



This morning, I'm going to begin with reading the brief narrative for today's sermon. Turn in your Bibles to Genesis 19:30-38. If you don't have a Bible, there are extras in the Gathering Center. Feel free to get one!

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*<sup>30</sup> Now Lot went up out of Zoar and lived in the hills with his two daughters, for he was afraid to live in Zoar. So he lived in a cave with his two daughters. <sup>31</sup> And the firstborn said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of all the earth. <sup>32</sup> Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve offspring from our father." <sup>33</sup> So they made their father drink wine that night. And the firstborn went in and lay with her father. He did not know when she lay down or when she arose.*

*<sup>34</sup> The next day, the firstborn 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 from our father." <sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> Thus both the daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father. <sup>37</sup> The firstborn bore a son and called his name Moab. He is the father of the Moabites to this day. <sup>38</sup> The younger also bore a son and called his name Ben-ammi. He is the father of the Ammonites to this day. <sup>1</sup>*

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What in the world could we possibly learn from this narrative? Yikes. As I was explaining to one of my children what I was going to preach today, I was simply explaining the story, and before I went any further, they said, "Wait. Are they gonna...?" The look on their face was shock and disgust. And while I think that's completely appropriate, I believe there are more reasons for this narrative than to simply walk away from it and say, "Yuck! I'm so glad I'm not like Lot and his daughters!"

The main idea of the sermon today is this: **Whoever would "save" his life will lose it.** You might recall that these are words of Jesus when he was talking to his disciples. So, why do I use it here? Well, if you remember last week's sermon on the destruction of Sodom and the rescue of Lot, we learned that Lot was clinging to his creaturely comforts in Sodom. Those worldly delights were anchoring him in Sodom instead of compelling him to serve the Lord with all of his heart. And even when Lot was being rescued from Sodom, you see how he lingered and didn't want to lose all he had so desperately worked for.

I think we can relate to Lot in more ways than we care to admit. Many of you probably remember the financial troubles of 2008. People were being laid off, construction companies were closing. Things were

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 19:30–38.

tight for many people, and in that time period, there were many deaths by suicide for very wealthy people. The acting chief financial officer of Freddie Mac, the chief executive of Sheldon Good (a leading real estate auction firm), a french money manager who invested money for many european royal and influential families, and the list goes on. What led to such extreme reactions for these people? I've spoken to some people about suicide, and they've said, "I'll never understand that." And maybe that's you today. But I really want to press that statement. Maybe you have never been tempted towards this, but have you ever been tempted to despair? Have you ever lost something, or had something taken from you, that has led you to the realm of despair and/or depression or feeling hopeless? Have you ever had circumstances in your life that have caused you to say, "What's the point then?! I can do this or that thing all right, and still get no reward!"

There was a 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophy named Alexis de Tocqueville who came to America to evaluate it, and in his writing about our nation, he noticed something. He wrote that **there was a "strange melancholy that haunts the inhabitants . . . in the midst of abundance."** He went on to commentate on this by saying that **"the incomplete joys of this world will never satisfy [the human] heart"** (*Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence; New York, Harper, 1988), p. 296, quot. in Delbanco, *The Real American Dream*; Cambridge, Mass.; 1999, p. 3). Do you agree with de Tocqueville? I think you ought to. In Ezekiel 14:3, God speaks to Ezekiel about the leaders in Israel and says this about them: **these men have set up idols in their hearts. . . .**<sup>2</sup> What does that mean to have idols in your heart? I think many people can understand the concept of an idol being physical. It's some thing you carve and bow down to in order to worship. But what's an idol of the heart?

The reality is that a physical idol is simply a physical manifestation of the idol of your heart. And how do you discern the idols in your heart? First off, idols aren't necessarily bad things in and of themselves. The theologian John Calvin, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century wrote this: **The evil in our desires typically does not lie in what we want, but that we want it too much (Calvin).** Think back to Adam and Eve in the garden. Is eating fruit bad? No. The issue with their sin was that it was rebelling against God. The real issue with sin is that it's inside of us. It reaches out heart and asks us, **"Do I supremely love God or the things of this world?"** You can test this in your own life, did you know that? When you are triggered and get really angry, or really joyful, or despairing – you have to ask yourself, why. Why do I feel this way? You could say, "Well, that person did this or that," but there's something deeper going on inside of you.

One pastor/theologian once wrote this about the idols of the heart. He says that our heart-idols drive us to "break rules we once honored, to harm others and even ourselves in order to get it" (Keller, *Counterfeit gods*, p. xvii). You might say, "Oh, then I don't have any idols of the heart. I'm not breaking any time-honored rules." Hold the phone. When your kids don't honor you, do you return with dishonor? Or maybe you feel parenting is pointless because of all the hurt. What about your fight against sin and fight for righteousness. Do you ever become hopeless? Why? Does God say, "Be hopeless"? No. What about when you feel hurt by *that person*? How do you respond? Are you quick to forgive? Or, do you feel the hurt so deep down that you're tempted to break God's rule to forgive as God in Christ forgave you? Ask the Lord and ask yourself, **"What are the idols of my heart?"** Idolatry will take you further than you ever wanted to go. And, as the apostle James says, "sin gives birth to death" (see Jas. 1:14-16). Even if you aren't physically dead, it'll zap any semblances of life from you. And this is what we see clearly in Lot. So, may Lot's negative example lead us to deny idolatry and to lose our lives for the sake of Christ – who is life! With this, let's see how Lot lost his "life," and also sought to save his "life."

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<sup>2</sup> [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Eze 14:3.

## 1. Lot sought to save his life.

Clearly Lot isn't physically dead, but he's lost what he has lived for. He made creaturely comfort the ultimate desire and pursuit of his life. That is the idolatry of the heart. Now, **how do we know this?**

First, we read that **Lot is living on the basis of fear**. Look at verse 30: <sup>30</sup> Now Lot went up out of Zoar and lived in the hills with his two daughters, for he was afraid to live in Zoar.<sup>3</sup> I love how one commentator translates this to give the fuller sense: **"because [Lot] was afraid to put down roots in Zoar, Thus he lived in a cave"** (Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, p. 49).

Lot lives on the basis of fear. If fear is your continual companion, you know there's a deep idol controlling you. Remember Psalm 37:8, **"Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil."**<sup>4</sup> But what is Lot afraid of? He's afraid to put down roots in Zoar, but why? This same commentator asks these questions: **Is [Lot] too close for comfort to the tragic scene? Does the cave promise more security than the open spaces of Zoar? Having been delivered by the mercies of God (vv. 16, 19), must he now fend for himself?** (Hamilton, p. 51)

The text doesn't tell us the specific fear, and I don't know if we need to know the specific fear because I think the answer could be all of the above. You see, when you lose what you're losing for, you often feel like you have to scramble to make sense of things. You often feel like you have to take control of things and figure out what you need to do to make everything right again. Why? Because what you have been living for has been taken from you. This is what I think is happening to Lot. Zoar is no Sodom. Lot tried to be a Judge and leader in Sodom. He tried to show people their wickedness. He just wanted to have some creaturely comforts, and God has taken all that away and even taken his wife! What's the point of living?!

So, second, **Lot lives in a cave**. You might say, "But didn't the angel tell Lot to flee to the mountains?" Yes. But Lot doesn't go to the mountains to flee the destruction. He goes to the mountains to live there. All of a sudden, the verbs in these verses no longer communicate speed. They communicate settling in. In this dark cave, Lot decides to live. What a picturesque way to describe Lot's despair. He's given up. And yet, he hasn't given up totally. You know how I know? In the ancient world, caves were used to live in for protection. Lot has turned to self-protection and, in having his daughters with him, he's controlling their fates.

Therefore, third, **Lot is self-protective and controls his daughter's future**. He goes to the cave simply for protection. But why didn't he end up going to Abraham? He knew other people groups existed. No. He's going to sulk. He's going to guarantee nothing will ever be taken from him again. He's also going to guarantee nothing will be taken from his daughters as well. He protects his daughters, but there in the cave, they'll never know marriage. They'll never have children. They will lose nothing because they have nothing.

I've seen this so many times in my life and with people I try to come alongside with who need encouragement and counsel. They know their way of living hasn't gotten them into the mess they're in, but when I try to give counsel, they say things like, "Well, I don't know if that would help" or they say, "But I still have to do something!" Often the reasons why they think the counsel won't work is because

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<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 19:30.

<sup>4</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 37:8.

they're trying to protect themselves from future feelings of hurt and/or they're still trying to control the circumstances. They've lost everything, and now they're just fighting for their control. It's so sad.

Can you just think about yourself for a moment? What hurts are you trying to protect yourself from? What people do you think you might be trying to manipulate or control in order to maintain your sense that everything's "good?" Lot ought to have seen the destruction of Sodom and said, "Praise the Lord! He got me out of Sodom." Instead, he despairs over his loss.

Isn't this how the wandering Israelites were, too? They should have seen themselves in Lot's response here. They were ones who would complain about being in the wilderness and even state that it was better living in Egypt! And I can't help but wonder how many of us here can relate, too. I remember a song written several years ago, written by someone named Sara Groves. The song title is "Painting Pictures of Egypt," and here are some of the lyrics: **the place I was wasn't perfect/ But I had found a way to live/ And it wasn't milk or honey/ But then neither is this// I've been painting pictures of Egypt/ Leaving out what it lacks/ The future feels so hard/ And I want to go back.**

Do you find yourself in this position? Maybe you're a parent and you're wondering what's the purpose of parenting when your children won't obey you and everything is so difficult. Are you living for affirmation of being a "good mom or good dad?" Is your life and validation there? Maybe for you, you can relate to the earlier illustrations of money. You don't have, or you have lost it, and your life is bound up in things. Maybe your life is bound up in being smart, or feeling respected, or in accomplishing things.

And you could say, "No way, that's not me," but when those things go wrong, how do you respond? Anger, self-pity, despair? All those are signs that you may be living for those things. And that's the sin of Lot. It's idolatry.

Finally, we see **Lot is completely hopeless**. Why do I say that? Well, when the daughters connive a plan to get pregnant, they know they can get their dad drunk. And Lot didn't get slightly buzzed. He was so drunk, the Hebrew tells us twice that he was ignorant to when the daughter laid down or rose up. By the way, while I in no way am condoning the daughter's actions, from a cultural perspective, if their dad died, they would have no one to take care of them. In addition, to get pregnant in the ancient world was a sign of worth. Lot essentially locked them up, and then in the oldest daughter's words in verse 31, she's simply suggesting something that was culturally known. The ESV makes this sound a little better, but the Hebrew for "come into us" always refers to incest. Clearly, this wasn't uncommon in Sodom. And so, just as Lot was willing to sacrifice his daughters to the raging crowd, the daughters are willing to commit incest.

Ventura, please heed Jesus' words. If you seek to save your life and seek to self-protect and live in self-pity and control, you will only be led further down the road of destruction. God did not give you this life so that you could live for it and seek to control it. If you live for it, you'll lose it. And that's precisely what we see next.

## 2. Lot loses his life.

Not only does Lot lose his life, he loses his daughter's lives, too. Remember, our idolatry always affects others. And when we think we have our idolatry under control, it is actually controlling us. It takes us further than we want to go. It makes us fools, and it will lead to a life of self-destruction. Oh Ventura, don't take your idolatry lightly. If you're thinking, "Could this thing be an idol," don't ignore that. Pray and seek the Spirit's wisdom and grace. In looking at Lot, we see how his desire for self-protection, self-

pity, and control leads to implosion of everything. The same will be true of us if God gives us over to our own way. And how do we see this with Lot?

Well, he's given over to drunkenness, and then becomes not only the grandfather of two of Israel's rival nations, but he's also the father of these nations – through incest with his daughters. Clearly, when Moses writes Genesis, he wants Israel to know the heritage of these nations. The Ammonites and Moabites come from this heritage. Like all humanity come from Adam and Eve – and can trace our sins back to them; Moses is tracing the sinfulness of Moab and Ammon back to their inception. Now, in case you don't know (or don't remember) some of their sin with Israel, let me read from Deuteronomy 23:3-4: <sup>3</sup> **“No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the Lord. Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of the Lord forever, <sup>4</sup> because they did not meet you with bread and with water on the way, when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you.”**<sup>5</sup> If you know this story, when they couldn't get Balaam to curse Israel, they sent Moabite women to seduce the Israelites at Peor.

We see the continued seduction of Moab and Ammon. Oh Israel, don't trust those who try to maintain control in their own selves and their own self-protection. This is what their father, Lot, did. And it only leads to further destruction and death. Ventura, don't fall prey to the same things – even if you think your ways aren't as “bad,” it's all sin against the Lord because God cares for the heart! Where's your heart with him? And this is the question I have about Lot as we conclude the final story of Lot in the Old Testament. When Lot is spared from Sodom, we're reminded of Abraham, who prayed for Lot. Abraham, who mediated for Lot and God answered him.

**Why didn't Lot trust his mediator?** The same can be said of us so many times, can't it? Why are we panicking and turning to ourselves for answers? But Lot ought to have turned to his uncle, Abraham, who saved him now twice. **Why didn't Lot see his rescue as an answer to prayer?** I mean, he probably didn't know Abraham prayed for him, but the Scriptures tell us that his righteous soul was deeply distressed by the sinful living of the people. Why didn't he say, “Lord, I've sinned in clinging to the world. Thank you for taking it away?” The same question can be asked for us, too, right? Sometimes we pray that God would teach us things and work greater godliness in our hearts, and then when God takes things away, we can turn to self-pity, anger or despair. Why aren't we grateful?

**Our Mediator prays for us and designs to take our love for this life out from us.** When I say “our Mediator,” I'm of course talking about Jesus. And he doesn't just pray for us or rescue us twice. We're told that he lives to pray for those of us who have turned from our sins and trusted him. In addition, remember that Jesus came to reconcile us to God so that we would truly live as God created us to live – for his glory! Remember Jesus' words I quoted earlier? <sup>25</sup> **For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.** <sup>26</sup> **For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?**<sup>6</sup> Lot seems to be a picture of both a righteous and an unrighteous person. What profit did Lot get in clinging to the world? He lost it all. But what about Abraham? He wasn't perfect, but he trusted the Lord, waited on him, and we are soon going to see God fulfill his promise of giving Abraham a son.

Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it, Jesus says. Do you believe him? You might say, “Easier said than done,” but I never said this was easy. I think it's actually impossible to live for Jesus' glory. If you lose your life for Christ's sake, that's only because he's genuinely rescued you and shown you his

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<sup>5</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Dt 23:3–4.

<sup>6</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 16:25–26.

superior worth – because if you know his superior glory, and you live in dependence on him. If you know your identity and life is in him – you will be willing to lose your life.

So, let me ask you. Do you feel like your life is lost right now? Do you feel like you're dying inside? Maybe your life being taken is actually an answer to Jesus' prayers for you. Have you ever thought of that? But you might say, "Why would Jesus pray that these things be taken away? Why would Jesus want me to experience this kind of death?" Answer: Because then your life will show that all worth, all glory, all you live for is actually Jesus. If Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, then ought you not live like it? Don't you want the Lord to empower you to live in Reality? Or do you want to just live for the scraps of this world's delights? If you see Jesus praying for your "death" so-to-speak as a good gift of God, you might be able to say with Job, **"Though he slay me, I will hope in him. . ."**<sup>7</sup> And some might say, "No, Job! It was horrible circumstances as a result of sin." But Job can go higher, and say, "Whether or not sin was involved, God is over it all and God has purposes in all of it!" Do you believe that? Can you say in your life, "Though he slay, yet I will hope in him?" Can you say, "Though my children deny Christ and I did my best as a parent, I will hope in the Lord?" Can you say, "Though I have chronic pain, yet I will hope in the Lord?" Can you say, "Though friends have hurt me, yet I will hope in the Lord?" Can you say, "Though I hate my job, yet I will hope in the Lord?" Can you say, "Though Christ followers have done me wrong, yet I will hope in the Lord?" All the while, do you know Jesus has given you the ability to love and forgive as God in Christ has forgiven you? I love the song lyrics that say this, **"O disarm me of everything that I would lean on/So I will lean on You//Jesus, strip me of everything I would depend on/So I'll depend on You."**

How can we say this? It's because our life isn't in the things of this world. The creaturely comforts were never made to satisfy the eternal longings of the heart. Only Jesus can do that. So, the apostle Paul can say, **"<sup>3</sup> For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."**<sup>8</sup> Or, he can say elsewhere in Galatians, **"<sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."**<sup>9</sup>

Oh, I hope you hear these words and believe them. Jesus lost his life for God's glory. How amazing! Jesus taking the punishment we deserved on the cross, and then giving his righteousness and reconciliation and forgiveness to anyone who would turn to him, from their sins! That's God's glory. Now, we're called to live like Jesus. Do you know because of Jesus, you've died! Now, live out your death to the world. Your life is with Christ! When you feel the death inside – lean into the Lord! This is your opportunity to shine the life and grace of Christ. You no longer live – meaning, your flesh. Christ lives in you! Now, show it! Reveal it.

And if you say, "But if I live this way, I'll not be the one in control. I'll not be able to protect myself. I'll have to trust the Lord." Exactly. If you try these things, you'll lose your life, like Lot. But if you lose it. God promises life! Will you trust him? Will you trust him right now? He's given everything in Jesus.

**<sup>25</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. <sup>26</sup> For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?<sup>10</sup>**

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<sup>7</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Job 13:15.

<sup>8</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Col 3:3.

<sup>9</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ga 2:20.

<sup>10</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 16:25–26.