

“Sodom – The Certainty and Justice of Judgment”

Genesis 19

June 13, 1999

Dr. Jerry Nelson

It is called the Gay Freedom Day Parade.

It is an annual event in San Francisco, California and in many other cities in this country.

Charles McIlhenny, pastor of the First Orthodox Presbyterian Church in San Francisco describes that parade:

“The parade begins with an army of lesbians riding motorcycles, proudly calling themselves Dykes on Bykes, in various degrees of dress and undress. Picture a colorful float slowly moving down the street. The float is filled with men and women gyrating to raucous music. The lesbians are smeared with paint and are topless. A gay man is dancing wildly to the music and (making obscene gestures). Another man is clothed only in a g-string...

Walking down the street beside the floats is a number of men dressed in women’s nighties, pantyhose and bright blue or red wigs. Dancing among the men is a bald-headed woman naked from the waist up...

Walking through the crowd are men dressed in black leather and silver-studded jock straps. They are members of the sado-masochistic element in the gay culture. One man is wearing a dog collar and the other, his master, is holding his slave on a chain.

The group called NAMBLA standing for North American Man/Boy Love Association advocating sex between adults and children is marching as if they are a respectable part of society.

Not long after they pass, a man strolls by with a sign which says, “God is Gay”. He is quickly followed by half a dozen lesbians from a group known as SLUTS (seminary lesbians under theological stress). Various gay church groups pass by identifying their affiliation with traditional mainline churches...

Amazingly enough, various political candidates and officials are in this parade. The police chief of the city is riding in an open-top car waving to the crowds, ushered on both sides by gay and lesbian police officers... (cont. next page)

Laws governing public morality and indecent exposure are suspended for the day in deference to the gay community. At the end of the parade route, a recruiting table has been set up to recruit homosexuals into the police department.

All of this happens each year at 11 a.m. on the Lord's Day-Sunday. (From When the Wicked Seize a City)

That description is not nearly as shocking as the event itself and the culture that organizes it and the larger culture that tolerates it or even celebrates it as cultural diversity.

Isaiah wrote, Isaiah 2:8-9 "...their words and deeds are against the Lord, defying his glorious presence. The look on their faces testifies against them; they parade their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to them! They have brought disaster upon themselves."

It was evening and the temperature outside was normal and comfortable.

Lot, Abraham's nephew, was sitting just inside the entrance to the city of Sodom – a large open place, much like the plazas in our cities.

There was nothing unusual about the evening.

Life in the city seemed to be taking place as usual – people scurrying here and there getting last-minute things done before dark.

Two men arrived at the city gate and Lot recognized them as strangers.

As was customary in that culture, Lot not only engaged the men in conversation but also invited them to spend the evening and night at his house.

Hotels were unheard of – strangers were treated with great hospitality.

The men were prepared to sleep in the open-air in the city plaza but for reasons we only later suspect, Lot insisted (almost strong-armed them) into accepting his invitation to spend the night in the safety of his house.

What happened next was almost too bizarre for description.

It makes the sickening parade in San Francisco seem almost mild by comparison.

For although the citizens of San Francisco allow such a lewd display of immorality to take place each year – it is hopefully fair to say that most San Franciscans don't approve of it.

But in Sodom, we are told in Genesis 19, it was all the men from every part of the city, both young and old, who showed up at Lot's house.

The author is emphasizing the point that the sick thing that was about to happen was so common, so prevalent, so pervasive, that the entire city, not just allowed it but, participated.

All the men of the city showed up at Lot's door and demanded that the two strangers come out, so the men of the city could have sex with them. Open, brazen, culturally approved homosexuality.

You can imagine the scene as hundreds of men were gathered in the street outside Lot's home, shouting with lust-filled hysteria.

Lot was evidently so aware of potential violence that he shut the door to his house as he stepped outside to face the crowd.

Is this what Lot had earlier feared would happen to the men if they had stayed in the plaza instead of his home?

Trying to talk sense into the crowd, Lot pleaded with the men of the city not to do what Lot called "this wicked thing".

Let me pause in the story for a minute and remind you that some today try to convince us that what the men of the city were demanding was not sex but to get to know the men socially – they claim the men of the city wanted to see the credentials of these strangers.

In the book, Towards a Theology of Gay Liberation, contributor Rictor Norton writes:

“The modern view (which has yet to seep down to the laity) is that ‘know’ means ‘see their credentials’, and the story is a parable about the violation of the Hebrew laws of hospitality. The sin of Sodom as homosexuality is a deliberate misinterpretation of the story...”p45

It is true that the Hebrew word used by the men of the city is “know” – they wanted to know the men staying in Lot’s house.

But it is a total distortion of the text, its context and the rest of Scripture to suggest that a discussion was all the men of the city were interested in.

These recent reinterpretations of Scripture are rather easily refuted by anyone willing to take the time to investigate the flimsy arguments used by modern promoters of the gay lifestyle.

For anyone interested in seeing the arguments, I highly recommend Richard Lovelace’s book, Homosexuality and the Church.

For over 4000 years the world has known that part of the sin of Sodom was its open homosexual activity.

That fact has been so widely known that such activity has for centuries also been known as “sodomy”.

But more importantly the city of Sodom became a symbol of God’s judgment on sin – not just on homosexual sin but on all sin, as we will see in a minute.

The major subject of the story of Sodom is judgment.

Most of you already know the end of the story – how God poured out his wrath on that city and three others like it.

Back in Genesis 13 when Lot was picking a place to live, we were told that God was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah.

In chapter 18 we saw Abraham pleading for Lot’s safety because the sin of Sodom was so grievous that the Lord was going to visit the place – such a visit usually meant a visitation of judgment.

Though we may first think of Sodom in connection with a particular sin (that was met with judgment), the Bible places the emphasis not on the particular sin but on the judgment.

We will find Sodom referred to in this way in the OT Law and the Prophets, and in the Psalms, and in the NT Gospels and Epistles – even in the book of Revelation.

Do you hear that? Sodom is used by God, throughout the Bible, as an example of his judgment on sin.

So this sermon is not immediately on the subject of homosexuality.

The sermon is on the subject of God's judgment on sin.

I am convinced that Moses told about this incident in history because he wanted his readers to take sin and judgment very seriously.

I think the whole text can be summarized this way:

Because God will most certainly judge sin fairly, suddenly, and severely, we are to accept his mercy and flee from sin.

What happened next, at the door to Lot's house, shows us just how depraved, the people of this city, had become, in their sin.

When Lot pleaded with them not to do this wicked thing – the crowd of men threatened Lot.

Genesis 19:9 "Get out of the way" they replied. And they said, "This fellow (Lot) came here as an alien, and now he wants to play the judge! We'll treat you worse than them. They kept bringing pressure on Lot and moved forward to break down the door."

So perverted and twisted was the thinking of these people that **all** morality broke down.

They were ready to do violence.

This was not just a private immoral act between consenting adults – these people had gone further until there were no restraints on their behavior.

Sexual perversion was just the most obvious manifestation of their sin.

Four hundred years ago, John Calvin wrote:
 “When the sense of shame is overcome, and the reins are given to lust, a vile and outrageous barbarism necessarily succeeds, and many kinds of sin are blended together.”

The rest of the Bible gives us a fuller picture of the sins of Sodom:

In Genesis 18 their sin is called grievous and wicked.

In Jeremiah it is described as adultery and hypocrisy and aiding those who do evil.

In Ezekial it is described as arrogance, unconcern, no help for the poor, detestable, vile, lewd behavior.

Whether it is in the life of one man or a whole nation, when a person or nation allows sexual perversion free reign – it usually runs headlong into almost every other sort of evil.

Lust does not stop with sex – it perverts all of life.

Like some New Year’s Eve parties or Mardi Gras celebrations the city of Sodom had let loose and the smell of its sin had reached God’s nostrils and made him sick.

The Bible clearly teaches that **our** sins are equally nauseating to God.

Sodom became the classic example **but** all sin is deserving of God’s judgment.

The Bible says the wages of sin is death.

The Bible says God will by no means clear the guilty.

We want the lowest standard of acceptable behavior to be just beneath what we do but Jesus raised the standard and said that if we even think it in our minds, in God’s eyes, it is as if we had done it.

So the lowest standard of acceptable behavior is not just beneath what we do but far above us – it is the holiness of God.

And the Bible says there is none righteous, not even one.

The cause of God’s judgment is sin – Sodom’s and ours.

I earlier said the message of this passage is this:

Because God will most certainly judge sin fairly, suddenly, and severely, we must accept his mercy and flee from sin.

We have discussed the **sin** that God will judge.

Now I want to look briefly at how **certain** we may be of that judgment.

After the men of the city threatened to harm Lot and break down the door of the house to get at the strangers they wanted, the text says, Genesis 19:10-11

“But the men inside (the two strangers who were actually angels) reached out and pulled Lot back into the house and shut the door. Then they struck the men who were at the door, young and old, with blindness so that they could not find the door.”

Then “The two men said to Lot, ‘Do you have anyone else here – sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else who belongs to you? Get them out of here, because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the Lord is so great that he has sent us to destroy it.’”

It is as if the Lord reaches the breaking point – he has delayed judgment, in mercy, for years – but now he has had it.

I don’t mean to make the Lord sound peeved or fickle but I do mean to make the Lord sound decided and certain.

Hebrews 9:27 says, “...man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.” – it is certain!

Jesus said that when he comes again, “he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another...”

2 Peter 2:6-10

“If he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly... , then **the Lord knows how to... hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment**, while continuing their punishment. This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority.”

In the next chapter Peter makes the point even more strongly.

Citing those who think that just because nothing **has** changed for a while that nothing **will** change – because no obvious judgment has fallen on people for their sin, that **no** judgment is ever coming, he says,

2 Peter 3:5-7 “They deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the... world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.”

You can be sure that neither Lot nor Abraham would ever again forget that the Lord’s judgment against sin was absolutely certain.

If God said he would judge sin, then he most certainly would.

Remember the message of the text is this:

Because God will most certainly judge sin fairly, suddenly, and severely, we must accept his mercy and flee from sin.

Judgment **will fall** on sin.

Judgment **will certainly fall** on sin.

But how FAIR/JUST will that judgment be?

The text teaches that the judgment that falls on sin **will be perfectly fair.**

Last week as we studied chapter 18 we saw that God was particularly interested in teaching Abraham that God would be perfectly just in his dealing with Sodom – God would make no mistakes – he wouldn’t rashly destroy the righteous along with the wicked.

In fact the Lord told Abraham in Genesis 18:20-21

“The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me...”

When the two angels, representing the Lord, reach Sodom, their task is in part to make an assessment of the situation – is this place as bad as reported?

How does the story answer that?

It’s worse!

And the people prove it by their very actions the first night the visitors are there.

Imagine a man on trial for attempted murder.

Then right in front of the eyes of the jury as he is testifying in his own defense, he picks up a sharp object and attempts to kill the man again.

Do you need more evidence?

While Sodom is being investigated for their sin, the entire city tries to commit one of the most vulgar sins on the investigators themselves.

Is more evidence needed?

God is always perfectly fair – just - when he judges.

This is the way the Bible describes it in Revelation 20:11-15:

“Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Judgment will be fair – people will get exactly what they deserve.

Because God will most certainly judge sin fairly, suddenly, and severely, we must accept his mercy and flee from sin.

God's judgment on sin will not only be certain and fair but it will also be sudden - unexpected.

The angels told Lot that the destruction was coming and apparently **Lot** got the impression it was coming immediately.

They had asked if he had any others who belonged to him in the city and he did, so he went to them that very night to tell them to come with him.

This is the way he said it, Genesis 19:14b “Hurry and get out of this place, because the Lord is about to destroy the city.”

The sons-in-law wouldn't believe Lot – they thought he was joking.

Most people live as if judgment is a joke – that it won't ever actually happen.

We make fun of prophets who declare, “Repent or Perish”.

We make fun of them because we, too, think judgment is a long way off, if it will ever happen.

James Boice said he once heard a comedy routine where each person was given a beeper that would signal them five minutes before they would die.

That way they could live any way they wanted to and then repent just before they died.

There is no beeper!

All the notice we will ever be given, has been given.

Here is the way Jesus described the suddenness of judgment: Luke 17:28-35: As it was in the days of Noah, "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, 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. On that day no one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods 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 his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it."

As judgment came on Sodom, suddenly, with no further warning, so it will come to each of us.

Don't count on a beeper signal.

God's judgment against sin will be certain, fair and sudden.

And it will also be **severe.**

Because God will most certainly judge sin fairly, suddenly, and severely, accept his mercy and flee from sin.

Genesis 19:15

“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.’”

Lot hesitated and the angels took the four of them by the hands and removed them from the city with a warning to flee and not look back.

Genesis 19:23-25

“By the time Lot reached Zoar (the city to which he begged to go), the sun had risen over the land. 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, including all those living in the cities – and also the vegetation in the land.”

Did you see pictures of the area around Mt Saint Helens in Washington State after it erupted several years ago?

Did you see the destruction in Yellowstone National Park after the fires swept through there?

Several times in Scripture the experience of Sodom is used to describe the severity of God’s judgment against sin.

Deuteronomy 29:22-24

“The whole land will be a burning waste of salt and sulfur--nothing planted, nothing sprouting, no vegetation growing on it. It will be like the destruction of Sodom..., which the LORD overthrew in fierce anger.”

Jeremiah used Sodom as an example of a judgment so severe that Jeremiah 49:18 says:

“No one will live there; no man will dwell in it.”

The New Testament uses many metaphors to describe the indescribable horror of God’s judgment on sin:

It is spoken of as fire and brimstone, eternal darkness, a rotting, burning garbage heap, teeth grinding in pain and anger, and everlasting fire, among others.

The destruction of Sodom was to forever stand as a symbol of how severe judgment is – it will destroy completely.

There will be no recovery, no second chance.

The Bible's description of Sodom's destruction was not, however, just to convey the bad news of certain, fair, sudden, and severe judgment on sin.

It is also apparent that it was told to warn.

Because God will most certainly judge sin fairly, suddenly, and severely, accept his mercy and flee from sin.

It is the warning given to Lot: "Hurry, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished."

The angels came to that city for the express purpose of warning Lot one last time.

Likewise God has placed you in this room this morning for the express purpose of hearing the warning once again.

The angels not only warned Lot but they took hold of his hand and urged him out of the city.

Likewise the Spirit of the Lord is in this place this morning pulling at your heart – urging you to turn to his mercy.

The angels warned Lot not to hesitate and not to look back.

Likewise God is saying to you "This is the day of salvation."
Not tomorrow, not another day – today.

The Bible asks why God's judgment has not yet fallen on our sin. The answer it gives is this:

2 Peter 3:9-12

"The Lord is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. **But** the day of the Lord will come (as unexpectedly) as a thief in the night. The heavens will disappear

with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire... Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God..."

I think **the warning is to everyone of us.**

Whether we think we are a Christian or not.

The warning is to flee from sin and turn to the mercy of God because sin will certainly be judged, fairly, suddenly, and severely.

I want to pray two prayers at this time.

The first is for you who consider yourself **believers** - you who are trusting in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

I want you to read the words of the prayer even as I pray it and I want you to listen, and if the words I pray fit you, then you make them your words:

"Holy God forgive me for treating my sin so lightly – for engaging in unholy speech and conduct that is an offence against you.

Help me to realize how despicable my sin is, how worthy of judgment it is.

And Merciful God, help me to flee from my sin to live a holy and godly life as I look forward to the day of your return.

And God, give me such a strong sense of the certainty of judgment, that my heart will go out to those others who need to be warned. AMEN.

Now I want to pray a second prayer.

This is for you who don't know if you are trusting in Christ.

You, too, watch and listen and if the words I pray fit you, then silently make them your words:

“Sovereign God, judgment has for me always been an unconsidered concept – at best, a concept I assumed applied to others, not me.

I recognize that I have sinned against you and my sin deserves your judgment – and judgment I will certainly get unless you, God, in your mercy save me and by your grace forgive my sins.

I ask you now to forgive me and save me from the judgment to come.

I ask you to include me in your family – the family of God.

And I promise that from this day forward I will seek to follow your ways – to turn away from my sin to live a holy life.

God, today I accept your salvation. AMEN

To those who are already believers, the Bible says,
“If we confess our sin he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

To those who are becoming believers, Jesus said,
“As many as received him to them he gives the right to become the children of God.”

If today you have determined to turn from sin, fleeing from it and running to the mercy of God, then know that God has in this minute forgiven you, brought you into his family, and saved you from the judgment to come.

I urge you, that if you have prayed that latter prayer this morning accepting the mercy of God – please come of the front of the worship center following the close of the service and let someone help you know what to do next.

If you didn't pray that prayer but know you must – then you come also and let someone help you.