

When people read about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, they always have a lot of questions. What was so bad that Sodom and Gomorrah had to be so horrifically destroyed? Were they so much worse than the big cities of today? Why was turning around so bad that Lot's wife was turned to salt? How do the heavens rain down sulfur?

In my experience, it's not difficult to understand why people ask these questions. What's more, it's understanding the reasons for the questions that really gives you the answer to them all, too. Why were these cities destroyed? Were they that bad? What's with the pillar of salt? The real reason for all these questions is judgment. We have trouble understanding God's judgment.

But God's judgment is real, and that's what we really need to understand. What's more, we need to understand that the reason we struggle with that judgment is because it is so very close to us. We see the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah all the time. It's as though we ourselves are Lot and his family, as though we're the ones standing around lazily sighing about the people about to be lost when the messengers of God are right there saying, "What are you doing? I told you what was about to happen here! **What Are You Waiting For? Get Out!**"

Watching Lot and his family is like watching a bad horror film. The angels say, "*Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished.*" Yet Lot hesitates! You know yourself what's about to happen, so you're reading it going, "Come on! Come on! Move it! Do you want to burn up with the rest of the people?"

But, the truth is I can't even joke about it. A number of movies come to mind, of course, but that's just making a funny out of something that isn't funny. This isn't a movie. This is real life. The People's Bible commentary from Northwestern Publishing House says in the Genesis volume: "When the two atomic bombs fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, there were survivors. When Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, there were no survivors, except for the four members of Lot's family. Moses tells us that the Lord 'overthrew' the cities of the plain; the destruction was so

thorough that what was left looked as though the cities had been turned upside down. When on the following morning Abraham stepped out of his tent and looked to the southeast, the entire landscape resembled a huge smoking furnace" (John Jeske, *Genesis*, 2nd ed., p. 170).

I don't want to joke about it because I want you to see what happened. I want you to see the reality of it and the seriousness of it. This isn't just a story. People died. People died and went to hell. Thousands of them. To play it down is a calloused mistake. It would also totally miss the point of it being recorded in the Scriptures in the first place. As Paul said of these ancient accounts, "*These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come*" (1 Corinthians 10:6). This was written to warn *us*.

So when I see Lot hesitating in his house just before the destruction of Sodom, I'm wrong if all I see is Lot. If it were just about Lot, there would be no reason for me to have to read about it, no reason to preserve the account by God's miraculous means throughout the last four thousand years. If I read this and yell at the movie screen in my mind, "What are you waiting for? You heard what the angel said! Get out! Get out!" but all the while I don't see any reason why someone should be yelling that at me, I miss the point. This account was repeated, recorded and preserved so that I would see a parallel and so that I would take warning.

So what are you waiting for? What are you waiting for? It's Advent. We just got done with the season of End Time and Christmas is soon approaching, so we all say that we're waiting for the Christ. And, indeed, we are. But if we're all listening when God gives warning, why haven't we all left selfishness, shallowness and short-sightedness behind so that we could pursue "*his kingdom and his righteousness*"? What are we waiting for?

It's good that we have a season like Advent or a season like Lent. We need these reminders. We need these warnings. God doesn't want to lose us. "*Be careful,*" our Savior warned us. "*Be careful or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation....*" You know what dissipation is, don't you? It's an attitude that's

very common today. It's a party attitude where you don't simply have parties to celebrate something but rather to throw caution to the wind and forget about everything for a while. It's partying to escape from life because you are unhappy with it. Of course, celebrations are good when you are praising God for his good gifts and enjoying them well, but dissipation is staying away from God and living within a self-centered moment.

But our Savior goes on with his warning. *"Be careful or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life...."* Yes, not just throwing caution to the wind but also being too worried about things that only God can take care of. And what happens? *"...and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. ...Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen."*

There's the kind of waiting we need to be doing. We are waiting and watching for an escape. We want out of here! We don't want to be standing around, too concerned about all this stuff that's going to be burned up and miss our chance at ultimate escape. Who wants to be dragged out of town like Lot and his family were? Get out! This place is destined to burn. Get out from sinful entanglements. Our home is in a different, safe place!

Of course, there are worse things than being dragged out of town because *"the LORD was merciful."* There's staying too close to the destruction even after we've been delivered, as was the case with Lot's poor, poor wife. She was swallowed up in it, encased in the salt that now covers that entire land.

That's the warning I want you to take more than any other. If you ask me, hers was the greatest tragedy of them all on that sad and horrible day. She was warned about being connected to that evil place and its horrible deeds. She had seen the evil first hand. She was then dragged out of it and saved because *"the LORD was merciful."* She knew why those cities were being destroyed and that she was being delivered. But she still clung to them. She stayed too close to the flames and was ultimately burned.

Do you not see yourself here? Do you not see why it is good for us to have seasons like Advent and Lent to prepare us to fi-

nally meet our God and our Savior?

We're just like the nephew of Abraham, just like the children of Israel. We have already been saved. We've already been dragged from the eternal death and destruction that is coming to us because of our sins and we have been brought safely to this moment where the messenger of God is now saying, *"Flee for your lives! Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!"*

And we've begged the LORD for mercy in this flight because the journey is too much for us. And the LORD has been merciful. But the LORD's judgment against sin is still coming, and he does not want us caught up in it like Lot's wife was. It is real. It is deserved. Do not long for that which God must destroy in order to deliver us. It needs to be destroyed or else there will never be true justice, because sin will continue to claim victims. Rejoice for the end of it and don't look back,

So, what are you waiting for? Get out!

When we were baptized, we were set apart for God. We were like Lot and Abraham being called out of Haran and being promised the land of Canaan as an inheritance. How eagerly such infant faith follows and what blessing those promises of God to us!

But there have been many bumps along the way as we await the ultimate fulfillment of that promise. Read the story of Lot in Genesis this week and see yourself. Like him, we've been tested and found lacking. Our eyes for earthly treasure can get pretty big, and we can end up trapped, entangled, but the LORD has also always been right there with the rescue.

But the Final Rescue is still coming. Don't let the baubles that have gotten to you before entangle you now. Everything has to be left here, because it will all burn, but don't worry; the LORD will restore to you in greater measure than you could ever imagine!

So, one more time, by the hand: I forgive you. One more time, you are rescued, delivered. You are free. Jesus has paid your ransom with his perfect life and death. So what are you waiting for? Leave immaturity behind for the joys of the new life that God alone provides, as he has already done through his Son. Amen.