

Ready When Christ Returns, Part 2

Luke 17:26-30

Turn to Luke 17 in your Bibles as we continue in our expositional study of the Gospel of Luke, verse 28, "Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot, they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building." Same pattern here as in the previous verse. Imperfect verb tenses, asyndeton, but Jesus adds some other activities of daily life, and you can see that in verse 28 they're paired up, eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, building, building.

There they correlate to one another. So to the physical necessities and the sensual pleasures of life, to the social and relational aspects of life, the joys of marriage, the joys of family, Jesus goes on to add the commercial aspects of life, like buying and selling, building a business, making a profit, the buzz of the marketplace, the intoxicating feel, feeling of the sale, the joy of inventing, the joy of developing, the joy of marketing, the joy of producing, all that is included in buying and selling, buying and selling.

Then planting and building, planting and building, what's that about? That's about progress. Progress. It's forward-looking. It's investment-oriented. Assuming a reliable and stable future, what's planted will be harvested, processed, consumed, and sold in the market, assuming everything will always be the same, nothing will ever, ever change. Real estate will never be a bad investment. Buy up all the land you can, and when you buy your land, improve your land, make it useful, make it productive, improve the property with buildings and barns and structures.

Again, any of these activities, are they inherently sinful? Didn't God create a world in which all these things are aspects of exercising dominion, subduing the earth? So what's the problem? Again, the problem is that living life in a fallen world, having inherited, as we have, a sin nature, as we deal with sin in the flesh, listen, even the good things that God gives us can become idolatrous distractions for us. Even the good things, the institutions of marriage itself, can be, become a cause or a means of turning our hearts away from God.

Jesus has a very short verse, verse 32, "Remember Lot's wife." We could also say, go into, to the book of Job. Remember Job's wife? Sometimes a marriage or your marriage partner can be

a means, I'm not trying to, I'm not trying to ruin any marriages, here, not trying to cause you to look suspiciously at your marriage partner. I'm just saying. Sometimes marriage, family, these things can be a cause of distraction, can be a vulnerability for us in turning our hearts away from God.

And that happened, listen, that happened in Sodom and Gomorrah. There were two other cities of the plain mentioned in Deuteronomy; Admah, Zeboiim. Notice once again, as Jesus is talking about Sodom, there's no mention of Sodom's more renowned, infamous list of sins. But we know, don't we, according to Genesis 19:4-5, that when the angels came to Sodom and they were sitting in the square, and Lot said, "No, I'm going to take you out of the public square and bring you into my home for hospitality and safety and care."

Before Lot and the angel visitors lay down that night, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man surrounded the house, and they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them." This outbreak of widespread perversion reveals the end of an all-too-familiar descent into sexual sin. Sodom's devolution into homosexual sin followed the same path outlined in Romans 1:18-32, which is, by the way, the

very same path that our country has been following for decades. We're now celebrating it.

The sodomites had been engaged for many years in the good things God had given them, but they became preoccupied with them. They became distracted by them, consumed by them, such that, as one put it, "the urgency of faith was replaced with laxity."

It was not too many years earlier that God had shown great, great favor to Sodom. You can see this back in Genesis 14, Genesis 14, and we read about this, you turn there, if you like, to Genesis 14 verse 17, and we read there about this epic battle, took place before the judgment on Sodom, epic battle, four kings against five. The kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, we find out they were defeated in that battle, and the enemy, the, the conquering enemy plundered all their possessions, plundered their cities, and Lot was taken as a captive.

Who's Lot? Lot is the nephew of Abram. Oh, so that's a big, big mistake. You just woke up the beast. You just woke up the giant. So Abram strapped on his sword, he armed his 318 men for battle, and they pursued the enemy. Abram and his company caught up with them, slaughtered them, and brought everything back. So

they snatched, these people snatched defeat right out of the jaws of victory, didn't they? Taking Lot, big mistake.

But that's when, according to Genesis 14:17 and following, the king of Sodom went out to meet Abram and, get this, another king came out as well. Look at verse 17, Genesis 14. "After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him in the valley of Shaveh, that is the King's Valley and Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High.

"And he," Melchizedek, "blessed him, and said, 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, and blessed be God Most High, who's delivered your enemies into your hand.' And Abram gave him a tenth of everything," thus setting the pattern, by the way, for the tithe in Israel's economy, the Aaronic tithe.

Nevertheless, verse 21, "The king of Sodom said to Abram, 'Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself.' Abram said to the king of Sodom, 'I've lifted my hand to the Lord, God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap, or anything that is yours, lest you should say, "I have made Abraham rich." So I'll take nothing but

what the young men have eaten, share of the men who went with me. Let Aner, Eshcol, Mamre take their share.'" And on it goes.

The king of Sodom, here, he's not only been rescued, not only has he had all his goods restored, he's introduced to this remarkable king, the king of Salem. What's that? That's Jerusalem. Melchizedek, he's a type of Christ. The writer to the Hebrews makes this connection plain because he uses him to illustrate the superlatively greater priesthood of Christ after the pattern of Melchizedek. It says in Hebrews 7:1-2, "For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him, and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, King of Righteousness, and then he is also King of Salem, that is, King of Peace."

God showed remarkable mercy to the king of Sodom, remarkable mercy to the city of Sodom. Not only that, but he allowed the king of Sodom to meet Abram, the father of faith, the one through whom all the families of the earth would be blessed. King of Sodom met Melchizedek, the king who represents the gospel itself, how God's righteousness and how God's peace can come together. Most profound mystery of human life: How can

God be just, maintain his holiness, and still receive sinners to himself?

Here's a hint in Melchizedek, this king of Sodom learned about God Most High, the possessor of heaven and earth, incredible spiritual privilege, to embrace by faith, to bring back to his people, and what did the king of Sodom do? What did the people of Sodom do? Having experienced divine rescue, having received this remarkable spiritual privilege, they returned to the marketplace. They went back to work. Went back to their fields, back to their real estate, back to their buildings, back to their business enterprises, back to business as usual.

So we read in Ezekiel 16:49, "Behold, this was the guilt of Sodom. She and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy." All the blessings that God gave them resulted in no change in their hearts at all. This self-indulgence of excess, the self-centeredness and pride, the love of ease and comfort, it turned their hearts cold to the poor and needy, and it only descends from there into the vilest of immorality. Again I point to you example Z, our country. Our country has experienced the same descent from the great gifts of God into the vilest of immorality.

Again, I want to make this abundantly clear, here. We notice, go back to Luke 17, we notice that Jesus didn't not draw our attention to Sodom sins. I have done that in the exposition of this text, but he did not. Jesus puts all the focus on Sodom's preoccupation with the matters of daily life. Why did he do that? Because for a Jewish audience standing before him, one so heavenly influenced by pharisaism, by highlighting Sodom sins to them, by focusing on Sodom's rap sheet, gives these Jews an easy out. It gives us evangelicals and easy out, undercutting the power of Jesus' warning. They could easily say, Well, we're not bad as, as bad as those people. We're safe from judgment. We're good folks, hard workers, family men, family women.

Look, we're no different, are we? That's why Jesus is posing this warning to his disciples. Let's entertain no false sense that we'll escape judgment if we fail to heed the judgment warnings, if we continue on with life as usual. What'll it be to us? That is the surest way to die, swept up in the fierce severity and swiftness of divine judgment.

Look at verse 29. Same pattern here, "On the day when Lot went out from Sodom." It was on that day, at the warning and the insistence of the angels, Genesis 19:14 says, "Lot went out, said to his sons in law, who are to marry his daughters, 'Hey,



get up, get out of this place, for the Lord's about to destroy the city.'" But he seemed to his son-in-laws to be jesting.

But they don't listen to Lot's urging. Only four people, four people, made it out of Sodom that day, Lot and his wife and his two daughters. "'On that day,'" Jesus says, "'fire and sulfur rained from heaven.'" This is a rain that when it came, no one got wet. This rain, the rain from the sky, sulfurous fire, not water. Again, *apollymi*, it destroyed them all with the swiftness and the ferocity and, and the devastation of a thermonuclear blast. God incinerated Sodom. Its entire population except for four souls, all gone, and that land is now covered over by the Dead Sea. Fitting.

The only use of those cities is to provide a perpetual example, according to Jude, Jude 7, "Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, they likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, and serves as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire." So Jesus uses these two illustrations: days of Noah, days of Lot. When Christ returns, people will not be ready. Verse 26, "Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be," more literally, "thus it will also be in the days of the Son of Man." You got, just as; you got, thus also. This grammar and wording indicate a very strong

correlation in the comparison, here. Jesus is trying to say, listen, this is exactly parallel. It's exactly similar.

The vast majority of people on the earth at that time, they will all be caught up in this rhythmic repetition of daily life, routine life. We can add from Genesis 6:5 that their thought life is wicked. It's only evil continually. They're indifferent to Noah's preaching. They're indifferent to his example of faith in building. Peter highlights the ratio of wickedness to righteousness in Noah's day: millions, even billions destroyed. But 1 Peter 3:20, "only a few of them were saved," right? That is, eight persons were brought safely through water.

Same thing will happen again when Christ returns. People will be indifferent to Godly preaching, they will be indifferent to Godly example, they'll be indifferent to the warnings of God's word, and they'll turn to us, scoffing. 2 Peter chapter 3:2-6, Peter says, "You should remember the predictions of the holy prophets," you should remember their predictions, "and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles. Knowing this, first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires, and they will say, 'Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since

the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.'"

They're uniformitarians. No change, everything is the same. Don't worry. Verse 5, "For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these, the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished." Again, Luke 17:28, "Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot," and then verse 30, the apodosis, the thought is completed, "so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed." Again, the ESV, too mild here. It's a very strong, insistent prepositional phrase, According to the *same* it will be, Jesus says. Corresponding to the same thing. Lot's time, our time; Lot's time, my time. "So it will be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed."

Again, the ratio of wicked to righteous in Lot's day, we don't know the populations of the cities of the plain, but four great cities, Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboim, with populations of many thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands. All died, only four saved. "As in the days of Noah," "as in the days of Lot." It will be exactly similar when the Son of Man comes, when he's revealed.

None other than venerable J. C. Ryle wrote this, he said, "It's hard to imagine a passage of Scripture which more completely overthrows the common ideas which prevail among men about Christ's return. The world will not be converted when Jesus comes again. The earth will not be full of the knowledge of the Lord. The reign of peace will not have been established. The Millennium will not have begun."

He's talking, there, directly to the postmillennial position, but he goes on to say this, "These glorious things will come to pass after the Second Advent, but not before. If words mean anything, these verses show us that the earth will be found to be full of wickedness in the day of Christ's appearing. The unbelievers and the unconverted will be numerous. The believers and the Godly, as in the days of Noah and Lot, will be found to be very few." End quote.

Look, it's the same picture given by the entire New Testament. It's the same picture from the Old Testament prophets as well. Same thing. Paul said to Timothy, 2 Timothy 3:1, "But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty." Don't we know it? But more is to come. "People will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, and wholly heartless,

unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness but denying its power.”

We're to avoid such people, but listen, down in verse 13 he goes on and says, “Evil people and imposters will go on from bad to worse. They'll be deceiving and being deceived.” Wow, Paul is such a pessimist, isn't he? Where'd he get that kind of an attitude? From Jesus. We're in the Olivet Discourse, which we're going to come to in due course.

Look, let me add one more, one more point. When the flood came, people were not ready. When the fire fell, people were not ready. When Christ returns, people will not be ready then, either. But what about you? What about now? So fourthly, before Christ returns, people can still get ready. There's hope here. The fact that we're reading this and not being consumed by fire says there's hope here.

Before Christ returns, people can still get ready, and there's two points I want to draw your attention to, one in verse 27 and another in verse 29. The judgment did not come in Noah's day until when? Until the day when Noah entered the ark, and then the flood came. God waited until Noah was safely tucked

away in the ark. I mean, 120 years went by. I mean, God didn't come at year 119, just before he puts the sealant on the boat, and says, "All right, get in!" No, his judgment was patient. It waited until he could tuck Noah and his family, his people, safely in the boat.

Same thing, judgment didn't come in Lot's day until when? On the day when Lot went out from Sodom. Verse 29, "And then the fire and sulfur rained down from heaven." In fact, the angel told Lot on the day of judgment, on that very day, "Escape to Zoar quickly." That's a small little city. "Escape to that city quickly," and the angel tells him, "for I can do nothing until you arrive there." I'm not allowed to touch this place until you're out of here, and there safely.

God waited for Noah. God waited until Lot safely arrived in Zoar. Listen, God withholds his judgment. He makes sure all his people are safe and sound before letting loose with his judgment. Again, listen to Peter picking up where we left off in verse 7. "By the same word." What word is that? It's the word that drowned the world with water. "By the same word, the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord

one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promises as some count slowness, but he is patient toward you."

Who's the, you? You believers. You Christians, to whom I'm writing this book. He's patient toward you, not wishing that any of you should perish, but that all should reach repentance, that all should reach Zoar, that all should enter into the ark of safety. "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

"Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn. But according to his promise, we are waiting for a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. "Therefore, beloved, since you're waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish and at peace, and count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given to him."

What does that tell you? There's time, still time for you to repent, still time for you to turn away from any preoccupation you have with the business-as-usual approach to life. That rhythmic repetition: They were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, being given in marriage. They were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building. On and on and on it goes like the rails on a train. Same rhythm lulling people to sleep in the days of Noah. Same rhythm lulling people to sleep in the days of Lot. And that is the same rhythm lulling people to sleep in our own day, and it'll be the same rhythm in the days of the Son of Man.

Listen, you don't need to die. You don't need to die, my friend. Follow the faith of Noah. Follow the faith of Lot. Neither Noah nor Lot, listen, neither of these guys were paragons of virtue. And yet, as Leon Morris says, "Both realized the catastrophe must come, and both took measures to save themselves. The Christian message is not for those who think that they deserve a better faith than their neighbors, but for those who, in the midst of universal indifference and complacency, realize the desperateness of their situation and asked, 'What must I do to be saved?'"



My friend, is that you? Noah believed God's promise of judgment, and with no signs of judgment coming, he spent the next 120 years of his life building an ark that would protect him from the coming cataclysm. He was no perfect man, but he heeded God's warning. He believed him, he took him seriously. He worked in faith, and he did it against the grain of his entire culture, and built the ark. "By faith, Noah," Hebrews 11:7, "being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in godly fear he constructed an ark for the saving of his household, and by that he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith." You follow the faith of Noah.

Lot as well. He believed in God. Living in Sodom had, had had a detrimental effect on Lot, Lot's mind and warped his judgment. According to Genesis 19:8, he made terrible suggestions about giving his daughters to the men and sending them outside. Terrible stuff. You can't, it's unimaginable to us now. But Peter, nonetheless, calls him, righteous Lot, three times in 2 Peter 2:7-8. He portrays Lot as a preacher of righteousness, a man who is tormented in his soul by the ungodly behavior of his neighbors. He condemned the men of his age. In fact, when they surrounded his house, they said, "This guy came as a sojourner, and now he's being the judge of us."

But Lot escaped the deadly rhythm of that life in Sodom, that life-as-usual. He believed God. He preached righteousness. And when God's judgment came, he left. He escaped Sodom. Noah escaped the deadly rhythm as well. He believed God. He preached righteousness. He built an ark, sustained diligent behavior, obedience over 120 years and when the flood came, he was gone; didn't experience it. My friend, there's salvation for you, too, if you'll only believe the gospel, take refuge in Christ, the ark of our salvation, before he comes in judgment. If you only believe him and heed his warning, and serve him now with your life.

Christian, the warning applies to us, too, lest we follow the rhythms of the people around us, lest we forget this great salvation that's, that's grabbed ahold of our hearts and we get involved in so much in the world. We give ourselves to that lest we come under the influence of the culture around us and drift off to sleep. And for us, the warning comes in that very short command, Luke 17:32, "Remember Lot's wife." "Remember Lot's wife." She escaped Sodom and then turned back and died.