

Distressed Heralds

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[0 : 0 0] Pone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's word to you today. Special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community. And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good, they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to see what God has to say to us in his word. We're back in our series on 2 Peter. You remember we broke near the end of November to do our Advent series in Zechariah, and now we're back. We're in 2 Peter chapter 2. We're again in verses 4 through 11, and you'll remember that 2 Peter is a letter written by a man named Peter, and he writes it to a church somewhere in the Roman Empire in the 60s AD. And you'll also remember in this letter, he has one hope, he has one desire, which is that these people, this church, would grow.

And he wants them to grow in two ways. He wants them to grow in grace, and he wants them to grow in knowledge. We see that at the very beginning of the letter and also at the very end. Now we'll have to do a little bit of review here. When we were in this letter before, now over a month ago, we were in verses 4 through 10, and I told you that there was so much in verses 4 through 10 that we were going to come back to it again and look at it a second time. So last time, when we looked at 4 through 10, remember there was one main point, which is that Noah and Lot serve as references to God, and they serve as references in two ways. They're references that God's judgment is real, and they're references that God's salvation is also real. And that was the main point of verses 4 through 10. But there's some other rich things here that we don't want to skip over. And so we're coming back again, this time seeing Lot and Noah, not as references, but as examples. They're going to serve this time not as references, but as examples. And there is examples specifically of how we live in a wicked world. How do we respond to a wicked world? There's, of course, a variety of ways. We might be tempted to react. We might be tempted to just be inoculated, to be immune to it. We're desensitized. We've lived among wickedness so long, we stopped and we don't notice it anymore. It doesn't affect us anymore. Another way we might respond is by sort of self-righteous anger. We're just always angry at the world. We're always talking about how bad things are. Lot and Noah, however, are going to model for us a different way. And so we're going to see two things this morning. First of all, that they hurt for the world, and they also speak to the world. We're going to see Lot and Noah hurt for the world and speak for the world. And so it's with that that we're going to read now. I invite you to turn with me, either in your worship guide or in your Bible or on your phone. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's word. And God tells us in Isaiah chapter 40 that the grass withers and the flowers fade, but his word stands forever. And so that's why we read it now, starting at verse 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, 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, verse 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, 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.

Verse 9, 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. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

Our Father in heaven, we thank you for your word, that it gives us the knowledge that we need to live in this world, and it also tells us about your grace, that you never call us to do what you don't also empower and enable. And so we ask for your power this morning by your spirit to hear and know and believe and understand what you've given us in your word, that we would grow this morning by your spirit and your word to love you more and more, and to love the things you love, and so to hate also the things that you hate.

[5 : 06] We thank you that we don't have to earn your help, but instead we ask for it in Jesus' name. Amen. As we come, of course, to the end and beginnings of various years, it's tradition for us to list many things that have happened in the previous year, good things, bad things, and of course there's a long list of bad things for 2020. Of course there's good things as well. It's easy to forget how long ago now it feels that we had 2019 coming to an end, and of course there was also a list of good things and bad things then. If you remember, one of the saddest things that happened in 2019 happened in April.

And in April of 2019, on the 15th to be exact, there was a structural fire in the Cathedral of Notre Dame. And you'll remember that caused the spire to collapse on the cathedral. The roof was destroyed. What was most interesting to me, though, besides the catastrophe of it all, was how people in Paris responded. There's a variety of ways you could respond, right, if you're walking along and you see this great historic monument being burned. Maybe you could be angry. Maybe you would snap pictures. Maybe you would call someone on the phone. But what showed up over and over in news articles about this was something different. Parisians cried. As they watched the cathedral burning, many of them were in tears. And this was mentioned not just in one news source, but in multiple news sources. This was their response to seeing something so beautiful on fire. Some of them, of course, were silent. They had nothing that they could say. The question for us in this passage is this. How do we respond when the world is on fire? How do we respond when the world is on fire? Of course, we see right away in this passage that we're looking at characters who lived in a world that was on fire. I'm going to take things out of order, so we're going to look at Lot first. Lot's world was on fire. We're told in verse 7 that he was distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked. And so Lot was living in a world filled with sexual perversion. Of course, we also know from Genesis chapter 6 through Genesis chapter 6, excuse me, not Genesis, that was Noah. Genesis 18 and 19, not just filled with sexual perversion, but also filled with violence. So Lot was living in this terrible world. He was living in Sodom and Gomorrah, and this city was out of control. It was out of control with sexual perversion. It was out of control with violence. And of course, we're told in other parts of Scripture that it was judged also for its lack of hospitality. Then we're then told in verse 8 the same thing. He's living among them.

[7 : 55] He was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard. So this was a city that was on fire. It was a city where the law was not honored or respected. It was a city where there was this perversion. It was a city filled with violence. And of course, we find out also that this is true of the world of the recipients of this letter. We're told about God's judgment, verse 10, for those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority. And so just like Parisians looking at the Notre Dame Cathedral burning, Christians have a variety of options for how they can respond, how they can react to this world. Lot chooses to be in anguish. We're told, verse 7, he was greatly distressed. Verse 8, he was tormenting his righteous soul. This word torment could also be translated torture. Lot was beside himself that the world was like this. He was beside himself that the world was filled with such wickedness. But of course, just like the Parisians didn't have to cry, there's a variety of options for us as well when we look at the world on fire. And there's Christians who choose different options.

There's, of course, one type of Christian. I would call this Christian the cool Christian. The cool Christian is proud of the fact that they're unfazed by the wickedness of the world. They're a live and let live kinds of people. They'll say things like this, you know, it's not really hurting anyone, this sin. It's not affecting me. You know, it's not what I believe, but I'm not going to worry about it too much. The cool Christian is proud of this. They're not like those uptight Christians, right, who are worried about these things. They understand there's a bigger picture involved. They understand it's not a big deal. In fact, it's common now sometimes for Christians to feel guilty for hating sin, like something's wrong with them. You'll find people trying to qualify their statements about how they understand the way things are, and it's really not that bad, and maybe it's not the way they would want the world to be, but that's the way things are.

You know, we're just going to agree to disagree. That's how the cool Christian operates. There's not just the cool Christian, however, there's also the reactionary Christian. If the cool Christian just lets sin slide off their back, the reactionary Christian is angry all the time.

Reactionary Christian is always talking about how bad the world is. The reactionary Christian says things like this, I can't believe. I can't believe that people would be doing things like this. They would mock those who disagree with them. They mock their political enemies. They mock people who disagree with the Christian sexual ethic. These people love to talk about how bad the world is.

[10:44] And it's a great distraction, right? Because if we talk about how bad the world is, we don't have to look at our own sin. We don't have to think about the problems in our own families and our own communities. And of course, this anger tends to come from a place of self-righteousness. The reason the angry Christian says things like, I can't believe they would do that, because the angry Christian thinks he's above such things. He forgets that it's God's grace and God's grace alone that's at work in his life.

Lot, however, gives us a different solution. He is tormented by the sin of the world around him. Lot is not a cool Christian. Lot doesn't pretend that it doesn't matter. Lot hurts over the wickedness of the world. It hurts him. Lot is also not a reactionary Christian. Notice what it doesn't say. It doesn't say Lot went around ranting all the time on social media. Whenever Lot showed up to parties and was with other believers, he went off about the state of the world. No, Lot chooses this third way. Lot is hurt.

And so instead of coming from a place of self-righteousness, here it comes from a place of love. Lot loves God. And so he loves the things that God loves. He also hates the things that God hates. He hates seeing God's good design, God's good creation marred and despoiled and misused. And so what would we say about Lot? Here's another reactionary conservative. No, here is someone who is grieving over sin. Here's someone who looks at the world. They know it's not the way it was meant to be, and it hurts them at their core. It tortures them because they love God so much. Here is something good and beautiful that's being destroyed. That is why there were tears over Notre Dame, right?

Look at what great greatness is being marred and destroyed and burned. Of course, there's many other examples as well. In 2003, when American troops went into Baghdad and shortly followed the fall of Saddam Hussein, one of the things that happened in the midst of the chaos was that the National Museum of Iraq was looted. And so all these priceless artifacts from around the Middle East were stolen, taken away.

[13:27] Some things were destroyed. Destruction of things that were priceless, that were irreplaceable. And they're trying, even now, there's a news article that came out this summer in 2020 to recover these works of art. There are people who are scouring eBay and the internet. Apparently, there was an increase in the number of illegal artifacts being sold during COVID. And in this news article, there's this picture of this man who just has his head, his face in his hands. And the caption for the picture is this, Iraqi National Museum Director, Musen Hassan, holds his head in his hands as he sits amid destroyed artifacts in the Baghdad Museum in 2003. That is an appropriate response to the destruction of priceless works of art and history. How much more is an appropriate response for the Christian as we see the destruction of the goodness that God has put into this world? How much more is our grief an appropriate response to seeing people take what is evil and call it good and call what is good evil?

That's how we grieve over the world without being cool Christians, without being self-righteous Christians. We recognize there's something beautiful and good and right. And we mourn and lament when it's lost and destroyed. And so as we look at the example of Lot, the question for us is this, is to examine our hearts and ask ourselves, do we love what God loves? If we love what God loves, we will hate what he hates. We prayed the Lord's Prayer together. And in the Lord's Prayer, we pray that God's kingdom would come on earth as it is in heaven. Well, if we want God's kingdom to come, it means we want everything that stands in the way to be done away with. It means that everything that stands in the way, that keeps us from the fullness of the kingdom is something that makes us grieve in the same way that Lot grieved. We want to be like Isaiah, who said in Isaiah chapter 5, woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. And of course, we could be like Isaiah in chapter 6 as well, when he says, woe is me, for I am lost. For I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.

For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. And so it's not about being uptight. It's not about being cool. It's about grieving over the destruction of what is good and beautiful in this world. And longing for when God is going to come and restore it again. Of course, God doesn't just tell us to pray for his kingdom to come. That's not the only thing Jesus tells his disciples. He also tells them to love their neighbors as themselves. He says this in Mark chapter 12, speaking about the two greatest commandments. He says the second is this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these. Why is it so tempting to be the angry Christian? There's probably a lot of reasons. One of them is, it's a lot easier to be angry than it is to actually move toward your neighbor. Being angry is a lot easier than loving your neighbor as yourself.

And so that brings us to our second example. Remember I told you we're going to hurt for the world, and we're going to speak to the world. Lot hurts for the world. Noah speaks to the world. We have this short phrase about Noah telling us that he is, this is verse five, a herald of righteousness.

[17:28] Another word for a herald is a preacher. Noah was a preacher of righteousness. If you remember the story of Noah in Genesis six, it's really six through nine, you remember that God comes and tells Noah that there's a flood that's going to come on the earth, and he instructs Noah to build an ark. And that's what we learn about in those passages. We don't see everything in chapter six through nine of Genesis. We don't see what we learn here. Noah was not just building an ark. He was actively engaged with the people around him. Noah was actively speaking to the world around him about the reality of God's coming judgment, what we saw last time from this passage, and presumably about the reality of God's salvation. It's subtle here. It's not explicit, but Noah is the opposite of the false teachers we saw at the beginning of chapter two. Remember the false teachers gloss over. They talk about the fact that God's judgment is not real. Noah, on the other hand, was a preacher of righteousness.

He was faithful in doing what I said we should do after the beginning of chapter two. We're faithful in speaking clearly about God's judgment and his salvation. And so Noah also fails to fall into these errors. Noah doesn't choose to be a cool Christian. Noah's building the ark as God has commanded him to. He also chooses not to be an angry Christian. Noah chooses to speak to the world. He is actively engaged in the lives of his neighbors. And so for us as well, as we answer this question, how do we respond when the world is on fire? How do we respond to a wicked world? We, like Noah, love our neighbors enough to speak the truth to them.

We love our neighbors enough to speak to the truth of them. I've mentioned this book before called Evangelism as Exiles, and I read some excerpts to you when we were in 1 Peter. I'm going to read an excerpt to you now as we're in 2 Peter. So often now, American evangelicals are despondent and hopeless, specifically in light of our fading cultural power and social influence.

Our knee-jerk reaction is to bemoan what is lost, to throw up our arms and call foul. That would be the angry Christian. As the ground erodes beneath our feet, we tend to fight for our rights in the public square and slam our opponents on social media. We're fearful about our future, yet fear of the future isn't necessarily the problem. We actually don't seem fearful enough, not nearly as exasperated or concerned about the certain and dreadful end of our unbelieving neighbors as we should be. More and more, I see Christians incensed when the world mocks us and our faith, but we seem to have no trouble disparaging others with whom we disagree, whether it's for their position on the environment or economics, guns, or gays. Meanwhile, we unnecessarily disenfranchise unbelievers by becoming ardent apologists for relatively unimportant opinions. But at the same time, we somehow lack an authoritative voice on far weightier matters. Few of us would ever risk offending someone by actually proclaiming the good news of Christ. Instead, we'll only passively or reluctantly share the gospel, provided someone else is inclined to listen.

Of course, convicting words, but words that encourage us to be not just like Lot, but also like Noah, a preacher of righteousness who loved the world enough to tell them the truth, who chose the hard path rather than the easy path.

[21:22] Now, if you know much about reading and teaching the Bible, you notice I've done something this morning I'm not supposed to do. I have told you to be like someone in the Bible. I've told you to be like Noah and to be like Lot. Of course, that's moralism, right? We're not supposed to tell someone just to be and do like some character in the Bible. We're supposed to look at Jesus, right?

The problem is the Bible actually tells us to be like people. Peter here is presenting these people as examples. And so how do we do this? How do we look to these people as examples without becoming moralist, without just commanding someone to do something they're not able to do? This is something we're going to talk about again. We're going to be in the book of Daniel, by the way, after we finish 2 Peter. Daniel, we're going to have the same problem. What do we do with the character of Daniel? Is it okay to say be like Daniel? Would I dare say something like dare to be a Daniel?

This is going to be another quick little master class on how we read the Bible. What do we do with characters as models? It is not okay to simply say be like this biblical character. That is moralism. However, the Bible gives us characters as examples. And so what we have to do is we have to say be like this character as he had faith in God. Be like this character because she trusted in God.

[22 : 50] Moralism is saying do. The gospel is saying God has done. He's done something for this character. This character responded in this way. God has done something for us. We can respond in that way as well. And so we can remove the danger of looking to biblical characters as examples when we look to them as examples because of their trust and faith and hope and confidence in God. The same is true for Lot and Noah. They had faith in God. They trusted and believed God's promises. Remember, God came to Noah and said he was going to save him from the flood and to build an ark. Noah had to trust that promise.

God had provided him what he needed. He had given him the ark. He had given him the directions and the instructions. Noah was responding in obedience. God initiated with his grace and his salvation.

Noah responded with a faithful obedience. The same is true for us. We look to God's goodness and provision first. And like the characters who are our examples, we respond in faith and trust and obedience.

And so, Christian, God makes you good promises as well. Remember, we saw this in 2 Peter 1 at the very beginning, verses 3 and 4. We heard about the great and very precious promises that God has given us.

The same is true for us now. If we are going to be obedient, if we are going to hurt for the world and speak to the world, we can only do that after we have received and known God's good promises.

[24 : 40] If we're going to be like Lot, we hear Jesus' promise in Matthew chapter 5, blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. If we are going to be like Lot, we start first with God's promise in Matthew chapter 5, verse 6.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. How do we function like Lot? We start by knowing that God offers us his blessing.

How do we function like Lot? We start by knowing that we'll be satisfied if we hunger for righteousness. We will be comforted if we mourn.

How do we function like Noah? Jesus also makes us promises. Also in Matthew chapter 5, he tells us, Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you, and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. How are we like Noah? We know that our reward is great in heaven.

[25 : 53] How are we like Noah? We know that God offers us his blessing. And so how do we become not moralists, but people who look to Jesus?

We are people who look to Jesus as we follow the example of Noah and Lot, because we know that God's promises are sure and true. And we know most of all that they are sure and true, because he has proven them in Jesus Christ.

His greatest promise, that he would send his son to die for our sins, has come true. How much more are all the lesser promises going to be honored?

Paul tells us this in Romans chapter 8, verses 31 and 32. If God did not withhold his own son, will he not also give us everything else? And so we look to Jesus, if we're Christians, on the cross, knowing that he is the guarantee of God's promises that empower and enable our obedience.

If you are not a Christian, remember what was true when we talked about this passage last time.

[27 : 07] Remember what was true of Noah. He was a preacher of righteousness. If you look back at Genesis, he built the ark for a really long time.

And there's probably a lot of people who thought he was crazy until the day the flood came. The same is true for us today in God's world.

God delays his judgment. He has not yet poured out full and final judgment on this earth. In fact, we're going to talk about that more in 2 Peter chapter 3. Peter's going to make the point that it's a proof of God's patience.

He's giving people time to repent. God is still giving you time to repent. It will not be forever. And so the call for you is also to love what God loves and to hate what he hates.

The call is to repent of your sins. To know that God offers forgiveness for anyone and everyone who accepts Jesus' sacrifice on his behalf.

[28 : 13] And he offers those promises of blessing to you as well. And so a Christian knows God's promises are true and trusts them in faith.

A non-Christian knows that God's judgment is real and that the call to repent is now. Now. Elliot Clark also says this, and I'll end with this, later on in his book.

As we've already seen, hope leads us to speak. Hope in future glory fills our hearts with joy and animates our witness. Even overcoming hindrances to evangelism like shame and exclusion.

But hope in God's active providence in our present circumstances also loosens our lips to preach the gospel. Why? Because we recognize that God has put us where we are for such a time as this. Brothers and sisters, God has put us here in 2021 in Colorado Springs for such a time as this. And he's called us to hurt for the world.

[29 : 20] And he's called us to speak to the world. He has made great promises for everyone who answers this call. And those promises are guaranteed by Jesus Christ.

Please pray with me. Our Father in heaven, we praise you that you do give us examples in your word of what it looks like to be obedient.

What it looks like to live lives of faith. We ask that you would use your promises to stir up our faithfulness just like you did for Noah and Lot.

We thank you that you show us our need for your grace and you meet us at that very same point of need. And we thank you that we don't earn these things or deserve them.

That your promises are given us by Jesus. And so it's in his name that we pray. Amen.