

24. When the Church fails the World (2007)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 June 2008

Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] Well, do turn with me, if you would, to the passage we read there in Genesis chapter 19, which is all about when the church fails the world.

If it's true that since the beginning the blood of the martyrs has been the seed of the church, then it's also true that right from the beginning it's largely been the sins of the saints that has most hindered the work of Christ's people in the world.

In Romans chapter 2 verse 24, Paul quotes Isaiah the prophet about the Old Testament church and says, The name of the Lord is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.

Not honored and rejoiced in among the nations, which of course was the true calling of God's people, but blasphemed because of them, because of their counter-evangelistic lifestyles.

And the sad fact is that through much of the history of God's church, whether Old Testament or New Testament, far from in everything adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour, as Titus urges us to do, the church has in fact desperately failed the world.

[1 : 18] And alas, so often it's been from the professing Christian church, from orthodox evangelical churches that have emerged those who in time have done immense damage to the cause of Christ and his kingdom.

Just think of nearly all the sub-Christian cults and movements that have emerged in the church's recent history. The Unitarians that emerged out of the Puritan churches, often the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses more recently, and endless others too.

Or go right back to the very beginning of church history, in the earliest days, and think of the Arians and the Nestorians and the Montanists and the great host of all the rest. And of course the whole New Testament itself is taken up with apostolic warnings against all kinds of falsity.

And that falsity was dangerous, wasn't it? Precisely because it sprang up within the professing church, not from outside it. Just as today, many of the biggest threats to real Christianity come from within the professing church, from within the major denominations.

Well, it should be no surprise then, should it, that way back in Genesis, we should see the same pattern even then. No surprise when we remember that, of course, the shadow of the serpent has been stalking the story since chapter 3, hasn't it?

[2 : 45] Seeking whom he may devour. And so it is in these chapters about Abraham, especially when what we've been seeing is that these chapters are about God's calling out of his covenant people, his church, those who are marked for covenant blessing, and therefore for covenant mission, the calling of the true church.

Do you remember? God calls his people to be friends. Abraham was the friend of God. And therefore to be priests, to intercede with God for men.

And also to be prophets, to speak to men and women for God. And the last time we saw in that graphic story about Sodom, we saw the church's message to the world.

A message about sure and certain judgment upon sin. And yet, the merciful message of salvation and the command to repent and to save yourself before it's too late.

But in these pitiful last verses of Genesis chapter 19, about the sad end of Lot and his family, we're reminded about the realities of the many failures in the Christian church and in the Christian family.

[3 : 59] And these things are written here, says the New Testament, for our instruction. That we may learn in our churches today and in our Christian families today not to fall into the same disasters as overtook some of our forebears.

The end of the ages has come upon us, says Paul. We are indeed privileged to be inheritors of the new covenant. But he says to the church in Corinth, Nevertheless, let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

Read these things and learn from them, says Paul. So I want to look first then at these verses we read at the end of chapter 19, which speaks so sadly of Lot's family legacy. And then I want us to go back, as the text I think invites us to do, and observe the contrast that we see in these chapters between the two men, Abraham and Lot, and their dealing with their lives and with their families.

The things which we will see in the end led to such different legacies in their lives. And we'll see very clearly, and the writer wants us to see, that it was a clear divergence in family leadership that led to such a clear difference in family legacy.

[5 : 19] So look first at Lot's family legacy in these verses, 30 to the end. It's a very sad and sordid tale, isn't it? We might have hoped, I suppose, that Lot's experience of rescue from Sodom would have changed him.

Surely it was a chance for a new beginning for this man. And at first, as you read verse 30, perhaps it seems that way. At last, Lot is heading for the hills. Is he seeking out, humbly, his uncle Abraham?

Well, alas, no. That's not his motivation, is it? He's going, says verse 30, for he was afraid to live in Zohar. We don't know why. Maybe he feared that God would destroy that place too, even though God had said he wouldn't, on Lot's account.

But Lot seems to have lost all sense of purpose, and he'd rather live in a cave, than in the tents of Abraham. And by the way, caves in the Old Testament were almost always one of two things. Either they were used for graves, or for refugees, people who were dead, or people who were as good as dead. It's a pretty grim scene, isn't it? One scholar says, when last seen, Lot has lost his home, his goods, and his wife, and is being shamefully treated by his daughters.

[6 : 38] It doesn't get more sordid, does it, than what we read here. Even the godless world cringes at this kind of incestuous perversity and deceit. Nor is it fictional, is it?

Or beyond belief. Just look at what we were reading in our newspapers just a couple of weeks ago, that awful story from that Austrian town. These things happen, don't they? I guess this was even worse.

The girls deliberately deceiving their own father. They obviously knew he would never agree to such a thing, so they had to deceive him. And they obviously had no qualms about it either. If you see it, they'd obviously imbibed far more of the morality of Sodom than the morality of their father.

And that's telling in itself, isn't it? As is the fact that Lot was so easily led into folly by them. The end, says Derek Kidner, of choosing to carve out his career, was to lose even the custody of his body. And so we're told of these horrible, incestuous conceptions and births by sin and deceit. And far from remorse, the daughters seem to glory in their shame, don't they?

[7 : 52] They celebrate their actions in the names that they give to their sons. Names that commemorate their incestuous behavior. The footnote tells us. Proverbs 29, verse 18.

It's very true, isn't it? Where there is no vision of God, the people cast off restraint. Such a striking contrast, isn't it, to the birth that we're soon going to read about, the birth of Isaac, through patient faith in God's miraculous working.

A son whose future will be taken up and used by God for his purposes of blessing in the world, in the line of promise that would lead on at last, in the fullness of time, to the coming of the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

What a contrast. Not just in the immediate circumstances of the birth, but also in the lasting consequences. Because the legacy of our lives is something that long outlives our own time span. Isn't that right? And that's really the true significance of these verses here. That's why they're here. Verses 37 and 38, if you look at them, conceal the import of Lot's true family legacy.

[9 : 06] It was a legacy of disaster and damage to the people of God for generations, for centuries, for millennia. You see what we're told.

These births were the beginning of, verse 37, the Moabites, and verse 38, the Ammonites. Two tribes who were to be a snare and a danger and a malign influence on God's people for generations.

Now Moses' readers, the first readers of this, knew that only too well. It was the Moabite king, Balak, you remember, who hired Balaam the prophet to curse Israel in their desert journeys. It was Moabite women who worshipped their vile god Chemosh, who led Israel into what has been called the worst carnal seduction in the history of Israel. Sexual seduction that led them into idolatry

with the Baal of Peor.

You can read about it in Numbers chapter 25. As a result, 24,000 of the people of Israel were lost and died in a plague. It was a whole episode that became symbolic of apostasy in Israel right through subsequent generations.

[10:15] It was the Moabites. The Ammonites were equally vile. It was their god, Moloch, to whom children were sacrificed in the fire. And to those abominations, Israel too succumbed at times.

Read through the history of Israel in the Old Testament. You will find the Moabites and the Ammonites a consistent blight on God's people. A constant enemy to God's promise all the way through.

It's quite extraordinary. Remember Nehemiah's enemies after the exile, when they came back to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Who were they led by? Tobiah the Ammonite.

Remember King Solomon's downfall led by the foreign and pagan women that he took to wife.

Read 1 Kings 11. First on the list, Moabite and Ammonite women.

He even built a high place, a shrine, says 1 Kings 11 verse 7, for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, and Moloch, the abomination of the Ammonites.

[11:22] And as a result of that, God judged, and the kingdom was divided after him. So any reader of the Old Testament knows the enormous implication, the terrible implications, for the people of God, for the church of God, of the legacy of Lot and his family.

Moses himself had told the people in Deuteronomy chapter 23 that no Moabite or Ammonite could ever be admitted to the Lord's assembly for the tenth generation forever. However, such was their determined opposition to the purposes of God and his people.

And yet that is the family legacy of what the New Testament calls righteous Lot. A righteous man, a believing man, but as Derek Kibner says, a man without the pilgrim spirit.

Don't you think it's frightening what damage professing believers can do to the cause of God and the world? And how the things that they've sometimes done can continue to blight the church from generation to generation.

Don't you think that's frightening? I do. Think of the damage done to the church by the first generation of critical scholars back in the 19th century who thought that what they were doing was trying to make the church more accessible to modern man.

[12:48] But actually, whose activities decimated the churches in the Western world for generations. Still blighting us today their legacy in our colleges and universities and our divinity faculties that have squeezed out and emasculated the true evangelical gospel.

Locked out and ignored still today as a legacy of what those men did. I think quite differently of the disastrous fallout.

Every bit as damaging from scandals in some of the groups that at first deliberately separated themselves right away from those kind of things and yet in the end ended up in disaster of their own.

There are many such. Think, for example, of the fallout from the bust-ups in the Exclusive Brethren in the 1970s. Some of you here know too much about that.

Lot's family legacy is a warning to both Christian families and to the wider Christian family to the church never to think that we can presume upon the grace and the mercy of God.

[13:58] Yes, God was merciful to Lot. He saved him from the disaster of Sodom. And yet the fruit of his folly lived on to dog God's people in perpetuity.

And Paul says, these things are written for us that we should not desire evil as they did. But it's not just chance, is it, that led Abraham and Lot to such different family legacies.

It was choices. Choices made all the way through the stories that we've been reading together. And as we've read the stories of these two men and seen how their lives developed, intertwined as they were, it's perfectly plain, isn't it, that the writer wants us to see the huge contrast in the choices each of them make, the way they live, the way they lead their families.

And if Lot's family legacy was both a pathetic end in itself and a pernicious entail, then we can see clearly that the reasons for that lie fairly and squarely with Lot's family leadership.

leadership. And in the contrast, all the way through their stories, that we're shown between that and Abraham's leadership of his family. And you know, in these days of the 21st century, when there are so many snares to family life, so many challenges for Christian families as we seek to bring up children for the Lord Jesus, in the midst of a disappearing Christian heritage in our nation, in the

midst of a rising tide of hostility to the things of God and the ways of the God, in these days, surely, nothing could be of more relevance to us than to see how God does want us to lead our family lives and how he warns us clearly not to go.

[15 : 49] When we think not just of responsibilities we have as parents for our families now, but also the implications that our family legacies can still have for generations.

A big responsibility, isn't it? And that's so for parents, especially for fathers, because despite what our government just decided last week, that fathers are not essential, according to God, the chief responsibility for our families is in the hands of fathers.

But not just for fathers and parents, for all of us, because family life is the bedrock for church family life. Even if we ourselves don't have families and children, we all have responsibilities to one another.

But also, the Bible is very clear that the health of individual families is always lined up with the health of the whole church family. One can't be strong without the other, can it? And that's why in the pastoral epistles so much emphasis on leadership in the church family is put, if you're going to lead God's household, there must be a real pattern of leadership in the family house.

So let's learn from the lesson of Lot's family legacy and let's see what the text flags up to us about Lot's family leadership because leadership leads to legacy.

[17 : 15] And we see, when we read through the stories of Lot and Abraham, we see a huge contrast between these two men. If I can put it like this, in Genesis 12 to 19, we have a picture of two men and their families, part of the same church family that began in the same fellowship together, but traveling in very different directions and taking their families with them in those different directions and taking their family legacy in those different directions.

That's what we see. And there are many points of contrast. Many, many are flagged up for us as we read through these stories. But let me just point out five. And they all begin with C, just so you can remember them.

First, Lot's conduct. And by that I mean the household values that are exhibited by these two men, Abraham and Lot. The family morality that prevails in their homes and the motivation for it. We think about Abraham first. We have a picture, don't we, of simplicity and consistency. It's summed up, isn't it, in chapter 18, verse 19, where God says, I've chosen Abraham so that he may lead his children and his household to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice. And that indeed is the picture that we see in Abraham's family, isn't it? Of course, Abraham isn't perfect. We've seen that. He's made mistakes. He gets things wrong. But there is a simplicity and a consistency about his life.

[18 : 44] God says to Abraham, walk before me and be blameless, in chapter 17. And we see Abraham doing just that. He knows the way of God. He trusts the way of God.

And he follows the way of God. God says, circumcise yourself and your whole household. And in chapter 17, verse 26, we read, Abraham obeys that very day.

And that simple consistency displays the true motivation for Abraham's morality, doesn't it? It all comes from love and trust of God himself because Abraham is God's friend.

And he loves the Lord. He wants to please him. And it's also positive, isn't it? It's a joyful obedience to God for his sake. As 1 John 5 says, this is the love of God that we keep his commandments.

And his commandments are not burdensome. Not when they spring from real love and real knowledge of God our Father. But Lot's conduct is quite a contrast, isn't it?

[19 : 49] It's both complex and inconsistent. He's living in the midst of Sodom and the world's culture has clearly blunted his conscience, made his moral life much less straightforward.

So we saw, didn't we, in chapter 19, that he's still horrified by the worst excesses of Sodom's behavior. Verse 7 of chapter 19, he says, don't act so wickedly.

And yet in the very next verse, he's throwing his daughters out to be mauled by the mob. He'd kept his daughters pure for marriage, we're told that. But one wonders if his motivation for that was far less love for God and his ways than a desire for social approval.

And that's often true, isn't it? Respectability and not righteousness is very often our motivation for our behavior, if we're honest. Isn't that right? We can't do that.

What will people think? Rather than, we can't do that, what would the Lord think? It's easy for us as Christians to begin to direct our conduct, our family morality, in a far more defensive kind of moralism and conservatism than it is real zeal for the heart of God and honor for his ways.

[21 : 06] Don't you find that? But that's why it all becomes so negative. And it's when our moral values are adrift from our love to God himself that commands from God become burdensome to us and to our children.

Because you see, our children will sense it, won't they? They're not stupid. They'll sense whether our household conduct, our morality is real, zeal for the Lord, or whether it's just hollow moralism. And if it is, they'll rebel against it, won't they? Maybe that was the root of the disdain of Lot's daughters for Lot that led to this dreadful scene that we read.

And we need to think about that, you know, especially as parents because children aren't fools. They'll sense our hearts so very easily. They'll know if our household morality, if our real conduct rings true.

And they'll equally see if we're just going through the Christian motions. We're just coming to church because, well, that's what we do. But there's no real enthusiasm there, no zeal for the Lord himself. They'll see it.

[22 : 15] Our conduct in leading our families, our morality and its motivations will leave a legacy. Is it simple and consistent?

Is it walking in the ways of the Lord for his sake? Or is it complex and inconsistent, keeping up appearances for our own sake? two choices.

By this I mean the priorities and the ambitions that we exhibit to our families and therefore for them and in them. Abraham, as we've seen, made the same choice that Joshua later made when he said, as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

And what that meant for Abraham was that clearly it would be not serving the delights of Sodom's society. Do you remember back in chapter 14 verse 22, Abraham determined that he would take nothing from the hand of the king of Sodom after he'd rescued him.

I've lifted my hand, he said, in loyalty to the Lord most high. And Sodom was going to have absolutely no hold whatsoever on Abraham. Now that was a costly choice for Abraham, wasn't it?

[23 : 27] To forego the city and its wares and to live instead in a smelly tent in the desert.

Abraham's wife had to make her own clothes, she had to milk goats and all sorts of things like that, while Lot's wife, no doubt, was shopping in Selfridges and chatting to her friends in Starbucks.

I'm sure there were many, many legitimate pleasures that were out of reach and forfeited for the sake of a calling by God to something far more important upon Abraham's life.

Because Abraham's ambitions and his priorities for his family were spiritual ones. And because they were what they were, everything else must be in second place.

Second to what matters for eternity. But not so with Lot. We've seen that, haven't we? Lot's heart, though righteous, was still very much in the thrall of what Sodom had to offer in the here and now.

As one writer says, Lot's life is the life of one in the grip of the world, even though he loved it with a bad conscience. And Peter tells us that Lot was vexed by the evil that he saw and heard in Sodom and yet he was so entangled with it that in the very day of disaster we read last time, do you remember, he lingered.

[24 : 54] Because the loves of this world were living on in his life so very powerfully. And also in his family. His wife even more so for her own disaster. And his daughters, as we've seen, clearly they had imbibed far, far more of Sodom's ways than Lot had ever wanted them to.

But if Lot was inconsistent in his conduct, he was consistent in his choices, wasn't he? All through, we've seen that, right back to chapter 13 where we're told Lot chose for himself the Jordan Valley with all its value and gain in the world's eyes.

Despite the clear danger that we're told the men of Sodom were wicked in the eyes of the Lord. And the New Testament again says these things are written for us.

I don't know about you, but I've never met a Christian father who said, I want my children to drift away from the Lord and become lovers of pleasure and hedonism and chasers of worldly gain and influence.

I've never met a father who said that to me of his desire for his children. But I have known many parents who have shouted that aloud in the choices that they've made for their families and for themselves as they themselves have put good career moves or a good house move or ambition for their children's sporting ability or musical ability or academic ability or whatever it is.

[26 : 27] Put these things before their spiritual ambitions for their children and for their own lives. Serving with the Lord's people and putting these things above all things.

See, Lot made a great business move when he moved to Sodom but God just wasn't in the equation, not at all. No doubt, Lot was able to say, oh, I've prayed about it. I'm quite sure, Lot was able to say, I have great peace in my heart about it.

But friends, those are two utterly meaningless phrases and they're usually used by Christians to prevent any sort of rational discussion and to claim support for very dubious decisions.

Are your choices for you and your family more about possessing the things of the world, the things of the here and now, or being possessed by the Lord of heaven and earth for now and forever?

It's a big question, isn't it? Third, Lot's concerns. And by this, I mean the things that fill a man's mind and heart and vision because these are the things also that fill a Christian's prayers, aren't they?

[27 : 39] When we look at Abraham, we see a big man, don't we? With a big heart. He has great concerns. He's a man who wants to save cities. And he's utterly God-centered and outward-looking in his prayers.

And his concerns reflect the heart of God. They're full of mercy and compassion. And his prayers, well, they're even for his enemies, for his rivals.

And he strives and intercedes in prayer with God for these cities of the plain. He's full of appeals to God's character and his mercy because he knows him and he trusts him. He's like the servant in Jesus' parable of the talents in Matthew 25 who knows his master and wants to enter his master's joy.

And in his prayers he exhibits that boldness and yet also a true humility of someone who knows God. He strives with God. He knows, though, that God is sovereign. He knows when to stop praying.

He's in tune with God. That's Abraham. What about Lot? Well, there's none of that, is there? He's a small man.

[28 : 49] His concerns are totally self-centered, aren't they? Inward-looking. There's no great reflection of God's character there. No great reflection of God's mercy in his prayers.

He's totally taken up with himself. In verse 20 of chapter 19, yes, Lot also prays that God would spare the city of Zoar, but only for his own sake so he could go and live there. He doesn't care about the place.

He only cares about his own skin. Abraham was praying, Lord, save their souls. But Lot was praying, Lord, save my skin. And at minimum cost.

He wants to get far enough away from Sodom to be safe, but he wants to stay near enough to get back if anything looks up. It's all because he's got such a totally wrong view of God, isn't it?

He's like that third servant in Jesus' parable of the talents who just hid it in the ground and did nothing because he thought his master was a hard man. And Lot seems to have such a wrong view of God's character.

[29 : 49] nothing will induce him to go to the hills to join Abraham to the place where God lives with his friends. And in that respect, friends, you know, he's like a lot of Christians, isn't he?

He wants the salvation that God can deliver, but he doesn't really want too much to do with God himself. I call it third-party Christianity.

You want an insurance policy but at minimum cost. You want to insure against the big disaster but you don't want to have to pay the full price of fully comprehensive discipleship.

And that's what a lot of Christian parents want for their children, if we're very honest, isn't it? What we really want for them is the best education and the best start in life and the best career, the best marriage and the best lifestyle.

And often, we'll put pursuit of these things and we'll put effort into seeking these things way, way ahead of investing in the spiritual development of discipleship in our children, especially, especially if that'll disadvantage them in the pursuit of other things.

[31 : 01] Isn't that right? We provide just enough for third-party Christianity. We want win-win, pursuing the world's reward and then when the crunch comes, slipping into heaven quite safe.

But you see, that's a real delusion, you know. Jesus tells us that. There is no third-party Christianity. You can't serve two masters because the concerns that fill your life and therefore fill your prayers for yourself and your family, they won't suddenly change, you know.

What you are, you will become forever. The things that fill your horizon and my horizons in life now, those are the things that are going to fill our horizons for eternity.

So it's a good question to ask, isn't it? What are the concerns that fill our minds in our hearts and our prayers for our families and our prayer meetings as a church?

Are they God-centered, outward-looking things of eternal significance? Or are they often full of self-centered, inward-looking things? Things that in the end, in eternity, won't matter a hoot.

[32 : 21] Our concerns, our prayers, those things also shape our legacies. Fourth, what character? By that I mean the witness and the impact of his personal life to others.

See, our prayers are important, but the Bible says that our lives speak. Our lives speak to God and they speak to other people as well, don't they? And Abraham's life, we read, certainly spoke to God. Chapter 18, verse 19, God says, I know him.

And we've read of the influence that Abraham's prayers have with God and his interceding for Sodom. But his personal stature also spoke to others of God. We'll see that very clearly when we come to chapter 21.

Abimelech, the Philistine king, says to him, God is clearly with you in everything that you do. It was obvious. In chapter 23, when Sarah dies and Abraham's seeking to buy a burial place, he says to the Hittites, I'm just a sojourner among you.

And what do they say? No, you're a prince of God among us. His life spoke to them. That's a believer whose character counts for God, isn't it?

[33 : 29] And we've all known believers whose godliness is so evident that it speaks. People who are princes with God. I can think of so many men in my own life whose lives have had that kind of impact on me as a boy and as a young man.

Women as well, yes. But of course, boys and young men, they need the character witness of men like that, don't they? When we were young, all of our holidays were spent up in the west coast of Scotland on a sheep farm.

And we all stayed in one room and early in the morning, much earlier than my parents wanted to get out of bed on holiday, I would be up and out. As soon as we went downstairs, the farmer's wife would shut the door and never let us back up to our parents.

Couldn't understand it then, but what a great woman she was, my goodness. But I remember and I'll never forget, sometimes in those early mornings in the front room of that farmhouse seeing a great big burly shepherd down on his knees praying at his chair before he started the day's work.

And the import, the impact that that had on a young boy of seeing a great big man, no Jesse man, a big man and a real man, a man I admired and looked up to, to see him down on his knees in his shepherd's gear in his tackety boots and all, head in his hands praying for his family, for his workers and I don't know what for else.

[34 : 56] I remember the same thing sometimes as a little boy going into my father's study and seeing him there on his knees, maybe on a Sunday morning in prayer. But I doubt Lot's family ever saw much of that.

I wonder what you think. Seems that Lot's character actually made his whole witness totally ineffective. Do you remember at the crucial time when he was sent out to preach the message of salvation and rescue to his sons-in-law?

What did they think? They just thought he was joking. His witness was absolutely emasculated by a lifestyle that must have been thoroughly counter-evangelistic.

That's a real tragedy, isn't it? It's a tragedy when friends or neighbors or family members. They're inoculated against anything that we might say of the truth about God because our lives speak so much louder than our words ever can.

I had a friend and classmate who was not a Christian and he lived next door to somebody who turned out to be an elder in the church.

[36 : 08] but so obnoxious and difficult was that neighbor who was the elder in the church that my friend actually had to move his house and his family and go and live somewhere else because it was having such a dreadful effect on all of them living next to these people.

Is it any wonder then that my friend would never come to church? It's worth thinking about, isn't it? It's an important question for us. What is our personal life saying? Saying to our children, to our workmates, to our neighbors and so on.

Is there any sign in our home life, in our work life that we actually take God seriously, that God is real? Because what we are will speak much, much louder than what we say.

Especially as far as our legacy within our own families is concerned. We've no right, have we, as parents? We have no right at all to expect our children to be more godly and more committed and more zealous from the Lord than we are going to be.

That would be ridiculous, wouldn't it? And God says in that, as in so many other areas of life, we reap what we sow. I suppose all of these things can be summed up in the final one, Lot's citizenship.

[37 : 27] That is, where a person's heart is really set on being at home. And again, there's a huge gulf between these two men, Abraham and Lot. It's epitomized really, isn't it, in the striking difference that there is between the first verse of chapter 18 and the first verse of chapter 19, when the heavenly visitors arrive.

In chapter 18, Abraham is sitting at the gate of his tent, whereas in chapter 19, Lot is sitting in the gate of Sodom. And that tells a story of huge significance, doesn't it?

The one is entrenched in an earthly city, fully attached to it in all its ways, increasingly at home in Sodom, despite uneasiness about its values, whereas the other is living as an exile, as a sojourner in the earth, in tents, fully detached from the drawing power of Sodom.

Not because he despises the settled life and houses and that sort of thing, but no, Hebrews 11 tells us plainly, because he desired a better country, that is, a heavenly one.

He desired and looked for a city whose architect and builder is God. Abraham was happy to be a stranger in exile on earth, and yet he was at home and absolutely at ease with God.

[38 : 45] And yet Lot, who was increasingly at ease in Sodom, is increasingly ill at ease with God, isn't he? There's such a contrast in the atmosphere in chapter 18 and chapter 19 when the heavenly visitors come.

Abraham is easily discussing with God, sitting and eating, and it's a wonderful scene. Lot is panicked to get them out of the village square and into his house for safety.

Lot has all the mod cons and the culture of a great city like Sodom. Abraham just has tents, but Abraham, Abraham, we're told, was camped beside the altar of the Lord, wasn't he?

By the oaks of Mamre. And so, while Lot sat in Sodom's gate pondering the things of the world, Abraham sat waiting on God and pondering his word.

And his family grew up with God's altar right at the very center of everything and a consciousness and the concerns of God's covenant defining the direction of their lives, whereas Lot's family at best, while God's concerns must have been quite peripheral, mustn't they?

[39 : 59] It's quite a question to ask, isn't it? Would a visitor to our homes tell where the center of gravity and the center of our family life really is situated? Paul says to us, doesn't he, our citizenship is in heaven?

But how would people know that? It's interesting, isn't it, that for one thing, the coming of God's messengers to Abraham's camp was greeted with such joy and excitement.

We have a sense Abraham wanting to provide the best and waiting expectantly to see what would transpire, whereas when they encounter Lot, their coming seems to just produce a huge problem.

The whole episode is something of a burden because it exposes, doesn't it, Lot and his true world. That's often true with Christians, isn't it? People begin to find that the things of God become an intrusion into their lives.

Coming to church, for example, becomes a bit of a chore. It's wearying. Same with Bible study or prayer. Or maybe somebody comes to visit you. Maybe an elder or somebody else wants to talk about your Christian walk, your spiritual life, and it just becomes awkward.

[41 : 12] You just don't want it. You want rid of that sort of thing. You see, the New Testament says that our citizenship is in heaven. Then our heart, it says, should be set on these things above.

And that means that the coming of opportunities to hear God's words from his messengers, whoever they are, these should be the sort of things that ignite our interest and our excitement.

We'll be welcomers of the word, won't we, like the Thessalonian church was?

Does the eagerness of Abraham's welcome of these visitors, does that mark your eagerness to meet the Lord among his people as you come to church? Are we welcomers of the word like that?

You see, all of these things in our life and especially in the leadership of our families, all of these things are giveaway signs of whether our lives are focused on the altar of God or on the altars of this passing world.

And again, friends, I am especially speaking here to fathers. I know that sometimes for a variety of reasons mothers have to play that role on their own. But we who are fathers especially can't dodge this simple reality.

[42 : 25] It is our family leadership that will yield our family legacy. And Moses wrote these things the way he did displaying the deliberate contrast between these two men for a clear purpose.

And the Spirit of God preserved these things in Scripture for that purpose for us. Firstly, as a warning. A warning to believers who want to have the best of both worlds.

It isn't possible. Jesus confirms it. You cannot serve two masters. You cannot serve God and mammon this world. Lot's way always, always leads to a legacy of disaster.

So be warned. Know where your true citizenship is. You're a Christian. You're a stranger and an exile in this world. And you always will be.

And the world, friends, will never accept you. Remember chapter 19 verse 9. Sodom's men rejected Lot, didn't they?

[43 : 26] You're just a foreigner, they said. This world will never accept you but it will be happy to ruin you. So don't go that way for your own sake but also for your family.

But secondly, he wrote these things as an encouragement, didn't he? Follow Abraham's example. Godliness with contentment, Paul tells us, is great gain. It really doesn't matter where you live or what you have or what you haven't got if God's altar is at the heart of your sojourn here on earth.

If Jesus Christ, through whom we have fellowship with the Father in heaven, if he is the center of our family life, then nothing else matters. Living like that and looking forward to God's city, making the Lord the real head of our household, following him unashamedly for all to see, for our children, for our spouse, for our friends and neighbors, that's the way to live.

Let our citizenship direct our choices and our conduct and fill our prayers, our concerns and shape our character.

And lead like that, says God to us today, as a true follower of Jesus, as a fully comprehensive disciple, not as a third party Christian. And the Lord will, by grace, honor all those who so honor him.

[44 : 58] And that's a promise. But as we close, one last thing. Maybe you're sitting here today and you're saying, yeah, I can see all that, but it's too late for me because I'm a lot.

And that is my life story and it is my family legacy and it's a mess. Or maybe you're sitting here and you're saying, well, I actually am a product of that kind of family.

Is there any hope for me? Am I cursed because of my parents' lack of obedience? Is there only blight for someone like me? I'm sure there are some here sitting, thinking just that this morning. If that's you, listen to this. Remember. Remember that this story is just part of a much bigger story, isn't it? It's not just the story of Lot's family leadership or Lot's family legacy, is it?

The story of Genesis. Right from the beginning, back in Genesis chapter 3, it's been the story of something much bigger, the Lord's family line. It's the story, isn't it, of the promised seed, the one to come, who at last would destroy the curse and reverse the curse of sin and bring restoration and bring healing and bring salvation and bring wholeness and new life to all who will trust in him.

[46 : 20] And listen to this. Even though Lot's legacy was a disaster for his own family and for generations, and even though the Moabites and the Ammonites were so vile that they were not to be admitted to the Lord's house forever, when you read through the Old Testament story, do you know what you find?

What you find is that both Moabites and Ammonites appear in the family tree of our Lord Jesus Christ. From Solomon's disobedient marriage to an Ammonite woman came Rehoboam, his son, an ancestor of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And remember, King David's grandmother. There's a whole book about it. The book of Ruth. Ruth the Moabitess who sought the Lord, the God of Israel.

Isn't that extraordinary? Yes, it is extraordinary. And what it says to us, friends, is this. Such is the grace and the mercy of our marvelous God that he is willing to get involved even in the worst mess that we can possibly make of our lives.

And out of that mess and that disastrous legacy that it leaves, our God can turn it into something beautiful in his hands. Something to bring extraordinary blessing way above and beyond anything that we could ever think or imagine.

[47 : 50] And if God can take even the blood of a Moabite and an Ammonite into the precious blood of his own son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to reverse the disastrous legacy of Lot.

And you know, by his grace, there's absolutely nothing that he can't do to bring beauty out of ashes from the greatest messes that you and I could possibly make of our lives if we humbly trust him. Never forget the words of chapter 18, verse 14. Is anything too hard for the Lord? The answer is a resounding no to anyone who will trust him.

Let's pray. Lord, you are the God of grace who can restore even the years the locusts have eaten. And so we lay our many failures before you as a fellowship and as families and as fathers.

We ask, Lord, that you would forgive us by your mercy and ask that you would even bring glory to yourself from the follies of our pasts. But help us today, we pray, and strengthen us for tomorrow that we may lead our lives and lead our loved ones with renewed vision.

[49 : 22] Self upon the cross, Christ upon the throne, and live with your altar ever before us that our legacy may yet be one of blessing and praise in this world to the one who has rescued us and loved us and made us citizens of the world to come.

and we ask it all for the glory of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Thank you.