

DON'T look back!

“Remember Lot’s wife” Luke 17:32



Philip Shields

November 2017

www.LightontheRock.org

I believe we all look back in various ways. But God warns us NOT to! WHY? It tells our God something about us – when we look back. Learn and be warned how devastating it is to go back to our past, look to it, or regret or long for it – and what we should do (according to scripture) instead.

Warm welcome everyone to light on the Rock. The Rock is our beloved Yeshua the Messiah. And he is also our Light as we shine his light, from his Rock.

Discussed Beatle’s song “Yesterday” – “....Oh, I believe in yesterday...now I need a place to hide away, Oh I believe, in yesterday.”

DO we believe and live in “yesterday”? Many do! It was a great hit and won the Grammy Record of the Year award in 1965, because it hit a chord with so many people. So many of us do live in yesterday.

WHY do we look back? We know Lot’s wife looked back – in the story in Genesis 19. We’ll look at that today – and then look at the many ways we do look back, and where should we be looking instead?

Rare is the person who never looks back. I believe many of you will hear examples of ways we look back that you may not have ever seriously pondered before. And you’ll understand why Abba – the Head over all – says to stop it.

WHY do we need this topic? At least our reward - and maybe more - may depend on our obedience to the command we’ve been given not to look back or go back. And our quality of life right here, right now, will be a reflection of this.

And be warned: Our Adversary (Satan means “Adversary”) WANTS you and me to look back – a lot. We’ll look at all that too. As do so many of my sermons, this was initially a study I did for myself – and then decided you may want to hear it too.

I look back way too much and intend to overcome that and stop it. Now. And you look back. This sermon started, as many of my sermons do, as a personal study for me, to teach me why it’s so bad to look back and learn HOW to counter the urge. I hope you get a lot out of this message. I’d love to hear your feedback.

Looking back is not always wrong. A lot depends on what is causing us to look back; what your purpose is, and whether we learn from our mistakes. But there are times and circumstances where our Savior is very clear: "DON'T look back!"

"Remember Lot's wife"

You know the story of Lot's wife – that just before they fled, two angels told Lot, his wife and 2 single daughters not to look back. Lot had at least 2 other married daughters, maybe 3 others, and that would be your possible "10 righteous" that Abraham was hoping for when he asked YHVH if he'd spare Sodom for the sake of 10 righteous (Genesis 18). Interestingly to me, Abraham never mentioned Lot by name but actually was asking about saving the city – because of them! This was a time when Abraham prayed for Sodom!

Genesis 19:15-17

When the morning dawned, the angels urged Lot to hurry, saying, "Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city." 16 And while he lingered, the men took hold of his hand, his wife's hand, and the hands of his two daughters, YHVH being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city. 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."

Lot pleaded to be allowed to go into the city of Zoar (which means "little") and that was granted. Now let's pick up in v 21-26.

Genesis 19:21-26

And he (the angel) said to him (to Lot), "See, I have favored you concerning this thing also, in that I will not overthrow this city for which you have spoken. 22 Hurry, escape there. For I cannot do anything until you arrive there. Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar.

23 The sun had risen upon the earth **when Lot entered Zoar** (formerly called Bela – Gen 14:8.)

So Lot is actually in another city already by this time; not still running out in the open terrain away from the city as all the Bible story drawings show it.

Compare this to **Genesis 14:8-11**, and you'll see that this whole area was full of sulfur or asphalt pits (KJV says "slime pits" – but they were asphalt.)

24 Then YHVH rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from YHVH out of the heavens. 25 So He overthrew those cities, all the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground.

26 But his wife looked back behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.

The New English Translation: "But Lot's wife looked back *longingly* and was turned into a pillar of salt."

The Hebrew verb (5027, Nabat) for "looked" means to "look intently, to gaze" as in Gen 15:5, in a focused way. Young's literal Bible says she "looked expectingly

behind him.” It’s the same word used by the angel who told her not to “nabat” – look intensely back or with any longing.

Later, in Gen 19:27-28 we read that Abraham *also* looked at the ruined plain where Sodom and the cities had been – but it’s a different Hebrew word. That word just means he observed, looked down toward – not a focused gaze or intense or a longing look as Lot’s wife had.

Scripture does not tell us WHY she looked back. Your guesses are as good as mine. We know she disobeyed and looked back – with some longing.

So many of us also look back that I doubt if most of us would have done any better than Lot’s wife. Now that’s sobering, don’t you think?

Think about Lot’s wife for a second:

- She definitely had other sons or daughters there – there were at least 2, maybe 3 or more other daughters, who thought Lot was kidding (Gen 19:12-14).
- They may have had some darling grandchildren there
- Certainly had servants and friends and their children
- Lot was rich. He almost certainly had livestock and even pets
- Had their **home** there—and they were wealthy. They had been rushed out, literally pulled out – but behind were people they loved. They also had left behind gold, silver, jewels, heirlooms. Plus, they could have used some emergency items like food and water!

Now she hears explosions behind her as “fire and brimstone” rained on the city. With your children and loved ones and valuables back in Sodom, what would you and I have done?

We’re not told WHY she looked back. Some have speculated she wanted *to return there to live* because she loved Sodom itself, the city, so much. *I personally don’t see that.* With loud explosions going on behind her, that would be like saying she wanted to go back to a city that was being “carpet bombed”. Who would? Unless there were critical reasons to go back, in her mind. And therein could be pointers for us today.

I personally don’t think that she loved Sodom itself so much that she wanted to go back to live there. I think she was horrified at what she could hear going on, and very naturally wanted to do something to save her family and friends – much like many people have done to race into their burning home to save a child or pet they knew to be in there. That’s my take on it at least. Especially when we add the context of Yeshua’s words in Matthew 24 and Luke...

Or, I suppose we could “see” someone running into a burning building to save a priceless jewel or painting or something of great value. But most likely – a life they wanted to save. A child. A grandchild. A dear friend. A family pet. Or all the above.

What would make you turn back or go back?

Whatever her reasons were – she disobeyed – and was punished for her disobedience. Obviously this lesson was placed there to be a lesson and a warning for all of us. But are we listening to the warning?

IT'S NOT JUST A STORY – Jesus SAYS REMEMBER Lot's wife

Look, the angel's warning wasn't just for Lot's wife. It's a warning to you and me! The time is coming when we're going to have to flee in a hurry. We won't have time to grab everything we normally live with. We may not have time to go back home – and in fact are commanded by our Savior not to. Look:

Luke 17:26-34

And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man:

So the context is what things will be like when Christ returns. Life will, in many ways, appear normal. But look closely at what Yeshua says:

27 They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.

28 **Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot:** They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; 29 but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all.

30 Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.

31 "In that day, he who is on the housetop, and his goods are in the house, let him not come down to take them away. And likewise the one who is in the field, let him not turn back.

32 Remember Lot's wife.

33 Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it."

Now verse 33, coming on the heels of v 32 is interesting.

- *Don't do things against this order from your King,* because you think something back there can help you survive better
- When it's time to leave – it will be time to leave without a minute to lose.
- Don't go back to get anything or anyone. Don't go back into your house at that time. You will have to trust your God's words here and obey him.

Yeshua used similar words in Matthew 24. He's going to say, that for those in Israel, there will be a time when you can't even spare a few minutes because time will be precious and you'll need to get out immediately, now!

Was Lot's wife thinking of something she wishes she could go back and get? That seems to be the context of the Son of God's words:

Matthew 24:15-22

15 "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand), 16 "then let **those who are in Judea** flee to the mountains. 17 Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. 18 And let him who is in

the field not go back to get his clothes. 19 But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! 20 And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. 21 For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. 22 And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened."

So Lot's wife looked back with longing. Something back in Sodom, burning up now like a bombed out city –something back there made her want to return and get something she had just left. Maybe she was even turning back.

So what can WE learn from this? Though we can't know for sure why SHE looked back – do you look back? **Please understand: you and I have the same command given to us, as Lot's wife had: "Don't look back. And don't go back. REMEMBER LOT'S WIFE".**

Let's define "LOOKING BACK"

From what God's Son says – it's related to going back, or looking back, at least in our minds, with some longing and yearning, to something you left.

Let's look at that – and other ways we could be looking back.

Longing for something Sodom or her world offered.

- Rev 18:4 commands us to come out of this world, out of Babylon. The language used is expressing the most intimate union possible. "Come OUT of her, my people..."
- **Adam and Eve** saw something they thought they could have by eating of the forbidden tree/fruit – "be like God knowing good and evil".

Genesis 3:4-7

Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate."

Notice how the apostle John draws a parallel to the very sequence of thinking that led Eve to sin – and to draw Adam with her, though he knew better!

1 John 2:15-17

"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world — **the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life** — is not of the Father but is of the world." (Described on the audio)

You and I can look back from the point of view of pondering all the things we've given up and where we might be today had we not alienated friends, family and others because of our

new beliefs. I mean for example, we now don't keep Christmas or Easter or Sunday worship.

Or maybe we wish we *could* do the things that our worldly friends can do – like working and doing our own pleasures on Saturdays. Or we look back when we regret having to tithe – and ponder how much better our retirement savings might look had we not tithed or spent all that money going to the Feast of Tabernacles each year. Or we're tired of being the odd man out at work. Beware of that kind of thinking. It borders on what Lot's wife did.

All of that is a form of looking back. The next point builds on this last one:

****Wondering if our decisions were WORTH IT. Satan will use this.**

Yeshua said – have to love him MORE than family or we aren't worthy.

Matthew 10:34-39 – Yeshua says that his ways WILL cause some friction in our relationships; a man against his father and so on. Then he says in v. 37 that anyone who loves his dad or mom, or his son or daughter more than him, “is not worthy of me.”

In Luke 14:26 he adds, “and his own life also”. We have to trust and love Him even at the cost of our own lives.

Remember even Peter – **see Matthew 19:27-29** -- admitted that in following the Messiah, they had given up ALL. “*We have left all and followed you...*” he said.

Then Yeshua replied that when Christ sits on his throne, all who followed him will also be leaders, then **Matthew 19:29** – “and everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands-- for my name's sake, shall receive a hundred fold, and inherit eternal life.”

That does imply he's calling us to at least be willing to leave everyone and everything, if it comes to that.

We can't be looking back. I have, in the past. I was offered a fully paid 4 year degree at the college or university of my choice when I was 18. I was Valedictorian with an almost perfect GPA in my school. But I went to a small private college in England instead.

And after college, I was offered a terrific paying job and management in California, but turned that down too, to do what I felt was my King's calling. For a lot less pay (in this life at least) and ... anyway, I shouldn't look back. Let's not be wondering “if only I had done such-and-such instead....”

Hebrews 10:32-39

But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: 33 partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; 34 for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. 35 Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. 36 For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:

37 "For yet a little while,
And He who is coming will come and will not tarry.
38 Now the just shall live by faith;

But if anyone draws back,

My soul has no pleasure in him."

39 But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul."

GOING BACK to get something – WHEN YOU KNOW you gotta just go and TRUST YOUR SAVIOR to take care of you and anyone back home still.

Christ equated looking back to going back to the house to get your jacket, or emergency kit, or water, or ...maybe even trying to talk loved ones into leaving. But Yeshua said there is coming a time when we just have to get out, and get out now, and trust him for the rest.

Are you going to obey –or not? Are you going to go back or look back?

This next point is SO commonly used by so many as their way they look back. If this next point applies to you, beware!

REGRETS – another way we look back

Big one for me: We look back by not letting go of our past mistakes, bad decisions – and sins. In other words, we're living a life of REGRETS, not forgiving self of past sins (largely because some people who call themselves ministers or believers won't let you forget).

Why I like some (not all) time travel movies: they allow me to daydream about what might have been if I could go back in life, knowing what I know now – and do it over.

REGRET – if we don't move on – is a form of looking back. And lingering with regrets will kill your present opportunities right now. You have to BURN YOUR BRIDGES. Julius Caesar did just that: he burned his ships so his soldiers had to fight/win or die.

And it's also saying "Master, God, I don't trust that anything IS going to work out for good here like you say in Romans 8:28. You're good. Fine. But I messed up super badly and I've ruined my life and a bunch of other lives. I'm sorry. But I also accept my life is ruined."

That's wrong reasoning. It's lack of faith in where your Master wishes to take you now. Satan will play on this regret over and over! He will "trash talk you" about what a loser you are. Don't listen to him. We're living on his turf – but we have to focus on our calling, looking ahead as Paul says in Phil 3:12-14.

But no matter how bad we've been, if we repent and change, God can and does work out all things for good in the end. We have to trust that. Even the bad stuff will work out – if we put it all in his hands.

Satan will CAPITALIZE on this and trash-talk you that “how dare you call yourself a child of God after all you’ve done. You should RESIGN right now from the family of God. Right now!” – Satan tells you. DO NOT LISTEN to that.

Regret takes shape and looks like this:

- “I sure wish I had done this or that instead.”
- **The “why didn’t I...?” type of questions.**
 - Why didn’t I pursue someone else to marry? Or attend a different college?
 - WHY didn’t I keep a better eye on my kids and what they were doing and ... and... and... and now one of your kids is dead.
 - Or why wasn’t I a better husband or wife? More than half of all marriages end in divorce.
 - You women: Why didn’t I marry that other guy I could have?
 - Why didn’t I read more to my children (or variations – why didn’t I encourage them more, teach them this or that, or spend more time with them in baseball, fishing, etc.
 - Why didn’t I pray more, and trust more – instead of what I did?
 - Or, “I wish I had spent more time with mom and dad – especially now that they’re both gone.”
 - Why didn’t I take full advantage of my choice, like my 401k matching funds? Why did I pull out of the stock market? Or why didn’t I pull out in 2008 when I could have?

To those of us who do this, here’s what God tells us thru Paul:

Philippians 3:12-14

“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; ***but I press on***, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; ***but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal*** for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”.

FORGETTING your sinful past! SO hard to do sometimes, especially when people keep throwing it back in your face many years later! *Be sure you never are like that, for that is so evil to dig up forgiven sins that are buried in Christ’s own blood.* It’s the worst kind of grave digging, and it makes it harder for people to forgive themselves, when they see God’s so-called children won’t forgive and let them move on.

And their sin is past. When a person grave-digs and gossips and spreads your forgiven past, their sin is present, and very, very vile in God’s eyes.

The truth is, we can’t unring a bell we’ve rung! *We can quit ringing it.* That’s repentance and changing directions with Christ now living in us more fully.

God has given you and me a huge GIFT: it’s the opportunity to live in the here and now, and future – and not the past – but the “right now”, and so that’s why

we can call his gift the PRESENT. It's God's gift to us. He truly lets us cut off our past, washed away in the blood of the Son of God – for you. ALL your and my sins, no matter how bad. ALL of them.

Read **1 John 1:7-9** again. ALL our sins can be washed away. Everyone's sins caused the death of Yeshua. So you're not any better – or any worse – than anyone else in Christ. Move on with your new life graciously. And certainly don't stand and condemn anyone else. We're all in this boat together, the boat called "Forgiven and Moving on".

When we live in the past, we are ruining this great GIFT, the new PRESENT from God, the ability and right to live, with TODAY, not wasting today on Yesterday! Remember the Beatles song, "Yesterday". A song full of regrets. I don't sing that song anymore.

I do not want to live in Yesterday anymore. Join me, and come out of Yesterday, and live to the full – abundantly in Christ – today, his gift, the Present.

Paul: The epistle or letter to the Philippians was one of Paul's last books he wrote. In that quote we just read, he is very strong about looking ahead. But earlier even in Paul's life, he did reminisce a bit about some of the horrors he had done. And Paul had done some horrible acts of violence and murder.

In other scriptures he refers to himself as "**chief sinner**" (**1 Timothy 1:15**) for having persecuted the early believers with so much venom and zeal – dragging men and women in chains off to jail, threatening and torturing various ones until they blasphemed the very name of Yeshua! Yes, he is right. He was a chief sinner. Don't whitewash it.... Except to say, even Paul could be forgiven and used to teach people about the amazing grace of our wonderful God.

We know he was the one authorizing the stoning of Stephen (that's what it meant to "hold the clothes" of those doing the stoning). So really in a sense, HE killed Stephen. And when Christ himself appears to Saul in Acts 9, Yeshua asked... well, let's read it: ("**Saul**" was his Hebrew name; "**Paul**" was the name he used when he went to the Gentiles. Paul or "*Paulos*" is a Greek name meaning "little.")

Acts 8:3

"As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.

Here's how Paul recounts the Acts 9 story of his call by Yeshua himself, speaking in Hebrew to the crowd:

Acts 22:2-5

Then he said: 3 "I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today. 4 **I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women,** 5 as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to **bring in chains** even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished.

And to King Agrippa, Paul said this:

Acts 26:9-11

"Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to DEATH, I cast my vote against them. 11 And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

12 "While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. 14 And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' 15 So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus [guarantee you he said in Hebrew – Yeshua], whom you are persecuting. ..."

So I think sometimes we DO look back. We shouldn't, but when you do things as horrifically as Paul had done – and as you or I may have done – yes, there are some regrets for the massive pain your or my sins have caused. And like Paul, sometimes it's hard to move on, but move on we must. As Paul did.

If we don't, we're rejecting what God the Son went through for us. Why waste all that?

"There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness..." Paul says in the end. (2 Timothy 4:8). He says that crown of righteousness is there for ALL –even you, me and Paul – who await Christ and accept his GIFT.

God puts our sins away and remembers them no more (Hebrews 8:12)!

The saying that "there's a special place in hell for the worst of sinners" – is just plain wrong. If the worst of sinners – which is what Paul said HE had been – if they repent, there IS a future. So if God himself forgets our sins when he covers them and buries them in the blood of his own Son, why do we hang on to them? WHY? And yes, I preach to myself too.

ALL of us have a part in helping one another move on. How? By letting someone's past sins be past. By representing the love of God in the love you show others, even all who have repented of the most vile of all sins you can imagine.

Don't work for Satan the Accuser of the brethren, by being his assistant – by accusing and gossiping about others' past sins, no matter how bad they were. "There's none righteous, no not one", Scripture says. If you've not been perfectly righteous, what right do you have to spread manure about someone else? *Or do we revel in someone's manure?*

Some have had a VERY hard time moving on and looking ahead –largely because some evil people including ministers, won't let them move on. They spread the dirt far and wide. I tell you on God's word, those who do that, who dig in the blood of Jesus' forgiveness for all who do repent, will themselves be judged.

God is not ashamed to be called your God (see Hebrews 11:16). Yeshua – the perfect son of God – is not ashamed to call you his brother or sister (Hebrews

2:11). If perfect Almighty God is not ashamed of you, why should YOU be ashamed of you? And why should you be ashamed of anyone else He has forgiven? So STOP looking back. Remember Lot's wife. Look ahead.

Side lesson: if you wish you could go back in time, start doing now the things you wish you would have done better long ago.

- **Wish you had spent more time with your kids? Do it now – at least with the grandkids.**
- **Wish you had gotten more sleep** and went to bed with your wife? Do it now. You're already divorced? Well, learn from it and move on.
- **Do you wish you had done more encouraging to others? Well, do it now. BE a modern day Barnabas – known as an encourager .**
- **"I wish I had learned how to ..."** Whatever that is, **start now.** Whether it's oil painting, learning to play guitar or piano, or wood crafts or a new sport or game (chess).

DAYDREAMING of the "Momentary pleasures of sin" Heb 11:24-26

This NEXT way we look back is VERY dangerous: Instead of REGRETTING—sometimes some of us look back in the form of RELIVING the past "pleasures of sin for a moment" – in daydreams and lustful memories. Very dangerous, very bad.

- **Years later, there should be nothing pleasant about sins we committed in the past. If you find them pleasant to think about – you haven't repented yet.** We should never be replaying old memories of past sins in any way but disgust. If we replay past sins – especially sexual sins with anything short of disgust – have we really left those behind?
- Paul admitted to still – at times – succumbing to the lure of sin when he says "that which I hate, I do". **But notice his key word: he said he HATED sins that still crept up in his life.** If we reminisce over past sins and replay them in our minds with ANY sense of enjoyment, can we say we HATE those past sins? If you hate past sins, we won't be replaying them. *If we hate past sins we won't feel good any time we give in to doing them again.*

Now we ALL commit some of the same sins repeatedly – like coveting, losing our temper, breaking the sabbath in some way, etc – so the old notion that "if you really have repented you won't do it again" is nonsense. Paul said he still succumbed to sin at times. I know sometimes I gave in to "the pleasures of sin for a moment" – but within seconds or minutes I hated myself for it, repenting deeply. Paul sinned – but he hated the sins he gave into.

Overcoming sin will be a lifelong goal – and of course Christ has overcome and it's HIS perfect life that covers us when we accept him.

- Some look back by enjoying movies and shows that depict their old life style and their old sins. STOP it. Vicariously, are we “looking back” thru the lens of a movie camera and vicariously enjoying “the old sins” through a movie. If we really understood the seriousness of our old sins, take adultery for example -- we wouldn't, we couldn't, enjoy watching adultery going on in movies. Again, rephrasing what Paul said, “I now HATE the things I did, the sins I committed, and I really hate it when I still from time to time do things I hate!”

So though we still stumble and sin, we now hate it. If you kinda still enjoy your old past, you're looking back, in a very bad way.

But worse, reliving old sins may say that you haven't come, even yet, to really hate sin. And yes, I preach to myself as well in these lessons. Let's be sure we're NOT looking back in any way – not with longing, not with regret, and not with any sense of relish.

THE BIGGEST THING ABOUT LOOKING BACK

ULTIMATELY – and here's the really BIG POINT why looking back is not good: IT SHOWS A LACK OF FAITH IN Christ AND WHERE HE'S TAKING YOU. THIS IS REALLY THE POINT!!

Luke 9:61-62

And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house." ***But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."***

I once asked a dear friend: “do you have regrets?” – he said, “No, not since I've turned my life over to Christ. Any wrongs I did he erased and paid for, and now I just trust that wherever he leads, I should follow him.”

Your God wants to re-set your path to HIS plans for you – yes, despite your horrid past. He can turn around even the worst of pasts and use you in his service too – just like he did all his servants – for they ALL were horrible sinners too. It is by using even people like you – and like me – to his glory that his grace is so clearly seen.

Look how God even turned **around David and Bathsheba's sin** and David's premeditated murder of Uriah, one of his most loyal and best commanders – a “top 30” in Israel. (2 Sam 23 – last verse). God used a son later born of that marriage – to form the Messianic line!

Abraham lied twice about his wife being his sister – and he is Father of the Faithful now, in spite of that, for God gave him a future and a new life. Isaac – same thing. **Samson** – horrible sinner in so many ways – is in the Faith Hall of Fame (Hebrews 11) because his past too, was forgiven.

Are you getting it? STOP the regrets. STOP the daydreams. STOP looking back.

When **Elisha** was called to take Elijah's mantle and be the new prophet – at first even Elisha asked to be able to go say goodbye to his mom and dad. In the end though, what did Elisha do? He burned his bridges. He burned his way back to the profession of farming that

he had at the time – and burned his plows and equipment. Total commitment to the new life God was calling him to! (**1 Kings 19:19-21**).

HAVE YOU BURNED YOUR TIES TO THE PAST? Have you burned your bridges?

When you have an old fashioned plow, they did their best to plow a straight furrow. The only way to do that is have a marker, a goal ahead of you, and not take your eyes off the mark. When you do, and look back, your line will go off. It won't be on target. It won't be straight. And you end up missing the mark, which interestingly enough, is one of the meanings of "sin" in Hebrew – missing the mark.

So keeping our eye on the goal – on YESHUA, our hero and savior, the Son of God – keeping your eyes on him, is the way to not look back!

That's exactly what Paul said, and we just read it in **Phil 3:13-14**. Let's read it again:

Philippians 3:13-14

"Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; ***but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal*** for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

Hebrews 12:1-2

"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ***2 looking to Jesus (ahead of us!), the author and finisher of our faith***, who for ***the joy that was set before Him endured*** the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. "

ANOTHER HUGE POINT: We can't maximize the gift our Father's given us – the here and now, the PRESENT, God's gift –when we're looking back.

I've said this already, but wanted to say it again. Our God wants us to have hope- to look ahead – to put the past behind us. Look at this passage in Jeremiah. I just love this passage.

Jeremiah 29:11-14

"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says YHVH, thoughts of peace and ***not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.*** Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, ***when you search for Me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you***", says YHVH.

LOOKING BACK CAN BE FORGIVEN TOO

Even the sin of looking back (it goes against Christ's command NOT to look back) is a forgivable sin. I'm out of time – but you can read about how Paula and Barnabas split over a disagreement concerning MARK, who had turned back on one of their trips and so Paul wanted nothing to do with Mark. But thankfully, Barnabas – whose name means "son of encouragement" gave Mark another chance.

The result: Even Paul late in his life ASKED for Mark, “For he’s useful to me in ministry” (2 Timothy 4:11). And Mark later became an assistant to Peter and recounted Peter’s account of the life of Christ in the Gospel according to Mark. Wow, I hope you see, we can repent of looking back. It’s not the unpardonable sin. But we must repent of it and start looking forward, looking to Christ,

Can YOU be a Barnabas to someone who feels their life is over because of their past? I’ve had a couple of Barnabas’ in my life who gave me hope too. You see, I have had a painful past of things done to me and things I’d done against others – and had to learn there’s still a future in Christ, even for someone like me.

How about YOU take someone struggling with life – under your wing? Let’s accept one another and extend hope and love to one another. I hope you accept me – as my past is wiped clean, as is yours. Praise God. After all, we are to love even our enemies and do GOOD to those who hate you – and so how much more a struggling believer? Hold God’s people in your heart, as HE does.

I promise you, when people of God who have lost heart see God’s children letting God be the judge as they love and accept this forlorn person and give him/her HOPE and a future – like God does, like our Father does – it will be far easier for them then to believe God holds out a bright future for them too.

When we DON’T forgive and encourage someone who’s done horrible things – worse than the worst sins – it gives room for Satan to get to work. That is why Paul told the Corinthians in 2 Cor 2 -- to BRING BACK the man who had done vile sexual sins and repented of them, back into their congregation.

And that man had RECENTLY done those sex sins. Someone who had sex sins from 25 or more years ago is not even in the same category. Bring him or her back into your fellowship.

If someone has been removed from your fellowship for sins of the worst kind, like that Corinthian brother, then when changes have been made and the sins are not being repeated – bring him or her back into your friendship and fellowship. I think it amazing that even Judas Iscariot was called “Friend” by Yeshua (Matthew 26:50).

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2 about this – “For we are not ignorant of Satan’s tactics”. I hope you see it and quit condemning people and leaving them outside your fellowship. Forgive and welcome them back with love as you see them no longer committing the same sins that got them put out of the fellowship.

Like GOD does. Like the Father of the prodigal son did. That father pictured God the Father’s joy to see even a depraved son who had shamed the family – come back home.

We need to apply **2 Cor. 5:15-17** – and realize God is changing us all, you, me, all of us – and we need to start seeing the new creation we are, because of God’s work and because of Christ in us, and we in him.

2 Corinthians 5:14-19

“For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; 15 and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

16 Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

18 Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and **has given us the ministry of reconciliation,** 19 that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”

Accept people back into your friendship and fellowship as you see the fruit of their lives the way it is now. They're changing. They're doing works of good deeds. Let them move forward.

So let's draw this to a close.

- We must not look back at our decisions to be a child of God.
- We must not look back at our old sins – either with regret, or God forbid, with desire. That would be like a pig going back to the wallow, or a dog to his vomit (2 Peter 2:20-22).
- **We can't plow a straight furrow if we don't keep our eyes on Yeshua**, who for the joy SET AHEAD OF Him endured the cross. Our model. Christ said we're not fit for the kingdom if we keep looking back (Luke 7:62).
- **Let's HELP others move forward by letting their past be past too** – and praising God living in them now more and more. let people know you're so glad to be see them again when they do come back.
- **Living in the past with regret --will kill you. It truly can lead even to suicide.** God is so powerful he can even turn the bad things in your life into Good. I'll give another sermon on that soon. Even David and Bathsheba – think of it, from that awful sin and the murder of Bathsheba's husband, out of those 2 people – David and Bathsheba – came the Messianic line.
- **And most of all – looking back means you don't trust God's working in you and your life.** Looking ahead shows God you DO trust what he's doing in your life, though we often don't understand it at the time.

SO – are YOU looking back? Or looking ahead as to what will come next. You've turned your life over to Yeshua's control. Your old self supposedly died and now your new life is in Christ.

Let's be like the men and women of faith in Hebrews 11 who looked ahead and looked up – to a city whose builder and maker is God!