

A SOLEMN WARNING

"Remember Lot's wife." Luke 17:32.

In one of His sermons in which He was speaking of the separations and sacrifices which Christianity demands, Christ suddenly uttered this solemn warning, "Remember Lot's wife." Thus our Saviour singled out Lot's wife as one whose fate is to be studied and remembered by every Christian.

As a background for this sermon, let us review a little of the history of Lot and his family. Lot was the nephew of Abraham. Together they had left Ur of the Chaldees to journey into the unknown. Abraham believed that he was making this adventure at the call of God. Lot had caught something of the contagion of his faith and enthusiasm and had accompanied him. Both Abraham and Lot prospered materially. Their immense prosperity brought on strife between their herdsmen, and they decided that it would be wise for them to separate. I can visualize them taking their stand on a promontory which gave them a lookout on all the surrounding country. With characteristic generosity, Abraham gave Lot the first choice.

Lot began to look in different directions. In one direction was a wild rugged country. There the grass was not plentiful, but the herdsmen could find sustenance for their flocks if they kept moving. In another direction was a marvelously beautiful country, the fertile valley of the Jordan. Lot thought, "If I go that way, I will make a lot of money." Then, he remembered that Sodom and Gomorrah, which were as cesspools in a flower garden, were in that direction. As he looked in the other direction, he thought, "If I go this way I will not make so much money, but I will have a better chance at the values that last. I will have a better chance at God. So will my children, and also my wife, who is a bit worldly." That way a better chance at things, this way a better chance at God. It is a choice we have to make and make every day.

Which way did Lot go? He pitched his tent in the direction of Sodom. Evidently he thought that he could take care of himself and keep his family uncontaminated by the wickedness of the cities of the plain. He did not take up his abode in Sodom, neither did he settle close to its wall; but he pitched his tent toward Sodom. There are many people who are not yet in the Sodom of wickedness, but there is a certain set of the sails of their lives in the direction of Sodom. What about you? Are you pitching your tent toward Sodom? Are you inclining more toward the people of Sodom than toward the people of God? If so, take heed lest you become a full-fledged citizen of Sodom.

As Lot was going in a wrong direction we are not surprised that he reached a wrong goal. Neither he nor his wife set out with the intention of moving into Sodom. They only went in that direction. But into Sodom they finally moved. There they prospered in fortune and in fame, and Lot became the mayor of the city. But Lot did not change Sodom; instead, Sodom changed him. That is ever the case. If we do not change our environment for the better, it will change us for the worse.

One day startling news came their way. In a spectacular and dramatic way, they were informed that Sodom was going to be destroyed on account of its wickedness, but Lot and his wife were offered an opportunity to escape. They were given an opportunity to escape and to begin life anew. Instead of accepting this privilege with enthusiasm, they resolved to postpone action as long as possible.

In view of the impending doom of the city, Lot went to speak to his sons-in-law, and said to them, "Up, get you out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city." But Lot had lived too long in Sodom to be taken seriously by them. His sons-in-law thought he was joking. He had lost his influence. What is sadder than the loss of influence? And how easily it happens.

All Lot could persuade to leave the city with him were his wife and two daughters. At last they turned their backs upon Sodom and made a reluctant start for the hills. Those who led them out of the city said, "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed." As they journeyed toward the mountain, Lot's wife traveled with slow and reluctant feet, and found herself lagging behind the group. She decided that she would take one last look in spite of the fact that such had been definitely forbidden. When she turned and looked toward the doomed city, that moment she became a pillar of salt (Genesis 19:26). There she stood a grotesque statue with her face turned back toward Sodom. Thus was she punished by her sin as well as for her sin.

Our Saviour read into this story a message that was at once timely and timeless. He heard those death-frozen lips preaching a sermon that was needed by those who lived in His day, and that is needed no less by us today. So He said to all: "Remember Lot's wife."

I. Remember Her Privileges.

1. She belonged to an excellent family

She was part of the little company of pioneers that left Ur of the Chaldees to create a new epoch in the world's civilization. She was a member of that family to which the world owes more than to any other family that has ever lived. She was kinsfolk with him through whom God was to send to the world its Saviour. She was kin to Abraham.

2. She had a pious husband.

Lot was not all that he might have been, but he was a righteous man whose soul was greatly vexed on account of the filthy conversation of the Sodomites. She knew how that sort of conversation vexed him.

3. She was well instructed.

She had received faithful instruction about God and how to worship Him.

4. She was warned of impending danger.

When the ruin of Sodom was impending, when ghastly death was rattling the latch of her door, God sent His messenger, to warn her and her family. Certainly no one could claim that she did not have a fair chance. She was told with intense earnestness of the doom which threatened the city. She was made to understand that there was also a way of escape, a way that would bring her to safety. She was urgently requested to escape for her life.

5. She had seen the wicked punished.

On various occasions she had seen the judgment of God executed on the wicked.

II. Remember Her Perverseness.

1. She acted under the impulse of feeling.

Her heart was still in Sodom. Her sin was that of presumption. The reason she looked back, thus disregarding the heaven-sent warning, was because she was

still in love with Sodom even though her steps were turned away from it. She especially felt the lure of Sodom and acted accordingly.

2. She acted under the impulse of unbelief.

She did not fully believe the words of the divine messenger. Consequently, her sin was in yielding to the powerful influence of unbelief.

3. She acted under the impulse of an inordinate worldly attachment.

Her sin was but a revelation of the secret love of the world which was in her. The disgusting rottenness of the wicked city was a stench in the nostrils of decency and yet she had fallen in love with it. Her mind was hankering after the things which she had left in Sodom.

4. She acted in contempt of warning.

Her sin, which was an actual violation of a specific command, revealed her true character. It also revealed that she had a divided heart and an undecided will. Her divided heart and undecided will did certain injurious things for her.

- (1) Robbed her of joy.

Since disaster and death were inevitable in Sodom, you would have thought that she would have gone out readily and cheerfully. You would have thought that she would have rushed out with nimble feet, with a song on her lips, and with deep joy in her heart because of her great deliverance. But the joy of what she was leaving more than counteracted the joy in what she was attaining. And being divided in her allegiance there was an utter lack of joy in her heart. Fingering the mud with one hand and reaching for the stars with the other, she found nothing but wretchedness.

Our most wretched hours are generally hours of indecision. To be unable to decide between two things is to experience the pain of missing both. Divided hearts are always unhappy. No half-hearted Christian is ever joyous. To find real joy in living one must be a whole-hearted Christian.

- (2) Retarded her progress.

God's Word says she "looked back from behind him." It does not take one who is undecided long to fall behind. An undecided person is a crippled person. Indecision squanders their powers. It is the person of decision, the one whose heart is united, that makes progress.

- (3) Wrought her doom.

As she went half-heartedly toward the heights her steps became slower and slower. At last she stopped and looked longingly back to the city. There and then she became her own tomb. She stood there a crude piece of statuary, but the face of the statue was turned not toward the heights, but toward the ruined cities of the plain. Her face was thus photographed for our beholding. This crude figure with its face turned toward Sodom gives us a photograph of the woman's soul. Sudden death did not turn her face in the wrong direction. The woman herself did the turning. All death did was to freeze that backward looking face so that all the future centuries might see it.

III. Remember Her Punishment.

1. It was sudden.

To her, it seems, that her punishment was entirely unexpected. She turned to look back and in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, her blood congealed in her veins, and she stood forth a monument of the wrath of an offended God.

2. It was seasonable.

Her punishment was not delayed, but it was inflicted at the very time that her disobedient act was committed. Neither was her punishment prolonged.

3. It was shameful.

Not only did she thus lose her life, but her punishment made her husband a widower and left her daughters without a mother. Her death in the very act of disobedience caused this punishment by which she was made a public and lasting monument of shame to herself.

4. It was merited.

Her punishment was absolutely consistent with the rules of justice, because she had been taught, entreated and warned.

5. It was cautionary.

The punishment which was inflicted upon her was designed to make her a memorial and a warning to all others. She thus became a monument before the world of God's power and faithfulness, and His righteous displeasure with disobedience.

In her punishment one can readily see two things:--

1. A monument to the divine wrath.

2. A beacon to warn the coming generations.

What is included in the warning which is administered here?

- (1) Beware of worldly entanglements.
- (2) Beware of questioning God's commandments.
- (3) Beware of delays.
Delays are dangerous. "Today is the day of salvation."