

## **“STAY AWAY FROM SODOM” (Genesis 19:1-11)**

A few years back Sharla and I were in California and we were making our way from the Lake Tahoe area over to San Jose. We took some of the back roads and around noon we were approaching the city of Stockton. We'd packed a lunch and I mentioned to Sharla that it was be nice on such a hot day to find a park with some shade trees and eat our lunch. I found a park on Google map that was on the way, and before going there we stopped nearby to get some gas. We hadn't thought about what part of town the park was in, and it became quickly obvious that we weren't in the good part.

A couple was getting gas next to us and I asked if they lived around there and they said they did. “Do you know if there is a nice park nearby?” “What do you mean by a park?” they said. I said, “A park with grass and trees. We're looking for a nice, cool place to eat our lunch.” The man paused a second and then said – and these were his exact words... “Get in your car and drive away. Lock your doors and don't stop driving until you're out of town.” We took his advice, and later that day I read that the park was in the middle of one of the highest crime areas in Stockton, and that Stockton was one of the most dangerous cities in the country. Who knew?

This story came to mind this week as I was reading through our passage in Genesis 19 and the infamous story of Sodom and Gomorrah. Even people who know nothing about the Bible know that Sodom and Gomorrah are notorious symbols of evil and wickedness, and that no one in their right mind would wander anywhere near their vicinity. One man did and barely lived to tell about it.

The story of Lot is a cautionary tale of what happens when a believer becomes part of the world system that rebels against God. In the Upper Room Jesus prayed that believers would be *in* the world, but not *of* the world. God has left us on earth to be salt and light to a dark world, but at the same time He calls us to be distinct from the world in our lifestyle and values.

In Genesis 12 God called Abraham out of his pagan environment and set him apart from all the other nations, so that through him and his descendants the world would see how they could be made right with God. Later God gave His chosen people a set of laws designed to distinguish them from the other nations. If Israel acted no differently than everyone else, they would be no different than the rest of the world and lose their influence.

One of the biggest concerns of parents is who their kids hang out with. In 1 Corinthians 15:33 the Apostle Paul says, “Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character.’” People tend to become like the people they hang around with, and if you hang around people who live in rebellion to God, their lifestyle and their values and their attitudes will rub off on you. The world has a strong pull – it's like a magnet that seeks to suck you in – but no matter how good it looks from afar, it will eventually will chew you up and spit you out.

Lot learned this lesson the hard way, and today we're going to learn four things the world did to Lot, and will do to us if we do not take heed. We're gong to spend the next three weeks looking at Genesis 19, and it's not a fun chapter to preach – it is R-rated and filled with unpleasant subjects – but it's in the Bible for a reason and is extremely relevant to the times in which we live.

The chapter is divided into three sections: Verses 1-11, which we will look at today, describes the prelude to God's judgment Sodom and Gomorrah; Verses 16-29 describes the destruction of cities, and 30-38 describes the aftermath of judgment and what becomes of Lot and his family.

In verse one we see the first thing the world does to Lot – **it seduced him**. Verse 1a says, “The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city.” In chapter 18, you'll remember, the Lord and two angels visit Abraham and the Lord tells Abraham that He is going down to Sodom to see if their sin is great and grievous as it appears to be, and if so, He will destroy the city. The Lord stays with Abraham while the two angels continue towards Sodom. When they arrive, they find Lot sitting in the gateway of the city.

In biblical times the gateway of the city was the central hub of the city's activities – its where business transactions took place, where disputes were settled, and where public announcements were made. The fact that Lot is sitting at the city gates means that he has become one of the leaders of the city – he is a fixture in the community. How did Abraham's nephew, who followed Abraham to the Promised Land, become part of such a wicked city?

You'll remember back in chapter 13 Abraham and Lot's herdsmen argue over pastureland and Abraham offers Lot to choose whatever land he wishes. Lot looks to the east and sees the lush, fertile pastures of the Jordan River Valley, and he says, “That's where I want to live.” He lives not by faith, but by sight. He sees a land where he can become wealthy and prosperous. What he doesn't see, or chooses to ignore, is that the land also happens to be where Sodom is located. Lot doesn't factor into his decision-making the moral corruption of the people living there and what that will mean for him and his family. All he sees is bigger herds, bigger flocks, and a nice life in a beautiful place.

Lot illustrates that becoming part of the world doesn't happen overnight, but is a gradual progression that takes place through a series of choices. First, Lot looks towards Sodom – he is enticed by the richness of the land, and then we see that he moves towards Sodom – he starts heading in that direction. Next, he moves near Sodom – he pitches his tent in the Jordan River Valley. Now in 19:1 we see that he is sitting at the gates of the city – he has settled in Sodom, he has built a house there, and he has become a leader.

Satan is the master of deception, and he always makes the world look desirable and good – just like the forbidden fruit was pleasing to Eve's eye – but he hides the pain and destruction that the world brings. The Bible is full of examples... King Solomon saw all that the world had to offer and he went all in and denied himself no pleasure. Yet at the end of his life he said, “Everything – the money, the women, the luxury – all of it means nothing, it's just a chasing after the wind.” The prodigal son saw all the enticements of the world and blew his entire inheritance on wild living, but ended up in a pig pen eating pig food.

Satan dresses the world up to look irresistible and lures you into it, promising you everything, but as Solomon and the prodigal son found out – and what Lot is about to find out – is that it will chew you up and spit you out, and leave you empty.

Secondly, the world not only seduced Lot, **it tormented him**. Verses 1a-3 say, “When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. ‘My lords,’ he said, ‘please turn aside to your servant’s house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning.’ ‘No,’ they answered, ‘we will spend the night in the square.’ But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate.”

Lot recognized that these men were different and in great respect bows down to them. Just as Abraham did in the previous chapter, Lot shows his two guests’ hospitality and offers to have them spend the night at his house. “No,” they say, “We’ll spend the night in the town square.”

I imagine Lot thinking, “Get in your car and drive away and don’t stop until you’re out of town.” He knows how wicked and depraved the people of Sodom are and what happens in the city after dark, and says, “I insist that you stay with me tonight, and I won’t take no for an answer.”

Lot is one of the more fascinating characters in the Bible. There is nothing about him in this chapter that would make us think that he’s a righteous man, and yet the New Testament says that he was. In 2 Peter 2:7-8 the Apostle Peter talks about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and says this about Lot, “...and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)...”

Lot, Peter says, was a righteous man – he knew the difference between right and wrong – and living in Sodom took a toll on him. Seeing the out-of-control lawlessness and depravity of the city distressed him. He never felt quite at home in Sodom – he never felt a sense of peace about living there – and when his guests say they are going to spend the night in the town square, his soul is tormented because he knows what will happen to them.

Lot pictures a Christian who tries to live in two worlds – who wants to have a relationship with God, but doesn’t want to give up the comforts and pleasures of the world. Jesus said, “As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world” (John 15:19). This world is not our home, we’re just passing through. We are in the world as salt and light, but were not to be part of the world.

Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other” (Matthew 6:24a). You can’t love God and love the world at the same time – they are incompatible and will pull you in two different directions.

Charles Spurgeon said, “The most miserable person in the world is the half-committed Christian, who is just enough in the world to be miserable in God and just enough into God that they are miserable in the world. If you’re going to be saved, be saved 100 percent.” You have to make up your mind – you either pitch your tent in Sodom and be part of the world, or you go all in for God and be separate from the world.

The world not only seduced Lot and tormented him, but thirdly, **it pressured him** to be like them. In verses 4-5 Lot’s worst fears are realized... “Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. They called to Lot, ‘Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.’”

The Lord told Abraham in chapter 18 that He was going down to Sodom to see if the sin of the city was as bad as it appeared, and this verse proves that it was. Abraham prayed that ten righteous people would be found in Sodom, but we find out later in the chapter that only Lot and his two daughters make it out alive – and that was purely out of God’s grace. The angels find that the city is wicked through and through – not just pockets of evil here and there – the city is saturated in depravity. All the men of the city – from every corner of the city – from all ages, young and old – surround Lot’s house and demand that Lot bring them out so they can rape them. Things were so bad in Sodom that the men don’t even try to hide their deviancy – it’s out in the open for all to see.

When a culture abandons God, one of the first things to go are the traditional, biblical standards of sexuality. Once the floodgates of the sexual revolution were opened in the 1960s, God’s standards of morality have been systematically torn down and replaced by a personal morality of one’s own making.

Years ago, I heard Bill Gothard say that “sin does not stand still.” That always stuck in my mind. Once the door is opened to one sin, it opens the door to another sin, and sin grows progressively bolder and more brazen. Things once considered sinful and abhorrent are now accepted and applauded.

In Philippians 3:19 Paul says that enemies of God “*glory in their shame.*” Rather than feel a sense of guilt and shame for violating God’s design for sexuality and gender, our culture glories in it and seeks to normalize what the Bible calls an abomination.

Until very recently traditional marriage was accepted as the norm – even if people had sex before marriage or committed adultery, it didn’t change the fact that traditional marriage held up as the standard. As recently as 1973 the American Psychiatric Association – far from a conservative organization – listed homosexuality as a “treatable, aberrant condition.” What changed? What changed was a constant drumbeat of the sexual revolution to define sexuality as personal preference rather than defined by the one who created and designed it.

Today there is enormous pressure on Christians to go with the flow and join the sexual revolution – not just accept it, but promote it and verbalize your support. But as Christians we can’t do that. Romans 12:2 says, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

The world wants to squeeze you into its progressive mold so that everyone walks in lockstep with the sexual revolution – there is a concerted campaign to normalize sin – and the pressure is so great that many cave to their demands. But the Bible says, “Don’t conform to the pattern of this world, but to God’s will and God’s standards.” We are to saturate our minds with the Word of God – so that we will be able to test what we hear and approve what is God’s good, pleasing, and perfect will.

The men of Sodom put pressure on Lot to bring the men out, but Lot resists their pressure. Verse 6-7... “Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him and said, ‘No, my friends. Don’t do this wicked thing.’” Even Lot recognizes that what they want to do is wicked, and refuses to comply with their demands. But what he does next defies explanation.

Verse 8... “Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don’t do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof.”

I have tried every way possible to understand what Lot is thinking, but there's no way to understand how a father can offer his daughters to be raped. I can't explain it other than to say that Lot feels so much pressure to appease the mob that he tries to stop one wicked thing from happening by causing another wicked thing to happen.

While proponents of the sexual revolution claim that it brings a better, more tolerant society, they never talk about the wake of destruction it leaves – and the ones who bear the brunt are women and children – those who are most vulnerable. The culture of Sodom was not unlike many cultures throughout history where women were considered second-class citizens to be controlled and dominated by men. When God's standards are not upheld in a culture, it becomes Darwinistic where only the strong survive and the weak are abused and trampled on. In the economy of Sodom, Lot's daughters were considered expendable.

Things changed for women when Jesus came and preached good news to all people. It was through the gospel that women were viewed as equal in worth as men and elevated in status. It was through the gospel that slaves received their freedom. It was through the gospel that children were viewed not as commodities, but as a godly heritage to be treasured. Any country you travel to today where women are still treated as property, you will find an absence of Christianity – and wherever women are valued and protected, it will find a foundation of Judeo-Christian beliefs.

We move on... We've seen that Lot was seduced by the world, tormented by the world, pressured by the world, and finally we see that he is **rejected by the world**. Verse 9... “Get out of our way,’ they replied. ‘This fellow came here as a foreigner, and now he wants to play the judge! We’ll treat you worse than them.’ They kept bringing pressure on Lot and moved forward to break down the door.”

Notice that in verse 8 Lot called the men of Sodom his “friends.” As long as Lot adapted to their ways and blended into their culture, they were happy to accept him as a friend, but the moment he refuses to go along with their demands, they turn on him. In today's terminology, they cancel him. Part of cancel culture is to not just say someone is wrong, but to label them with a derogatory term. They tell Lot, “You're a foreigner – you're an outsider who moved into our city and acts as our judge.”

The tactic of the sexual revolution is to vilify anyone not adhering to their agenda with a label... you are narrow-minded, intolerant, bigoted – you're on the wrong side of history. And once they vilify you, they try to marginalize you – you must not be allowed to speak. One recent example was a student at UC Berkley named Isabella Chow, who was on the student council. When the student council set forth a resolution saying that gender was not based on biology, but on identity, Isabella Chow abstained from voting. She didn't vote no, she simple abstained and released this statement: “While I have love and compassion for homosexual and transgender students and disavowing any discrimination or harassment directed towards them, as a Christian, I personally do believe that certain acts and lifestyles conflict with what is good, right, and true. I believe that God created male and female at the beginning of time, and designed sex for marriage between one man and one woman.”

As you can imagine, Chow's well-worded comments were met with universal scorn and calls for her to be kicked off the council, if not the campus. Chow said, “No matter how much I tried to say, ‘I can love you and still disagree with you,’ people still interpret my disagreement with being a bigot and a hater.” Christians being marginalized is nothing new, but in our hyper-political culture it is ramping up, as there is an intense effort to vilify and marginalize Christians.

The Apostle John said, “Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you” (1 John 3:13). John points to the story of Cain and Abel as an example. Cain killed Abel because his actions were evil and his brothers were righteous. Abel’s goodness exposed Cain’s badness, and Cain murdered him. If you take a stand for God’s truth, you can expect the same hatred and rejection. Your righteousness reveals to people their lack of righteousness – it convicts them of their guilt – and they will reject you.

The men of Sodom become an out-of-control mob and turn on Lot and try to break down his door. Verses 10-11 say, “But the men inside reached out and pulled Lot back into the house and shut the door. Then they struck the men who were at the door of the house, young and old, with blindness so that they could not find the door.”

At this point the angels take over and rescue Lot from the crowd – they pull him in and lock the door. Then they strike the mob with blindness so that they can’t find the door. Their blindness illustrates how hardened they are in their wickedness. Their blindness is a wake-up call – and opportunity for them to stop and think about what they’re doing – it’s a mini-judgment of a much bigger judgment to come.

In His mercy God gives people many wake-up calls to get their attention, so that they will stop and recognize their sin and say, “I’m out of control, I have an addiction, I need help” and cry out to God for mercy. The men of Sodom do not repent, but continued to grope blindly for the door. Their hearts are hardened beyond the point of return. They didn’t learn from God’s mini-judgment, and now will be left to God’s ultimate judgment.

The lesson that comes from these verses is simple: Stay out of Sodom. Get in your car and don’t stop driving until you’re out of town. Lot should have never pitched his tent in Sodom. The world looks good from afar, and the world promises prosperity and pleasure, but it’s headed for destruction. Don’t be part of it – don’t let your mind be shaped by the pattern of this world, but by the will of God.

At the same time, God has left us here in the world for a reason – He has placed us here to be salt and light – to be distinct – so that people who are lost in sin can know the way to be saved through faith in Christ. That is our mission, and by God’s grace may we be in the world – demonstrating God’s love and grace – but not of the world – because this world is not our home.