

Sermon Notes

(A basic transcription with modifications for style and clarity)

DID YOU LEARN ANYTHING?

Marshall Stiver, April 15, 2020

I'd like to begin with a personal question for each of us today. We need to ask ourselves which of these two statements fits us the best. I have learned from various experiences in life, or I have experienced many things in life.

Probably all of us would say that we've experienced many things in life because we experience something every day, many things every day. Obviously then, the real question is, "Have I truly learned from the things that I've experienced in life?" That's the question. But let's, for clarity's sake, define in practical terms, which means usable terms to us, the difference between learned and experienced that I want to give you today. Let me give you an example to try to convey that to you.

As a child I'm sure that all of us were taught by our loving parents, because parents do love us and they want the best for us, so they would have said to us "Don't touch the stove, Johnny or Sally, because it'll burn you." They probably told us that many times. So, let's say that we did touch the stove and we got burned (which many of us did) so we've gained an experience, haven't we? We could then say that we've learned what mom and dad said was true, absolutely.

But that's not the whole definition of the word 'learned' that I want to give you today. I'm not giving you a dictionary definition. I'm giving you what I want you to gain from this message. It is a part of it. But there is more to it than just acknowledging a fact.

For what we're talking about today goes beyond just recognizing a fact (in other words, that mom and dad were right when they said, "Don't touch the stove"), to letting that fact now dictate the course of action that we're going to follow in the future. That is what we're talking about.

Let me give you an example, a personal example, which I think should illustrate this very well for you. When I was a child, I would occasionally do some really stupid things. Some of you are saying, "Yeah, I bet you did", and probably some are just stunned. But my only response is, "Where should I begin?"

I'll begin with what I can remember my folks always saying. I've amended it just to enhance the effect slightly. They'd say something to the effect of, "If you get one kid in a group together, you've got half a brain there. If you get two kids in a group together, there will be a quarter of a brain there. And, if you get three kids in a group together,

there won't be any brain at all." I'm sure you've heard similar things. I stated it differently for effect.

But anyway there were three of us together on this particular occasion and we all had matches and firecrackers. It was on the fourth of July and we were having a fantastic time. It was a fun time. That is, up until one of us without a brain said to the other two brainless ones, "Hey, I bet I can hold a firecracker in my hand longer than you guys can."

You know what that does to a small boy's mind? That's an automatic provocation. So, he lit one and he held onto it and we watched. It got down there to about a sixteenth of an inch and he pitched it. It blew up about three or four feet in front of him right in the air. We were impressed, without question.

So then my brother, being older than I am, did the very same thing. He lit his firecracker and he let it get down and I thought it was going to blow up in his fingers. But it didn't. It blew up about two feet in front of him and again, that was awesome!

Of course you already know which of the three brainless kids won the competition just as surely as everybody else out in our yard did that night because they heard me holler! It wasn't a holler of victory, it was a holler of pain.

You can imagine what my dad did. He came on the run. He knew it wasn't a victory kind of a noise he had heard. It was a painful noise. He came on the run; he took ahold of my forearm and he carefully looked at my hand. He was inspecting it. We grew up on a farm. We did chores and we needed our appendages to be able to contribute. There was more to it than that from my dad, but I'm just throwing that in.

My fingers were already beginning to swell up and I can remember the odor. There was the odor of that sulfuric smell you get from really cheap gun powder after it's been burned. That's what we could smell. And there was some black and blue beginning to show up with the swelling.

Since none of my fingers were actually dangling, he took the opportunity to try to teach me something because he knew he had my attention at that point. Still hanging onto my arm and looking directly into the eyes of a kid whom he knew, who at the moment was in a group by himself again (at least he had half his brain working) he said "Son, did you learn anything?" That's a pretty powerful question, especially when he has your full attention with at least half your brain. "Son, did you learn anything?"

His definition of "learn" is the thing I'm trying to convey to us today. He wanted to know if I recognized the fact that what I had just done was both dangerous and stupid. It was really dumb! And would I now let that fact that I had been able to ascertain, would I let that define my future course of action? That's what my dad wanted to know.

Now, I heard that question repeatedly as I continued on up through my adolescent years, as I'm sure most of us probably have heard those questions from our parents. Generally, the question was not for the same thing twice. Sometimes it was and sometimes it was for three times or more about something that I was particularly difficult about. But always the question would come back through the kindness and the seriousness of my father. And he would say, "Son, did you learn anything?"

He asked that same question to each of my siblings as well. Always at the appropriate time when he had their attention, and when the effects of whatever had happened were felt, he would ask that question. Of course, it's not hard to see why he would have asked that question at all. He wanted his children (as did my mom, they worked hand in hand together, but he was the voice)... They wanted us to learn to be able to think our way through something in order not to make needless mistakes in life – whatever they might be. Mistakes can be little mistakes, or they can be big ones, and they can be very, very painful ones.

Now did my siblings and I make some needless mistakes growing up? Well, absolutely! We made some mistakes. But we also increasingly (I believe due in a large part to these questions my dad would ask) had some successes that were based on learning to think a decision through to the end, to a wise conclusion.

You know, our Father wants the very same thing for each of us today at any age, at virtually any age. Our Father wants us to have a better life. He wants us to have a good life and as Christ said in John 10, He wants us to have an abundant life. A really, really good life.

The Passover which we just kept reminds us of what Christ did for us to be able to embark on that kind of life. He gave Himself to cover the death penalty in our stead so that we could go forward and begin to learn a different way of life. When I say "learn" I mean to truly learn a different way of life. We (and I'm referring to us all, those of us who have been baptized) chose a far more abundant life that is the product of repentance, obviously, and learning to leave sin (in other words, bad decisions) behind.

The Days of Unleavened Bread are annual reminders of what it is that we committed ourselves to God to do. We committed to thinking our way through the decisions we make every single day (big or little decisions) in order to live a more abundant life. A life with unadulterated happiness, genuine happiness. A life with true peace of mind, which comes, of course, from the sacrifice of Christ when our debts were cancelled. A life without fear, the fear of God's final judgment. In effect, our Father is saying to us during these Days of Unleavened Bread, and virtually any day of the year, He's saying, "Son, daughter have you learned anything over this past year or over these last Days of Unleavened Bread?" Or, as we go through our daily lives, "Have you learned anything today or this morning or this evening?"

Regardless of our age, there is always a deeper understanding, a deeper level for us to go to, that when truly learned – when we truly learn the thing that God wants us to gain from – enhances our life. It may not be a huge enhancement, or it may be. Or it may be just little by little that our life becomes better. An enhanced life obviously involves change, which will be change for the better. Change which comes with truly learning is one of the great blessings that comes with maturity. And maturity isn't restricted to advanced age. Often we think of it in that way. We think you can only be mature when you're old. Well, that's not true, not true at all!

Trials, which are difficulties, can – depending on our attitude (and that's key) – cause us to mature at virtually any age. We can have trials of health. Without question, we can have trials of our own mortality at virtually any age. We can have trials of family dynamics. In other words, we may be living in a family that's more dysfunctional than functional. We can have trials of our own will versus God's. We can see what God's word says. We know the truth and yet we have these trials, these struggles. What are we going to do? We can have trials when personal responsibilities increase. We all take on more responsibility as we age, up to a point.

All of these things can help us to mature. Any of these things, when we're of a teachable frame of mind, will help us to mature. It doesn't make any difference if we're eight years old or if we're eighty years old, we can learn. As we just said, change comes with truly learning and it's one of the great blessings that comes with maturity.

Today is a great day, the Last Day of Unleavened Bread. So, with all of that in mind we should ask ourselves, "Have I learned anything this past year or during these seven Days of Unleavened Bread? Have I truly learned from the mistakes I have made and will that now define my course of action, the things that I do from here on forward?" Our decisions, obviously, will reveal that answer to us. Our decisions will do just that.

Here's the thing brethren, if that annually recurring question doesn't grip us in our own minds on a daily basis... Yes, we need to think about it during the Days of Unleavened Bread, but we need to think about this question every single day. If we don't, sin will catch us unaware. It absolutely will. We have to learn. We have to internalize God's word if we're going to be aware of what our life is really like. And if we're really going to have a good life we have to do this.

Let's go to Genesis chapter 4, beginning in verse 3. We're going to look at the example of Cain and Abel. We could ask ourselves, in principle, do we think this question was playing in Cain's mind every day? Was it? Was he truly learning or was he just gaining experiences as he plotted his own course, planned his own course through life? Of course we know the answer, but let's read the account.

***Genesis 4:3* And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD.**

4 Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering,

These two brothers, two men, expressed something to God through the offerings that they brought. Various historians will say that Cain brought just what was left of his food, that which is invaluable, such as flax or hemp seed, something of that sort. What we know is that he was just going through the motions in going before God in that way. If he would have had a lit firecracker in his hand it would have gone off. There is no question about it. He wasn't thinking his way through this decision that he made in regard to what he should offer.

Abel, on the other hand, was thinking. He offered something that revealed a different attitude altogether. It revealed deep thought. He brought a firstborn lamb and the fat thereof. The fat could literally refer to the fat that comes off of a lamb's carcass. It could mean that. We know from Leviticus 3:16 that God claims that fat as His own from these offerings. That could have been it.

Or (and this is a more likely scenario and the one we're going to be thinking about now) that fat could refer to the firstling being the fattest and the choicest of Abel's lambs. We know that God our Father used a lamb to typify Christ, His firstborn. It was the firstborn lamb. Christ was a Lamb, as we know without spot, wrinkle, or blemish. He was the first and He was the choicest of God's flock.

So, the symbolism is very clear for us, I think. I think we can easily comprehend the symbolism here. It is through the sacrifice of Christ, our Passover Lamb, that our past bad decisions (sin) could be forgiven so that we can truly learn to live a more abundant life. And that's something we do over time, obviously, we grow at it.

The fact that we just kept the Passover is a testament to our understanding that we still have more learning to do. That's why we keep the Passover every year. That's why we keep the Days of Unleavened Bread every year, because we keep working at it. In other words, it's a testament to the fact we truly need the Lamb's sacrifice ongoing through life. What do we do at Passover? We recommit to this way of life. That's one of the key things at Passover time.

So now, this all comes back to Abel. We're getting there. Abel was giving his firstling lamb, the choicest of his flock. He was then, in effect, acknowledging himself as a sinner and acknowledging the need to truly learn through life. Whereas Cain arrogantly and dismissive of God, gave a sham offering. He gave a nothing sort of an offering. Abel humbly gave of the very best to God because he had humbly thought his way through to a correct conclusion. He needed what that lamb represented and that's what brought him to that correct conclusion.

5 but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

6 So the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?”

He asked the question, “Why are you angry? Why has your countenance fallen?” Did the Creator of this universe and all that’s in it really not know why Cain was so mad? We know that He knew. What was He doing? He was in a way, kindly asking a question in an effort to give Cain a chance to repent and change his thought process by changing his attitude.

It was the same thing as saying, “Did you learn anything from this?” If he really had learned something from it, it would inform his immediate and his future decisions and actions. That’s what God goes on to tell him here in verse 7.

7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.”

If you’re not of an attitude to truly learn, then sin lies – and what does ‘lies’ mean? It means it lurks or crouches. I like that definition, it’s meaningful. It means it lurks or crouches. Sin is lurking or crouching as if to leap. We think of something that lurks at the door. That, of course, was exactly what happened in Cain’s case.

Remember the two statements we started with? I have truly learned from various experiences in life. And, I have experienced many things in life. Cain had just, in this instance, experienced something. He experienced a rejection of his offering by God. And the sad thing is, he didn’t learn anything from it. There was no self-introspection. There was no attitude to learn. He should have been beside himself. He should have been beside himself, internally torn up over the fact that God had rejected His offering. But he wasn’t. And the result was that the sin that was crouching at the door sprang into action resulting in his choice to take his brother’s life. A very bad, bad scenario.

With his brother out of the picture, this selfish individual could reason that life would be better and that he would have preeminence. What this tells us about Cain is that he desperately wanted a more abundant life. He probably wanted what he saw that his brother had. His brother had a better life, but he had wasted a learning experience that could have moved him in that direction. In the same direction to have a good life and he lost it. He missed his opportunity.

11 So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.

12 When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth.”

13 And Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is greater than I can bear!”

He didn’t like this! He didn’t like anything about it. But the point of it is, this is the fruit of not truly learning. That’s the fruit of it. Nothing turned out the way that he

wanted it to turn out. His life was cursed. And that's what happens when we don't learn from the experiences that we have in life. He had choices to make and we have choices to make. Every day that we draw breath, we have choices to make. We have the opportunity to make good ones. We have the opportunity equally to make bad ones. We have the opportunity to experience many things in life or to truly learn from the things we experience in life. We have to choose. We have to choose to learn, to truly learn from those experiences.

Let's stay here in Genesis and go to chapter 13 and we'll look at another example. This will be of Abram and Lot. I like to call Abram Abraham, but that's not what he's called at this point in his life and so, we'll call him Abram. I'd like to take somewhat of a speculative look at Abram and Lot and most especially at Lot.

***Genesis 13:5* Lot also, who went with Abram, had flocks and herds and tents.**

6 Now the land was not able to support them, that they might dwell together, for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together.

7 And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. The Canaanites and the Perizzites then dwelt in the land.

It's a pretty simple picture for us to see in our minds. Both of these men had a lot of animals. And a lot of animals required a lot of grass to eat and a lot of space. So the dilemma that they found themselves in was a very practical one, a very normal one. Something had to change. Something had to give. They needed to put some space between themselves in order to be able to have peace and to have a sustainable grazing program for their flocks and herds. What are they doing? What is this situation? It's an experience. They are experiencing something in life. Choices will follow and Abram makes the very first one.

8 So Abram said to Lot, "Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren.

9 Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left."

Abram decides to give his nephew pick of the land, even though this land was given to him by God. He's being very, very generous. The choice that he makes here is based on what he has learned in life. It's not just based on the moment. It's based on what he's learned in life.

Abram believes God. We know that Abram became Abraham and Abraham is called the father of the faithful. If you study into what Josephus had to say about Abraham, we know that he studied to prove God's existence. That's one of the things that he did. And then he began to preach about God's existence, according to

Josephus. He knew, he had proven to himself that God existed, that He was the Creator of everything. So, he put his trust in God above himself and above anything else.

Solomon, one of Abram's descendants sums up what Abram had truly learned. This comes from the Proverbs.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths.”

“Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh and strength to your bones.”

Abram had found the true source of the good life that he really wanted because he knew who created life. He'd proven it to himself. He had no doubt in his mind. Basically, we all inherently want the good life. Cain wanted it. Everybody wants it. But in the previous example, Cain counted on himself for the “good life”. He wasn't looking to God. He wasn't learning the things and taking to heart the things that would bring him to the good life. And he failed miserably.

Abram put his confidence in God's way of thinking. And God's way can easily be defined as the give way. We've heard that for many years growing up within the Church, the give way of life. So, instead of making a self-first choice, he simply gave Lot his choice of all the land.

Now, in the context of our thought process then, he recognized the fact that he could react to this situation selfishly, which goes against God's nature. He understood these principles. Or he could react graciously, believing that God could bless him regardless of Lot's choice. That is the person who has thought his way through something to the end. It had become a part of him. By faith and humility his course of action was set. When we look at the difference between Abram and Cain the difference is stark. A stark difference.

10 And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar.

11 Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other.

Obviously Lot had made his choice and we're going to come back to that. But let's first acknowledge something about Lot. It's very important for us to have a balanced view of it. Lot was traveling with his uncle Abram because he had shared his beliefs regarding God. It was the Apostle Peter in 2 Peter that refers to Lot as righteous Lot. So, he's a man who's not clueless about spiritual matters.

But he is at a different maturity level, spiritually speaking, than his uncle is. Any of us would acknowledge that none of us are at the same level today. It varies. It varies according to what it is we're talking about; the subject or whatever the case may be. Sometimes the younger person will be the more mature person and the older one less mature. It just depends. It depends on the individual attitude as to how much we are truly going to learn at any given age. It all comes down to attitude.

But let's be a bit speculative now, and this is what I was talking about, based on the principle of God's word. Lot's been given first choice. He's looked out across every direction. It's an awful lot like what God offered Solomon. It's almost like saying, "Look, you can have anything you want out here. What do you want?"

Let's think about Solomon just for a moment, because we can kind of compare these two individuals. Early on Solomon loved God and he wanted to walk, and did walk, in his father's footsteps just as Lot was walking, in essence, in his uncle's footsteps. And God was very pleased with Solomon. And God said to Solomon, "Ask! What shall I give you?" That's an incredible thing to be presented to a young person.

Of course, we know the story well. Solomon could have asked for virtually anything. He could have asked for anything, money, long life, the death of his enemies. That's what we see in scripture. He could have asked for many, many other things. But instead of doing that, his choice was guided by what he had truly learned from his experiences in life up to that point. That would include the day to day living and the things that he had learned of God and His way of life. His father would have taught him a lot of things about God.

I'll just add this thought. Our personal experience with God is the best! That's the best experience that we could ever have, bar none, in terms of experiencing something that we want to learn. That's the key to it all. In Solomon's case, he asked for the wisdom and understanding that he needed to be able to serve God's people. And because the fear of God was obviously in that choice, God blessed him. And when we say "the fear of God" we always think of a humble attitude. God blessed him with much more than he had even thought to ask for. That's how God is.

Now at the time of these two choices, and I'm referring to Solomon's and Lot's, Solomon was younger than what Lot would have been. Solomon's choice reflected greater maturity as well.

Lot looked out at the grassland and having come from an agricultural background that's something that is (in a livestock person's mind) an incredible thing, when you know you've been given your choice of all the grassland around. That was amazing. He's looking at this grassland and the water that's down there on the plain of Jordan near Sodom and Gomorrah. He looked at the physical evidence and it was awesome.

It was a simple decision because it was the best. Without question, it was the choicest of the land, on a physical level.

In his mind it was one of these things that's "Let's do it! This is great." There's no thinking required. It's obvious. This has got to be it. In his mind it was a slam dunk. But the decision he made was dangerous and it was stupid. It reflected spiritual immaturity. You see, he hadn't truly learned from life's experiences to be guided in all of his future decisions. He hadn't internalized all that was needed yet. He needed to mature. He wasn't at the same level that his uncle was. His choice reflected a self-first attitude. That's something that any of us have to deal with continually, after we've been baptized or before we've been baptized.

I would also say that undoubtedly Lot made many good choices in his life, but this wasn't one of them. We can benefit by concentrating on this particular one, because we can gain some understanding from it.

12 Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom.

13 But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the LORD.

That's an incredible statement. In other words, it's almost as if he's saying he knew what he was walking into. He knew that the cities down there were like this. The land that he had chosen was primo. It was very, very good, but the city which he chose to dwell in was full of wicked and sinful people. And his choice of where to live defies the principles of God's word.

Abram let his decision be guided by God's give way of life. That's the principle that he put into play. Young Solomon's decision was guided by the very same thing. How can I help these people of yours? All your people. It was the give approach.

But Lot's decision would appear (again, this is speculation, I'll admit that), it would appear to have been made on "what seems right to me." We can make money there. It was not necessarily what is best for those around me. It's not best for those within my care, my family. And of course, God could have blessed Lot with far more than he could even imagine to ask if his actions had been defined by what he truly learned rather than what he was experiencing at the moment. His decisions were based on what he was experiencing at the moment.

Now to add gravity to the need to truly learn, let's look at how one bad decision can affect more than one generation. Sometimes, and I know I've thought this in the past, sometimes we can rashly and dangerously think to our selves, the decision I make in this or that matter, or some other thing is only going to affect me. That's never true. That is never, never true.

Let's go to chapter 19 now in Genesis. We'll go to verse 12. We know this story, I think, very, very well. There are a lot of lessons to learn from it. We know how God sent two angels down to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because almost all of the people had rejected God, they'd rejected His authority and had therefore totally rejected the family as God had designed it to be. Family is the object of the creation in the first place. God's plan of salvation all revolves around family. Family is the pinnacle of God's creation. And everything that was going on there by the majority was against the family.

Genesis 19:12 Then the men said to Lot (and of course, these were the angels), **“Have you anyone else here? Son-in-law, your sons, your daughters, and whomever you have in the city—take them out of this place!**

13 For we will destroy this place, because the outcry against them has grown great before the face of the LORD, and the LORD has sent us to destroy it.”

They made it really clear, this place was going to be wiped out. It had turned into, basically, an animalistic culture that was totally swallowed up in self-gratification. Lot's daughters appear to have been (depending on how you read this), but they appear to have been engaged to these two fellows because verse 8 states that they had not known a man. In other words, they were still virgins. But they were engaged to those of the opposite sex, as they should have been. They were about to embark on a normal life together while living in a perverse culture, so they obviously had some understanding. There was obviously something there. But his future sons-in-law were still affected by the godlessness that was around them.

14 So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who had married his daughters, and said, “Get up, get out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city!” But to his sons-in-law he seemed to be joking.

The warning that he gave them was... you can imagine how Lot would have said this. He would have known it was true. He would have said it with great urgency and great seriousness. It was a life or death warning and it was simply laughed off. It was just repelled. They were living in a culture that didn't even want to retain God in its knowledge. They didn't even want to have God brought into a conversation because I'm sure in that culture, as in many places today, to bring God into a conversation would be the end of the conversation. We all know that there can be a great deal of pressure exerted on young people because we were all young once, in a perverse culture or in any culture. That's a given. There's pressure at that age.

Let's look at a couple of scriptures that explain the dynamics here. Why did these young men fail? Let's look at the dynamics. Solomon said:

Proverbs 13:20 He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed.

We could paraphrase this in the context of what we're discussing today. We could say the person who daily walks and talks with those who truly learn from life's experiences will become wise. And those that daily walk and talk with people who just experience life as it comes will become just like them. They'll lose their connection to God and they will end up laughing at what will eventually be their own destruction. That's something to think about. That is really something to contemplate. Verse 21 follows right up on everything that we've covered so far.

21 Evil pursues sinners, but to the righteous, good shall be repaid.

In other words, those who don't truly learn from their mistakes will be overcome by them. Sin will overtake them unaware. That's how it works. This was true in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah. It was true in the case of Cain. And probably we can all think of people that we have known in our lives who have pursued evil and been overcome by the penalty of their errors. It could be true of any one of us and that's what we really need to think about because that's the sobering aspect of it.

Let's also go to Proverbs 10, verse 17. I'm going to read this to you from the ESV because the wording is different and it really adds to what the statement is saying.

Proverbs 10:17 (ESV) Whoever heeds instruction is on the path to life, but he who rejects reproof leads others astray.

That's not a good thing. We can be led astray and that's what we've been talking about. That's part of the dynamics of Sodom and Gomorrah. Three things can happen in a wicked environment.

1. We can experience God's word and humbly be instructed in how to live. That's the best scenario.
2. We can experience sin. In other words, we can play with firecrackers and get bruised and burned, but truly learn from it. We can course correct and that's good. That's really good.
3. Or we can experience sin and we can be overcome by it.

Additionally, those who bristle up and reject the guidance and correction that comes with God's way of life, will lead others astray. That is the very worst dynamic. Others will be led astray. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. That's the principle. We can read it in scripture and we can look at it in life. We can see that happen. We could have seen it happen in our own lives at one time or another.

The dynamics that were lacking in Sodom were points one and two, obviously. And of course, the reason that Sodom makes such a great example for us to study is that the city was almost completely populated with unbelievers. We can't know the exact ratio of believers to unbelievers, but we can know that it was extremely lopsided. You recall how Abram said, "What if there were forty or thirty or twenty or ten?"

So, those of the greatest interest to us at this point in time, would be anyone who was somehow related to Lot, or who has any close relationship with Lot. Family, friend, as I said, anyone who was close. They would represent or could represent as we make this supposition, they could represent a type of God's Church as it exists in our modern culture.

Lot's sons-in-law were led astray, as Solomon refers to here. It is important to note, that it doesn't appear from what we read here that they were practicing members of the common perversion in the city. But the fact that they laughed at the idea that God would incinerate the city for its rampant anti-family perversion, illustrates that they were very accepting of the evil around them. It brings us back to the words of Solomon that we just read. "A companion of fools will be destroyed."

By comparison Peter wrote that Lot was vexed. So, here's a man who was called righteous Lot and he was vexed by their filthy conduct. Vexed means that he was worn down; he was oppressed, he was sick to the core by what he saw.

So now, let's return to my acknowledged speculation that Lot's decision to move to the best pastureland for his livestock and then dwell in a city full of evil, could have been made according to what seemed right to him. A money-making opportunity. It would appear that that choice was not based on what would be best for his family and for his future family. That's the way it would appear. If that speculation is correct, we can see how a bad decision can, without question, affect generations. No person is an island in themselves, totally separated from everyone. It would appear to not be a decision based on what he had truly learned in his study of God, but rather a decision based on what he was experiencing at the moment.

So, when we look at this bit of history and contemplate it (because, as I said, there are a lot of things we can learn from it) are we basing our decisions on what we have truly learned of God's way of life or on what we're experiencing at the moment? Have we learned anything?

But now let's return to Lot's generation because, as we all know, sin can catch us unaware at any age, virtually any age. Let's go back to chapter 19 of Genesis. We know how the angels had to take Lot and his wife by the hand and then his two daughters by the hand to lead them out of the city because they were hesitant to go.

***Genesis 19:17* So it came to pass, when they had brought them outside, that he said, "Escape for your life! Do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains, lest you be destroyed."**

They were given very specific and urgent instruction regarding how to preserve their lives. They were to exit the plain and they were not to look back. This obviously was a test on what they had truly learned. What was truly inside of them, what they had

internalized. This was a test of that. As we live into tough times we're going to be tested in the very same way. What have we really, truly learned in our lives?

Had they truly grasped how horrible a culture they had been living in and how it had pulled their two potential sons-in-law totally away from a better life and how it had weakened their own resistance to sin? They had to be led by the hand to go out of the city, it had so weakened them. Did they now truly comprehend all the subtle changes that had somehow become common or even normal to them?

Had these been burning questions in their minds all through the night? They were told early that night. Did they think about those things through the night? How did they not see this thing coming? Something of this magnitude, how could they not see it coming? How did all this demented evil come to seem so commonplace?

You know, brethren, do these questions go through our minds today urgently? Do we think about these things. Because we live in a very similar culture today, without question. Let's add some balance here because balance is good. That's what we need. We don't want to view the history here in Sodom and Gomorrah in an out of balance sort of way. Sexual perversion was only a part of the depravity of these two cities.

We can reflect on what the Apostle Paul spoke of in the last days in 2 Timothy 3. We don't need to turn there because we know it extremely well. He was talking about how conditions will be in the last days. We know the last days will be like the time of Noah and the time of Lot. It's going to be the very same kind of situation. We can reasonably surmise that those conditions that Paul was talking about in the last days would have been there in Lot's time.

The people of Sodom and Gomorrah also would have loved themselves more than anything else. They would have loved themselves. Self would have been first above everything. They would have been loud, they would have been brash, they would have been obnoxious in their pride. They would have been unloving and brutal. They would have been despisers of good and of those who do good and they would have not wanted to retain God in their knowledge. And without God in their knowledge they could cast off restraint, they could think anything they wanted. They could do virtually anything they wanted to do.

All of this is what would have or could have become commonplace to them little by little and bit by bit. Just as a slow, slow ebbing downward slide. What had they missed in those successive bits? What did they miss? Brethren, what have we missed, because we are living in the same kind of a slide today. Can we identify those successive bits of slippage in our modern culture? It's been over decades.

Just for instance, back in the 1970s I can remember hearing admonishments and sermons as a young person growing up about how the family was under attack in

modern sitcoms. The roles were being changed around and people were laughing at it like that was a good thing. Little by little the defenses went down. Then after that sexuality began to come into the picture, especially in television and so the boundaries were continually being pushed a little bit, a little bit more and a little bit further. And people accepted it little, by little. By little it became accepted. That's not how it was originally at all.

What about the news media today? Look at the news media. There's anger, hatred and disrespect. There is lying, there is character assassination, all of these things going on. I don't think that makes anybody laugh. Do we emulate it? Do we find ourselves short-fused, easily angered, very, very opinionated or whatever the case may be? We have to ask ourselves the same kind of questions that should have gone through Lot's mind, as well as his wife's.

All of this could have become commonplace to them little by little and bit by bit. Were they fervently looking back? That's a question we need to ask. Were they fervently looking back at what they'd experienced up to this very point in time that they'd come to? Were they now in fervent prayer imploring God to help them to truly learn from what they had failed to see in their experiences? What is it that we haven't seen? How did we get to this point? How could we not have seen it?

Lot and his wife had one night in which to determine if they really had learned something or not. That's when push came to shove over the course of that night. It was a brief period of time before the end would come to Sodom and Gomorrah and all the plains around it. Let's do something hypothetical here.

Hypothetically, we could compare the night that they had left to really get real with themselves, to the short period of time that we now have until Christ's return. Our course is very similar to theirs. Our culture is incredibly similar to theirs. Considering Lot and his wife, we know that Lot survived, that his wife looked back and she perished. I think we could safely conclude that she had experienced a lot of things in her life, but that she hadn't really learned from her experiences. She hadn't internalized what she should have internalized from those experiences.

It doesn't matter how old we are, whether we're eight or whether we're eighty, we must, if we want to have a good life, learn from her example. We have to learn from her example. In Luke 17 Christ said that very thing. He said, "Remember Lot's wife."

Our loving Father wants to know if we're really learning from the things we experience. These Days of Unleavened Bread picture a time of really learning so that our present and future course of action is well-defined. We want to have a well-defined plan of action when crises occur. We're living in a crisis right now aren't we? And there are many more to come as we draw into the end time.

The thing that can spiritually derail us is the very same thing that got Lot's wife. Let's go to Luke chapter 9, verse 62. Here we see that Christ used that same term, "looking back", and it's an obvious reference back to Lot's wife. But He's not talking about her openly here. The principle fits.

***Luke 9:62* But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."**

As we think about and put this back into the realm of Lot's wife, it's very important to realize that Lot's wife didn't actually go back to Sodom. Or did she? Well, yes she did. She did it in spirit. She didn't do it in the letter. She did it in the spirit. In principle, she had not made a complete break from the world. She was experiencing the world and not truly learning from it. God's conclusion in that is that she was not fit for God's Kingdom. Now that makes the picture pretty clear for us, I think.

Have we made a complete break from the world? Are there any weaknesses or sins that we've tolerated in our lives over this past year or over this past decade? Do some of the very same things come into our minds year after year over the Passover? We have the same problems over and over and over again. Sometimes they do repeat themselves, yes. And that's what Christ's sacrifice was for, absolutely, as we strive to overcome.

But we've also been called to go on to perfection. We haven't been called to stay weak. We've been called to go on to perfection, to eventually make a clean break from every aspect of this world. The power to make those breaks also comes through the sacrifice of Christ. It covers both sides of the coin. It covers it all. God has given us the power to truly learn from the things we experience, so that we can truly have a better life. Lot and his wife had a very short period of time to determine which of the two statements that we started with truly applied to them. Brethren, we need to know what applies to us. We need to know now. Let's close with Romans chapter 13, verses 11 through 14. Our proving time is short.

***Romans 13:11* And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.**

Think again about Lot and his wife. They had one night to get real with themselves to determine, "What have I internalized? What have I really become?"

12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.

13 Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.

14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

Obviously, we need to put extreme emphasis on this last verse. “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.” We are to imitate Christ through the power that He has given us. He opened the door for us to be able to receive that power through baptism, repentance and belief in faith. It’s been given to us and so now we have to be urgent about it.

This is not about our will, not about our willpower. It’s about yielding to the Holy Spirit just as Jesus Christ did when He was here on this earth as a physical man. He yielded Himself to the Holy Spirit and He was powerful. Brethren, that is how we are to become.

As we live on into uncertain times and trying times (and we all know they’re here), we need to symbolically hear our loving Father’s voice every morning, every evening, throughout the day. In our own minds we need to hear Him say: “Son, daughter have you learned anything?” ◇