

ABRAHAM #16 Genesis 19, Part B 1-28-16

A COUPLE TO REMEMBER

(Genesis 19) We began last week to look at the ugly but instructive story of the wickedness and consequent destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Two angels had come to the city of Sodom. Their mission was twofold: get the nephew of Abraham, whose name was Lot, out of the city. Then, destroy it. The first 11 verses of this chapter give us a snapshot of the unbelievable perversion which dominated in Sodom. We won't read that today, we just pick up the story again at verses Genesis 19:**12-26** *Then the two men said to Lot, "Whom else have you here? A son-in-law, and your sons, and your daughters, and whomever you have in the city, bring them out of the place; 13 for we are about to destroy this place, because their outcry has become so great before the Lord that the Lord has sent us to destroy it." 14 Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, and said, "Up, get out of this place, for the Lord will destroy the city." But he appeared to his sons-in-law to be jesting. 15 When morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Up, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away in the punishment of the city." 16 But he hesitated. So the men seized his hand and the hand of his wife and the hands of his two daughters, for the compassion of the Lord was upon him; and they brought him out, and put him outside the city. 17 When they had brought them outside, one said, "Escape for your life! Do not look behind you, and do not stay anywhere in the valley; escape to the mountains, or you will be swept away." 18 But Lot said to them, "Oh no, my lords! 19 Now behold, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have magnified your lovingkindness, which you have shown me by saving my life; but I cannot escape to the mountains, for the disaster will overtake me and I will die; 20 now behold, this town is near enough to flee to, and it is small. Please, let me escape there (is it not small?) that my life may be saved." 21 He said to him, "Behold, I grant you this request also, not to overthrow the town of which you have spoken. 22 Hurry, escape there, for I cannot do anything until you arrive there." Therefore the name of the town was called Zoar. 23 The sun had risen over the earth when Lot came to Zoar. 24 Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven, 25 and He overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. 26 But his wife, from behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.*

Last Sunday we looked at three of the five main characters in our story. We considered the wickedness of Sodom, the holiness and grace of God, and the activities of the angels. Today, our focus is on the man named Lot, and on his wife.

I mentioned last Sunday that our son used to go to college on a mountain. Sometimes the mountain road would get slick due to rain, snow or ice. When our son was there, with a car, I used to occasionally worry about him driving on that mountain road. Now, suppose you lived in a community like that - with a college on a hill, and dangerous mountain roads. Suppose you were concerned to help those students driving up and down that road. What is the best way to offer them aid? Would it be to build a nice, expensive hospital at the bottom of the hill, a hospital well-equipped to provide first aid and surgical assistance and rehab programs for the students who wrecked on that mountain road? Or, would it be more helpful to place warning signs all over the mountain roads and line those roads with railing, and speak firmly and soberly to the students about the need for safety, and maybe even place guards out when there is fog or ice? Hmm? Wherein does compassion lie? And wherein is wisdom found? In preventative measures or restorative ones? Some of us want to say that compassion is found in both types of measures. But, it is possible that the best solutions, the most efficient solutions are found in the preventative measures? I think so. The best case scenario is to avoid accidents. I expect we all agree with that. In the modern world and church though, I find that if you are involved in hospital work, if you give yourself to mend the broken, you are rightly considered compassionate, but if you are one who issues warnings, who sets up railings, who even guards young people against the dangers of life, then you are likely to be called a *legalist*, then you are *rules-oriented* instead of *grace-oriented*.

So, we hear, but apparently God believes that issuing warnings, and threats and pointing to instructive bad examples is, in fact, a way of grace. An ounce of prevention is worth? A pound of cure. I Corinthians 10 says of the Old Testament stories of the people of Israel

I Corinthians 10:**6-11** (NIV) *Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. 7 Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry." 8 We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. 9 We should not test Christ, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. 10 And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel. 11 These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. The*

stories of Lot and his wife are also given for our instruction. Everyone is good for something, even if it to serve as a bad example. Our friends in Sodom were good for that.

Let's begin with Lot. Lot, the nephew of Abraham, was apparently a true believer in the living God. The book of II Peter in the New Testament tells us that his spirit was oppressed by the sensual conduct of the unprincipled men among whom he lived in Sodom. We should not therefore overstate the failures of Lot. But, there were five important things that our friend Lot, was not. Let's learn from them if we can. First of all, Lot was not wise. Especially he was not wise in his selection of where and among whom to live. You may remember back in Genesis 13 that Abraham and Lot had to go their separate ways and Lot chose to go in the direction of Sodom, even though it was known what kind of people lived there. There is a principle of wisdom that Lot violated in that choice. It is the principle that if you lie down with dogs you rise up with fleas. Or as it is put in I Corinthians 15:33 *Do not be deceived; evil company corrupts good morals.* The Proverbs also are full of warnings about who you choose to hang out with. Lot wasn't wise. He put himself and his family in the midst of a people that was given over to immorality. And they would pay a great price. It is certainly possible for vibrant, on-fire believers to go into the midst of great depravity and make a real difference for God. But, it is also possible, especially for the spiritually immature, to see the environment that surrounds us shape us into its mold. Without our being aware of it, our consciences will conform to the social norms of those with whom we live, unless we conscientiously and zealously work to prevent it. Lot was not so conscientious, not so zealous. His wife and kids certainly weren't. And, as a result, he became not an agent of cultural change, but a victim of cultural decay. This was all too predictable. The verse in I Corinthians 15 is interesting to me because of the preface. "Do not be deceived." So many deceive themselves, kid themselves on this very point. They think that where they live, and go to school and work and whom they date and what they watch or what they hear won't really hurt them. God disagrees. I Corinthians 15:33 *Do not be deceived; evil company corrupts good morals.* Lot's choice to live with his family in Sodom was not wise.

Secondly, Lot was not serious. He was not a serious man. He was a lightweight. We may get this from the way the men of Sodom spoke to him. They didn't take him seriously. Neither did his sons-in-law. These were two boys apparently engaged to his daughters. 14 *Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, and said, "Up, get out of this place, for the Lord will destroy the city." But he appeared to his sons-in-law to be jesting.* Wow! Lot was not a

man they took seriously. You get the impression that Lot was a good ole' boy. He wasn't used to taking life seriously. His family wasn't used to Lot saying much of real significance. Many people we know are very much like this. They aspire to always keep things light. They don't want any heavy conversation. They want their religion lite, they want their marriage lite. They want their friendships and their talk lite. Everything is lite. You have been around people, I'm sure, who seemed to talk constantly. And one motivation for doing that is to maintain control of the topic of conversation in order to avoid any subject that is unwelcomed or too serious. And what are those subjects considered out of bounds in polite company? Politics and religion. Why those two? They are the very things that matter. They are serious and we don't want to be serious. Now, the issue here is not whether you are able to relax and enjoy yourself, the issue is whether you can be serious and if you know how to handle yourself around serious subjects. A lot of parents, for example, do fine with their kids when it comes to playing ball, or going shopping, but they can't talk with them about God or marriage or sex or death. I remember Garrison Keillor, in one of his books about the semi-imaginary Minnesota town Lake Wobegon, describing a group of Lake Wobegon men at a funeral or around someone's death bed. He says they shuffled around awkwardly until someone broke the ice by talking about the weather, and soon they were all caught up in small talk - the kind that helps us forget the serious issues of life. But, my friend, God, Christianity, the Bible is not for the frivolous. Life is serious. Judgment is sure. Have your fun in its place, but get serious. I Peter 5:8 *Be of sober spirit, be on the alert.* You could replace "sober" with "serious" -- something Lot was not.

Thirdly, our man Lot was not influential. Lot probably lived in Sodom for many years. No doubt he had plenty of opportunities to speak of the Lord and turn souls away from sin, but he seems to have had no effect at all. He had no weight with the men of the city. In 19:7 He called these crazed Sodomites his *brothers*. He chose the way of polite accommodation to the way of honorable distinctiveness. He possessed none of that respect and reverence which even the men of the world will often concede to a bright servant of God. Had he only influenced ten men in the way of righteousness the city would have been spared, but it never happened. It also didn't happen in his family. There is indication that not a one of his family members feared God. His wife had her heart in the world. His daughters had to be dragged from the city and in the next story in Genesis showed themselves to be lawless, immoral schemers. The sons in-law to whom he had pledged them were clearly scoffers. Lot may get into heaven. I expect he will be there, but there may be none of his

family to go with him. This sad situation can happen even to solid believers. My only point here though is to note that influential is something our friend Lot was not.

Fourthly, Lot was not decisive. 15-16a *When morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, “Up, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away in the punishment of the city.” 16 But he hesitated.* But he hesitated. The King James Version says he lingered. What a great deal about the soul and character of Lot is communicated in that one word. I owe most of my thoughts on this to J.C. Ryle who has an entire chapter on Lot in his awesome book entitled “Holiness.” In a way, we can understand Lot’s reluctance. He was leaving there in Sodom all of his worldly goods. He was leaving the life that he had known for many years, including several persons that he cared about. But, given what Lot knew, those things are no excuse for his indecision. Lot knew the awful condition of his city. Yet, when told to get out, he hesitated. He had been told of the fearful judgment about to come. Yet, he hesitated. Lot knew that God always kept his word. He had witnessed that while he was with Abraham. Yet, he hesitated. Lot was convinced enough of the coming danger that he had sought to persuade his sons-in-law to leave. Yet, he hesitated. Lot could see the angels standing there, waiting for him. He heard the voice of these ministers of God ringing in his ears to hasten him out of the city. Yet, he hesitated. He was slow when he should have been quick, backward when he should have been forward, piddling when he should have been hastening, loitering when he should have been hurrying, cold when he should have been hot. It is reality in this fallen world that we cannot have everything we may want. Happiness in time and eternity requires that we make decisions about what we must have and what we are willing to part with. Jesus says that if we must have money we cannot have him. If we must have the world, we can’t have heaven. The options are clear and require decisiveness. Lot was rescued in spite of himself, by an angel who decided for him. But you and I can’t count on that. Will you avoid any serious dealings with your soul and with eternity until it is too late? Will you hang with the world and hang with the world and hang with the world and linger and hesitate until the end has come, until the day is past? When you start to feel the fires of hell, it will be too late to escape. Lot was not decisive. He hesitated. Will you?

Fifthly, Lot was not prospered. He lost all that he had. He went from living in luxury with his wife to being a widower, living in a cave in Zoar. He was saved, but so as thru fire. Apart from his own life and his two graceless daughters he was left with nothing but regret. I Corinthians 3: 11-15 (NIV) *For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12*

If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. 14 If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. 15 If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames. You get the point there? Paul is saying that if Christ is your foundation then you will be saved from hell, but if you build on that foundation with cheap stuff, in other words, if you live your life in a manner unworthy of Christ, then you will experience great loss and will face a judgment with little reward. Lot was rescued but not prospered.

The point in all of this for you is this—if you find yourself sinking in to the moral mire of the Sodom around you, then it is time to make a radical, complete, permanent and immediate separation from sin. Radical means you get at the root of the evil, leaving nothing. Complete means you removed every vestige of your former life. You don't try to live for God partially, but wholly. Permanent means you never give a thought to going back. Immediate means you do it now. No last flings with the world. You get up and run for your life. It is time to make a radical, complete, permanent, and immediate separation from your sin as you link your life with Christ. Learn from Lot's mistakes.

Now, it is time for us to learn from the mistakes of his wife. We aren't told much about this woman. We don't even know her name. The only thing she did that was recorded for us in Scripture is found in verse 26a *But his wife, from behind him, looked back.* As a result she became a pillar, a hardened, rock-like monument of salt. This is undoubtedly strange. But what we are to learn from it is fairly plain to see. Luke 17:32 *Remember Lot's wife.* This warning from Jesus comes in the context of his teaching about ultimate judgment and the destruction of the world at the end of the age. It follows Luke 17:29-31 *on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. 30 It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed. 31 On that day, the one who is on the housetop and whose goods are in the house must not go down to take them out; and likewise the one who is in the field must not turn back.* The point is that when you see the Son of Man coming in the clouds there will be no point in trying to get home quickly to get your things. That will be a futile effort because there just will not be time. Furthermore, such an attempt will be worse than futile, it will also reveal a heart that is caught up in the things of this world. When you can see the King of glory coming to reign and your immediate

concern becomes your things, your material stuff, something is terribly wrong. Your stuff is going to burn when Jesus comes. That is probably why someone would want to run get it. Jesus says, “Don’t.” I had a dream once about a fire. In my dream, I was in a hotel room in a large, old, brick hotel where lightning had struck and I could see that the opposite end of the hotel had caught on fire even up to the top floor where I was. As I saw this I didn’t grow particularly scared because the fire was a good ways off and I knew I would be able to escape in plenty of time. But, what I did start to think quickly about was, “what should I try to take with me down the fire escape? My stuff was in a suitcase. Should I try to take it all or just the best stuff or should I exit as quickly as possible and leave my stuff to burn? That is one of those situations that tests your values. You start thinking about what things you would most hate to lose. If you could only make three quick trips inside your burning house what objects would you remove? When a fire is coming your values are tested, and your heart is revealed. That is why Jesus said not to go back for your things. And that is why he said *Remember Lot’s wife*. Lot’s wife serves us well as a negative example. Here was a woman who was fairly intimate with true religion. She had married a man who knew the living and true God. She had traveled about with Abraham the great man of faith. She was no stranger to the truth but in the end she was destroyed with the wicked. Why? Well, she looked back. And for the problem of her backward glance God had a saline solution. She turned into salt. Just for a little glance backwards? That strikes us as bizarre that God would take such a severe action against a little mistake like that. If that is your feeling I can certainly understand it but you should understand that the little disobedient act was in rebellion against a great big God. The orders were clear and presented with passion. The angel said in verse 17, “Escape for your life! Do not look behind you.” What a ridiculous rule that is, huh? That is just like God isn’t it?! He is too rules-oriented. He’s always coming up with rules and then throwing a fit if they aren’t obeyed.” Such are the thoughts of those whose hearts have never been subdued unto sweet submission before the Lord. Andrew Bonar said.: “it is not the importance of the thing but the Majesty of the Lawgiver that is to be the standard of obedience.” Known, willful disobedience of any commandment of God says a great deal about one’s heart, and please see that that look back to Sodom implied some very serious things. That look was a little thing but it revealed the true character of Lot’s wife. Little things will often show the state of a man’s soul even better than great ones and little symptoms are often the signs of terminable disease. The fruit that Adam and Eve ate was a little thing but it revealed a rebel heart. The backward look of Lot’s wife was a little thing but it told of her love for the world. The

look back revealed that her heart was in Sodom. You have heard it said that you can take the boy out of the country but you can't take the country out of the boy. So it was here. Sodom, its ways and its values, were in Mrs. Lot's heart. I John 2:**15** *Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him* James 4:**4** *You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.* Jesus has taught this as powerfully as anyone when He said you cannot love God and money or put anything before the Lord in your heart. Lot's wife was not one whose life centered on the Lord. Her life was in the socializing and the riches of Sodom. Where is your life? Right after admonishing us to remember Mrs. Lot, Jesus said this: Luke 17:**33** *Whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it..* He means by that that whoever is determined to keep his old ways, to enjoy the benefits of the old life will never find in Jesus new and abundant and eternal life.

Jesus wants his disciples to hear the message loudly and clearly. He wants to insure that they don't forget it, so he points to Lot's wife as an example of what happens to the man whose heart is wrapped up in this world. *Remember Lot's wife.* Hold her up in your mind as a constant warning. Blessed are those who learn from their own mistakes. Even more blessed are those who learn from the mistakes of others. I don't know about you but I have stored away in my mind numerous negative examples. I can think of dozens of people whose lives serve me as warnings to avoid the sins that brought them down. I think of David, and so many other leaders who have been wrecked by sexual sins. Their stories serve me as warnings. There are others whose love of money has destroyed them. Others whose loose tongue brought them low. Others who let themselves grow proud. Their lives become warning signs for me urging me to stay clear of those sins. Who here knows the name of Len Bias? 24 years ago the sports world was shocked by the cocaine death of a young man named who had just become the #2 pick in the NBA draft. Len Bias was headed towards a career that would pay him millions of dollars a year. He was a young man who was 6'8" 230 pounds of solid muscle. One writer said he had the body of a Greek god. But he messed around with cocaine and it killed him. Recently, a man showed me what cocaine look like. A chunk the size of an aspirin - just a little thing - - can turn you into an addict. That little thing that he had been warned not to do, destroyed Len Bias. The mother of Lenny Bias was a Christian and made it her life goal to warn a generation of young people against the drug that killed her son. Most moms

would have done all they could to forget that tragic boy but this mother travelled the country for years saying “Remember Lenny Bias.” It is a warning of love and it is a warning against sin.

So also is the Lord’s warning. *Remember Lot’s wife*. It is a call not to look back once you have made a commitment to the Lord. When you leave the sinful ways of this world take with you your heart, your mind, your eyes. Don’t look back, don’t think back, don’t go back. Don’t even think about it. That has become a popular phrase in the last decade. It’s a good warning and one that God has given to us. Don’t even think about abandoning Christ for the things of this world. That is what the angel was telling Lot’s family. Don’t look back. Don’t even think about Sodom or going back there because if you don’t think about it you likely won’t do it. But Mrs. Lot ignored the warning. She ignored God’s gracious warning. Friends, when God is kind enough to put up a warning sign for you do not ignore it. If you think you can defy God’s warnings. If you think you know better than God and that one little look won’t hurt, you are playing with fire. When you turn your back on the world in order to have Jesus you must, you must, keep your back to that world and walk with your eyes set on Jesus and the promises of God. How I love the story of Christian in *Pilgrim’s Progress*. When he discovered the book that told him that the town where he lived was soon to be destroyed he asked the man whose name was *Evangelist* what he should do. Evangelist pointed him to a light and a gate and urged him to flee the wrath to come. Bunyan then writes, “So, I saw in my dream that the man began to run. He had not run far from his own house when his wife and children saw what was happening. They cried after him to return but the man put his fingers in his ears and ran on, crying, ‘Life, Life! Eternal Life!’ He would not look behind him but fled toward the middle of the plain.” That is the ticket, unreserved commitment to eternal life. Unreserved abandonment of this world. Dear friends, we are like the pilgrim for we too live in a world that is destined to perish. If we could only get that through our heads. However nice your American middle-class life may be it is all going up in smoke. We get so comfortable where we are it is very easy to forget that. But we dare not forget it. Get your heart out of this world and start living for eternity with a determination not to turn back. Get settled on Jesus. Get settled on Jesus as your Savior, your Lord, your Treasure. Don’t try to keep a foot in this world. Live for heaven. Don’t try to live for both. *Remember Lot’s wife*. She was almost saved, but she looked back because her heart was in Sodom. You—looking unto Jesus, will you this day make a radical, complete, permanent, and immediate separation from sin?