

And Justice for All

2 Peter 2:4-9

There is truth, and there is falsehood. That was the whole message of the last two sermons. From chapter 1, we studied first the “word of the prophets made more certain,” “the prophetic word confirmed, which is the “prophecy of Scripture [which did not come] about by the prophet’s own interpretation..., but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”

And last Sunday, as a contrast to that true prophecy, we studied the falsehood of the false prophets, those “who will secretly bring in destructive heresies.”

That can be troubling for us, for we live in a world where truth and falsehood are constantly at war. And that war often spills over into our lives, as it did for two prominent OT saints, Noah and Lot. Their story is recalled in our text this morning, and they are used for our encouragement.

We’ll begin that encouragement with the simple reality that,

I. GOD EXECUTES JUSTICE UPON THE WICKED.

Sometimes, particularly when we come face to face with wickedness and falsehood, that is the biggest encouragement we could have.

When confronted with the apparent prosperity of the wicked, David writes in Psalm 73, “But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”

He went on to think to himself, “Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence. “All

day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning.”

That is a rather common discouragement. But David knew better, for that great psalm continues.

Ps. 73:16 “When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me 17 till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. 18 Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. 19 How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors!”

That was his encouragement, as it will often be for us, too. God will destroy the wicked, according to his perfect justice. Peter speaks of that destruction, speaking of sending the fallen angels to hell in verse 4, he “delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment.”

And in verse 6, we read that he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. In verse 9 we read of his day of judgment.

Peter gives us three clear-cut examples of God’s justice upon the wicked in these verses. First,

A. The example of the fallen angels.

v.4

Now, this is a very interesting verse, because we learn something here that is described in only one other cross reference,

Jude 6 “And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day.”

The fallen angels. When did they fall? How did they fall? We know none of those answers, and it is foolish to speculate about things on which the Bible is silent. Some of the angels fell. That much we know. They fell from their positions of authority and honor. And they did so after the six days of creation, for at the completion of those days, we read that,

Gen. 1:31 "Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day."

So after the sixth day, none of the angels had fallen. But by the time that the serpent tempted Adam and Eve, which I presume would have been only a matter of days or a couple weeks, since Eve had not yet conceived a child, sometime before then, Satan and a host of the angels fell.

They sinned. That's what we know. And we know that God did not spare them. He sent them to hell.

The Greek word there is Tartarus, which is actually borrowed from the writings of classical Greek mythology. Tartarus was the place of judgment reserved for the rebellious gods in the legends of Greek mythology. It was the deep abyss to which the gods were condemned. By using the name Tartarus, Peter is not validating the stories of Greek mythology as though they were truthful, but he is certainly communicating in a way that his hearers would be sure to understand. The fallen angels were condemned under God's justice. Even the angels, those glorious creatures which inhabited the heavenly realms. Even they, when they sinned, would experience God's justice.

God sent them to hell, and Peter describes that further. He put them into gloomy dungeons, literally pits of darkness, vividly

describing in symbolic language the condemnation they would experience.

And what are those gloomy dungeons where they are being held? What are the angels experiencing now, those who have been sent to those pits of darkness? Specifically, are they free to roam about doing whatever they please?

The answer is clearly "no." They are being "held for judgment."

They are already incarcerated, imprisoned in the county jail, to use the analogy of our present day court system. They have been arrested and imprisoned, and they await only their date of sentencing before the judge.

And those angels are apparently joined in their incarceration by the wicked, represented by the rich man in the account of the rich man and Lazarus.

Luke 16:19 "There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. 20 "But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, 21 "desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 "So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 "And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 "Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.' 25 "But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted

and you are tormented. 26 'And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.'"

Luke uses the Greek word Hades for hell, and describes it as a place of agony. A place of fire. A place of torment. And there was a great chasm between that place and the place of the glory of God's presence.

Surely that must be the same place which both Peter and Jude refer to, the place where the angels are held for judgment, as an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly. The example of the fallen angels is an example that God executes justice upon the wicked. So is,

B. The example of the ancient world.

v.5

Interestingly, Scripture here seems to speak of three great ages, or three great periods of time which divide and define all of history. There was the ancient world, which is here defined as the world that existed before the flood. Then there is this present age, the world after the flood. And then there is a great future age, the age to come. The new heavens and the new earth in all eternity.

The ending of that first age came about by the deluge of the flood, the hand of God's judgment. In that sense, the ending of this age will come about the very same way. By the hand of God's judgment.

As an example of what will happen to the ungodly, God did not spare the ancient world. Because they were given over to wickedness. All of them, except Noah. So thoroughly given over to sin that we read that,

Gen. 6:5 "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6 And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. 7 So the LORD said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them."

"Every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time." So what happened? God brought a flood upon the ungodly people. With the only exception of Noah and his family, with only two of every kind of animal spared in order to continue procreation, God destroyed every living creature on earth. Every one. As an example of his justice.

Notice how Peter ties together the great flood and the final judgment.

2Pet. 3:3 "...scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, 4 and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." 5 For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, 6 by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. 7 But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men."

God executes judgment upon the wicked, and the example of the flood should be an encouragement to those who, by faith, live godly lives.

Finally, we have,

C. The examples of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

v.6

There, specifically, we are told that they were destroyed as an example. An example to us of how the ungodly will be judged. That example is for our encouragement. It is an assurance for us, as we'll see in a few moments. But most of all, it is a revelation of God.

A god who overlooks sin is not the God of the Bible despite the popular appeal of such a god in our day. A god who tolerates sin is not the God of the Bible, despite the attitudes of many people today. And with specific regard to Sodom and Gomorrah, a god who fails to condemn horrible sexual immorality is not the God of the Bible. Despite the popular appeals of so many in our day.

Peter tells us that Sodom and Gomorrah were burned to ashes? For what reason? Horrible immorality. Sexual immorality. Including the degrading sin of homosexuality, described in verse 7 as the "filthy conduct of the wicked." That filthiness has particular reference to sexual filthiness and impurity, made explicitly clear in Genesis 19.

We read of this city in,

Gen. 19:23 "By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land. 24 Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah —from the LORD out of the heavens. 25 Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, including all those living in the cities —and also the vegetation in the land. 26 But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt. 27 Early the next morning Abraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood before the LORD. 28 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."

That is an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly. As a sure and certain reality.

And so when you might be tempted to think like David thought in Psalm 73--"Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence,"--when you start to get discouraged when you have to come face to face with the prosperity and success of those who are wicked, think about their final destiny. "Surely [God places] them on slippery ground; [God casts] them down to ruin. How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors!"

But what about the godly, described by Peter as the exception in the sinful world. What about Noah and what about Lot? What Peter declares is that,

II. GOD PROTECTS THOSE WHO DEMONSTRATE THE REALITY OF THEIR FAITH WITH SINCERE GODLINESS.

These two things are happening simultaneously, throughout this whole age. The wicked will face God's justice, but the godly will be rescued. Protected.

And so it is, in the symbolic language of Jesus' parables, that we live in a field that consists of both wheat and tares, or weeds.

Matt. 13:24 "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; 25 "but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. 26 "But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. 27 "So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then

does it have tares?’ 28 "He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The servants said to him, ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’ 29 "But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. 30 ‘Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.'""

The reality is that weeds will grow up among the wheat. The wicked will live and prosper among the godly, though ultimately, they will be gathered and tied in bundles to be burned! But the wheat, the wheat will survive. Despite the weeds. The wheat will flourish, because of God’s sovereign protection. Take,

A. The example of Noah.

v.5 “[God] saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly.”

Noah was a preacher of righteousness, no doubt speaking and demonstrating a powerful witness of faith during those 120 years of ark building. Yet no one accepted the call to repentance, and they perished in their sin.

And what else do we know about Noah?

Hebr. 11:7 “By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.”

And from the Genesis account, in contrast to the greatness of man’s wickedness, we read that,

Gen. 6:8 “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.”

Noah found favor, grace, before the Lord, and as an object of

God’s grace, we then read that,

Gen. 6:9 “This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God.”

Noah was a man of faith, who demonstrated the reality of his faith with his sincere godliness. He walked with God. Therefore, God protected him!

Then,

B. The example of Lot.

God rescued Lot, even as he burned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes.

v.7-8

Now, the interesting thing about those words is that they give Lot a very, very positive evaluation. Reading through the account in Genesis by itself, you might not come to that conclusion. Lot was actually quite hesitant to leave Sodom, as we read in,

Gen. 19:15 “When the morning dawned, the angels urged Lot to hurry, saying, "Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city." 16 And while he lingered, the men took hold of his hand, his wife’s hand, and the hands of his two daughters, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city. 17 So it came to pass, when they had brought them outside, that he said, "Escape for your life! Do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains, lest you be destroyed.”

Lot seems ungrateful to God’s graciousness, and even bargains with the angels.

Gen. 19:18 Then Lot said to them, "Please, no, my lords! 19 "Indeed now, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have increased your mercy which you have shown me by saving my life; but I cannot escape to the mountains, lest some evil overtake me and I die. 20 "See now, this city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one; please let me escape there (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live." 21 And he said to him, "See, I have favored you concerning this thing also, in that I will not overthrow this city for which you have spoken. 22 "Hurry, escape there. For I cannot do anything until you arrive there." Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar."

And certainly Lot's horrible example of drunkenness and incest which produced sons through each of his two daughters is a demonstration of unspeakable wickedness.

But nonetheless, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Peter gives us an infallible evaluation of the whole of Lot's life. He was a righteous man. He was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men. He was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard. Surely he demonstrated the reality of his faith with sincere godliness.

And God rescued him. As an encouragement for us--so let's end by looking more specifically at that encouragement and how it applies to us.

III. GOD ENCOURAGES THE RIGHTEOUS WHO LIVE IN THIS WICKED WORLD BY GIVING THEM GREAT ASSURANCES.

Great assurances. Things which you can be confident of. Things which you can know and be sure of. The first assurance is so obvious from the examples of Noah and Lot which we just studied.

A. The assurance that God will rescue the righteous from their trials.

v.5 "[God] saved Noah."

v.7 "[God] delivered Lot."

Their example gives us our assurance, which is Peter's main point.

v.9a

This is similar to the experience described in Psalm 34, where we read about a righteous man finding his protection from the wicked in God.

Ps. 34:4 "I sought the LORD, and He heard me, And delivered me from all my fears."

Ps. 34:6 "This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard him, And saved him out of all his troubles. 7 The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, And delivers them. 8 Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!"

Ps. 34:15 "The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their cry. 16 The face of the LORD is against those who do evil, To cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. 17 The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears, And delivers them out of all their troubles. 18 The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit. 19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all. 20 He guards all his bones; Not one of them is broken. 21 Evil shall slay the wicked, And those who hate the righteous shall be condemned. 22 The LORD redeems the soul of His servants, And none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned."

We surely learn from Noah and Lot that “many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all.” And that should be a great encouragement. Notice, too, that the Lord delivers them from their troubles, which means, that they will experience troubles. The promise is not that the righteous will have no troubles. That’s a false hope. In this world, you will have trouble. But in the experiences of those troubles, the Lord will deliver you.

In Jesus’ words,

John 16:33 “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

Take heart from the example of Noah. Take heart from the example of Lot. The Lord will rescue the righteous from their trials. And, then we have,

B. The assurance that God will restrain the work of the wicked throughout this age.

v.9-10a

This is a very important part of our understanding of Satan and his work on earth, and it has great implications for whatever view of eschatology you reach. The simple truth is that God restrains the work of the wicked throughout this age.

Speaking of the people who died in the flood and in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, we can be sure that the unrighteous are held for judgment while continuing their punishment. But that also includes the angels, held in gloomy dungeons. By implication, therefore, Satan would be among those fallen angels.

With understanding of the restraints placed upon Satan, I

apply the words of Revelation 20 to this present age.

Rev. 20:1 “Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. 2 He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; 3 and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.”

It makes perfect biblical sense to me to understand that Satan is bound with a great chain, and therefore kept from deceiving the nations until the thousand years are ended, symbolically referring to this whole age. The flip side of that is the Great Commission that Jesus gives to his church. Since Satan will be kept from deceiving the nations throughout this age, restrained at least to that extent, we are to go to all those nations with the gospel with the expectation and the confidence of spreading the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Mat.28:18 “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

If Satan were free to deceive the nations, and if he weren’t bound in any way by the sovereign, omnipotent power of God, then we would have little confidence sending out missionaries, wouldn’t we?

But Jesus clearly declares his authority over Satan. He clearly

declares that his kingdom has come and that he rules as the King. When he was accused of working for Satan,

Matt. 12:25 "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. 26 "If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? 27 "And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. 28 "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. 29 "Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house."

The point is that the kingdom of God has come. Jesus came and tied up the strong man, and in the language of that parable, he is now robbing his house! So we have the assurance that God will restrain the work of the wicked throughout this age. Satan will still be around, still given permission under God's providence to tempt us, and he will win some skirmishes. But the outcome of the war has already been determined. For we also have,

C. The assurance that God has promised a future day of judgment.

God is the great equalizer. There will be a day of judgment.
v.9

That should be your greatest encouragement, as you endure the troubles of this world. God has promised, and it is just as certain as the day of his creation. There will be a day of judgment.

Let me end by going back to Psalm 73, for a final, personal, and practical application of all this. Remember the Psalmist's discouraging dilemma, thinking that because the wicked seemed

to have things so well, he had kept his heart pure in vain. He had lived in innocence in vain, for in his own words, "All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning."

And when that discouragement was removed by the realization that the wicked would be punished at the great day of judgment, how did he respond to God? We these great words of triumphant faith.

Ps. 73:25 "Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. 26 My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. 27 For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry. 28 But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, That I may declare all Your works."

So I don't want to end today talking about how the wicked will be destroyed, but rather by letting the assurance of that day of judgment be an encouragement to the faith of the righteous.

Ps.73:27 "...those who are far from [God] shall perish; [God will destroy] all those who desert [him] for harlotry. 28 But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, That I may declare all Your works."

Ps. 73:1 "Truly God is good to Israel, To such as are pure in heart."

Mat. 5:8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God."