

Message 4 Lot, Rescued by Fire

The destructive power of fire is very familiar to us all in Australia. We are blessed with many richly scented, eucalyptus trees that are also very combustible. Bushfires are part of our history. In 2007 some athletes were on a marathon in Western Australia when they ran into a bushfire in a ravine. A young woman received severe facial scars and another had to have a leg amputated because of the burns.

In Genesis, the story is told of cities completely destroyed by fire, Sodom and Gomorrah. Sodom was wicked and sinning greatly against the Lord (*Gen. 13:13*). Lot, the nephew of Abraham, decided live near them because the land was fertile. Its increasing sin, however, caused God to bring them to account. He sent two angels to rescue Lot and his family before destroying them. There are powerful lessons from this. See *2 Peter 2:6-9*.

1. Future judgment with fire is certain.

v6 if 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;

Peter regards the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire as an example of what is going to happen in the future. It reveals something of what will occur on the day of judgment. The coming Day of Judgment is a basic belief of Christianity. It is not a side issue or obscure interpretation. It rather promises a time of justice for all and that evil would not coexist with goodness forever. We have hope for a better future with Christ's return preceding it.

Jesus taught much about a future judgement with fire. At the end of the age angels would pluck out the ungodly as “...weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire..” (*Matt.13:40*). “Every tree that does not bear good fruit [i.e. fruit of righteousness] is cut down and thrown into the fire.” (*Matt.7:19*). The last book of the Bible warns us, *Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:15)*. If you are thinking of sinning, know you are a not going to get away with it! Aware of this keeps us from doing wrong in times of temptation and it encourages those who are away from God to return.

Examples of destruction by fire have occurred throughout history other than in the Bible. In 79 A.D. about 11,000 people lost their lives in ash fallout and the intense heat of the volcanic eruption of Mount Vesuvius in Italy. **Pompeii** was completely destroyed. What is interesting is that in the rapidity of its burial much of the character of the city was preserved. This was only to be discovered over a thousand years later. Archaeologists now reveal that the city was rampantly immoral with a house of prostitution, extensive drunkenness, and lewd sexual artwork, too confronting for even today's public to be displayed without restrictions.

I was born in England so was interested to learn about an historical destruction of London by fire. In 1666, the **Great Fire of London** destroyed much of the city. A bit amusingly, the fire started in a place called Pudding Lane and eventually stopped at Pye (i.e. Pie) Corner. This was interpreted to indicate judgment on the city due to its widespread gluttony at the time. It made me think twice before over-eating desserts at a wedding last night!

In the Biblical example, Lot and his daughters escaped with the help of angels. Why was this so? Can we learn something from it? How can we escape the future judgement by fire?

2. Rescue is possible by being righteous

v7 and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless v8 (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)—

Noah, a righteous person, was saved from the Flood. Lot and two daughters were saved from the fiery destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Peter describes Lot as a righteous person (v7). It must be added, in the Genesis account, Abraham prayed concerning Sodom and Gomorrah and the righteous within it. We need many intercessors for today!

Like Lot, you may grieve at the deteriorating moral condition of our nation. We must expand our understanding of ‘being righteous’. Descriptions of being righteous in the story of Lot come from different angles, each highlighting an important feature of the dichotomy of good and evil.

- a) **Godly/Ungodly** – A godly person respects God and stays in close relationship with him. Naturally, God would save them! Who wouldn’t save their close family member in a fire? Whom should I save, my wife or my twin grandsons in a fire? All three! I would give my life for them all because I love them so much. If you want to be safe from the future judgement, get close to the God who loves you. I develop my relationship with God through daily praying and reading the Bible with an open, listening heart.
- b) **Lawful/Lawless**. Sodom and Gomorrah are described as being lawless. They had no boundaries by which to live. One time I was late to the train station so I hoped on without a ticket. All the journey in I felt guilty. I reasoned that I should exit from a station different to normal. I was still caught and received due penalty. Now you know I am an unrighteous pastor! The people of Sodom, however, were completely depraved in their lawlessness in wanting to abuse the visitors for sexual pleasure.
- c) **Righteous/Unrighteous** – the standard of righteousness in the New Testament is internal, within heart and mind, not just outward action. For example, hatred of a person in the heart is likened to murder and in danger of judgment (*Matt. 5*).

The water that destroys also washes. The fire that destroys also purges of impurities. John the Baptist introduced water baptism and prophesied that Jesus would baptise with the Holy Spirit *and with fire*. (*Matthew 3:11*). The Holy Spirit came upon the first disciples as tongues of fire. The Holy Spirit’s work is not only to empower but also to purge us of our impurities. Before the popularisation of Spirit Baptism in Pentecostalism, it was regarded as sanctification – being made holy or righteous. This sanctification work of the Spirit needs greater appreciation among today’s Christianity!

3. God knows how to rescue you from fiery trials.

v9 if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment

Godliness or righteousness, through relationship with God, and adopting the boundaries of God’s law will save you from trials. *1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.*

The amazing, good news is that God has provided a way out even for the unrighteous. The Bible asserts that Jesus came into the world to save sinners! (*1 Timothy 1:15*). A godly person for the ungodly. Learn from history and receive Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. Be baptised in water and in the Holy Spirit with fire to transform you to be a godly person.