

**Genesis 19:15-17, 23-29.**

***15 With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished." 16 When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD was merciful to them. 17 As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, "Flee for your lives! Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!" 23 By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land. 24 Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the LORD out of the heavens. 25 Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, including all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land. 26 But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt. 27 Early the next morning Abraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood before the LORD. 28 He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, toward all the land of the plain, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace. 29 So 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.***

**The LORD leads us by the hand out of sin and judgment**

- I. In his mercy the LORD warns us of the coming wrath**
- II. In his grace the LORD delivers us from judgment**

Let's play a little word association this morning. When I say the name of a Biblical person or city I want you to think of the first few words that come to mind. Ok, here's the first name. Noah. What are the first words that come to mind? Were they... flood, ark, animals, destruction, dove, rainbow. When I say Bethlehem... perhaps the first words you thought of were... manger, stable, star, shepherds, baby Jesus. When I say Jesus... Christmas, cross, Savior, salvation. When I say Abraham... father of believers, faith, Isaac, Sarah, line of the Savior, descendants like the stars in the sky. When I say Jerusalem... Holy City, Israel, temple, sacrifices. Golgotha ... Jesus, crucifixion, place of the skull, cross, it is finished.

How about when I say the words Sodom and Gomorrah what are the first words that come to your mind? Sin, homosexuality, judgment, destruction, fire, brimstone; were those some of the words. What about the words: mercy, grace, patience, personal deliverance. Be honest, did those words cross your mind at all when you first thought of Sodom and Gomorrah? Well that is also an important part of our lesson before us today, isn't it?

When we hear of Sodom and Gomorrah it is often difficult to see anything but wickedness and judgment, because those parts of the biblical account are embedded into our memory in such an unforgettable way. The story of Sodom and Gomorrah is one of the most striking accounts of God's judgment against sin. Fire and sulfur came down from heaven like a sudden squall of torrential burning rain, laying waste to every last inch of a fertile plain, leaving neither a single plant nor a single human survivor within the city limits. But in the midst of such devastation God provided gracious deliverance. Abraham's nephew Lot lived in the city of Sodom. And in his undeserved love God sent his angels to rescue Lot and his family from the coming destruction. The LORD sent his angels to warn Lot. They urged him to flee for his life. Even when Lot hesitated to leave God was patient with them and persistent in his mercy and the angels grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city; for as our text tells us, the LORD was merciful to them.

Mercy, grace, patience, and salvation are words not often associated with Sodom and Gomorrah but they are certainly a part of the story that should not be left out, overlooked, or forgotten. The Almighty God is indeed serious about sin, but in his love and mercy the LORD leads his people by the hand out of sin and judgment. And that's what we will take time to remember today. **We praise our Lord for how he leads us by the hand out of sin and judgment. In his mercy the LORD warns us of the coming wrath. In his grace the Lord delivers us from judgment.**

The sins of Sodom and Gomorrah are well documented throughout the pages of Scripture and they are still well known today. The people of these two cities are described not only as shamelessly lost in the sin of homosexuality, but they were also violent, crude, wicked and godless people. It seems that they were immoral in every way. Abraham had even prayed for God not to destroy the city, asking the Lord to spare the city if ten righteous people were found in it. But there was not even ten. The stench of Sodom and Gomorrah's sin had reached the Lord and God decided it was time to rid the world of this evil. With wisdom and justice the Lord rained down destruction on Sodom and Gomorrah and the Lord would use this as an object lesson to teach generation after generation about his wrath and anger against sin.

Notice that in our lesson for today the name of God used to describe of this act of judgment is the LORD. This was the special name reserved for the covenant God. The LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah. The LORD; how is it that the God of free and faithful grace vaporizes a city with the explosive power of fire and sulfur from the Lord from heaven? Well, this very act was carefully carried out in accordance with the LORD's love not only for the people of Abraham's generations, but future generations to follow. God not only rid Abraham's generation of the evil influence that resided in Sodom and Gomorrah, but this sight of God's judgment bordered on Israel's Promised Land and would forever stand as a warning to the people of Israel. In New Testament times the name of Sodom is associated with the concept of judgment several times to serve as warning and a type of the final

overthrow that is in store for the unbeliever. Today, the name of Sodom and Gomorrah is still associated with the dangers of sin and the coming judgment.

In our minds we might be quick to dismiss the relevance of this story for our own lives, and dissociate ourselves from it. *"This is a judgment story. This is God giving wicked unbelievers what for. This is not about me."* But it is. It is about all those evil things in this wicked world that we grow to love. It is that longing in our hearts to fit in and belong to this world. Instead of avoiding evil too often we set up camp right next to it. We tolerate wickedness. We grow attached to sin. In his mercy God warns us of the coming wrath and the dangers of sin. We need that warning to keep us faithful until the day our Lord comes again.

Take Lot for example. Look at how he had been influenced by the evil that he dwelt in and among. Look at how he reacts to the angels' warning. Look at how he hesitates to leave. See how he has grown attached to a town, a life, a world so full of evil that he hesitates at the command of angels sent by God. And yet the LORD is merciful, the LORD is patient. In his mercy the LORD not only sends his angels to warn Lot of the coming wrath, but in his grace God's holy angels persist and they take Lot by the hand, and they deliver Lot and his family from destruction.

Much like it was for Lot, the wicked influence of this world is so thick around us that we slowly become accustomed to it and it suddenly it becomes a part of our lives. We know certain things are wrong but having been desensitized to it we tolerate it, and then we hesitate to separate ourselves from it. Even though God warns us of the dangers of sin, the dangers of immorality; even though we know shouldn't live in the midst of such filth, we hesitate. Instead of fleeing for our lives, we do nothing. We don't turn off the TV or change the channel, but instead we watch that show we know we shouldn't. We listen to that dirty joke, our ears waiting for the punch line. Our eyes linger on that picture. We loiter too long in a certain place craving some slice of gossip. Our hearts yearn for riches and covet the comforts of this world even though God warns us that an unhealthy lust for money often leads a man into many troubles including leading his soul away from God. Instead of fleeing from sin like it was a burning city we nestle up to it like it was a roaring fire.

In love God and mercy warns us to leave such things, because they will have an effect on us. As much as we are tempted to view such things as harmless and something that we can control, the immoral things of this world are so terribly dangerous. To drink in immoral conversations of ungodly friends and neighbors, to swim in the immoral filth that is available on the internet, to let the garbage on TV and in books and in the movies wash over you and think that it will not affect you is pure fiction! It is! These things have a slow and steady mind numbing, soul crushing effect on us. And so God in his mercy takes us by the hand and he leads us out of sin and judgment.

Through his Word God warns us, time and time again, he warns us to flee from sin, cling to him, and to watch out for the coming wrath. He tells us in his word to flee

sexually immorality (1 Cor. 6:18), flee from idolatry (1 Cor. 10:14), from materialism and greed (1 Timothy 6:11) from the evil desires of youth (2 Timothy 2:22) such as drunkenness and wild living (Luke 21:24), flee from all of this and instead pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. He takes us by the hand so that we may flee from the sins of this world and he then he leads us to that which is good and lovely and from him. In love the Lord leads us by the hand so that we are no longer content to dwell in and among the evil things of this world, but instead Christ Jesus comes to us through his word and he makes his home with us. His word, his love dwells within us. And through that word he leads us out of the dangers of sin and judgment and brings us through this wicked world to our home in heaven.

God warned Lot of sin and judgment. He was patient with him when he hesitated, and God's angels led him by the hand to safety. Lot's wife was not so fortunate. She did not listen to the angels warning. Her heart belonged to that former life and so she turned and looked; and like the city that she could not leave behind she too perished. Her body, now a pillar of salt, stood as a grim monument to the terrible price that all will pay who cannot tear their hearts loose "from the joys and toys this earthly life offers" (Jeske, People's Bible Genesis page 171). It is hardly surprising that when Jesus warned his disciples against earthly-mindedness he added, "Remember Lot's wife."

The LORD in his mercy warns us and the Lord in his grace delivers us. Each of us could say, "The sin that I inherited, the sin that I commit, the sin to which I have grown attached, I should be punished for it all. I should be destroyed and swept away into the fire and brimstone of hell." But God in his grace and mercy relents and gives us a way out. He graciously takes you and me by the hand and he delivers us. Instead of judgment he gives us patience and mercy. Instead of fire he gives us the saving waters of Baptism. Instead of wrath and destruction he gives us love and salvation. Instead of condemnation he gives us saving faith in Christ Jesus.

And our Savior day by day wants to take you by the hand to strengthen and keep you safe in that faith. He teaches you his Word. He makes his home in your heart and surrounds you with fellow believers. He gives you a love for his word and a desire to flee the temptations of this world. All this LORD does that you and I should be his own and live for him. All this he does for you and for me because of his mercy, because of his grace.

Perhaps, after today when you hear the words Sodom and Gomorrah you will not only associate those words with sin and judgment, but you will also associate them with mercy, forgiveness, and deliverance.

With this in mind we will end with one more word association. What do you think of when you hear the words Judgment Day? By God's grace we as believers not only will think of judgment and destruction, but we as sons and daughter of God will think of a day of mercy, grace, deliverance, and salvation. We will think of a day, when heaven and earth will pass away and on that day God will send his angels to take us by the hand and lead us to eternal life. Amen.