

Remember Lot's Wife

A Solemn Warning From Jesus About Lost Souls

by J.C. Ryle (1816-1900)



There are few warnings in Scripture more solemn than this. The Lord Jesus Christ says to us (in Luke 17:32) "Remember Lot's wife."

Lot's wife was a professor of religion: her husband was a "righteous man" (II Peter 2:8). She left Sodom with him on the day when Sodom was destroyed; she looked back towards the city from behind her husband, against God's express command; she was struck dead at once, and turned into a pillar of salt. And the Lord Jesus Christ holds her up as a beacon to His church: He says, "Remember Lot's wife."

It is a solemn warning, when we think of the person Jesus names. He does not bid us remember Abraham, or Isaac, or Jacob, or Sarah, or Hannah, or Ruth. No: He singles out one whose soul was lost for ever. He cries to us, "Remember Lot's wife."

It is a solemn warning, when we consider the subject Jesus is upon. He is speaking of His own second coming to judge the world: He is describing the awful state of unreadiness in which many will be found. The last days are on His mind, when He says, "Remember Lot's wife."

It is a solemn warning, when we think of the Person who gives it. The Lord Jesus is full of love, mercy, and compassion: He is One who will not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax He could weep over unbelieving Jerusalem, and pray for the men that crucified Him; yet even He thinks it good to give this solemn warning and remind us of lost souls. Even He says, "Remember Lot's wife."

It is a solemn warning, when we think of the persons to whom it was first given. The Lord Jesus was speaking to His disciples: He was not addressing the Scribes and Pharisees who hated him, but Peter, James, and John, and many others who loved Him: yet even to them He thinks good to address a caution. Even to them He says, "Remember Lot's wife."

It is a solemn warning, when we consider the manner in which it was given. He does not merely say, "Beware of following-take heed of imitating-do not be like Lot's wife." He uses a different word: He says, "Remember" He speaks as if we were all in danger of forgetting the subject; He stirs up our lazy memories; He bids us keep the case before our minds. He cries, "Remember Lot's wife."

I will speak of the religious privileges which Lot's wife enjoyed.

In the days of Abraham and Lot, true saving religion was scarce upon earth; there were no Bibles, no ministers, no churches, no tracts, no missionaries. The knowledge of God was confined to a few favoured families; the greater part of the inhabitants of the world were living in darkness, ignorance, superstition, and sin. Not one in a hundred perhaps had such good example, such spiritual society, such clear knowledge, such plain warnings as Lot's wife. Compared with millions of her fellow-creatures in her time, Lot's wife was a favoured woman.

She had a godly man for her husband: she had Abraham, the father of the faithful for her uncle by marriage. The faith, the knowledge, and the prayers of these two righteous men could have been no secret to her. It is impossible that she could have dwelt in tents with them for any length of time, without knowing whose they were and whom they served. Religion with them was no formal business; it was the ruling principle of their lives and the mainspring of their actions. All this Lot's wife must have seen and known. This was no small privilege.

When Abraham first received the promises, it is probable Lot's wife was there. when he built his tent between Hai and Bethel, it is probable she was there...when the angels came to Sodom and warned her husband to flee, she saw them; when they took them by the hand and led them out of the city, she was one of those whom they helped to escape. Once more, I say, these were no small privileges.

Yet what good effect had all these privileges on the heart of Lot's wife? None at all. Notwithstanding all her opportunities and means of grace-notwithstanding all her special warnings and messages from heaven-she lived and died graceless, godless, impenitent, and unbelieving. The eyes of her understanding were never opened; her conscience was never really aroused and quickened; her will was never really brought into a state of obedience to God; her affections were never really set on things above. The form of religion which she had was kept up for fashion's sake and not from feeling: it was a cloak worn for the sake of pleasing her company, but not from any sense of its value. She did as others around her in Lot's house: she conformed to her husband's ways: she made no opposition to his religion: she allowed herself to be passively towed along in his wake: but all this time her heart was wrong in the sight of God. The world was in her heart, and her heart was in the world. In this state she lived, and in this state she died.

In all this there is much to be learned: I see a lesson here which is of the greatest importance in the present day. You live in times when there are many persons just like Lot's wife: Come and hear the lesson which her case is meant to teach.

Learn, then, that the mere possession of religious privileges will save no one's soul. You may have spiritual advantages of every description; you may live in the full sunshine of the richest opportunities and means of grace; you may enjoy the best of preaching and the choicest instruction; you may dwell in the midst of light, knowledge, holiness, and good company. All this may be, and yet you yourself may remain unconverted, and at last be lost for ever.

I dare say this doctrine sounds hard to some readers. I know that many fancy they want nothing but religious privileges in order to become decided Christians. They are not what they ought to be at present, they allow; but their position is so hard, they plead, and their difficulties are so many. Give them a godly husband, or a godly wife-give them godly companions, or a godly master-give them the preaching of the gospel-give them privileges, and then they would walk with God.

It is all a mistake. It is an entire delusion. It requires something more than privileges to save souls. Joab was David's captain; Gehazi was Elisha's servant; Demas was Paul's companion; Judas Iscariot was Christ's disciple; and Lot had a worldly, unbelieving wife. These all died in their sins. They went down to the pit in spite of knowledge, warnings, and opportunities; and they all teach us that it is not privileges alone that men need. They need the grace of the Holy Ghost.

Let us value our religious privileges, but let us not rest entirely upon them. Let us desire to have the benefit of them in all our movements in life, but let us not put them in the place of Christ. Let us use them thankfully, if God gives them to us, but let us take care they produce some fruit in our heart and life. If they do not do good, they often do positive harm; they sear the conscience, they increase responsibility, they aggravate condemnation. The same fire which melts the wax hardens the clay; the same sun which makes the living tree grow, dries up the dead tree, and prepares it for burning. Nothing so hardens the heart of man as a barren familiarity with sacred things. Once more I say, it is not privileges alone which make people Christians, but the grace of the Holy Ghost Without that no man will ever be saved.

I ask those who attend a sound ministry in the present day to mark well what I am saying. You go to Mr. A's, or Mr. B's church: you think him an excellent preacher; you delight in his sermons; you cannot hear anyone else with the same comfort; you have learned many things since you attended his ministry; you consider it a privilege to be one of his hearers! All this is very good. It is a privilege. I should be thankful if ministers like yours were multiplied a thousandfold. But, after all, what have you got in your heart? Have you yet received the Holy Ghost? if not, you are no better than Lot's wife.

I ask the children of religious parents to mark well what I am saying. It is the highest privilege to be the child of a godly father and mother, and to be brought up in the midst of many prayers. It is a blessed thing indeed to be taught the gospel from our earliest in-fancy, and to hear of sin, and Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, and holiness, and heaven, from the first moment we can remember anything. But, O, take heed that you do not remain barren and unfruitful in the sunshine of all these privileges: beware lest your hearts remain hard, impenitent, and worldly, notwithstanding the many advantages you enjoy. You cannot enter the kingdom of God on the credit of your parents' religion. You must eat the bread of life for yourself, and have the witness of the Spirit in your own heart. You must have repentance of your own, faith of your own, and sanctification of your own. If not' you are no better than Lot's wife.

I pray God that all professing Christians in these days may lay these things to heart. May we never forget that privileges alone cannot save us. Light and knowledge, and faithful preaching, and abundant means of grace, and the company of holy people are all great blessings and advantages. Happy are they that have them! But after all, there is one thing without which privileges are useless: that one thing is the grace of the Holy Ghost. Lot's wife had many privileges; but Lot's wife had not grace.

*The "Remember Lot's Wife" tract is available from **Chapel Library** ministry at this link:*

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