

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Des Moines, WA  
December 2, 2012  
Advent 1**

**Genesis 19:15-17,23-29**

**Advent Watchwords: "Judgment!"**

- 1. A lesson in God's certain justice**
- 2. A lesson in God's mercy and grace**
- 3. Two lessons for our Advent preparation**

**Hymns: "Lead Us to Your Light" – 1 – Distribution:  
29, 27, 11 – Closing: 2**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

**Genesis 19:15-17,23-29 –**

<sup>15</sup> *With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished."* <sup>16</sup> *When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD was merciful to them.* <sup>17</sup> *As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, "Flee for your lives! Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!" ...*

<sup>23</sup> *By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land.* <sup>24</sup> *Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the LORD out of the heavens.* <sup>25</sup> *Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, including all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land.* <sup>26</sup> *But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.*

<sup>27</sup> *Early the next morning Abraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood before the LORD.* <sup>28</sup> *He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, toward all the land of the plain, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace.*

<sup>29</sup> *So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived.*

Happy new year!

I'd like to be the first to wish you that today. As you can see, we are entering an entirely new church year today as we begin the first season called Advent. The word "Advent" is derived from a Latin word that means "coming." As we begin the new year, we look forward to the coming of Jesus. Advent gives us the opportunity to look forward to Jesus' coming in two ways. First, we are looking ahead to Christmas, when we will commemorate his first coming in the flesh. Also, Advent gives us the opportunity to contemplate Jesus' second coming, when he will return to judge the world.

As we worship these Sundays of Advent, each week we will focus on a "watchword" of Advent. Gleaned from our Scripture readings, these watchwords will give us the opportunity to focus our thoughts on the proper, spiritual meaning of this busy season. **Our sermon text today focuses on the Old Testament lesson of Sodom and Gomorrah, and focuses on our thoughts on the watchword "Judgment!" Let's learn from this vivid, sobering account today.**

## **1. A lesson in God's certain justice**

The first questions we must ask as we reflect on Genesis 19 are, "What was the sin of Sodom? What caused the Lord to act with such decisive justice?" Reading through the verses before our text will be helpful: "*The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground.*" <sup>2</sup> *'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'...* *Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house.* <sup>5</sup> *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.'* <sup>6</sup> *Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him* <sup>7</sup> *and said, 'No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing.* <sup>8</sup> *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.' <sup>9</sup>'Get out of our way,' they replied. And they said, 'This fellow came here as an alien, 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. <sup>10</sup> But the men inside reached out and pulled Lot back into the house and shut the door. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> The two men said to Lot, 'Do you have anyone else here—sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here, <sup>13</sup> because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the LORD against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it.' <sup>14</sup> So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were pledged to marry his daughters. He said, 'Hurry and get out of this place, because the LORD is about to destroy the city!' But his sons-in-law thought he was joking." (Genesis 19:1-14, sel.)

Other places of Scripture speak about the sins of Sodom:

- *Jude 7 - Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.*
- *Ezekiel 16 - Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. <sup>50</sup> They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen.*
- *Isaiah 3 – "The look on (Jerusalem's) faces testifies against them; they parade their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to them! They have brought disaster upon themselves.*

Many generations down through history have thought that they are the inventors of sexual immorality and perversion. How false! Sodom's legendary sins long ago had not escaped the notice of their Maker.

We see in our reading how God acted in a decisive, just way: "The angels urged Lot, saying, 'Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished.' By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land. <sup>24</sup> Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the LORD out of the heavens. <sup>25</sup> Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, including all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land. <sup>26</sup> But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt. <sup>27</sup> Early the next morning Abraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood before the LORD. <sup>28</sup> He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, toward all the land of the plain, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace. So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived."

Did you hear the many vivid words used in this account?

- Swept away
- Punished
- Burning sulfur
- Overthrew
- Furnace
- Destroyed
- Catastrophe

We don't know exactly where Sodom and Gomorrah were located in that southern part of Canaan. Many scholars believe the location lies beneath the current Dead Sea. Isn't it sobering that this area is the lowest area on earth, sunken far below sea level? And today, the landscape is as barren as any on earth, with no vegetation? It stands as a somber reminder of the judgment of God.

As we live in the last times of the earth and look ahead to the last judgment, this is a serious lesson to keep in our minds. Think about the signs in nature that our Gospel reading listed in Luke. Are you surprised when signs in nature occur? Or do you expect them? Remember that Jesus is returning soon! And don't fail to witness to that fact when you have opportunity

in a day and age when people have thrown out the doctrine of hell!

In all these serious thoughts about God's justice, we can't forget an obvious fact. The fact is that we should perish also in the face of God's justice and judgment. We're not just talking about one sin today that condemns. Listen to more:

- When Jesus sent out his disciples on a mission trip, he told them, *"When you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near.' I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town."* (Luke 10) Not receiving the Word of God is a sin that brings God's judgment and wrath.
- *"If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left,<sup>27</sup> but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God."* (Hebrews 10) Deliberate sinning also incurs God's fearful wrath and punishment.

**By nature we are all under the same sentence and punishment that Sodom and Gomorrah faced before our holy God.**

## 2. A lesson in God's mercy and grace

This message so far might leave you wondering, "Where is the grace of God?" This is a depressing sermon so far. But there is indeed grace in this account, much grace, in fact!

Where do we see it? There is grace that God showed to Sodom. We see grace in a number of ways:

1. First, God gave the people of Sodom and Gomorrah time. In his grace, he did not bring Judgment Day upon them immediately. He chose to bring it after their sin had multiplied and they had become hardened in it.

2. We also see God's grace in allowing Lot to bring his influence there. We read the background verses before that showed that Lot put himself in dire danger by sticking his neck out. He did not offer a godly alternative for these men – in fact we would fault him highly for offering his daughters to them – but he did speak up against their evil plans, so much so that they recognized it: *"Get out of our way," they replied. And they said, "This fellow came here as an alien, and now he wants to play the judge! We'll treat you worse than them."* (19:9)
3. Finally, Lot also made a gracious, last ditch plea to his sons-in-law, who were either married to two other daughters or engaged to his two at home.

### **God showed mercy toward Sodom!**

We also see God's grace toward Lot's family: *"With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished."<sup>16</sup> When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD was merciful to them.<sup>17</sup> As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, "Flee for your lives! Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!"*

The Lord in his mercy sent angels to warn Lot and his family. When Lot hesitated all night, they finally pulled him and his family out of the city by their hands. They clearly told them what to do. And if we would have read a few verses in between, we would have seen that Lot begged not to run for the mountains, but to another immoral city nearby, and they surprisingly granted that request, even delaying the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah until they arrived there!

### **God showed mercy toward Lot's family!**

However, once again if we simply look at details in this story, we will miss important applications. Great grace has also been shown to us in this account:

- We see God’s grace in the name he uses for himself in this account. It is not “God” who acts, which is a name that emphasizes his sheer power. It is the “LORD,” his name that emphasizes his covenant love to his people, love which caused him to make a plan of salvation that he would be faithful to. He promised to send a Savior to die for the sin of the world and to save those who put their faith in him.
- We see the grace of the Lord as he mentions Abraham’s name in this account, who had prayed for his nephew Lot. This was Father Abraham, through whom God would send the Messiah, his Son.

**Because of that Savior whose birth we look forward to again this year, we have the forgiveness of sins.** We are rescued from the hellfire of God’s wrath, because Jesus endured it on the cross as he suffered and died for your sin and mine. He suffered the punishment displayed at Sodom and Gomorrah so we would never have to. And through faith in him, we are headed for paradise with God!

### 3. Two lessons for our Advent preparation

Therefore, let’s close our look at this account with two lessons for our Advent preparation. Since we still have the season ahead of us, how good it is for us to learn lessons for our faith and life.

First, Lot. What can we learn from him this Advent? Lot is an interesting case study, a study in contrasts. We hear in 2 Peter 2: *“Lot, a righteous man... was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men<sup>8</sup> (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard.)”* That’s quite a telling commentary on Lot, a great positive!

Yet we also see negatives:

- Lot had chosen the better land by the heathen cities, when given the choice by Uncle Abraham.

- By the time of this story, we see that Lot had even moved into the city and was hanging out at the city gate, the place for business and commerce.
- When Lot has to address the crowd, he calls them “friends” and offers them his unmarried daughters.
- Lot hesitates for some reason and does not leave the city.

Why these negatives? Was Lot getting comfortable in the city? Was he indecisive in whether he wanted to leave? Had his perspective been dulled? Why did God have to pull him out?

We can’t say for sure, but it certainly is a warning to us not to become dulled to the world around us. In the sewer of news, ideas, and sins around us, can we be tempted toward dullness? Might we become complacent and lose our urgency to hold on to the Word of God and its truths? Might we be lulled to sleep in thinking, “I’m strong enough”?

If you like to watch football, you’ll notice that at the end of the game when things are on the line the running backs will hold on to the ball for all they’re worth. When defenders need the ball and are trying to pry it from their arms, they will hold on with two hands and hang on for all they’re worth. As we approach the end of time, I’d submit to you that the devil and his wicked allies are trying much harder than that to pry the Word and faith from your heart. It is a time that we need to hold on for all we’re worth. It is not a time to be complacent or casual about your spiritual health or your eternity. It is also a time – thank the Lord – that we can be assured that God will keep his grasp on us also.

One way that I’d encourage you to do this during the Advent season is by using a flier of daily Advent Bible readings that we have available for you. This can be a practical way to keep us vigilant and watching as we await Jesus, and we have a stack of them on the table in the back today for your use.

Second, Lot’s wife. She is one of the most mysterious characters in the Bible. Her name is not even mentioned. Jesus commented on her tragic figure in Luke 17: *“In the days of Lot people were eating and drinking, buying and*

*selling, planting and building. <sup>29</sup> But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. On that day no one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside, should go down to get them... Remember Lot's wife! Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it."*

As we ultimately flee this doomed city, there is danger in looking back. Lot's wife couldn't bear to leave, and she looked back – literally, she gazed and stared intently with care and concern. She couldn't let go. **She teaches us that worse than a dulled conscience is one that loves what is left behind, loves this world, loves its vices, calls it home, and regrets having to leave it. May this never be said of us! May we avoid that fatal temptation!**

Dear friends, welcome to Advent! I think you'd agree with me that it begins today on a somber note. Yet it is a good beginning, for this is a serious matter before us. It deals with our spiritual health and our eternity.

**Therefore, may God grant us an appreciation for his Advent blessings:**

- 1. His justice is real and imminent**
- 2. His mercy and grace are also near**
- 3. And he will help us to prepare for his coming this Advent season**

Amen.