

RUN FOR YOUR LIFE!

Maybe you have heard the story of the two guys that were out hiking in the woods one day when they met up with a hungry bear. The bear started running towards them. The two guys started running but then the one guy stopped, opened up his backpack, pulled off his hiking boots and started putting on running shoes. His friend yelled "What are you doing! Even with those running shoes on you can't outrun that bear". He replied "I don't have to outrun the bear. I just have to outrun you!"

Have you ever had to run for your life from something? In the Bible there was a man who had to run for his life, not because of a bear but because the city he was in was about to be destroyed.

Gen. 19:15 With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished." 16 When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD was merciful to them. 17 As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, "Flee for your lives! Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!" 18 But Lot said to them, "No, my lords, please! 19 Your servant has found favor in your eyes, and you have shown great kindness to me in sparing my life. But I can't flee to the mountains; this disaster will overtake me, and I'll die. 20 Look, here is a town near enough to run to, and it is small. Let me flee to it--it is very small, isn't it? Then my life will be spared." 21 He said to him, "Very well, I will grant this request too; I will not overthrow the town you speak of. 22 But flee there quickly, because I cannot do anything until you reach it." (That is why the town was called Zoar.) 23 By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land. 24 Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah--from the LORD out of the heavens. 25 Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, including all those living in the cities--and also the vegetation in the land. 26 But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

I remember a time when I was a kid visiting a friend on his farm. We were playing in the cow pasture. The cows were a long way away but I was still afraid they would come closer. My friend assured me that they would stay far away so I just forgot about them. We were so caught up in what we were doing that we didn't notice the cows until they were only a few yards away. We finally looked up and ran for our lives! We tried to continue playing but I was too shaken up by the experience. I learned something that day. You can't enjoy yourself when you are always having to look over your shoulder.

The same is true with sin. When Abram and Lot arrived back in Canaan after returning from Egypt they had accumulated such wealth that the land could no longer support both their flocks. Abram gave his nephew Lot the opportunity to choose where He would like to go.

Gen 13:10 Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, toward Zoar. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) 11 So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company: 12 Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents **near** Sodom. 13 Now the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD.

Lot chose the Jordan valley because it was well watered and a "garden". It looked like the perfect spot but there was one problem. It was near Sodom. Lot knew that the people of Sodom were very wicked but he still he chose to live there.

There are many choices which we face in life which look great from a distance. Like the valley they look great from a human standpoint. The problem is that they are close to Sodom.

Notice that while Lot first pitched his tents NEAR Sodom we see in just the next chapter that he was now living IN Sodom.

Gen 14:11 The four kings seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food; then they went away. 12 They also carried off Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom

The same is true in life. Don't pitch your tents near sin or soon you will be living in it. I have heard stories of people who have been hooked by a variety of addictions. They almost always start by just an 'innocent' act that did not seem like much at the time. Gamblers who started by just putting a quarter in the slot machine. People struggling with pornography from just a glance at something they should not have been looking at. If you play with fire you will be burned. If you mess with the cat you can expect to be scratched. If you play with sin it will destroy you. Stay away from sin in your life!

A Burmese Christian tells the following parable: A little banyan seed said to a palm tree one day, "I am weary of being tossed about by the wind; let me lodge in your branches." "Remain as long as you like," was the reply. Soon the tree forgot all about its tiny guest, but the seed did not remain idle. Immediately it began to work its roots under the bark and into the heart of the trunk itself. Finally the tree cried out, "What are you doing?" "I'm only the little seed you allowed to rest among your boughs," came the reply. "Get out!" exclaimed the palm. "You've become too large and strong!" "I cannot leave you now," said the banyan. "We have grown together, and I would kill you if I tore myself away." The tree tried desperately to shake itself loose, but to no avail. Eventually its graceful leaves turned brown, and its trunk wasted away; but the banyan continued to thrive until its host could no longer be found.

Maybe you are here and you recognize that you are living too close to Sodom. Run for your life! I believe that God is saying 3 things to you today:

1. DON'T HESITATE – get out of that situation NOW

When God tells you to run for your life you had better move WHEN you are told to. The angels came to Lot and warned him of the impending disaster, but Lot hesitated so they grabbed him by the hand and led him out of the city. When the angel said MOVE he meant NOW. The city was going to be destroyed immediately. Lot hears the warning, but hesitated when he understood what that meant.

The same is true in our lives. We find ourselves in places or relationships that are bound for destruction and God says MOVE but we hesitate. We over think it. We start weighing out the pros and cons and we start to rationalize the situation in our minds. Let me ask you a question. Has there ever been a time in your life when God has had to grab you by the hand and drag you out of a bad situation? I know what that is like. You don't hesitate. You run when you are told to.

Maybe you are here today and you are messing with something you know is wrong and you know that God has told you to move but you are hesitating. Remember the story of Joseph when he was in charge of Potiphar's house. Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him. What did Joseph do when tempted?

Gen 39:11 One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. 12 She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.

Joseph had drawn the line and Potiphar's wife knew his stand. When that line was crossed he got out of there. When Joseph saw he was in the wrong place at the wrong time he RAN. He didn't try to argue with the wife or discuss the issue in detail, he just ran.

Two gas company service men, a senior training Supervisor and a young trainee were out checking meters and parked their truck at the end of the alley and worked there way to the other end. At the last house a woman looking out her kitchen window watched the two men as they checked her gas meter. As they finished the meter check the older supervisor challenged his younger co-worker to a foot race down the alley back to the truck. As they came running up to the truck, they realized that the lady from the last house was huffing and puffing right behind them. They stopped and asked her what was wrong. Gasping for breath she said, "When I see two gas men running full speed away from my house, I figured I had better run too." When you see danger don't hesitate... RUN!

James 1:13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

James says evil thoughts lead to evil actions. It is like having a child, at first the baby is just a single cell but then it quickly grows until it is birthed and grows to adulthood. The key to overcoming temptation is to catch it early. It starts in the mind. If the devil can get your attention then he can get you. You don't fight it. You run. You refocus your attention on something else. Shift your thoughts. The more you fight a feeling, the more it controls you. If you ignore it, you weaken it.

The Bible does not tell us to resist temptation. It tells us to resist the tempter. There is a big difference. When Jesus was out in the desert and the devil came to tempt him to use his miraculous power for selfish reasons and said, "Why don't you turn these stones to bread?" Jesus does not resist the temptation. He doesn't say, "No thanks, I'm really not that hungry!" He was hungry. Instead he refocuses on God's Words and resists the tempter. The more you fight something the more you focus on it and move towards. The more you say to yourself "don't eat the chocolate cake" the more you focus on CHOCOLATE CAKE!

There is an old story of travelling salesman that went around selling a magic potion that would turn water into gold. There was just one catch. While you followed the detailed instructions you could not think about red monkeys or the potion would not work. Do you think anyone ever was able to do that? The more you say to yourself "don't think about red monkeys" the more you think about red monkeys.

You need to draw a line and not cross it. Purity starts in the head not the hormones.

Running from temptation means that you have to run from some situations. There are times you have to get up and turn the TV off. Walk away from the group that's telling the dirty jokes. Leave the party that is serving alcohol. If you don't want to get stung, you have to get away from the bees. Get up and move physically out of the situation.

2. DON'T ARGUE – don't settle for second best

Secondly, when God tells you to run for your life you had better move WHERE you are told to. When Lot and the angels got outside the city they again told him to flee for his life but again he hesitated.

Gen 19:18 But Lot said to them, "No, my lords, please! 19 Your servant has found favor in your eyes, and you have shown great kindness to me in sparing my life. But I can't flee to the mountains; this disaster will overtake me, and I'll die. 20 Look, here is a town near enough to run to, and it is small. Let me flee to it -- it is very small, isn't it? Then my life will be spared."

What Lot was really saying here is that he knew the way to safety better than God. Lot was afraid of going to the mountains and instead wanted to go to the nearby town of Zoar. The word ZOAR in Hebrew means INSIGNIFICANT.

Lot traded God's perfect plan for insignificance. How often do we do the same thing? We substitute God's best in our lives for something much less of our own making. We see in this story that soon after Lot arrives he leaves Zoar and goes to the mountains where he had been told to go in the first place. Wouldn't it have been better for him to have just trusted God and gone there in the first place?

Gen 19:30 Lot and his two daughters left Zoar and settled in the mountains, for he was afraid to stay in Zoar. He and his two daughters lived in a cave.

The same is true for us today. God directs us but we hesitate and want to go our own way thinking that we know the safe path better than Him. Down the road we find out that God's plan was best for us all along. I have seen so many people run out of one bad relationship right into another. Out of one bad addiction right into another. They trade Sodom for Zoar and end up miserable.

Don't jump out of the frying pan into the fire. Don't trade bad for worst. Choose God's best for your life and go there first. You will save yourself a lot of heartbreak.

Good parents want their child to learn from their mistakes. The issue is trust. When God tells you where to go you don't argue – YOU GO THERE. You may question and have doubts about His direction but listen to His will and go where He tells you to.

3. DON'T LOOK BACK – keep your eyes on the finish line

The sad ending of this passage is that Lot's wife looked back and became a pillar of salt. We are not told exactly why this happened. We see that Lot reached Zoar before the Lord acted. They were warned not to look back and to go as fast as they could. The New Testament speaks of this account as an example of the second coming:

Luke 17:28 "It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. 29 But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. 30 "It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. 31 On that day no one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. 32 Remember Lot's wife! 33 Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.

The principle is that the second coming of Jesus will be immediate and people will not have time to prepare for it. Lot's wife was overtaken by the disaster because she hesitated.

I believe the sin of Lot's wife was not the looking back but the hesitation it represented. How many races have been lost because people lost focus of the finish line and looked back to see how far others were behind them.

Luke 9:61 Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family." 62 Jesus replied, "No-one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

You can't plough looking backward. It just doesn't work. You can't follow Jesus that way either. Maybe you are here today and you are saying "I will follow you Lord; but first let me go ..." You have heard the saying that if Jesus is not Lord of all then He is not Lord at all. What have you placed before your relationship with Jesus.

In March of 1519 Hernando Cortez set sail from Cuba and landed in Mexico with 10 ships and 500 Spanish soldiers. He faced almost immediate opposition from the native peoples. Against impossible odds and after facing several hard fought battles, the opposition made his men want to return to Cuba and safety. Knowing that his men were considering mutiny, Cortez ordered that the ships be burned to prevent any thought of retreat. Cortez did not want to simply visit Mexico, he wanted to conquer it. Retreat was not an option.

For the soldiers with Cortez, security meant Cuba. They dreamed of returning to the familiar surroundings and safety of the city walls. To the friends, wives and children they had left behind. We all have places of security in which we live. Places that are familiar to us and comfortable. Sometimes these familiar places are areas of sin or apathy. God calls us to move on but we can't let go of the things that are familiar.

Steven Curtis Chapman wrote a song about this story called *Burn the Ships*;

In the spring of new beginnings a searching heart set sail
Looking for a new life and a love that would not fail
On the shores of grace and mercy we landed with great joy
But an enemy was waiting to steal, kill, and destroy
Quietly he whispers, "Go back to the life you know"
But the one who led us here is saying
Burn the ships we're here to stay
There's no way we could go back
Now that we've come this far by faith
Burn the ships we've passed the point of no return
Our life is here so let the ships burn and burn

You have probably heard this before but in Africa they catch monkeys by putting a big piece of food in a trap with a narrow opening. The monkey grabs the food but cannot get it's hand out. Instead of just giving up and letting go it will struggle until it gets caught.

Maybe there is an area of your life where you are living too close for comfort with sin. Maybe there is an area where you are already living in Sodom and have been for some time. Listen to the words of God. Get up and run for your life. Now is the time to act. Go wherever God directs you and don't look back.