

Don't Look Back

This week's lesson started with a thought last Sabbath. For some reason, the thought of "don't look back" came to mind. As you all know, I look at definitions and sources of words and phrases. "Don't look back" is an idiom with several meanings, none of which are complicated. Many concepts are associated with this phrase, most are motivational. "Don't look back" can focus on the future rather than past mistakes, embracing new opportunities, pursuing new goals, and direction for personal development. All of these themes can be found throughout scripture. God does not want us to drag around our "old luggage," He wants us moving forward.

2 Peter 3:17-18- "Therefore, beloved, since you know this in advance, be on guard against *such practices*, lest you be led astray with the error of the lawless ones, *and* you fall from your own steadfastness: Rather, be growing in *the* grace and *the* knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and into *the* day of eternity. Amen."

Is looking back a terrible thing? A simple reflection on lessons learned is quite healthy, so long as we do not allow the enemy to rub our faces in our mistakes, Christ died to forgive us of our sins and only the enemy will remind us of them. But looking back in an unhealthy manner, dwelling in the past can have consequences. Lot's wife is an example.

The story of Lot can be found in Genesis 11-19. Lot was the son of Haran (Abraham's brother). Lot traveled with Abraham from Ur to Canaan. Both Abraham and Lot's families grew in prosperity, and they were faithful unto God's promises. We know the story of Lot and how he hid the two angels from the perverted crowd outside his house in Sodom. Lot even offered his two virgin daughters as an appeasement to satisfy the crowd. This was averted by the two angels striking the crowd with blindness (**Genesis 19:11**). Lot was told to flee the city with his wife and two daughters as God was going to destroy the city.

Genesis 19:12-14- "And the men said to Lot, "Have you anyone here besides yourself? Bring your sons-in-law, and your sons, and your daughters, and anyone *else you have* in the city, bring *them* out of this place, For we will destroy this place, because great is the cry of it before the face of the LORD. And the LORD has sent us to destroy it." And Lot went out and spoke with his sons-in-law, who

married his daughters, and said, “Get up and get out of this place, for the LORD will destroy this city.” But to his sons-in-law he seemed to be jesting.”

They were told to flee and not look back.

Genesis 19:16-17- “But he lingered, so the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hands of his two daughters (the LORD being merciful to him), and they brought him forth and set him outside the city. And it came to pass, when they brought him outside, *they* said, “Escape for your life! **Do not look behind you**, nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountain lest you be consumed.”

God began destroying the city by raining down fire and brimstone. Lot’s wife disobeyed their instructions and looked back as they escaped. She was immediately turned into a pillar of salt.

Genesis 19:24-26- “Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire, from the LORD out of heaven. And He overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the

ground. But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.”

The Bible does not mention her name but knowing that she was Lot’s wife and the niece of Abraham, it can be surmised she was enlightened to God’s laws and way of life. So, what was it that caused her to hesitate and look back? We know she had other daughters from reading Genesis 19:12-14.

Leaving behind loved ones once learning God’s truth can be the hardest hurdle to overcome. People have the tendency to want to “save” other family members and share God’s truth, to get them on the Ark. We need to remember, it is God who does the calling, it is not up to us (John 6:44,65). They may not be called just yet or will be in the Second Resurrection. We cannot hesitate in moving forward with God’s truth once revealed to us.

Matthew 10:37-39- “The one who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and the one who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And the one who does not take up his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. The one who has found his life shall lose it; and the one who has lost his life for My sake shall find it.”

It certainly goes against our human nature and emotions to understand God wants us to love Him more than the members of our own families. If people cannot get past giving up Christmas and Easter, how can they begin to cope with loving an unseen God more than their own family? Imagine the faith of the disciples who dropped what they were doing and picked up and followed Jesus Christ? But leaving family members to do God's will is probably the most common hardship new believers face.

Perhaps this is why He reminds us to "remember Lot's wife."

Lot's wife's focus was on the world, possibly possessions, and family she was leaving behind. Anyone struggling with leaving family behind can fully understand if this were her thinking at the time. But we just read, God wants us to love Him more than anyone or anything. Her turning into a pillar of salt served as a blunt reminder of the consequences of being more attached to the things of the world than to the love of God.

1 John 2:15-17- "Do not love the world, nor the things *that are* in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him because everything that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pretentious

pride of physical life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world and its lust is passing away, but the one who does the will of God abides forever.”

His lack of faith, *even* from the angels warning them in person, led to her uncertainty and her death. Can we see any of our behavior in her actions? The doubts, the hesitations, lack of faith, or even disobedience? Even if we are “partially” obedient, God is no respecter of persons. “Partial” fails to meet His standard of our complete love, trust, and obedience to His instructions. Her turning into a pillar of salt is a stern warning against us returning to sin after we have been delivered.

John 8:10-11- “And when Jesus lifted Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, “Woman, where are your accusers? Did anyone condemn you?” And she said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said to her, “Neither do I condemn you. Go, and sin no more.”

As we read in 1 John 2, we are commanded not to love the world, nor the things of the world. Holding on to the stuff we should not be dragging with us, will halt any forward growth and progress. God called us out from the world and wants all of us.

2 Corinthians 6:17- “Therefore, come out from the midst of them and be separate,” says *the* Lord, “and touch not *the* unclean, and I will receive you;”

Lot and his wife and daughters were being called out to a place of safety. They were given a way out. Much like today, the temptation, distractions, and doubts we face can cause us to ignore the way God gives us to escape. Temptation is not sin, but it can become sin if we yield to it. Hesitation shows an underlying uncertainty that places earthly ties over God’s Divine instructions. God wants us to move forward.

Looking back reveals a heart that is still bound to the former things in life. Relationships, family members, possessions, and old traditions can hold us back from ever knowing the full joy of living God’s way of life. As far as family members, we must release them and trust God that He will care for them, whether they receive His truth now or we get to teach them after the Second Resurrection. Our mission at hand is to make the First Resurrection. Jesus Himself warns us of looking back in Luke 17.

Luke 17:30-33- “This is how it shall be on the day that the Son of man is revealed. On that day, let not the one who is on the housetop, and his goods in the house,

come down to take them away; and likewise, let not the one who is in the field return to the things behind. **Remember Lot's wife.** Whoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.”

This is something we could face in the future. When it is time to move, God means it. Don't look back, move! Lot's wife had life ahead of her and death behind. She chose the wrong direction for whatever reason. We who have been baptized have no reverse. We have made our decision and the direction we are headed. There is no looking back.

Luke 9:62- “But Jesus said to him, “No one who sets his hand to the plow, and looks back at the things behind, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

The example left by Lot's wife serves as an example of the senselessness of holding on to what God has condemned and said will “pass away” (1 John 2:17). Our eyes have been opened, and a great truth has been revealed to us.

Psalms 119:18- “Open my eyes, so that I may behold wondrous things out of Your law.”

Matthew 11:25-27- “At that time Jesus answered and said, “I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent, and have revealed them to babes. Yes, Father, for it was well pleasing in Your sight *to do* this. All things were delivered to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; neither does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son personally chooses to reveal *Him*.”

Matthew 13:11-12- “And He answered *and* said to them, “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has *understanding*, to him more shall be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have *understanding*, even what he has shall be taken away from him.”

Many themes can be associated with the example of Lot’s wife. We are to be obedient, loving God first and no longer being attached to the things of the world. We must move past temptations and corrupt influences.

Hebrews 12:1- “Therefore, *since* we are surrounded by such a great throng of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that so easily entraps *us*; *and* let us run the race set before us with endurance,”

God has given us many examples of consequences for disobedience in scripture.

Leviticus 10:1-2- “And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, and put incense on it, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which He had commanded them not to do. And there went out fire from the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.”

2 Samuel 6:6-7- “And when they came to Nachon’s threshing floor, Uzzah reached out to the ark of God and took hold of it; for the oxen upset *it*. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah. And God struck him there for the error. And he died there by the ark of God.”

Even in the New Testament, God’s judgment was swift for disobedience. In this case, Ananias and Sapphira fell dead for lying to God (**Acts 5:2-9**). We have the blessings of Christ Jesus and His grace and mercy, but trials and judgments still come to those who profess to belong to God and *do not walk in obedience*. Some fail to see their own disobedience in their outwardly “Christian” conduct within the church. Again, God is no respecter of persons. He knows the heart's true intentions. We who have been baptized cannot look back. We must forget the things we leave behind and press forward to the things ahead.

Philippians 3:12-14- “Not as though I have already received or have already been perfected; but I am striving, so that I may also lay hold on that for which I also was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not count myself as having attained; but *this* one thing *I do*— forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth to the things that are ahead, I press toward *the* goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

“If Cinderella went to pick up her shoe; she would not have become a princess.”
God’s message is clear. Our destination is assured by the promises of God. We *must do our part* with steadfast dedication and loving obedience. If we keep looking back, we will miss what is in front of us. Amen.