

Remember Lot's Wife



By Joe Crews

Introduction

"Remember Lot's wife," said Jesus. That is probably the most dramatic, potent illustration the Master ever used in a sermon. As we read the context, it is very obvious that the words were being applied to those living on this planet right now. "In that day" refers to the "day when the Son of man is revealed." Here is what Jesus actually said:

"Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the, same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away:

and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot's wife." Luke 17:28-32.

What did Jesus mean by that cryptic expression "Remember Lot's wife"? What does that woman of long ago have to do with people who are watching the closeout of history? Why did the Master relate Mrs. Lot to our day? Jesus used her as a fearful warning. That woman became cold, careless, and disobedient. Finally the judgments of God fell upon her, and she became a pillar of salt on the plains of Sodom.

I gather that one of the most deadly perils for God's people in the last days will be to slowly slip away from the truth as Mrs. Lot did. Jesus warned that the loss of spiritual power takes place almost imperceptibly: "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." Matthew 24:12. As pressures of conformity and compromise crowd in, the faith gradually erodes and disappears.

I confess to you that this is the pastor's most perplexing problem today. Perhaps a newly baptized family in the church is bubbling with that wonderful first-love experience. They are willing to go anywhere and do anything for the Lord. Their contagious enthusiasm is a joy to behold. But soon the pastor notices that the ardor is beginning to wane a little bit, and the family is no longer excited about their faith. They slowly begin to withdraw from participation and even attendance at church. The pastor visits the family and tries to uncover the problem. To his surprise, he discovers that they still believe as much as ever, but they have lost their love for the truth.

How can we explain this slacking of spiritual power? How does the devil steal the very heart out of the Christian experience? One thing is certain: it does not happen suddenly or overnight. People lose their love for the truth by degrees. Little by little they lower the standards and compromise the faith, until nothing remains except a dead, empty formalism.

After reading all that Jesus said about those who are saved, we see one grand absolute truth standing out clearly. There will be no divided heart in heaven. There will be no half surrender on the part of the redeemed. Those who enter God's kingdom will be there because they wanted eternal life more than anything else in the whole world. The Lord Jesus used Lot's wife as an example of those in the last days who will not be single-minded for the truth; who will love material things more than the things of God. Christ said, "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." Luke 14:33.

Do you remember the story in the Bible about the businessman who went searching for the most priceless gem in the world? At last he located it and learned that it was for sale. But the price was outrageous! In order to

buy that pearl he would have to sell his home, his business, and use every penny of his lifelong savings. But mark this: The man's desire for that pearl was so deep and compelling that he did not argue about the cost. He did not consider waiting until he could better afford the purchase. Nor did he attempt to bargain for a lower price. Immediately and eagerly he hurried away, sold everything he had, and brought the money back to buy the gem from the owners. The pearl, of course, represents eternal life, and those who desire it must be prepared to invest everything they have in order to obtain it.

Lot's Good Intentions

But let's come back to the story of Lot's wife and try to understand what Jesus wants us to learn from her example. According to the Bible record, she belonged to one of the finest families in the East. As the nephew of Abraham, Lot shared the tremendous faith of his uncle and prayed at Abraham's altar. When God's call came to get out of Mesopotamia, Lot went right along with Abraham, not knowing where the call might lead. Together they brought their families to the entering place of the Promised Land and offered their sacrifices of thanksgiving.

Then dissension erupted between the herdsmen of the two wealthy kinsmen. Their vast combined flocks and herds didn't have enough room to graze in such a restricted area, and they had to separate. Lot was given the choice of direction as the whole land stretched out before him. On one side lay the verdant hills with their lofty trees; the other led down into the crowded centers of commerce and trade. The materialistic appeal of the prosperous cities had an immediate impact on Lot, and the Bible records very simply that he "pitched his tent toward Sodom." Genesis 13:12. The predictable pattern of future tragedy was settled by that early decision to move near those wicked cities.

Lot stands forth as a man of good intentions. Quite obviously he did not actually plan to take his family into the urban environment of sinful Sodom. He would only live in the vicinity, where he could take advantage of the economic opportunities of such a bustling trade capital. Very likely he made special mental reservations about letting his family mingle with the degraded inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. In fact, he had no idea at all of giving up his religion. His move was prompted by selfish concern over temporal advantages, and he had no intention of losing anything.

But what happened in spite of all the wonderful intentions? Poor Lot lost his wife, his possessions, and almost his own life. Good intentions were not good enough. He moved closer and closer to the cities until finally he actually moved in to dwell with the Sodomites. His plans to guard the spiritual interests of his children failed to materialize. All his rationalization about counteracting the wickedness with stricter prayer schedules and family-altar religion just didn't seem to work out as planned. He gradually compromised with the environment and watched his children slowly assimilate the ways of their heathen neighbors.

I'm sure Lot did not feel at ease when he first settled among the evil citizens of that abominable place. Every day he heard news of the mushrooming crime rate. He must have been repulsed and even horrified by the vile jokes and obscene language. Then he had to watch with alarm the growing fascination of his family for the perverted lifestyle of their friends and associates.

Finally, his daughters fell in love with worldly men and married them. Outside of the home, united with the enemies of God, they lost all faith in the ancestral religion of their childhood and youth. They began to look upon Lot as narrow and bigoted and soon expressed their extreme loathing of his half-hearted appeals to establish true worship in their homes.

Nevertheless, we still tend to sympathize with Lot in his frustrated attempts to hold the reins on his unregenerate wife and children. He had much against him, but most of it had been created by his own weakness and indecision. One compromise led to another, until finally he must have become totally

demoralized over the rebellion of his worldly family.

Mrs. Lot's Response to Sodom

Still, it was an act of flagrant presumption when Lot actually settled within the city. The society there was shameless, degenerate, and entirely sex-perverted. Mrs. Lot not only moved into Sodom, but Sodom moved into her. She was the type who loved fine things, and the mad whirl of social activities fascinated her from the beginning. She was soon caught up in the excitement of party rounds of pleasure, and the evidence seems to indicate that she eventually shared much of the materialistic mind-set of the Sodomites.

Can we analyze the cause of such a shocking turnabout? How could it happen to the wife of Abraham's relative? Was it, perhaps, because no one was praying for her in that provocative situation? No, indeed. Abraham was pre-sending his prayers and sacrifices night and morning for his nephew's family. Was it because no warnings were given concerning the spiritual dangers? We cannot believe that those angel messengers left them without full information concerning the snares of Sodom. Then what brought terrible soul-ruin to this woman? Was it because she disbelieved the call of God to get out? No. She did not mock the message as did her married daughters and their husbands. She believed the warning and actually started on her way to safety.

But mark this – there was no eagerness in her heart and no enthusiasm for the program. She was so reluctant to leave the fine appointments of her affluent Sodom home that she lingered. Her heart and life had been so bound to material things that she could hardly pull away from the accumulated treasures of those finely furnished rooms. With death at her heels, she lingered. With life and security awaiting her on the mountaintop, she lingered. What was wrong with the woman? She loved the world more than she loved God. She still believed the truth; she knew what she ought to do; she wanted to be saved–yet she lingered.

We still find many people exactly like Mrs. Lot. They also believe the truth, know what they ought to do, and want to be saved. They linger, too, just as she did. Like Lot's wife, many of them wait until the pull of the world overpowers the will to act, and they are not able to let go of "things." Why will people linger over the call of God? Have you ever done it? Millions have lingered until the best years of their life are gone. They linger until their children grow up and are lost in the world. They linger until the world holds them with bands of steel and the voice of God dimly fades away.

But at last Mrs. Lot began to move. The record describes how angels had to take hold of their hands to hurry them out of the doomed city. The angels cried, "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee." Genesis 19:17. But Lot's wife did not reach the safety of the mountains. Why? The Bible tells us that she "looked back," and immediately she was turned into a pillar of salt. Why did God deal with her so severely? Was it not the smallest offense of all just to move the head slightly? The Word of God has a name for that type of action: sin. She disobeyed the commandment of the Lord, and her judgment underlines the urgency of obedience. God means what He says. There is no excuse for sin, and God cannot overlook it.

Is There a Little Sin?

Nowhere in the Bible does God give the slightest tolerance for men to modify His revealed will. God says what He means to say, and He accepts nothing less than full compliance with His commandments. Some dramatic experiences are recorded in the Scriptures which emphasize this urgent truth. Two sons of the high priest offered strange fire before the Lord, and they died on the spot. God had required that they use only the sacred fire in the sanctuary during their priestly ministry. To them it seemed unreasonable that one fire could not burn sacrifices as well as another fire. Using such human judgment, Nadab and Abihu disobeyed the direct command of the Lord and died. They did not understand the seriousness of violating the sanctity of that which God had set apart for a holy use.

Similar arguments are used today in connection with things which have been sanctified by God. Often it is asked, "What is the difference between worshiping on the Sabbath and worshiping on Sunday? One day is just as good as the other." The tremendous difference is that God made one day holy and wrote an unchangeable law about it on tables of stone. The day is different because it has God's special blessing upon it. Woe to the man who touches with common hands those holy institutions of God!

Nadab and Abihu were not guilty of any rebellious defiance of their faith in other areas of their religious office. They never considered refusing to carry out the proper type of offering in the manner prescribed by the Levitical statutes. The small matter of the fire was the only command which struck them as frivolous and arbitrary. In that area alone, they felt justified in making a tiny change that would more easily and smoothly fit into their idea of functional worship. They reasoned that such a minor deviation in the interests of such a sanctified program could not bring any serious consequences. God would certainly not count it a sin to improve on a program to worship Him.

What an irony that much disobedience of God's law takes place in the name of religion! Christ acknowledged that men would be worshiping Him while they substituted the "commandments of men" for His requirements. He rejected such worship as vain and empty. In the sermon on the mount, He described a large class who would seek entrance into the kingdom because they had prophesied, cast out demons, and done many wonderful works "in thy name." Yet Jesus will say to them, "I never knew you: depart from me." Matthew 7:23.

How can people become so blind and deceived that they feel securely saved while willfully breaking God's commandments? In their vain worship, they bowed regularly in prayer, sang songs of praise, and probably never missed a church service. They professed great love for God and gave moving testimonies of the same.

Is the same problem with us today? Do religious people still disobey God's law while professing to love Him? On any given Sabbath, look around you to see what is going on. People will be ignoring the very heart commandment which God wrote on the tables of stone: "The seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work." Exodus 20:10.

Who are these people who ignore God's Sabbath commandment? As you see them hurrying about their regular work program, pursuing their own pleasure on the seventh day, there seems to be no remorse for violating the clear command of God. Yet tomorrow many of them will be in church, praying, singing, and talking about how much they love Jesus. Where did they get their definition of love? Was it from the bumper stickers on the interstate—"Smile if you love Jesus," "Wave if you love Jesus," "Honk if you love Jesus"? That is not what Jesus said, is it? He declared, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." John 14:15.

To Obey is Better

Why do people feel secure in breaking one of the Ten Commandments? For the same reason Saul felt secure in bringing back the forbidden sheep and oxen. God had told him not to bring back a thing after he defeated the Amalekites. But Saul was going to use those animals to sacrifice in his worship of God. Notice the incredible illogic of his actions. He disobeyed in taking the animals and then tried to justify the disobedience by using the stolen animals in worshiping God. In the same way, modern church members disobey God by taking the Sabbath for their own use. Then they do like Saul and try to justify their disobedience by worshiping God in the name of what they have stolen.

God declared through the prophet Samuel, "To obey is better than sacrifice." It is also better than all the vain worship of a thousand religious services performed in conjunction with the willful violation of His specific command. Obedience is better than anything else in revealing our love. Jesus said so. "If ye love me, keep my

commandments." Disobedience is worse than anything because it is an act of disloyalty in its very nature. Observing a counterfeit day derived from the pagan worship of the sun is no more acceptable to God than Saul's prize-winning sheep and cattle. He is not honored by disobedience, and He is especially offended by the breaking of His commandments in the name of worship.

Have you noticed that in the stories of Nadab, Abihu, and Uzzah the seemingly slight offense had to do with things God had set apart for sacred use? The fire was holy and the ark of the covenant was holy. Both were to be reserved and preserved for one sacred purpose only. Common hands were not to be laid on the ark and common fire was not to replace the holy fire. When those "set apart" things were treated just like other things, the judgments of God fell.

Are there sanctified things today which God has set apart for a holy use? Indeed there are. The Sabbath has been described by God as "my holy day." Isaiah 58:13,14. That one-seventh of time has been signally blessed and commanded by God for rest and worship.

The tithe is something else which has been separated by the Word of God for a special, sacred purpose. To appropriate that one-tenth for ourselves is actually to steal from the very coffers of God. The Scriptures describe it thus: "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings." Malachi 3:8.

Some people are horrified to read about the judgments which fell upon Uzzah when he touched the ark of God and upon Lot's wife when she simply turned her head. Are tiny infractions so serious that sudden death can ensue? Does this indicate that the quantity of sin is not so significant as the quality of it? If Eve's simple act of biting the fruit could precipitate six millenniums of planetary suffering and death, surely we dare not measure disobedience in terms of size or appearance.

No wonder, then, that Lot's wife suffered the same terrible consequences as all others who trifled with the word of a holy God. The offense of looking back indicated a divided will. It also revealed the fact that her heart was still bound up with the affairs of a corrupt, condemned social order. Two voices were competing for her allegiance: one, the voice of the highlands—the voice of God calling her to liberty, purity, and salvation; the other, the voice of the lowlands—the voice of popularity and pleasure, the voice of Sodom. Slowly the voice from beneath gained the mastery of a badly bent conscience, and Mrs. Lot stands before us as a tragic example of a divided heart.

Jesus said, "Remember Lot's wife," and He said it to those who would live through the final traumatic moments of earth's history. He is saying it to us right now—"Remember Lot's wife." We need that message. Millions are just as double-minded as Mrs. Lot. They find no time to pray with their family. Like Mrs. Lot, many read magazines more than the Bible, and thus they have only a superficial form of religion. Like Mrs. Lot, they linger around the edges of sin—make no strong decision to go all the way in obedience to God.

God's Ultimatum to Lot

What did God think about the namby-pamby way Lot had neutralized his influence in Sodom? You know the story of how those angels visited Abraham and then Lot, telling him that God had tolerated their fence-straddling long enough. They had reached the limits of their double life, so God faced them with an ultimatum: get out or get in! "This is it!" God said. "You can't be neutral any longer. Choose right now what you will do. Come all the way out, or stay there and perish."

What a fantastic confrontation: a final call, a last-minute chance to slip from death to life! Does it sound familiar? If it doesn't, you had better look around again and see what's happening to the world. The same fiery fate which loomed over Sodom has been decreed for this wicked age as well. Jesus pointed to the parallel

conditions between the two periods of history. After describing the excesses and indulgences of Lot's day, Jesus said, "Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed." Luke 17:30.

What did He mean by "even thus"? Similar moral and social problems? No doubt about that. Did He also foresee a startling final appeal to lingering Lots and Mrs. Lots whose wills have almost been paralyzed by indecision? Indeed, the language of the Master seems to indicate that the whole sordid picture of a dying world was before Him. As in the days of Sodom, men would have just one last opportunity to say Yes or No; then it would be over. Some, like Lot's wife, will be so wedded to the world that they cannot let go in time. They will have to perish with the things which they loved more than they loved God. Others, like Lot, will arouse just in time to choose quickly and decisively. Without a backward glance, they will move out in complete obedience to the will of God. This is the choice everyone faces.

The same issues which precipitated the dramatic showdown in Sodom are leavening the Christian churches at almost every level. Materialism and lukewarmness have placed a mold upon the lifestyle of millions who profess to be followers of truth today. While the winds of destruction are slowly slipping through the fingers of the four apocalyptic angels who have been holding them back, the professed people of God relax in a carnally secure dreamworld. Like Lot's family, they have become comfortable in the society of money markets and a compromised faith.

God looks upon the nauseous blend of flesh and spirit as intolerable. As the True Witness of the Laodicean church, He calls upon this last-day religious remnant to repent. Just as those heavenly messengers laid down the ultimatum so long ago, we are also being called to leave it all or perish. There is no more time to be divided. Get off the fence, God says, and be either hot or cold. Come all the way out and live, or stay lukewarm and perish. There is no place for half-surrender in the church of the translation!

The story of Lot and his family proves that God will not long tolerate a double lifestyle on the part of His professed people. Those who are trying to live in two worlds must make a decision. God's Word declares that the friendship of the world is enmity with God. "Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." James 4:4. Another Bible writer, who was the closest of Christ's disciples, declared, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (1 John 2:15).

What One Sin Can Do

Why did Jesus say, "Remember Lot's wife?" Because He knew that many others would be just as attached to "things" as she was. They would linger, and then look back with longing heart upon those things which are forbidden. "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." Luke 14:33.

What do modern church members know about the principle of self-denial and forsaking all? The book of Revelation foresaw the unholy mixture of Laodicean Christianity which would make God sick on the stomach. He said, "I will spue [vomit] thee out of my mouth." Revelation 3:16. Those words are probably the most graphic that ever passed the lips of our Lord. He was addressing the subject of hypocrisy in the end times. Similar strong language was used by Jesus in describing the same condition among the religious leaders of His day. He called them hypocrites generation of vipers, and whited sepulchres.

In the Old Testament, God used equivalent rhetoric in calling for His vacillating people to get off the fence. "If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him." 1 Kings 18:21.

In all these instances, God was speaking to those who laid claim to being His favored, chosen ones. Yet their practice was not the same as their profession. There was a mingling, in their experience, of the holy and unholy. They were saying one thing and doing something else. The result was a weak, wishy-washy witness

which made no positive impact on others. God found such conduct repulsive. That is why He demanded that choices be made; but take note that only two alternatives were ever available. It was either God or Baal, obedience or disobedience.

One of the strangest obsessions of modern churchianity is to blithely blend the concepts of salvation and sin. The Bible makes it very clear that willful transgression is the antithesis of spiritual security. God's call is to "come out of her and be ye separate." Deliberate disobedience cannot coexist with a clear Christian conscience. The Word of God has much to say about sin, but never a good word. No one has ever read the slightest inspired intimation that sin should be reduced or diminished. Whenever it is mentioned, sin is declared to be non-negotiable. It is to be abandoned, rejected, and utterly repudiated. Jesus did not say to the adulterous woman, "Go and taper off on this sin." He said, "Go and sin no more." John did not write: "My little children, these things write I unto you that ye sin less and less." He plainly declared, "I write unto you that ye sin not."

The story of Lot's wife is a dramatic illustration that the presence of one small act of willful disobedience can lead to eternal loss. Any effort to reconcile God's love, character, or righteousness with a tolerance for sin must end with miserable failure.

How is it with you today? In this final fragment of probationary time, have you renounced every competitor of Christ for first place in your heart?

Just as the angels pleaded with Lot and his family to make a total surrender, the Holy Spirit urges upon us the same kind of commitment today. The call is for separation and urgent action. Multitudes linger in the twilight zone of indecision while the fires of destruction are poised for the annihilation of this world. Worldlings and professed Christians alike are hearing the plea of God to turn loose. The door of probation is open for just a few moments more.

To every soul there comes a golden last moment of decision before the door shuts. Will all be able to recognize that moment? Tragically, no. Some, with senses dulled by worldly compromise, will not even discern the final departure of God's messenger of salvation. The sins of Sodom are just as hypnotizing and appealing today as they were long ago. The same perverse practices have become more commonplace and popular than they ever were in the doomed city of the plains. Lot had no time to take anything with him. Neither do we. There must be a willingness to deny self and cut away from the abominations of the flesh in every form. Our only hope is to move quickly in separating from the evil attachments of a corrupt society. A loving Saviour stands behind the invitation, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord."

The secret of being able to resist and reject the appeal of a perverse, renegade society is to look at the cross of Jesus Christ. We might abhor the evil and desire deliverance, but there is only one source of strength to break the pattern of sin. Christ's substitutionary death at Calvary satisfied the penalty which transgression had placed against every living soul in the world. The broken law demanded death, and when Jesus suffered that penalty for every man on the cross, a glorious transaction was made. Legally, every lost soul was freed from the penalty of disobedience. Again, in a legal sense, the whole world was redeemed through the atonement of the cross. The corporate guilt of Adam's descendants was canceled by the corporate justification accorded through the death of Jesus.

We can truthfully assure every sinner right now that his sentence of death has already been legally satisfied and executed upon his substitute, Jesus. What a fantastic truth! This means that God actually took the initiative in saving man. He almost made it difficult to be lost by declaring an emancipation from the slavery of sin for every person who would receive it. But please take note that something was done even for those who would not receive it. A corporate justification actually was made effective for the entire world, both good and evil.

Through that universal justification the curse of universal condemnation was erased, and Adam's children could be born without bearing the guilt of their father's sin. (Romans 5:18)

But the most glorious consequence of the atonement is seen in the experience of the ones who claim personal justification through faith in His blood. Paul described it thus: "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Romans 3:24-26) Here is clearly revealed a picture of individual acceptance of all those who claim Jesus as forgiver and justifier.

What is accomplished for the ones who enter this intimate relationship of justification by faith? Are they merely delivered from the guilt of sin, or do they also receive deliverance from the sin itself? Paul answered that question. "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Galatians 6:14.

In this verse we find that victory over the world system of evil is definitely tied to the atonement of the cross. No one has been delivered from sins of the flesh without receiving that deliverance as a gift through the merits of Christ's suffering and death. We are made dead to the world's appeal by looking into the face of our Substitute and Saviour. His agape love, revealed at the cross, melts the stubborn will and weans the heart away from every attraction the world can devise. That is how Jesus is "made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." 1 Corinthians 1:30. It is all in the cross. Look at it daily and remember Lot's wife, that you may be saved from her terrible fate.

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