

## Week 7 - Nooses and Lifelines - 2Peter 2:4-10a

### Scripture Reading: Psalm 119:153-160

#### Introduction

A pastor friend of mine once asked a group of people to state their favorite aspect of God's character

And he was somewhat surprised to hear one lady say that her favorite aspect was God's wrath because it guaranteed that all of the "bad people" would get what was coming to them

Most people tend to shy away from that aspect of God's character and instead favor his love or his mercy

Many people openly state that they want to have nothing to do with the God of the Old Testament because they see him as overly harsh or even cruel in his judgments and actions

They prefer instead to look to Jesus in the New Testament believing, erroneously, that Jesus was completely accepting of everyone and never condemned anyone

I, for one, am partial to God's mercy because I know that I am one of those "bad people" that the lady of wrath spoke about, and I really don't want what I deserve

But we err if we focus too much on any single attribute of God to the exclusion of the others because God is multi-faceted in his character, and we do well to have a more balanced view of him and his activity in the world

I have titled my sermon this morning "Nooses and Lifelines" because, in the verses we will be considering, Peter uses examples that show both God's judgment and his mercy

In verses 1-3 of chapter 2Peter introduced the false teachers who are going to be the focus of most of the remainder of his letter

We saw how he began to answer the claim made by the false teachers who were saying that since God had not yet punished them; no punishment was coming at all

And Peter closed his introduction by stating in verse 3 [2Peter 2:3b] that their condemnation from long ago was still active, and their destruction was wide-awake

Now, starting in verse 4, we will see Peter give the justification for his statement of God's impending judgment yet to come as he uses examples from the Old Testament that illustrate both God's judgment and his mercy

Please join me in your Bible and follow along as I read **2Peter 2:4-10a**:

*For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued 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, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.*

First, we will look at three examples from the Old Testament concerning God's judgment of the wicked or ungodly:

Fallen angels, the ancient world, and Sodom and Gomorrah

#### **I. God's judgment of the wicked**

Peter begins this section by saying, "For if God..." but we need to understand that there is no ambiguity or doubt in what Peter says here

His argument is given in an "if-then" construction where the "if" that he uses actually means "since," making his logic: "For since God..."

In Latin, we would refer to Peter's argument as an *a fortiori* construction that says, "If x is true, how much more is y true"

So that Peter is supporting his statement concerning the judgment of the false teachers by saying, "Since God acted in this way toward these three groups of the ungodly, he is certain to act in a similar way toward the false teachers"

The x proves the y

And the first group Peter mentions is fallen angels

## A. Fallen angels

Again, Peter writes [**2Peter 2:4**]:

*For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment...*

We know that God, through Christ, created angels as spiritual beings as Paul states in **Colossians 1:16**

*For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.*

And God gave the angels moral agency as seen in the fact that some of them followed Satan as they sinned and fell from their positions

The Bible is unclear on when precisely this fall occurred but we know it had to be sometime between the events of **Genesis 1:31** when God looked at his creation and judged it "very good" and **Genesis 3:1** when we see Satan, in the form of a serpent, tempt Eve

It is equally unclear just what Peter has in mind when he says these particular angels "sinned" but he can't mean the fall of the angels itself because we know that those who fell became what we know as demons that are still active today

So Peter has to mean some other action that was engaged in by only some of the demons

Many godly commentators take Peter's mention to mean an event that is recorded in **Genesis 6:1-4** where we read:

*When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. Then the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years." The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown.*

There are several reasons why this passage is unlikely to refer to fallen angels when it references "the sons of God"

As we have already stated, angels are spirit beings who do not have physical, material bodies and, according to Jesus in Matthew 22:30, they do not marry

And we would have a few very serious questions to answer if we were to say they produced offspring with human women such as the nature of the resulting children

Obviously, they would be a new kind of hybrid beings so we would have to answer what their nature would be and whether they would have human souls

Then we would have to consider the succeeding generations of offspring as the angelic influence became watered down

Moreover, nothing in the *context* of the passage in Genesis 6 indicates that the "sons of God" should be understood as angels and that idea actually seems like more of an intrusion on the stream of thought leading up to it

The larger purpose of the narrative leading up to chapter 6 is the development of the godly line of Seth and the ungodly descendants of the rest of mankind - those who were descended from Seth and Cain

So, it seems most natural to understand the “sons of God” in Genesis 6 as men who are righteous intermingling with the daughters of the ungodly over time

I don’t want to spend a great deal of time on this issue because the specific sin involved isn’t Peter’s point but it was necessary for me to at least mention it - if you have questions about it, I’d be happy to talk with you personally later

For today, though, it seems best to understand that Peter is referring to some unspecified sin that some of the fallen angels engaged in that resulted in God casting them into confinement and chains

**Jude 6** seems to speak of these same angels saying that they *“did not keep to own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling”*

Again, that’s a somewhat ambiguous description of their sin which tells me the specifics of it were either expected to be well-known by the original audiences or that the specifics aren’t the point of the mention

Peter’s point here is that God judges sin - even the sin of angels

And if God judges angels how much more will he judge the sins of men who refuse to repent

## **B. The “ancient world”**

Next, we see Peter mention “the ancient world” by which he means mankind before the worldwide flood of Genesis 7 shifting his focus from sinful angels to sinful people

When we paint happy scenes of a smiling Noah on his little ark welcoming all the animals coming in two-by-two, we can easily lose sight of the fact that what happened was quite horrific in its scope

In that one act of judgment, God wiped out the virtually the entire human race by drowning the ungodly

Jesus used the account of Noah and the flood to warn against an equally horrific yet just judgment that was coming with his return in Luke 17

When the Lord returns as Conquering King and Judge, everyone who is not found to be on the “ark” of Jesus Christ will perish for all eternity

Again, Peter’s point is that God has judged all mankind once and God will judge all mankind again at a future judgment

## **C. Sodom and Gomorrah**

Peter next moves on to Sodom and Gomorrah and the destruction of them as an example of what is to come in verse 6 writing [**2Peter 2:6**]:

*If by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly...*

The account of Sodom and Gomorrah found in Genesis 18-19 is well-known for the gravity of their inhabitant’s sin and how God destroyed those cities and the entire valley by raining sulfur and fire down from heaven

Sodom and Gomorrah were proverbial examples of wickedness leading to judgment long before 2Peter as we see references to them in the prophetic books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, and Zephaniah

Jesus also used Sodom and Gomorrah as examples of God’s judgment in **Matthew 10:15** and Sodom alone in the same way in Matthew 11:34-24

Paul also quoted Isaiah 1:9 in **Romans 9:29** concerning how thoroughly Sodom and Gomorrah had been destroyed

Peter says that God “condemned [the cities] to extinction” and turned them “to ashes” as a judicial act

Then he adds that God did so to provide *“an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly”*

So, by three historical examples Peter makes clear that God is able to judge the ungodly, that he has judged the ungodly in the past, and that he will judge the ungodly in the future

But Peter also shows another side of God in the Old Testament and that is that God also shows mercy to the righteous. Far from being a one-dimensional, angry God of wrath, God also preserves and delivers.

## **II. God's mercy toward the righteous**

And in Peter's narrative we see two instances of God's mercy in the accounts of Noah and Lot - two very different men.

### **A. Noah**

Peter points out in verse 5 [**2Peter 2:5**] that God *preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others*.

While it wouldn't be surprising that if he had done so, whether Noah actually preached verbally and what he might have said is unknown.

But one would have to imagine that people asked him questions while he was constructing the ark.

Actually, we don't even know for certain how long it took Noah to build the ark although it was many years and likely somewhere between 50 and 75 years according to the calculations done by Answers in Genesis.

And **Hebrews 11:7** tells us that Noah "*condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith*" simply through believing God enough to build the ark.

So we can understand that, if in no other way, Noah was preaching righteousness by his actions.

We see in **Genesis 6:5** that "*the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*"

And we read in **Genesis 6:11-12** that "*the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.*"

And we read in **Genesis 6:9** that "*Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation*" and "*Noah walked with God*".

Noah stood out from his generation because, even though he was a sinner and flawed as we see in the post flood account of his instance of drunkenness, he revered God and tried to please him.

And his righteousness was apparently assumed for his entire family as well because it was assumed in that culture that a family would follow the religion of the head of the family.

Then in **Genesis 6:8** we read that Noah was saved by grace the same as everyone who is saved -

*Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD*

Noah didn't "earn" grace from God - he found it just as anyone can.

Peter's point is that God is able to bring judgment to the entire world and to spare the righteous while destroying the unrighteous.

### **B. Lot**

Then, in verse 7, Peter turns to the example of Abraham's nephew, Lot.

Look again with me at verses 7-10 [**2Peter 2:7-10**] where we read:

*And if he rescued 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, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.*

Notice that Peter calls Lot "righteous" twice and then says he had a "righteous soul" in verses 7-8.

Nothing about the account in Genesis makes me think of Lot as a particularly righteous man.

For sure, he was relatively righteous when compared to the people among whom he lived but, for the most part, he seems to be rather self-indulgent and overly tolerant of the deviant behavior that was going on around him

When we look at the account of Lot we have to wonder how he could be considered righteous when he chose to settle in Sodom in the first place seeing it was outside the land of promise

It was a bad choice and God even used a local skirmish to try and get Lot to leave but he returned and, while our text says that he was tormented in his soul by what he saw and heard around him, he still continued to live there

And how he could be considered righteous when he offered his two virgin daughters to the men of Sodom who wanted to “know” his two celestial houseguests

His conduct in doing so was completely reprehensible as he could have just as easily offered himself to the men outside in order to protect his guests

After all, they *were* looking for a same-sex encounter

Also remember that he had to be dragged by the hand out of Sodom by the angel visitors in order to be spared

In fact, nowhere in the Genesis account is Lot called “righteous”

However, in Genesis 18 we read of Abraham’s intercession for Sodom where he asked if the city would be spared if a sufficient number of righteous individuals were found within it

And, starting at 50 Abraham negotiated the number of righteous down to 45, then 40, then 30, 20, and finally, 10

In **Genesis 18:32** we see the Lord say, *“For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.”*

Apparently, there were not enough righteous people to spare Sodom but Lot himself was spared thereby implying that he was righteous -

Or at least righteous enough not to have actually joined in with the sin of Sodom and to still be bothered by it

Suffice it to say that if Lot demonstrated faith in God he would also be the recipient of imputed righteousness as **Genesis 15:6** tells us Abraham was

In any event, though we might have difficulty seeing Lot’s righteousness from our perspective, Peter says God saw it

And Lot was spared, not because of his righteous deeds, which appear to be few, but because he put his faith in God and God graciously intervened to save him from the coming destruction

And Peter’s point again is that God knows how to punish the wicked while preserving the righteous as he makes plain in verse 9 [**2Peter 2:9**]

### **C. Mercy is God’s prerogative**

One of the biggest problems many people have with God is that he doesn’t choose to show mercy to everyone

It’s the reason so many are drawn to the false doctrine of universalism, or salvation for all

But there is one thing we need to always remember when it comes to showing mercy - it is always God’s prerogative

As God told Moses in **Exodus 33:19** –

*I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.*

The reality is that judgment is deserved by all and there is nothing we can do to earn God’s mercy

It’s his exclusive right to decide when and how he will show mercy and it’s not ours to question or judge because God isn’t accountable to us and he doesn’t owe mercy to anyone

And in our passage, Peter shows three solid examples of God exercising his righteous judgment in destroying the ungodly while preserving the righteous

Another thing we need to be accept is that Peter isn't saying here that the righteous will never suffer in this life  
 Actually, there are times when the righteous suffer right alongside the wicked when God sends his judgments  
 Peter's purpose in this section of his letter is to show how God is warning of the eternal judgment to come as he says in verse 6 [2Peter 2:6] that God mad Sodom and Gomorrah "*an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly*"  
 Peter's principal point in these verses is that God has the power to preserve and to punish  
 And verse 9 [2Peter 2:9] tells us that he preserves the godly from punishment while at the same time he is actively preserving the wicked for punishment at the day of judgment

Especially those who desire defilement and despise authority bringing the whole subject back to the false teachers of Peter's day

The false teachers may claim that judgment isn't coming because it hasn't yet come but Peter assures his readers that God is preserving those heretical teachers for future judgment and that their punishment is certain

And while they claimed that God was asleep Peter assures them that they are being kept under God's sentence of punishment pending the final judgment like prisoners in jail awaiting their walk to the gallows

## Conclusion

We live in a time that is not so different than the times of Noah and Lot

Jesus taught in Matthew 24 that when he comes it will be like the days of Noah as people will be going about their daily lives without care for eternity when suddenly they will be swept away to eternal judgment

And with every passing day we see our world becoming ever more like Sodom and Gomorrah as people are living their lives without moral restraint

We are surrounded by people who "indulge in the lust of defiling passion" giving full reign to their perversions and those who "despise authority" and dare God to do anything about it

Sadly, many believers have given in and begun to tolerate and even compromise with the wickedness that surrounds us  
 And those outside the church laugh at the idea of judgment just as they did in Peter's day

Then, when we see the wicked prosper even as their wickedness multiplies, it can be hard to keep free from despair  
 Especially when they turn to persecute us simply for trying to live as followers of Christ

But Peter's account of God's punishment of the fallen angles, the ancient world, and Sodom and Gomorrah reminds us that God can and does judge the wicked and assures us that his righteous justice is not asleep today

And we can take comfort in the fact that God knows how to preserve the righteous

He is equally adept with the hangman's noose and the lifeline

And it is an encouragement to know that the salvation of the righteous is according to God's grace and mercy so that we know that if we are actively trusting in his Son he will preserve us from judgment - we don't have to try to earn it

We need to remember both as we sojourn here

Let's pray

**Psalm 119:153-160 (Page 516)**

Look on my affliction and deliver me, for I do not forget your law.

Plead my cause and redeem me; give me life according to your promise!

Salvation is far from the wicked, for they do not seek your statutes.

Great is your mercy, O LORD; give me life according to your rules.

Many are my persecutors and my adversaries, but I do not swerve from your testimonies.

I look at the faithless with disgust, because they do not keep your commands.

Consider how I love your precepts! Give me life according to your steadfast love.

The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.