THE LORD RAINED DOWN BURNING SULFUR ON SODOM AND GOMORRAH

Genesis 19:1-38 (Key Verse: 24)

*Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah*—*from the LORD out of the heavens.*

**Brothers and Sisters,** the title of today’s message is ***“THE LORD RAINED DOWN BURNING SULFUR ON SODOM AND GOMORRAH,”*** and the message is based on Genesis 19. Let’s read the key verse (24) together: *“Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the LORD out of the heavens.”* Praise be to God, who has laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed—the LORD whose word is eternal and stands firm in the heavens; the LORD who exercises kindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; the God who so greatly loved and dearly prized the world that He even gave His one and only begotten Son, so that whoever believes and trusts in Him as Saviour shall not perish but have eternal life. Amen! In today’s passage, we are going to learn that God’s precepts (His original thoughts and rules about how to behave or what to think, which should be the foundation from which other ideas, concepts, and beliefs are built) are to be fully obeyed. We are going to learn that God’s word is to be fully obeyed—in other words, diligently obeyed, with a careful mind, and in His intended way. Overall, this is what we are going to learn through God’s judgment that came upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and more closely through the lives of Abraham’s nephew Lot, Lot’s wife, and his daughters. Looking at Sodom and Gomorrah as examples of God’s judgment, we are going to learn that God’s judgment is sure and will surely come to pass. Therefore, there is a way we ought to live in light of this truth and certainty—to escape by His mercy revealed to us. May God, whose word is truth—and to whom our Lord Jesus prayed that He sanctify us by the truth—grant us one word through this message. **Amen!**

From Shepherd Desmond’s message, *“WHAT IF ONLY TEN CAN BE FOUND THERE?”* last Sunday, we learned that the LORD answered Abraham’s prayer of intercession for Sodom and Gomorrah. The persistent prayer by Abraham—moving from fifty righteous people downward—was a plea to the LORD that, since He is the righteous Judge of all the earth, it would not be right to destroy the wicked along with the righteous. Abraham asked that the LORD spare the place for the sake of ten righteous people (Genesis 18:16–33). The LORD answered his prayer, saying, *“For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it”* (Genesis 18:32b). Shepherd Desmond taught us to learn from Abraham, who had the courage to pray persistently because “he knew who God is, he had a relationship with Him, obeyed Him, and trusted Him.”

Although the LORD said, *“For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it,”* we learn from today’s key verse that the LORD destroyed it (He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah). Look at verse 24 again: *“Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the LORD out of the heavens.”* We could draw a simple conclusion and say there were not ten righteous people, and so the LORD destroyed it, but let us look into the word of the LORD in Genesis 19 and learn from it. Amen!

Look at verse 1: *“The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground.”* In verse 22 of the previous chapter (Genesis 18), we learn that *“The two men [who were with the LORD] turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD [interceding for the place].”* If you recall, the LORD had revealed to Abraham His plan for going to Sodom. The LORD said to Abraham, *“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. If not, I will know”* (Genesis 18:20–21). So angels in the form of men had come to do just that. As these men arrived at the place, they were seen and honourably met by Lot, who was a kind of civic leader and had high standing in the place, as was customary for those who sat by the “city gate.”

Lot, like Abraham, was hospitable and honouring of visitors. Look at verses 2–3: *“My lords,” he said, “please turn aside to your servant’s house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning.” “No,” they answered, “we will spend the night in the square.” But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate.”* Let’s recall Shepherd Khomo’s words in his message covering a similar attitude in Abraham in the previous chapter (Genesis 18): *“Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. And such people are indeed the most blessed. May God grow in us a heart of humility and servantship, teaching the word of God to all strangers, even our known brothers and sisters, for our own salvation. Amen!”*

There is something else to note here—that Lot strongly insisted that the two men/angels go with him to his house. Why so strongly? Let’s recall the key verse (24) of today’s passage: *“Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the LORD out of the heavens.”* We know that the men came as per the LORD’s revealed plan to investigate the outcry against the extremely grievous sin in the place and possibly destroy it in light of divine judgment. Although the place was not yet destroyed—since the LORD had not yet rained down His wrath in the form of burning sulphur—we can see through the key verse that this place was indeed wicked.

Lot, being one whom Apostle Peter described in 2 Peter 2:7–8 as *“a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard),”* cared for their safety in this wicked place. He had to strongly insist they go no further into the city but come to his house. There’s something valuable to note here: the more wickedness increases in the world we live in, the more we are to strongly insist on the Gospel. Notice that Lot didn’t force them but strongly insisted. May God help us to strongly insist on the Gospel, knowing that we would be acting both righteously and lovingly, since these men/angels were to be refreshed from their journey in his house. Amen!

Indeed, Sodom and Gomorrah were wicked. Look at verses 4–9: *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.” 6 Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him 7 and said, “No, my friends. Don’t do this wicked thing. 8 Look, 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.” 9 “Get out of our way,” they replied. “This fellow came here as a foreigner, 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.*

This place was so wicked that the term *“sodomy”* originated from this text to describe a homosexual act between men—men sleeping with men. How wicked can a place be that an act of disgrace can be named after it? It’s striking that there is a term such as *“worldly,”* which is used interchangeably with *“fleshly”* and *“carnal”* in the Bible to describe the sinful nature. For example, the Apostle Paul said to the church in Corinth: *“Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?”* (1 Corinthians 3:1–3). No wonder John 3:16 says, *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

Since the term *“sodomy”* stands for a homosexual act between men—and this is the very sin that Lot tried to stop the young and old men of Sodom from committing in such an outrageous manner—we are reminded that sex is not just sex. It is taken seriously by God, and so should we—lest we incur judgment upon ourselves. Lot tried his best to stop them, even going so far as to offer his virgin daughters, saying they could do what they liked with them. Of course, that would have meant his daughters being raped and abused throughout the night by a large group of men. These men were going to treat Lot worse than his guests. I suppose they were going to rape these men in front of him, then his daughters, and do the same to him—with no mercy. That’s how wicked these men were. What can we make of Lot, who tried so hard to stop such wickedness? Being a righteous man, he knew how evil that act was. In his thinking, he thought it would be better—since it’s natural for a man and a woman to have sex—that their wickedness could be limited even to that extent. This, however, was still wicked—and a similar incident is recorded in Judges 19, where a Levite’s concubine was forced outside to a crowd of men who wanted to rape the Levite. The men of that town abused her all night, taking turns raping her until morning, which made the Levite complain about such wickedness in Israel. Moreover, Romans 1:26 notes, in relation to God’s wrath against sinful humanity, that *“even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones.”*

Looking at the key verse, it makes sense why God would rain burning sulphur on that place. It makes sense because the wicked men of Sodom had hard hearts—they even refused to sleep with virgin women as a replacement for the two men and wanted to do worse to Lot himself. Think of the death penalty: we have such laws because some people are unrepentantly wicked. Even in the church, there are times when discipline is needed—for example, in 1 Corinthians 5, where a believer had a sexual relationship with his stepmother, and Paul said, *“Hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.”* Indeed, Abraham was right in his prayer that God is the Judge of all the earth, who does right.

There’s something else important to realize in this passage as the events unfold: the LORD’s judgment was at hand, as the angels also saw first-hand that indeed God would surely bring judgment upon this place. There is a time aspect to the execution of the LORD’s judgment, and therefore there is an urgency in how we should conduct ourselves—to avoid or help others avoid the sure judgment of the LORD. Look at verses 10–16: *10 But the men inside reached out and pulled Lot back into the house and shut the door. 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. 12 The two men said to Lot, “Do you have anyone else here—sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of 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.” 14 So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were 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. 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 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!” 18 But Lot said to them, “No, my lords, please! 19 Your servant has found favor in your eyes, and you have shown great kindness to me in sparing my life. But I can’t flee to the mountains; this disaster will overtake me, and I’ll die. 20 Look, here is a town near enough to run to, and it is small. Let me flee to it—it is very small, isn’t it? Then my life will be spared.” 21 He said to him, “Very well, I will grant this request too; I will not overthrow the town you speak of. 22 But flee there quickly, because I cannot do anything until you reach it.” (That is why the town was called Zoar.) 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.*

For the past three weeks, I have been meditating deeply on marriage as some verses came to my mind, and this meditation on God’s word led me to desire the coming of Christ in light of the beautiful union of marriage as designed by God and the process of entering such a union. However, last Sunday, as I was driving to the Bible House, I was deeply reminded that there is such a thing as *speeding His coming* based on 2 Peter 3. It became clear—as confirmed through today’s passage and message—that if I am serious about the Day of the Lord, I would speed its coming and let go of hindrances such as fear, mediocrity, and sentimentality that have persisted in my life and walk with God. I would not linger like Lot, who loved his wealth in Sodom and had a hard time leaving it behind. Surprisingly, after he tried to warn his sons-in-law, they thought he was joking. I can imagine those sons-in-law joking about his wealth, saying that if it were true, all his wealth would go to waste. Also, his sons-in-law were important to the future of his betrothed daughters. In that time—and perhaps less so in ours—marriage for women was a source of financial security and determined what their future would look like. Let’s remember Shepherd Desmond’s Spring Bible Conference message: *“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”* I see that if I am serious and genuine about speeding His coming—especially considering that we live in the last days and do not know the hour He will come—I should not look back to the world like Lot’s wife, who looked back and became a pillar of salt (verse 26), because she was double-minded. No matter how legitimate we may think it was for her to look back, this shows how sure and serious God’s judgment is, for the angel of the LORD specifically told them not to look back.

Moreover, looking at Lot and his daughters, I am deeply reminded that once mercy has been shown in its fullness—as the LORD, having remembered Abraham, brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where he lived (that is, Zoar)—I should never revert to my own thinking, no matter how noble it may seem. Instead, I should remain principled no matter the situation. You cannot get a noble thing by breaking God’s precepts. No wonder Romans 12:1–2 says: *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will.”*

We should **not** be like Lot’s daughters, who cunningly slept with their father to achieve what they thought was a noble thing—the preservation of their family line in light of their circumstances (verses 30–38). God’s precepts and principles stand even in crisis. Among other reasons, that’s why prayer exists—to help us look to the LORD in situations that seem “impossible” or “hopeless.” Shepherd Desmond said in his message: *“We also may be in situations where it may seem like it is done, nothing else can be done, but from Abraham we can learn that it is never done. We can learn that God is willing to hear us and can change situations or circumstances that are unreasonable, done, or irreversible.”* What Lot’s daughters did had dire consequences for God’s chosen nation later—the Moabites and Ammonites, descendants of these daughters, became enemies of Israel. Breaking God’s precepts and principles has consequences, just as natural laws do. That is why Galatians 6:7 says: *“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.”* I am really challenged to be a godly, principled man now that the LORD has shown me mercy—to realize that I have not taken the coming of the Lord seriously.

**In conclusion**, although we did not learn much about how angels work, an important teaching was given about the coming judgment of God using Sodom and Gomorrah as an example. Our Lord Jesus spoke of His Gospel message in relation to this place upon which the LORD rained down burning sulphur, saying: *“If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet. Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town”* (Matthew 10). And so it is relevant to us today. Although the day of judgment is sure, there is mercy—and that mercy must be truly appreciated without double-mindedness or hesitation. Lot was righteous, but his story is one of compromise and half-hearted separation from the world. Let’s be reminded that *the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.* Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. If it had not been for Abraham’s prayer of intercession, Lot would have perished. And so, prayers for wicked and seemingly hopeless cities such as Sodom and Gomorrah should be presented to the LORD, who—though He is the righteous Judge of all the earth—can hear our prayers and be merciful, even to one person. Truly, as Scripture says: *“Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”* And that is what some of us were. But we were washed, we were sanctified, we were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. The Day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought we to be? We ought to live holy and godly lives as we look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. **One word:** *Decisively escape judgment through God’s word!* In other words, **make up your mind to appreciate the mercy of God.** **Amen.**