

“Sow the wind and reap the whirlwind”

Genesis 19:30-36

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Dr. Jerry Nelson

If you were to characterize the following people in one word, what would it be?

Christopher Reeve “courage”

Michael Jordan

Billy Graham

Mother Theresa

Colin Powell

O.J. Simpson

Michael Milken

Michael Jordan “Athlete”

Billy Graham “Evangelist”

Mother Theresa “Compassion”

Colin Powell “Leader”

O.J. Simpson “acquitted murderer”

Michael Milken “fraud”

What about YOU?

If you had the opportunity to write your own epitaph – one or two words that, you hope, would characterize your life when it is over – what would that one word be?

When you think of the following people, by what description are they most remembered?

Moses “deliverer”

David “psalmist”

Judas “betrayor”

Plato “philosopher”

Alexander the Great “conqueror”

Spurgeon “preacher”

What about you? What word or words will describe your life?

The Bible is a book about the best news a person could ever hear – the gospel – God reaching down to save his people from the consequences of their sin.

But in this book of very good news there are some very sad stories.

Stories of people who do not respond to the grace of God and whose lives end tragically.

One such story is about the man named Lot.

If we were to characterize his life, if we were to describe his life in one word, as we did others earlier, we would write the word “failure”.

Through nine chapters of the book of Genesis (beginning in chapter 11 and culminating in chapter 19) we hear of this man Lot.

He’s never the principle character in the stories.

Only a couple of times does he even come to the foreground as a major character.

But he’s always there.

Moses, who wrote the book of Genesis, apparently had something very definitely in mind by referring to Lot as often as he did.

And what he has in mind is comparing and contrasting the lives of two men – Abraham and Lot.

The one-word epitaph for Abraham would be “faith”

For Lot, again I say, it would be “failure”.

I’m convinced that Moses tells us about Lot primarily to warn.

To his first readers and to us the warning is “don’t go the way Lot did” and “if you are on the same path as Lot was, get off now before it is too late.”

What you are going to hear and see this morning is the description of a life that began with great promise but ended ignominiously – in utter humiliation – and the challenge is “don’t go there.”

Lot, you remember, was Abraham’s nephew, the man for whom Abraham prayed and who was saved from the destruction of Sodom when God judged that and other cities.

After he escaped with his life, his daughters and little else
Moses tells us the rest of the story.

READ Genesis 19:30-38

One man wrote, “Have you ever noticed how many men in the Bible failed in the second half of life? Our enemy is so cunning that he will wait forty or even fifty years to (spring the) trap.” Joe Aldrich In Farrar p66

The frightening thing about Lot is that he was not an evil man intent on doing evil things but that he was what the world today would call a good man who made choices (choices that seemed so good at the time) but choices that eventually caught up to him.

In fact, from many outward appearances, Lot looked much like many in the church today – a hardworking, conscientious, religious, civic-minded, and prosperous man.

But there were cracks in the foundation of his life that eventually brought him down.

I just recently re-read some of biography of Dr. Bob Pierce, founder of World Vision and later of Samaritan’s Purse.

To much of the world, Dr. Bob was compassion personified.

But when one of his daughters wrote the biography there was also another story to be told.

He was a compassionate man, his heart did break with the things that break the heart of God, but Bob Pierce apparently made some choices along the way that resulted in a tragic end.

Bob was all over the world caring for other people’s families but wasn’t caring for his own.

By the end of his life he was separated from his wife and estranged from his daughters.

His daughter tells of a sad last encounter with this father and husband.

He was nearing death, sick with cancer, staying in a hotel room to which he invited his family to come for a meal.

There amidst stiff, almost formal, conversation they said their final “good-byes”.

Who wants life to end that way?

Who wants life to end the way Lot’s did?

And again I think the warning, especially to men, is check the foundation.

Are you a man of faith on your way to a fruitful future or are you a fraud on your way to eventual failure?

Look briefly at Lot’s life with me.

I said earlier that when we read chapters 11-14 of Genesis we almost wonder why Lot is even mentioned.

He was just there, seemingly incidental to the main story.

Genesis 11:27-31 “Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot...Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot (Lot’s father had died), and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan.”

Terah and his family didn’t go all the way to Canaan but stopped in a city that became known as Haran. But after the father, Terah, died the Lord told Abram to leave Haran and go the land that God would show him.

Genesis 12:4 “So Abram left, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him.”

Everywhere Abram went Lot went also.

Lot was there when Abram told of God’s promise and command.

Lot was there when the family traveled to the new land.

Lot was there when Abram built an altar in the new land and worshiped the Lord.

Lot was there when Abram made the big mistake in Egypt and God had to rescue him.

(“So Abram went up from Egypt...and Lot
 went with him.”)
 and Lot was there when Abram again
 worshiped the Lord.

Knowing what happened later in Lot’s life, I get the distinct impression that Lot was always around religious things but not personally engaged.

He had enough religion to know what to do in the worship
 services that Abram led and to have certain standards,
 apparently higher standards than the world around him, BUT
 apparently not enough religion to alter Lot at the core of his life.

It was as if he was clothed with a modicum of religion but
 it had not changed him from the inside out. He was
religious but without conviction.

By chapter 13 Lot’s true colors begin to show.
 He loved the world and the things of the world.

By this time Lot, having made the same investments his uncle Abram made, had become a fairly wealthy man.

In fact he and Abram had too many cattle to be able to graze the same area.

Abram gave Lot the choice of which land he wanted and this is what the Scripture says Lot did:

Genesis 13:10-11 From the mountain, “Lot looked up and saw the
 whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the
 Lord, like the land of Egypt, toward Zoar. (This was before the Lord
 destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah). So Lot chose for himself the
 whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east... Lot lived
 among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. Now
 the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the
 Lord.”

The plain looked like the Garden of Eden, never mind the cesspools of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Poor Lot. The material things of life were so alluring that, regardless of the company he would have to keep, he would choose Sodom.

He probably thought he wanted to live near enough to Sodom to enjoy its advantages but not so close as to get caught up in its life.

And that choice would have tragic consequences for his family in years to come.

The stairs downward in Lot's life had small steps.

In 13:10 we see that "**Lot looked**" toward Sodom.

In 13:12 we see that he "**pitched his tents**" near Sodom.

In 14:12 we will see that he "**was living in Sodom**", in his own "house" (19:3) – He had settled in.

And in 19:1 we will see that he "**was sitting in the gateway of the city**" as a leader in the city.

Preacher F. B. Meyer wrote, "Age after age has poured forth its crowds of young hearts, to stand upon an exceeding high mountain, whilst before them have been spread all the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them; the tempter whispering, that for one act of obeisance all shall be theirs. In assurance and self-confidence; eager to do the very best for themselves; prepared to consider the moralities only in as far as these did not interfere with what they held to be the main chance of life" they too have chosen to pitch their tents near Sodom. (quoted in Boice 482)

One man who put the world above Christ in his priorities still brought his family to church but his heart was not in it – his attendance was perfunctory.

His interest in money led him to cultivate his deepest relationships with non-Christians.

Most of his income went to maintain his high standard of living and the rest went to maintaining his daughters at prestigious but godless schools.

Understandably the girls rejected Christianity.

One Christian man who knew them said to his wife, "Isn't it sad what happened to those girls?"

His wife responded, "What do you expect when you pitch your tents near Sodom?" (Boice p479)

How many men, who have hung around religion from birth but unaffected by it, have begun to make the choices of life with no regard for the kingdom of God?

How many men have put their jobs ahead of their families, their social advancement ahead of their involvement with God's people, or their recreation ahead of service for God's kingdom?

When finally God had "had it" with the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah and the other cities of the plain, in keeping with his promise to Abraham, God sent angels to warn Lot to leave before the judgment of God obliterated those cities.

When the angels said it was absolutely time to leave, the Bible says Lot "hesitated".

And when the angels told him to flee to the mountains, Lot tried to negotiate a different destination.

He pleaded with them to let him go to a small town called Zoar instead.

There, Lot could retain something of the life he had become so dependent on.

Lot was so tied to material possessions that he was willing to risk his life and the lives of his family members to hang on to some of the past.

He loved the world and the things of the world.

And as the story progresses we see a third thing about this man – he was **weak of character**.

When the men of the city gathered around Lot's house and demanded to have sex with the two guests, Lot did the unspeakable – he offered his two virgin daughters to the men of the city to do with them as they pleased.

Lot was so weak of character that he was willing to make immoral compromises.

It isn't that he had no sense of morality – obviously he did.

Peter tells us that he was in turmoil about the lifestyle of the men of that city but when push came to shove (literally) Lot didn't know what to do but come up with a crazy and equally immoral idea – weak of character.

The angels get Lot out of his immediate predicament by pulling him inside and blinding all the men at the door.

When the angels told Lot to get to his entire family and warn them to leave the city, Lot did so.

But we see his weakness again when we see the response of his sons-in-law.

They thought he was joking.

When it came to spiritual things, apparently Lot had no credibility – weak of character.

Lot was apparently **religious without conviction**.

He also apparently **loved the world and the things of the world**.

He was also **weak of character**.

And lastly he **didn't trust God**.

God, through the angels said specifically, "Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!"

But when Lot argued in favor of going instead to the small town of Zoar, this is what Lot said: Genesis 19:19-20 "I can't flee to the mountains; this disaster will overtake me and I'll die... Let me flee to it (Zoar)...then my life will be spared."

In open contradiction of the promise and command of God, Lot says in essence, I can't trust you God, I still need to be in control of my life so I can have my life **and** my things.

Lot was a man who was religious without conviction, who loved the things of the world more than obedience to God, who was weak of character and who didn't trust God.

Where did it get him?

Nobody respected him.

The townspeople didn't – in spite of how long he had lived in their midst, in spite of being a leader in the city, when the chips were down, they called him a judgmental outsider.

His sons-in-law didn't – they laughed at him.

And what about his wife?

His wife had learned so well from Lot's example that she couldn't turn her back on the past – she was so captivated by the things of the world that she couldn't let it go and so she looked back and died instantly becoming a pillar of salt.

Those **things** were more important to her than life itself.

And her disobedience meant her death.

Lot's credibility with his own wife was so low that he couldn't influence even her to do the right thing.

And what about his daughters?

They had married men of Sodom.

And now at the end of the story the daughters, following their father's example, have so little faith in God and are so willing to compromise morality that they plot and act immorally to keep what little they have.

God had taken Lot and his family out of Sodom but Sodom hadn't been taken out of them.

Lot had started with such promise.

Look at him now!

Widowed by sin, fearful, living in a cave, drunk and the father of his own grandchildren.

And that was not the end of it all.

Those children/grandchildren would become nations of people who, 500 years later, would be prime enemies of the people of Israel.

What Lot started wouldn't end for centuries.

How could a life that began with such promise end in such failure?

I don't want to be simplistic in answering that but I do think of three things that would have made the difference in Lot's life and family.

They are perspective, priorities and perseverance.

It is noteworthy that Abraham and Lot had nearly the same experiences early in life.

They both knew of God's calling to leave Ur and later to leave Haran.

They both experienced God's leading to Canaan.

They both experienced God's protection of them when Abram failed so miserably in Egypt.

They both experienced God's blessing on their lives, materially.

They both saw God deliver Lot from the kings of the east.

Slowly but certainly **Abraham's** perspective was altered.

He became a man who increasingly understood that God's will must be the goal of his life.

He could not just live for the present, he had to make his decisions based on a plan that God had, that could take years to develop.

He had to believe that a future, he couldn't see, was worth the investment of his life now.

His perspective became God's kingdom not just his own immediate satisfaction.

Lot never gained that perspective – he lived for the immediate, what he could see, what he could get.

When Abraham's perspective changed, his priorities changed.

Obedience to God and fellowship with God became most important.

He certainly made mistakes, his faith faltered at times, but his priorities were settled.

Lot's priorities were self-preservation and material possessions and he gave himself to those things.

Where he lived, how he invested his time, what he modeled for his family said exactly what were priorities for him.

Lot needed his perspective and priorities changed.

How could that happen?

There is only one way – Getting into the presence of God.

Abraham kept encountering God and it changed him.

Our perspective and priorities are changed most when we persevere in meeting with God in his Word.

Steven Farrar said Christian men in America are “Spiritually anorexic” – they have an aversion to soul food.

Over 50% of Christian men, active in their churches, are not reading their Bibles with any consistency – not drawing spiritual energy from the source.

When we persevere in meeting with God in his Word it does two things:

1. Reminds us of **who** is in control of life – it re-calibrates our perspective.
2. Reminds us of **what** is true truth: Samuel Johnson said, “The supreme end of education is expert discernment in all things – the power to tell the good from the bad, the genuine from the counterfeit, and **to prefer** the good and the genuine to the bad and the counterfeit.”

Reading God’s word shapes our values and sets our priorities.
(Farrar p112)

Ending life as Lot did is an all-too common occurrence.

It may not end in incest but, for too many, what began with great promise ends in failure – a life given to the wrong things.

But the failure doesn’t come all the sudden – it comes slowly by degree as the cracks in the foundation widen until finally the house crumbles.

But the grace of God makes it possible to stop the deterioration – to end life in faith instead of failure.

Men, especially to you I say, recommit yourself to God and his Word. Let his Word set your perspective and shape your priorities.

Don’t go where Lot went.