And whoever loses their life will preserve it.

[27 : 56] In other words, Jesus is saying, don't give your heart to Sodom. Don't give your heart to anything that is not from God. If you do, your life will be broken and crushed.

After all, consider what happens to Lot in the end. He loses his moral compass. He loses the credibility of his witness, as the reaction of his son-in-laws to him show.

He loses his home, eventually ending up in a cave. He loses his family to godlessness, as we'll soon see. He has effectively lost all his life stood for.

So on one level, the answer is simple. Flee! But instinctively, we know that it's not so simple. For if we have accepted the picture Genesis 19 paints of us, we know fleeing is complicated.

After all, think about it. If Sodom has gotten into us, that means we've become slothful, corrupted, blinded, and foolish.

[29 : 09] If Sodom is in us, then we are fully deserving of judgment. And so, how will we run?

Where will we run to? We're more likely to be like Lot, you know, hesitating, lingering, bargaining, at a loss.

Where is the hope? Well, here is the hope. Verse 24 gives us a picture of fire and brimstone. Verse 25 gives us a picture of destruction.

Verse 26 gives us a picture of condemnation. But in verse 23, we have a picture of safety.

As the sun rises, we see that Lot is spared. He's made it. His escape from Sodom. But how?

Is it because he's so clever and courageous and righteous? I trust by now that you can see that it is impossible for that to be the reason. No, actually, this has nothing to do with Lot.

[30 : 15] For down in verse 29, notice what we are told. When God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived.

It was not on account of Lot, but on account of the intercession of Abraham that Lot lived. It was because God remembered his promises to Abraham that Lot lived.

Nothing in Sodom could have protected him. Only something or someone outside Sodom could. It is only on account of the sheer grace and mercy of God that Lot and anyone is able to flee.

And by the way, we need to radically change our ideas about grace and mercy. You see, when we hear the words grace and mercy, what do we normally associate them with?

We think of nice piano music maybe, soothing words, something soft and fluffy. But Genesis 19 shows us a different picture of grace.

[31 : 35] Look back at verse 16. What happens when Lot was hesitating and lingering? Well, look at what the angels do. They don't think twice, but they just grab everyone's hands and get them out of there.

And although the NIV uses grass, a more literal translation will tell you that the angels literally seize them. This is what grace is.

It's not God trying to bujok you. It's God grabbing you and getting you out. It's a dramatic intervention of rescue. It's more like the story I read last week about the final commercial flights leaving Kabul where the pilots didn't bother to wait for clearance from the control tower, but simply carried everyone on their plane to safety as soon as they could.

This is grace. Grace is, Ephesians 2 verse 1, when we were dead in our transgressions and sins, in which we used to live when we followed the ways of this world and of the rulers of the kingdom of the air.

But now, Ephesians 2 verse 4, because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.

[32 : 58] It is by grace you have been saved. You see, if we want to escape Sodom, we need God to make a radical intervention.

On our own, we'll probably just flee to another Sodom. That's what Lot does, actually. In verse 20, Lot makes this self-serving request.

Let me run to this small town called Zohar. Now, if Zohar sounds familiar to you, that's because we've already heard about it before, back in Genesis 14. Do you remember that story about four kings versus five kings?

Well, Zohar was one of Sodom's allies. And so Lot is asking to run to a place that's still associated with Sodom. He can't quite leave Sodom behind because Sodom is still in him and his family. In verse 30, we discover that Lot and his daughters don't stay long in Zohar because they're scared. Any place that's associated with Sodom probably feels like hell now. But even in the mountains where they do go, as the preacher Ken Hughes soberly puts it, Sodom is reborn because Sodom is still in them.

[34 : 19] in verses 31 to 38, we get this rather lapam blast aspect story of his daughters tricking their father into sleeping with them by getting him drunk.

They have a noble intention, preserving the family line, but they resort to immoral means. And verse 37 tells us the consequence of this act.

The line of Moab, who would become one of the enemies of Israel later on, is brought into being. They don't bring blessing at all.

You see, that's how far Sodom goes. Genesis reminds us of this again and again. You know, this episode echoes what happened earlier in Genesis after Noah had this embark from the ark.

You can read about it in Genesis 9. And it will echo again later in Genesis 38. where we find a rather similar La Pam Blast SX story involving Judah and his daughter-in-law, Tema.

[35 : 24] Sodom goes deep. And that's why we need a radical intervention. But here is our hope. God's grace goes deeper still.

That's what the Bible says. For God intervenes even through this sorry episode. because as we trace the line of Moab, we eventually encounter a Moabite woman.

Ruth. And instead of acting as an enemy, Ruth says of God's people, your God will be my God. And she marries one of God's people and from her line comes King David.

God's grace does go deeper still. Because even out of this sorry episode, God brings forth the line from which Jesus emerges.

The one who can get Sodom out of us. The one who alone can shield us from the ultimate consequences of sin. The one who intercedes for us. The one who helps us flee.

[36 : 39] Do you see? Here, even in the ruins of Sodom, even in the ruins of Lot's life, we find the gospel.

And Jesus says today, that's why you don't just flee anywhere. Flee to him. Now, perhaps for the very first time today, some of you are waking up to the reality that Sodom lives within you.

And try as you may, you just can't get rid of it. But Jesus says, he can. He can lead you out. Now, perhaps some of you today have gone back to live in Sodom in some area of your life.

And you're ashamed of that. You wonder if God would bother pulling you out. well, God put foolish, unrighteous lot out, didn't he?

If he did that, he'll graciously pull you out. So, don't negotiate. Don't hesitate. Just flee to him. And as you flee, you might feel like you're losing your life because after all, you're leaving what you thought was paradise.

[38 : 00] paradise. But Jesus says, whoever loses his life will preserve it. In fact, more than that, he promises you will actually have life to the full.

So, don't linger. Don't look back. Look to Jesus and find refuge underneath the shadow of his wings. Let's pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. As we come to you now, we pray indeed that again, we will let your word weigh heavily on us.

We will allow it to permeate every fiber of our being. Father, please help us to be honest with ourselves and with you where we have let Sodom get into us, where we have become dull and blind to you.

where we have refused you. Father, please help us to wake up to that reality before we reap the consequences.

[39 : 12] But Father, instead, please help us to run to you. Help us to remember that on account of your son Jesus, we can do that without any fear. Thank you so much that you have radically intervened in our lives when we trusted in Jesus.

us. And we ask once again that you continue to intervene in our lives where we have gone astray. Pull us back onto the road back to you. Thank you so much for your mercy. Thank you so much that we can find the gospel even in Genesis 19. Help us to, therefore, not go off track. Help us not to linger and look at the things of this world, but help us to have our hearts and affections captured by you once again. All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.