

## "LIVING AS CHRISTIANS IN AN EVIL AGE"

2 Peter 2:5-9

### Introduction:

More and more people believe we are living in the last days. They point rather convincingly to the prosperity of evil on every side. The tide definitely seems to be running against godliness. Old-fashioned standards of morality have been forgotten. Respect for human life slips lower and lower. An honest man is a rare find. Yet some of us are committed to living for God in this age. Do we have a chance?

It is a mistake to think that things have ever been easy for the godly. The basic spirit of the age has always been against those who would live the godly life. The corruption that has become so evident in our day has been present in every age. Indeed the corruption became so bad in the day of Noah that God determined that destruction of the world was the only answer. The same became true later in two rather prominent cities, Sodom and Gomorrah. Yet there were some people who lived the godly life right in the midst of their impossible corruption. Peter brings them before us in the passage on judgment for encouragement. It may have seemed that the whole world was going to follow the false teachers and their corrupt ways. What were those who had a heart for God supposed to do? They were to remember Noah and Lot.

There are some important things that we can learn from these two men. They demonstrate to us that you can know a meaningful life--regardless of how corrupt the world may become. You can do the will of God if you are the only one. You do not have to despair. Consider with me three basic affirmations that come out of this passage.

### I. YOU CAN LIVE A USEFUL LIFE IN AN EVIL AGE:

V. 5 "And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly." Noah was the only man who had a heart for God. He alone found "grace in the eyes of the Lord."

start all over. It was so bad that even the God of mercy could find no basis for hope. Interestingly the last days are likened unto the days of Noah by the Lord Jesus Himself. He felt that the moral quality, especially the godlessness of the age, would repeat itself in the close of human history. Could this be what we are experiencing in our day?

What does a godly man do in a godless age? Surely there is just no place for such a man. Would it not be better for him just to withdraw from the age, reject his world completely, and hibernate in some secret place? We can learn something from God's purpose for Noah. The evil of the age became an opportunity for Noah. Peter declares that he became "a preacher of righteousness." As we read the account in Genesis we find no record of Noah being a preacher. Yet there is a strong tradition surrounding his name that assures us that he was a preacher. Josephus said that he made an earnest effort to persuade his friends and neighbors about the coming judgment. Jesus also indicated that he was one who bore witness to his generation. Surely a godly man could not know that a fearful judgment was falling upon the world, and allow his neighbors to stumble into the judgment unwarned. Both by what he did and what he said he gave a witness to that evil generation.

The ministry of Noah justified the was of the Lord. God cannot be accused of judging the world without warning. For one hundred and twenty long years Noah worked and preached. He served as the herald of the god of heaven among the sinful people of earth. When the judgment finally came, the world had been warned.

From the ministry of Noah we can learn something about serving God in an evil age. Those who serve God in dark days have to learn how to find their encouragement in God alone. They can not look to outward signs of success for their encouragement. While Noah knew very little success in his pursuit of ministry, who would want to label his life as useless? We may not succeed in turning our generation from its headlong plunge toward moral destruction, but if

we fulfill the ministry God has given to us faithfully, we have succeeded. The truth we need to carry with us is that we can live a useful life regardless of the darkness about us.

## II. YOU CAN LIVE A PURE LIFE IN AN EVIL AGE.

v. 7 & 8 "And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked." (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds.) For those of you who have read the Genesis account of Lot's life, this evaluation may come as some surprise. Was he really a righteous man, or does Peter just have a little lapse of memory?

The details of the Life of Lot are rather familiar. He was the nephew and companion of Abraham. He shared in his pilgrimage to the land of Canaan. He and Abraham parted company when their prosperity began to create problems for them. Lot was given the choice by Abraham as to where he would dwell, and he chose the prosperous plains, and moved toward Sodom and Gomorrah. After a while he moved into these wicked cities of the plains, and lived there for several years. On one occasion he was carried captive by some invaders who overcame the two cities, and had to be rescued by Abraham. According to Genesis, it was the intercession of Abraham that led to the deliverance of Lot from the cities of the plains. We also know that he lost his family, all except his two daughters, who brought the spirit of Sodom in their hearts. Yet here he is described as a righteous man.

What are we to make of this? Evidently Lot was successful in doing one thing. He was successful in keeping himself morally pure in the midst of great moral corruption. He withstood the temptations that beset him and overcame. Peter tells us that "he vexed" his soul. Two different words are so translated in the text. The first means to oppress, to wear down, and it implies outward discomfort. Lot never really found a comfortable place in Sodom. He always felt out of place because of the immoral and godless conduct of his neighbors. The other word means to torment, to test. It probably refers more to the mental stress and unrest that came to Lot because of the behaviour of the crowd. According to the record, there is no reason to believe that Lot ever indulged himself in the godless excesses of the Sodomites.

Why does Peter call our attention to "righteous Lot"? It is because he wants us to know that with the help of God you can live pure in the midst of impurity, you can walk upright when others are living wrong. However, there is an implied warning here. Any time you begin to become comfortable with the unjust behaviour of the world about you, you are in great danger. Once you become comfortable with it, it is only a slight move to become a participant. But this is reassuring. It does not matter how dark the world about us may become morally, it is possible for us to live the righteous life. We can walk with God in the midst of great corruption.

## III. YOU CAN LIVE A SAFE LIFE IN AN EVIL AGE:

V. 9 "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment." This is the great summation of the passage. This is the inspired deduction from the experience of Noah and Lot.

Two words are used in connection with these two men. Of Noah it is said, V. 5 "but saved Noah the eighth person." This word "saved" means to guard, to protect. God knew about Noah and kept a careful watch on him all the while. God led him to build the ark. God shut him up in the ark. God kept his eye on the ark throughout the storm. God brought him safely out of the ark. God guarded this godly man.

Of Lot it is written, and just Lot." "To deliver" means to save, to rescue. You will recall how God sent his special angel to Sodom to get Lot out before the judgment fell. Indeed, because Lot was a little slow about leaving, the angel had to hurry him along. God would not destroy the righteous man with the wicked city

Two great truths come out of this to comfort us. First, God does know who the righteous are. He does not simply lump the whole human family together and treat them all the same. God knows those who seek to walk in His ways and do His will. He knows those who have set their hearts upon Him, and who trust in Him.

#### Illustration

The prophet Ezekiel demonstrates this in his prophecy. He sees a vision in which God is preparing to bring destruction upon the people of Israel. Included in the destruction will be Jerusalem and the temple. But before the destroying angel is sent forth, another angel is sent to put a mark in the forehead of each one who has his heart upon the Lord. They are marked to set them apart from the wicked who have departed from the Lord. Then when the angel is sent forth to kill, he is instructed not to touch one of those who has the mark of protection upon their forehead. God knows who the righteous are.

In our evil age, He knows who they are. There are times when the Noahs may think, God does not know or care who we are. They may begin to falsely reason that God has forgotten. But He has not!

The other great truth is that God protects those who live godly. They are not included in the judgment that falls upon the wicked. The judgment of God is selective. This does not mean that they are immune to all of the suffering that may attend the judgment of God, but it rather means that they are personally safe. Noah lost everything in the flood except God and his family. Lot lost almost everything in the overthrow of Sodom, but he personally escaped. God looks out for His own.

Every person who is seeking to live the godly life in this present evil world is safe. They are safely kept by the righteous God of this universe. Take heart in the protection of our God today. He knows who you are and is carefully looking out for your best interests.

#### Conclusion:

Are you discouraged? I find many sincere Christians who are discouraged in our day. Because their lives seem to have so little impact upon the sinful world about them, they are about ready to quit. What if Noah had quit building his ark because no one seemed to care? Take courage brother! The only life that makes any sense is the life that is centered in God and is lived for the glory of God. Every man who has his heart set on God is on the winning side. The last word will be victory.