

## Don't Look Back!

A sermon based on Genesis 19:15-17,23-29

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I'm sure you've seen the commercials before, about the dangers of texting and driving. The girl who looks down for a few moments to check out a text, then looks up just in time to see her car feet away from hitting a mother and her daughter who were crossing the road. The guy, driving with his friends, casually sending off a text, finishes it just in time to see his car about to slam into a minivan parked on the curb, with a dad and his son getting stuff out of the back of it.

Heart-breaking to think about those accidents happening, but they do. And it's not just texting and driving. But I think we'd all agree that's not the only distraction that could get you into serious harm while driving. It's just one of the newer ones.

But what about before there was texting (back when dinosaurs still roamed the earth)? I'll tell you one I've been guilty of. We don't really have too many of them here, but billboards or those signs with the changing messages. I've had it happen where I catch the message a little too late and cock my head to the side and then behind, trying to see the rest of it. Not safe at all.

The number one rule they teach you when driving is always keep your eyes on the road. Looking down, to the side, behind you, anything that takes your focus off the road for even just a second can have disastrous results. The same is true for our lives here as strangers on this earth. As we shift from season of End Times to Advent, we're reminded where our eyes, our hearts, our lives should be focused...straight ahead, ready and waiting for the coming Christ-child in a few weeks and, sometime soon, our same Christ to come back. Having our eyes fixed in any other direction could be dangerous, eternally dangerous, so friends, don't look back!

Don't look back! A lesson Lot and his family had to learn in our first lesson this morning. A lesson they had to learn the hard way. I'm guessing most of you know the account well. Lot, his wife, and two daughters settled down in Sodom, right next to Gomorrah, two cities notorious for their wickedness, and in particular, their sins of the sexual nature. Extremely perverse.

Extremely revolting to God, so much so that he informed Abraham he was going to destroy the two cities and all the filthy sinners inside their walls. Concerned for the people there, or maybe just concerned about his nephew Lot and his family, Abraham prayed to God to spare the city. Actually got God all the way down to 10 faithful people there. If 10 faithful people were found in the city, God would spare it.

Four. That's it. Four was the number of believers in Sodom and Gomorrah. Not enough to save the two cities. But enough for God to show his mercy and save the few faithful, which he did, sending two of his angels to go and bring Lot and his family safely out of Sodom before it met its violent end.

And that's where our verses today pick up. You know, we have to applaud Lot's faithfulness. With all the evil ruining the town around him, with all the attractiveness of sin surrounding him, he and his family were able to withstand and refrain. Hats off to them for that.

What's not so impressive was Lot's reaction to the angel's warning to leave. Do you see what it was? "When he hesitated." He hesitated. He knew what was coming. The angels had told him. God was about to destroy his home. And yet – unbelievable – Lot hesitated, unable to take decisive action. Maybe he had become so attached to what Sodom had to offer that he was reluctant to make a clean break. After all, this had been his first choice when Abraham had given him the option to choose where he wanted to live. You'd have to think Lot chose the better land...better for filling his pocket, building up his earthly wealth, maybe, but certainly not better for his soul.

But you know, maybe his hesitation is not so unbelievable. Imagine yourself in his situation. God says to you today, "That's it, I've had it with the Interior. The substance abuse, the liberal viewpoints, the violence, the disregard and disrespect people have for me here, that's it. Get out of here because I'm going to send a snowpocalypse and wipe this place off the face of the earth."

How many of you would, without so much as a twitch, without even trying to pack up as many of your belongings as you possibly can, would just pick up and leave? Right now? Probably not so easy, right? Not that we're trying to excuse Lot's hesitance, but from a human standpoint, we can understand why he did.

You don't have to try to imagine his situation. You are in his situation.

The book of Ecclesiastes says, "There is nothing new under the sun." And it's true. The same sinful indulgences of Lot's time still linger around today, just as tempting, just as harmful, just as disgusting to God. You could even say we have our own Sodom's and Gomorrah's...Amsterdam known for its prostitution rings. Las Vegas, aptly named Sin City with its gambling and sexual promiscuity, amongst other vices. San Francisco's a hub for homosexuality. We could go on.

But you don't even have to go to any of those places to find Sodom and Gomorrah. You can turn on the TV, open an internet browser, listen in the halls at school, the breakroom at work, your favorite restaurant, the store. Death, sex, gossip, lies, hate, greed, it's everywhere. Sinful corruption is everywhere. We wake up, leave our homes, and immediately we're in Sodom and Gomorrah. We might not even need to leave our beds before we enter that world.

And just like Lot, God tells us, "Hurry and get away from this." Hurry and get away from this filth. Stay away from sin and temptation. And don't look back, longing to be with that sin. And we turn around right away and high tail it out of there. We flee, right?

Or do you hesitate? "Well, I know this show's got some attractive women or men in it but it's one of my favorites. I don't want to give up watching it just so that I won't be tempted to have indecent thoughts." "I know I should tell the truth and count that little extra income on my taxes, but, I mean, there's a loophole...maybe not the most ethical, but who's going to call me out on it?" "I really shouldn't hang out with her or her friends because all they do is spread rumors and bad-mouth other people, but you know, the stuff they got is good and I can find out other people's true colors, which may not be for the best."

And that's just a small sample of choices we're faced with every day, where the answer should be easy – don't hang around this temptation. Yet, we do, and then we get caught up in the sin.

Lot's not alone in his conflicted lifestyle. Countless believers fall in with a corrupt world, maybe even fall in love with a corrupt world rather than flee a doomed society. God's people, you and I, living in a

pagan world, we must remain separate...or as Paul says, live in this world but not of this world. Because this corrupt world system awaits God's coming judgment, which will be far greater than the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

You think fire and sulfur being hailed down on a city was bad; God's coming judgment will be far greater, far worse. Maybe that's why Jesus so adamantly warned in our gospel, "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap."

We know what happened to Lot's wife when she hesitated and looked back at sinful Sodom and Gomorrah. Turning into a pillar of salt would be a blessing to us if we do the same, hesitating, longing to be back in with our sinful world. But that wouldn't be our fate. No, our fate would be being included amongst the rest of the unbelievers and being thrown into a lake of fire that will never die. Then you would have to look back, with regret, that we didn't live how God wanted us to, that we didn't hurry and flee from sin and temptation.

Fellow believers, it's hard, isn't it. Such a serious warning, from Jesus, from God's Word, one we've heard many times before, and yet, it's hard. Sin and temptation are so great, so enticing, it's hard to hurry, flee, and not look back at sin and temptation, isn't it?

So what can we do? Don't look back; look up. Right now...a little to my left...right there. And you have your solution. Look up at the cross. And keep looking there (and I don't mean literally, that you have to spend every waking moment staring at a cross or a picture of a cross!).

Live your life with the cross in constant view. Every time you come face to face with temptation for the world, the devil, your own sinful flesh, think about the cross and what took place there.

There, the LORD was merciful to us. Same as he had been to Lot and his family, even at a time where, with imminent disaster all around him, and Lot was still hesitating to leave it. That's the phrase that sticks out in our verses this morning...in spite of Lot, verse 16 -"the LORD was merciful to them."

What you have in your worship folders for this section is the updated NIV translation, which does ever so slight of an injustice to this invaluable phrase. What would make it better, and more in line with the original language, is to capitalize every letter in the name LORD. Do you know why it's better? LORD, all capitals, is the special name God gives himself throughout the Old Testament when he wants to zero in on his characteristic of faithful love and his unconditional grace.

That's who saved Lot and his family. That's who showed mercy, compassion to them. The LORD of free and faithful grace. Less than 10 believers in Sodom, God could have left them there and wouldn't have broken his promise to Abraham. One of those four believers was reluctant to leave his sinful home, even after God so lovingly warned him about impending judgment. All reasons for God to leave them be and allow them to suffer the same fate as their evil city.

But he didn't. His loving response was mercy and salvation. The same response he's had for you and me as well...at the cross.

With an entire world, generations of people, corrupted by sin, including you and me, God could have let us all suffer the fate of hell. And the LORD, the God of free and faithful grace, showed us mercy instead. And he never hesitated. He didn't give pause at the idea of sending Jesus to earth. Jesus never gave

pause, never looked back, longing to be in heaven. Never did that, even when it came to offering his perfect life on the cross to save us imperfect sinners, incapable of saving ourselves. No, he went, and died, and saved us.

And God has forgiven our sins, and he continues to forgive, even when we're foolish enough to still look back and fall into sin again, even after he's warned us against it. By God's love and grace and mercy, the cross is still there, right in front of us, with forgiveness pouring from Jesus' blood and washing us clean.

And we just look up, focus on the cross and what Jesus did for us there, and the forgiveness is ours. And when sin and temptation continue to hound you, which is today and every day, instead of looking back and hesitating, keep looking up, and not just at the cross, but beyond that, to Jesus' return and to your heavenly home.

I know Advent is a time when we get to prepare our hearts for the coming of the Christ-child to save us, a gift of his grace, but it's hard not to also think about his second coming, when that little child, cute baby, will return as the our victorious King and the bringer of eternal judgment and destruction, another gift of his grace.

If you look at our verses again, especially verse 24, you see how it was the LORD (again, should be all capital letters), it was the LORD who destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. It was love that moved God to destroy evil in order to save his people, save them from those same sins and temptations.

The LORD will do the same for us when he comes back. By grace, he will destroy this world of sin for our sake, so that, as Jesus says in our gospel, "you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man." In heaven...forever.

That is our future. So why dwell on the past? Why look back and long for what's behind us, the sin and temptation that try to steal our focus? Let's not hesitate to leave behind the things of this world for the promise of eternal deliverance. Let's not look back on what might have been, but ahead to the promised salvation of the Christ.

Looking back is dangerous. Looking back could be deadly, especially with Jesus set to return at any moment. So, friends, don't. Keep your focus ahead. Hurry, flee from sin and temptation, every day. Look up to the LORD, your God of free and faithful love, the God of grace, the same grace, which, as Paul writes in Titus, "brings salvation...to all people...teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ."

Now that's something worth looking at and living for. Amen.