

Sodom

Genesis 19

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Loved ones, there are two ways to live life here on earth and one is the way most people live; they hope that something good will happen tomorrow. That is, they hope that circumstances will turn out well tomorrow; they live continually hoping that something will turn up that will be good. That's the way they go along in regards to their marriage plans, their professional plans, and other things; they hope the circumstances will turn out right. Or they hope that they can get enough things out of the world that will make them in some way secure. Or they hope they will meet somebody nice who will like them and who will give them the sense of meaning that their parents gave to them when they were young.

You can live that way -- that's the way the great bulk of mankind live. They live by faith in the world, in its things, in its circumstances and in the other people in the world. Or you can live by faith in God. Faith in God is a very positive, aggressive way to live. It's an absolute conviction about something that Jesus said in John 16:33. It's one of those verses that you really ought to memorize and let it become part of your own life. Jesus is speaking and he says, "I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

That's the way to live in this world; in absolute certainty that Jesus has overcome it; in absolute certainty that he has overcome everything in the world that could destroy God's plan for your life. In absolute confidence that he has moved ahead of you during this coming week, during this coming year, and has already smoothed all the rough places and has already filled in all the valleys. He has overcome the world so that when you come into a situation that is tense in your home life or into apparent failure in your professional or your job life, immediately in your heart the word rises up, "I have overcome the world." You sense inside you, "Wait a minute -- Jesus knew this hill was coming and he overcame this. He was the lamb slain before the foundation of the world; the world was crucified in him. I know he crucified this; he foresaw this and crucified it. I have nothing to fear at all here. These Jericho walls may look as solid as anything, but I know they are already down in him, so I can move straight on into this, in absolute confidence that I can enter this city."

That's by faith in God; it's a completely different kind of faith. One is tentative -- hoping that things will turn out right; hoping that you'll meet the right guy, hoping that the right circumstances will occur that will make you happy, hoping everything will go well. The other is absolute faith that my Father, in his son Jesus, has destroyed everything in this world that can destroy my life and so I have nothing to fear. It's a life free from fear and you can see it's a very positive life.

If you're sitting there thinking, "Well it's a kind of resigned life isn't it?" No, that's the Buddhist perversion of it, it isn't a resigned life. It isn't "Que Sara Sara whatever will be, will be." It isn't just, "Oh well that must have been the Lord's will; I'll just lie back and take it." No- it is an absolute confidence that the strongest friend in the world is standing beside you at the beginning of this week and that he has already cut down all the giants; you can walk through the week with absolute confidence that the way is made clear for you. So it is a positive, aggressive

attitude. If you say to me that taking that attitude at the beginning of the week is what works the miracle, no. That attitude has to be taken at the very moment you're lifting the stones and throwing those silly little stones at that massive giant. It has to be at that actual moment of doing the thing that you have confidence; your heart rises within you. Now that's a different thing. I used to work myself up into a persuasion at the beginning of the week, "Yeah this is true, this is true, oh I'm going to tear through this week in absolute victory." The issue is -- does your heart rise in joy and delight at the moment when Goliath faces you? That is, at the moment when the car skids into the side of the road and you know it's going to be half an hour of digging to get it out? It's at that moment that, if you're living by faith in Jesus and in his resurrection and his power, your heart rises and you "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say rejoice." [Philippians 4:4] It's at that moment that your faith goes out, and that enables God to work in the situation -- you're out of there in 10 minutes. It's at that actual moment when you're facing the disaster that the faith rises in your heart. So it's a fearless way to live. It's a delightful way to live. It's a joyful, ever rejoicing way to live and that's God's plan for us.

Now the instances of people living that way and people living the other way are multiplied in this book, especially in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament God gives very visible examples of people who lived like that and other people who didn't live like that. Tonight we're going to study what happened to a man who did not live like that, and his name is Lot. The first time he expressed faith in the world rather than in God is found in Genesis 13 when Lot and his uncle, Abraham, were traveling together. They had all kinds of people and all kinds of cattle and all kinds of livestock with them -- it was a big caravan -- and trouble began to arise. Genesis 13:7, "And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle. At that time the Canaanite's and Perizzites dwelt in the land. Then Abram said to Lot, 'Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen; for we are kinsmen. Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left.'"

In other words, "You have the good computer" or "You take the car" or "You take the ticket and go to the concert." That's it see? I have absolute confidence that God, your dear Father has great plans for you. You don't need to grab what you can when you can; in absolute confidence you can let the other person choose. That was Abraham; absolute faith that God was in control of his life. Lot did not exercise that faith in verse 10, "And Lot lifted up his eyes" to God? No. "And Lot lifted up his eyes, and saw that the Jordan valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar; this was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan valley and Lot journeyed east; thus they separated from each other." That was the first time Lot expressed clearly where his own faith was; it was in what he could see and touch. It was in the world and his own judgment of the world and his own manipulation of its resources.

Now loved ones it's interesting; the Bible doesn't say anything bad about Lot. Many of us here tonight may well be thinking, "Now we're going to get the good guy and the bad guy. The good guy is Abraham with the white hat and the bad guy is Lot with the black hat. He's going to go to hell, I know he is." Well it's interesting; it's not like that. If you look at what the New Testament said about Lot you find a different impression. 2 Peter 2:7-8 "and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the licentiousness of the wicked (for by what that righteous man saw and heard as he lived among them, he was vexed in his righteous soul day after day with their lawless deeds.)" God's judgment of Lot is that he is righteous; that he was a righteous man and he had a righteous soul. So many of us here could be Lot's; it is possible, it seems, to be justified and even to go

to heaven and yet not to live a life that is filled and operated by working faith. The result in your life if you do that will be the same as Lot's.

The story in Genesis 19 is a sad story. The fact is that despite him being a righteous man he did not exercise this kind of working faith in God. His life slipped from one plateau to a lower one, to a lower one, to a lower one, to a lower one. I think it's a warning for us here that it is possible to be a child of God, to be a Christian, and yet not to go forward in aggressive working faith, and if you don't, your life will back off, and off, and off, and off. Indeed you'll be backed more and more into a corner because that's what Satan does.

Satan is all the time pressing upon you as the Prince of this world, and he's all the time trying to press you into a corner out of which you cannot get. You will be pressed into that corner, which the Old Testament calls a "straightened place". You'll be pressed into a straightened place where you're in a straight jacket and you can't move. Satan's desire is to get the children of God bound hand and foot and packaged into a corner where they cannot move or do anything for God, and that's the battle that you and I face. Smith Wigglesworth made that statement, which is worth remembering; he says that inactivity of faith is a robber which steals blessing. Inactivity -- just inactivity; he doesn't say lack of faith, failing to let your faith go out onto more and more limbs and attempt greater and greater things for God -- but inactivity of faith is a robber which steals blessing. Increase comes by action, by using what we have and what we know. Your life must be one of going from faith to faith and Lot didn't do that. Lot didn't use his faith in that way. Every opportunity he had to exercise faith in the fact that Jesus had already been ahead of him, and had smoothed out all the mountains; every time he had an opportunity Lot backed down and put his faith in what he could see and touch.

Loved ones it is possible for you, even though you're dear people, probably most of us here have a real desire to know Jesus, a real desire to be his good followers, but if you don't exercise working faith and keep going forward and going out on more limbs and look forward to this coming week believing that God had planned it for you perfectly and beginning to see his victories, you will eventually back into a little corner. You may go to heaven, but your life here on earth will be unfruitful and end up a far deterioration from what it started as. Now you'll see this, loved ones in Genesis 19:1. "The two angels came to Sodom in the evening; and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom." Because that's where he ended up; he chose that land and Sodom was in it. "When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and bowed himself with his face to the earth, and said, 'My lords, turn aside, I pray you, to your servant's house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise up early and go on your way.' They said, 'No; we will spend the night in the street.'"

Now it's very close to what happened in the previous chapter with Abram if you'll look at Genesis 18:1 – 5. So you can see in many ways that Lot was a man who respected God's Angels, because that's of course who those people were. In Genesis 18:1, "And the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men stood in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the earth, and said 'My lord, if I find favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, while I fetch a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on -- since you have come to your servant.' So they said, 'Do as you have said.'" The only difference was, there were three men with Abram and there are only two here with Lot. The third one, who visited Abram, was Jesus; Jesus, in one of his appearances in the Old Testament, because no man has ever seen God at any time, but the son has revealed them, so it was Jesus with the two angels

that visited Abraham.

You remember that Abraham stayed before Jesus and kept praying to him on behalf of Lot; praying to him for Sodom and Gomorrah, pleading with him that he wouldn't destroy Sodom and Gomorrah if there were 50 righteous men, if there were 40 or if there were 30. Jesus was before Abraham at that time while the two angels went on to Sodom. The other difference is that in this instance they said "Yes we'll stay here with you" but back in chapter 19 they said "No, we'll spend the night here in the street." Now the reason for that is found in Genesis 18:20; it was their purpose in going to Sodom and that's why they said "We'll stay in the street" and actually the Hebrew word is "the court" so they were saying "We'll stay in this outer square of the city." The reason is in Genesis 18:20, "Then the Lord said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry which has come to me; and if not, I will know." So God said, "I'll go down to Sodom and see if the people are as bad as the news is coming to me that they are." The two angels were intended to spend the night in the public square where they could observe what the people in Sodom were like. In Genesis 19:3, "But he urged them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate." What they were trying to save him from is in this next verse, because they foresaw that the place was not a place of righteous men at all; it was a place filled with men who hated God.

"But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old" just the men you see, "all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; and they called to Lot "Where are the men that came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them." In Hebrew the word "know" is Yada. It means "know" in the sense that you say a husband "knew" his wife; it meant that they had intercourse with them. That's where sodomy came from, as Sodom was filled with overt homosexuals who practiced that. It gives you some idea of how that kind of deviation, and it's not just homosexuality and lesbianism; it's any of the extreme vices as they begin to be carried to excess; as the Holy Spirit is withdrawn from the world, so they will overcome people completely.

This kind of thing will actually happen; strangers will come into a town and the people will be so bored with each others bodies that they will go for the new bodies that have come in. It's really like the animals they eventually behave as. Maybe that's something we should remember with our little -- we hardly call them deviations -- we wouldn't be troubled with deviations -- but our little lust, or our little preoccupations with the body, whether it's the wife or the husband or the boyfriend or the girlfriend. It's important to see loved ones; don't set out on that path, because it's only God's grace how far you'll slip down it, so don't touch that stuff. Love the dear heart of the person; love their heart, care for them, disregard their body and put them first and then what you do with their body will be right and will be natural. When you put the body first you eventually end up in this same kind of slavery, it's just that most of us in our society are restrained by what people think so that we hold back, and it's the same kind of enslavement. So that's what happened.

Now in verse 7 we come upon some of the paradoxes that you end up in if you don't keep moving forward in aggressive faith. That's why I thought it was good, what [Smith] Wigglesworth said, if I can remember it; he said, "You're life should be one of going from faith to faith." You're life must be one of going from faith to faith. So you have faith for something today; but tomorrow it will be something bigger. God will constantly bring you into situations where you'll be faced with a bigger disaster or a bigger tragedy or a bigger thing to overcome so that you'll go up from faith to faith. If you don't do that; today's faith is not sufficient for tomorrow's challenge and you slowly begin to deteriorate. A colleague said to me some time ago that some people can look better going down

then somebody else on the way up and if you think of that, it's true. If you fall far enough, at a certain point if you meet somebody on their way up, you can look better going down, because you're still apparently ahead of them. The tragedy is, that even if you're at that point of faith and you're not going on to the next point, you're beginning to slip down, and eventually you end up with the people who do not even respect God and you end up in some of these paradoxes in these verses.

Genesis 19:7, "and [Lot] said, "I beg you my brothers do not act so wickedly." You end up with people that think of themselves as your brothers, and you kind of think of them as your brothers because you work with them or you live with them or you deal with them socially continually and so you are, in a sense, their brother. In fairness, they have every right to call you brothers because they don't know your faith very much because you don't act it out much; you keep pretty quiet about it, so as far as they're concerned you're the same as them, so you end up saying that kind of thing; "my brothers I beg you do not act so wickedly." In other words; in one way you're close to them, and in another way you're miles away from them and what they are doing is not what you agree with at all. You end up treating them as your friends, and they think of you as just themselves but actually your hearts are miles different. And if you keep on living with them like that without them seeing you going forward in aggressive faith eventually you lose every bit of faith that you have, and you actually do become like them -- even if outwardly you don't act as wickedly as they are. That's the first paradox you come into when you don't go forward in faith.

You see the next one in verse 8; "Behold, I have two daughters who have not known man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof." You get caught in those hideous enigmas; those hideous enigmatic situations where he was obligated by the ancient law of hospitality to take care of the guests. The only way he could hold these maniacs off was to almost throw his two daughters to them. In other words; you're so often faced with the issue of committing one sin to avert another sin if you don't go forward aggressively in faith, from faith to faith in your daily life, you begin to find yourself walking with people who do not think about God the same way you do and you end up being forced, virtually, into sins of omission if not commission. They are not as bad as the sin you would otherwise have to commit.

So we get ourselves into it in all kinds of silly situations; where they assumed we would like a pornographic magazine and we just kept quiet because we didn't want to offend them so we don't say anything. We end up saying, "Oh no, I don't read that." Which is fair enough, but that's not really the way you think of it at all. You end up sinning with a little lie because again you don't want to offend them; you back down another step. Then you keep on backing down, and backing down; committing one little sin to avoid committing a worse sin, but still; you're committing a sin. The worse thing is you're stepping back and back from that absolute faith that God is able to take care of your reputation or of what they think of you. He's able to take care of his witness to them if you will be honest.

Then it goes on in verse 9, "But they said, "Stand back!" And they said, "This fellow came to sojourn, and he will play the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them." Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and drew near to break the door." You eventually will end up in that situation; we'll say, "Oh, so you're the judge? You're the one that thinks you're holier than thou!" Eventually loved ones that's what happens. If you don't go forward in aggressive faith, openly and plainly before your colleagues at work, before your neighbors, before your friends, before your relatives, eventually, however carefully you go, you'll end up in this position where they begin to think you think you're better than us. So it's a very clear illustration of what

happens if you don't go aggressively forward from faith to faith; moving on into higher realms of trust in God. If you don't do that; you'll end up beginning to be squeezed in and squeezed further and further back.

If you'll read this chapter when you go home you'll see it's just down, down, down. It's just steadily down; he just keeps backing off every time. It was only the angels acting very powerfully and miraculously that delivered Lot in verse 10. "But the men" the two angels, "put forth their hands and brought Lot into the house to them, and shut the door. And they struck with blindness, the men who were at the door of the house, both small and great, so that they wearied themselves groping for the door."

Some of you may have seen those great paintings in some of the art galleries which suggest that it wasn't a total physical blindness but struck them with a blindness that prevented them seeing what they wanted to see; they wanted to see the door, but somehow they couldn't find it. So the angels delivered Lot. Then God continues in his great mercy in verse 12, "Then the men said to Lot, 'have you any one else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or any one you have in the city, bring them out of the place; 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. So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters" he called them sons-in-law, but they were simply betrothed but not yet married – "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."

It just goes on and gets worse. Even the people who are going to part of your own family think, "We haven't heard you talk this way before, so you must be just joking." You can get to that place with your friends or your relatives. If you don't move out in aggressive faith you can get to this place where there is this kind of quiet witness that nobody ever knows about. You can get to this place where when you finally do speak; people don't believe you because it's not like what they've known. It's probably a real indictment of us when people who have worked with us for months or years say, "I never knew you went to church" or "I never knew you were a Christian." That's kind of sad and it gives you some feeling of which way you've been moving. Now there is something else in this verse; you can see the tragedy of doing anything to get a man or get a girl. It's tragic to get into that situation where you have men committed to your daughters and your daughters committed to men and the men don't even believe God's word when you speak it to them.

Loved ones don't touch it. Stay unmarried rather than get married at all costs -- stay unmarried. You're far happier being what God wants you to be; free and able to move on from faith to faith than to end up committed just to get a man or just to get a girl. Don't forget that there are probably dozens of us here this evening that could testify; don't do that; don't get married at all costs. Don't -- hold steady; God has a great life for you. He has a beautiful life for you. He has it all planned. You don't need to strain credulity, and that's what we do you know. "Well, I don't know if he's a Christian, but he goes to church and I've given him some books and he's reading them."

It's all so sad. I think it's sadder to me now because I've been connected with the campus for 16 years and I've heard it often and then seen the disaster years later, when the marriage is just nothingness. No, don't; you don't need to strain. If the guy is a child of God it will be obvious he's a child of God. If she's a daughter of God it will be obvious she's a child of God and you don't have to prove to yourself or rationalize. Don't get yourself into that spot when your godly father speaks God's word's to your about to be husband and he thinks it's a joke, if that's his attitude, then it's going to be a tragic situation when you're alone together at night trying to

share the deepest things of life, if that's how little empathy he has.

Verse 15, "When morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, "'Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city.'" That is the same story; it is as you cease to exercise faith, the blinkers go on, your discernment gets fuzzier and fuzzier, and you begin to get more preoccupied with the things that you have. That's Lot's story right from the beginning; he looked and saw the Jordan Valley, it looked good and he wanted it. That's how he ended up in Sodom in the first place. It seems that that carries right on through and it's eventually the cause of the disaster that occurs to his wife. He begins to hanker after what he's got and to try to hold onto it. Verse 16, "But he lingered." But he lingered; so Lot is still backing off; "Now Sodom is bad -- it's a bad place. I know you had to rescue me there. I know how my neighbors almost took advantage of you, but it's a place I've gotten used to. I like it here." He really wanted to stay! Then God did one of those gracious acts that he has probably done with you sometime in your life, "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 forth and set him outside the city."

I don't know if you've been in that situation, but I think all of us have to thank God for the moments when he has just taken us and put us in a different place. Often we wondered why we lost the job, or we wondered why this disaster happened, or we wondered why this misunderstanding occurred and really; it was God, for our own good, taking us and saying, "I can't get you to come, but I'm going to move you." He can't keep doing that, otherwise he destroys your freewill and destroys any value you will be to him in heaven or to yourself. He can't do it often, but most of us probably can thank God for certain moments in our lives when he did that for us. That's what he did for Lot and maybe that's a warning to us; it was almost a last attempt to save Lot and it really didn't work, as you'll see.

Verse 17, "And when they had brought them forth, they said, 'Flee for your life; do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley; flee to the hills, lest you be consumed.'" There was all kinds of vehemence in that and all kinds of emergency spirit in it. "Flee for your life; do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley; flee to the hills lest you be consumed." It's unbelievable but the next verse is what happens to us; "And Lot said to them, 'Oh no my lords'" and you think, "For goodness sake can't you hear them --get going!" It's just unbelievable, but, us too loved ones, us too. Too often we get so attached to the things we have faith in, that God could use a megaphone to us and do it in a million decibels and yet we come off with this; "Oh no my lords; behold your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life; but I cannot flee to the hills, lest the disaster overtakes me, and I die." He meant of course, "I won't get there in time so don't send me away to the hills." You wonder, really, if that's what he was after. You wonder if it was real fear that he would make it or not because of what he says next; "Behold, yonder city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one." In other words, "I don't want another big city just a little one; it's a place where there are people, and there are things. It's a place where there are resources; let me escape there." "Let me escape there -- is it not a little one? -- and my life will be saved."

Think loved ones; the next verse suggests that we can work our way into God's second best for us, and I think we can. Some of you have asked at times, "Do you think God ever gives you second best or lets you have second best?" I think we beat him into it -- I think we do. I think there comes a time, like when the Israelites asked for a king and he knows they don't need a king. He says, "Alright, I'll give you a king" because he can't keep overruling our free wills -- we need to remember that; don't let's think that God is able and determined to keep us from second best,

whatever happens. No, he is bound by our free wills. You can see it in verse 21, "He [the angel] said him, 'Behold, I grant you this favor also, that I will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken. Make haste, escape there; for I can do nothing till you arrive there.' Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar." It means little. "The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar." Lot got what he wanted yet again. He got the Jordan Valley the first time and found himself in Sodom and Gomorrah because of that. Now he got Zoar instead of the hills, so God will let you work your way into the second best for your life if you keep on persisting. So don't; go for the best; don't ask for a concession. Don't think to yourself, "I'd like to be a missionary, but I like surfing in Hawaii" and all variations of that, that one's so obvious that we're too shrewd to say that about that one! But you know the way we do about the other things; "How can I get this and do that at the same time?" Don't touch that; the moment that kind of manipulation and grabbing begins to show itself up in you, it's the beginning of the end of your faith. You may say, "Oh no, brother, I'm going out on out on faith at the same time." No -- God knows you're looking for something for yourself in the situation and as soon as he sees that, he knows isn't full faith and in fact you won't see the miracles. So don't go for it; don't look for something for yourself; forget yourself. Say, "Lord, I want an exciting life with you. Use me whatever way you want to, to bring people to yourself. Whatever you want, I know you'll take care of me. I'm confident about that; let's go together." Have that attitude.

Verse 24, "Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven." It was like bitumen; a mixture of tar and the kind of stuff that would come out of a volcano, kind of like asphalt. And it's evident because of the Dead Sea which has two levels; a deeper level and then a shallower level, so there might well have been a sea there at that time, but it was only half the size it is now; the rest of it is formed by this asphalt and the area, as you know, is salt and filled with chemicals. So the very evidence is there to this day that such a thing happened.

Verse 25, "and he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. But Lot's wife" who, of course, had caught Lot's disease, "Lot's wife behind him looked back, and she became a pillar of salt." She was probably caught in the whole reigning of brimstone that was coming down and it covered her and destroyed her. The whole message of it is: don't look back. Never look back to where God has brought you from. Never look back for a moment with the kind of yearning; I "Oh I wish I had that car" or "I wish I had that apartment" or "I wish I had that coat." Don't look back for a minute. Forget it. Don't let your eyes be drawn back to it. If you look back for a moment after beginning to follow God, then you will begin to find salt in your mouth and salt in your heart and bitterness coming into your life. Don't do it; keep going forward. I see different people here who are beginning to go after God -- go after him in ministry. Go forward gloriously; never look back. Never think of going back. Whenever you have a penny in your pocket, whenever your ministry isn't achieving anything at all, never look back. That's the moment when you keep going forward. That's the moment when you begin to walk on water. That's when things get exciting. It's relatively easy when you're walking on hard rock, when people are respecting your ministry or your singing or you're speaking or whatever you are doing in your job or your business. Then it's relatively easy to think, "Oh yes, I'm getting somewhere." But there comes a time when God allows you to walk on water. At that time walk on the water and don't think of looking back and yearning back. Never go back, loved ones. Never look back. Even yearningly, don't let your mind go back. Keep going forward.

The following of Jesus is a gloriously heroic experience; its heroic living. It's exciting and heroic. You'll get to the end of your life amazed at how exciting and how full the life has been.



Then you'll see other little ones who have looked back and they are back there in their little homes and their little families and their life has been boring and very pedestrian and ordinary. Never look back keep going forward.

We see Abraham, who had prayed for Sodom and Gomorrah, in verse 27, "And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the Lord; he looked down at Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the valley, and beheld, and lo, the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace." What it proved was in verse 32 of the previous chapter; it proved there weren't even ten righteous. Remember how he prayed in Genesis 18:32; "Then he said, 'Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there?' (Ten righteous men.) "He answered, 'For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.'" There weren't even ten in Sodom and Gomorrah. What God did do in response to Abraham's prayer was to save Lot, almost against Lot's own will. I don't know how far you interpret that in intercessory prayer, but it does suggest that the prayer of a righteous man avails much. It is amazing how mightily God will strive with your father or your mother, son or daughter, or your brother or your sister or your friends if you will intercede mightily and powerfully for them. It seems that he'll do anything. He'll almost go to the extent of almost overruling their own will; except that he cannot, finally, do that. But God will do so much in response to our prayers, so if you had said, "Well then can you pray a person into the kingdom against their will?" Nobody can do that. Jesus himself cannot do that. With Jerusalem he says, "I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks, but you would not." Even Jesus cannot overrule people's free will. It is interesting isn't it how far God will go, even to the angels seizing Lot and saying, "Go." He'll go very far towards trying to answer your prayer for others.

Verse 29: "So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt." Lot's life was saved. Of course, he was a broken man; he had constantly undermined the faith that was in him, so it is a sad story at the end. "Now Lot went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the hills with his two daughters, for he was afraid to dwell in Zoar; so he dwelt in a cave with his two daughters." Same thing again; now he moved to a cave. Sometimes I have shared with you -- don't move unless God tells you. This was what Lot was doing; first he got the Jordan Valley and ended up in Sodom. Then the angels wanted him to flee to the mountains and his response, "No, not the mountains; let me flee to Zoar." Then he got to Zoar and didn't even stay there, he moved to a cave. It seems he just deteriorated and moved from place to place. Don't move if God doesn't tell you to move because he won't know where to find you next! It seems, in a sense, that he'll always be able to find you, in a sense of the spirit relationship with you; however, he senses when you are no longer with him. So don't move like that; don't move from place to place, you can see it is always a move down.

I don't know if you've seen enough of life to know it, but it's interesting now to look at life and to see the passage of years and to see that those that go on from faith to faith have lives that open out and out and out and that become more exciting and fuller while those who move in faith in their own little resources, clinging to their own clothes of righteousness around them, their life goes smaller and smaller. They start in a castle; move to a mansion, move to a house, move to an apartment, end up in a cave. Somehow their life gets smaller. There is some mighty law at work in the world that enables people who move in the faith of the greatness of God to move into greatness themselves. God seems to set your feet always in a broad place. Whereas when you move on faith in your own happy little resources and for your own purposes you end up in a very narrow place, as this man did in a cave.

In Verse 31 the story draws to its tragic conclusion. "And the first-born said to the younger, 'Our

father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come into us after the manner of all earth.'" Of course you eventually end up in this spot if your faith is in your own ability to get a man or get children; you eventually end up in this kind of situation. "Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve offspring through our father.' So they made their father drink wine that night; and the first-born went in, and lay with the father; he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. And on the next day, the first-born said to the younger, "Behold, I lay last night with my father; let us make him drink wine tonight also; then you go in and lie with him, that we may preserve offspring through our father.' So they made their father drink wine that night also; and the younger arose, and lay with him;' and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose." I suppose your company determines what you become, doesn't it, you can't avoid that. You can't avoid becoming like the people you keep company with, really. "He did not know when she lay down or when she arose. Thus both the daughters of Lot were with child by their father. The first-born bore a son, and called his name Moab; he is the father of the Moabites this day." That's not why the Moabites ended up antagonistic to the Israelites; they just ended up antagonistic to the Israelites because they wouldn't help the Israelites in their escape from Egypt. Still it is interesting that that was so, and the same with the other tribe. "The younger also bore a son, and called his name Benammi. He is the father of Ammonites to this day." The Moabites and Ammonites were antagonistic to the Israelites -- to God's people. Lot's life just faded away in a kind of whimper.

Well, you have a life before you; each one of us has a life before us. Most of you have at least 40 years, so you can choose whether it's going to be an opening life and a broadening life and an ever growing and developing life because you're moving forward in aggressive faith in God and in his power over the world; or it can be a diminishing, withering, shrinking life that eventually ends up in the cave half drunk. God's word is faithful; you know that. You know that can be illustrated a thousand times down through the past centuries -- it's true. So loved one's do move out in faith and move on in faith and speak your faith and be what you are with your friends and with your colleagues. Look forward to this week and look forward to what's happening. Believe God to make changes in your colleagues and your friends, because here's the secret; if you are not influencing them, they are influencing you; if you're not influencing your friends and colleagues at work, they are influencing you; because you are denying your Lord if you're not confessing him. So move out and begin to move forward. Don't move by fear. Don't move by dependence on what this little world can give you. God has far more than that for you.

Let's pray.

Dear Father: We thank you for such clear direction, for such a plain illustration in this dear mans life of what happens, even to a just man, if he does not move forward believing in you, and opening his life out, and moving aggressively forward in attempting great things for God and expecting great things from God. Father we give ourselves now to move forward, to move into heroic faith and a heroic life. Lord we want to move out for you and be used by you. We would rather be, at the end of this life, penniless with a sense of the breadth of God in our lives, then have good insurance policies and stocks and shares built up, yet be found in our own narrow cave with no one to look after us. Lord we give ourselves to you this day. Father, we look forward to this week of things that will come. We intend to move forward aggressively, believing Lord Jesus that you have overcome the world. Every difficulty that we have come up against we will immediately say, "The Lord will provide." We will immediately look up to you and say, "I thank you Lord that you foresaw the situation.

And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now and evermore. Amen.