

## **Lot Lingered** **Genesis 19:12-26**

<sup>12</sup> Then the men said to Lot, "Have you anyone else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone you have in the city, bring them out of the place. <sup>13</sup> For we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the LORD, and the LORD has sent us to destroy it." <sup>14</sup> So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, "Up! Get out of this place, for the LORD is about to destroy the city." But he seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting. <sup>15</sup> As morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Up! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be swept away in the punishment of the city." <sup>16</sup> But he lingered. So the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city. <sup>17</sup> And as they brought them out, one said, "Escape for your life. Do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away." <sup>18</sup> And Lot said to them, "Oh, no, my lords. <sup>19</sup> Behold, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life. But I cannot escape to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me and I die. <sup>20</sup> Behold, this city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one. Let me escape there—is it not a little one?—and my life will be saved!" <sup>21</sup> He said to him, "Behold, I grant you this favor also, that I will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken. <sup>22</sup> Escape there quickly, for I can do nothing till you arrive there." Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar. <sup>23</sup> The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar. <sup>24</sup> Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the LORD out of heaven. <sup>25</sup> And he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. <sup>26</sup> But Lot's wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

### **Scripture Introduction:**

<sup>10</sup> For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica... (2 Timothy 4:10) With these cryptic words, Paul speaks of the depth of his abandonment he experienced in Rome at the end of his life. Surely Demas had no intention of abandoning the Christian life, but in leaving Paul for the comfort and conveniences (this present world) found away from him in Thessalonica he brought disgrace to his Christian life. Like so many of us, he had not counted the cost of walking the Pilgrim's Path.

We might be tempted to be hard on Demas, but that would be a mistake. For his path is well worn. Our passage before us this morning reminds us of how easy it is for us to settle for a "comfortable Christianity" and in turn shipwreck the lives of those around us. Lot lingered because he loved the world much. Demas left Paul because he loved the world much. What about you? What do you love?

### **Introduction:**

There are some things that take life quickly: a bullet, a vicious predator, a deadly virus or a fast moving natural disaster. However, there are things, equally deadly, yet take our life more slowly.

Several years ago, while I was in Belize on a mission trip I had the privilege of visiting the ruins of an ancient Mayan community. Altun Ha was the name of the sacred site. Like most of the ruins found in the Central Americas, Altun Ha was situated in the jungle. To me, the jungle is as fascinating as the ruins themselves. My eyes are quickly drawn away to the vegetation, insects, animals and sounds of the jungle.

On this particular trip I noticed a new tree, one that I had never seen before. This tree had attached itself to another huge tree, which was already several feet in diameter. The new tree was growing on the outside of it and all around it. Its branches were like tentacles wrapping around the host. I asked Miguel, our Mayan Presbyterian guide, who was driving our bus, what

kind of tree it was. He said they called it “the strangling tree” because it wraps itself around other trees and squeezes the life out of the tree on the inside.

The image of that tree has never left me. What a picture of the way sin attaches itself to our lives and slowly squeezes life out.

It is no mistake that our passage this morning is set in a place that could be characterized as a jungle, where all sorts of compromise and dark deeds are practiced. The cities of the plain, including Sodom and Gomorrah, were the Las Vegas of the ancient world. There were no places more exciting from the perspective of the world, but no places darker from the perspective of the Lord.

For our friend Lot, who had left his uncle Abraham for the fertile plains around Sodom, this place proved to be more than he could handle. The apostle Peter will not allow us to suppose that Lot was not a Christian. There he describes him as a “righteous man” in need of rescue from the Lord. However, just because he is called a “righteous man” does not mean that he was a vibrant Christian.

Lot was, like I fear so many of us are today, a Christian caught between the call of God and a world seeking to live without God. If there ever was, here was a man who sought to live between two worlds and serve two masters. Here was a righteous man who just didn’t “walk the walk,” as we say.

“How do you know that, pastor?” you ask. Well, it is very clear in verse sixteen. “But he lingered.” In the face of impending judgment (12-13), he lingered. In the face of losing his family, he lingered. In fact, his future sons-in-law struggled to take the comments about impending judgment seriously from their future father-in-law. Verse 14 tells us they thought he was joking. And let’s not forget who is speaking to him. This is the Angel of the Lord. Therefore, it is before the face of the Lord himself that Lot lingers.

How could Sodom be so precious?

**Main Idea:** For us Lot serves as a **warning beacon** to help us understand both the **causes and the costs of a half-hearted Christian commitment**. And so, as we heed this warning **we are led away from a life of careless indifference**.

### 1) What were the causes of Lot’s careless indifference?

How did Lot get here? How in the world does one act so half-hearted about matters so important? The answer is not so difficult. Like all of us, Lot acted out of self-interest. Sodom had given him much of what he had desired. It had provided him:

- **Prosperity:** It is clear that Lot is living in a well-appointed and well-protected home. The dangerous residents of the city, while desiring to get in are unable to do so.
- **Prestige:** Lot met these guests to the city at the city gate, which means that Lot had become a leading citizen of the city. Lot was one who deliberated on matters of chief importance of the city.
- **Promise:** Lot’s daughters were engaged to be married to, what must surely be, two “sons of the city.” Such family alliances promised much for Lot’s future and the future of this family.

How did Lot get here? It is not so hard for us to understand. His spiritual condition was rooted in the desires of his heart?

“What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions<sup>1</sup> are at war within you?” **James 4:1**

Yet those desires were introducing him to a war for his very soul. James will go on to say that friendship with the world is enmity with God. **Lot is a vivid illustration of one of God’s people who sought to maintain friendship with the world and live by sight and not by faith.**

**Key Idea:** As a result, we learn that a **half-hearted Christian lacks the moral courage to act decisively when the command of the Lord comes.**

## **2) What were the costs of Lot’s careless indifference? (30-38)**

The answer to this question is simple. It almost cost him everything. In fact, consider the costs of his spiritual half-heartedness:

- **Prosperity lost (30-38):** Lot had gone from being a wanderer with his uncle to dwelling near Sodom, to having a luxurious dwelling in Sodom, but now he ends his life in a cave in the wilderness.
- **Prestige lost:** Lot had begun as a shepherd. He then became a city outsider, but rose to become a city leader. But, he ends his life in disgrace. He allows his immoral daughters to take advantage of him while he is in a drunken stupor. How the mighty have fallen!
- **Promise lost (16, 26):** Now there will be no future people for Lot in Sodom. He lost his friends and associations. He lost his sons-in-law. He lost his wife, who was turned to a pillar of salt. Now, there will only be the future of the Ammonites and the Moabites. Through one who partook of the promise, come those who will fight the promise. These will be the tribes who will continually fight the people of Israel.
- **Place lost:** Sodom, along with the cities of the plain is all lost. Why? Isn’t it because Lot had not lived there for the Lord and instead lived their like the nations. Lot’s problem was not simply that he moved to Sodom. The Lord was not against Lot or his family for merely his presence there. Rather, it is that his presence had meant so little to that city. Rather than live distinctly for God and seek to transform the city, he had been transformed by it. As a result, Lot also lost any hope of saving the city.

In truth, everything is lost. Except for Lot himself, all that Lot had wanted/desired is lost.

<sup>20</sup> But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' <sup>21</sup> So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." **Luke 12:20-21**

**Key Idea:** We also learn that the **half-hearted Christian inevitably** loses everything they sought to secure for themselves. **In seeking the world, they are sure to lose it.**

## **3) Warning beacon that leads us to make course corrections**

What course corrections does this passage invite us to make as we consider our lives as Christians? At the very least the passage asks us to consider if I might be among the lingerers? In the words of James, am I a “double-minded” man, wanting both the world and the Lord? What is the danger of pursuing this path?

- **Danger of having an ambiguous profession of Jesus Christ.** There is a great danger for those who presume on the saving grace of their Lord. Prior to the judgment it looks as though Lot, his wife, his daughters and his future sons-in-law all have a commitment to the Lord. However, in the crucible of judgment the realities of their commitments are

ferreted out. The sons-in-law were left and so destroyed. Lot's wife longingly looked back and became a pillar of salt. Lot's daughters sank down and succumbed to gross immorality. Only Lot was rescued.

There is a very real danger in being a half-hearted Christian, a Sunday only Christian, careless Christian, a nominal Christian, a worldly Christian, etc. **There is a very real possibility that you are not a Christian at all.**

It doesn't matter that you have associations in the Church, that you have given lots of money or that you are on a church board etc., when push comes to shove, the half-hearted linger and their hearts are revealed.

The question I have for you this morning is very simple, **“Do you have a living faith and trust in Jesus Christ today? Does your life support that claim? If I asked those who see you everyday would they say the same?”**

Let me get very personal. What do your personal and persistent habits of your life reveal?

- Church attendance
- Submission to God's word
- Family priorities
- Integrity in the workplace and in relationships
- Stewardship of your money and time

**Please don't harden your heart to what this passage is saying to you today. Is it indicting your heart and leading you to make an unambiguous commitment to Christ? Is it leading you away from being a lingerer?**

- **Do not despair of grace**

Nevertheless, this passage does leave us with more than simply a warning. It leaves us with the **perseverance of grace**. God would have us never despair of his saving mercies. After all, he does save Lot. He rescued the righteous man, no matter how much he was tortured in his soul over the wickedness in Sodom. Make no mistake about it. Lot was not a vibrant follower of the Lord, but a follower nonetheless he was. And God rescued him.

And God will rescue you today. Are you like Lot, piled high in compromise and double-mindedness? What about what you did last night, last week, last month or last year? As long as there is today, there is hope. Don't despair of grace. Heed its call and leave the city that has stolen your heart. Leave today and look back to Jesus Christ.

**Conclusion:**

This story like all in this section of Genesis is running commentary on the life of Abraham. Abraham comes in at the end of the story to reflect on Lot's lot (27-29). Of course, it was in answer to Abraham's prayers that Lot was saved, the one righteous man in all of Sodom. Lot, the one who lived by sight or Abraham, the one who continues to live by faith, which are you? That's the question the passage is pushing us to answer?

Do you feel the tentacles of the strangling tree seeking to gain a hold in your life making it more and more impossible for you to live for Christ? Are you ready to definitively, unambiguously and boldly live for Christ today? Which will it be?