



Sodom and Gomorrah

Sermon - Sunday 13th June 2021

Genesis 18:16 – 19:38

(Just a ratings notice – There are some elements in here that are quite explicit and confronting; I am not sure they are suitable for children)

FIRE and BRIMSTONE

There may be some of you who think that we need more of those old fashioned 'fire and brimstone' sermons...pictures of God's fiery judgment on sin and sinners...loud exhortations to repentance. Well...

This is THE 'fire and brimstone' sermon... As best I can tell this is the only narrative in the Bible where God rains down literal fire and brimstone (or burning sulfur as the modern translations have it) on the ungodly.

We come to the events of the judgmental destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. (I will from here on simply refer to Sodom to take in both places.)

Here is archetypical Judgement but also archetypical Salvation; God acts in salvation even as he acts in Judgment. As he acts in Judgment he acts in Mercy.

We are looking at ***Genesis 18:16 - 19:38***; we need first to set the context.

We saw last week in Genesis 16 the attempt by Abram and Sarai to organise a son through Hagar and Ishmael.

In chapter 17 God re-affirmed the covenant and set circumcision of males as the sign of this covenant. In this chapter our 'heroes' are re-named Abraham and Sarah.

Now in chapter 18 the events we are about to consider occur immediately after the visit of the 'strangers' to Abraham's tent AND their announcement that THE son will be born within the year.

The meal is finished, the promise made and so...

18:16 When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward

Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way.

These 'strangers' seem to have some purpose

¹⁷ Then the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do

We see the LORD here debating with himself. Is he going to reveal his immediate plans to Abraham or not? The deciding factor is the relationship that exists with Abraham already – the covenant relationship which will ultimately extend to all nations.

¹⁸ Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him.

SO the LORD speaks...

²⁰ Then the LORD said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous...

God has plans for Sodom – plans to judge them and execute judgement on them for their wickedness – their sin is so grievous. God plans to see for himself through his messengers – his angels.

²² The men turned away and went toward Sodom, ...

The two messengers/agents/angels proceed on their way; we will catch up with them soon. Abraham and the LORD remain. Abraham is not settled; he is vexed and he has a question for the LORD.

...but Abraham remained standing before the LORD. ²³ Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?"

Are you sure that this is 'fair'? Can you really punish the righteous along with the wicked? And so the prayer/negotiation begins. Prayer because this is Abraham bringing his concerns before his God – his LORD.

"Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

It's negotiation because Abraham pushes the point. One suspects Abraham plucks a number out of the air – 50 – surely even in wicked

Sodom there will be that many righteous people. God ‘concedes’...

²⁶ The LORD said, “If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.”

But Abraham keeps thinking about Sodom and what it is like and ‘hedges his bets’ so to speak to finally bring the number down to 10.

The Lord responds,

“For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.”

A mere ten and God will spare the city.

³³ When the LORD had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.

Now the negotiating parties split – Abraham to home – the LORD goes about his business. Meanwhile in Sodom...

Remember we have met Sodom before in these narratives. In 13:10 there is a bit of a spoiler as to the end of Chapter 19’s tale. Sodom is part of the land Lot chose; in 13:13 we are told:

Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD.

Sodom is involved in the running wars of Chapter 14, then 18:20:

Then the LORD said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous...”

Sodom has an appalling reputation...and it is about to get worse!

Genesis 19:1 The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city.

The travelers arrive in Sodom; it is evening and Lot is in the gateway. The gateway is the place of doing business – Lot is a respected man in the town. It appears there is no one else there or no one else bothers to greet the strangers.

When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. ² “My lords,” he said, “please turn aside to your servant’s house.”

Lot offers hospitality. He obviously recognises them as important but seems to offer minimum hospitality in contrast to Abraham's largess. The heart is there - the execution is lacking.

⁴ Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom —both young and old—surrounded the house. ⁵ They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them."

Obviously the 'men's' arrival has been noted as well as their location. A 'gang' consisting of all the men of Sodom gathers and their intention is clear – rape. This is not homosexual love; this is sexual violence in a same sex context.

⁶ Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him.

Lot seeks to defend the strangers by offering alternative victims – his own daughters (not sure what they thought of that – by the end of the chapter it appears they have little respect for their father). Lot claims the protection of 'hospitality.'

⁹ "Get out of our way," they replied.

Lot is ignored and maligned – the mob grows increasingly violent and insistent.

¹¹ Then they struck the men who were at the door of the house, young and old, with blindness so that they could not find the door.

The angels grab Lot pull him back and then strike the mob of men from Sodom blind – they are thwarted in their attack.

¹² The two men said to Lot, "Do you have anyone else here....¹³ because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the LORD against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it."

The angels, having revealed their power, now reveal their mission – Sodom is to be destroyed. Lot's sons-in-law, when warned, think he is joking.

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, his wife and his daughters hesitate; the angels grab them by the hand and lead them out of the city. And no looking back!

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!”

¹⁸ But Lot said to them, “... I can’t flee to the mountains; this disaster will overtake me, and I’ll die.”

Lot enters into his own negotiation – selfishly motivated (contrast Abraham) and has his request granted.

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, destroying all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land.

God acts in judgement - thorough and complete Judgement. The LORD will not overlook sin; the LORD will not tolerate wickedness; he WILL judge.

²⁶ But Lot’s wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

Lot’s wife (never named) looks/turns back and is consumed in the judgement.

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.

Abraham sees the judgement and destruction that has been wrought from the place where he ‘bargained’ with God. But God has fulfilled his

word – one righteous man has escaped - not enough to save the city, but the righteous live. We will come back to Lot's righteousness.

But for now the wickedness rolls on...

³⁰ Lot and his two daughters left Zoar and settled in the mountains, for he was afraid to stay in Zoar. He and his two daughters lived in a cave.

³⁶ So both of Lot's daughters became pregnant by their father.

³⁷ The older daughter had a son, and she named him Moab; he is the father of the Moabites of today. ³⁸ The younger daughter also had a son, and she named him Ben-Ammi; he is the father of the Ammonites of today.

These women 'seduce' their father and incestuously conceive sons who go on to be part of the nations round about Israel.

It is worth noting that from Moab generations later comes the Moabite, Ruth, who we meet in the book of Ruth; she is an ancestor of both King David and the greater King, Jesus.

So...sin continues. So what?!

A couple of curly points:

The Sin of Sodom

The sin presented before us is homosexual gang rape. There is no putting it any other way. This is sexual violence of the highest order. And sexual violence in any context is wickedness and sin and an abomination. So here in this narrative the sin is not mere same sex attraction or activity; it is far beyond that.

That said, the Bible does not condone same sex activity or any other sexual activity other than that between a man and a woman in a lifelong committed relationship.

We do not have time to go further into this matter here but there are some notes in the Bible Study, "Thoughts, Notes and Answers" booklet.

It is also worth noting that when the sin of Sodom is mentioned in the prophets, it is not the sexual aspect that is stressed. For example in

Ezekiel 16:49 the LORD says:

“Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. ⁵⁰ They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore, I did away with them as you have seen.”

These things are what we might call social and economic wickedness. The attempt at homosexual gang rape may well be included in ‘detestable things’ but it is not highlighted.

The Righteousness of Lot

In 2 Peter 2, Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, calls Lot a righteous man.

² and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless...

Now without going into a list there is not much in this part of the story or anywhere else that commends Lot. Just the offering of his daughters to the mob is enough to make you feel sick.

But God rescues him – not on the basis of his justice but on the basis of his mercy and on his relationship to Abraham and his family. Lot had done nothing to deserve salvation and, indeed, had to be semi-dragged into it – but God is always looking to save. Lot is saved by God’s grace as are all of us. We all deserve God’s judgment.

So what?! Firstly...

PRAYER IS REAL

Abraham’s pleading with God shows us much about prayer:

Prayer rests on a relationship with God...demonstrated by Abraham’s walking with the LORD.

Prayer is based on God’s willingness to be approached...God declares his intention to Abraham and waits for his response.

Prayer is made on the basis of God’s character...will not the judge of all the earth do right?

Prayer rests in God’s will...Abraham leaves the outworking of his prayer

to God. Secondly...

JUDGMENT IS REAL

When we come to passages like this the graphic detail and the facts are not given merely to provide information or pique our interest. It seems to me that as well they are there to make us feel the horror of sin, to begin to see it as God sees it. We are meant to have our stomachs churn and to be offended and outraged.

Sin is serious!

But according to Jesus there is a sin which is worse than that of Sodom...

Luke 10:12 I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

Jesus is referring to the sin of rejecting God's gracious offer of salvation...salvation offered at the cost of Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross. For those who reject God's offer, judgement is certain. Sodom is but a foretaste.

And remember Lot's wife (Luke 17:32); it wasn't a mere glance over the shoulder that brought her judgment – she had turned back, back to her former life...a warning to all of us! Thirdly...

MERCY IS REAL

God listens to Abraham and Lot and Lot's daughters are saved. The angels tell Lot to seek out

"...anyone else here—sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here!"

God in his mercy wants to save; he wants to bring a people to himself. So put yourself under God's mercy. Pray for the salvation of those around you; remember if they stand outside a relationship with God through Jesus they remain under God's judgement. Have confidence in the God who makes promises and keeps them!