

Remember Lot's Wife

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[0 : 00] Among the many words and concepts that this pandemic has emphasized as very much being in vogue in 2020, well, one of the words anyway that we're hearing so often is the word normal, new normal or old normal.

Of course, you can't define what normal is. It's impossible or very, very difficult anyway. I remember many years ago when I was in my late teens as a student in Edinburgh, I had a friend who was a medical student, and he told me that one of the test questions that he was given as a student was to define the word normal.

What is normal? Because the definition of normal isn't that straightforward. But in the current pandemic, there's really a longing for normality, for some kind of normality to return.

And of course, on the one hand, there's a lot of good in that. There's the good of a return to a person-to-person fellowship in the church when we can all come back together, as it were, to join in worship one with another, even in this building.

We look forward to that return of that normal. Or we can think of the old normal, as it were, when families could get together and we thought nothing of visiting a friend or a parent.

[1 : 27] That old normal we look forward to our return to. That's, of course, changed in all our social distancing. The normality that we enjoy before all these restrictions, the normality of steady employment, job security, freedom to travel, whether in our own country or between regions, even going abroad.

A return to that kind of normality, we have to say, is a correct response. But there's an old normal. There's an old normal that we do have to flee from.

The sins that we're so prone to fall into. The temptations that we succumb to so easily. The neglect of God's Word.

The neglect of God's church. The lack of true spirituality that we were so easily sucked into. Into a world that is no desire to honor and glorify God.

And so we've been given this opportunity to look to our priorities and to realize what truly matters in the life of faith. The life of honoring and glorifying God.

[2 : 38] And this pandemic, because we believe and know that it's under God's sovereign permission that all these things have happened. Certainly has brought us to see that we can't return to the old normal that included a sort of a worldly focus on material things and material values.

That old normal that didn't seek first the kingdom of God. That old normal that we're put aside all the important aspects of living for God.

Things such as our discipline of prayer. Our discipline of reading God's Word. Even loving God and loving our neighbor. And when we look to our hearts, look to ourselves, we have to admit, we have to confess, that the old normal that we were so prone to, it was like a sleepwalking.

A sleepwalking through that old normal. And God stopped us in our tracks. And told us not to look back. Not to look back for the so-called good old days.

And He's calling us to look forward. To look forward with that new horizon. To get our priorities right. To reevaluate our priorities in light of God's Word.

[3 : 58] Because we're to live in the kingdom of God. We're to live with kingdom values. We're to live with God's rule in our hearts. We're to have God's reign over you.

To be willing subjects of the Lord of Lords and King of Kings, rather than being a willing subject in a world that is so contrasting to the one true God.

So we can't look back to these times and values that are contrary to God's Word. And not look back with any kind of longing. But to move forward in faith.

To move forward in trust and hope in the one true Savior. And use this opportunity to have that renewed zeal for the Gospel.

To use this opportunity to be strengthened in your faith. To have that renewed faith in our Lord. A renewed hope in His Word. And a renewed love for one another.

[5 : 02] And it's that theme of not looking back, but looking forward. That's what we're going to spend a little time on this morning. As we said at the beginning, we're going to return back to this passage in Luke's Gospel.

As we looked at last Lord's Day morning. Remember, those of you who were here last Lord's Day morning, we were looking at the parable that Jesus taught about the persistent widow.

The woman who sought justice from an unjust judge. And because of her continual clamor for justice, the unjust judge gave in and gave that woman what she asked for.

And we noticed that parable that spoke of God and His great mercy towards His people. Because if an unjust judge could give to a poor widow of heart's desire, how much more will a righteous, holy God give what His people are crying for?

That teaching that we were reminded of, that teaching that tells us to be persistent in prayer, to pray without ceasing, and to do it in the light of the return of the Lord Jesus.

[6 : 12] Jesus comes as the righteous judge to dispense righteous justice for all. And so we've been reminded to be praying people.

Reminded, even as we were reminded even last week, in the focus on our National Day of Prayer, to be those who call upon God for His mercy. We pray because we know that God is a prayer hearing and prayer answering God.

God wants you to commune with Him. Because these days are evil. And so we pray through these days, and pray that the Lord will have mercy upon us. That in wrath, God would remember mercy.

And so we're going to continue with that theme this morning, this theme of judgment. Judgment given with the warning that we find in the passage, to remember Lot's wife.

And if you might be thinking, well, isn't this rather a, maybe even a depressing way to begin? Well, it's the time of year that so many are now latching on to in relation to Christmas and the advent of Jesus, the blessing of this time of year.

[7 : 18] If you're thinking, well, somehow this isn't quite connecting with this time of year. Well, we have every reason to turn to this passage. In fact, there is a connection, a connection with the Lord Jesus, as we find in this passage.

There's a connection with Jesus' reason, the reason for Jesus coming to earth and for Jesus in His return to earth. Because there's warnings given in this passage to reflect on, to consider our priorities in looking to the Lord Jesus and focusing on Him, putting Him first, trusting in Him for our salvation.

And I think if I've said before recently, I can say it again, just like a good medicine, we have to have a godly realism in our lives.

It can be sometimes bitter to taste, but it's necessary for our spiritual health. So, let's get our bearings then here in the passage.

Jesus is nearing the end of His ministry, the end of His three-year ministry. He's come from heaven to earth to save His people, to save His people from our sins.

[8 : 28] He's come to bring in the kingdom of God. He's come to bring in His reign, His rule over the hearts of His people. He's come to bring in His power. It's not an earthly power.

It's not a power that rulers have, earthly rulers have. It's a power that comes from the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's not something that can be seen outwardly. It's from within. And Jesus says, He's telling the people there, as He's telling us, He's saying, the kingdom of God is present already.

It's inward rather than outward. It's God's rule in the heart of His people. It's not like an outward rule in a great palace of a king. And so He tells, He continues to tell of the kingdom of God.

He's saying, the kingdom, yes, is yet to be realized when He returns again in His glory. But until that time, until Jesus returns, life will continue. People are going to carry on doing the normal things that, well, that really characterize the human race.

[9 : 35] Now, of course, as we read there in the passage, the kind of things that are happening will happen before Jesus returns. These things will continue. But we can't forget that God has promised that Jesus is returning in judgment.

As we're told in the passage there, God's judgment will come as in the days of Noah, as in the days of Lot, as we read in the book of Genesis.

And we're finding here examples. Examples that are both an encouragement and a warning. In Noah's day, we read in Genesis, Noah was saved.

His heart was right with God. But there were those who perished in the flood because they had no time for God. In Lot's day, that you read off in Genesis 19, when you're home, you can read the passage.

In Lot's day, Lot was saved because he trusted in God. He trusted in God's promises. So many others perished. And his wife perished because her heart, along with so many others, was still drawn to the world and not drawn to God.

[10:51] And so Jesus is telling us here, he's telling us of that great divide when he returns. He's speaking of those whose hearts are right with God, who are going to leave and who will leave everything for the sake of the Lord Jesus and are saved eternally.

No longing, no nostalgia for the world that is disappearing in judgment. On the other hand, those whose hearts are in the world, who want to go back to the world, who want to retrieve what they think they're losing.

Just as Lot's wife looked back when she was escaping from Sodom, when God poured his judgment on that city, she lost her life.

And Jesus gives this start warning then, remember Lot's wife. And it's this warning that we're hearing again today. Even what this pandemic has brought before us to bring before our hearts to realize what's truly important, what's truly necessary for salvation.

And very much, this pandemic has brought to us to realize the very fragility of life, the very fragility of those things that we placed our trust in beforehand, but to realize what truly is of worth.

[12:13] It's not the box sets. It's not the lives of the so-called celebrities that just seem to be on our media time and time again. It's not even the Christmas that the media loves to declare that somehow been saved.

No, what truly matters is another saving. It's the saving of lives through faith in the Lord Jesus who came from heaven to earth to come to bring salvation for His people.

What truly matters is that salvation, that saving, the saving of lives, coming to the Lord Jesus and saved from the judgment of God to come.

And in the light of that true saving, that's what we're going to do this morning to remember Lot's wife. Well, we ask, of course, and it's taken a long time to reach our first point, but what are we to remember in Lot's wife?

Three things, as we saw in the headings. First of all, we're going to look at this aspect of looking back that's judged. Looking back that's judged.

[13:21] Because God had pronounced judgment on these cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The cities and the people inside the cities had repeatedly disobeyed God.

And God's judgment was imminent. And the nephew of Abraham was a man called Lot. Lot lived in that city of Sodom. Lot lived in the city that God had warned about judgment.

Lot had been commanded to escape from the city with his wife, with his two daughters, with his two sons-in-law. Lot urged his family to leave. The sons-in-law didn't leave.

They thought that Lot was just making things up. But Lot's wife and Lot's two daughters, they did leave and they were commanded by God's messengers, God's angels, don't look back when they were fleeing.

And we read in Genesis 19 that they actually did escape from Sodom and they fled to a little city, a little city called Zor, and it seemed, anyway, when they were in that city, it all seemed well.

[14:32] But then Lot's wife did something in that city. She looked back. She turned her face back towards Sodom just as God was raining down judgment on that city, the judgment of fire.

She looked back and that looking back indicated a longing, a yearning for that place, a place that had once been so much part of her life, the place that was now being destroyed by God.

We'll come back to that aspect of longing in a minute, but just think about the actions of Lot's wife and looking back because God had clearly commanded not to look back.

As the family were fleeing, don't look back to Sodom. And for a while they're obeying that command. But in that little town of Zor, a great sin was committed as a looking back, and for that there's judgment.

You see, God's given us commands to be obeyed. It's commands that we can't just simply dismiss with some kind of a whim, you know, let's just take it or leave it.

[15 : 43] No, the commands that God's given us are for your good and for the glory of God's name. We flout His commands at our peril when we have other gods before God.

We break God's command to have no other gods before Him. The command that calls us to worship God and to worship God alone. And very much at this time of year we're hearing that command before us and that command that we see that's broken so often because we substitute even the remembering of the birth of Christ with the gods of materialism and secularism.

We applaud the so-called saving of Christmas and the decisions that the government's making to ease down lockdown and yet we think nothing of the one true Savior who came to save us.

And aren't we calling on God's judgment even by our own willful disobedience when we disobey His commands? Lot's wife, she turned back when she was commanded not to look back and for her disobedience she was judged.

And Jesus then is calling us to remember her. Don't just think about her but remembering with a view to action, with a view to resolve, to fully obey God's commands, to flee from His judgment, to flee even from our own hearts and our disobedience to His word.

[17 : 24] So we remember Lot's wife. And then secondly as we mentioned just a moment ago as we see the longings of the heart, the longings of the heart revealed.

Why did Lot's wife look back? I mean, the city, Sodom was being punished, punished in God's wrath, the city that had become, and still is, I suppose, a byword for extreme licentious behavior. I mean, she had no place in that city. She had been commanded to flee from that city. But you see, her looking back was much more than just a physical turning of her head and a turning with her eyes.

It was a turning back in her heart. She continued to desire the stench of sin. She continued to desire the ugliness of transgression.

She continued to desire the rottenness of iniquity. She hadn't let go of her desires to return to a life that was contrary to holiness. The longings of her heart remained in Sodom.

[18 : 34] And for that, she would share in the judgment that God was pouring down in that city and become that pillar of salt that we read of in Genesis 19. And, you know, as we do anticipate a freedom from the restrictions even of the lockdown, as we look forward, we pray to next year when that will happen.

But at the same time, let's pray that we don't have the longings for a return to all that we once held dear that was contrary to God's word and God's commands.

Because, in many ways, the easing of the lockdown is going to be a test for every Christian, every believer. It's going to test your faith. It's going to test your heart. It's going to test where your true belongings truly are, your true longings.

truly are. Are you going to look forward? Are you looking forward to the new normal in order to have a renewed love for the Lord Jesus?

Are you looking forward to this new normal that we pray will come and come soon so that you'll have a renewed zeal to serve our Lord and Savior?

[19 : 46] Or are we just going to abuse the freedoms that we're going to be given? Are we just going to abuse these freedoms to make them into a form of license that relegates the Lord Jesus to some kind of footnote in your life?

What is your response then when we come to that new normal? Will it be a life lost or a life gained as we see in, as Jesus tells us in verse 33, in response to what he's saying about our priorities in life?

Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it. You see, even in this passage, there's hope and encouragement because in remembering Lot's wife, at the same time we're remembering those who were saved from God's judgment, those who did escape from the judgment against Sodom, those who didn't look back.

Lot's two daughters, they didn't look back, they did what they were commanded to do. They had no longing for that city that yes, they once lived in and once loved, but were being delivered from in God's grace.

And so Jesus, when he's seeing even the very breath of remembering Lot's wife, he's telling of the eternal safety of the person who loses his life and in losing it, preserves it for all eternity.

[21 : 22] You see, Lot's wife, she tried to keep her life, only to lose it, in contrast to those who lost their life's passion for sin in order to preserve their life.

It's that dying to sin, that dying to self that gives true life to those who are truly alive in the Lord Jesus. And there's much, even at this present time, there's so much that we're being called to lose in order to gain.

You've been you who know the Lord Jesus as your Savior, you've been called to serve Him. And in being called to serve Him, you've been called to die. As someone once famously wrote, when Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.

What's that dying? It's dying to self, it's dying to sin, it's dying each day to all the longings, the sinful longings that still lurk in our hearts. Even that looking back, looking back to the forbidden fruit that's still calling you.

But I plead with you as I speak to myself, give up these unrighteous longings and gain what truly counts in that eternal perspective of salvation.

[22 : 43] Some months ago when Andy was doing the children's address on the martyred missionaries who went to Ecuador, the famous words of Jim Elliot that really have resonated through the decades.

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

Don't be a fool and keep what you just don't want to give up. Don't be a fool and refuse to gain that which is life eternal.

You can't lose that life when your life is hidden in Christ. But you'll lose that which is most precious if you refuse to heed the call that's given to you in God's word.

When you refuse that call to look to Jesus, to look to him and away from sin. I pray that even at this time, this time of yes, continued national crisis, that it gives you, brings to you that new direction in your life.

[23 : 55] If you don't yet know the Lord Jesus as your saviour, look to him. Look away from all that draws you away from Christ. Look to him. And in looking to him, don't look back.

Don't look back to those things that so have become part of a life without Christ. Look to the Lord Jesus. Look to him in faith.

And don't look back on all that would destroy your life eternally. Look to Jesus and remember Lot's wife. Amen.

And let us pray. Lord, we give you thanks for your word, your word of warning, your word of encouragement. May it be that our hearts truly are looking to you and looking away from all that is contrary to your holiness, your word, your salvation.

Help us, Lord, to look with our eyes of faith, to look to Jesus and to follow him all our days. Hear us, Lord, as we continue in worship before you now.

[25 : 03] We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.