

Dark Days

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[0 : 00] If you're an American, you probably should know this. Most of you probably do. But every year, the President of the United States makes a speech to Congress and to the watching nation.

And when he does so, he addresses a couple things. And when he does it, that speech that happens normally in January, February, sometimes even March, is called the State of the Union. And it's actually mandated by the Constitution.

And what it says is the President must, must, from time to time, give to Congress information on the State of the Union, hence the name, the State of the Union, and recommend to their consideration things that should be done moving forward.

And as he does this, he kind of, the President will give an idea of where we're at and where we're going. So where we're at and where we're going.

There's kind of some famous State of the Union speeches, as you can imagine. They've ranged from slightly humorous to really sad and to really important.

[1 : 07] One that's kind of funny is James K. Polk in the 19th century. He talked about the California gold rush before it was known as the gold rush. He told the American public that gold was found in California.

So the population of California in one day went from 80 folks to about 300,000 folks. Not in one day, but very shortly afterwards. We have very important speeches like Abraham Lincoln's speech to the American public during the Civil War.

And then we have very sad speeches like that of Gerald Ford in 1975. He started this speech very directly to the nation and said, The State of the Union is not good.

And then he went on and said, This is the way forward. This is the hope that we have as American citizens. Well, this morning, the State of Sodom is not good.

The State of Sodom is not good. Sodom is trapped in sin, and there's really no hope going forward.

[2 : 12] The State of Sodom is not good, and we know that's about to be met with judgment. If you were here with us last week, that's no surprise. We heard about that promise.

We heard about that ominous warning of judgment. And this morning, we see in that clarity of Gerald Ford, the State of the Union is not good.

We see in Scripture, the State of Sodom is not good. And this morning, we're going to examine that in the life of Lot, but also the wider population of Sodom.

We're going to see the scope, like how bad is it really? How far does it go? How deep does it go?

And then we're going to see how God meets out judgment against sin. After all, could it really be that bad?

Is it that bad? We're going to find out as we look at Sodom. So, look with me at verse 1. The two angels came to Sodom.

[3 : 13] And when they did, what did they see there? They saw Lot was sitting at the gate of Sodom. And as he sat at the gate of Sodom, we see this connection to what we saw last week.

That in this promise of these angels and of God's judgment upon this place, we see the severity of sin. But it's not immediately clear to us. Because what's Lot doing?

He's just sitting down. He couldn't be doing anything that bad. Oh, but it's really bad. How bad is it? It's extremely bad. In fact, the thing that's surprising about how bad it is, is it involves the hero of our story.

Or the kind of hero. That's Lot. You see, last week, if you remember, Lot's family member is Abraham. And Abraham had pleaded with God on his behalf.

That, Lord, if there's just one righteous man, will you save Sodom? Will you not sweep away the righteous with the wicked? And the Lord shows him grace and mercy by not destroying Lot.

[4 : 19] Right? That's the promise. And then we'll see here in this section of Scripture. There's just one problem, though. Lot is sitting at the gate. And if you remember from what you know of Scripture, men of importance, men of value, sat at the gate.

They were elders of the city. And as they sat there, they passed in judgment on everything that happened in the city. So here we have Lot, who's a foreigner, sitting at the gate in this wicked city. Of these men, he should have nothing to do with. It reminds us of the picture of Psalm 1. Stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers. Lot, our hero, has some position of prominence over the city that is wicked.

That's our first clue that something is going wrong, very wrong in Sodom. Our next clue is this. It's not all bad with Lot, though.

He is sitting in this seat, but he does show hospitality to these strangers. Look at verse 2. Or at the end of verse 1.

[5 : 32] When he saw them, he rose to meet them. And he 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.

And they said, No. We will spend the night in the town square. But he pressed them strongly. The picture is he's twisting their arm and he says, Stay with me.

Their response is kind of rude. But he presses them further. Remember that because we'll return to it in a second. We see that Lot sees their importance.

He knows the command to show hospitality to strangers. He doesn't know that they're angels yet, but he will in a minute. And in doing so, what does he do next? He doesn't just invite them into his home, but he prepares a feast for them.

And he does it quickly with everything that he has. Unleavened bread. He invites them into this home and he makes them comfortable. But in the person of Lot, we see something interesting.

[6 : 35] We were talking, I was talking with somebody at the end of last week about this. Lot is this mix of righteousness and sin. We know that he's called righteous.

We know that Abraham pleads his case before the Lord because he is righteous. And we just read in the New Testament this promise in 2 Peter, or this reminder in 2 Peter that he is righteous.

But he's marked by sin. He's sitting at the gate. And as we'll see in a second, it goes even further. So what are we supposed to do with Lot?

He's a righteous man, but he's still marked by sin. Keep this in mind as we look at the widening scope of sin in Sodom.

Now let's turn our attention to what follows in this scene in 4 through 11. The story shows us how bad it really is. How truly awful it is in Sodom.

[7 : 33] We see the scope of sin. Not just how deep it runs in Lot's life, but it goes everywhere. It's young. It's old. To a man. The picture is one of completeness.

That young and old, every family, every household in this city participates in this. Maybe not in this one event, but this sin runs into all of this city.

It's everywhere. Everywhere. Verse 5 says this. And they call it to Lot. We're the men who came to you tonight. Bring them out to us that we may know them.

It's a euphemism. They're saying that they don't want to simply meet and greet these visitors, but the men of Sodom wish to rape these male visitors in Lot's house.

It's the same language that we see time and time again in Genesis when it comes to sexual relations. We see it in the rest of the New Testament. They were commanded to show these visitors kindness, but what do they do instead?

[8 : 41] They try to do them harm, and they seek to sin against them. How bad is it? The state of Sodom is not good. It's really not good.

Now, there's no confusion about their intent. Look at verse 6. Lot went out to the men at the entrance and shut the door after him and said, in verse 7, I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly.

So it's not just simply meeting and greeting them. There's no confusion. Lot knows what they're there for because they've said it. And then Lot's response to them is, don't act so wickedly.

Don't act so wickedly. He calls them on their sin, and he calls it what it is. It's wickedness. But in doing so, we see this subtle reminder of how bad it is even in Lot's life.

What does he say to them? He says, my brothers. Not just men, my brothers. He's not just appealing to them as, guys, don't do this. He's saying, my brothers.

[9 : 43] The man that was supposed to be righteous, that was supposed to stand in opposition of wickedness, identifies with them as brothers. The righteous followers of the Lord associate with wickedness.

And then he goes further. We see his response in verse 8. What is his solution to the problem? He's going to chuck out his daughters to these men.

Let's be clear. This is not a good solution. It shows us, even in this righteous man, how deep sin goes into his life. That his solution to this problem was not to stand and fight.

It wasn't even to flee. It was to send out his daughters. How bad is it? The whole town and this one man are marked by sin.

It is bad. And then it gets worse. The response of the mob is this. They're going to double down. And they're going to insult Lot and say, it's going to go worse for you.

[10 : 45] This man who's had some prominence in the city is then threatened. They go back and say, hey, you're just an outsider. Why are we going to listen to you, even though you're in this position?

And in fact, you're going to suffer a worse fate than these men that we want. And so what is the response of the angels? This gets a little confusing because it keeps saying men. The angels open the door and they reach out and pull them back inside.

And they shut the door. And then they blind all of these men that are on the outside. This is the bottom of this sad spiral. Now, that even in being blinded, they don't change their course.

They don't change their direction. They don't do what's right. They don't stop and take stock of what they've done and say, maybe I shouldn't be doing this. Maybe we shouldn't be doing this at all. Instead, they press further and press harder. They grope around in the darkness until they exhaust themselves. See, when God disciplines sin, we should stop and take account of our lives and say, how did I get here?

[11 : 53] Should I be doing this? This happens all the time in the history of Israel. This happens even in our own lives. And yet we still pursue sin in our blindness.

How bad is it? The state of Sodom is not good. Now, I want to take a really quick minute to address the nature of the sin of Sodom.

We know it's clear from this passage. It repeats it over and over. The men of Sodom are sinful. And there's some in our day. And interestingly, this has never happened before in the history of the church that have said, the sin here is not homosexuality.

It's lack of hospitality. But as we saw from the context, Lot knows what they're talking about. He tries to solve the problem in a bad way. But he tries to solve the problem.

The context demands that it be sexual intercourse. Think back. Lot, what was his warning to those angels who were visiting? He wants them to stay in his house.

[12 : 56] And he insists upon it. He twists their arm because he doesn't want this. He doesn't want anything bad to happen to them. And he knows that if they stay in the town center, that it will.

And the solution that Lot gives is not scolding for lack of kindness, a lack of hospitality, as one would expect. His solution is to call it wickedness and then throw out his own daughters.

And it's not just rape. It's homosexual sin. The New Testament talks about this and says this in Jude.

Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.

How bad is it? It's really bad. Lot's heart is not good. The state of Sodom is not good. Now, oftentimes when we think about things that are powerless or things that are powerful over us, we fail to recognize things that seem powerless, things that seem insignificant, like who we love or whatever we do with our bodies or the words that we say.

[14 : 21] Actually are powerful. Think about water. Water looks powerless. I can pour it in a cup. I can control it. I can splash it out of the pool.

I can divert it away from the river by means of construction. But over time, water is a really powerful thing. It seems powerless, but it has the ability to destroy rocks, to destroy homes, to destroy cities.

water seems powerless, water seems powerless, but left unattended, but left unattended will destroy even rock. It drips and drips and drips.

Sin is kind of like that. We have this picture in Lot's life that he's left things unattended, and the drip, drip of sin has unraveled in his life in this point.

Yes, Lot is righteous, but there's very much the sense in this story that Lot is doing things that he shouldn't. He's acting in a way that is not right. He's okay with sitting at the gate.

[15 : 30] He's okay with calling them brothers. He's even okay with offering his daughters to these men. Drip, drip, drip. It starts little, and then it ends up in this situation, just as we saw last week.

The sin of Sodom didn't start here. It started with other things, and then grew to this. But Lot is an example to us as Christians.

Not necessarily a good example, but it's a bad example, because he is righteous. He's an example to us that we have to recognize the battle is with these little things that snowball into these larger things, those sins that are acceptable, that we joke about, that we don't even try to fight against, snowball or drip, drip away in our lives until we have a gaping hole the size of Sodom.

We have to realize that it's a battle, but we are not powerless in this battle. God has given us his spirit to fight against it. He's given us his word. He's given us each other.

He's given us this time on Sunday mornings to be reminded that it is a battle and to reorient our hearts against sin in our own lives.

[16 : 51] If you're here this morning and this message against Sodom that we read about kind of strikes a chord, or you're thinking, I've heard this before from you Christian types, and I don't know about it.

Let me say this, that this example that we have in Sodom is not good. The rest of Scripture says that, that it's not good.

The sin of homosexuality is not good. The sin of Lot is not good. Both of those things demand judgment. Both of those things are paid for by the blood of Christ.

Even our sin today in this room are paid for by that same blood. The difference between Lot and the men of Sodom is that Lot is righteous.

They both do things wrong, but Lot follows after the Lord. He's struggling and wrestling against sin. Sometimes well, sometimes not so well as we see. But the call is to follow the Lord, to be counted among the righteous, to see the glory of what Christ has done on the cross and follow after him.

[18 : 02] The men of Sodom stand as an example. Lot is an example for us. We're to flee from sin, flee from Sodom, but walk as righteous Lot.

The state of Sodom is not good. And so, judgment against sin, judgment against the sin of Sodom is necessary. Let's turn our focus on that.

Look with me at verses 12 through 14. Here in this scene, we have a shift. It's less about the sin of Sodom and more about the response of Lot that then morphs back into what happens to all of Sodom.

It's the warning of judgment. The men of Sodom have sinned and there's a warning to Lot. It's coming not just because the sin is a little bit, because it's great sin.

If you look at verse 13, the outcry against sin is great and it's become great before the Lord and the Lord has sent us to destroy it, is what the angels say.

[19 : 11] It's coming. Judgment is coming. And what does Lot do? He warns his family. He warns his future sons-in-law and says, this is coming. And what is their response to this announcement of judgment?

It's not a turning away from sin. It's not a fleeing after what is good and right and true. It's not even following Lot because he's their future father-in-law.

Instead, they think it's a joke. God's judgment is a joke. But it wasn't just the future sons-in-law that didn't understand judgment.

On some level, it kind of includes Lot himself. He knows that it's coming. He knows that he's to flee from it. And what does he do? Look at verses 15 and 16 with me.

As the morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, Up, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be swept away in the punishment of the city. But he lingered. So the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand and the Lord being merciful to him.

[20 : 17] There's that idea again that even in sin, even in delayed obedience, which is disobedience, the Lord is still merciful to him and brings him outside to the city.

He tells him to run for the hills but he says, Wait, wait, wait. I don't really want to run for the hills because, you know, I might get swept up in what's happening. If I can just go to this little city, then it will be okay.

And the Lord being merciful grants him this request to go to this little town, this little city, that's what its name means, and stay there. Lot is slow to listen to the Lord.

He's reluctant to follow after him, even though he knows judgment is coming. He pleads not a righteous case like Abraham.

Think about how Abraham pleads on behalf of Lot. Lord, you are righteous. You are merciful. You are slow to anger. It's the words of Moses later. But he says, Lord, will you not sweep away the righteous with the wicked?

[21 : 20] Lot here pleads his convenience because he's slow to listen to the Lord for ease. How bad is it? It's so bad that Lot, in the face of judgment, says, Oh, Lord, that's really inconvenient for me.

Ah, I don't really want to do it. Is it really that bad, Lord? Do I really have to move that fast? Yes, Lot, you do. Look at verses 23 through 25.

When the sun had risen on the earth and when Lot came to Zohar, then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven.

He overthrew those cities and all the valley and all the inhabitants of the city that grew on the ground. He literally scorched earth. Yes, it's that bad.

Judgment comes not in the form of an invading army this time in the history of Israel, but the Lord is literally raining down fire and sulfur and killing even the grass.

[22 : 21] If you remember from last week, there's a lot of similarities between this story and the story of Noah. That sin had become so great and so wide that destruction, that judgment was coming.

Not over all the earth this time, but on this city. And one family remains because of righteous Lot. Because of righteous Noah.

Not perfect, but righteous. Except for Lot's wife. Verse 26 reminds us, But Lot's wife behind him looked back and she became a pillar of salt.

Lot is not perfect. He falters. He falters in not leading his family. He's slow. He wants ease and convenience. And even his wife disobeys.

Disobeys that clear command that the angel had given to not look back on sin. To not love it. But to look forward to how the Lord was providing graciously to them more than anything else.

[23 : 26] That's what the angel told them to do. And yet, she looks back. She loves sin and loves her life more than she loves God's promises.

How bad is it in Sodom? It's that bad. It's not good. Often we respond very much like Lot to God's word.

We kind of dilly-dally or delay when we know what's clear. When we know something is imminent. And like children, when we delay our obedience, it's really disobedience.

Empty the dishwasher. The command has something implicit in it. It's like now. Right? Not in a week. Not in a month. Follow after me.

It's now. It's not in a week or when things get right or when I feel good or when times are sweet and awesome. No, it's now. It's explicit sometimes in Scripture.

[24 : 26] And yet, we still don't do what we are commanded to do. Lot is not saved because he followed these commands. We even see in his own family they don't follow his commands.

His sons-in-law, his wife, even in him, he wants to go someplace else because it's easy. But the story of God's judgment is front and center in the story of Sodom.

We see it really clear. It's complete. It goes down even in Lot down to his core and his family, his sons-in-law, his wife.

The destruction of Sodom stands as a warning to Israel and to us about sin. How sin is going to be judged. We hear often today that sin is not that big of a deal.

It's not that important. You know? Is sin even real? The story of Sodom reminds us that sin is real and it will be judged.

[25 : 31] Even something as trivial as looking back, God is holy and demands our worship. He demands us to be holy and yet we're not.

Jesus reminds us of this event and he says to his followers, the people that follow after Christ early on in the Gospels, he says this in Matthew 10 of the trials that they're going to face in cities that don't believe in his message, he says this, that judgment against sin, it will be worse than it was in Sodom and Gomorrah for those that reject his message.

That should shock us. Is sin serious? Yes, it's going to be judgment against sin when we break God's law that's worse than this and yet we think judgment's not real.

We dilly-dally. We delay. If you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, I'm glad you're here but the Bible is really clear that God executes judgment against sin just like in Sodom.

We're called to follow after Christ and to love him, to walk as righteous people. That doesn't mean you get it all right. Lot clearly didn't get it all right but he's following after the Lord and he's saved from judgment.

[27 : 04] Now Christians, do we live in such a way that this message is at our core that we live in this reality that our friends and neighbors know that we are that serious about sin and what's going to happen to them that we can't just but share the gospel with them.

We talk a lot about fervent witness. If this event doesn't create fervor in you, I don't know what will. do we impress upon our friends and family and our coworkers that judgment against sin is real and coming?

Lot did. For all of his failings, for all the things that he got wrong, Lot told people. We should tell people. At the very close of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, we have this.

It's not one of triumph. Not, yay, everything's better. It's this. Abraham comes out and surveys the destruction. Not Lot.

And what do we read at the end? So it was then when God had destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered not Lot, but Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow when he overthrew the cities in which Lot had lived.

[28 : 27] God remembered Abraham. The wording here is deliberate. There's this picture of righteousness, a promise of what will come from Abraham, the thing that will save them all.

It's not Lot was righteous, look at Lot, but look to the one and follow after the one that comes after Abraham. that will make you righteous. Remember Abraham.

Remember his righteous pleas for mercy. Let us hope like Abraham. Let us live like Abraham. Let us wait with expectant hope for Abraham's son that's coming, that is Jesus.

Let's pray. Lord, we're reminded this morning that following after Christ, that following after you, that is righteousness.

Even in the midst of our struggle against sin, even when we do things that are wrong, that, Father, that judgment has come against sin, just like the city of Sodom. But that judgment has been paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ.

[29 : 40] And may we follow after him because of it. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen. Please stand