

Our World on Trial

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Date: 14 May 2023

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[0 : 00] Well, I met recently with a new Christian who's just starting to read the Bible, and very wisely he started by reading the four Gospels first, but now he's gone back to Genesis and we met up, and he said he was shocked when he read this chapter in his Bible.

I thought this was the Holy Bible, he said. What is going on? What is going on here? Perhaps that is you now as we've just read that together.

If a friend asked you, what did you hear about in church on Sunday, where would you begin? This is one of the most shocking chapters in the Bible, so if you are not shocked, you should be shocked. But I hope that by the end of our time together, we are shocked, but shocked by the right thing. We could be shocked, couldn't we, by the judgment that we have seen from God, total destruction. But I hope as we look closer, we are shocked instead by the human sin that calls for that judgment from a just and a holy God.

[1 : 18] A God who only, only ever does what is right. What could deserve that punishment from this God? And I hope too, that we are shocked by what isn't deserved in this chapter, which is God's rescue of a man and his family from that destruction, who as we'll see, really deserved to be left in the city when it was destroyed.

See, here is why this is in our Bibles this morning. Not because what we have just read is holy, but because the God of the Bible is holy.

And it says we look as the one who is holy that we see ourselves rightly, and we are shocked then by our sin. And we see him rightly, and we are shocked by his salvation.

But if we're going to be shocked, okay, by this chapter, shocked by our sin, we need to know what it is. So firstly then, what is sin? What is going on here?

Well, rather than me tell you, let's see it together in the text. But before we get that step back, okay, we need to remember, don't we, the context for the text.

[2 : 33] Now, the setting we saw for this last time was a courtroom. Remember, conjure that image back up in your mind, the courtroom, because chapter 19 is the beginning of a trial that God has set up in chapter 18.

So just if you glance back in your Bible to verses 20 and 21, chapter 18, the Lord said the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grievous, that I will go down and see if what they've done is as bad as the outcry that's reached me.

If not, I will know. So hear that, a charge has been brought, and now God has put them on trial. And we should be thinking then, what has caused such an outcry?

That's not the outraged outcry of the morality police. This is the tearful outcry of victims. So what could be so grievous?

But God said that deliberately, remember, so as to bring Abraham into the courtroom, into his dealings with the world, to make him, remember, a mediator.

[3 : 46] So, verses 17 and 18, the Lord said, shall I hide from Abraham what I'm about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him, through him.

So God here, what's he doing? Setting up Abraham as the mediator, through whom he will deal with the world. So that Abraham, remember, acted as a defense lawyer for the cities of the plain, pleading the case of these cities before God.

And his case was, this is so important, okay, as we look at this chapter, his case, remember, was, what if, what if, what if, Lord, in judging these cities, you actually punish undeserving people as well as deserving people?

Just see that dilemma there in verse 24. He said, what if there are 50 righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of 50 righteous people in it? Far be it from you, he said, to do such a thing, to kill the righteous with the wicked. Treating the righteous and the wicked alike, far be it from you.

[5 : 03] Will not the judge of the earth do what is right? In short, he's asking this, isn't he? What if in seeking justice, Lord, you carry out injustice?

Isn't that what makes us squeamish about God's judgment? What if it's not fair? Is it right, Lord, really?

Is it right for you to do that? Well, God affirms over and over and over again in that chapter, doesn't he, that by no means would he punish the righteous and the wicked alike.

In no circumstance would God miscarry justice or give punishments that aren't deserved. He can be trusted this morning to judge justly because his justice is perfect and nothing is hidden from his sight.

Okay, unlike human judges, he does not miss the evidence. And he does not misunderstand the situation. And he doesn't interpret things wrongly.

[6 : 10] He will never draw a wrong conclusion from what he sees and hears. And he will never, ever hand down a sentence that is not fitting and deserved.

His justice is unimpeachable. Unimpeachable. And so now he is going to see whether the charges brought against these cities are true.

Is it as bad as it has been claimed? And so, verse 1, the two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening. Okay, they are there to gather evidence for the judge for the trial.

And they bump into Lot, who is sitting in the gateway of the city. Now, Lot is a complicated character. Okay, on the one hand, he is different from the people of the city.

But this is so important that at the same time, he is certainly not without fault. Okay, just feel the tension in his life, just what's been described here. Okay, he insists, doesn't he?

[7 : 12] He insists that the men must come to his house and not spend the night in the square. Why does he do that? Because he knows what will happen to them if they spend the night in the square.

And he does not want that to happen to them. He knows what the city is like. And yet, he's bought a house in the city. The men who come to hammer down his door are the men he sits with in the gate, where the leaders of the city would sit.

And when he goes out of his door to speak to them, he calls them his friends. Or in Hebrew, it's actually his brothers. He knows what the men of Sodom are like.

And yet, he's marrying his two daughters to them. He protects his guests from the men of Sodom. Yet, he offers them his daughters to do with what they want.

Do you see what is going on here? Back in chapter 13, way, way back, remember, we're told the people of Sodom were wicked and sinning greatly against the Lord.

[8 : 16] And what did Lot do? He pitched his tents near Sodom. He thought he could live near their sin and not be part of it.

But 25 years later, and he's got a house in the city, and his daughters are marrying their sons. What's happened? He thought that sin was safe.

He made peace with sin. Not so bad. He could live with it. He has been desensitized, hasn't he, to sin. And now he is comfortable with it.

So much so that he is living under the sword of God, hanging over the city, and he's not bothered. It's scary, isn't it, that the angels have to physically throw him out of the city to get him clear and safe.

That is how much danger he is in. We'll come back to Lot, but that divided heart is so vital to this chapter, understanding sin and its draw on each of us.

[9 : 19] Okay, understand this, that sin does not draw a line between us and them. It draws a circle around all of us. It is us, and it's us.

We are all in on it in some way, just like Lot in that city. So what is this sin in the city? What is sin? Well, it doesn't take the angels long, does it, before the sin shows itself.

Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom, both young and old, surrounded the house. They called to Lot, where are the men who came to you tonight?

Bring them out to us so we can have sex with them. Now, there's no easy way to talk about this, is there, so I'm just going to say it. That traditionally, the sin in this chapter was understood to be the same-sex desire of the men.

Men demanding sex with men. Now, today, society's sexual ethics, okay, have changed so that we might understand the sin to be the sexual violence in this chapter.

[10:31] Okay, the rape that they are demanding. But friends, the text does not let us separate things out that cleanly. Genesis is saying, what is sin?

It is all of the above. The sexual violence is sin. The unrestrained lust is sin. And the same-sex desire is sin.

How can I say that in love? Let me tell you, I do not say that out of fear, out of hatred. It is such a sensitive topic. I would love to speak to you more after the service, if you want to, about it.

Okay, I would love that. Please come and find me. I say that because that is what the Bible says. In the beginning, God designed human love and sex to be between one man and one woman for life. Jesus himself quotes the verse in Matthew 19. This is Jesus speaking. Haven't you read, he replied, that at the beginning, the creator made them male and female.

[11:38] And said, for this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife. And the two will become one flesh.

God says, and Jesus confirms that, this is the one only relationship in which human sexual love is right.

Marriage between one man and one woman for life. To see how Sodom is corrupting God's design at every point. Every point.

Not one and one, but a gang. Not for life, but for a moment. And not a man and a woman, but men with men.

Our world has turned God's good design on its head. Sex with whoever you want for however long it makes you happy, as long as everyone consents.

[12:33] And the only sin is saying that it is wrong. But brothers and sisters, the Bible doesn't let us decide for ourselves what is sin and what is not.

And sin is breaking God's good design for human life. Any lack of conformity or transgression of the law of God.

And that means when it comes to sex, that any unrestrained sexual thought, desire, feeling, action outside of the covenant of marriage is sin.

We might say, okay, for those people that's fine, that's sin. But my sin doesn't hurt anyone. What is my sin?

If it doesn't hurt anyone, surely it can't be wrong. But oh friends, sin always hurts someone. Sin always hurts someone. Remember the outcry to God of the victims of the sins of Sodom.

[13:36] Do you really think that the porn industry has no victims? Do you really think that letting desire grow towards another doesn't affect how you treat your husband, your wife?

Do you really think you've slept with before marriage will not hurt your future spouse? Do you really think that breaking and corrupting God's good design for human love will not hurt your partner, your partner's ye?

Your friends, the outcry of our sin has reached God's ears. And yes, we have in different degrees, but all of us corrupted God's design.

You might think, I'm nothing like the men of Sodom, but here's the thing. So did Lot. Are we, like him, content to be righteous only by comparison with the people that we know?

Are we content to be proud of whatever sin that we don't commit, but pleased and at peace with the sins that we've decided are okay to do or feel or look at?

[14:49] Or have we bought the Christian version of the world's sexual ethic that says, I wouldn't do that myself, but if that's what makes them happy, why shouldn't they?

Friends, God has put our world on trial, and he finds that there is no one righteous, not even one. For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

That is hard to hear, and it is hard to say. But Genesis shows us three mistakes, okay, that people have in hearing that news.

Three ways, then, not to respond to this news. First, verse nine, don't respond by getting angry. That is possible that that has made you angry, that you are angry.

For a number of reasons. It made the people of Sodom very angry. Lot says what they want to do is wrong. Get out of our way, they replied. This fellow came here as a foreigner. Now he wants to play the judge.

[15:52] We'll treat you worse than them. It's so up to date, isn't it? Who are you to judge us? Isn't that what we fear as Christians is being seen as judgmental?

We don't want to feel that way, do we? We do not want people to see us as the judge. But what mistake have they made in getting angry at Lot? They say he wants to play the judge. But this is not his judgment, is it? Whose judgment is it? The outcry to the Lord against its people is so great. God says this is wrong.

It would be totally fair for people to be outraged if this was only my human opinion. Okay, you would have every right to ask, who are you to tell me what I should and shouldn't do?

Especially who I should and shouldn't sleep with. But I or we as Christians are not playing the judge. We're not playing the judge. We need to remember that.

[16:51] We need to remind others of that. I'm not standing over you. I'm standing with you and saying that there is a judge over us who has given his law and has said that we have broken it.

And so you need to know if you are angry that you are really angry with God. And getting angry with him will not change his judgments. Second verse 14, don't respond with ridicule.

Okay, if you're not angry, perhaps you just think that this is laughable. These Christians saying that God is angry about my sex life, it's hilarious. Well, Lot's sons-in-law thought the same.

Look, verse 14. Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law who had pledged to marry his daughters. He said, hurry and get out of this place because the Lord is about to destroy the city.

But his sons-in-law thought he was joking. You're having us on, they say. They think they're going to run out of the house and Lot is going to say, we got you. The joke's on you, they think.

[18:00] The Lord isn't going to judge us. Again, what mistake have they made here? They think that Lot is only bringing a human message when this is a divine message.

God was warning them to escape his judgment. But they laugh in Lot's face. And I don't know about you, that actually makes me feel a bit sick.

But given this one chance to escape God's wrath, they think that he was joking. They laugh about it. Moments before they are destroyed.

Friends, do not let that be you. If God is speaking, it is not funny. Thirdly, verse 16, don't respond as if you have got time. Even if you take this seriously, you know that you need to escape God's wrath. You might be thinking, well, now is just not a good time. Dinner's cooking. The football's on later. I've got work tomorrow. You don't have time.

[19:02] Listen to verses 15 and 16. 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.

When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and led them safely out of the city, for the Lord was merciful to them. What mistake does Lot make? The angels say, Hurry.

And he hesitates. He thinks wrongly, doesn't he, that judgment is coming on his timetable, not God's. If he needs time, God will wait.

But the angels grab him by the hand. They drag him out of the city. Hurry, we said. Flee for your lives. They cannot get through enough, can they?

Lot does not have time. It's now or never. And so, friends, do not think that judgment is coming on your timetable. God has set a day when he will judge the earth in righteousness.

[20:07] And the gospel says, flee for your life. Turn now and escape God's wrath forever. Make peace with your creator and king while he is still far off.

The gospel does not say take your time. It says make it a priority to count the cost and then run for your life to Jesus. Dare I say it, this is more important than what you've got on this afternoon.

This is more important than what is happening for you tomorrow. Because the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night without warning. So take this warning now and respond to it now.

Turn to him and you will be saved. Three ways the people in Sodom didn't take the message seriously. And those are the same three ways for us not to respond to it today.

But next we need to see two things God does. We see the sovereign kindness of God and the severe justice of God. You might be asking, where is his sovereign kindness in this passage?

[21 : 20] Well, we saw it in verse 16. When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand, the hands of his wife and his daughters and led them safely out of the city. Why? Look at it.

For the Lord was merciful to them. Merciful. It was said before that the Lord and his family, they do not deserve to escape God's wrath.

I hope that we can see why. They are righteous only by comparison with people in one of the worst cities ever to exist. He's offered his own daughters to a mob, hasn't he?

Later on in the chapter, the bit that we didn't read, his daughters will get their dad drunk and sleep with him and get pregnant to carry on their family. You can read that bit at home.

So God does not save them because they are righteous. See the difference between Abraham and God. Abraham thought it would be quite just if God spared the whole city for the sake of ten righteous people in it.

[22 : 21] But God is both more just and more merciful than that. He's more just because sinners will not be spared his punishment simply because they have good neighbors.

That's the basis of Abraham's argument, isn't it? When you boil it down, what sort of justice would it be if rapists were not found guilty because a nice family lived down the road?

Would that be right? Surely it wouldn't. But God is also more merciful than Abraham because he saves Lot and his family despite them not being righteous.

Not because they are righteous. We'll see how he does that in the end. But just see the reason why he saves them is we're told purely because he was merciful.

Because he was merciful. Because he is kind to the wicked and to sinners. See then the sovereign kindness of God, saving the undeserving.

[23 : 26] His kindness that on the eve of his judgment, he would grab Lot and his family and throw them out of Sodom. Almost against their will so that they would be spared.

He gives them, doesn't he, an unlikely city of refuge to run to, not to be destroyed by his wrath. And friends, God, the kind God, does that for us today.

We do not run to safety before he grabs us and drags us there himself to an unlikely place of refuge.

The blood-soaked cross of Christ. That is where we are safe. That is where we are shielded from his wrath. Christ died to satisfy in full God's wrath.

To exhaust God's wrath against those who ever would or ever had trust in him. So that in God's sovereign kindness, he provides this place of safety for us.

[24 : 31] And he does not simply invite you. And he does not simply command you. But he takes you in hand. And he drags you there himself. You see, as Lewis, he called himself famously the world's most reluctant convert.

That was Lot, wasn't it? And perhaps that's you today, reluctant to turn, to put your trust in your Savior, Jesus. Well, God is kind enough to give you a boot in the back and push you towards him. If he is doing that today, do not resist him. Trust him. Flee to the cross of Jesus. Because see, too, the severe justice of God.

Having done that, having checked that the city was indeed clear of righteous people, here's what God does in verses 24 and 25. Then the Lord rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah from the Lord out of the heavens.

Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, destroying all those living in the cities. Total punishment. Uncompromising destruction.

[25 : 42] God has finished his investigation.

God has finished his investigation. He's closed the trial. He's given his verdict. And this is the sentence he hands down. Death that can't be escaped. Fire that is not quenched.

And it is not for me and it is not for you or us to water that down today. This is not an angry outburst. This is the controlled judgment of God against sinners who would not repent.

And Jesus is so clear. We heard him say this earlier that what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah is only the trailer for what he will do to the whole earth.

These cities become shorthand in the Bible for God's verdict on a guilty world. Hear this again. Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also it will be in the days of the Son of Man.

[26 : 49] People were eating, drinking, marrying, being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. It was the same in the days of Lot.

People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed.

It will be just like that, says Jesus. Life will be going on as normal. And then he will come and end it. And for those who ignore the warning and do not turn, it will end in eternal hell.

Death that cannot be escaped. Fire that will not be quenched. Torment that will never end. Friends, hear the words of the Lord Jesus. That day is coming.

And you have sinned. So what are you trusting in to see you through that day? Or here, as we close, there's one final way for us not to respond.

[27 : 56] And then how we must respond. One more way not to respond. Do not respond to this with nostalgia. Nostalgia. That might sound strange, but it tempts us every day.

What do I mean by nostalgia? It means this. If you have trusted in Jesus Christ, do not look back and long for the life that you have left. The lifestyle, the sin that God has saved you from.

Jesus says, remember Lot's wife. What did Lot's wife do? Lot's wife looked back and she became a pillar of salt. What does it mean?

She suffered the same fate as the cities of the plain. Because in her heart, she loved the life that she had left behind. Brothers and sisters, it is a dangerous thing to love what God hates.

It is a dangerous thing to long for what God will judge in his wrath on that day. Because if we are not rooting those things out of our hearts, if we are not repenting of them and bringing them to Jesus, what's the danger?

[29 : 03] The danger is that we will be judged. The danger is that we will be judged. If in our hearts we have not in fact changed towards our sin.

If we have not in fact turned to the Lord Jesus, no claim to be a Christian is going to save us then. Do you know prayer that we have prayed? No profession that we have made?

If we make peace with our sin and long for the life that God has rescued us from. If you cherish sin in your heart today, remember Lot's wife.

Remember Lot's wife. Do not look back with nostalgia on the sins that God has saved you from.

When do our hearts need to be set if we are to be saved from God's wrath?

Well, this is how God saves us from his wrath. Not because of our righteousness. And not because of how we feel. And not even because of our faith.

[30 : 08] But because of our righteous mediator. Verse 27. Genesis lifts up our eyes to see he who's there. Abraham looking down on the cities that he had prayed for.

And verse 29 reminds us of what? That when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham. He remembered Abraham and brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived.

What does it say? Lot was saved because of the mediator between God and humanity who had interceded for him. Who had stood between and pleaded for his life.

Friends, that is how God saves us from his wrath. By the one and only mediator standing between God and us. The Lord Jesus Christ. God raised him up and sent him for that very purpose.

Not only to plead for us, but to die for us. To stand in our place. To take God's wrath for us. To die our death for us. To suffer our punishment for our sins for us.

[31 : 17] And clothe us instead in his perfect life of righteousness. So that now he can say to God. Let my people be spared. Let my people for whom I have died.

For whom I was raised. Let them be saved from your wrath. For I took your wrath for them. And they are clothed in my righteousness. That they might escape on that day.

He pleads for us, brothers and sisters, on the basis of his death and resurrection. His own righteousness. That we would be saved. And that is how we are saved.

Only in him. Because we have a savior who was overthrown for us. He was raised for us. And he is now able to save completely those who come to God through him.

Because he always lives to intercede for us. He always lives to pray for your salvation.

[32 : 22] Friends, he is our only hope in life and our death. Our only savior. So here is how we must respond. Believe in the Lord Jesus. And you will be saved.

Let's pray for that together now. God, our Father, you have warned us from heaven.

Of your perfect and just judgment against our sin. And Father, our hearts tremble before you. The judge of all the earth. Knowing that you only do what is right.

Father, we confess that we have sinned against you. But we have sinned in our thoughts and words and deeds. And Father, how we thank you then.

That you are not only the just judge. But the savior of all who would trust in you. Father, how we thank you. That you have provided your son, the Lord Jesus. He who has lived a perfect life in our place.

[33 : 35] How we thank you. How we thank you. How we thank you. How we thank you. How we thank you. That you provided him a sacrifice. Sufficient to cover all our sins.

To pay, Lord, for what we have done. How we thank you. That he hung upon that cross in our place. And took our punishment. So that we can come to you today.

And say. We are forgiven in him. Oh Lord, we pray. For those who as yet have not come to you for forgiveness. That by your spirit you would drag them to the Lord Jesus.

Compel them, Lord, we ask. Father, for those of us who are there already. That we would rest in his forgiveness. That we would rest in his finished work.

And Lord, that we would warn others. Lord, help us, we pray. Not to be comfortable. Living in a world under judgment. Lord, that you would help us.

[34 : 35] Not to make peace with our sin. But to bring it before you every day. Lord, keep us, we pray. From turning back. Keep us, we ask.

On the straight and the narrow way. That leads to life. Our Father, how we thank you. For your grace to us in Jesus. That does not only begin a good work in us. But brings it to completion on the day when he comes.

Lord, keep us, we pray. Fixing our eyes on him. For we pray in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.