

When the Church Fails the World

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: 04 June 2023

Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 0 0] Good, well let's turn now to our reading for this evening, and we are in the book of Genesis. So a few weeks ago we were looking at the first part of Genesis chapter 19, so we're going to read the last bit of the chapter.

And I'm going to begin the reading from verse 29. So Genesis 19, I'm reading from verse 29 to the end of the chapter. 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.

Now Lot went up out of Zoar and lived in the hills with his two daughters, for he was afraid to live in Zoar. So he lived in a cave with his two daughters.

And the firstborn said to the younger, Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manna of all the earth. Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve offspring from our father.

So they made their father drink wine that night, and the firstborn went in and lay with her father. He did not know when she lay down or when she arose.

[1 : 3 5] The next day the firstborn said to the younger, Behold, I lay last night with my father. Let us make him drink wine tonight also. Then you go in and lie with him, that we may preserve offspring from our father.

So they made their father drink wine that night also. And the younger arose and lay with him. And he did not know when she lay down or when she arose.

Thus both the daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father. The firstborn bore a son and called his name Moab.

He is the father of the Moabites to this day. The younger also bore her son and calls his name Ben-Ami.

He is the father of the Ammonites to this day. Amen. May God bless his word to us. Well, do you have your Bible open at Genesis chapter 19 and the passage that we read there at the end, which is a very sobering passage all about when the church fails the world.

[2 : 5 1] In the story of God's people through the Old and New Testament times and ever since, far from adorning the gospel of God our Savior, at times the church has so failed the world that instead, as Paul says, God's name is blasphemed among the nations because of it.

It's been from within the professing church that so many have emerged to do great damage to the true cause of Christ. Very early heresies like Arianism and Gnosticism and so on to the Unitarianism that came out of the Puritan movement laterly to the likes of the Mormons, the Jehovah's Witnesses and all kinds of extreme cults.

And that's why the New Testament is full of warnings against all kind of falsehood. It's precisely because such things spring up within the church, not outside.

And of course, that's so often what we've seen in our own day, isn't it? Among so many of the historic churches here in our own nation and in other places. So it shouldn't surprise us that the same pattern is here right from the very beginning in the book of Genesis because the shadow of the serpent has been stalking the story ever since chapter 3, seeking whom he may devour.

And in these recent chapters, we've seen God calling out his missionary household through whom the whole world is going to be blessed. These are critical developments for the whole of God's kingdom.

[4 : 30] And what does Jesus warn us? Wherever the seed of the gospel is bearing fruit, the enemy will seek to sow damage. So the story of Lot's miraculous rescue from Sodom that we looked at last time, that shows us not just the dreadful judgment of God and the deep mercy of God, but also, if we look carefully, it shows us a very sharp contrast between Abraham, the priestly intercessor of God, and Lot's pathetic indecision, which left him saved.

But just as one escaping from the flames, as Paul puts it. As we read Genesis 18 and 19, indeed the earlier chapters also, we're shown the contrast between Abraham and Lot in terms of their lives, and particularly in terms of their family leadership.

And we're shown also what that leads to in terms of their family legacies. And Moses wrote this so that his people would see very clearly that vital divergence in family leadership, that it leads to a vast difference in family legacy.

And God's preserved it for us. It flags up very pointedly, this abiding message for all the true seed of Abraham. These things are written for our instruction, says Paul.

So let anyone who thinks he stands firm take heed lest he fall. So we better pay attention, haven't we? Look first at this passage we read in verses 30 to 38, which speaks so sadly of Lot's family legacy.

[6 : 18] We're going to look at that and then go back as the text invites us to observe the contrast that we see throughout these chapters between Abraham and Lot, between their dealing with their families, which leads in the end to such a different legacy.

And what we see is that it is a clear divergence in family leadership that leads to such a clear difference in family legacy.

So first look at Lot's family legacy. This is a sad and sordid tale, isn't it? We might have hoped that Lot's escape from Sodom at God's hand would have changed him.

Surely this was a start, a chance for a new beginning, a fresh start. And you might think that at first in verse 30. Last, we see that Lot is heading for the hills.

Is he ready now at last to say a farewell to the valley, to humble himself and to seek out his uncle Abraham once again and go and live with the people of faith?

[7 : 21] Well, no, that's not his motivation. Look, it's just that he was afraid to live in Zor. We don't know why. Maybe he thought God would destroy it too. Even though God had said he wouldn't destroy it, he'd keep it safe for his sake.

But Lot seems to have lost all his sense of purpose. So he'd rather live in a cave than in the tents of Abraham.

Caves, by the way, in the Old Testament are places reserved either for the dead or for refugees. For the dead or for those who's good as dead. It's a pretty grim scene.

One scholar says, when last seen, Lot has lost his home, his goods, and his wife, and is being shamefully treated by his daughters. It doesn't get much more sordid, does it, than what we're reading here.

Even the godless world cringes at this kind of deceit and incest and so on. Although it's not beyond belief, is it? It's not fictional. These things crop up still today. But it's grim.

[8 : 25] These girls deliberately deceiving their father. They know that he would never agree to such a thing, so they have to deceive him. But they've obviously no qualms about it, have they, themselves? They've imbibed a lot more of the morality of Sodom than the morality of their father, which is telling in itself, isn't it?

As is the fact that Lot was so easily led into this fully by them. Derek Kidman says, the end of choosing to carve out his career was to lose even the custody of his body.

And so we're told about these horrible, incestuous conceptions, births by sin and deceit. And far from remorse, do you see, the daughters actually glory in their shame by celebrating their action in the names that they give to their sons, names that commemorate their incestuous behavior.

The footnote tells us that. Here is pride, is it not? But where there is no vision of God, Proverbs tells us people will cast off all restraint.

It's a very striking contest to what we're going to read about soon in the birth of Isaac, through patient faith in God's gracious and miraculous working, a son whose future will be taken up and used by God for the purposes of bringing blessing to the world, bringing on the line of promise through which at last the Savior, the Lord Jesus, will come.

[9 : 53] But what a contrast here. In the immediate circumstances, but also in the lasting consequences. Because you see, the legacy of our lives are things that will outlive the length of our lives.

And that's the really great significance of this sad little section. You see, verses 37 and 38 there, they conceal the true impact of Lot's family legacy.

And it was a legacy of damage and disaster for the people of God for generations, for centuries. You see, their births were the beginning of the Moabites and the Ammonites.

And both of these were to be a snare, a danger, a malign influence on Israel for generations. And Moses' readers knew that very, very well. It was the Moabite king, Balak, that we heard about this morning, who hired Balaam to curse Israel.

And it was Moabite women that Paul was telling us about who worshipped their god Chemosh, their vile god, and led Israel into the worst kind of sexual sin in the history of the nation.

[11 : 02] They went into idolatry with the Baals of Peor. And the Bible tells us 24,000 of them died in one day in God's judgment. And the whole episode became symbolic of Israel's apostasy for generations to come.

And the Ammonites, they were equally vile. It was their god Moloch to whom children were sacrificed in the fire. And Israel themselves were brought down to that filthy practice at times.

If you read the history of Israel, you read the Moabites and the Ammonites were a consistent blight on the people of God. Consistent enemies to God's promise.

Remember Nehemiah's enemies. Who were they led by? Tobiah the Ammonite. Remember Solomon's downfall, led astray by foreign pagan women he took to be his wives.

Who's first in the list in 1 Kings 11? Moabite and Ammonite women. He even built them a high price, a shrine for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab and Moloch, the abomination of the Ammonites, we're told in 1 Kings 11 verse 7.

[12 : 11] And as a result, catastrophe, the whole kingdom was divided in two and ultimately brought to nothing in exile. Any reader of the Old Testament knows the enormous implication, the terrible implication of the people of God, of the church of God, of this legacy of Lot's 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, to the place where the Lord dwelt. Forever. Such was their determined opposition to God and to his people.

But that was the family legacy of the one that Peter calls righteous Lot. a believing man. But as Derek Kidna says, one without the pilgrim spirit.

It's very frightening, isn't it? What professing believers can do to damage the cause of God in our world and how it can blight the church for generations.

Think of the damage that the first generation of liberal scholars, critical scholars of the 19th century that they thought what they were doing was helping to make the church more accessible to modern man.

[13 : 36] But their actions resulted in the decimation of the Western church. And still does today as divinity faculties in the West have locked out and ignored the true evangelical gospel for generations.

Or think quite differently of the kind of disastrous fallout, every bit as damaging as that, from scandals in various Christian groups. Think of some who separated themselves deliberately from that kind of liberalism but ended up in utter disaster of their own.

Some of you here could relate the story of the Exclusive Brethren, for example, in the 1970s. Lot's family legacy, friends, is a warning both to Christian families and to churches.

Never to think that we can presume on the grace and mercy of God. 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 the people of God in perpetuity. And Paul says these things are written for us that we should not desire evil as they did.

[14 : 46] But it's not just chance, is it, that led Abraham and Lot to such different family legacies. It was choices. It was choices made all the way along and all through the stories that we've been reading.

And as you read the stories of these two men, how their lives developed, intertwined as they were, it's perfectly plain that the writer wants us to see that huge contrast in the choices that they make, in the way they live and in the way they lead their families.

And if Lot's family legacy was both a pathetic end and a pernicious end tale, then we're to see clearly that the reasons all lie in Lot's family leadership.

And in the contrast all the way through that we're shown between that and Abraham's leadership of his family of faith. And in these days that we're living in in the 21st century when there are so many snares, aren't there, to family life, so many challenges to Christian families as we seek to bring up children for Jesus Christ in the midst of a disappearing Christian heritage in our nation and a rising tide of hostility to God and the ways of God, surely nothing could be more relevant for us today to see how God wants us to lead in family life and to see what God warns us that he is against and that we must avoid.

And we think not just of the huge responsibilities that parents have for our families now but also the implications of these family legacies that can last for generations. It's a really big responsibility.

[16 : 34] And that's so for parents and especially for fathers. God gives fathers chief responsibilities for their families no matter what society today might want to tell you.

But it's for all of us because family life is the bedrock of the church family. And even if some of us ourselves don't have children, we've all got responsibilities, haven't we?

And also the health of individual families in the church is always bound up with the health of the whole church family. You can't have one strong without the other.

That's why in the pastoral epistles when Paul is talking about Christian leadership, he talks all the time about leadership in God's household and leadership in the domestic household. They're utterly related.

So we need to learn fully the lesson of Lot's family legacy. And to do that, we need to see what the writer flags up for us about Lot's family leadership. And I want us to think about that and see the huge contrast that he shows us with that of Abraham.

[17 : 40] I can put it like this. In Genesis 12 to 19, what we have is a picture of two men and their families who are part of the same church family. They begin in the same fellowship together, but they are traveling in radically different directions and they are taking their families with them.

And their family legacies also. And there are so many points of contrast that are thrown up here if you read these stories, but I want to point out just five.

They each begin with C's, so hopefully we can remember them. First of all, Lot's conduct. And by that I mean the household values that are exhibited by these two men. The family morality that prevails in their homes and, crucially, the motivation for that.

If you think first of Abraham, what we have in Abraham is a picture of simplicity and consistency. Summed up back in chapter 18, verse 19, where God says, I've chosen Abraham so he may command his children and his household to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice.

And that is the picture that we see of Abraham and his family. Of course, Abraham's not perfect. We've seen he stumbles, he gets things wrong, but there is a simplicity and a consistency about his life.

[18 : 56] God says, walk before me and be blameless, and Abraham seeks to do just that. He knows the way of God, he trusts the way of God, he loves the way of God, and he follows the way of God.

God says, circumcise yourself and your entire household, and Abraham obeyed that very day. And that simple consistency displays the true motivation for his morality.

It is love and trust of God himself. He was God's friend. He loved him. And he wanted to please him. And it's also positive, isn't it? It's joyful obedience to God.

We're reading in 1 John 5, this is the love of God to keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. Not when they spring from real love and knowledge of God our Father.

But Lot's conduct, you see, by contrast, was both complex and inconsistent. Living in the midst of Sodom, the world's culture had blunted his conscience, made his moral life much, much less straightforward.

[20 : 06] So yes, he's horrified still by the worst excesses of Sodom's behavior. We saw that in chapter 19, verse 7. He shouts to the crowd, don't act so wickedly. And yet in the very next verse, he's throwing out his daughters to the mob instead.

He's kept his daughters pure for marriage, we're told. But you wonder whether the motivation was much less love for God and his ways than a desire just for social approval, for respectability, not real righteousness.

And if we're honest, quite often, that can be our motivation. Can't it? We can't do that. What will people think? Rather than we can't do that, what would God think?

And it's easy for us as Christians to begin to direct our conduct and our family morality far more by a sort of defensive moralism and conservatism than out of zeal and love for God and for his heart and honor for God's ways.

But you see, all of that becomes negative, not positive. When our moral values are adrift from love for God himself, that's when his commands do become burdensome for us and also to our children because they'll sense it.

[21 : 25] They'll sense if our household conduct and if our morality really is just a horror moralism and they'll rebel against that. And maybe that was the root of Lot's daughter's disdain that led them ultimately to this dreadful thing.

I mean, think about that as parents because children are not stupid. Children can sniff a fraud. They sense our hearts very easily. They'll know if our conduct and our household morality really rings true or they'll know if we're just going through the Christian motions.

We're just coming to church because, well, that's what we do. There's no real enthusiasm, no real thirst for the Lord. They'll see it. Of course they will. Our conduct in leading our families, our morality and its motivation will leave a legacy.

Is it simple and consistent, walking in the ways of the Lord for his sake, or is it complex? Is it inconsistent? Is it more to do with keeping up appearances for our own sake?

Second, lots of choices. And by this I mean the priorities and the ambitions that we exhibit to our families and therefore in them. See, Abraham, we have seen, he made the same clear choice as Joshua would later make himself.

[22 : 48] As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord, he said. And that meant clearly not, therefore, serving the delights of Sodom society.

See, back in chapter 14, do you remember, Abraham declined to take anything from the king of Sodom when he rescued him. He says, I have lifted my hand in loyalty to the Lord most high. Sodom will have no hold on Abraham.

That was a costly choice, wasn't it? To forgo the city, to forgo its culture, to go and live in tents in the wilderness. Abraham's wife had to make do with making and mending her own clothes, milking goats, things like that.

Lot's wife was shopping in Selfridges and having coffee in Starbucks with all her friends. And there were many perfectly legitimate pleasures that were just out of reach and forfeited by Abraham and his family because God had called them to something far more important.

Because Abraham's ambitions, his priorities for his family, his spiritual priorities, because they were what they were, everything else had to take second place to what mattered for eternity.

[24 : 03] But it wasn't so with Lot. Lot's heart, although it was righteous, it was still won by what Sodom had to offer in the here and now. And as one writer says, it's the grip of the world even on those who love it with a bad conscience.

Peter tells us, doesn't he, that Lot was vexed by the evil in Sodom and yet he was so entangled that even in the day of destruction, remember, he lingered.

He lingered because the love of this world lingered in his heart so powerfully. And also in his family, his wife, even more so to her terrible loss. And his daughters had clearly imbibed more of Sodom's ways than Lot ever, ever imagined that they would or wanted them to.

But if Lot was inconsistent in his conduct, he was also very consistent in his choices all through life because right back in chapter 13, remember, we read, Lot chose for himself the fertile Jordan Valley.

He chose what was full of value and gain in this world's eyes. despite the clear danger that went with it, despite living in a place where it was wicked in the eyes of the Lord.

[25 : 19] And Christ's apostle says these things were written for us. I've never met a Christian father who said to me, I want my children to drift away from the Lord to become lovers of pleasure and hedonism, chase us after worldly gain and influence, things like that.

Never met someone who said that. But I have known, sadly, too many parents who have shouted that aloud in the choices that they've made for their families.

As they themselves have put perhaps good career moves or a good house move or ambitions for their children's sporting ability or musical ability or academic talent or whatever it is before their spiritual ambitions for their own lives and for the lives of their children.

Lot made a great business move for sure when he chose to move to Sodom, but God was not in the equation. And no doubt Lot was able to say, oh, I've prayed about it.

I've got real peace about it. Friends, those are two utterly meaningless phrases that Christians tend to use to prevent wise, rational discussion and to claim some sort of divine support for dubious decisions they don't want to talk about.

[26 : 45] And I need to say, your choices for you and for your family, you need to ask yourselves, are they more about possessing the things of the world for you and for them? Or are they more about you and them being possessed by the Lord and His kingdom?

That's a question you have to ask yourself. Choices. Thirdly, Lot's concerns. And by this I mean the thing that fill your mind and your heart and your vision because those are the things that fill your prayers, aren't they?

When we look at Abraham, we see a big man with a big heart. He has big concerns. Here's a man who wants to save cities. And his prayers are God-centered. They're outward-looking, aren't they?

His concerns reflect actually the heart of God. They're full of mercy, full of compassion and full of prayers even for his rivals, even for his enemies. Like the cities of the plain.

He was wrestling to intercede with them for God. And he's full of appeals, isn't he, to God's character because he knows God. He trusts God. He's like the servant in that parable Jesus tells in Matthew 25, the parable of the talents.

[27 : 56] He knows his master as they did. And in his prayers, he exhibits boldness as well as humility. He strives with God. But he knows that God is sovereign.

He knows when to stop asking. He's in tune with the heart and the mind of God. But with Lot, there's none of that, is there? He's just a small man.

And his concerns are totally self-centered. They're inward-looking. There's no great reflection on God's character. There's no great appeal to God's mercy in his prayers.

He's just totally taken up with himself. Yes, in verse 20 here, he does also pray for God to spare a city, Zor, but only for his own sake, only so he can go and live there. He doesn't care about the place.

He just cares about his own safety. He's not praying like Abraham, Lord, save their souls. He's praying, Lord, save my skin. at minimum cost, too.

[28 : 55] He wants to go just far enough away from Sodom to be safe, but near enough to get back if the chance arises. And it's all, you see, because he has such a wrong view of God.

He's like that third servant in Jesus' parable. Do you remember the one who just hid it in the ground and did nothing? Why did he do that? He said, Oh, my master's a hard man. And Lot seems to have that same view of God, doesn't he?

Nothing will induce him to go back to the hills to join Abraham in the place where God loves to dwell among his friends and eat with them and talk with them. He's like quite a lot of Christians, you know, who want the salvation that God can deliver to them without having too much to do with God himself who's the deliverer.

I call it third-party Christianity. You want the insurance policy for the future but at minimum cost to insure against the big disaster without having to pay the full price of fully comprehensive discipleship.

And friends, I have to say that is what a lot of Christian parents really are actually wanting for their children. Is what we really want for them, really, really want for them, the best education, the best start in life, the best career, the best university, the best lifestyle?

[30 : 27] And are we putting the effort that we put into the pursuit of these things way ahead of really investing in their spiritual development, in their discipleship?

Especially, especially if doing that might somehow disadvantage them in the pursuit of these other things that we think are so important. We provide just enough a third-party policy so they can win-win, pursue all the world's rewards, and slip into heaven when the crunch comes.

Friends, Jesus says there is no third-party Christianity. It is an illusion. You can't serve two masters because the concerns that fill your life now and fill your prayers for yourself and for your family, they won't suddenly change.

They are what you are and what you will be forever. And the things that fill your horizons in your life now will be the same things that fill your life and your horizons for eternity. That's a good question to ask ourselves, isn't it?

What concerns do fill my mind and fill my prayers in my own life and in our family life and in our church prayer meetings for that matter?

[31 : 49] Is it God-centered, outward-looking prayer of eternal significance? Or is it more self-centered and inward-looking, all about things that in the end really won't matter very much at all?

Our concerns and our prayers, they will shape our legacy. Fourth, Lot's character, that is the witness and the impact of his personal life on others.

Our prayers are important, but the Bible tells us also that our lives speak to God and also speak to others about God. Abraham's life certainly spoke to God in chapter 18, verse 19.

Have we seen it? It says, I know him. And we've read of the great influence that Abraham's prayer has with God as he intercedes for Sodom, but his personal stature also spoke to God and spoke of God.

We'll see that very clearly when we come to chapter 21. Abimelech, the Philistine king, says, God, I can see God is surely with you in everything you do. Chapter 23, later on, the Hittites say to him when he says, oh, I'm just a sojourner with you, they say, oh no, but you are a prince of God among us.

[33 : 01] They saw it. And there's a believer whose character is counting for God. And I'm sure many of us have known believers whose godliness is just so evident that we know these are princes with God.

I can think of many men throughout my life who've had that kind of impact on me, particularly as a boy and as a young man. I can think of women as well, but let me just say this, boys and young men need the character witness of men, particularly.

As a boy, all my holidays were spent in a sheep farm up on the west coast of Scotland where there was a family that we knew and the manager, an old man, a great burly shepherd called Ewan McMillan.

We stayed in their house and we all stayed together in one family room and as young kids, we woke up early in the morning. Once we went down to the kitchen, Ewan's wife would not allow us back out protecting our parents for their time in the morning.

And so we would sit down and he would come in having been doing his work and he would come and have his breakfast and then every day I would see him kneel down at his chair and spend time praying, praying for the day, praying for his family, praying for his work.

[34 : 17] And I'll never forget to my dying day, that big burly man in his tweeds and his big tackety boots kneeling down at that chair. And as a boy of six, seven, eight, that left an indelible impression upon me.

There was a man and a man of God. And I'm thankful I saw that many times in my own father's life as well.

But I doubt Lot's family ever saw very much of that, if at all. And it seems, doesn't it, that Lot's character, his life, actually made any witness he had totally ineffective.

And remember, at the critical time when he tries to save his sons-in-law, what did they think? His testimony was just all one big joke. They ignored it. His home life seemed to carry absolutely no authenticating mark for his message.

His witness was emasculated by what you would have to call a counter-evangelistic lifestyle. And it's a tragedy, isn't it, when that's the case?

[35 : 23] When friends or family or neighbors are so inoculated against anything that we might say about the truth of God because our lives shout so much louder to the contrary.

I had a friend, an old medical colleague, years ago, and he lived next door to a man who was an elder in the church, and it was a church I knew. And this man was so obnoxious, so difficult to live beside that my friend had to actually move house to go and get away from the stress that it caused his family to live there.

Is it any wonder that he would never come to church with me? It's worth thinking about, isn't it? What is our personal life saying to our children, to our family, to our workmates, to our neighbors?

Are there signs that people can see in our home life, in our work life, that we actually take God seriously, that we are what we're speaking about? Because friends, what we are will speak much, much louder than what we say, I'm afraid.

Especially as far as our legacy with our own families is concerned. As parents, we don't have any right, do we, to expect our children to be more godly more zealous for the Lord than we are?

[36 : 48] Sometimes in God's mercy, that is the case. But usually in that, as in many other areas of life, we reap what we sow. I suppose all of these things could be summed up in the last thing, and that is what I'm calling lots of citizenship.

That is where a person's heart really is set on being, at home. And again, there is a great gulf between these two men, Abraham and Lot. And it's epitomized, really, in the striking difference there is between verse 1 of chapter 18 and verse 1 of chapter 19, when heavenly visitors arrive to both of these men.

In chapter 18, Abraham is found sitting at the gate of his tent. In chapter 19, Lot is found sitting in the gate of Sodom. And that tells a story of huge significance.

The one is entrenched in an earthly city, firmly attached to it in its ways. And he's increasingly at home in Sodom, despite his uneasiness about its values and some of the behavior.

But the other is very plainly an exile on earth. He's a sojourner, intense. He's fully detached from all the drawing power of Sodom.

[38 : 03] Not because he despises the settled life or the houses or any of these things, but because, as Hebrews 11 tells us, he desired a better country that is a heavenly one, a city whose architect and builder is God.

The Abraham is a stranger, an exile on earth, but he's totally at home and at ease with God. And yet Lot is increasingly at home and at ease in Sodom, but increasingly ill at ease with God are the things of God.

And there's such a contrast, isn't there, in chapter 18 and 19 and the whole atmosphere when these heavenly visitors come. And they come to Abraham, there's that wonderful, easy discourse with God.

Chapter 19, with Lot, there's panic. Lot has all the mod cons, all the culture of Sodom. Abraham, just tense in the desert.

But Abraham, Abraham, Abraham was camped by the oaks of Mamre. That is, we're back in chapter 13, we're told, he built the altar of God.

[39 : 13] So while Lot sat in Sodom's gate, pandering to the things of the world, Abraham lived his life waiting on God and pondering his word. His family grew up with God's altar firmly at the center of their household life.

And the concerns of God's covenant defining the whole direction of their life. Whereas for Lot's family at best, the Lord's concerns were surely just peripheral. So it's worth asking, isn't it, could a visitor who comes into our home, could they tell where the center of gravity of our whole family life really is?

Could they tell in your house somebody came to stay for a day or two? I hope so. Our citizenship is in heaven, says the Apostle Paul.

How are people going to know that by looking at us? It's interesting, isn't it, that for one thing, the coming of God's messengers to Abraham's camp to speak God's word was greeted with great joy, great excitement.

They were hungry, weren't they, to provide the best. They were waiting expectantly for what would transpire. When they encounter Lot, it's just one huge great problem from the beginning. The whole episode is a burden.

[40 : 34] Partly that's because it exposed the truth about Lot's world. And again, there are Christians like that, aren't there? They begin to find that things of God are a burden, are intrusion on their life and irritation.

Coming to church becomes just a chore. It's a bit wearying. Same with Bible study. Same with prayer. Somebody visits, perhaps, from the church and wants to talk about your Christian walk, wants to talk about the spiritual life, wants to talk about the Bible.

And it's just really quite awkward and you just wish they would go away. You see, the New Testament tells us that if our citizenship is in heaven, then our hearts should be set on things above.

The coming of messengers of God's Word, whoever they are, should be something that excites our interest. We'll be welcomers of the Word, won't we? Because they're speaking the language of our true home.

I wonder if the eagerness of Abraham to welcome the angels of God marks our eagerness to meet with God, to meet with God's people, to come together on a Sunday.

[41 : 52] Are we welcomers of the Word of God, as Paul said the Thessalonian church were? All these things, they're giveaway signs, aren't they, of whether our lives really are staked on the altar of God or on the altars of this passing world?

And again, I'm speaking especially to fathers among us, well, to all of us, and I know sometimes mothers have to play that role alone for whatever reason, but those who are fathers can't dodge this reality that it's our family leadership that will yield our family legacy.

And Moses wrote these chapters the way he did, displaying so clearly the contrast between these two men. He wrote it for a clear purpose. First, there's a warning to believers in his generation who wanted the best of both worlds to tell them that is not possible.

And Jesus confirms that. You can't serve two masters. You can't serve God and mammon, this world. Lot's way leads always to a legacy of disaster.

Be warned. Know your citizenship. You are a stranger. You're in exile in this world. You belong to God. You will always be a stranger in exile. The world will never accept you, however hard you try.

[43 : 23] Remember what happened in chapter 19, verse 9, at the crunch? Sodom's men rejected Lot. You're a foreigner, they said. Well, he was. This world will never accept you if you're a true follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It will be happy to ruin you, though. So don't go that way. Don't deceive yourself for your sake and for your families. It's a real warning.

But of course, also, it is a great encouragement. It's saying to us, follow Abraham's example. Godliness, says Paul, with contentment is great gain.

It really does not matter where you live or what you have or what you haven't got. None of these things matter if God's altar is at the heart of your sojourn in this world.

If Jesus Christ, through whom we have fellowship with the Father, is at the center of our family life and our community life. Live like that, looking forward to God's glory.

[44 : 28] Make the Lord the real heart of your household. Follow his way unashamedly for everyone to see no matter what they think. For your spouse to see, for your children to see, for your neighbors to see, for your colleagues to see.

Let your true citizenship direct your choices and your conduct and fill your prayer concerns and shape your whole character.

Lead like that, you see, as a true follower of Jesus Christ, as a fully comprehensive disciple, not a third-party Christian. And the Lord God, by his grace, will honor those who honor him.

He promises so. But just one last thing as we close, because maybe tonight you're saying, well, I can see all that, but it's too late for me because I am a lot.

And that is my story. It's a story of my family, too, and it's a mess. Or maybe you're the product of that kind of family. And you're thinking, well, is there hope for me?

[45 : 39] Am I cursed for my parents' lack of obedience, for example? Is there anything but blight for someone like me? And some of us may be thinking that, but if so, listen to this.

Remember, this story, this story is just part of a much, much bigger story. It's not just the story of Lot's family leadership or Lot's family legacy.

Right from Genesis chapter 3, we've been reading the story of the Lord's family line, haven't we? It's a story of the promised seed, of the one who is to come, the one who at last will destroy the curse, reverse the curse of sin, and bring that restoration and that healing and that salvation and that new life to every single one who puts their trust in him.

And listen to this. Even though Lot's legacy is a disaster for his family and for generations, even though the Moabites, the Ammonites, were so vile they were not to enter the house of the Lord ever, when you read on through the Old Testament story, do you know what you find?

What you find is that both Moabites and Ammonites end up in the family tree of Jesus Christ, the Savior of this world. Isn't that astonishing? It was Solomon's disobedient marriage to an Ammonite woman that brought his son Rehoboam, the king, who was the ancestor of Jesus.

[47 : 08] And remember David's great-grandmother, Ruth the Moabite, who sought the Lord, the God of Israel. Isn't that extraordinary?

It is extraordinary. And friends, it tells us this. such is the grace, the marvelous grace of our God that he is willing to get involved even with the worst mess that his people can possibly make of their lives.

And out of that mess, out of even a disastrous legacy, he can turn it into something beautiful and wonderful in his hands. Something that brings ultimate blessing beyond our understanding, beyond our comprehension.

If God can take even a Moabite and an Ammonite and bring their blood into the precious blood of his son and reverse through him that disastrous legacy of Lot, then friends, by his grace, there's nothing, there's nothing he cannot do to bring beauty out of the worst ashes of our messy lives either.

If we would just trust him and love him. Never forget what the angel says in chapter 18, verse 14. Is anything too hard for the Lord?

[48 : 33] Well, the answer is a resounding no. No. For everyone who trusts in him. That's the message.

even when the church fails the world, we have a God and we have a gospel that overcomes the world. Well, let's pray.

Lord, you are the God of grace who can restore even the years the locusts have eaten and we relay our many failures before you as your followers and as families and as fathers and as churches and we ask that you forgive us.

Will you bring glory to yourself even even from the follies of our past through your great grace and mercy and help us, Lord, today strengthen us for tomorrow so that we may lead lives and lead our loved ones also with a renewed vision with self upon the cross, Christ upon the throne.

Help us to live, Lord, with your altar at the heart of our existence so that our legacy may yet be more of blessing and of praise even in this world to the one who rescued us, to the one who has made us citizens of the world to come.

[50 : 09] Hear us, Lord, help us, we pray. For we ask it all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.