

First Things – Genesis

Genesis 18:16-33

“When Judgment is Coming”

1. **WHY GOD REVEALS HIS JUDGMENT**
 - A. As a motive for intercession
 - B. As a method of instruction
2. **WHY GOD RENDERS HIS JUDGMENT**
 - A. Because of His position
 - B. Because of His perspective
3. **WHY GOD RESTRAINS HIS JUDGMENT**
 - A. The presence of the righteous in this world
 - B. The prayers of the righteous in this world

1. In his book *The God Who is There*, D.A. Carson includes a chapter entitled “The God Who is Very Angry”.

2. Carson says, “Any residual ideas of God as a slightly sleepy grandfather figure and nothing more simply will not stand up to the way that the Bible portrays God’s righteousness...”¹

3. Unfortunately, too many people today have created a warm, fuzzy god in their own image; one that only loves and hugs, and never hates or judges.

4. That is not, however, the God of the Bible. He is gracious and loving, but He is also holy and just. He is not one-dimensional, and to know Him fully is to accept that He is the God who executes judgment upon sin.

5. In Genesis 18, the Lord told His servant Abraham that He was preparing to deal with wicked cities of the plain, including Sodom and Gomorrah. From what the Lord told Him that day, Abraham knew that judgment was coming.

6. As we read through the Word of God, we also know that judgment is coming. The prophecies of the Bible reveal that the day is fast-approaching when the cup of God’s wrath is going to be poured out upon this wicked world.

7. As we study this text in Genesis 18, we learn some things about the judgment of God, and how we are to respond to it as believers who have been saved from the wrath that is to come.

8. Rather than squirming uncomfortably at the thought of judgment, we must face it squarely and respond to it correctly.

9. Look at this text with me and notice some things we learn here about the judgment of God. First of all, we see here something about:

I. WHY GOD REVEALS HIS JUDGMENT

1. After the meal that Abraham had prepared for his heavenly visitors, the old man walked with them a bit as they started on their way.
2. As the men looked down from the mountain toward the fertile plain, they set their eyes upon the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.
3. In verse 17 we read, "*And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do...*"
4. Knowing what was coming for those cities and the people living in them, the Lord saw fit to let Abraham in on what was about to happen.
5. We are reminded here that God's judgment does not come without warning. He has revealed the coming judgment to us as His people, just as He did for His friend, Abraham long ago.
6. Consider with me why God tells us of the judgment that is to come. First of all, the text indicates that He does so:

A. As a motive for intercession

1. Look again at the text. The Lord decides to tell Abraham what He is going to do, saying, "*And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do...*"
2. Verse 18 continues, "*Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?*"
3. In other words, there was a sense in which all the nations of the world were connected to Abraham. Through Him, and His ultimate Seed, the Lord Jesus, all the nations would be blessed.
4. By revealing the danger that these neighboring cities were facing, I believe the Lord was trying to stir up Abraham's concern for them.
5. The Lord was motivating Abraham to intercede on behalf of these people, which Abraham does in the remainder of this chapter.
6. In Romans 1:14, Paul describes himself by saying, "*I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.*"

7. The great apostle felt as though he had an obligation to all people to preach to them the gospel.
8. When we read in the Word of God of the judgment that is coming upon mankind, our hearts ought to be stirred to pray for them and point them to Jesus!
9. The knowledge of hell ought to be just as alarming to a saved man as it is to a lost man. We should be motivated for the sake of others because of what we know about the judgment of God.
10. Currently, there are more than 4.5 billion people on this planet who are facing the prospect of dying without Christ, and spending eternity under the judgment of God in hell.
11. God has made this known to us, and we ought to be motivated by it. He reveals His judgment, not only as a motive for intercession, but the text indicates that He also reveals it:

B. As a method of instruction

1. Look at what else God says about His reason for telling Abraham of what He was going to do. He says in verse 19, *"For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him."*
2. The Lord "knew" Abraham. He had chosen Him and called Him, and He knew that Abraham would teach his posterity about the God He served.
3. He also knew that Abraham would point to the judgment of God as part of his instruction to those who would follow him.
4. It used to be that you heard a lot more about the judgment of God and hell in our churches. Preachers used to call people to flee from the wrath that is to come.
5. Now it seems in most churches, the fire and brimstone preaching has been put away. Rather than telling sinners that a hell awaits them if they don't repent, we now tell them that God has a great plan for their lives.
6. Rather than teaching our children to fear the judgment of God, we've made God out to be a kind of cartoon character, with a book full of colorful and entertaining stories.
7. The truth is that we must speak clearly of the wrath and judgment of God. He has revealed it to us so that we might teach those around us of its truth!

8. John Updike's novel, *In the Beauty of the Lilies*, tells of a Presbyterian preacher in the early 1900's who completely lost his faith in God and became an atheist.

9. Before he left the ministry, the story tells of him going to visit a dying man in his congregation. The man confronted his pastor about his preaching. He said:

"I never heard enough damnation from your pulpit. Many mornings I had to strain to take hold of what you were saying, Reverend..."ⁱⁱ

10. When it comes to the issue of the judgment of God, we as God's people ought to speak clearly. God has revealed His ultimate judgment to us, and it is our responsibility to teach the truth of it to those coming behind us.

11. As we look further at this text, we see here not only *why God reveals His judgment*, but we see also further:

II. WHY GOD RENDERS HIS JUDGMENT

1. As the Lord shared with Abraham His intentions for the cities of the plain, He said in verses 20 and 21, "*Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know.*"

2. In these verses the Lord revealed to Abraham *why* He was about to judge the neighboring cities.

3. As believers today, it is important that we understand why God can and will judge sinners. We must understand that His wrath is justified. He has a right, and even an obligation, to judge sin.

4. Notice what He said to Abraham about the coming judgment. First of all, He would render judgment:

B. Because of His position

1. In verse 20, the Lord said that "*...the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great...*" In verse 21, He said that the cry had come unto Him.

2. The word "cry" is interesting. Some translate it as "outcry". The word speaks of the complaint of someone who is being abused or victimized.

3. The word indicates that the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was not just sexual perversion, but all kinds of social and moral evils.

4. In Ezekiel 16:49, the prophet describes the sins of Sodom as, "...*pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.*"
5. One writer says, "Sodom and Gomorrah were terrible little towns in which the inhabitants cared only for themselves while they brutalized and oppressed each other."ⁱⁱⁱ
6. What I want you to see is that the outrage and outcry against this wickedness came to the ears of Almighty God.
7. He is the One to whom these sins cried out for punishment and judgment. Why, because He alone is the judge of mankind.
8. He is the One who is ultimately offended and wronged by man's sin. He is the One whose law has been violated.
9. In Psalm 51:4, fallen King David confesses and says, "*Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight...*"
10. Of course, David had sinned against others, but it was God who was ultimately and chiefly offended.
11. As Creator and giver of life, God is uniquely positioned to judge the sins of His creatures. The outcry against sin ultimately comes to His ears.
12. Notice further that God renders judgment, not only because of His position, but also:

B. Because of His perspective

1. Notice what God says to Abraham in verse 21. "*I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me...*"
2. If God could read the thoughts in Sarah's mind, then He knew full well the wickedness of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.
3. It was not that God was not fully aware of what was going on there. Instead, by this statement, God was assuring Abraham that He would not judge them unless they were completely deserving of it.
4. God does not judge sin randomly or inconsistently. When He judges sin, we can be sure that He has a better perspective on it than we do.

5. Some fear that the judgment of God might be unfair in the end. They fear that some might get less than they deserve, and others might get more than they deserve.
6. In reality, God knows all things. He sees not just the deeds, but the hearts of all men. He knows full well the measure of their sins.
7. On the other hand, we do *not* know everything. We don't have the full perspective on someone else's life. We are not qualified to adequately judge anyone else.
8. When Michelangelo was painting the "Last Judgment" scene on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, he was constantly being pestered by one of the Pope's assistants who wanted a preview of the work.
9. When the work was finally completed, the man was horrified to find that the great artist had painted him into the scene, among those who were tormented in hell.
10. We do not have the power to save someone from hell, or send anyone to hell. However, we believe, as Abraham says in verse 25, "*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*"
11. Indeed He will! When He renders His judgment upon sin, we can be assured that He is justified and right in what He does.
12. In this text, we see not only something about *why God reveals His judgment*, and *why God renders His judgment*, but notice also thirdly that we see here:

III. WHY GOD RESTRAINS HIS JUDGMENT

1. Verses 23 through 33 record for us an amazing conversation that took place between Abraham and the Lord.
2. Once Abraham heard of the judgment that was coming, he quickly began to intercede for the people standing in the path of that judgment.
3. While Sodom and Gomorrah were eventually destroyed, we nonetheless learn some things from this conversation about how the judgment of God might be delayed or restrained.
4. As we live in a world headed for destruction, what we learn here is of great importance and relevance to this day, as much as it was to Abraham's day.
5. Consider what we learn here. We see here that the judgment and wrath of God are restrained because of:

A. The presence of the righteous in this world

1. Look now at verse 23. When Abraham hears of what is coming for the neighboring cities, the Bible says, *"And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?"*
2. Abraham's question set the stage for the remainder of the conversation. In verse 24, he asks whether the Lord would spare the city if 50 righteous people were found there.
3. In verse 26, the Lord answered, *"If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes."*
4. Abraham presses on throughout the chapter, reducing the number from 50, to 45, to 40, to 30, to 20, and finally to only 10 righteous people in the city.
5. In each case, the Lord's answer is the same. He said finally in verse 32, *"...I will not destroy it for ten's sake."*
6. Ultimately, not even ten righteous people were found, but a truth emerges here that is important. The presence of the righteous in this world is a deterrent and a restraint to the judgment of God.
7. Yes, He still judges sin. Yes, His wrath is still revealed, but the presence of the righteous keeps His wrath from being poured out completely.
8. Our Lord Jesus said that we are "the salt of the earth". Our presence in some way restrains the decay that would otherwise destroy our society.
9. With that being said, if we cease to be righteous and distinct in this world, are we not hastening that coming judgment?
10. If there is no difference in our lives and those who are heading toward hell, are we not in some way stoking the fires of judgment?
11. There is no way that we can stop the eventual judgment of God. However, that is no reason for us to grease the skids of its approach by living like those who stand in its path!
12. As we will see, Abraham's nephew, Lot, was spared from the judgment that fell upon his adopted city, but it appears that His life did little to slow the descent of his community.
13. May God find us righteous for the sake of those around us!

14. We learn here that the judgment of God is restrained, not only by the presence of the righteous in this world, but I think we also learn that it is in some way restrained by:

B. The prayers of the righteous in this world

1. This section in Genesis 18 is usually described as one of the great Bible illustrations of intercessory prayer; that is, prayer on the behalf of someone else.

2. Abraham prayed that the Lord would spare the people of those cities. He interceded on their behalf.

3. As we look into the next chapter, we realize that Abraham's pleading was not enough to save those cities.

4. The Lord destroyed them because of their exceeding wickedness. Yet, Abraham's prayers were not completely in vain.

5. Genesis 19:29 says this: *"And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt."*

6. The Lord remembered Abraham and his prayers, and because of them Lot was spared from the destruction.

7. We are reminded that there is power in intercessory prayer! When we as God's people pray for others, we can make a difference in future of their lives!

8. With that being said, who are you praying for? Is there someone that is right now standing in the path of God's judgment for whom you are interceding?

9. If you don't pray for them, who will? Who will call their name out to God and plead for His mercy on their lives?

10. My favorite writer, J. Sidlow Baxter once said, "Men may spurn our appeals, reject our message, oppose our arguments, despise our persons – but they are helpless against our prayers."

11. May the Lord's judgment upon someone be restrained in some way because of our prayers!

1. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is referenced some 22 times in Scripture as an illustration of the judgment of God.

2. One day, all the world will be judged as those cities were. That day is coming, and we have been warned of it.

3. We have also been pointed to another judgment; the judgment of the cross of Jesus. There God judged the sin of His people finally and forever in the person of His Son.

4. The only reason we don't face the same judgment as the people of Sodom is because Jesus was judged in our place.

5. Knowing that He can save from hell and judgment ought to motivate us to do all we can to tell everyone can about Him.

6. Before that terrible day of wrath comes, let us live holy in this present world. Let us pray for those around us. And let us proclaim Jesus to a world that will perish without Him.

ⁱ Carson, D.A., The God Who is There, (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010), *Amazon Kindle edition*

ⁱⁱ Updike, John, In the Beauty of the Lilies, (Fawcett Books, New York), *Amazon Kindle edition*

ⁱⁱⁱ Hughes, R. Kent, Genesis: Beginning and Blessing, (Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL, 2004), p. 263