

# The Church's Abiding Message to the World

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[ 0 : 00 ] We're going to turn now to our Bibles, and if you don't have reach of a Bible, there's some at the sides here and scattered around the building. It'll help you a great deal if you can follow on.

We've been studying together in the book of Genesis, and we've come to Genesis chapter 19. Last time, chapter 18, we saw that God giving circumcision to Abraham and his family led immediately to mission.

God calls his covenant family into being, his church, to share his mission to the world. And Abraham was called God's friend, and therefore he was made a prophet who speaks to men for God, and also a priest who speaks to God for men and women.

At the end of chapter 18, we saw that demonstrated in Abraham's great intercession for the city of Sodom and the other places. But what is the message of that mission of the church?

Well, that's the answer. The answer to that question really is seen here in chapter 19, and it's given to us in a very vivid and dramatic way.

[ 1 : 16 ] And it is, of course, a very serious chapter indeed. So we're going to read verses 1 to 29 of Genesis 19. The two angels, that is, those who'd been sent by God to investigate Sodom, came to Sodom in the evening.

And Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed himself with his face to the earth and said, My lords, please turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night and wash your feet.

Then you may rise up early and go on your way. They said, No, we'll spend the night in the town square. But he pressed them strongly. So they turned aside to him and entered his house, and he made them a feast and baked unleavened bread.

And he ate. But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house.

And they called to Lot, Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them. Or your translation may say that we may have sex with them.

[ 2 : 28 ] Lot went out to the men at the entrance and shut the door after him and said, I beg to you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Behold, I have two daughters who have not known any man.

Let me bring them out to you and do to them as you please. Only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof. But they said, Stand back.

And they said, This fellow came to sojourn, and he has become the judge. Now we will deal worse with you than with them. And then they pressed hard against the man, Lot, and drew near to break the door down.

But the men reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them and shut the door.

And they struck with blindness the men who were at the entrance of the house, both small and great, so that they wore themselves out, groping for the door.

And then the men said to Lot, Have you anyone else here, sons-in-law, sons, daughters, anyone you have in the city? Bring them out of the place, for we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the Lord, and the Lord has sent us to destroy it.

[ 3 : 43 ] So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, up, get out of this place, for the Lord is about to destroy the city. But they seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting.

As morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, Up, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be swept away in the punishment of the city. But he lingered.

So the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the Lord being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city. As they brought them out, one said, Escape for your life.

Do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away. The Lord said to them, Oh no, my lords, behold, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life.

But I cannot escape to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me and I die. Behold, this city is near enough to flee to, and it's a little one.

[ 4 : 48 ] Let me escape there. Is it not a little one? And my life will be spared? He said to him, Behold, I grant you this favor also, that I will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken.

Escape there quickly, for I can do nothing until you arrive there. Therefore, the name of the city was called Zor. The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zor.

Then the Lord rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah, sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven. And he overthrew those cities and all the valley and all the inhabitants of the cities and what grew on the ground.

But Lot's wife behind him looked back, and she became a pillar of salt. And Abraham went up early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the Lord.

And he looked down towards Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the valley. And he looked, and behold, the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace.

[ 6 : 06 ] So it was that when God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow when he overthrew the cities in which Lot had lived.

Amen. May God bless to us this solemn word from his word and help us to heed and understand its message.

There has only ever been one gospel. Paul tells us it was announced in advance to Abraham. And it rings out unchanging from Genesis here right through to Revelation, where it's encapsulated in those words of the angel that we read at the beginning.

When John sees an angel with an eternal gospel to proclaim to every nation, tribe, and language, and people on earth. And it's this. Fear God. Give him glory.

For the hour of his judgment has come. And Genesis 19 is a chapter preserved in Scripture to give us a vivid, dramatic picture of what the true gospel is really all about.

[ 7 : 33 ] It tells us so clearly what is the church's abiding message to the world. Whether in Abraham's day, or Jesus' day, or indeed in our own day.

It tells us the gospel is not an interesting offer to be discussed. Rather, it is an urgent command to be obeyed without delay unless unimaginable horror is to follow.

And that message is variously articulated through the Scriptures, but it is universally consistent.

Flee from the wrath to come. It's how John the Baptist put it in Matthew chapter 3.

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. It's how Jesus began his own ministry. Save yourselves from this corrupt generation. Peter's words on the day of Pentecost.

Or in the words of the angelic messengers here in this chapter, verse 15, Verse 17, Escape for your life.

[ 8 : 40 ] Do not look back, lest you be swept away. There's a very solemn chapter. But it's one we must take seriously because God's prophets, and his apostles, and Jesus himself, all take it very seriously.

They all preached the message of this chapter. And we must hear it because it is God's abiding message to the world through his church.

So we're going to look at what the text of the story says to us, and then the lessons that the Bible itself draws to apply its message to us.

Narrative falls into three very clear sections. So first, in verses 1 to 11, we see an ample demonstration of Sodom's wickedness.

These verses serve to display the justice of God and the judge of all the earth who Abraham has told us in chapter 18, verse 25, must and will always judge only with absolute justice.

[ 9 : 50 ] And these verses demonstrate for us the appalling depravity of a society and a culture that has become utterly, irredeemably evil.

Verses 1 to 3 begin, well, with a righteous man, but in an evil city. Very like the start of chapter 18. Visitors approach, just as they had to Abraham.

But Abraham's nephew Lot isn't sitting in the door to his tent. He has now abandoned the life of the stranger in exile. Back in chapter 13, you'll remember, we were told that he moved his tent quite near to Sodom.

But now, look at verse 3, he's got real estate. He's got a house in Sodom. And he's got a position of standing. We're told he's sitting in the city gate. That's where the elders sat to make policy, to discuss judgments and so on.

So he was in the city chambers of the day. Lot is now a senior counselor in Sodom. Maybe he'd cashed in on his relative Abraham's kudos as the savior of the five cities.

[10:56] Remember in chapter 14? We don't know. But at any rate, he is fully integrated into Sodom society. And yet, he is clearly also not entirely comfortable.

He doesn't really belong in a place like this. Peter tells us that plainly in 2 Peter chapter 2. Lot was a righteous man. He was greatly distressed by the wickedness all around him in Sodom.

This thing is he saw the things that he heard. And you can see that in verse 3. He's very agitated. These angels want to just sleep in the city square.

Well, after all, it's warm and pleasant. It'd be safe inside the city from any wild animals, from any wandering bandits. But no, Lot will not have that.

He pressed them strongly. He insisted they come into his home for safety. Why this unease? Why this sense of urgency?

[11:55] Well, verses 4 to 8 make it very plain that Lot had very good reason to be uneasy. For all his haste to get these men out of sight and into his house, word had already got out that these quality men had come into town and were lodging with Lot.

And such was the appalling depravity of this place. Verse 4 says, The men of the city, the men of Sodom, young and old, all of the people to the last man from a mob that is intent on a violent, violent orgy of homosexual gang rape.

That's what's being talked about here. Bring them out that we may know them. The NIV translates that correctly, that we may have sex with them.

That's plain from verse 8 where he speaks of his two daughters who have not known any man yet. They're virgins. This is a really appalling scene. It's not just that the Bible condemns homosexual practice, which it does consistently through Old Testament and New Testament, but this is far, far worse.

This is rape. This is something abhorrent in every ancient Oriental culture, not just in Israel. Notice what the writer is telling us.

[13:15] This is an ample demonstration of what God had said in chapter 18, verse 20, that the outcry of Sodom's sin was so great it had come up to God.

This is the solemn proof now of what Abraham had hoped would not be so. What did Abraham sought in chapter 18? Just ten righteous men and God said he would spare the city. But what is the reality?

Look at verse 4. All the men, young and old, all to the last man are flagrant in their wickedness. It's just as Paul quotes, isn't it, from the psalmist in Romans chapter 3.

None is righteous. No, not one. There is no fear of God before the eyes of these men. And that's why, as Paul also says in the opening chapter of Romans, which he calls the gospel of God, he says, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

You can read it later. It's all of the peace with Genesis 19. There's no question of the horror of this place, Sodom. The whole atmosphere is one of rank evil.

[14:35] Though we can see why Lot is so desperate in verse 6. He goes outside to face them to try and protect his guests because he knows just how serious they are about it.

This is not a joke. This is deadly danger. Which is why he was left with this awful alternative of throwing his two daughters to them to satisfy their lusts instead.

Isn't that terrible? But you see, Lot's got himself into a position where the only choices that are open to him are awful ones, terrible ones.

And that can sometimes happen to other believers like Lot when they allow themselves to be carried along to places that they know they're not at home and they don't belong and yet somehow they acquiesce all the same.

Only terrible choices. It's appalling. When you read the end of the story as we will next time about Lot and his daughters, you can't help wondering if they lost all respect for their father from that moment on.

[15:40] How could they not be disgusted and betrayed? Maybe Lot was hoping that his future sons-in-law mentioned in verse 14 who must have been in the crowd if every man was there that somehow they would exercise some restraint on them all if they saw their fiancées thrown out like hunks of meat.

But either way, what a horrible, what a sordid business. And in any case, it was to no avail. Verses 9-11 just further demonstrate the absolute rampancy of the evil.

The Lord pleads with them, don't act so wickedly. Verse 7. But instead of bringing them to repentance, they're just provoked all the more. How dare you lecture us, they're saying. We're going to do to you even worse than we're doing to them.

What on earth that could be? Goodness knows. And Lot is only saved by the supernatural intervention of the men, the angels who are now revealed for who they really are in verses 10 and 11.

And yet, look at verse 11. Even when they're struck with blindness, probably some dazzling light to confuse them and disorient them, even then, such is the frenzy of their sin that they still go on groping for the door trying to get in, refusing to heed even that intimation of judgment, but just raging against everything that's good and holy and just.

[17:08] It's a terribly fearful picture, isn't it, of human sin? Not just pursuing sinful lusts and horrible things, but the pride, the persistence, the sheer celebration at the heart of it.

And that's not just the ancient Sodom, is it? That's humanity, that's human societies, all throughout history and still today. Paul says in Romans chapter 1, though they know God's decree, they not only do evil, but they give approval to those who do evil with pride.

God keep every chance for Sodom, this city, to be seen in the best possible light. The angels assume the best, don't they, when they come? It's safe to stay out in the open square. Lot does everything he can do to try and restrain the evil in the city, and yet it's all to no avail.

And there's nothing but rank wickedness, real depravity. And it would have been worse still, wouldn't it, had it not been for God's restraint by striking these men blind?

And that's always true in our world, by the way. Our world would be far, far worse were it not for God's merciful hand of restraint on evil. We see glimpses of how bad it could be all of the time, sometimes, when he lifts that restraining hand in order to expose evil for what it really is.

[18:38] And we see how terrible sin is, how deep the curse is that we brought on the world. But without the restraining hand of God, just as here, without the restraining hand of these angels, things would have been far worse, and our world would not last another day without destroying itself.

This is one of the darkest passages in Scripture, although it is not unique. And we won't linger on it longer, but it's here for a purpose.

It is an ample demonstration of the sheer evil of the cities and of the unquestionable justice of God in judging them as he did.

The judge of all the earth, as Abraham said, will and always will do right. And when God's sword of judgment falls, it is never capricious, it is never hasty, it is never unrighteous.

That was so important for Moses' people Israel to know who he was writing for. Because Moses told them about their role in administering God's justice against Canaanite cities when they were going to enter the land.

[19:56] He'd said to Abraham that only when the sins of the Amorites had reached their full measure would Israel enter the land as his instruments of justice, not for their own imperialism.

He says clearly in Deuteronomy chapter 9, not because of your righteousness are you going to possess the land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the Lord your God is driving out from before you and to confirm the promise to your fathers.

God doesn't want his people to ever get any ideas of their own superiority or any sort of false favoritism. God is a God of absolute justice.

That's important, isn't it, for us to remember because even as Christians sometimes we can question God's justice. People sometimes say, how could God punish someone forever?

Eternal punishment. Surely that proves that God is unfair and unjust. No. God is just and God will be shown to be just in the end.

[ 21 : 06 ] Just as here, there will be ample, abundant demonstration of the sinfulness and the wickedness that demands his judgment. The judge of all the earth is just and he does justly.

And he will be demonstrated to be just and only just in all his judgment on all human sin and wickedness. And that is the church's abiding message to the world because it's the Bible's consistent message.

It's God's consistent message to the world. God's judgment. But it's not the whole story because God is also merciful.

And the next section describes in verses 12 to 22 an astonishing deliverance from Sodom's wickedness. They display the extraordinary and the absolute mercy of God as reluctant Lot is literally dragged out of the conflagration and brought to safety.

C.S. Lewis once famously described himself in his own conversion from atheism. He said he was the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England. But surely what we see here in Lot's deliverance must be the most reluctant convert of all time ever.

[ 22 : 32 ] And yet, you see, in this sorry picture of Lot, Derek Kidner says, rightly, that all believers, all believers have good reason to see ourselves and our own salvation in the hands of the sheer sovereign grace and mercy of the Lord, who rescues from the gaping jaws of judgment those who are saved only by his sheer mercy.

Notice the pattern of God's mercy in this great deliverance, because there's both a gospel proclamation and there's gospel propulsion. Salvation is of God, and it is of God alone from the beginning to the very end by sheer sovereign mercy. See, in verses 12 and 13, there's proclamation of the gospel message, isn't there? Judgment is coming. It can't be averted.

The outcry is so great, the Lord will and must destroy this place. See, God's grace and his love warns people before it happens that judgment is coming. And that's the gospel Jesus preached. Repent before it's too late. That's the apostolic message through and through. Do you remember what Paul said in Athens? The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent because he has fixed the day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man he has appointed. God's grace and his mercy issues in a proclamation, a warning of the reality of God's wrath and a command, an urgent command to respond. And you see it here. Look again and again. Verse 12, get out before it's too late. Verse 14, up, get out of this place. Verse 15, up, lest you be swept away.

Verse 17, escape for your life. Escape to the hills. Verse 22, again, escape quickly. You see again and again God's gracious warning. Flee from the wrath that is coming. You see how urgent that eternal gospel message really is. And yet how gracious, even at this late hour, mercy is offered to Lot and his whole extended family. Verse 12, sons, daughters, sons-in-law, anyone, anyone you have in this city.

[ 25 : 07 ] We don't know if there were other daughters or those two that were still at home or others or just the two prospective sons-in-law, but either way, what grace because those people were in that vile mob.

And yet Lot goes out now and proclaims to them, warns them. He proclaims the gospel to them in verse 14. And give Jesus, at the very last supper, pleading with him, even the enemy, offering mercy.

And yet as there so it was here in verse 14, they thought it all just a hilarious joke. Judgment coming, God's wrath coming, punishment for sin. Don't expect us to believe in that nonsense. What a joke.

The world hasn't changed very much, has it? There'll be no judgment. Or if there is, God can't touch us. If he thinks he can, bring it on. That's how it was in the first century. Peter reminds us in his second letter.

But they forget, he says, the history of the world and the real and terrible judgments in the past that happened as warnings about a judgment far worse that is still to come for the world.

[ 26 : 30 ] To all Lot's extended family, just ignore the warning. It's very telling, isn't it, on Lot? Have they not seen anything in that man's life, in his home, in his personal testimony, nothing in him to suggest that God was actually real, that God should be taken seriously?

It seems not, isn't it? It's a tragic thing when a Christian has a chance to bear witness to the truth of the gospel, but their life has just slipped so far from being anyone of real godliness that, well, their words just fall on deaf ears.

They've been robbed of any real power. So the grace and the mercy in that proclamation of the saving message largely goes unheard.

Even, it seems, in Lot's own house, they have to be forced into being delivered themselves. Gospel grace propels them out of Sodom.

Verse 15, look, the crack of dawn, the very last moment, it seems Lot's still asleep. He's just hoping it's all not going to happen. It's just a bad dream. Up, says the angel, save yourself from this twisted and tainted generation.

[ 27 : 47 ] But look at verse 16, he lingered. I mean, it's barely believable. Until, of course, you realize just how powerful the hold of sin is on the hearts of men and women, on our own hearts.

Lot lingers in the face of God's grace, and they have to be literally propelled, dragged out, one in each hand, says verse 16. The Lord being merciful to him.

And even then, verse 18. Having lingered in the face of God's grace, he now seeks to limit God's merciful provision. Oh, no, Lord, I can't do it. I don't want to go to the hills.

I don't want to go to the land of promise where Abraham lives. I don't want that whole package and being part of God's people. Look, verse 20, here's just a little place.

Surely you can spare that, and I can just happily live there. It's pitiful, isn't it? Derek Kidna says, not even Brimstone will make a pilgrim of him.

[ 28 : 53 ] He must have his little Sodom again if life is to be supportable. And friends, the New Testament tells us, doesn't it, that there will be Christians just like that, whose lives in the end have borne no fruit for Christ, nothing that will last at all, and therefore they will.

He says, suffer loss in the world to come, even though they themselves are saved, says Paul, but only as through fire. Just like Lot, dragged into deliverance.

But for all that, don't miss the astonishing deliverance. Don't miss God's extraordinary mercy and patience for this pathetic man, Lot. He is, as Amos the prophet put it, he is a brand plucked from the burning, literally.

And yet that is what the Bible tells us, that every single believer is, a sinner saved from the wrath of God by the sheer grace and mercy of God.

There's surely no more picture anywhere of the free, unmerited grace and mercy of God than in these verses here, is there? I can't think of one. The Lord, verse 16, being merciful to him.

[ 30 : 11 ] He proclaimed his grace in his warning of the coming judgment. And then he propelled the man and his family, against all his hesitations, out to safety.

And the Apostle Paul says to the Christian church, likewise, you were children of wrath. But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us when we were dead in our transgressions, he made us alive together with Christ.

By grace, you've been saved. This is not your doing. It's the gift of God. It's not as a result of your work so that no one can boast.

Astonishing deliverance from wrath and judgment by the sheer sovereign mercy and grace of God. That is the unchanging gospel.

But you see, the last section insists that we should never forget that the eternal gospel will not hide the dreadful abiding reality of the wrath of God.

[ 31 : 24 ] Verses 23 to 29 there, they press home, don't they, the historical fact of the abiding destruction for Sodom's wickedness.

Sodom was given every opportunity to avoid that terrible end. It had lots of influence, such as it was, to no avail. It had been saved once before, hadn't it? By Abraham himself. And God himself refused to judge them just upon hearsay.

But his messengers confirmed the very worst. In fact, the half had not been told. And yet, even then, opportunities to repent were given.

But again, they were spurned. Bring it on, was their attitude. And so, just like before the flood, God sees that he must judge.

And he will judge. And he does, fearfully and completely. And friends, these verses leave us in no doubt that God's wrath against sin is real and terrible.

[ 32 : 34 ] There's nothing remotely metaphorical there in verse 24. No doubt all the natural elements of the region provided the immediate means, the volcanic activity there, the bitumen pits we read of in chapter 14, the salt and the sulfur.

But verse 24 leaves us in no doubt that this is God's doing. The Lord rained down sulfur and fire. Nor is it somehow an impersonal thing, as if some automatic mechanical response happened to sin. It could not be described in more personal terms. The Lord rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah, sulfur and fire, from the Lord out of heaven. Powerful, personal, righteous anger. The wrath of God that the Apostle Paul says is being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness. That is what the eternal gospel of God proclaims, according to Paul in Romans chapter 1.

And according to Moses here in this chapter. And according to all the scriptures and the Lord Jesus himself. And notice the scope. It is universal, verse 25.

[ 33 : 49 ] He overthrew all the cities, the valley, all the inhabitants. Even the vegetation is destroyed. It is universal. And also, verse 26, individual.

Do you see? Lot's wife was not engulfed at random, but because she looked back. That is, she turned back in her heart to cling hold of that corrupt world of Sodom.

Even in its day of judgment and destruction. Having received the knowledge of the truth and salvation, she deliberately turned back. She chose lies and sin.

So that in the words of Hebrews 10, there is no longer any remaining sacrifice for sin, but only fearful expectation of judgment, a fury of fire.

It is truly a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God because God will not be mocked. And so Lot's wife was engulfed by the fire and the sulfur.

[ 35 : 00 ] And when Abraham went back to see the place where he had interceded with God for these cities, he looked, verse 28, and behold, the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace. It was an abiding destruction for centuries, for millennia.

The apostle Jude says these cities serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire. Josephus, the first century historian, said that vestiges of the divine fire can still be seen there. Philo, his contemporary, said likewise. Ruins and cinders, brimstone, smoke, murky flames continue to rise from the ground. And even today, some of you will have seen the whole environment of that Dead Sea area is just a scene of sulfurous devastation.

And yet we were told back in chapter 13, the place looked once like the garden of the Lord, like the garden of Eden. But it's a standing witness, you see, both to the reality of the shocking wickedness in the hearts of unrepentant men and women, but also the terrifying reality of the wrath of the Holy God of heaven.

So there's the story of Sodom's ends. There are two sides to it. The ample demonstration of Sodom's wickedness and God's righteousness. And the abiding destruction of evil by God's just wrath.

[ 36 : 31 ] And yet at the heart of that story, an astonishing deliverance through that amazing mercy of God, through the sovereign proclamation and the sovereign propulsion of the eternal gospel, a word that says to the world, fear God, give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come.

So friends, what are we to learn from all of this? Well, the Bible itself tells us the significance of this story. It explicitly tells us that this story's message is the church's abiding message for the world. And that that message, the gospel, is a warning because love warns about judgment. Love urges action before it's too late. First, it's a warning, obviously, to the world and to societies that have forgotten God, forgotten his ways, refused to repent.

It's a warning that God will not stay his wrath forever. He will investigate. He will be just. But where whole communities and cities and nations and empires, where they persistently flout his laws and scorn his ways and refuse his heralds of mercy, those who do seek to limit the evil, who seek to restore righteousness in the public realm, the realms of sexual behavior, the realms of medical ethics, the realms of spiritual loyalty and so on, where they ignore all of these things, there may well come a time when, as verse 13 says, the outcry against its people becomes so great that the Lord will bring his hand of judgment to fall in time and in history, just as he did here in Sodom.

And the Bible makes that quite clear. To become like Sodom becomes a byword for God's judgment on many nations, on God's destruction of empires that have become so evil and wicked that they are intolerable to him.

[ 38 : 35 ] Babylon, Edom, Moab, all of these are marked out for God's judgment, just like Sodom by God's prophets. Isaiah 13, Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the splendor and the pomp of the Chaldeans will be like Sodom and Gomorrah when God overthrew them.

Its time is close at hand, its days will not be prolonged. And so it was. You can read the history books. And just likewise, the Persian Empire, the Greek Empire, the Roman Empire and many other empires all through history who became just like Sodom.

And we need to pay heed to that warning, especially in the Western world in the 21st century. You read Ezekiel 16, you'll see that Sodom and its downfall all began with a society that the prophet says became proud and indulgent and sick with prosperous ease while it exploited the most needy and became degenerate in its sexual behavior.

Are we in the West today? We need to heed the warning of the eternal gospel for societies like that. It's very sobering. In our governments in recent decades have passed more laws directly flouting biblical morality including sexual morality than any others in history have shown more disdain for human life.

This chapter is a sobering warning to the world. There's no escaping it. But it's also a very sobering warning to the church, to God's own people.

[ 40 : 20 ] Because when the church abandons God's truth and follows ways of the world into wickedness as so often it has done, then the church cannot presume on any kind of spiritual status.

What does Peter say? Judgment begins at the house of God. And repeatedly the prophets call God's people worse than Sodom and Gomorrah.

Even the prophets of Jerusalem, the clergy have become like inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah to me, says the Lord through the prophet Jeremiah.

And Moses himself warns Israel, God's people, that he'll overthrow their land in exactly the way as he did with Sodom and Gomorrah if they abandon his covenant, if they presume on his grace, if they think that, oh, well, we're God's chosen people, we can do what we like.

Not so. And the Lord Jesus warned his people in exactly the same way. Read what we were reading in church this morning, the letters to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3.

[ 41 : 26 ] I know your works, says the Lord. It comes up to my ears and if you will not repent, I, I will come against you. I will remove your lampstand.

I will destroy your church. It's a warning to the church not to become proud and presumptuous. I think that God can be mocked, that God's ways can be abandoned and scorned and he'll just go on smiling benignly on his people.

No. There are so many major Christian denominations that seem to think today that they can do exactly that. Especially, indeed, in this area of promoting sexual perversity and many other direct defiances against God's word and his ways.

Not so. Heed the warning of the eternal gospel. Fear God and give him glory for the hour of his judgment has come.

Don't think because you call yourself a historic church or an established church or a national church or an evangelical church for that matter.

[ 42 : 39 ] Don't think you can flout God's almighty hand. It's to God's church that he said these words through Isaiah the prophet. The look on their faces bears witness against them.

They proclaim their sin like Sodom. They do not hide it. Woe to them. They've brought disaster on themselves, says the Lord of hosts. This passage is a warning to the nations.

And it's a warning to the church. And of course, above all, it's a warning to every single human being. A warning of something far, far worse than this destruction of Sodom that we see here because what we see here was just a temporal judgment.

Physical destruction of a city in time and in history. But the apostle Peter tells us so plainly, doesn't he, that that is but an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly on the day of God's eternal judgment that is still to come and that will bring judgment to this whole wide world and all of its people.

So who are the ungodly who will be condemned like that? Well, it will be those plain and simple who, like here, who refuse and who reject the same eternal gospel, who resist the only way to escape, which is in heeding the warning of God's judgment and embracing that sheer mercy of God in the deliverance that he has accomplished through Jesus Christ, his son.

[ 44 : 18 ] Jesus himself tells us that plainly in Matthew chapter 11. He denounces the citizens of Galilee, his hometowns, who heard his words, who saw all that he did and yet still perversely refused to worship him, refused to obey his gospel.

This is what he said to them. It will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for you. Does that shock you?

Perhaps it does, but you see, it is Jesus Christ who talks about hell and about judgment more than any other in the Bible. Why do you think that is?

It is because Jesus Christ, the Son of God, loves more than any other. He loves men and women. He loves boys and girls and love warns.

It warns about the judgment to come. It proclaims God's abiding gospel message. Repent, escape, up, flee, save yourself, save yourself from the wrath to come.

[ 45 : 27 ] Jesus Christ shouts to a complacent world a word of loving warning. Read it yourself in Luke chapter 17.

He says, just as it was in the days of Lot when people were living without a care in the world, but the Lord rained down fire and sulfur from heaven and destroyed them all. So it will be and the day the Son of Man is revealed.

So Jesus says, remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to preserve his life like her by clinging to the worthless things of this world, he will lose it.

But whoever loses his life, that is, the one who heeds the way of the eternal gospel and flees to the mercy of Christ, no matter what might be left behind in the things that this world rejoices in and this world won't let go of, they will be saved, he says, securely, certainly, eternally.

How can anyone be sure of that? Look at the last verse of our section there, verse 29. Don't miss that. It's a wonderful, wonderful verse.

[ 46 : 42 ] And that too is the eternal gospel of God. Was Lot saved on his own account? Was Lot regarded as righteous Lot for his own merits? You cannot read this story, can you, and seriously think that?

Now this verse tells us the truth. We've seen him propelled out of destruction by God's sheer mercy but you see, verse 29 there shows us why.

It was all because he had a priestly intercessor. No other reason. See, God remembered Abraham and he sent Lot out.

Out of the destruction. Out into a place of safety. Isn't that an astonishing thing? The gospel warns us all, just as it warned Lot, of a terrible judgment to come, but warning alone isn't enough, is it? Because we can't save ourselves even if we had the inclination. Lot needed total rescue and it came entirely on account of another.

[ 47 : 51 ] And we too need an intercessor. We too need a great high priest, far greater than Abraham, to save us. We need a great high priest, to save us to the uttermost from the judgment that is still to come.

But we have one. Whoever lives to make intercession for us, Jesus Christ, the Son of God himself. And he said this to God his Father, I'm praying for them for all that you have given to me.

And if Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is interceding for you, then you are safe. Because it is Jesus alone who can deliver out of that wrath to come.

But how do I know Jesus will be praying for me, interceding for me? How do I know that I'll be safe? Well, Jesus went right on and said this, all the Father gives to me will come to me.

And whoever comes to me, I will never cast out. God's judgment is coming.

[ 49 : 03 ] Jesus' resurrection has called time on this world. There is no hope of escape, friends, unless Jesus will intercede for you.

But you've heard him. He says he will. He says, whoever comes to me, I will never cast out. Not ever.

Whoever comes to him, he will hold on his heart before God forever. And on that day, that day of dreadful wrath, God will remember Jesus and send you out of the midst of the overthrow of judgment and into the life of his glorious eternal kingdom.

That is the church's abiding message for the world. It's a message the world needs to hear. And how will it be heard unless someone proclaims it to them?

That's a question for us as the church of Jesus Christ today. Let's pray. Let's pray. Peter says, Jesus commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to

be judge of the living and the dead.

[ 50 : 39 ] that to him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

And so, Lord, may this, the eternal gospel, be the abiding message of this church and every church and of our lives, all the days of our lives.

that we may see the mercy and the grace of God propel people out of the judgment and into the life of your eternal Son, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.