

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God
IN CHRIST JESUS.*

(Philippians 3.13-14 NASB)

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by – Stuart H. Pouliot

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Don't Look Back

Then one of the angels said, "Run for your lives! Don't look back and don't stop in the valley. Run to the hills, so that you won't be killed." (Genesis 19.17 GNB)

And another also said, "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home." But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9.61-62 NASB)

I recall that when I was in a rock band during my teen years, one of my most favorite songs that we played was titled *Don't Look Back*. I don't remember the lyrics, but the title rings in my ear, especially for the hour in which we live. It is a strange hour when the world seems to be becoming more and more neurotic, for lack of a better word. As I write this, the global financial markets are reeling to and fro on mere speculation that the US economy is heading into a recession. The US government proposed a \$145 billion economic stimulus package, and Wall Street and the world markets responded that this is not enough. Other financial experts respond that there will be no recession and that no big action needs to be taken. Whom does one listen to in these days of shaking and confusion? Perhaps, we should listen to no one. It is time to listen to the voice of the Spirit of God.

Personally, I sense that something much greater is working behind the scene in what is transpiring in our day. On one level, fear and greed are driving the financial markets. On another level, there seems to be some sinister force at work to cause people to not think rationally. Of course, fear and greed can lead to irrational thought as well, but there seems to be something else at work on the order of a deceptive spirit going throughout the world. Yet, on another level, we know that our God is Sovereign. The world is in Babylonian captivity, captive to a financial system that is not of the Kingdom of God, and, as such, this "house of cards" must be shaken until it falls. Are we at that point when God's judgment comes upon the world to release us from the yoke of this bondage?

There were several things that I believe the Lord spoke to my heart during 2007 indicating that we are nearing the end of this captivity and that He is about to manifest Himself to His conquering people. Surely, the fall of the financial system of the world, when it does come, will be a shaking of monumental proportions. What are we to do as this unfolds? There are many things to do, but the other day, as I was praying, the words **don't look back** came to me.

Studying the story of Lot, we discover that Lot, his wife, and their two daughters were delivered from Sodom. Before sending the judgment of fire on Sodom, the Lord sent angels to remove Lot and his family, who were warned: **And it came about when they had brought them outside, that one said, "Escape for your life! Do not look behind you [Don't look back], and do not stay anywhere in the valley; escape to the mountains, lest you be swept away"** (Genesis 19.17 NASB [added by writer]).

In type, the plain of Sodom represents the world and the mountain represents the Kingdom of Christ. As they were fleeing for their lives, Lot's wife looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt (Genesis 19.26). In type, she represents one who chooses to look back at the world, desiring the things of the world that are passing away and not looking toward the kingdom that cannot be shaken. Lot's wife did not press on toward the goal of reaching the safety of the mountain. She sought to save her life in reference to the world that was to be destroyed and lost her life in reference to the mountain (the kingdom) that was ahead. In like fashion, we too can be excluded from

entering the coming Kingdom of Christ if our mind and heart are set on the world and not on the things above where our Lord is seated (Colossians 3.1-4).

Perhaps, Abraham, Lot, and his wife represent three types of people in relation to New Jerusalem. Abraham lived on the higher plain of the mountains. He was looking for the city of God; **the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God** (Hebrews 11.10). He will enter the Kingdom of Christ and New Jerusalem with the first company of conquerors, which means he will rise in the first resurrection. Lot and his wife will both appear at the second resurrection but with different outcomes. Lot was on the lower plains below the mountains, and he had to be pulled out of Sodom before its destruction. He is like one who will appear at the Great White Throne Judgment to be **saved, yet so as through fire** (1 Corinthians 3.15), at which time he will enter the holy city. His wife will also appear at the Great White Throne, but she will be cast into the lake of fire to be restored through God's all-consuming fire that burns up the chaff. The pillar of salt must be brought through God's spirit-fire in order to release her in a time commensurate with her deeds, after which she will enter the holy city either at the consummation of the eons or perhaps before. Just a thought!

Jesus spoke another word to His disciples about entering His kingdom: **"No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."**

The word *put* means "to throw upon"; the word *look* is in a tense showing continuous action; the word *fit* means "well-placed." In this case, Jesus used the task of plowing, putting the hand to the plow. Looking back implies continually turning away from the task. The ox might be pulling the plow, but the person is continually looking in the other direction. The person is continuing in one direction as the ox pulls, but he is continually looking in an opposite direction. Simply, his eyes are not ahead, looking toward the goal, but are continually looking away from the goal that lies ahead and back to the world from which he has been delivered.

Jesus declared that such a one would be unfit for the kingdom. Please note that this is a word to the believers, not to unbelievers. Those begotten from above can see or enter into the kingdom (John 3.3, 5), so this verse is a warning to those who belong to Christ.

What is the goal? It is entering the coming Kingdom of our Lord, entering *the reign of the heavens*.

We need to continuously press forward, never going back. We are to throw ourselves into the task of walking worthy of the God who calls us into His own kingdom and glory (1 Thessalonians 2.12). If we do, then we will be well-placed in the kingdom. Like a glove fitted for a hand, we will be fitted in the kingdom as we receive a position of authority commensurate with our good works that we completed *in Christ* (Ephesians 2.10).

Dear brethren, we are in days that we need to heed John's exhortation.

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever [remaining for the eon]. (1 John 2.15-17 NASB [CV])

One day the world will dramatically change as it is prepared to meet the King of kings and His conquerors. If today, tomorrow, or even a few years from now, all that we know and hold to be our security is cast to the ground as dust and ashes, what will be our response? Will we look back and lament over the loss, or will we see it as a good thing? Will our hearts reveal that we love the world, or will we keep our hands to the plow and press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus? Which will it be for you?

Don't look back!