

“A Picture of Hell”
(Genesis 19:24)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last week, we considered how the Lord protected His people so that His work of redemption could move forward.
 - a. He protected His people from the Canaanites: The descendents of the cursed line of Canaan, the son of Ham, the son of Noah.
 - (i) They were so evil, the Lord commanded His people not to have close dealings with them.
 - (ii) They were yet to become even worse, so that the Lord removed His people to Egypt until they had filled up the cup of His wrath, and then sent His people into the land utterly to destroy them.
 - (iii) The Canaanites hated God’s people because they were the seed of the serpent; they hated them because they were strangers in the land; and they hated them because the Lord sometimes used them to bring judgment on them – remember, Simeon and Levi killed all the men of Shechem because he violated their sister.
 - (iv) But the Lord was watching over them: He sent angels to protect them, and made these wicked men afraid of them.
 - b. He protected them from all their other enemies, as well.
 - (i) He protected Jacob from Laban, when Laban came after him to bring him, his family and all his possessions back to Paddan-aram.
 - (ii) He protected Jacob from Esau, when Esau came after him with four hundred armed men, as he was returning to Canaan.
 - (iii) God’s people had left the ark when the flood of God’s wrath was over, but the ark had not left them – the Lord Jesus Christ was continuing to protect them from His and their enemies.
2. Remember, since you are also a part of His plan, He is protecting you as well.
 - a. You are the seed of the woman, surrounded by the seed of the serpent.
 - b. You are few in number, while they are many.
 - c. You are called to live and proclaim a message, which they hate.
 - d. But the Lord said He would be with you until your work is done: you are safely in His hands because of what Jesus has done.

B. Preview.

1. This morning, we’re going to consider another way the Lord protected His people and advanced His work: by providing a terrifying picture of His wrath in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.
 - a. Fear is a very powerful thing – it can restrain the sins both of the converted and the unconverted.

- b. The converted look at God's wrath and realize that this is what they deserve for their sins, but for the grace of God.
- c. The unconverted look at it – and though they often try to deny it – know that this is what waits for them, unless they repent.

2. What we'll see are two things:

- a. First, that the Lord used the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah to prevent the Canaanites from harming His people.
- b. Second, that in this judgment, the Lord was giving the world a picture of His coming wrath which would in turn promote His work of grace.

II. Sermon.

A. First, let's consider that the Lord used the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah to prevent the Canaanites from harming His people.

1. Remember that Abraham didn't yet possess the land in those days.

- a. His seed would possess it after the Lord brought them out of Egypt.
- b. For now they were merely strangers in the land.
- c. But events like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah would keep the Canaanites from harming them.

2. Let's consider why this might happen from Lot's situation.

- a. Lot was a stranger in the land, but he was identified with God's people.
- b. And from the events that took place in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, it surely must have appeared to the Canaanites that the Lord's destruction of those cities must have had something to do with how they treated him.
 - (i) Lot took these two travelers in and gave them the hospitality and protection of his house.
 - (ii) Later that evening, the men of Sodom surrounded Lot's house and demanded him to bring out the men that they might abuse them.
 - (iii) When Lot declined, they threatened to abuse him worse than the two men.
 - (iv) It was then the angels acted:
 - (a) They reached out and drew Lot back into the house.
 - (b) They struck the men at the doorway with blindness.
 - (c) Then they told Lot to bring anyone who belonged to him out of the city.
 - (d) They would not send God's judgment until Lot and his family were safely out of harm's way.
 - (e) And when they reached Zoar, the Lord rained fire and brimstone out of heaven and destroyed those cities, so that when Abraham arose in the morning and looked down towards that valley, it looked like a fiery furnace from all the smoke he saw.

c. It was so horrible a sight that it must have terrified the people of that land.

- (i) As we saw last week, the Lord will later put the terror of His people on the Canaanites for the sake of Jacob when his sons killed the inhabitants of Shechem.
- (ii) Here He did it by way of a visible image.

- (iii) This event may still have been in their minds when Jacob was afraid of the Canaanites because of what his sons had done.
- (iv) This might be the terror He caused to fall on them.

- B. Second, let's consider that in this judgment, the Lord was giving the world a picture of His coming wrath which would in turn promote His work of grace. This was another way the Lord used this event to promote the work of redemption: by showing the world the terror of His Law so that they might realize their need of redeeming grace and mercy.
1. The Lord has always advanced His work in this way: using the law and His judgment for breaking it as a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ.
 - a. There was perhaps more of a need for the Lord to reveal His wrath in the OT times, before the New Covenant.
 - b. In the Gospel, we clearly see how seriously God takes sin in the sufferings and crucifixion of Christ:
 - (i) Seriously enough to pour His full wrath out on His beloved Son.
 - (ii) Here we see just how evil sin is.
 - (iii) But we also see the love and grace of God in that He was willing to give His Son to suffer and die in the place of those who would trust in Him.
 2. How did God reveal His wrath in the OT days?
 - a. In Moses' day, the Lord revealed His wrath against sin through His judgments against Egypt in the Ten Plagues and the drowning of the Egyptians in the Red Sea, as well as through His fiery appearance on Mount Sinai just before He gave them the Law.
 - b. In the days from Adam to Noah, He did so through Adam, as he told his offspring of the judgment God threatened in the garden and in the terrible consequences of Fall, since he was an eyewitness of these things – Adam lived nine hundred and thirty years.
 - c. From the days of Noah until the time of Abraham, the Lord taught men to fear Him through the worldwide Flood. Noah and Shem were both still alive in Abraham's day – they were eyewitnesses.
 - d. At this point, the Flood had probably faded from the minds of most, though some version of the Flood account was passed down from generation to generation in most cultures.
 - e. And so the Lord was pleased again to reveal His wrath in the destruction of these cities, which is one of the clearest pictures He has ever given of the nature of hell.
 - (i) Jude writes, "And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day, just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire" (vv. 6-7).
 - (ii) The Lord used this as an example to His people of what sin deserves:
 - (a) "Now the generation to come, your sons who rise up after you and the foreigner who comes from a distant land, when they see the plagues of the

land and the diseases with which the LORD has afflicted it, will say, ‘All its land is brimstone and salt, a burning waste, unsown and unproductive, and no grass grows in it, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the LORD overthrew in His anger and in His wrath’” (Deu. 29:22-23).

(b) “Unless the LORD of hosts had left us a few survivors, we would be like Sodom, we would be like Gomorrah” (Isa. 1:9).

(iii) And He used it as an example to sinners of the same thing:

(a) “And Babylon, the beauty of kingdoms, the glory of the Chaldeans’ pride, will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It will never be inhabited or lived in from generation to generation; nor will the Arab pitch *his* tent there, nor will shepherds make *their flocks* lie down there” (Isa. 13:19-20).

(b) “‘Therefore, as I live,’ declares the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘Surely Moab will be like Sodom and the sons of Ammon like Gomorrah – a place possessed by nettles and salt pits, and a perpetual desolation. The remnant of My people will plunder them and the remainder of My nation will inherit them’” (Zeph. 2: 9).

(c) Peter writes, “He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing *them* to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly *lives* thereafter” (2 Pet. 2: 6).

C. Finally, let’s consider two applications.

1. First, the rebuke this is to the church for refusing to talk about God’s wrath against sin or hell in presenting the Gospel to the world.

a. It’s becoming increasingly popular not to speak of unpopular things for fear that the church will scare people away.

(i) They have reasoned obedience out of the Gospel – you don’t have to submit to Christ as your Lord to have Him as your Savior; you only have to change your mind about who He is and receive His mercy and forgiveness, without changing the way you live.

(ii) They have removed the cross from the Gospel – the idea of a blood sacrifice turns people off.

(iii) And they have eliminated the message of hell:

(a) Some don’t want to talk about it because people don’t want to hear it. They want to focus on heaven instead, thinking that unbeliever will want to go there.

(b) Others believe a god of love simply can’t send people to hell – they don’t deserve it.

(iv) Eliminating the “negative” things, they add a lot of positive, self-help items that will attract people, and voila, you have the contemporary church.

b. But we need to remember two things:

(i) The Lord has given us a message that we have no right to change.

- (ii) God is the One who reveals His wrath for the very purpose of turning sinners to the Gospel.
 - (a) Just examine the biblical accounts of evangelism and you'll find that the Law and the consequences for breaking it are always mentioned first before God's pardon in Christ.
 - (b) No one will ever come to Christ for no reason – the reason they will come is to flee from the wrath to come.
 - (c) The Law is a schoolmaster to lead people to Christ (Gal. 3:24).
 - (iii) This morning, if you see your danger apart from Christ and know that you haven't receive God's grace in Him, then let the Law and God's wrath have its work in your heart – let it produce the fear that will cause you to seek Christ for His mercy and grace.
2. Second, we need to remember that God reveals His wrath not just for the world's sake, but primarily for ours.
- a. Do you know that you (and I) deserve the same thing that happened to Sodom and Gomorrah?
 - (i) That's what your sin deserves apart from Christ, and even though He has taken your sins away by His death, that doesn't mean you have the liberty to continue to sin.
 - (ii) Paul writes, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?" (Rom. 6:1-2).
 - b. But what is even more frightening is the possibility that by continuing to sin after you have come to know Christ, you might just prove that you're not really converted.
 - (i) John tells us, "No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother" (1 John 3:9-10).
 - (ii) The author to the Hebrews tells us, "For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries" (10:26-27).
 - (iii) Don't forget, Jesus says it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment than for you, if you turn away from all that He has told you, all that He has shown you.
 - (iv) Just because you fall into sin doesn't mean you're not a Christian; but when you are in sin, it's very difficult to know; and from what Jesus tells said, this is something you don't want to be mistaken on.
 - (v) Let the example of Sodom and Gomorrah be a means of bringing you to self-examination, and if necessary, repentance. Amen.