

# Grace and Wrath

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] There's a fictional comic book character in the British comic strip called Judge Dredd. And I have not read it myself, and I would not endorse its contents, but it is a well-known cultural reference point.

And he is a law enforcement officer in some kind of dystopian future, sometime in the 22nd century. And he's invested with the power to not only police, but also to arrest, convict, sentence, and execute criminals.

So in himself, he is both the jury, the judge, and the executioner. And normally, people should be wary of investing so much power, concentrating it in one person. But this is Judge Dredd we're talking about. He's a superhero, right?

So he is known for his unflinching execution of justice and known for his incorruptible integrity. He never bends the law for anyone, and he follows the law impeccably.

And so his catchphrase is, I am the law, right? And his multipurpose pistol is called the lawgiver. And his motorcycle is named the lawmaster.

[ 1 : 0 8 ] I mean, it's a comic book we're talking about, right? So he's not a conventional hero. He's kind of an antihero, really. But there is something about him that is still heroic and awe-inspiring.

Why is that? It's because as much as people, we desire and admire mercy and compassion in people, we also desire and admire justice.

It is right to protect the innocent and punish the wrongdoer. And people are outraged for this reason when they see the evildoers go free, when they see the innocent unprotected.

And in Genesis 18 to 19, we see God's judgment, his rightful and holy judgment and punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah. And his judgment is infallible, and his punishment is exacting.

But that's not all we see. God's so much more than a cosmic judge read, right? He's also merciful, compassionate. We see his grace and favor.

[ 2 : 1 2 ] And seeing the wrath of God on the one hand and the grace of God on the other simultaneously is what helps us properly both to fear him and love him as God. And that's the main point of this passage.

We are to fear and love God because he is the judge of all the earth who punishes justly and saves graciously. And so my first point is going to be that he punishes justly.

And my second point will be that he saves graciously. And the first point is going to take most of the sermon, so don't despair if I say second point after 40 minutes. Now, the first point is that God punishes justly, and we see this in chapter 15.

A little bit of chapter 19. But before we get a glimpse of his punishment, we see as kind of a contrast to the wickedness of the Sodomites, Abraham and Sarai.

We get another glimpse into their life. And Abraham is portrayed as kind of this righteous person, and we see this in his hospitality toward the guests he receives. Verse 1, it says, The Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre as Abraham sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day.

[ 3 : 20 ] Now, but this is from the narrator's perspective. It's different from Abraham's perspective, because he says in verse 2, When Abraham sees the Lord, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him.

When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth. So the narrator tells us that the Lord came to Abraham, and Abraham says he sees three men, right?

So it's not the same. So Abraham has a little bit, he has no idea who he's truly encountering here. And this is impossible to ascertain for sure whether this is representative of the persons of the Trinity or not, but it may be a hint of that, because it's three men, the three persons.

For example, there's in verse 9 of chapter 18, it says, They said to Abraham, so third person plural pronoun, but then later it says, It's the Lord said.

So it kind of goes back and forth between the third person plural pronoun and the third person singular pronoun. And then not only that, it says that the men set out from there in 1816 while the Lord was still speaking to Abraham.

[ 4 : 29 ] So it seemed that the Lord stayed, and then his two angels or represented perhaps went to Sodom. And that's what it seems in the beginning when it says in chapter 19, verse 13, the visitors say, We are about to destroy this place because the Lord has sent us to destroy it.

But then later in verse 24, it says that the Lord destroyed Sodom. And Lot entreats the Lord, not the men. So there's a consistent kind of conflation of the identity of the Lord and the identity of the three people, three men were the angelic visitors.

So there's two main possibilities, either that they represent persons of the triune God, the Father, Son, Holy Spirit, or it's the Lord himself and his two angelic representatives, but the angels are so closely identified with God and represent him that they're almost addressed as the Lord himself.

But either way, we're supposed to understand these to be divine figures or divine representatives at the very least. But Abraham doesn't realize this. But even though Abraham doesn't realize this, he unwittingly treats these visitors as if they were God.

So we see his piety in that, even though he is himself unaware of it. So first, he runs to greet the guests. It was considered unbecoming of the gentleman of that time to run.

[ 5 : 45 ] Yet he runs, which is what people do in Genesis, only when they're running toward a long-lost relative. And he bows himself down to the ground, which is also a gesture of great honor and respect. You bow down to someone who is high and mighty, not to someone who is lowly.

And in these, there's a lot of double meaning in play of words. The word bow down is the same word for prostrating yourself in worship. Now, and he refers to God as Lord, even though that can simply be translated as sir.

It also was used before to refer to God as the Lord, the sovereign Lord, right? So there's this, again, play on words. So Abraham is treating these visitors better than he himself knows.

And he promises just a morsel of bread, but in reality, he prepares the veritable feast when they come. He says he brought cakes out, and not just with any type of flour, but with fine flour, and with three seahs of fine flour, which is about 90 cups of flour.

How many of you guys bake? So that's enough bread to feed 100 people. Well, that's not just a morsel. And not only that he kills a calf, a small goat or a lamb would have sufficed for three guests, but he kills a calf.

[ 6 : 53 ] And it's not just any cow, it's tender and good. So in all of these actions, Abraham's not only showing, displaying his hospitality and generosity, but his piety, because all of this points to the later code, the law of God that Moses institutes.

Because according to the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, only fine flour is supposed to be used in the grain offerings offered to God, Leviticus 2.1. And for making the bread of the tabernacle, in Leviticus 24.5.

And then also, you're supposed to offer fine calf, not just any kind of animal, but a calf that's selected, afford sacrifice offering. And after all of this, you would think that Abraham would sit down with his guests and eat, but he says that he sets the food before them and stands by them while they eat, like a servant waiting on his master.

Right? So all of this shows Abraham's piety, his righteousness toward God. And then we begin to see the true identity of these guests in verse 9. Where is Sarah your wife?

Now, at first, that seems like a totally normal question. Yeah, where's your wife, Sarah? But if you think about it, this is a very unusual question, because if you remember, these are perfect strangers to Abraham by this point.

[ 8 : 06 ] So first of all, how do you even know I'm married? And secondly, how do you know that her name is Sarah? And remember, God came right earlier in chapter 17 and then gave her that new name, Sarah.

And so this guest knows her new name. So Sarah, where is your wife, Sarah? So at this point, Abraham's probably a little bit bewildered. He said, well, she's in the tent. But before he could say anything, God says, the Lord says, I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah, your wife, shall have a son.

Now, this was a promise that was given before, but this is the most specific it has ever gotten up to this point. He says, this time next year, they know now when this son is going to finally come.

And Abraham, when he first heard this in chapter 17, verse 17, he laughed. And again, here it says, Sarah also laughs to herself, saying, after I am worn out and my Lord is old, that's his word to Abraham, shall I have pleasure.

But lest we prematurely, you know, criticize, castigate Sarah for her lack of faith, the narrator tells us why Sarah has such a hard time believing. Verse 11, now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years.

[ 9 : 24 ] the way of woman had ceased to be with Sarah. Abraham was by this point 99 years old, Sarah is 89 years old, and she is menopausal.

So that means it's a biological impossibility for her to conceive, let alone give birth. And so this laughter is not one of arrogant mockery, but of cynical, wary disbelief conditioned by years and years and years of disappointment.

And she would have had every right to doubt and to be skeptical of these guests if these were just ordinary guests. But they're not, right? These are divine guests.

So verse 13, 15, it continues, the Lord said to Abraham, why did Sarah laugh and say, shall I indeed bear a child now that I am old? Is anything too hard for the Lord?

At the appointed time I will return to you about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son. But Sarah denied it, saying, I did not laugh, for she was afraid. He said, no, but you did laugh.

[ 10 : 28 ] So even though Sarah was eavesdropping behind the door, somehow the Lord knows Sarah was laughing to herself and then confronts her, and then he says explicitly, is anything too hard for the Lord?

So from this encounter with the Lord, we see that he is not only all-knowing, but he's also all-powerful. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. And thus, in saying this, the visitor confirms that he is not just the ordinary guest, but he is the Lord himself.

And even in Sarah's laughter, she confirms the promise of God because the name Isaac, which will be the name of their son, means I laughed. So in Abraham's laughter, in Sarah's laughter, God's promise is confirmed to them.

Yes, you doubt, you're skeptical, but even through that, God's will will prevail. So with this optimistic note of God's promise of Isaac, the narrative starts to turn in verse 16 and becomes a little more foreboding because God has chosen Abraham to bless him and make him a great nation and through him to bless the nations and for him to be a bastion of righteousness in the earth.

But Sodom and Gomorrah, in contrast, has exceeding wickedness and has reached to the heavens. And so God has come to render judgment. And so when the Lord confides this to Abraham, this purpose to Abraham, Abraham begins to intercede on behalf of the righteous in Sodom and Gomorrah or the righteous that may be there.

[ 11 : 54 ] Verses 23 to 25, follow along with me as I read that. Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are 50 righteous who are in it.

Far be from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked so the righteous fare as the wicked. Far be that from you. Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just?

So this, the whole Old Testament attests to the reality, the truth, that the Lord loves the righteous, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. That's what he says in Psalm 146, 8 to 9.

And that's the principle upon which Abraham builds his defensive case. If there's any righteous, if there's righteous in the city, how can you possibly, if you are just, if you're righteous, destroy the righteous along with the wicked?

And the Lord apparently agrees with Abraham's logic because Abraham begins to bargain with God and God keeps assenting to his suggestions. So verse 32, and he bargains all the way down from 50 to 10.

[ 12 : 56 ] So God answers in verse 32, for the sake of 10, I will not destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Now, some people wonder why Abraham didn't, you know, take this to its logical conclusion.

Say, why don't you just go all the way to one, right? Why didn't you say that? But I think the principle is already established by this point because God is saying, no, I will not destroy the righteous along with the wicked.

That's what he's saying to Abraham. So the bargaining stops there and even though, and the whole point of this bargaining is that we will see this clearly in the next chapter, but there is no righteous person in Sodom and Gomorrah at all.

So even if there were one, God would have saved the city for the sake of that righteous, but there is not one. And Lot, who is the lone, relatively speaking, righteous person, is not a citizen.

He's a sojourner. He's described as a guest in that town. So now, let's turn to Lot as we go and in chapter 19, verses 1 to 3. And here, we see Lot's hospitality to the angelic visitors just as we saw Abraham's hospitality to the angelic visitors.

[ 14 : 01 ] And there's a lot of verbal parallels to highlight that Lot, like Abraham, though not as righteous, is also relatively righteous. Read verses 1 to 3 of chapter 19 with me. Now, the two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom.

When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed himself with his face to the earth and said, My lords, please turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night and wash your feet. Then you may rise up early and go on your way.

They said, No, we will spend the night in the town square. But he pressed them strongly, so they turned aside to him and entered his house. And he made them a feast and baked unleavened bread and they ate.

You see the similarity? So he, Lot, like Abraham, calls them lords. And Lot, like Abraham, prepares them a feast. And Lot, like Abraham, bows himself to the face, his face to the earth.

And so in all of this, Lot is also hospitable. But we see kind of something a little bit, that makes us a little bit uneasy about their interactions because it was taken for granted in the ancient Near East.

[ 15 : 09 ] You offer hospitality to visitors who are in your town, foreigners. But it was the height of, you know, dishonor and to refuse that offer. You always accept that, so you don't refuse that.

But here the angels are reluctant to stay in Sodom and Gomorrah. So they refuse the offer so that he has to almost twist their arms to bring them into their house. So something is going on here. Why are they so reluctant?

And then when they get to Lot's house, the bread that they serve is unleavened. So that suggests that it was prepared in a hurry. And this seems to be an allusion to the later Exodus, right, when Israel has to leave Egypt and they're leaving in a hurry to have to eat unleavened bread.

And remember from a couple chapters ago that Sodom was described a land like Egypt, right? So now here, just like Israel has to leave Egypt, now here Lot's going to have to leave Sodom.

So it's already, we're seeing a foreshadowing of that. Now, and that's, there's another key difference here and is that Abraham, when he was preparing, he had help. His wife, Sarah, was helping him prepare the meal for the guests.

[ 16 : 12 ] But here, interestingly enough, even though that would have been traditionally what their wives would have helped them do, Lot here seems to prepare the meal alone. He doesn't have help. It seems, it's kind of this passage, is kind of portraying Lot as this solitary, righteous person.

He doesn't have any help. He's alone in this foreigner's land. Even his wife is not really on his side. And we see this later. His wife is actually, as she is leaving with Lot, turns around because she can't let go of Sodom and then she turns into pillar of salt.

Now, so Lot is the solitary, righteous person who is a sojourner in Sodom. And then we learn in verses 4 to 11 the full extent of the Sodomite wickedness.

This is just appalling as you read it. Read with me. 4 to 11. But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man surrounded the house.

And they called to Lot, where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them. Lot went out to the men at the entrance, shut the door after him and said, I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly.

[ 17 : 28 ] Behold, I have two daughters who have not known any man. Let me bring them out to you and do to them as you please. Only do nothing to these men for they have come under the shelter of my roof.

But they said, Stand back. And they said, This fellow came to sojourn and he has become the judge. Now we will deal worse with you than with them. Then they pressed hard against the man Lot and drew near to break the door down.

But the man reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them and shut the door. And they struck with blindness the men who were at the entrance of the house, both small and great, so that they wore themselves out, groping for the door.

Wow, so much sin in a span of a few verses. And the narrator's intention in describing this is that we are thoroughly repulsed by the wickedness of Sodom.

There's many things. So first, these men of Sodom came before they laid down. So meaning, remember, the guests came in the evening already. So not much time has passed since these guests came.

[ 18 : 29 ] But instead of talking about how they can be hospitable to these guests, they've been conspiring a gang rape is what they've been doing. So they didn't lose much time before they laid down.

They already were at the door. Second, these are described as the men of the city, the men of Sodom. And recall that, according to 18.2, these angelic visitors came as men in the form of men.

So what these men are clamoring for is homosexual gang rape, right? And this is where we get the word sodomy from the word Sodom. Now, Genesis 2.24 prescribed God's intention for sexual relations among humanity.

Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife and they shall become one flesh, right? So sex is supposed to be within the confines of marriage.

And marriage is supposed to be between a man and a woman and not any other combination of genders. And marriage is supposed to be between one man and one woman.

[ 19 : 28 ] Now, what the Sodomite men are trying to do here transgresses every single one of those categories. Do you guys see that? It's a homosexual gang rape. And I want to be sensitive to people who perhaps might struggle with same-sex attraction because it's common, especially nowadays.

And if that's you and you are tempted and if you are... But I want to make a distinction between succumbing to temptation and to impulses and sinning.

Being tempted and succumbing to the temptation are two different things. Hebrews 4.15 says, We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sin.

Jesus was tempted. He was tempted, it says, in every way yet he was without sin. So it's possible to be tempted yet not sin. And so Jesus is able to empathize with even your weaknesses.

Weaknesses that you don't think anyone else can understand or relate to. He can understand. He empathizes with you. And while I personally don't know what it's like to struggle with that kind of temptation, I do know what it's like to struggle with temptations.

[ 20 : 44 ] Every single Christian, every day, daily, we wrestle with dozens of impulses and desires that are contrary to the will of God. And that's what it means to be a Christian is to every day put to death the misdeeds of the flesh and to follow the Spirit.

That's the Christian calling. That's what we do. And we have hope in this. We are not alone in this. 2 Peter 2, 6-9 It says, If by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes, God condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly, and if he rescued Lot, the righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked, for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials.

Did you hear that? The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials. That's what he did for Lot, and that's what he can do for you, for us.

So do you wrestle, then, with fear and anxiety? Do you struggle with grumbling and discontent? Are you weighed down by guilt?

Are you harried by lust? Are you overcome by anger? We can persevere in righteousness with the Lord's help. So turn to him in your struggles, in your temptations, no matter what stripes it comes in.

[ 22 : 14 ] So now, returning to the text, I mentioned two things that highlight Sodom's wickedness. It's the third thing that highlights their wickedness. Verse 4, both young and old, and all the people to the last man surrounded the house.

Later in verse 11, it reiterates the same point, both small and great, it says, came. So this is trying to point out, like, so the dilemma, the discussion between Abram and the Lord earlier, is there any righteous person in Sodom?

The answer, according to this text, is no. Everyone, from small to the great, to the last man came. All the men of Sodom came. They were all participating in this wickedness.

And then, fourth, remember that these visitors are not just ordinary men, but either divine persons or angelic beings. And so then, what these men are proposing to do, even though they might not know the full extent of it, is unwittingly the same sin that led to God's judgment in the flood during Noah's time.

So sons of God marry, intermarrying with the daughters of men. It's the angelic beings having sexual relations with humans. So just to, and there's actually a lot of verbal perils between Noah's, the judgment of the flood, and this judgment in Sodom and Gomorrah.

[ 23 : 23 ] both use the language of reigning, right? In this case, it's fire and sulfur, but the language of reigning is used. Both talk about destroying, and both are concluded with the refrain that God remembered Noah, and here God remembered Abraham.

And in, after the judgment, in both cases, Noah, earlier in chapter 6 and 7, and here in this case, Lot, are dishonored by some kind of sexually indecent act by his own children.

So there's a lot of parallels between the two stories, and it's to show that this is a type. It's following the type of God's judgment in the flood. And of course, the main difference is that God doesn't destroy the whole earth because God promised Noah after the flood that he'd never do that again.

Now, Lot, we see his righteousness, the fact that he tries to protect his visitors, but it's a relative righteousness as you will see. He is brave. He goes out by himself, closes the door behind him.

He doesn't know what these men are going to do to him, trying to protect his guests. And then, he offers the sexual favors of his two daughters who have not known any men. I mean, this is a really embarrassing detail about Lot in this chapter.

[ 24 : 32 ] So, they have not known any men. That's to know is a euphemism for sexual relations. So they're saying that these are virgin daughters that he is dangling in front of these wicked men.

And now, this is a completely inexcusable thing to do and a horrendous thing to do. But according to the ancient Near Eastern Code of Conduct, they held the highest regard the need to protect the visitors that came under their roof because they were especially aware that they may be angelic visitors.

So, that's what he's trying to do. But he does get some kind of poetic justice later in verses 30 to 38 because Lot dishonors his two daughters here by using them as a bargaining chip with these wicked men.

And then later, he will himself be dishonored by his two daughters and he will himself become the means by which they lose their virginity and are impregnated. Right? You see that. There's kind of a Lot does.

That's how we know the narrator doesn't condone this act because Lot's punished later in what happens to him by his daughters. But the angels, it's a really tragic story, but the angels intervene and they urge Lot to grab the rest of his family and leave.

[ 25 : 39 ] But the night passes and the morning dawns and Lot still there in Sodom. And so, verse 16, it says, But he lingered. So, the men seized him.

These are the angelic visitors. They seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand and then the Lord being merciful to him and they brought him out and set him outside the city. So, Lot, it seems, had grown accustomed to city living, the luxuries of urban living.

It seems that Lot has become too attached to things of this world. It seems that Lot is too fond of his other family members that he can't follow God's direct command.

And so, the angel sees Lot, his wife, and two daughters and bring them outside of the city. And as Lot and his family escape to Zoar, God punishes Sodom and Gomorrah. See this in verses 24 to 26.

Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur, and fire from the Lord out of heaven. And he overthrew those cities and all the valley and all the inhabitants of the cities and what grew on the ground.

[ 26 : 46 ] But Lot's wife behind him looked back and she became a pillar of salt. So, our best guess for where Sodom and Gomorrah might have been is roughly the southern, southeastern end of the Dead Sea.

So, just to the south and east of that. just outside of the promised land. And it's a desolate area. It's a desert. But according to the Bible, it used to be green, you know, the verdant land like the Garden of Eden.

And it's because of this judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah. And the area actually still reeks of sulfurous fumes. And asphalt deposits which have a very high sulfur content are found there regularly.

So, all of this characterizes the land even to this day. And so, the story is, this is obviously a total judgment. And stories of God's judgment like this often make people uncomfortable.

And especially if you're not a follower of Jesus and you don't know the character of God, then it makes us all the more uneasy. We like a God of love. We don't like a God of judgment.

[ 27 : 56 ] But the reality is we actually all do like a God of judgment. We actually do all like justice. We submit to the rule of law in this country and the courts render judgments day in and day out. And even the people who clamor for mercy and leniency, they are rarely consistent in their outlook and they like the punishments just as much as we do when it has to do with the causes that they are passionate about.

To illustrate, last year, a college student from California raped a woman while she was unconscious and was sentenced to six months of jail time followed by three years of probation.

So six months in jail, not six years, which is what the prosecution was pressing for. And under California's peculiar legal formulas, his jail term was actually reduced by half.

So he was only in jail for three months after raping a woman who was unconscious. So this decision by the judge was widely decried. There was a lot of backlash and there was a campaign to recall the judge and the judge himself personally vowed never to take up another criminal case even though he tried to defend his judge verdict.



And not only that, a new legislation was approved in California as a result of this case to make sure that certain cases of sexual assault always result in prison time. And so this verdict, the judge's verdict was based on the fact that too harsh of a punishment would have had a severe impact, quote unquote, on this man.

[ 29 : 29 ] And the woman who was raped wrote a heart-wrenching letter which she read at the sentencing and in it she wrote that the rape had already had a severe impact on her even though the judge is worried about it having a severe impact on this man.

Her letter went viral with people all across the country bewailing the leniency of the judge. And whether you agree with the judge's verdict or not, and there are people on both sides of the issue, we all can agree that there was widespread outrage about this verdict.

And why was there such an outrage? It's not because people are masochistic, right, and they derive sick pleasure from seeing a young man rot in pleasure. That's not why. It's because they felt that there was an injustice.

It's because they felt that the outrage stems from the fact that the severity of the punishment doesn't match the severity of the crime. They feel that the woman who deserved to be cared for and affirmed and upheld in her worth and dignity was not given the due value and worth and dignity.

That's why people are outraged. And so we see in this two sides of justice. On one side, justice punishes the wrongdoer, but on the other side, justice affirms and upholds the value and dignity of the people who are suffering, the victims.

[ 30 : 39 ] There's two sides. And so if you think about it that way, in the same way, God's judgment and his punishment of those who rejected him affirms the supreme and indeed eternal worth and dignity of the God who was offended.

We've been seeing a lot of ants in our house lately. That's the time of the year. And I kill them every day when they come back. And I kill them because they get into our food.

I mean, I'm fine with them living anywhere else. I mean, if they're starting to get into our stuff, then I'm going to take care of them, right? They could also bite my children. But no one's going to give me a hard time about that.

I hope not, right? And no one's going to try to call the police on me for killing ants, right? But imagine if one of us is abusive to our pet dog. Cruelty to dogs is punishable.

It's a punishable misdemeanor with fines up to \$1,000 or imprisonment up to a year. And then imagine if even more seriously, if there was a case of domestic abuse if we harmed one of our own spouses.

[ 31 : 45 ] Now, that is a crime punishable by up to a lifetime in prison in certain states. Why the difference in the level of punishment? Because the people involved, the victims, are more valuable, more worthy.

Now, imagine the offense committed against an eternal, benevolent God. We commit treason against Him. We are ungrateful. We violate His covenant.

We are unfaithful adulterers to a faithful God. Only an eternal punishment. That doesn't suffice. Eternal punishment, separation from Him, is word, is sufficient to affirm and uphold the worth and dignity of God.

And if that's the case, this should strike us with a healthy fear of God. right? We speak of petty crimes, right? There's no such thing as a petty sin because every sin is committed against eternal, holy God.

Now, the fact that we're supposed to fear God doesn't mean we have to be terrified of God. That's not how the Bible uses the word fear. So, there's an example in Exodus 20, 20, where Moses says to Israel, Do not fear, for God has come to test you that the fear of Him may be with you that you may not sin.

[ 33 : 04 ] Did you guys catch that? The two words, fear, it's the exact same Hebrew word, but it says, God came, and God came to Him so that they may have fear, but then He doesn't want them to be fearful.

So, what's going on here is that He doesn't want them to be terrified that God's going to destroy them, but God does want them to have a healthy fear of reverence, a sense of awe of living in His presence, presence of a holy, internal God.

I mean, you could think about it this way. I mean, I don't know who's the most so-called important or VIP that you have ever interacted with, but imagine that you are dining with someone of great power, a powerful personage, right?

You are not going to have wandering eyes. You are going to watch to make sure that you're not chewing with your mouth open, right?

You're not going to be checking your phone and distracted. No, you're going to be honed in and attentive and careful of watching your manners. Are you not? Right? But imagine living daily, every second of our life, before the very face of the living God.

[ 34 : 10 ] That's the fear of God, to live in awe and reverence and to imagine how that will change our posture in our corporate worship. Imagine how that would change our posture and attitude and behavior in the privacy of our homes.

To live before the face of God, that's fear of God. And you see this everywhere in Abram and Lot's interactions with him. They call him Lord. We use it so much, it loses force of meaning in our minds, but that's Master.

Master. Master, I am at your service. Master, I'm here to do your bidding. They bow to him and Abram is so tentative as he approaches God.

Oh, I undertake him to speak to the Lord. I'm just dust and ashes. Oh, let not the Lord be angry and I'll speak. Oh, let not the Lord be angry and I'll speak again just one more time.

Right? This kind of fear of God is the normal and natural response of humanity that relates to God because God punishes justly and that is God's rightful prerogative.

[ 35 : 14 ] And we are mistaken when we think that God's wrath and punishment of evildoers is shocking and scandalous. It's not shocking. It's not scandalous for God to punish the wicked. What's shocking and scandalous is not God's wrath, but it's God's grace, His mercy that's shocking and scandalous.

And that's precisely the point that theologian D.A. Carson makes in his wonderful book, The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God. Why does God love sinners?

Why is God gracious and merciful toward people who deserve eternal punishment? That is shocking and that's scandalous. And that leads us to our second point. God saves graciously and we see this in his remembrance of Abram and deliverance of Lot.

After coming out of the city, one of the angels said to Job, Escape to the hills lest you be swept away. But Lot objects in verses 18 to 20. Read with me. 18 to 20 of chapter 19. Oh no, my lords.

Behold, your servant has found favor in your sight and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life. But I cannot escape to the hills lest the disaster overtake me and I die. Behold, the city is near enough to flee to and is a little one.

[ 36 : 25 ] Let me escape there. Is it not a little one? And my life will be saved. Now this scene parallels Abraham's intercession on behalf of the righteous in the Sodom.

There's a lot of verbal parallels there. Sweep away, die, spare, granted. They're all same words. And in this, but this parallel exposes the main difference because Abraham is fending for the righteous in the city.

He's concerned for God's righteousness being vindicated. But Lot is just concerned for his own safety. And you see this because the word escape occurs five times and the word escape rhymes with the name Lot.

And it sounds like the name Lot. So it's like he just wants Lot, Lot, Lot to escape, Lot to escape, Lot to escape. That's all he wants in this passage. So he says, I cannot escape to the hills lest the disaster overtake me and die.

So his basis for appealing God is just his own weakness and convenience. And so Lot's certainly righteous, relatively speaking, compared to the Sodomites, but he's no Abraham. His is a relative righteousness, not an absolute one.

[ 37 : 30 ] And if you consider that, Lot himself certainly doesn't deserve God's salvation. Yet God grants even this request and why? We see the answer to that in chapter 19, verse 19 and verse 21.

The Lord says, behold, well, Lot says to the Lord, behold, your servant has found favor in your sight. In verse 21, the Lord replies, behold, I grant you this favor also.

The word favor is elsewhere translated grace. It's the same word that Abraham used in 18.3 when he said, oh Lord, if I have found favor in your sight. It's the same word that was used in Genesis 6.8 when it said, Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

It's referring to God's saving grace. And grace is a gift, something that we receive, not because we earned it or merited it, but freely out of God's sovereign grace.

That's what this is. That's the favor. That's the reason why Lot is delivered, not because of his righteousness. That's why in verse 29 of chapter 19, after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, it says that God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow.

[ 38 : 40 ] It doesn't say God remembered Lot. It's because God remembered Abraham and the covenant he made with him. That's why Lot is spared, not because of his own righteousness.

And Abraham, too, is not saved because of his own righteousness, but because his faith was counted to him as righteous, as it says in chapter 15, verse 6. So, then how can God justify this grace?

How can he satisfy his justice? It's because of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and what he did in dying for our sins on the cross.

God never lowers his standards. That's not what he's doing here for Lot. God is exacting in his judgments, and for that reason, we can never hope to attain salvation for ourselves. We'll always fall short.

But Jesus lived the perfect life of righteousness. He merited, earned salvation on behalf of his people and he died so that his righteousness can be counted to us, to our credit.

[ 39 : 44 ] That's our source of righteousness. That's our source of salvation. You see, Abraham was interceding on behalf of Sodom, but he failed. Why? Because there was not a single righteous person in Sodom on whose account God could spare the city.

But Jesus succeeds in his intercession on behalf of sinners because he is himself that one righteous person on whose account God can spare sinners and still satisfy his justice.

And what a glorious privilege this is because the Old Testament saints always were tentative and fearful and apprehensive in their approach to God because Jesus had not yet come.

But he says in Ephesians 3.12 for us, in Christ we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. It says in Hebrews 4.16, let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

So if you think of yourself as approaching God when we approach God's quarters, you know, don't come with this tentative, barely audible knock on the door. No, barge in with the key because we have the key in Jesus Christ because we're his adopted sons and daughters and have confidence that you can be in the presence of God.

[ 41 : 03 ] When you feel crestfallen with guilt, when you feel downtrodden by sorrow and worry, think on this and let your heart fill with the joy and gratitude that comes from knowing this great salvation.

This is what leads us not just to fear God but also to love him. And let me speak briefly to those of you who have not yet trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation because this salvation is not yet yours but it can be.

So I want to entreat you today, turn with me just one last time to chapter 19, verse 28. After God's judgment of Sodom, it says, Behold, the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace.

Does that remind you of anything we've seen so far in Genesis? Remember chapter 15, verse 17, when God appeared in the covenant-making oath sign with Abram?

It says, When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. Those are not the exact same Hebrew words but the image it invokes is the same.

[ 42 : 19 ] A smoke coming out of a furnace, a kiln, a kiln. And that's the language used, exact same language that's used here in this chapter is used later in Exodus 19, 18 to refer to God's presence on Mount Sinai.

So what's going on here? So God's presence is marked by fire and smoke and your fate is determined by whether or not you're in proper relationship to that fire.

God is a consuming fire it says Hebrews 12, 28 to 29. Now if he's a consuming fire and if you are in right relationship with God in faith and obedience then that's when you experience the warmth and light of the fire and get to live by it.

But if you are in wrong relationship with him of sin and unbelief and rebellion then you experience the incinerating flames of his jealousy. It depends on what relationship you are in with this consuming fire.

Jesus warned in Matthew 10, 15 that it would be more bearable for people who are in Sodom and Gomorrah than for those people who reject his messengers today.

[ 43 : 26 ] Jesus warns in Luke 17, 28 to 30 just as it was in the days of Lot they were eating and drinking buying and selling planting and building but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all so it will be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed.

Don't go about your daily business oblivious to the return of the Son of God because the King will return the first time he came to save the second time he will come to judge the earth.

We are to fear and love God because he is the judge of all the earth who punishes justly and saves graciously. Let's pray together.

God, we want to live according to the truth of your word here in Genesis 18 and 19.

Lord, we don't want to live in our own righteousness. We don't want to live in our own confidence bluffing our way through this life. Help us as a church to be wholly dependent on you so that we may live in light of the light and warmth of the consuming fire captured by the love of the Father in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the presence and the fellowship of the Spirit.

[ 45 : 05 ] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.