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Responding Rightly to the Warnings of God's Word (Genesis 19:12-22)

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7/13/2014

When you study God's great works of deliverance in Scripture, one thing you notice is the way that God's redemptive acts always serve as an occasion for God displaying the full range of His divine attributes. In every act of redemption, we not only see God's tender love displayed, but also His fearsome justice. Whether it be the deliverance of Noah and his family from the waters of the flood, or the deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt, or the deliverance of all God's elect from sin through the death of Christ--in all these events, we see displayed what Paul calls the "kindness" and the "severity" of God. We see God's kindness in the mercy He shows to His elect who take refuge in the shadow of His wing; and we see His severity in the judgment He executes on those who have provoked His wrath continually and who refuse to repent.

That is certainly what we find here in Genesis 19. In the verses I have read this morning, we see righteous Lot delivered from all danger and harm by the mercy of God, while at the same time, we see the unrepentant inhabitants of Sodom set apart by God for judgment.

Last week, we saw how God had sent angels to the city of Sodom for a final evaluation of the spiritual character of the city's inhabitants. After the men of Sodom showed themselves to be thoroughly given over to a reprobate mind by their unrelenting effort to gang-rape these two strangers, it was clear that nothing remained for the people of that city but to be punished by God. It was clear that they had not only turned their backs on the Lord, but were absolutely committed to a life of lawlessness. Far from softening their hearts, Lot's pleas to the men of Sodom to turn from their evil ways only infuriated them and made them more resolute in their rebellious attitude. They were enraged that Lot would have the audacity to judge them. They were so hardened in their hearts toward God, so deaf to His voice and impervious to all counsel that nothing remained for them but to perish under God's wrath. What else can you do for people who are determined to live as a law to themselves in open defiance of God and His truth?

The sad fact is, there were not even ten believers in the city of Sodom. Had there been ten persons in that city who feared God, God would have spared

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the city on their account. But there were not; Lot was the only righteous man in that city. For that reason, God destroyed Sodom and spared only Lot and his family. Now, the fact is, God was under no obligation to spare Lot from the fiery judgment that came upon that city. The fact that He did so was owing wholly to His sovereign mercy. As we read in verse 16, "the Lord was merciful to him." God wanted to magnify His mercy in Lot; that is why He spared him. He also wanted to show forth His character as a righteous Judge who distinguishes between the righteous and the wicked in his dealings with them.

The fact that God chose to grant mercy to Lot does not mean, however, that Lot was saved without a struggle. What is striking about this passage is the way that Lot seems to fight against his own deliverance from destruction. When God held forth to him the promise of deliverance, we see him go through a tremendous inner struggle to lay hold of that promise by faith. He struggled because he had certain impediments within himself that made it hard for him to let go of his attachment to Sodom. He resisted detaching himself from his identification with the city and its inhabitants. Thus, even though the Lord saved him, he was "scarcely saved," or as the saying goes, he was saved "by the skin of his teeth."

Lot's deliverance from Sodom was effected by means of three words of warning, to which Lot responded in three different ways.

I. The First Warning-- The first warning came immediately after the two angels had judged the men of Sodom by striking them with blindness. We read in verse 19 that they said to Lot, "Have you anyone else here? Son-in-law, your sons, your daughters, and whomever you have in the city-- take them out of this place! For we will destroy this place, because the outcry against them has grown great before the face of the Lord, and the Lord has sent us to destroy it!"

There are two things to point out regarding this first warning of the angels to Lot.

1) First, it is clear that by now that Lot understood that these two strangers in his home were angels. I say that because Lot had witnessed these two strangers deliver him from a multitude of violent men by causing the entire multitude to be struck with a strange and inexplicable blindness, so that they could not find the door of Lot's house. This was clearly a supernatural act by which these men showed themselves to be supernatural beings. Consequently, when they said to Lot, "We will destroy this place," Lot does not seem to have questioned the truth

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of what they said, because he was convinced of who they were. He knew they were angels, based on what they had done. Moreover, Lot knew better than anyone else the gross wickedness of the people of Sodom, so it would come to him as no surprise that the Lord, as a righteous Judge, was about to wipe them out. So this is the first thing to notice about the first warning of the angels to Lot - Lot knew that this warning was backed up with the authority of heaven itself.

2) The second thing to notice is that when these angels asked Lot, "Have you anyone else here?" that question expressed a concern for those who were near to Lot. The angels were telling Lot, "The Lord in His mercy to you is not only concerned about saving you, but about saving those who are dear to you, as well. His mercy toward you overflows in an attitude of kindness toward the members of your household, as well; for it is pleases God to see households saved, as well as individuals. God is willing to save the members of your household from the imminent destruction that will come on this city, if they will but lay hold of the mercy that has now come near to them through you. They must believe the news of deliverance that the Lord has brought to your hearing.

We see this principle of God's working throughout the Bible. God loves to see his grace overflowing from individuals to the members of their households. Thus, when the Lord saved Noah from the flood, He showed favor to Noah's family at the same time by calling them into the ark to be saved along with Noah. When the Philippian jailer fell down trembling before the apostle Paul and asked, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul replied by saying, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." Did Paul mean that those in the jailer's household would be saved automatically? No; each member of that household had to respond personally by faith to the gospel invitation. But the phrase "you and your household" revealed to the jailer God's kind intention toward his family. It assured him that God intended to hold forth to His family the same gospel promises he had heard, so that they, too, by believing, could enjoy the same blessings of salvation which he enjoyed. What we see here, I believe, is a general principle of God's working. God delights to save, not only individuals, but families or households; consequently, one of the chief means that God has appointed for drawing the elect to Himself is the earthly family.

That should be of great encouragement to us in praying for our children, knowing that God so often uses family ties to draw people to Himself. I believe that we can take a principle like that revealed in Psalm 103:7-8 and use it in our prayers as we plead with God for our children and grandchildren. We ought to

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pray for them in some way like this: "Oh, Lord, you are a God who delights to see your name exalted in believing households. You love to see the faith passed on from one generation to the next among, so that the 'children's children' of believes may know and love you as did their fathers. Oh, Lord, will you not magnify this principle of your working in my own family! Oh, Lord, please fulfill in the lives of my children the promise of Psalm 103:7-8!" I think that Baptists have every warrant to pray that way for their children, even though we do not baptize our children until they come to faith, by the grace of God.

God had mercy on the household of Lot. The problem was that, not all of those in his household were willing to lay hold of the mercy tendered to them. We read in verse 14 that immediately after hearing this first warning, Lot "went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who had married his daughters, and said, "Get out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city!" But to his sons-in-law, he seemed to be joking" (Genesis 19:14). Although our text says these sons-in-law were married to his daughters, what that means is that they were betrothed to Lot's daughters. I say that for two reasons; first, because in an ancient times, a betrothal was as legally binding as a marriage, so much so, that if a man was betrothed to a woman, he might be regarded by her parents as a son-in-law, even before the marriage was consummated. Second, Lot tells the men of Sodom that his daughters had not yet known a man, so it is obvious that they were not yet married. For these two reasons, I believe these men were preparing to marry his daughters. So far, however, they had not yet married in the fullest sense.

The fact that Lot would willingly give his daughters in marriage to pagan idolaters who made no profession of faith in the Lord, is further evidence of his backslidden condition. What a pity that a man of God would sink to such a low level in his concern for his own children. As Geoffrey Thomas puts it, "Lot had been happy with such ungodly and unrighteous alliances, light fellowshiping with darkness, good with evil."

Now, however, all that was about to unravel. Lot was about to see his whole world come apart; everything he had striven to obtain in Sodom was coming to an end, including his relationship to these two young men. That was evident from the moment Lot opened his mouth and began to speak. The spiritual division between Lot and these young men was immediately apparent, for they were unable to take seriously a single word that Lot said. Although Lot spoke to them with a tone of great urgency, exhorting them to get out of bed and escape from the city quickly without delay, to his sons-in-law, Lot seemed to

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be joking. The alarm in his voice seemed to be "put on." They thought he was playing a practical joke on them in order to make sport of them. They thought perhaps that he wanted them to jump out of bed and run out of the house so that he could laugh at them and later make jokes about them to his daughters. They could not take him seriously, for the message he brought seemed to them utterly preposterous.

Is that not typical of the way the world always reacts to the message of divine judgment? When believers bear faithful witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, His present reign, and His second coming in glory to judge all men, the world typically responds with mocking and scorn. That seems to be especially true on college and university campuses around our nation. Atheistic professors and students are becoming increasingly bold in their outspoken derision of Christian beliefs. When Christians show up on campus to speak out on any number of 'hot button' topics-- whether it be creation or abortion or homosexuality or any similar issues, skeptics frequently turn out to deride, condemn and repudiate the truth claims of Christianity. If you speak to these skeptics about coming judgment, they become especially abusive and hateful. Like Lot's sons-in-law, they think Christians are only joking when they speak of God's wrath.

Yet none of this ought to surprise us, for it was predicted long ago by Christ's apostles. The apostle Peter, for example, spoke of a coming day when "scoffers" would come "walking according to their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.'" These scoffers are what we call philosophical naturalists, people who deny that any forces are at work in the world other than natural forces that science can understand and measure. When these mockers hear of a coming day when Christ will return personally to earth to judge the world in righteousness, they mock, because such beliefs contradict their naturalistic philosophy.

That was the attitude of Lot's sons-in-law. They laughed at the very idea of judgment, because it contradicted their naturalistic view of the world. They forgot about the flood of Noah's day. They suppressed the pangs of their own conscience, as well. They had hardened themselves in the irrational belief that if something was outside their personal experience, it couldn't possibly be true. How tragic when people mock the Word of God like that.

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How did their mockery affect Lot? Well, it appeared to have dampened to some degree his own sense of urgency; and I say that based on Lot's response to the second warning the angels gave him, just as dawn was breaking.

II. The Second Warning--We read in verse 15 that "when the morning dawned, the angels urged Lot to hurry, saying, "Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city!" The angels were alarmed by the fact that Lot and his family seemed to be dragging their heels in response to the first warning, which was probably given around midnight. Now the long night hours have fled, and the sky will soon be lightening and the sun will soon rise, yet still Lot is dawdling in his house, along with his wife and daughters. He just keeps walking in circles, like a man whose head is screwed on backwards and is having a hard time figuring out which way to go.

Perhaps Lot was looking somewhat sadly at all the goods he had acquired and was trying to decide what to take with him. Perhaps he was hoping that his sons-and-law would reconsider his admonition and show up at his doorstep any minute, ready to go, and he wanted to wait until the last moment to give them that opportunity. Perhaps he was even praying in his thoughts to God that He would spare the city and give it more room for repentance. Perhaps he was simply so dumbstruck by the horror of what the angels had said that he felt paralyzed with a sense of fear and could not find within himself the power to get moving.

What is evident is that Lot was not responding as he should to the warning of the angels. Even after they have told him that his life and the life of his wife and daughters is in imminent danger, Lot remains in a sort of daze, doing nothing. The text says that he was "lingering," unable to pull himself away from the city of destruction. At that point, we might expect God to wash his hands of Lot. We might expect him to say, "If Lot cannot bring himself to part with this city, then let him perish here with the rest." But God does not do that, because Lot is dearly loved by him as one of His elect. He is the one righteous man in that city, justified through faith alone in the promises of God, and therefore, he stands righteous in the sight of God, despite his many personal imperfections. For that reason, God refuses to treat him as a reprobate. Instead, he shows him mercy as we read in verse 16, by directing the two angels to literally drag Lot and His family, gently but forcibly, out of the city. We read in verse 16, "The men took hold of his hand, his wife's hand, and the hands of his

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two daughters, the Lord being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city."

Notice that expression in the middle of verse 16, "the Lord being merciful to him." What a precious expression! It highlights the source of every blessing that Lot received in this chapter-- the sovereign mercy of God. It is not that Lot was saved by his willing cooperation with God, for there is a sense in which we have to say that Lot was saved despite himself and his resistance to God. He lingered when he ought to have fled; he kept deliberating when he ought to have acted promptly, without hesitation; he came so very close to perishing in the fire that consumed that city. But God had mercy on him and saved him, despite himself. I am reminded of the words of C. S. Lewis who said, "I was brought kicking and screaming into the kingdom of God." What a beautiful picture we see here of the two angels leading Lot and his family out of Sodom just before daylight-- one angel taking the hands of Lot and his wife, the other angel taking the hands of his two daughters and leading them through the dark, winding streets of the city through the gate out into the fields beyond Sodom-- in this beautiful picture we see an illustration of the totally gracious character of salvation. As one writer puts it, "Hankering after Sodom, perhaps thinking of the wealth they had to leave, the good man and his wife still lingered, and were at last only dragged forth by force beyond the precincts of the doomed city. It reminds us that . . . none would escape from the city of destruction if divine grace were not to lay hold of them and drag them forth."

III. The Third Warning-- The third warning Lot and his family received came just after they got beyond the gates of the city into the fields outside of Sodom. It might seem as if they were now safe, with all dangers behind them-- but that was not so! As soon as Lot and his family were outside the city, heaven's alarm bells went off again, as loudly as ever before, as a third warning rang in their ears. It is unclear if this third warning was spoken by one of the angels, or if the Lord Himself now appeared on the scene and spoke to Lot directly. Our text simply says that when the two angels had brought Lot and his family outside, "he" spoke to Lot. The "he" seems to indicate that the Lord was now on the scene and speaking to Lot directly; I say that because Lot responds to speaker by addressing him as "Adonai" which means "Lord," and by making a request of him that is based on a recognition of the speaker's divine grace and power and authority. So I believe that God is here speaking to Lot, and Lot to God.

This third warning was every bit as urgent as the previous two, if not more so, for God said to Lot and his family, "Escape for your life! Do not look behind

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you nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains, lest you be destroyed!"

God wanted Lot and his family to escape to the mountains, because the fire was going to destroy not only Sodom, but other cities on the plain of the Jordan, as well. The whole valley was to be set ablaze. The safest place to take refuge, therefore, would be in the hills above the level plain. You would think such clear instructions would put an end to all discussion, and that Lot would say, "Thank you, Lord, for saving us!" as he headed off in the direction to which God pointed him. Amazingly, however, we find Lot still reluctant to respond in simple obedience to God's commands. Now, instead of lingering in the place of danger, but starts to argue with the Lord, raising objections to what the Lord has said and begging Him for permission to go elsewhere.

God told him to go the mountains. Lot's response: "No, my Lord, not there!" What did Lot have against going to the mountains? It may be hard for us to believe, but he actually doubted God's ability to preserve his life there! In verse 19, he says, "I cannot escape to the mountains, lest some evil overtake me and I die." Here we see even further evidence of Lot's backslidden spiritual condition. He had been so long in the company of pagans that he was forgetting how to think as a believer. Did it not occur to Lot that if God had gone to all the trouble to deliver him from the destruction of Sodom by miraculous means, God was well able to preserve his life in the wilderness! Would God bring him out of the city through the ministry of angels, only to abandon him afterward? It seems as if Lot was not putting two and two together. He was not thinking like a Christian. He was allowing irrational fears to take hold of him and hinder him in his obedience to God. What was it that he feared? Did he think the mountains were so far away that he wouldn't have the strength to get there? Did he think they were so rocky and barren that he would find no food or water there? Did he think that they were so cold that he would freeze to death at night? Or so steep, that he might slip and hurt himself climbing them?

People use similar excuses to avoid becoming Christians. "Oh," they say, "if I professed faith in Christ, I might backslide and bring shame on the name of Christ! The Christian life is so difficult, so demanding. I'm sure I could never endure to the end. I would surely turn back before reaching heaven." Are those not silly excuses for going on in unbelief? If the Lord is kind enough to you to send His word, if He then multiplies His grace to you by calling you to faith in His Son, do you not think that He is powerful enough to keep you to the end? Paul told the Philippians, "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it

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until the day of Jesus Christ." God never starts something that He doesn't finish. Christ will surely keep His own redeemed sheep safe until the very end. Lot doubted God's ability to keep him safe in dire circumstances. He acknowledged that God had poured out on him abundant grace until now. He acknowledged that God had favored him, and had increased His mercy to him by saving him from destruction. But now, he thought, God couldn't keep him alive in the mountains? How silly!

Not only did Lot raise objections, however; he also suggested an alternative plan. Can you see how presumptuous that is? He asked God to send him to a small town close by where he could continue to enjoy the comforts of city life. Twice, he points out to God that it is just a little city, as if to say to God, "I'm not asking you for too much, Lord. The people who live there are few; therefore, it won't demand too much of your mercy to spare it; and by letting me live there, I can avoid the dangers and the discomforts of life in the mountains."

We are somewhat astounded by Lot's audacity. What in the world is he doing arguing with God and begging God to give him an easy road? Does he not realize that it is an unspeakable mercy to have his life spared at all? Does he not realize that the Lord's way is best, and that if he commits his way to God and obeys his word, God will take care of all the rest? His faith is so pitifully weak.

But here is the amazing thing; God grants him his request. In His Fatherly grace and compassion, He stoops to Lot's level and meets him there. Isn't that amazing? Look at what he says to Lot in verse 21-- "And he said to him, 'See, I have favored you concerning this thing also, in that I will not overthrow this city for which you have spoken. Hurry, escape there, for I cannot do anything until you arrive there.' Therefore, the name of the city was called Zoar" (Zoar means "little" or "insignificant.") One of the most consoling attributes of God is His patience. He is not like a short-tempered father who cannot bear with his children's faults, who always reproaches them for every mistake and barks at them relentlessly like a yapping watchdog who barks at the drop of a hat. No, God is longsuffering with his children. He bears with us in our weaknesses, and does not jump on us every time we say or do something amiss. He is full of compassion and kindness, so He meets at the level of our spiritual maturity and ministers to us where we are. That is what we see Him do here with Lot when he lets him flee to Zoar; He shows pity to Lot by granting his request, and at the same time, he shows pity to the people of Zoar for Lot's sake.

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I should point out that Lot later realizes the wisdom of God's plan, for we see him just a few verses later leaving Zoar and heading to the mountains with his daughters.

CONCLUSION-- What a rich revelation of God's righteous character is given to us in this nineteenth chapter of the Book of Genesis! On the one hand, we see here displayed the awesome holiness of God in the judgment God brings on the ungodly. But at the same time, however, we see in this chapter a tender display of God's sovereign mercy toward believers who look to God as their redeemer. They may be in a spiritually weakened condition, as Lot was, but they are still the objects of His saving love and the heirs of His mercy, and for that reason, God bears with them and will not suffer to be condemned with the world.

In our witness to the world, we must always uphold these two sides of God's righteous character-- His justice and wrath, and on the one hand, and His mercy and grace on the other. It is only by upholding the full range of God's attributes that we can faithfully proclaim the gospel of Christ to people in our day.

The tragedy of so much preaching today is that it omits entirely the message of divine wrath. Yet it is the reality of God's wrath which gives to true gospel preaching its tone of urgency, by impressing on sinners their need of salvation. It is only when people know they are in danger of perishing under God's wrath on account of their sins that they feel an urgent need to repent and be saved.

In many churches, a false gospel is preached today that says simply, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life and wants you to love your neighbor as yourself." That is all that is proclaimed. There is no note of urgency in such preaching; no call to repentance; no warning of eternal judgment that will fall upon the ungodly and the unbelieving if they refuse to repent. The modern 'feel good' message heard in many churches is completely lifeless and can save no one, because it directs no one to Jesus Christ for salvation

To be quite honest, during my childhood years, I cannot remember ever hearing a single word about divine judgment from any pulpit in the liberal churches our family attended. The assumption seemed to be that children born of Christian parents are already Christians, so all they need to hear is that God loves them and wants them to love others, too. But that is a false message, for it is not true that a person is a Christian simply because they have been born of

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Christian parents. That is a lie. We only become Christians by experiencing a spiritual birth from heaven, and the evidence of the new birth is that we repent of our sins and turn to Jesus Christ alone for forgiveness and the gift of eternal life.

Until a person has received Jesus by faith as their Savior and Lord, he is lost and under condemnation. That is why the call of the gospel to all men is to flee the wrath to come by fleeing to Christ. Like Lot, we must flee the city of destruction. We must flee to Christ and embrace Him and ask Him to wash away our sins and give us a new heart and to make us heirs of heaven. By nature, you are not an heir of heaven, but a child of hell... You must be made an heir of heaven by a work of grace in your soul. This is the true gospel of salvation-- a gospel that which points men to Christ and says, "Salvation is found only in Him. Flee to Him. He is your city of refuge."

Have you fled to Christ? If not, I urge you to do so right now. Linger no longer in the city of destruction, but flee for your life to the Lord of life, and find safe refuge in Him. Call upon Him to save you from your sins, and when are safely joined to Him by faith, be faithful to point others to Him, as well, since He is the only One who can give them forgiveness and eternal life. For we know that this present world is destined for judgment, but in Christ, there is the promise of salvation "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name given among men by which we must be saved." Amen.