

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CHRISTIANS SIN? - Part sixteen

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WHY THE MESSAGE OF DIVINE JUDGMENT SEEMS UNREAL TO UNBELIEVERS (continued)

Genesis 19:12-15 - "Then the men said to Lot, "Have you anyone else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone you have in the city, bring them out of the place. [13] For we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the Lord, and the Lord has sent us to destroy it." [14] So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, "Up! Get out of this place, for the Lord is about to destroy the city." *But he seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting.* [15] As 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."

The issue we're examining is that strange phrase in the fourteenth verse - "*But he [Lot] seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting.*" I have called that a **strange phrase** because the sentence before it - the sentence they considered humorous - doesn't seem funny at all - "**So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, 'Up! Get out of this place, for the Lord is about to destroy the city'**"(14).

So the question I'm asking last week and this is **why this reaction?** Why can't these people take Lot seriously? And the reason I think we all need to have an answer to that question is the New Testament says the account of Lot is an example of how we are to relate the truth of God's coming judgment to our present age:

2 Peter 2:4-9 - "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; [5] 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; [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; [7] and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked [8] (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); [9] then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment...."*

Peter says we are to **study Lot**. We're to remember his story. So what we're doing here is in direct obedience to a New Testament command. And last Sunday we considered two answers to the question, "**Why does the message of divine judgment seem unreal to unbelievers?**"

Here are the two reasons we studied last week. **First, any truth can reach the mind without being fully realized in terms of its importance and relevance.** Like knowing the gravitational pull on the moon is less than that on earth. I know that to be true. But it doesn't matter to me. When you deal with people and spiritual things you quickly learn that the hard part isn't **educating** people to **understand** Biblical truth. Knowledge isn't that hard to impart. The real issue - the issue that seals eternal destinies - is getting people to feel the **urgency** of the truth they hear.

Second, we have evidence of the blindness and hardness of heart against the idea of divine judgment by the way they do prepare for other coming events, far less important. In fact, Jesus **indites** the leaders and thinkers of His day for the way they repeatedly did this in **Matthew 16:1-4**:

Matthew 16:1-4 - "And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. [2] He answered them, "*When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.'* [3] *And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.'* *You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times* [4] An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah." So he left them and departed.

Today we will start with point number three, as we continue from last week:

3) **THIS FAILURE TO TAKE SERIOUSLY THE JUDGMENT OF GOD IS ALL THE MORE SENSELESS WHEN ONE THINKS OF THE ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY OF ITS COMING**

Consider the plain truth of the matter. The danger of the wicked losing his **soul** is much more certain than the loss of his **wealth** in this earthly life. The danger of losing his **soul** is much more certain than the loss of his **health** in this earthly life. The wicked may or may not fall into **poverty** in this world.

The Psalmist lamented the many wicked who were at ease, living in comfort and prospering at every turn (**Psalm 73**). It's a very dangerous game to measure the blessing and pleasure of God by material prosperity. Poverty may or may not come to the wicked, but the judgment of God is absolutely certain.

So again, we must consider the question: **why do we prepare for tragedies that may never happen** (this, by the way is how insurance companies make their money) **while ignoring the one great reality that we can't avoid?** Why do we spend large sums of money on insurance for houses and cars and possessions we may never damage or lose, but take no thought for our souls, which will, at some point with absolute certainty, face judgment? What has caused this acute and dark blindness in the most important and eternal aspect of our existence?

Look at these people as Lot speaks and pleads and warns. They're perishing **tomorrow** and are actually being **told** about it! They think Lot

is just trying to frighten them. How do people grow immune to what they most need to understand? How do they fritter away their lives with useless things and miss the biggest and most central truths they need to embrace?

This is the question we need to probe again in closing:

4) **WHY DOES THE MESSAGE OF JUDGMENT SEEM UNREAL TO UNBELIEVERS?**

Are there other reasons than the two we studied last week? This question is an important one for Christians to face and answer because it can become easy for Christians to water down their **own** understanding on God's judgment simply because they see so many **others** not taking it very seriously. But there are more solid, Scriptural reasons why unbelievers don't take the message of judgment seriously.

- a) ***Outside of Jesus Christ people not only commit sins - they are bound in sins. And this bondage keeps them from receiving revealed truth.***

John 3:19-20 - "And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people ***loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.*** [20] For everyone who does wicked things ***hates*** the light and ***does not come to the light***, lest his deeds should be exposed."

So our wickedness, apart from repentance, causes us to go into **denial** about divine judgment. There is no truth that puts a search light on all our deeds like the absolute, inevitable prospect of God's judgment finally breaking the bubble of our self-proclaimed rule over our lives. The reality of divine, absolute, truth-saturated judgment bearing down on our lives is the brightest light of ultimate reality we will ever face.

And if you're committed to illusions, distractions and relativism you will do everything in your power to flee this light of judgment. You will flee the searchlight of absolute, divine truth like an escaping prisoner dodges the searchlight on the prison tower.

Evil deeds are an escape attempt from God that must be maintained against all odds. There is nothing **rational** in this flight from truth. It is sheer denial and desperation.

- b) ***Careless people have filled their minds with enough material distractions to pull their thoughts away from the ultimate reality of God's coming judgment.***

This is perhaps the essence of what the Bible calls **worldliness**. It is really a shame that we've linked Biblical worldliness with make-up and fashion and music. Those things may be limited **expressions** of worldliness, but they never capture its **essence**.

The essence of worldliness is the **training of the mind to become familiar only with what can be grasped with the physical senses**. Nothing seems real that isn't **immediate** and isn't **sensually perceived**.

This is how unbelievers **tie their minds down to earth**. This is how they **push eternity to the periphery of their concerns**. This is why Jesus said it was very hard for the rich to inherit the kingdom of God. They have so many things to **pull their minds earthbound**. This is what Jesus meant in these famous words from the parable of the sower and the seed and the growth of the kingdom of God in our lives:

Matthew 13:22 - "As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches ***choke the word***, and it proves unfruitful."

Unfruitful means the Word and church and worship and the voice of the Holy Spirit don't **produce** anything. Nothing changes in the life as a result of them. This was also the truth Jesus was hammering home in His parable about the wealthy business man:

Luke 12:16-21 - "And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, [17] and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' [18] And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. [19] And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; ***relax, eat, drink, be merry.***' [20] But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and ***the things you have prepared***, whose will they be?' [21] So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

Here's a man who is leaving this world **tonight!** And he hasn't even thought about it. **Why?** It's not that he's incapable of planning ahead. He's thought about everything else. He's brilliant and productive with his material concerns.

And that's exactly his problem. He thinks that enough. He's been thinking about *everything else* but what's most important. He has squeezed God out with the distractions of his own wealth. The biggest crisis of his whole eternal existence is coming *tonight*, and he's not given it a thought. *Judgment doesn't seem as real to him as those cranes and bulldozers and construction crews on his estate*. He can't *feel* the reality of judgment anymore. Has your success done that to you?

c) ***Many times friends and associations keep people from sensing the reality and importance of divine judgment.***

If you are constantly around people who don't talk and think about divine judgment, chances are you won't either. And there's a classic example of this in the Scriptures:

Matthew 24:37-39 - "As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. [38] For as in those days before the flood they *were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage*, until the day when Noah entered the ark, [39] and they were *unaware* until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man."

Don't overlook one very important detail in this account that Matthew doesn't record. The text says these people were *unaware* (39). But these people had no reason to be surprised by the flood. It wasn't an unannounced event. They had been specifically *told* that this judgment was coming. But, like Lot's relatives in Sodom, the news didn't seem *real* to them. They thought Noah was just trying to scare them, or brainwash them. Or they thought they'd always have more time later on.

But why didn't *any* of them respond? How could they *all* have missed the point so totally and so tragically? The answer is in Jesus' words in our text. These people had *heard* Noah talk about the coming flood. In fact, these people had *seen* the ark being built. But they didn't take it all in - it didn't register - because *no one else* was taking it seriously either. It's incredibly demanding to concentrate on something no one you're regularly with is concentrating on. That's the life lesson to take home from church today.

There is such an important lesson for Christians here too. O, how we underestimate the power of *associations* in our lives! There is a *corporate necessity* to a strong faith that only one Christian in a thousand fully understands. This is why the New Testament constantly warns us about *undervaluing* the simple, sacred, life-giving act of coming together for church. "*Don't forsake it!*", the writer of Hebrews says.

I know you are reaching the lost world around you. That's great! I wouldn't minimize that for anything in the world. But there is something else to remember while you touch the world with the love and grace and gospel of Jesus Christ. While you're touching them, they're touching you. While you're influencing them, they're influencing you.

Never doubt the truth of this. This is why Paul says no one is to "*think of himself more highly than he ought*" (Romans 12:3). Remember what Jesus said in His parable about the seed and the soils. When the seed gets mixed in with the weeds and thorns, the weeds and thorns win. While you are out in the world, the world gets sown into your heart. You cannot avoid it.

The associations you build with unbelievers cuts into the credibility of divine truth in your own heart. Jesus said so. Both the sharpness of my own conscience and the saliency of divine truth are numbed to the lowest common denominator of the crowd I am most with. If everyone else I am with is eating and drinking and partying when the door to the ark is shut, so will I be.

We are not to be fooled. And we are not to become bored with the things of God in this world. What we know for certain is this: *within four decades most of us will face our Maker*. For those in Christ Jesus this truth should excite and warm our hearts. Life for the child of God, in spite of all set-backs and hardships and sorrows, is ultimately heading for home.

But there's also a lost world to be reached. Most of them don't even care about divine judgment. We must be sharp enough for them to catch this vision of the future from us.