



The Sermon

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Genesis 18:16-33

"The Certainty of Judgment"

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TRANSCRIPT

Well, we've got quite a passage we're going to be looking at today, so I trust that you've got your pew belt on and you're buckled in. We are in Genesis chapter 18 in our journey through the book of Genesis, Genesis chapter 18, and as we always do, we want to read the text, then we'll pray, then we'll look carefully at what the text says. The title of this message is "The Certainty of Judgment."

Beginning in verse 16 of Genesis chapter 18, this is the word of the living God: "Then the men rose up from there, and looked down toward Sodom; and Abraham was walking with them to send them off. The Lord said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed? For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him.' And the Lord said," - verse 20 - "The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know.'

"Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the Lord. Abraham came near and said, 'Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will You indeed sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that

the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?' So the Lord said, 'If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account.' "And Abraham replied, 'Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am but dust and ashes. Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five, will You destroy the whole city because of five?' And He" - the Lord - "said," 'I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.' He spoke to Him yet again and said, 'Suppose forty are found there?' And He" - the Lord - "said," 'I will not do it on account of the forty.' Then he said, 'Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak; suppose thirty are found there?' And He said, 'I will not do it if I find thirty there.' And he said, 'Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord; suppose twenty are found there?' And He said, 'I will not destroy it on account of the twenty.' Then he said, 'Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once; suppose ten are found there?' And He said, 'I will not destroy it on account of the ten.' As soon as He had finished speaking to Abraham the Lord departed, and Abraham returned to his place." The certainty of coming judgment. Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we already feel the weight of this text. We feel the magnitude of the certainty of Your judgment that was about to fall heavy upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and we shall see it next week. But here in this passage You are revealing Abraham what You're about to do. And so, Lord, as we look at this today, I pray that everyone in this building will feel the weight of this. And when we take the Lord's Supper at the end of the service, may we feel the glory of Your grace that has removed the judgment from our heads. So, Lord, let us be true to Your word today. May Your word speak; may I get out of the way. May Your words speak loud and clear; may every heart here today be receptive, in Jesus' name. Amen. [End]

In these verses we see the certainty of divine judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah. Judgment is a subject that we do not like to think about. We don't like to talk about it. We want to be happy and joyful, which we are in the Lord, but we cannot negate passages like this. We find passages like this offensive, unpleasant, unsettling to our cultured senses; and yet judgment is a truth that is taught throughout the entirety of the Bible. A God without judgment is no God at all but a mere figment of man's fallen imagination, because our God is holy; therefore, He must judge all that is unholy. God despises all sin and God judges all sin, because He is Holy God, and therefore a God of judgment.

This runs throughout the entirety of the Bible. Christianity is a religion of judgment. Jesus Himself said, "The Father has given all judgment to the Son." And Jesus spoke of a resurrection of judgment at the end of the age. In fact, Jesus said that He will send the Holy Spirit to convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment. And that is one of the primary offices of the third Person of the Trinity, to come into this world and to bring conviction of coming judgment.

When Paul stood at Mars Hill, he said, "God has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness." That date is fixed on God's calendar and has been written with permanent letters, and that day is looming on the horizon. There is a gathering storm at the end of this age in which there will be judgment. The author of Hebrews says, "It's appointed unto man once to die, and after this comes the judgment." Everyone in this room has two unbreakable appointments: death and judgment. And whether you're a Christian or whether you are an unbeliever, you will stand in judgment before the Lord. Peter spoke of the day of judgment and the destruction of ungodly lives, and Jude spoke of the judgment of the great day. It will be a great day because it will be great in judgment. And John records in the book of Revelation, "Hallelujah, because the judgments are true and righteous." All heaven is singing praises to God, "Hallelujah," because the judgment is coming.

The word "judgment" in the Greek language is *krisis*; that comes into the English language as "crisis." And the word "judgment" literally means a separation. It means a separating to sort things out. And there will be a separation of the sheep from the goats. There will be a separation from the righteous from the unrighteous, of the saved from the lost, of the godly from the ungodly. There will be this great separation. It will separate families. It will separate relationships. It will separate cities and nations. The great divide is coming.

And not only will there be a judgment at the end of the age, but there will be judgments preceding the end of the age. God brings judgment upon nations, God brings judgment upon regions, and God brings judgments upon cities. And we see here in this text the judgment of God that fell like fire from heaven and consumed Sodom and Gomorrah. God had had enough. They had crossed the line. The cup of iniquity was now full. There was no turning back. And we shall give thought to God's temporal judgments before His eternal judgment as we look at this text.

So, the first thing that I want you to note is, "the discernment of God," that's in verse 16, the discernment of God. Verse 16 begins with the word "then" which indicates it's a continuation from the previous verses where God and two angels have come to Abraham and have sat down, and Abraham and his servants have served them a meal; and it's in the midst of that setting by the oaks of mammary at about a 3,000-foot elevation that there is now this continuation.

"Then the men rose up from there." The men referred to the three men mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, one of whom is identified in verse 1 as the Lord. God has taken the form, strange as it seems, as a man, and has appeared with the other two men who are angels. We know that from chapter 19, verse 1.

And so, "The three men" - after they had been served by Abraham and his servants - "rose up from there," - from the table as if they are now ready to go someplace - "and" - it says - "they looked down toward Sodom." Something in Sodom has drawn their attention, specifically God's attention. What is taking place in Sodom has not passed the eye of God. God sees what is taking place in Sodom. He has not yet acted, but He is about to act. What is taking place in Sodom has captured His focus, and verse 20 will tell us it is a city of great sin, not just sin, but great sin. And some cities are more sinful than other cities. And not all sins are the same, and some sins are more grievous sins than other sins. And here in Sodom and here in Gomorrah their sin is so odious that it is crying out to God, verse 20, crying out to God for God's attention, and it cannot be ignored any longer by God.

And the end of verse 16, "and Abraham was walking with them to send them off," to send off the two angels. God will remain and have further dialogue with Abraham. And to this day, God still looks down upon the cities of this world. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. And God sees what takes place in cities, even this city in Dallas; and God sees the sexual perversions, He sees the injustices, He sees the murders, He sees the abortion clinics, He sees the prejudice, He sees the violence. Nothing escapes the all-seeing eye of God. And just because judgment has not yet fallen does not mean that God does not see it.

And Jonathan Edwards likened it in his famous sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," 1741, Enfield, Connecticut. He likened it to the river of God's wrath flowing, and there is a dam that is holding it back: it is

the dam of His patience, it is the dam of His mercy. But the longer that dam holds back the flow of His wrath, that wrath is only building and escalating, because when the time comes that He removes the dam of His patience, the wrath will come like a tsunami and overwhelm sinners and sweep them into the bowels of hell below. That's what's taking place right now in cities like Washington DC, New York City, Hollywood, Chicago, Dallas. It is the patience of God that is holding back this mounting, building river of wrath. But the day will come, just as it did with Sodom and Gomorrah, that the patience of God will tolerate it no longer.

So this leads now, second, to "the disclosure of God"; that's in verse 17, the disclosure of God. As the three men are departing, one of them remains; it is the Lord Himself, and He stops to talk to Abraham, and He discloses what is in His mind, what has already been determined by His sovereign will that He will do. And so, we read in verse 17, "The Lord said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I'm about to do?'" It's a rhetorical question, the answer of which is, "No, God will not hide from Abraham what is about to take place with unwavering certainty."

God will allow Abraham insight into the mind of God that Abraham will know what is about to take place, And He gives the reason why He will now reveal this to Abraham: "since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation," that God will be working through Abraham in such a way that the nation Israel will come to fruition through Abraham's lineage. And in some ways, Sodom and Gomorrah would have been a hindrance if they had been allowed to continue for God's plans for the future of Israel. So Sodom and Gomorrah must be taken out of the way, so that what God will do through Abraham will not have hindrance.

And so, we continue to read, "and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed," that there will come from the loins of Abraham the Messiah, the greater Son of Abraham, the greater Son of David, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself; and it will be through Christ that the gospel will go to the ends of the earth and that salvation will come to all the nations of the world.

Verse 19, God gives a further explanation to Abraham: "For I have chosen him." And the word "chosen" here speaks of sovereign election, God's discriminating choice from before the foundation of the world whom He will save out of a fallen humanity. And God's not under obligation to choose anyone. If God allowed the whole world to go into an eternity of

eternal punishment, God would remain just, and God would remain sinless and flawless. God didn't have to choose anyone.

And so, God in mercy, "For I have chosen him." And the word "chosen" here in the original Hebrew means "to know," and it speaks of an intimate love relationship between a husband and a wife. It speaks of choosing to set your heart upon someone in the most intimate personal relationship. And that is the word that is used here: "For I have known him," – as a husband would know his wife in an intimate, physical way, so I've set My heart upon Abraham – "so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice." Just a parenting point. This is what parents do, they command their children. They're not to be their buddy, they are to be the authority figure in their life, and they are to command them in such a way that they keep the way of the Lord; that's what parents are to do. And just a footnote: the destruction of society that we see all around us would be so quickly corrected virtually overnight if fathers and mothers would simply do what fathers and mothers are commanded by God to do, which is to command their children to keep the way of the Lord.

At the end of verse 19, "so that the Lord may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him," and that refers to the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant. And so even in the midst of this section of scripture that is so weighty with judgment, there is this light of grace that is shining into the life of Abraham and his children and those who would follow after him. And I think we see something here that we who are believers, we are but islands in the midst of oceans of unbelievers, that we are like tiny stars on a dark night that stand out in this sinful and adulterous generation, and we too have been made objects of God's grace.

Verse 20, "And the Lord said, 'The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great.'" God is saying, "Their sin is screaming to Me to do something about this." Their sin is shouting, and God can no longer turn a deaf ear to this.

"The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave," and the word "grave" here is translated elsewhere in the Old Testament as "glory," *kabowd*, which means a heavy weight, and used positively to speak of the glory of God. It speaks of the magnitude and the exponential weightiness of the attributes and the being and the existence of

God, that God is not a lightweight, that God is extremely marked by gravitas. Well, the same word is used here for "grave," that when put on the scales of God's justice, their sin is so heavy and so weighty that the scales just tip over. It is now time for God to act.

So, verse 21, God is the speaker, and God says, "I will go down now and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me." God says He is going to make an onsite inspection, that God, as it were, will come and walk the streets of Sodom and Gomorrah and see for Himself firsthand this outcry that is screaming flagrant sin into the ears of God. And He comes down to make certain that this outcry is not exaggerated, that it's not overstated, that the volume of this outcry does not exceed the wickedness of the sin that is taking place in Sodom and Gomorrah. And so, God says, like He did at the Tower of Babel in chapter 11, verse 5, that God will come down. It's an anthropomorphic expression to communicate to us that God will audit the city, that God will scrutinize the houses, that God will peer into every life and into every heart before He brings His judgment.

And He concludes, verse 21, "If not, I will know." In other words, speaking in human-like terms, "If it's not as bad as the outcry makes it to be, then I will know." And what we are to learn from this is that God is not blind to the sins of a city, neither is He deaf to the outcry of a city's impurities, that God is fully informed. And just because God has not yet acted does not mean that He does not know, and it does not mean that He will not act.

I think we would have to agree today that the sins of this nation are screaming and shouting to God to come down and judge us. The hypocrisy and lies in Washington DC, the brutalities and violence of New York City, the murders and crimes in Chicago, the pornography and the sleaze in Hollywood, and all of the sins of all the cities of America are a chorus of voices that are screaming to God, begging God to come down and judge. You and I are living in a very dangerous place, and Dallas, Texas is not exempt from this.

So, I want you to note, third, "the dialogue with God," in verse 22. What follows now is a lengthy conversation between Abraham and God that almost sounds like our prayers of intercession. So, in verse 22, we read, "Then the men turned away from there" - that's the two angels; they turned away from Abraham's tent - "and" - it says - "they went towards

Sodom," - they are going to Sodom to prepare the way for judgment, they are forerunners of the judgment that is to come - "while Abraham was still standing before the Lord." There will now take place this one-on-one conversation between Abraham and God.

So, in verse 23, "Abraham came near." He drew close to God. He is referred to elsewhere as the friend of God. He has been declared the righteousness of Christ. He is clothed in righteousness, and he may now draw near to God. "And Abraham said, 'Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?'" And what is of concern to Abraham is who is in Sodom, specifically his nephew Lot and his family. And when you have loved ones in the city that is about to be consumed you enter into intercession with God. Abraham knows that judgment is coming.

So, verse 24, Abraham begins now this dialogue with God: "Suppose," - meaning - "what if there are fifty righteous within the city?" Now that's a very modest number. There are hundreds, if not thousands of people in Sodom. I mean, this is a remnant of a remnant: fifty. "Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will You indeed sweep it away?" "To sweep it away" means like a tsunami of judgment just to sweep them away into a greater judgment into the bowels of hell itself. This judgment within time is nothing compared to the judgment throughout all eternity future in the lake of fire and brimstone.

"Will You indeed sweep away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it?" Abraham is hoping for a positive response: "God, it would be so unfair of You if You just leveled the whole playing field, if You just burned the whole city in a crisp, and there are fifty righteous within the city. God, that would be so unfair of You." It's like a father driving a car, and there's three children in the backseat and one's acting up, and the father says, "Okay, I'm going to punish all three of you."

So, verse 25, "Far be it from You," - and then there's a note of humility here - "far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay" - and he understands to be swept away will mean they will be slain, they will be put to death - "to slay the righteous with the wicked," - that the believers will be swept away and slain with the unbelievers, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Wow, that's so seemingly unfair.



So, the end of verse 25, "Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" And, beloved, I want to assure you that the God of heaven and earth will always deal perfectly justly. No punishment will ever exceed the offense. It will never be too heavy. It will never cross the line. It's the meaning of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth in Leviticus; and what that means is that the punishment will always fit the crime, that the punishment will never exceed the crime; and so because not all crimes are the same, not all punishments are to be the same. If you walk across the street as a jaywalker and you're given a ticket, you should not get a life sentence; but if you kill someone, you should not be given a fifty-dollar fine. Not all sins are the same, and not all sins are to receive the same punishment. Hebrews 2:1-2 says, "Every sin will receive a just recompense." So much sin, so much recompense. So much of certain kinds of sin, so much greater judgment. There will be degrees of reward in heaven, there will be degrees of punishment in hell. Why? Because, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" The word "justly" here means fairly, equitably, rightly, correctly. And Sodom has been weighed in the balance and found wanting.

So, verse 26, "So the Lord said, 'If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account.'" And the "their account" refers to the fifty righteous, that the vast majority of the perverse sinners will be spared in a city because there would be fifty righteous. There would be a preservative restricting the heaviness of God's judgment in this lifetime.

So, verse 27, "Abraham replied, 'Now behold,' - in other words - 'give attention to this, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am but dust and ashes.'" It speaks of the humility and the lowliness with which Abraham has postured himself.

He says in verse 28, "Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five, will You destroy the whole city because of five?" Five less than fifty would be forty-five. And there is a certain shrewdness about the negotiating of Abraham here; rather than saying forty-five, he just says five: "If there's just five less," - which is a seemingly small amount - "would You not spare the city?"

"And He" - God, at the end of verse 28 - "said, 'I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.'" How incredible are the ways of God, the blessing of

God that comes upon a city because of the righteous who are there, and the restricting of chastening and punishment and judgment of a city simply because of the righteous who are there. The most important people in any city are the righteous. The favor of God follows the righteous.

So, verse 29, "He" - Abraham - "spoke to Him yet again and said," - he's very persistent - 'Suppose forty are found there?' And He" - God - "said, 'I will not do it on account of the forty.'" Verse 30, "Then he said, 'Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak.'" In other words, Abraham is obviously being persistent, almost, as it were, nipping at the heels of God, and won't let this go. But there is a certain admirable quality about this, that he's like the widow in Luke's gospel who just keeps on knocking and keeps on knocking and will not go away until she receives three loaves of bread.

Abraham is persistent in prayer, and humbly says, "Do not be angry; suppose thirty are found there?" Abraham lowers the number because he is very aware of the rampant iniquity that is present in the city of Sodom and Gomorrah, and so he factors it down to thirty. "And God said, 'I will not do it if I find thirty there.'" Now God knows exactly how many righteous are there. God is omniscient. God knows all things, immediately comprehensively, perfectly. There's no progression in the knowledge of God. God is not learning anything, God has known everything that there is to know from all eternity past, and the reason is God has foreordained all things. He knows all things because He is the one who has foreordained all things. So this is gracious of God to allow Abraham to, in essence, pull at Him. But God knowing full well how many righteous are in Sodom and Gomorrah, it's not going to meet the standard; it falls short.

So, verse 31, "And he" - Abraham - "said, 'Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord; suppose twenty are found there?'" He lowers the number yet again. "And the Lord said, 'I will not destroy it on account of the twenty.'" Just twenty righteous in the city of Sodom and Gomorrah would withhold the judgment of God. It speaks to how the people of God are the apple of His eye, how the people of God have such a favored place in God's program that God would withhold dealing equitably in this life with the unrighteous because His favor is upon the righteous.

Verse 32, "Then he said, 'Oh may the Lord not be angry,' - in other words, "please bear with me just a little bit longer" - 'I shall speak only this

once,' - in other words, "this is my bottom line, this is the baseline" - 'suppose ten are found there?'" What a small number, ten out of a whole city. That's like one family. I mean, Noah had eight that got on the ark. And maybe it's two families: "If I could just find a family, or two families that are righteous." And God said, "I will not destroy it on a count of ten."

Let us apply this to America today. What is withholding God's judgment right now upon America? And someone as well said, "If God does not judge America, He's going to have to raise up Sodom and Gomorrah and apologize, because we have gone way beyond Sodom and Gomorrah." We have pushed the fence posts out and pushed the boundaries out so far that Sodom and Gomorrah would blush at what is taking place in this land. We have flaunted God's law; we have desecrated God's name; we have despised God's message. It is the presence of the true church in America that is withholding the judgment of God upon this entire nation. And the irony is this nation hates the true church, yet we are the very ones that are preserving their life. How strange. And who knows, who knows this morning what is the number in the mind of God of how many righteous there must be in this nation before we have hit the end of God's patience.

This should encourage us in our evangelism. So often we think we're hardly even making a dent in the millions and millions and millions of people who live in the United States, and the cause of morality and godliness and wholesomeness. Yet in the mind of God it is a relatively small number by this standard that is keeping that dam in place that is holding back His wrath before it will swallow up the land. And I tell you, when the Lord comes back and He takes the church out of this world, all hell is going to break loose.

This brings us, finally, to the last verse, verse 33, "the departure of God." Upon reaching the number ten, the dialogue between Abraham and God has stopped, because they are not even ten righteous in Sodom. So, verse 33, "As soon as He had finished speaking to Abraham." That is to say God has nothing left to say, God has already said everything that He has to say. And it is always a judgment of God when there is silence from heaven.

The greatest judgment that God brought on Israel in Amos 8:11, "Behold, days are coming," says the Lord, "in which there will be a famine in the land, not for drink or water, but for a hearing of the word of the Lord." And the greatest judgment and the greatest curse that God can bring on a nation

is to withhold preachers of the truth and withhold preachers of the gospel and to turn them over to false prophets and to false teachers; that is the greatest curse that can come from God upon a nation.

And so, God's finished, He has nothing left to say, it's already been said: "And you would not listen." There are not enough righteous in Sodom to restrain His judgment, and He has already said what He will do, and it is irreversible, it is irrevocable, it is inevitable, it is chiseled in stone and set in concrete. The judgment will come. Sodom has hit the point of no return. There will be no further offer of grace.

"And the Lord departed," - He withdrew His presence from Abraham - "and Abraham returned to his place," to his tent, no doubt, visibly shaken with what he has just heard. And what we will look at next week will be the inevitable result of what God said He will do. God is a God of judgment, because He does justly on the earth.

There will be a final judgment at the end of this age, a great separation; but in the meantime, there are judgments upon a nation from which they do not recover. There are judgments upon regions of a nation. There are judgments upon cities that precede the final judgment. What should this say to us as we're about to take the Lord's Supper? There is only one place to stand to escape God's judgment, and that is to stand in Christ.

Years ago when I went to school in West Texas there are many prairie fires that take place in the plains of West Texas. And I remember being told of a prairie fire that once started, and when they start they can't be stopped. And there was a father with a son who was out hunting, and they saw the fire coming, and they could not outrun the fire, and it was hopeless. And the father said to the son, "Stop right here." And the father pulled out a match and he threw it at their feet and started a fire. And the son, "Dad, what are you doing?" And the fire that he started began to move, and it just left a charred blackened circle; and as the prairie fire was coming, the father said, "Come stand where the fire has already been. The fire cannot come where the fire has already been." And as they stood on that charred place, the wall of fire came to that place and went around them, because the fire had already fallen.

There is only one place for you to stand to escape the fire of God's judgment, and that is to come to the cross, because two thousand years ago God's fire of wrath fell heavy upon His Son. As He bore our sins upon the cross, He shed His blood and He made the only atonement for our sins. And as we come and stand by faith with Christ, the fire of the last day will pass us by, and we will be unsinged and untouched, because Jesus absorbed the fire on our behalf.

So have you ever come to Christ? Have you ever taken the step of faith and come to Christ? You can come to church and that will do you no good. You can come to a Bible study and that will not save. You must come to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ by faith. You must repent of your sins and, as it were, burn your bridges behind you, and with that decisive step of faith commit your life to Jesus Christ. But the fire is coming, and it's coming sooner than any of us think or realize; and there's only one place to stand, and that is in Him who bore our sins and suffered the wrath that was deserving us in His body upon the cross. May this be true of you, that you are found in Christ, because the certainty of judgment is coming, and you will not escape. Let us pray.

[Prayer] Father, may the full force of these verses weigh heavy upon us. May they sober us. May they call out to us to make certain that we are standing in the Lord Jesus Christ. Father, as we now come to take the Lord's Supper, may we humble ourselves as we take it, in Jesus' name. Amen.