

Subject: "Don't Look Back"

Scripture: Luke 17:26-32; Genesis 19: 23-26

"Remember Lot's wife." These three words from Luke 17:32 have always gripped me. We often point to the shortest verse in the Bible, two words that we read about Jesus in John 11:35, as one of the most interesting verses in the Bible. It is; in it, we see that Jesus, the Son of God, our divine Lord, weeps over his friend Lazarus despite His sovereign power to raise him from the dead and bring him back to life. It shows our Lord's compassion and love, that power, no matter how great, never trumps love.

But, while John 11:35 is an important verse of Scripture (who knew two words could be so powerful, right?), there is another important verse that is probably the second shortest verse in Scripture: that is, the words of Jesus in Luke 17:32 -- "Remember Lot's wife." This verse contains three words and three words only, but they're important words for both those in Jesus' day and those of us alive today.

In context, Luke 17 is a chapter about faith, gratitude, and even the coming of the kingdom. The Pharisees ask Jesus about the coming kingdom and Jesus tells them about what it will be like when He, the Son of Man, returns. He compares His future return, His second advent, to the days of both Noah and Lot. In Luke 17:26-30, Jesus tells how things happened in the days of Noah and Lot:

26 And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: **27** They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. **28** Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; **29** but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from

heaven and destroyed *them* all.**30** Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. (Luke 17:26-30)

In other words, when destruction comes upon them, those who will be destroyed will think it's "just another day in Paradise," to use lyrics from a song I heard some years ago. They won't even suspect the end is near, won't have a clue that their time is up, won't notice the oncoming divine destruction and judgment. The wrath of God will "sneak up" on them, quickly, unexpectedly, without warning. And they, lost in eating, drinking, and marriage, will find themselves destroyed.

In verse 31, Jesus says that those on their rooftop shouldn't come down to get their goods, or that those who are in the field, "let them not turn back." And then He says, "Remember Lot's wife." Now, I'm not sure if we understand what Jesus means by those on the rooftop and in the field not turning back, but we sure do understand what Jesus means by Luke 17:32. We understand "Remember Lot's wife" because we know Lot, we know about his wife, and we know what happened to her. To find out what happened, let's revisit Genesis 19.

We read some of the text earlier, but it's rather long. To save the long reading of Genesis 19 for the purpose of a timely sermon, let's cover the basics of the account. Genesis 19 tells us of a wicked Sodom and Gomorrah. Earlier in the chapter in verses 1-11, we find Lot having to fend himself off from the men of the city in order to protect the male angels that he has graciously invited to live under his roof. The men of Sodom, the males, are homosexual. They want Lot to bring out the male angels so they can "know" them, so they can have sex with them. Of course, Lot offers his daughters instead, but the males of the city don't want them. It's easy to see why; they're homosexual. Church, please take note: the solution to someone's struggle with homosexuality is not to arrange a heterosexual date with one of the nice "church girls" or "church boys." If that person struggles with homosexuality, then that person will never date someone of

the opposite sex. Only God can change a person's view of their sexuality. A good date is no substitute for God's grace.

In the case of Lot and the men of Sodom, however, the men didn't want to go on a date with the male angels; they wanted to gang rape them, both young men and old men. Well, the angels tell Lot that God has sent them to destroy the city and that he should tell his daughters, sons-in-law, anyone related to him to flee the city because, if they don't, they'll be destroyed with the Sodomites. Well, Lot, a righteous man, tells all his family to flee the destruction. He goes to his sons-in-law, his daughter's husbands, and tells them to flee the city, but the text says that they believed he was joking and paid him no mind. In the end, Lot flees Sodom and Gomorrah with his wife and two daughters (whose husbands stayed behind to their own destruction) and flees to a place called Zoar. It takes Lot all night, according to Genesis 19, but he gets there, since the Lord says He couldn't destroy the city until Lot and his family made it out safely. And when he does, the Lord then destroys Sodom and Gomorrah with fire, brimstone, and all sorts of natural destruction.

When the angels tell Lot and his family to flee, they give them a clear command in Genesis 19:15-17 :

15 When the morning dawned, the angels urged Lot to hurry, saying, "Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city." **16** And while he lingered, the men took hold of his hand, his wife's hand, and the hands of his two daughters, the Lord being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city. **17** So it came to pass, when they had brought them outside, that he said, **"Escape for your life! Do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain.** Escape to the mountains, lest you be destroyed." (Genesis 19:15-17)

In Genesis 19:17, we see the angels' words to Lot, Lot's wife, and Lot's daughters: "Do not look behind you." In other words, "Don't look back." God

didn't want them to see the destruction or to long for Sodom and Gomorrah because, as we've seen in Genesis 19 alone, it was a sinful and wicked place and the Lord's patience had run out with these wicked cities. They were sinful, evil, unwilling to repent or change, and so God had simply had enough of them. And he didn't want His people, the righteous, longing for life again in such wicked cities. Sodom and Gomorrah, to use a modern comparison, were the San Francisco and Las Vegas of their day. According to the child movie, *All Dogs Go To Heaven 2*, San Francisco is a very worldly city -- so I didn't make that one up.

So with this advice, you'd think that everyone could pay attention and follow commands. Lot, Lot's wife, and their daughters were the only ones that escaped the destruction. We often think Noah had pitiful numbers (after all, he only saved himself, his wife, his sons, and his sons' wives, totaling a mere EIGHT people), but Lot had even fewer numbers: he escaped along with his wife and two daughters, a total of FOUR people. And yet, not all four made it out of Sodom and Gomorrah; Lot's wife, unnamed in Scripture, looked back to the city in direction violation of the angelic command. The text says in Genesis 19:26 "But his wife looked back behind him, and she became a pillar of salt."

Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt. She was all set to escape the destruction, to escape God's wrath. She was counted righteous, but she looked back. In her heart and mind, she longed for life in Sodom and Gomorrah again. Though her body was fleeing the sinful place, she still wanted to live in sin. If you think about it, nothing but sin existed in Sodom. To long for Sodom was to long for sin. And Lot's wife, a righteous woman, still longed for such a sinful place, the lifestyle she had. How could a righteous person long for such a place? The Scriptures tell us that there was nothing but unrighteousness there. Peter tells us in 2 Peter 2:7-8 that God "delivered righteous Lot, *who was* oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked **8** (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented *his* righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing *their* lawless deeds)."

Lot was tormented every day by the conduct of the Sodomites. In Genesis 19:9, we read that they said that Lot “keeps acting as a judge.” In other words, Lot was a righteous man, and they called him a “judge” because they realized he didn’t live like them. Lot was different. He lived out what righteousness looks like, even in the land of ungodly Sodom and Gomorrah. See, you, like Lot, CAN live godly in an ungodly land. You CAN be “in the world” but not “of the world.”

So, Lot’s wife looks back and turns into a pillar of salt. It may be hard to believe, but that’s what Scripture records. We don’t know if the pillar was cylindrical, pillow-like, or some other odd shape. But what we do know is that Lot’s wife turned into salt.

Now Jesus in Luke 17:32 tells us to “Remember Lot’s wife.” What is our Lord communicating to us in these three words? He’s telling us that, as Lot’s wife turned back to the sin she left when she was being saved, we too, can turn back but that we shouldn’t.

First, we, like Lot’s wife, are being saved by God. Lot’s wife was fleeing Sodom and Gomorrah for better ground, a more godly place. She was being saved, was being delivered, was in the process of getting to her destination. She had started fleeing the city and leaving behind all its sin and iniquity. She was in a good place. And we are like Lot’s wife in that regard: we too, are being saved. 1 Corinthians 1:18 says that “**18** For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, **but to us who are being saved** it is the power of God.” As Paul says, we are “being saved.” Salvation is not yet fully realized in our lives, as we are not yet clothed with immortality and haven’t yet put on our immortal bodies, but we are in the process. We are on the road to final and full salvation. And we, like Lot’s wife, are escaping the sinful city, the world, fleeing from the wrath to come, as John the Baptist tells the Pharisees and Sadducees to do in Luke 3:7 and Matthew 3:7. We have been saved in the past, we’ve heard the gospel message and we have believed on the name of Jesus Christ

and trusted Him to save us from our sins. And the day we “got saved,” past tense, the angels rejoiced in heaven and we rejoiced on earth. So we, like Lot’s wife early on, are being delivered out of this sinful world. We’re still in the world, but every day, God is delivering us. And one day, the full deliverance will take effect.

But keep in mind, we are still on the road. We’ve not yet been fully delivered. And so, we are running away from the city, trying to escape the destruction the Lord has said is coming upon the world. And yet, even on the road to final salvation, on the road to glory, we can still look back. Calvinists will tell you that this is all a matter of fairy tale for true believers, but how do they explain Lot’s wife? Was she not counted righteous initially, along with Lot and his daughters? Yes, she was. So her looking back is why she was turned into a pillar of salt. If she was “never saved to begin with,” then why would God have allowed her to attempt to escape the city? The angels only told Lot about God’s imminent judgment; no one else in Sodom would have known except Lot and his family.

We, like Lot’s wife, have been given the warning that God is bringing wrath on the world, that one day, the earth, once destroyed by water, will be destroyed by fire, as Sodom and Gomorrah were. So we’re fleeing because we are righteous, declared so not because of our works but because of the righteous work of Christ on the Cross. We’ve been covered with His shed blood. We are righteous, and we’re fleeing because no one wants to stay where the destruction is. Why stay in this sinful world when the world to come offers us eternal life, joy, peace, and more happiness and bliss than we can ever remember here?

And yet, we have a problem similar to Lot’s wife: being in the world, fleeing to salvation, we look back. There are many of us who, despite the joy of what we’re going to, continue to look back. What does it mean “to look back”? It means to reflect, to meditate upon, to long or yearn for something. And when we “look back” at things in life that we know are not good for us, we’re longing for that sin or struggle or sinful situation. If God has brought

us out of those sinful circumstances (say, prostitution, drug dealing, a life of drunkenness, a life of gang crime, an abusive relationship, and so on), why do we look back and yearn for those things? If what we have in front of us, that is, Heaven, is so much better than what we have on this earth, why are we running to Heaven while looking back at this earth and the things of this world?

As John says in 1 John 2:15-17:

15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. **16** For all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. **17** And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

We are not to love the things in the world, to yearn for them, to long for them. Why? Because the world and all its jewels and gems are passing away. When you and I long for, yearn for, desire, lust after, the things of the world, we are doing nothing more than bowing down before Satan.

Remember what Satan told Jesus in the wilderness? He told Him that he'd give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if Jesus would fall down and worship Him. All that is in the world, all the riches of the world, are fading away, as are the kingdoms of the world. Anyone that lusts after them sells their soul to Satan for a little piece of real estate, a little money in the bank, a little celebrity status, a specific job with a six-figure salary. But, as Jesus asks in Matthew 16:26, "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Sodom was Sin City in Genesis. It was the San Francisco and Las Vegas of ancient days, a place where the land was excellent (Lot chose to pitch his tent near Sodom because of its choice land) and the eating and drinking parties were all too common. Drunken orgies were as common as

breathing there. And who would want to give all that up? I'll tell you who: a righteous, godly person like Lot. It was earthly; what God was trying to give Lot, Lot's wife, and their daughters was heavenly, from above, not from below. And Lot's wife succumbed to all the sin, eating, drinking, orgies, and partying and was left to be destroyed alongside the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. She could've made it out. She almost made it out. But she looked back, longed for, yearned for, her former life. She had left sin, headed for salvation, but she cherished what she'd left behind instead of yearning for what was ahead. She loved her sin more than her God, her past more than her present and future.

How many times have we reminisced over "the good 'ole days"? How many times have we thought about "what used to be" or what we did "back in the day"? I'm sure we've all thought about the old days gone by. It's a normal human tendency to want to look back. It's normal to miss that special someone you felt like was "the one" for you, even when you realized they'd never serve God and thus, could never be your mate. This happens all the time: a person gets frustrated with life and longs for the bottle they've been delivered from. The bills are high and the money is due, and someone longs to rob homes like they once did. A man is frustrated with his marriage, some rocky problems are present, and so he'd rather just go sleep with one of his old girlfriends "for old time's sake," rather than stay there with his spouse and work it out with love, discussion, and prayer. A soldier is frustrated with his time out at war and when he comes home, is so tired of commitments that he'd rather abandon his wife and children and sleep with any woman that'll have him instead of staying there and letting his husband and father commitments shape his character.

These situations are all too common because we all get frustrated. We all know what it's like to have something good in front of us and get cold feet, get scared, miss the old. God's people did the same thing in the Old Testament: God led them out of Egypt, and all they could do was focus on the food they left behind. "Who will give us meat to eat? **5** We remember

the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; **6** but now our whole being *is* dried up; *there is* nothing at all except this manna *before* our eyes!" the Israelites said in Numbers 11:5-6. They had their freedom, and all they could think about was the "slave food" they had in Egypt. They had the best thing of the two and didn't realize it, even with their chains gone.

We've got to come to a place where we realize we've decided to follow Jesus, and that, as a result, we've left EVERYTHING to follow Him. There can be no turning back. As Jesus Himself says in Luke 9:62, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." To be fit for the Kingdom, we must stand behind our decision. If we start out right but turn back, we end up wrong. God doesn't want or need "starters." What He desires are "follow-throughers," committed people who will flee this sinful world until He returns for them.

Have you decided to follow Jesus? There's a song written that we sing so much in the American church. The context of the song is that the song writer and Indian Christian missionary, Sadhu Sundar Singh, [was captured and called to renounce his faith by the chief in the village](#). In response the convert declared, "I have decided to follow Jesus." His two children were killed and in response to threats to his wife, he continued, "Though no one join me, still I will follow." His wife was killed, and he was executed while singing, "The world behind me, The cross before me." This display of faith is reported to have led to the conversion of the chief and others in the village. [Here are the words to the song](#):

I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;
No turning back, no turning back.
The world behind me, the cross before me;
The world behind me, the cross before me;

The world behind me, the cross before me;
No turning back, no turning back.
Though none go with me, still I will follow;
Though none go with me, still I will follow;
Though none go with me, still I will follow;
No turning back, no turning back.
My cross I'll carry, till I see Jesus;
My cross I'll carry, till I see Jesus;
My cross I'll carry, till I see Jesus;
No turning back, no turning back.
Will you decide now to follow Jesus?
Will you decide now to follow Jesus?
Will you decide now to follow Jesus?
No turning back, no turning back.