

Series: "Genesis: The Beginning Continued"
Sermon: "God the Just Judge of All the Earth"
Text: Genesis 18: 16-33
RGGJR/FBCCS/6-20-21 **UNEDITED**

- In the second half of chapter 18, the book of *Genesis* continues to show the generation of Israelites, who were about to enter the Promised Land, and us what our God is like.
- When it comes to God's devastating acts of judgment on human beings many of us humans are in the same boat--not all of us but many of us.
- Within the broad sweep of humans who are labeled Christians in their theology, I have read many books and even talked personally with many pastors and teachers who truly feel not a qualm about rejoicing in their strong belief that God purposely creates some human beings for the purpose of sending them into eternal damnation.
- They believe God creates people for "hell" to show and to celebrate the truth of his absolute sovereignty over all people and all circumstances. I believe God is sovereign. However, I **DO NOT** believe he demonstrates His sovereignty this way.
- As a member of the "***Sometimes-I Still-Sin***" club of humans I can find myself in a different boat than these theologians when it comes to God's acts of judgment in human history. I can find myself in a boat alongside unbelievers when it comes to having some of the same feelings and questions they have.
- The theologians I mentioned just now might point an accusatory finger at me for this. "*See Raleigh, you do your theology of God's sovereignty in the matter of judgement based on feelings not on the text of Scripture.*"
- I would say they misunderstand what I mean. Because, there is not much truer than "*but for the grace of God there go I,*" I find it hard to **rejoice** in feeling God is wonderfully sovereign because he judges others—just not me.

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- I still return to Scripture for truth about God's judgments and forming my theology. I am simply admitting my weak, human feelings can sometimes identify with the judged.
- So, for example, when we looked at the Flood in the days of Noah in Genesis 6,7 and 8, one feeling that entered my thinking was a sadness that all but Noah and his family had to die in that judgment. I didn't for a minute doubt God and all I know about Him. I simply felt pain for the human pain and loss.
- Unlike other theologians, I cannot read the Bible as consistently teaching me their conclusion that I am supposed to feel *glee* that all of the bad humans got what they deserved. And, then proclaim, such judgments make God look powerful and sovereign even though I believe the Bible teaches He is indeed powerful and sovereign.
- I can empathize with the feelings of the unbelieving young people I meet and even some believing ones I teach that ask, "*If God is a loving God, why did he kill all the Canaanite babies?*" I don't agree with their misunderstandings inherent in the question but I can understand their feelings as one human being to another.
- ***Now, if this somewhat serious, theologically oriented introduction has not yet confused you please allow me try harder to do that.***
- You may have heard me suggesting so far today that I assume all of God's judgments of humans, such as the Flood, the Tower of Babel, or still to come later, the utter destruction of the Canaanites in the Promised Land—that I am saying all of these are judgments always concern for all involved, matters of ***eternal destiny***—heaven or hell—saved or lost-- in our inexact terms that we use today. Please hear me clearly here: ***I do not believe they are.***
- I have emphasized this point all along while teaching *Genesis*. We would do well to consider how this point has been confused in the

teaching of the New Testament writers as well. Much—actually without a doubt MOST—of what these writers address is not about heaven and hell even though it has been made to be about that by so many.

- *Genesis* is not a discourse focused on modern theological conceptions of **soteriology**—(concepts of “salvation” as we think of salvation) that is, it is not about matters of “going to heaven or hell.”
- *Genesis* is rather a revelation of the LORD-- Yahweh—the El Shaddai—the God for whom nothing is “*too hard*” (as the NIV boringly put it). It is a revelation of His righteous and just nature, character, purposes, redemptive plan, and his invitation then to Abraham’s offspring to be a people who are blessed with his empowerment to be part of that plan.
- The judgement of the “cities of the plain”—specifically Sodom and Gomorrah cannot be automatically and utterly equated with a judgment to eternal damnation. It is so often easily viewed this way. Then it is only one more easy step to conclude that this means all who are guilty of the sin of homosexuality must be damned eternally to “hell” (in our terms of hell). Then it is one more easy step to conclude, this diseases “AIDS” is spread by sinful, homosexual activity so those who die from it must be under Gods’ judgment of eternal damnation.
- Please don’t think I am exaggerating. I was in the room when such theological things were easily concluded by leaders of a political movement. Later the conclusions that are easily shown to be inconsistent and unbiblical were repudiated but it was too late. This caricatured picture of a God who judges this way was already permanently tattooed on a whole movement.

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- Please note, lest anyone get into a *kerfuffle*, I said twice in that last statement that homosexual activity is indeed a sin.
- Well then, now that the theological confusion for some of you is complete for today, let's consider what the 2nd half of *Genesis 18* may have to say about a God who does indeed judge great populations of human beings in ways that might feel harsh.
- First, we need to recall what we learned about the LORD in the first half of the chapter. We learned the LORD was willing to and, we might even say, wanted to, have a personal relationship with His covenant people sprouting from Abraham.
- Second, we learned that the LORD is the God for whom nothing is "too hard" to do in order to accomplish his plan through his human agents like the laughing Sarah and Abraham. Nothing is too marvelous for the LORD! Nothing is too incredible for the LORD! Nothing—when it comes to keeping his promises.
- Then, 3rd, we learned that the LORD knows the heart not just the appearance of human beings. The LORD knows this heart inwardly even down to the individual level of a 90 year old woman who lies about her own heart outwardly. The LORD doesn't fall for or play along with human inward lies—or human self-deception (the lies we tell ourselves. The LORD just says: "*Yes, you did laugh.*")
- With those thoughts that turn out not to be trivial in this context, let's begin at verse 16 of chapter 18. **READ Genesis 18:16-19**
- The messengers of the LORD, acting as the LORD's agents, are about to judge the people of Sodom and Gomorrah in a devastating manner. No nothing living will survive if caught in the judgment.
- The messengers could have done this without telling Abraham. Abraham might have been left guessing about the cause of the destruction.

- The LORD doesn't want to leave the man with whom he is establishing a relationship as his human agent guessing about this judgement. It will help Abraham and his offspring know how to live and how to walk before the LORD so that God can fulfill his promises by blessing them as his people.
- It will make it clear that the LORD is not hiding his role as judge. The LORD has nothing to be ashamed of in this judging devastation. The judgment is righteous and just. Abraham can witness that even if the judgment raises questions because he is in the same boat with some other humans like us when it comes to feelings about judgement.
- Imagine the misunderstanding that might have been magnified if Abraham had to wonder if the LORD had done this and was hiding it from him.
- Imagine what we might wonder and conclude if we thought the LORD were hiding the reality of judgment on the Canaanites or even the reality even eternal judgement from us. We might wrongly conclude the LORD was acting unjustly and didn't want us to see his unrighteous wrath against human sin.
- So, first, the LORD has nothing to hide in being a judge of human sin.
- Next comes another scouting trip for the LORD. Look at verse 20 and 21 please. **READ Genesis 18:20-21**
- Do you remember the judgment at the Tower of Babel? There too in chapter 11, the LORD "**came down**" to see and act in judgement on the human sin.
- The LORD may well have actually "**come down**" to Babel as a Christophany (a preincarnate presence of Christ in time and space) but this doesn't eliminate the need to suggest anthropomorphic descriptions in chapter 3, 11 and here again in chapter 18.

Anthropomorphic simply means God is describing himself in human terms for the sake of understanding.

- When God asks, "Where are you Adam?" I think God already knows. When God comes down to the tower, I think God already knows. When God comes down to Sodom and Gomorrah I think God already knows the extent of the sin and its corrupting influence on the redemptive plan.
- However, the gods of the day—say NaNa the moon God, were a capricious bunch who, without any thought wiped out human beings at a whim. Humans meant no more to them than bothersome gnats who could be smashed without a second thought.
- The LORD has revealed what would seem to us to be something like or inner human dialog in the previous verses even though God shows elsewhere in Scripture he already knows everything and doesn't have to ponder information as we do.
- Now the LORD reveals that this decision to judge in this way is not a **whim**. It is based on **reality**. It will be based on *eyewitness* evidence from a human perspective. It will be based on the **truth** of the sin of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.
- AND, let's remember, the LORD just showed us he knows when we laughed in our heart even if we deny it. As I said, He knows the individual heart of a 90 year old woman.
- When it comes to the LORD, for whom nothing is too hard, Abraham can trust that His judgments are based on truth and his judgments are based on the truth of each individual heart.
- It was not too hard for the LORD to know the true hearts of all who died in the Flood. It will not be too hard for the LORD to know the true hearts of all who will die in these cities. It will not be too hard for the LORD to know all the individual hearts of the Canaanites who

will someday die in judgment. It will not be too hard for the LORD to know the hearts of all individuals at the final judgment.

- He will know the hearts of each human but will he be **just** in his judgment knowing those hearts? Will he be just even when believing humans can identify with the feelings and questions of unbelievers in judgment? Please remember that none of us knows the true heart of every human as the LORD knows their heart.
- For my lifetime so far, our culture has reached the pinnacle of confusion over what is called "**justice.**" I could preach a whole series on this confusion where something now being called "**equity**" is valued over what is called "**justice.**"
- This **equity** is defined in human terms and is often attempted pragmatically without regard for any other values than the human values defining it autonomously from God.
- I don't believe in **justice** defined by human values apart from God either! But all that is for another day's discussion.
- Today the question is will God do "justice" in his own terms when he judges. Abraham has some questions about this. He is in the same boat as I am. Please look at verses 22-33 for this strange questioning.
- **READ Genesis 18:22-33**
- LORD, "**Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?**" asks Abraham. Then he asks it a little differently with a questioning statement to get at the heart of the issue he has in mind: "**You won't treat the righteous and the wicked the same...right LORD?**" **In your acts of judgement, you will be just...right?"**
- The bargaining is about sparing the whole unrighteous population to be just in treating the righteous who happen to be among them.
- The questioning of how careful the LORD will be with **justice** goes for 50? 45? 40? 30? 20? 10?

- My Momma asked me about this one this week and when your Momma asks you better look for an answer, right?!
- "Why did Abraham stop at 10?" If the whole pattern would have been by 10's it would be easy to say something like ANE potentates only counted by 10's meaning everyone included. They never considered the smaller change in an equation. However, that 50 to 45 increment puts the lie to that possibility.
- The best reason I have is a surmising on my part but I think it fits well. Abraham may have started out with the human feelings of—I'm a sinner in the same boat—so will you really judge all those people, LORD?
- I think we cannot escape the idea that he has Lot (a nephew raised like a son) and his family on his mind as he tries to see if they will be spared by sparing the whole city.
- I believe by the time he gets to 10, the bigger point has been made clear in Abraham's thinking and heart. It is stated in that last question of verse 26. ***"Will not the judge of all the earth do right? You will be just and righteous in your judgement, won't you LORD? I believe you will LORD!!"***
- Unlike the Prophet Jonah who misunderstood the LORD's judgment in the opposite way, Abraham quits asking and the chapter closes with ***"Abraham returned home."*** He did not sit on a hillside, Like Jonah, sulking because the LORD hadn't proved according to his human criteria how God's judgment should work one people he liked or didn't like.
- This is where we must all "get out of the boat" of human feelings and standards of just judgment.
- This is where I must either believe God when he says he knows the truth of every single human heart and, based on truth, he will judge

absolutely justly and righteously...or I can stay in the boat of human feelings that cannot know what God knows and cannot be trusted to be absolutely true reflections of reality.

- God's judgments—especially large, seemingly general, judgments like this one that can feel to us humans like they might sweep up innocent people—and treat the righteous the same as the wicked—these judgments are tough for the faith of some.
- Again, the question is, "**Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?**" The answer according this second half of *Genesis* 18 is, "Yes the LORD will do right! The LORD our God is just and righteous in his judgements.
- He doesn't hide the reality of judgment from his people. He has nothing to hide in his perfect righteousness.
- He judges based on truth—how things really are in the hearts of individuals.
- And, He judges justly. The righteous are not unfairly treated as if they are the same as the wicked.
- Abraham ***believed*** the LORD and returned home. Did the LORD somehow prove his just righteous judgment to Abraham?
- Did the LORD tell Abraham his divine algorithm for determining when mercy and patience had gone on long enough? No, that determination of when, where and how to judge humans remained totally within God's purview—the LORD's control.
- The time, place, degree and the justice of the LORD's judgments had to remain a matter of faith. The Lord for whom nothing was too difficult was also the LORD for who would always judge the whole earth rightly.

- Through history, humans have decided they know what is just and righteous when it comes to the judgment of other humans. Throughout history, humans have usually been wrong.
- They can't see the true heart of others. They can't make the proper calculation of patience and mercy from the perspective of God's eternal plan. So, humans have often chosen to judge God for his judgments. Instead, Abraham chose to trust God for his judgments.
- Two small points to add and I'll close. The first is that God did indeed agree to spare the whole cities from destruction if there were some, at least ten in this case, righteous people living in them. As much as some folks dislike the presence of Christians in our country, it may be the presence of those Christians is all that is holding back the just, righteous, general judgment of God on America. So, don't all of us leave at once. Oh, Wait! Someday we will all leave at once.
- Secondly, there is no way the LORD can prove experientially to each of us that his judgments have been, are and will all be perfectly just and righteous.
- He can only tell us this is the truth. The reason we so desperately need God's Word and his Word taught and proclaimed correctly so that we know it is that some things God can only tell us. We then, like Abraham, can choose to believe God or not.
- When my human feelings question God's judgment, I have a choice to make. Will I decide what God must be like based on my feelings? Or, will I hear what the Word of God says and make my conclusions based on that?
- The God for whom nothing is too hard to do to accomplish his plan is the God who will judge the whole earth rightly. He will not capriciously judge the righteous as he judges the wicked. He will judge all humans by the truth of their hearts. That is who God is!