

Genesis 19: 26-38; “Looking Back or Looking Toward?”, Sermon # 57
in the series – “Beginnings”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on October 14th, 2012.

Last week as I closed the message, I said to you that the Lord was merciful to Lot in that he worked with him, through the angel, in regard to all his fears concerning leaving Sodom. I didn't have time to open that part of the sermon up, but perhaps we can do so this morning in the first point. It is the eyes of a person, where they are looking, and what is behind that look, that is what we want to speak of this morning. You can often tell much about a person by their eyes. Do they look you in the eyes when you are speaking to them, or do they look away? Do they look at the ground or do they look beyond you?

You can often tell much about a person by the look in their eyes. You can tell what they think about you, whether they care. You can tell whether they are proud or whether they are humble; but especially what they love and care about the most. Where do the eyes of your heart go? The eyes are the gate to the soul. Our eyes and where they go is of great significance in the sight of Almighty God. “For His eyes,” it says in 2 Chronicles 16: 9, “run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.”

Today we are going to find out whose heart is loyal to Him. And as we do so, we must ask ourselves whether our hearts are loyal to God, or whether they are treacherous in His sight. Much can be determined by where our hearts are looking. The issues of eternal life, whether we perish or whether we are saved, whether we will honor or whether we will dishonor ourselves in the sight of the Holy God, are all bound up in where we are looking.

So let's ask this question. What direction did Lot, Lot's wife, and Abraham look on that fateful day when Sodom was destroyed? It was where they looked and what they thought of when they looked, which revealed the state of their hearts and determined how God should deal with each of them? There was a certain direction that each of them looked that determined what they really were in God's sight. And the direction which we are continually looking will determine how God will deal with us as well. Let me give you the 3 directions in which each one looked:

1st – Lot's look was a look away . (verses 17-23)

You remember that Lot was a man who lingered in Sodom when he should have been up and out. The angels have had to take hold of his hand and his wife's hand and the hands of his two daughters and set them outside the city. “The Lord being merciful to him,” he escapes. He has to be persuaded to leave by the stern warnings of the angel; “Escape for your life!” “Do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain.” “Escape to the mountains, lest you be destroyed.” And you remember his response. “Please no, my lords...” “you have increased your mercy which you have shown me by saving my life; but I cannot escape to the mountains, lest some evil overtake me and I die.” What greater evil is there than not to obey the express command of the angel to him?

He says, “See now...” Well what are you looking at Lot? He looks away from the command of the Lord to his earthly interests. He is looking away from Sodom but he still would rather have the company of men. He would still rather have other options than what the Lord has, through the angel, plainly told him what would be best. “This city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one; please let me escape there (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live.” Now why would he say such a thing? I think that he is like many people in our day, even many Christian people in our day who have a man-centered, selfish, and worldly faith.

They would rather do, in every situation what pleases them best. They are ultimately concerned more for their comforts than for their obedience to God's clear commands. They are more concerned to have the company and fellowship of men than they are to have fellowship

and communion with God and His people. And they live the Christian life in the fear that God is asking them to isolate themselves and not enjoy the society of men. They realize that it is a great mercy to be delivered from the wrath to come, but does that mean that I have to “suffer the loss of all things” and live alone in the mountains? “Some evil may overtake me and I will die.” They have a strong humanistic element of hypothetical fear that keeps them from a prompt and immediate obedience. They say, “What will happen to me if I should obey you God?” “Some evil might overtake me and I might die.” Lot’s looking away to another earthly city shows us that he is a man of compromise. He should be looking for the “city made without hands whose builder and maker is God.”

But he is a man who wants as many options as he can get; and especially those which will make him feel that this life is truly worth living. But truly, he is not living by faith. He is living by sight. The angel told him to flee to the mountains. The Psalmist says, “I will lift up my eyes to the mountains.” “From whence shall my help come?” “My help comes from the Lord, Who made heaven and earth.” “The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.” “The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.” “The Lord shall protect you from all evil; He shall keep your soul.” “The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore.” (Psalm 121: 1,2, 5-8)

But Lot is saying, “I will lift up my eyes to the nearest city, from whence comes my help.” Why can’t Lot live by faith? Because he is looking at earthly things and not so much at heavenly things. You remember in Chapter 13: 10 it says, “And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that was well watered everywhere (before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah). It was like the garden of the Lord...” “Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan...” The trouble with some Christians is they are looking more at what they want out of this life; their comforts, and earthly joys, instead of living by faith in what God has said in His word that He wants them to do.

Living by faith in God’s Word was Abram choosing to dwell in Canaan without any square foot of it actually in his possession, although it is all given to him by God. Living by sight is Lot’s choosing to dwell in the cities of the plain even though he knew that there were great sinners there. Now, since Sodom is going to be destroyed, Lot will settle for a smaller city instead of the bigger one. Surely a little worldliness is not so bad, is it? “My soul shall live,” he says. No, we really live if we stand fast in the Lord; if we love him and keep His commandments. “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widow in their distress, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”

You do see from this text, however, that God works with us as Christians, in regard to all our fears, whether they are exaggerated or whether they are real. The angel says, “See, I have favored you concerning this thing also, in that I will not overthrow this city for which you have spoken.” So we see from this how gracious God is to consider his fears and ours; his prayers and ours. We should have our faith squarely resting upon His all-sufficient word and not fail to pray. “I sought the Lord and He answered me and delivered me from all my fears.” Lot’s problem and his sinful weakness were that he could not trust that the Lord knew what was best for him. He thought that he would rather “lean to his own understanding.”

And yet the angel grants him his request. The Lord does permit us to see the outworking of our worldly choices, and He helps us to understand whether they are the ones which work for His glory and for our good. Sometimes we do not see many things until it is too late and we have delayed our repentance long enough that terrible consequences come. But even in this, God faithfully delivered Lot from himself and his sinful weaknesses and he will do the same for any true Christian. The Lord is not against city life, if those who live in the city are inclining their hearts to righteousness and truth, and if they are seeking God for the meaning and answers to their life. The Lord longs to be gracious to you through His Son, and by His grace teach you to

turn away from the world. But will we look to him everyday, and in everything, or will we look away and look for other options?

2nd – Lot’s wife’s look was a look back. (Verses 24-26)

In verse 24 it says that the Lord rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the Lord out of the heavens. But it was at that very time that Lot’s wife chose to disobey the express command of the angel, and she “looked back behind Lot” and she became a pillar of salt. Now here is a study in contrasts, the very difference between a true Christian and a person who has deceived themselves. There is no mention that Lot, who apparently was in front of his wife, ever looked back, even though his wife experienced this judgment. In the midst of this crisis of obedience, he passed the test, whereas his wife did not. She would dare to disobey in the midst of the Lord’s showing her and the rest of her family this great mercy.

The difference between a true Christian and a person who is just simply going along with the faith of others around them is this. The true Christian will learn the way of repentance by responding to the grace and mercy that is being shown them, by repeated attempts to obey the Lord’s Word. He may fail at many points and need to be taught the lessons of obedience more than once, as we shall see with Abraham in chapter 20, but in the crucial times when the Lord is bringing His judgments, there is a response of obedience. This was one of those crucial times for Lot and his wife. Lot was willing to try to compromise his obedience as we saw, and yet the Lord will not let him ultimately do that either. But here, he will not look back to Sodom.

His wife, who appeared to have gone along with him, happy to escape the judgment, must still have had some covetous longing in her heart to be back in Sodom. She still wanted to have things the way that she used to have them, with her friends and family there. She had never learned, nor did she want to learn, the destructive and damning nature of sin. And so now, when the very evidence of it is presented, and the judgment is falling upon that wicked city, she still looks back. This is a case where the look says it all to God. That look back, brought the immediate judgment of God.

She was thankful that she had escaped God’s judgment upon Sodom, but she was not concerned about escaping from her own sins. She was probably questioning whether God was even right to destroy the city. She probably had a covetous desire to retain the things that she had grown to love there, many of which left God out, or were downright worldly and sensual. She didn’t think the word of the angel, which was the word of God to her, to be of great enough weight to obey it. And in that one look, she despised God. And I believe that for that one look that she lost her soul.

There is a day coming when Christ shall return, and in Luke 17: 28-36 it says that people in that day will be in danger of losing their souls, on short notice as well. Talking first about that fact that it will be like the days of Noah in the day that He comes, the Lord Jesus also mentions Lot and his wife. He says, “Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all.

Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. In that day, he who is on the housetop, and his goods are in the house, let him not come down to take them away. And likewise the one who is in the field, let him not turn back. “Remember Lot’s wife.” “Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.” This is exactly what Lot’s wife was saying with that one look. “I want to save my life in Sodom, I don’t want to lose what I had there. It was a fatal mistake, an eternally fatal mistake I believe.

There were two in the plain that day, who were husband and wife, who were fleeing from the judgment. And one was taken and the other left. One lived and would live forever because he did not look back. The other died and she became a monument to God’s everlasting justice. And Jesus says also in Luke 9: 61, 62 , when someone came and said to Him, “Lord I will follow You,

but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house.” “But Jesus said to him, ‘No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.’ There are earthly loves, of people and things that seem to be to many people more important than knowing and walking with God in faith and repentance. But it will be proved in a coming day what the priority was in God’s eyes. He can tell from our eyes, where we look and what is behind that look, whether we love Him more than the world; whether we love him more than the earthly relationships. Do not look back to the Sodom of this world, dear believer, when the crisis of obedience comes for you. Believe that God has better, much better things for you in the New Heavens and New Earth.

Peter talks about it in 1st Peter 3: 10 -13 where he says, “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”

This is what is coming beloved brethren. Stand fast, so that you do not lose the reward of your faith. All the good things of this earth will pale in comparison to what Christ will give to His people. He has gone to prepare a place for us. Set your mind on things above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. The world is crucified to you and you to the world if you belong to Jesus Christ.

3rd – Let’s look at Abraham’s look. His was a look toward Sodom. (Verses 27-29)

It says, “And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the Lord. Then he looked toward Sodom.” He said to himself, “So this is what God’s judgment upon sin looks like.” “This is the place to where sinners are brought for their wickedness, being consumed by fire.” This is the best thing to do in regard to the judgment of Almighty God which is coming upon the whole earth. We do well to look toward that place and that day. We need to “get up early” in the morning of our lives to see that this is where sin brings us; to God’s awful judgment.

It says further in verse 28, “he looked toward all the land of the plain (the place which before had looked like the garden of the Lord); and he saw...” It is good for us when we look that we can truly see; see with spiritual eyes. “He saw, and behold the smoke of the land which went up like the smoke of a furnace.” Remember, beloved brethren, that all that is green and lush and beautiful and pleasant now can be turned into a furnace in a moment in the Lord’s judgment and will be some day when he returns. And in the book of the Revelation chapter 14, verse 11, concerning God’s judgment upon false Babylon and those who believe a false gospel, “The smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever.”

Verse 29 of our text says, “And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in which Lot had dwelt.” God remembered Abraham because He knew what direction Abraham was looking. Abraham was looking toward what God would do in mercy and judgment for Him in the promise of Christ. And not only for him, but also for Lot, his nephew whom he loved. When Abraham looked toward Sodom he was looking at what God had done in judgment. And he was remembering what He would yet do for him in mercy and grace. Abraham was looking toward Him, not only to be saved, but also to be kept, until and beyond the day of judgment; until the time would come for the meek to inherit the earth, and for the pure in heart to see God. For this he was eternally thankful. Are you?

