Chapter Twenty-Four

The Monument to Lot’s Wife

A. The monument identified by the two pilgrims.

Now I saw that just on the other side of this plain, the pilgrims came to a place where an old monument stood, right next to the highway. At the sight of this they were both concerned because of the strangeness of its shape, for it seemed to them as if it had been a woman who was transformed into a pillar. Therefore they stood intently looking at it, but for a time they did not know what to conclude.

Eventually Hopeful noticed an inscription on the head, though in an unusual style of writing; so being no scholar, he called upon Christian, on account of his learning, to see if he could interpret the meaning. So after some study of the letters, he found the meaning to be this, “Remember Lot’s wife.” Then he read it to his companion, and after this they both concluded that it was the pillar of salt into which Lot’s wife had been turned; this happened when, fleeing from Sodom for safety, she looked back with a covetous heart. As a result of this amazing sight, both travelers were stimulated to enter into the following discourse.

The Plain Ease having passed, and just prior to refreshment at the River of God, a symbol of sober pastoral exhortation presents itself (Luke 17:32). Its location is intended to arrest the attention of pilgrims who are too relaxed and laid back.

1. It is a feminine shaped edifice of apparent stone.

The posture is of a pilgrim pressing forward away from the Silver-Mine, yet the head is turned back toward Demas having a facial expression of longing and regret.

2. It is an inscribed memorial of petrified salt.

The inscription is distinctive, that is not human in style. However, Christian’s greater experience with the learned reading of his book leads him to translate as follows: “Remember Lot’s Wife.”

a. There is recollection of Lot’s wife.

These were the words of their Master (Luke 17:32). This reference is to the wife of Abraham’s nephew who escaped one judgment only to be destroyed by another, specifically by becoming like a carved statue through petrification by salt (Gen. 19:1, 12-26).

b. There is cause for new discourse.

Both pilgrims then realize that the monument was erected for their instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures they might have hope (Rom. 15:4). So their minds are eagerly engaged with regard to profitable application.
B. The Two Pilgrims Wisely Muse over this Warning.

Elsewhere Bunyan comments:

I have sometimes wondered at Lot in this particular; his wife looked behind her, and died immediately, but let what would become of her, Lot would not so much as look behind him to see her. We do not read that he did so much as once look where she was, or what was become of her; his heart was indeed upon his journey, and well it might: there was the mountain before him, and the fire and brimstone behind him; his life lay at stake, and he had lost it if he had but looked behind him.²

1. Christian sees the truth of this object lesson.

CHRISTIAN: Ah my brother, this is a timely sight, for it has come just at the right time after the invitation which Demas gave us to step aside from the way and view the Hill Lucre.³ And had we gone over as he desired, and as you were inclined to do, my brother, I suppose it is quite likely that we ourselves would have become a similar spectacle for those who will follow after us.

Being more knowledgeable in the Word of God, he quickly connects the sequence of recent events with the Old Testament significance of Lot’s wife. Both he and Hopeful have recently encountered situations that find their parallel in Sodom (Jer. 23:14).

a. It visualizes what might have happened to the pilgrims.

This providential and timely object lesson is a reminder of fearful consequences had Hopeful’s carnal inclination won the day. In such a case, yielding to Demas’ overtures would have provided a sad example for other passing pilgrims (I Tim. 4:12).

b. It warns of the escape and judgment of Lot’s wife.

She escaped the immediate judgment of Sodom after some urging (Gen. 19:15-16) only to be later engulfed by a salt deluge on account of lingering and hankering after the attractions of city life. Hence, authentic pilgrimage calls for constant vigilance (I Pet. 5:8).

² Bunyan, Works, III, p. 394.
³ Jer. 23:14; Rom. 15:4.
2. Hopeful repents of his weakness when tempted.

CHRISTIAN: Ah my brother, this is a timely sight, for it has come just at the right time after the invitation which Demas gave us to step aside from the way and view the Hill Lucre. And had we gone over as he desired, and as you were inclined to do, my brother, I suppose it is quite likely that we ourselves would have become a similar spectacle for those who will follow after us.

HOPEFUL: I am sorry that I was so foolish, and the thought of this makes me wonder why I am not now as petrified as Lot’s wife. For in what way was there a difference between her sin and mine? She only looked back, whereas I had a desire to investigate the mine. Let grace be adored here, and let me be ashamed that such a thought should ever enter my heart.

CHRISTIAN: Let us take notice here of what can be profitably learned to help us in the future. This woman escaped one judgment, for she did not suffer the judgment of Sodom; however, she was destroyed by another, which, as we see, was her being turned into a pillar of salt.

HOPEFUL: True, and we should allow her to be both a warning and an example. As a warning, we should shun her sin, since her judgment indicates what will befall us if this wayside monument does not restrain us. So Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, with the two hundred and fifty men that perished in their sin, also become a sign or example for others to beware the judgment of God.

But above all, I ponder one particular thing, and that is how Demas and his friends can so confidently stand over there looking for treasure, while this woman merely looked behind her; for we do not read that she stepped so much as one step out of the way, nevertheless she was turned into a pillar of salt. And the judgment which overtook her remains an example, and within sight of those rummaging in the mine. For if they were to simply lift up their eyes, they could not miss seeing her.

His ready contrition is an example to Christian who will shortly be in need of this same grace of humility (Jas. 5:16).

a. He is amazed at his deliverance and not that of Lot’s wife.

She was withdrawing from Sodom and only glanced back, yet he was guilty of blatant desire for wealth as they stood still and conversed with Demas. His trembling conclusion is that only the pure grace of God can account for such a distinction (I Cor. 15:9-10).

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4 Jer. 23:14; Rom. 15:4.
5 Num. 16:1-50; 26:9-10; I Cor. 10:6, 11.
b. He is soberly warned by both Lot’s wife and Korah.

Now Hopeful also reflects on the Word of God concerning other examples of worldly covetousness. Israel provides a wealth of illustrations. “Now these things happened [to Israel] as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved. . . . Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (I Cor. 10:6, 11).

(1) Lot’s wife would not shun the sin of lust.

While her feet were ambling away from Sodom behind her husband, her heart had never departed from that depraved city. Unlike Lot, that urban environment did not so much as vex her soul (II Pet. 2:7-8).

(2) Korah would not shun the sin of rebellion.

Hopeful recalls the insurrection of Korah, Dathan, Abiram, On, and the two hundred and fifty leaders of Israel against the leadership of Moses and Aaron (Num. 16:1-50; Jude 11). However, the point is that such intransigence in the face of Moses’ rightful role, and the terrifying judgment that resulted, present a sober “warning” (Num. 26:10) to pilgrims who entertain returning to “the flesh pots” of Egypt (Exod. 16:3).

c. He is amazed at the willful blindness of Demas and his friends.

Why was Lot’s wife so immediately and decisively judged while Demas and his friends were allowed to continue with their mining enterprise?

(1) The lust of Lot’s wife seemed less devious.

She stayed in the way without any deviation and yet suffered swift retribution. On the other hand, Demas and company did step out of the way without experiencing rapid judgment.

(2) The memorial to Lot’s wife was clearly visible.

Demas and his friends could not avoid seeing the encrusted form of the society lady from Sodom. Perhaps they did avoid looking forward as much as possible.

CHRISTIAN: Yes, it is an astonishing thing to contemplate, and it indicates that their heart has grown quite desperate in this case. For I cannot think of what is more fitting for them to be compared with than he who picks pockets in the presence of a judge, or the thief who cuts purses under the shadow of the gallows.

It is said of the men of Sodom that “they were exceedingly great sinners” because “they were sinners before the Lord,” that is within his eyesight, and that notwithstanding the kindnesses that he had showed them, for the land of Sodom then was like the Garden of Eden. Therefore this provoked him all the more to jealousy, and made their plague as hot as the Lord out of Heaven could make it. And it is to be reasonably concluded that those, such as we have been talking about, who sin in God’s sight, yes and in spite of many warnings being continually set before them in calling for repentance, must be judged with the greatest severity.

In Part Two, when Christiana and her pilgrim contingent arrive at the Hill Lucre, they are astonished at the blindness of Demas and By-ends when they turned aside to prospect for silver. “Only they considered again, that nature is not affected with the harms that others have met with especially if that thing upon which they look, has an attracting virtue upon the foolish eye.” Even so, why are they not immediately judged?

a. As with an impudent thief.

In the shadow of a sentencing judge or gallows at the ready, he brazenly picks pockets or cuts waist-belts that support money bags. Upon being caught, how swift will be his sentencing, how severe his sentence, how total his guilt!

b. As with the haughty citizens of Sodom.

Sodom had been by repute, “like the garden of the Lord” (Gen. 13: 10). Yet its population sinned exceedingly “before the Lord” (Gen. 13:13 KJV), that is before the very face of God without reverent regard for the many gracious favors it had received. This caused God to respond without delay with great severity. He does not ignore audacious, shameless sinners.

c. As with Demas, By-ends and company.

In gazing covetously from the rim of the Silver-Mine, with the fixed stare of Lot’s wife all but hovering over them, these obstinate religious hedonists have also come to the brink of God’s patience. Like Korah, their insolence calls for radical judgment, and it will surely come!

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7 Bunyan, Works III, p. 228.
4. Hopeful gives thanks for God’s mercy.

HOPEFUL: Without doubt, you have spoken the truth. But what a mercy it is that neither you, and especially I, are ourselves not made to be examples as was this woman. Therefore this occasion gives us the opportunity to thank God, to fear him, and always to remember Lot’s wife.

He continues to marvel at the preserving grace of God, especially in the face of his temporary flirtation with such rank foolishness. But his repentance is solid as he and Christian commit themselves to greater watchfulness and constant remembrance of the lesson of Lot’s wife. They could easily have sung the verse of Robert Robinson:

O to grace how great a debtor  
Daily I’m constrained to be!  
Let that grace, Lord, like a fetter  
Bind my wandering heart to Thee.  
Prone to wander - Lord, I feel it -  
Prone to leave the God I love:  
Here’s my heart, O take and seal it,  
Seal it from Thy courts above.

The Pillar of Salt