

Kings Norton Baptist Church

Sunday 30th April 2023 10 am

Living in Holy fear

Welcome to all.

Opening Scripture and prayer

Hymn MP 237 Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty

Scripture Psalm 9 (page 564)

Prayer of praise and thanksgiving.

Notices Housegroup at the chapel, strict time, please come, see below

Next Sunday *coronation* lunch, 9:45 prayer time, time keeping

Spring convention, Warwick in the BCM Update

Children's talk Joshua Daniel

Chorus MP 151 For I am building a people of power

OM Ships video Leaflets

Prayer and share time

Reading Genesis 18:16-33 (Page 18)

Hymn MP 1072 In Christ alone

Sermon Living in Holy fear

Hymn MP 239 Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord

Closing Prayer



Earlier Church Covenant 1967

3. It is needful to cultivate the Christian life, and so I promise to present myself at the services of worship, realising the importance of the prayer meeting, and putting away all idle excuses and self-justification.

Prayer and Exordium

■ On 12th Dec 1984 dense fog shrouded the M25 near Godstone, Surrey. The hazard warning lights were on but were ignored by most drivers. At 6.15 a.m. a lorry carrying huge rolls of paper was involved in an accident, and within minutes the carriageway was engulfed in carnage. Dozens of cars were wrecked. Ten people were killed. A police patrol car was soon on the scene, and two policemen ran back up the motorway to stop oncoming traffic. They waved their arms and shouted as loud as they could, but most drivers took no notice and raced on towards the

disaster that awaited them. The policemen then picked up traffic cones and flung them at the cars' windscreens in a desperate attempt to warn drivers of their danger; one told how tears streamed down his face as car after car went by and he waited for the sickening sound of impact as they hit the growing mass of wreckage farther down the road. John Blanchard's "whatever happened to hell" p.297

✚ Would you have stopped? How good are you at heeding a warning? x2

Today's passage is Gen 18:16-end. The title is: 'Living in Holy fear x2.

Three visitors had come to Abraham, they were angels, **ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation** 1:14 They are on an errand to tell elderly Abraham and Sarah that they will have a child. The second errand is to bring judgment on Sodom. That comes in Ch. 19. The three angels had by the time they reached Sodom become two. 19:1. Many see the third angel as the Lord, before whom Abraham stood, and to whom he drew near Ge 18:23.

God is Holy

We sung Holy, Holy, Holy - above all God is a Holy God, unlike any other, set apart from sinners, with eyes too pure to behold evil. What he sees in Sodom is particularly grievous to His Holy nature, - an affront to His Holy name.

20 **The LORD said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous.**

Back in Genesis 13:13 we are told: **the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD.** The detail of the sin: Ch. 19 **Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them."** Gen 19:4-5

Sodom was a city in which sexual perversion reigned. It had characterised the city, it was not here and there in pockets just among a few - it had pervaded the whole city, everyone, everywhere, young and old alike.

✚ Sodom, and its corollary 'Sodomy' became a by-word for perversion.

The recurring reference to Sodom throughout Scripture is used as a warning. Sodom is referred to over 25 times in the Bible as a mark of God's right anger against sin - and as a warning to others.

For example in Isaiah 3:9 we read: **The look on their faces testifies against them; they parade their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to them! They have brought disaster upon themselves.**

God says sin should make us ashamed, it should produce disquiet, it should stir a reaction of conscience and cause us to blush. Jeremiah had to say: **Are they**

ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush. So they will fall among the fallen; they will be brought down when I punish them," says the LORD. Jer 6:15 & 8:12 *Do you blush?*

There are strong forces in our land doing all they can to normalise this sin across all ages. What was once considered a perversion is now proudly paraded as something good. This is how the ungodly world works. Peter warns: **'he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly;** 2 Pet 2:6

I am amazed that God has not brought more judgement on our nation. How patient he is. Jude the Lord's brother says: **Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.** 1:7 Sin is checked by the salt and light of the church.

But it is now in the church. That is what the prophet Jeremiah had to confront - sin amongst God's Holy people, that is in His church. God speaking through Jeremiah says: **Among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen something horrible: They commit adultery and live a lie. They strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no-one turns from his wickedness. They are all like Sodom to me; the people of Jerusalem are like Gomorrah.**" Jer 23:14

✚ No wonder he is called the weeping prophet!

Part of the judgment on the land is a weak and compromised church, a church which has lost its saltiness - and therefore its light has grown dim.

Immorality will be out there – it must never be in here – in the church - amongst God's Holy people.

Paul says to the church: **But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.** Eph 5:3 - God is Holy and therefore we are to be Holy.

Crusaders if we follow Jesus should anything change in me? two columns stop being / start being many were hard pressed to think like this

'Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.' 2 Tim 2:19. *Simply put* - If you do not do this – you do not belong to Him.

So often the root of the problem is that we do not see God as Holy. We belittle God and elevate ourselves. And therefore we do not understand his wrath.

God is Just

God is not only Holy - He is Just. **God is just.** 2 Thess 1:6

2a

Most of you in this room have a good understanding of Justice, so too others in our land, the reason being that the modern British Justice system was founded on Biblical principles - from a God who is just – and shows it.

That is not true in many other parts of the world where there's been little Christian influence. So too in areas of the world before Biblical thinking came.

Missionary Mary Slessor who lived amongst the tribes in the Calabar saw how this African tribe, typical of all, saw Justice before Christianity. "Oppression and outrage were common. Their law was often resisted by the slaves and women regardless of the consequences. If a fine was imposed the one to pay would sit subdued and sullen, and then obtain his revenge by seizing or murdering some passing victim. All combined in a common enmity against other tribes, and the region was enclosed with a fence of terrorism as impenetrable as a ring of steel. Each sought to out rival the other in the number of heads captured or the number of slaves stolen or harboured, and naturally there was no end to the fighting. They had their own idea of justice and judicial methods, and trials by ordeal formed the test of innocence or guilt, the two commonest being by burning oil and poison. A pot was filled with palm oil which was brought to the boil. – Let's leave that to the imagination - She says this method was the most troublesome — for the investigation, sentence, and punishment were carried out simultaneously. Occasionally the relations of the victims would be powerful enough to take exception to the summary procedure and seek redress by force of arms, and a vendetta would reign for years. If a man or woman were blamed for some evil deed an appeal could be made to the law of substitution, and a sufficient number of slaves could be furnished as would be equivalent for themselves, and these would be killed in their stead. The eldest son of a free House, for instance, would be spared by the sacrifice of the life of a younger brother. " just a small extract!

✚ So there's godless life in all its ugliness. - But God is a God of justice, opposed to the degrading of any human on any grounds. LICC Mark Greene

That is how the nations around Abraham would have been, detestable in God's sight. God was patient saying **for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.**" Gen 15:16 But the point comes when the sin overflows, it reaches heaven and heaven can no longer remain silent. Judgment comes – and quickly

Yes God's justice is right and good. God is not only Holy but he is Just.

Psalms 45:6 **Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a sceptre of justice will be the sceptre of your kingdom.** See also Psalms 89:14, 97:2

God's justice demands action against any affront to God's Holiness. Justice means any transgression, and every transgressor, or lawbreaker will face the

2b

due consequence - and God's justice will be perfectly administered. Do not think that because it hasn't come yet – that it won't come – it surely will and then the full measure of punishment will be metered out.

The Day of Judgment is the day every sin is accounted for, every record set straight, every action squared. The Year of Jubilee was a year of reconciling all wrongs and resetting everything to how it should be. This year started with the feast of Atonement which equates to Judgment Day at the end of the age.

Everything will be exposed before Him to whom we have to give an account, every secret sins will be laid bare before all and due punishment pronounced. Every wrong righted, every evil punished and every score settled.

Some sins lag behind – some sins go before. The sin of Sodom went before, such public evil speeded the bringing down of God's just punishment.

1. It's rebellion worse for they had all seen and benefitted from the helping hand of God with the rescue of the city from the aggressive kings - Gen 13
2. They also had Lot's witness, clouded as it was by his compromised life.

God is perfect and His justice is perfect. He does not make mistakes, he does not need the jury, witnesses nor defence council for he knows everything – yet due to the seriousness of punishment – in which he takes no delight – he double checks. just as he did at Babel (Gen 11:5). We read here in v21 **I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.**" I want to be sure, maybe it be not as bad as I have heard, sadly it was. Yes it was bad, Yes it was plain to see. It is ripe for Judgment.

God shares his plan with Abraham

17 **Then the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?"** God is speaking - to himself – but within earshot of Abraham. He wants Abraham to hear of what he is about to do. But why?

The first reason is that Abraham is a prophet (see Gen 20:7) and **Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets,** says Amos 3:7

Another reason is that Abraham is God's friend, (James 2:23 speaks of that) and a friend is someone with whom you share your business with.

Jesus said in John 15:15 **I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.**

But I think the main reason is in v19, the key verse of this passage: **For I have chosen him, - or literally I know him - so that he will direct his children and his**

household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.

Abraham in teaching others to do **what is just** is the same of what he says of the Lord 25 **Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?"** or literally to **do justice, x2** God is showing Abraham how to administer justice so he can know, value and teach justice to his family and household. We see this as we look at the prayer.

Prayer

The bulk of the passage is this prayer, it is a model prayer for we have so much detail. The first of its kind in the Bible and an exemplar for us to follow. It looks like an intercessory prayer and some of the commentators take this line.

However, notice Abraham never asks the Lord not to judge those deserving judgment, he does not say as we say when we intercede on behalf of others "Lord be merciful, forgive them, bring your grace and declare the sinner righteous through Christ's sacrifice as you have done me, etc., etc.,"

No here is it all about justice. x2 Abraham pleads with the Lord to not destroy the righteous, God's own people along with the wicked.

Deut 25:1. **The judges will decide the case, acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty.** Not the other way round **Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent—the LORD detests them both.** Proverbs 17:15

How often does God not bring Judgment because of the presence of His people. As with Paul one of 276 on ship God spared them all because of Him.

A basic lesson of prayer is to pray according to the Lord's character – known through His word. God will only act in-line with his character, of his Holiness, hence we read 25 **Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you!** see the emphasis: **Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" do right!**

Abraham is not saying don't punish the wicked.

✚ *We can learn from how Abraham prays, He's God centered, He is reverential, He is not presumptuous, His prayer is not full of vagaries but with definite pleas. He prays humbly **I am nothing but dust and ashes** v27. He prays persistently as he goes from 50, 45, 40, 30, 20, down to ten.*

But why stop there? If the Lord would not destroy a large city on the basis of ten righteous people, what about 9,8,7 or 4 the number in Lot's family?

Did Abraham not wish to seek preferential treatment for them? Did he not realise that Lot had married a local and worldly woman? That the daughters

had married men who laughed at judgment, and that they themselves became nations that were opposed and antagonistic towards God, in other words it was only Lot who was truly saved. How often is that the truth of our families too.

So hear the application

The main message this morning is that God's judgments promote Holy living.

We don't like the motive of fear "Don't frighten people, no fire and brimstone"

This passage says otherwise. To understand Justice is to understand holiness

Abraham was to **walk before** God Almighty **and be blameless.** Gen 17:1.

Here the Lord said ^{v19} **For I have chosen him, (Abraham) so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, - - so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."**

In other words if Abraham lives in Holy fear - and leads his children and his household in holy fear - then they will be saved.

At last you say! We've heard about living in Godly fear, where you might say is mercy? Where is grace? **GOSPEL -**

Abraham a sinner like us all here this morning - had received grace and was/is considered righteous in God's sight. He was given everlasting life with God.

This is not just for Abraham - but for all - all of you here - who profess faith in Christ today.

He received it by faith. So it is today. Do you fear the Lord? do you revere Him? Do you see the seriousness of your sin before a Holy God who will one day judge? Then confess and turn from the sin you know you have - look to the Son, look to Him, and you too will be given freely the gift of life.

To help Abraham direct his household in this way he is shown how the Lord works Justice. As a nation's foundation must be a foundation of Justice, so must a home, a life.

✚ While Sodom was in full swing and in the full enjoyment of its pleasures - it was about to perish. It did not perish by chance, but by divine punishment. And when the cause of the punishment is declared beforehand, - it will far more effectually pierce and stimulate our dull minds.

In other words God's judgment on Sodom so clearly before Abraham was to show him that in our confusing world where things happen with no warning the same principles of Judgment still apply. So take note and live by it, live in Holy fear, x2. You and everyone in the household of faith.

This was Abraham's cue, sadly we have precious little of that around today

- What if there were stocks on the end of your road? Would that make a difference to crime in your street?
- What about some gallows up on the Green. This is how justice used to be displayed publicly to warn others. Noticeboards on the estates with photos of local criminals to shame them in Soviet Russia

Those stocks aren't there, but we have here in the Bible in full multi-colour the Holiness and Justice of God, our warning signs, the gallows, stocks, for us to take head and live in fear of the Lord.

This should mean we stop accommodating immorality in our home, stop winking at what we know is sin and let it go without it being dealt with, bad language, blasphemy, how often I hear God's Name frivolously used. The message today is - *God is Just and one day he will act if we don't take heed.*

That is why we had punishments at school, where are they today? That is why prison was to punish to stop people going there.

We could stop most unruly and bad behaviour instantly through the fear of punishment - of which there is currently very little.

- How many, even in our families who will end up in hell because there has been no correction in their life. In one family I knew the father was exasperated by his ungodly immoral daughter he died prematurely through the stress of it. The sad thing is that he did nothing about it.

The fear of punishment is to produce a Godly fear of the Lord - which then leads us to seek salvation. Like **Noah who by faith, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family.** Heb 11:7

Godly fear leads to salvation. This passage of the destruction of Sodom is not for Abraham alone but for us in the household of faith. God is speaking to us all here, that we know his will, be corrected by it and pass it on.

Yet many, most have not done so. How little fear of God there is today.

Dramatic events such as this serve to inspire terror, we should know them well. Our dull spirits need a sharp stimulus to bring Godly fear.

- How often is a person's testimony to saving faith the result of a shock experience that produced a fear.

✚ The plight of the lost is so terrible, the power of sin so great and the horror of hell so fearful - God has given every warning - how can we not do everything to warn others. The preaching of grace, finds a willing ear to those who fear God, that they may hasten unto Christ. _____END