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Remember Lot's Wife: A Woman to be Remembered [Part 2: The Reality of Hell]

*An Article by J.C. Ryle
(See Chapter 10, Holiness)*

May 22nd, 2022

Sermon Text: Luke 17:32

Scripture Reading: Luke 16:19-31

“Remember Lot’s wife.”

This morning I want to give you the latter half of J.C. Ryle’s sermon which we began last Lord’s Day. Ryle reminded us of this sobering warning from the Lord Jesus Himself that we never forget Lot’s wife. He described for us the great spiritual privileges Lot’s wife enjoyed, and yet, they did her no good because her heart was set upon Sodom. She loved this present world and she perished. She looked back.

Ryle warned us very seriously that by remembering her, we look to ourselves. The greatest spiritual privileges will do us no good at all if we love our present life and disregard Christ.

I want to recommend to you that you also consider Lot. Specifically, Lot as an example of mustard seed faith. He was a man of faith, though his faith was weak.

Gen 19:15-16 As morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, “Up! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be swept away in the punishment of the city.” (16) But he lingered. So the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, **the LORD being merciful to him**, and they brought him out and set him outside the city.

He lingered. Not out of love for Sodom, not looking at Sodom as his wife did, but his faith was hesitating. He needed divine assistance to grab him and get him out of that place – *the Lord being merciful to him*.

judgment,

Ryle is going to speak to us now about the reality of hell. It is a terrible, holy, absolutely true and just end for all who love this world and reject Christ.

But as we begin, I want to remind you of the mercy and help which God showed to Lot, even though he lingered. *The Lord being merciful to him.*

1Jn 1:8-9 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (9) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Have you sinned? Of course. If I claim to have no sin, I am a liar – to myself, to others, and to the Lord. But if I confess my sin, if I admit my need of Christ – that I as one who has sinned need a Savior – God’s promise is sure. He is faithful and just to forgive us. Just as He forgave and rescued Lot.

2Pe 2:7-9 and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (8) (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); (9) then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of

Hear then, J.C. Ryle:

I. **I will now speak, in the last place, of the punishment which God inflicted on Lot’s wife.**

The Scripture describes her end in few and simple words. It is written that “she looked back and became a pillar of salt.”

A miracle was wrought to execute God’s judgment on this guilty woman. The same Almighty hand which first gave her life, took that life away in the twinkling of an eye. From living flesh and blood she was turned into a pillar of salt. That was a fearful end for a soul to come to!

To die at any time is a solemn thing. To die amidst kind friends and relations, to die calmly and quietly in one’s bed, to die with the prayers of godly men still sounding in your ears, to die with a good hope through grace in the full assurance of salvation, leaning on the Lord Jesus, buoyed up by Gospel promises - to die even so, I say, is a serious business. **But to die suddenly and in a moment, in the very act of sin,** to die in full health and strength, to

die by the direct interposition of an angry God - **this is fearful indeed.**

Yet this was the end of Lot's wife. I cannot blame the prayer-book Litany, as some do, for retaining this petition, "From sudden death, good Lord, deliver us." That was a hopeless end for a soul to come to!

There are cases where one hopes, as it were, against hope, about the souls of those we see go down to the grave. We try to persuade ourselves that our poor departed brother or sister may have repented unto salvation at the last moment, and laid hold on the hem of Christ's garment at the eleventh hour. We call to mind God's mercies; we remember the Spirit's power; we think on the case of the penitent thief; we whisper to ourselves, that saving work may have gone on even on that dying bed which the dying person had not strength to tell.

But there is an end of all such hopes when a person is suddenly cut down in the very act of sin. Charity itself can say nothing when the soul has been summoned away in the very midst of wickedness, without even a moment's time for thought or prayer. *Such was the end of Lot's wife.* It was a hopeless end. She went to hell.

But it is good for us all to mark these things. It is good to be reminded that God can punish sharply those who sin willfully, and that great privileges misused bring down great wrath on the soul.

Pharaoh saw all the miracles which Moses worked - Korah, Dathan, and Abiram had heard God speaking from Mount Sinai - Hophni and Phinehas were sons of God's High Priest - Saul lived in the full light of Samuel's ministry - Ahab was often warned by Elijah the prophet - Absalom enjoyed the privilege of being one of David's children - Belshazzar had Daniel the prophet close by his door - Ananias and Sapphira joined the Church in the days when the apostles were working miracles - Judas Iscariot was a chosen companion of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

But they all sinned with a high hand against light and knowledge; and they were all suddenly destroyed without remedy. They had no time or space for repentance. As they lived, so they died: as they were, they hurried away to meet God. They went with all their sins upon them, unpardoned, unrenewed, and utterly unfit for heaven.

And being dead they yet speak. They tell us, like Lot's wife, that *it is a perilous thing to sin against light, that God hates sin, and that there is a hell.*

I feel constrained to speak freely to my readers on the subject of hell. Suffer me to use the opportunity which the end of Lot's wife affords. I believe the time is come when it is a positive duty to speak plainly about the reality and eternity of hell. A flood of false doctrine has lately broken in upon us. Men are beginning to tell us "that God is too merciful to punish souls for ever - that there is a love of God lower even than hell - and that all mankind, however wicked and ungodly some of them may be, will sooner or later be saved."

We are invited to leave the old paths of apostolic Christianity. We are told that the views of our fathers about hell, and the devil, and punishment, are obsolete and old-fashioned. We are to embrace what is called a "kinder theology," and treat hell as a Pagan fable, or a bugbear to frighten children and fools. Against such false teaching I desire, for one, to protest.

Painful, sorrowful, distressing as the controversy may be, we must not

blink it, or refuse to look the subject in the face. I, for one, am resolved to maintain the old position, and to assert the reality and eternity of hell.

Believe me, this is no mere speculative question. It is not to be classed with disputes about liturgies and Church government. It is not to be ranked with mysterious problems, like the meaning of Ezekiel's temple or the symbols of Revelation. *It is a question which lies at the very foundation of the whole Gospel.* The moral attributes of God, His justice, His holiness, His purity, are all involved in it. The necessity of personal faith in Christ, and the sanctification of the Spirit, are all at stake.

Once let the old doctrine about hell be overthrown, and the whole system of Christianity is unsettled, unscrewed, unpinned, and thrown into disorder. Believe me, the question is not one in which we are obliged to fall back on the theories and inventions of man. The Scripture has spoken plainly and fully on the subject of hell.

I hold it to be impossible to deal honestly with the Bible, and to avoid the conclusions to which it will lead us on this point. **If words mean anything, there is such a place as**

hell. If texts are to be interpreted fairly, there are those who will be cast into it. If language has any sense belonging to it, hell is for ever.

Mat 10:28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Mat 23:33 You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?

Rev 20:14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

I believe that the man who finds arguments for evading the evidence of the Bible on this question has arrived at a state of mind in which reasoning is useless. For my own part, it seems just as easy to argue that we do not exist, as to argue that the Bible does not teach the reality and eternity of hell.

Settle it firmly in your mind, that the same Bible which teaches that God in mercy and compassion sent Christ to die for sinners, does also teach that God hates sin, and must from His very nature punish all who cleave to sin, or refuse the salvation He has provided.

The very same chapter which declares, "God so loved the world," declares also, that "the wrath of God abideth" on the unbeliever. (John iii. 16, 36.) The very same Gospel which is launched into the earth with the blessed tidings, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," proclaims in the same breath, "He that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark xvi. 16.)

Settle it firmly in your mind that God has given us proof upon proof in the Bible that He will punish the hardened and unbelieving, and that He can take vengeance on His enemies, as well as show mercy on the penitent.

The drowning of the old world by the flood - the burning of Sodom and Gomorrah - the overthrow of Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea - the judgment on Korah, Dathan, and Abiram - the utter destruction of the seven nations of Canaan - all teach the same awful truth. *They are all given to us as beacons, and signs, and warnings, that we may not provoke God.* They are all meant to lift up the corner of the curtain which hangs over things to come, and to remind us that there is such a thing as the wrath of God. They all tell us plainly that "the

wicked shall be turned into hell.”
(Psalm ix. 17.)

Settle it firmly in your mind, that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has spoken most plainly about the reality and eternity of hell.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus contains things which should make men tremble. But it does not stand alone. No lips have used so many words to express the awfulness of hell, as the lips of Him who spake as never man spake, and who said “The word which ye hear is not Mine, but the Father’s which sent Me.” (John xiv. 24.)

Hell, hell fire, the damnation of hell, eternal damnation, the resurrection of damnation, everlasting fire, the place of torment, destruction, outer darkness, the worm that never dies, the fire that is not quenched, the place of weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth, everlasting punishment - *these, these are the words which the Lord Jesus Christ Himself employs.* Away with the miserable nonsense which people talk in this day, who tell us that the ministers of the Gospel should never speak of hell! They only show their own ignorance, or their own dishonesty, when they talk in such a manner.

No man can honestly read the four Gospels and fail to see that he who would follow the example of Christ must speak of hell.

Settle it, lastly, in your mind, that the comforting ideas which the Scripture gives us of heaven are at an end, if we once deny the reality or eternity of hell.

Is there no future separate abode for those who die wicked and ungodly? Are all men, after death, to be mingled together in one confused multitude? Why then, heaven will be no heaven at all! It is utterly impossible for two to dwell happily together except they be agreed.

Is there to be a time when the term of hell and punishment will be over? Are the wicked after ages of misery to be admitted into heaven? Why then, the need of the sanctification of the Spirit is cast aside and despised! I read that men can be sanctified and made meet for heaven on earth: I read nothing of any sanctification in hell. [And thus, purgatory is an invention of man]. Away with such baseless and unscriptural theories!

The eternity of hell is as clearly affirmed in the Bible as the eternity of heaven. Once allow that hell is not eternal, and you may as well say that

God and heaven are not eternal. The same Greek word which is used in the expression, “everlasting punishment,” is the word that is used by the Lord Jesus in the expression, “life eternal,” and by St. Paul in the expression, “everlasting God.” (Matt. xxv. 46; Rom. xvi. 26.)

I know that all this sounds dreadful in many ears. I do not wonder. But the only question we have to settle is this - *Is it Scriptural? Is it true?* I maintain firmly that it is so: and I maintain that *professing* Christians ought to be often reminded that they may be lost and go to hell. *Remember Lot's wife!*

I know that it is easy to deny all plain teaching about hell, and to make it odious by invidious names. I have often heard of “narrow-minded views, and old-fashioned notions, and brimstone theology,” and the like. I have often been told that “broad” views are wanted in the present day. I wish to be as broad as the Bible, neither less nor more. I say that *he* is the narrow-minded theologian, who pares down such parts of the Bible as the natural heart dislikes, and rejects any portion of the counsel of God. [And thus, the “liberal” theologian is not liberal at all].

God knows that I never speak of hell without pain and sorrow. I would gladly offer the salvation of the Gospel to the very chief of sinners. I would willingly say to the vilest and most profligate of mankind on his deathbed, “Repent, and believe on Jesus, and thou shalt be saved.” But God forbid that I should ever keep back from mortal man that *Scripture reveals a hell as well as heaven, and that the Gospel teaches that men may be lost as well as saved.*

The watchman who keeps silent when he sees a fire, is guilty of gross neglect - the doctor who tells us we are getting well when we are dying, is a false friend; and *the minister who keeps back hell from his people in his sermons is neither a faithful nor a charitable man.*

Where is the charity of keeping back any portion of God's truth? *He is the kindest friend who tells me the whole extent of my danger.* Where is the use of hiding the future from the impenitent and the ungodly? Surely it is like helping the devil, if we do not tell them plainly that “the soul that sinneth shall surely die.” Who knows but the wretched carelessness of many baptized persons arises from this, that they have never been told plainly of hell? Who can tell but thousands might be converted, if

ministers would urge them more faithfully to flee from the wrath to come?

Truly, I fear we are many of us guilty in this matter:

There is a morbid tenderness amongst us which is not the tenderness of Christ.

We have spoken of mercy, but not of judgment; we have preached many sermons about heaven, but few about hell: we have been carried away by the wretched fear of being thought “low, vulgar and fanatical.” We have forgotten that He who judges us is the Lord, and that the man who teaches the same doctrine that Christ taught cannot be wrong.

If you would ever be a healthy Scriptural Christian, I entreat you to give hell a place in your theology. Establish it in your mind as a fixed principle, that God is a God of judgment, as well as of mercy; and that the same everlasting counsels which laid the foundation of the bliss of heaven, have also laid the foundation of the misery of hell. Keep in full view of your mind that all who die unpardoned and unrenewed, are utterly unfit for the

presence of God and must be lost for ever.

They are not capable of enjoying heaven: they could not be happy there. They must go to their own place: and that place is hell.

Oh, it is a great thing in these days of unbelief to believe the whole Bible! If you would ever be a healthy and Scriptural Christian, I entreat you to beware of any ministry which does not plainly teach the reality and eternity of hell. Such a ministry may be soothing and pleasant, but it is far more likely to lull you to sleep than to lead you to Christ, or build you up in the faith.

It is impossible to leave out any portion of God’s truth without spoiling the whole.

That preaching is sadly defective which dwells exclusively on the mercies of God and the joys of heaven, and never sets forth the terrors of the Lord and the miseries of hell. It may be popular, but it is not Scriptural: it may amuse and gratify, but it will not save. Give me the preaching which keeps back nothing that God has revealed. You may call it stern and harsh; you may tell us that to frighten people is not

the way to do them good. But you are forgetting that –

the grand object of the Gospel is to persuade men to “flee from the wrath to come,” and that it is vain to expect men to flee unless they are afraid.

Well would it be for many professing Christians if they were more afraid about their souls than they now are! If you desire to be a healthy Christian, consider often what your own end will be. Will it be happiness, or will it be misery? Will it be the death of the righteous, or will it be a death without hope, like that of Lot’s wife?

You cannot live always: there must be an end one day. The last sermon will one day be heard; the last prayer will one day be prayed; the last chapter in the Bible will one day be read - meaning, wishing, hoping, intending, resolving, doubting, hesitating - all will at length be over. You will have to leave this world and to stand before a holy God. Oh, that you would be wise! Oh, that you would consider your latter end! You cannot trifle for ever: a time will come when you must be serious.

You cannot put off your soul’s concerns for ever: a day will come when you must have a reckoning with God. You cannot be always singing, and dancing, and eating, and drinking, and dressing, and reading, and laughing, and jesting, and scheming, and planning, and money-making. The summer insects cannot always sport in the sunshine; the cold chilly evening will come at last, and stop their sport for ever. So will it be with you.

You may put off religion now, and refuse the counsel of God’s ministers: but the cool of the day is drawing on, when God will come down to speak with you. And what will your end be? Will it be a hopeless one, like that of Lot’s wife? I beseech you, by the mercies of God, to look this question fairly in the face. I entreat you not to stifle conscience by vague hopes of God’s mercy, while your heart cleaves to the world. I implore you not to drown convictions by childish fancies about God’s love, while your daily ways and habits show plainly that “the love of the Father is not in you.”

Remember Lot’s Wife.

There is mercy in God, like a river - but it is for the penitent believer in

Christ Jesus. There is a love in God towards sinners which is unspeakable and unsearchable - but it is for those who “hear Christ’s voice and follow Him.” Seek to have an interest in that love. Break off every known sin; come out boldly from the world; cry mightily to God in prayer; cast yourself wholly and unreservedly on the Lord Jesus for time and eternity; lay aside every weight. Cling to nothing, however dear, which interferes with your soul’s salvation; give up everything, however precious, which comes between you and heaven.

This old, shipwrecked world is fast sinking beneath your feet: the one thing needful is to have a place in the lifeboat and get safe to shore.

Give diligence to make your calling and election sure. Whatever happens to your house and property, see that you make sure of heaven. Oh, better a million times be laughed at and thought extreme in this world than go down to hell from the midst of the congregation and end like Lot’s wife!

And now, let me conclude this paper by offering to all who read it, a few questions to impress the subject on their consciences.

You have seen the history of Lot’s wife - her privileges, her sin, and her end. You have been told of the uselessness of privileges without the gift of the Holy Ghost, of the danger of worldliness, and of the reality of hell. Suffer me to wind up all by a few direct appeals to your own heart. In a day of much light, and knowledge, and profession, I desire to set up a beacon to preserve souls from shipwreck. I would moor a buoy in the channel of all spiritual voyagers, and paint upon it, “Remember Lot’s wife.”

(a) Are you careless about the second Advent of Christ? Alas, many are! They live like the men of Sodom, and the men of Noah’s day: they eat, and drink, and plant, and build, and marry, and are given in marriage, and behave as if Christ was never going to return. If you are such a one, I say to you this day, Take care: “Remember Lot’s wife.”

(b) Are you lukewarm, and cold in your Christianity? Alas, many are! They try to serve two masters: they labour to keep friends both with God and mammon. They strive to be a kind of spiritual bat, neither one thing nor the other: not quite a thorough-going Christian, but not quite men of the world. If you are

such an one, I say to you this day, Take care: “Remember Lot’s wife.”

(c) Are you halting between two opinions, and disposed to go back to the world? Alas, many are! They are afraid of the cross: they secretly dislike the trouble and reproach of decided religion. They are weary of the wilderness and the manna, and would return to Egypt, if they could. If you are such an one, I say to you this day, Take care: “Remember Lot’s wife.”

(d) Are you secretly cherishing some besetting sin? Alas, many are! They go far in a profession of religion; they do many things that are right, and are very like the people of God. But there is always some darling evil habit, which they cannot tear from their heart. Hidden worldliness, or covetousness, or lust, sticks to them like their skin. They are willing to see all their idols broken, but this one. If you are such an one, I say to you this day, Take care: “Remember Lot’s wife.”

(e) Are you trifling with little sins? Alas, many are! They hold the great essential doctrines of the Gospel. They keep clear of all gross profligacy, or open breach of God’s law; but they are painfully careless about little inconsistencies, and

painfully ready to make excuses for them. “It is only a little temper, or a little levity, or a little thoughtlessness, or a little forgetfulness” - they tell us: “God does not take account of such little matters. We are none of us perfect: God will never require it.” - If you are such an one, I say to you this day, Take care: “Remember Lot’s wife.”

(f) Are you resting on religious privileges? Alas, many do! They enjoy the opportunity of hearing the Gospel regularly preached, and of attending many ordinances, and means of grace: and they settle down on their lees. They seem to be “rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing” (Rev. iii. 17); while they have neither faith, nor grace, nor spiritual-mindedness nor meetness for heaven. If you are such an one, I say to you this day, Take care: “Remember Lot’s wife.”

(g) Are you trusting to your religious knowledge? Alas, many do! They are not ignorant, as other men: they know the difference between true doctrine and false. They can dispute, they can reason, they can argue, they can quote texts; but all this time they are not converted, and they are yet dead in trespasses and sins. If you are such

an one, I say to you this day, Take care: "Remember Lot's wife."

(h) Are you making some profession of religion, and yet clinging to the world? Alas, many do! They aim at being thought Christians. They like the credit of being serious, steady, proper, regular, church-going people; yet all the while their dress, their tastes, their companions, their entertainments tell plainly they are of the world. If you are such an one, I say to you this day, Take care: "Remember Lot's wife."

(i) Are you trusting that you will have a death-bed repentance? Alas, many do so! They know they are not what they ought to be: they are not yet born again, and fit to die. But they flatter themselves that when their last illness comes they shall have time to repent and lay hold on Christ, and go out of the world pardoned, sanctified, and meet for heaven. They forget that people often die very suddenly, and that as they live they generally die. If you are such an one, I say to you this day, Take care: Remember Lot's wife."

(j) Do you belong to an Evangelical congregation? Many do, and, alas, go no further! They hear the truth Sunday after Sunday and remain as

hard as the nether-millstone. Sermon after sermon sounds in their ears. Month after month they are invited to repent, to believe, to come to Christ, and to be saved. Year after year passes away, and they are not changed. They keep their seat under the teaching of a favourite minister, and they also keep their favourite sins. If you are such an one, I say to you this day, Take care: "Remember Lot's wife."

Oh, may these solemn words of our Lord Jesus Christ be deeply graven on all our hearts! May they awaken us when we feel sleepy - revive us when we feel dead - sharpen us when we feel dull - warm us when we feel cold! May they prove a spur to quicken us when we are falling back, and a bridle to check us when we are turning side I May they be a shield to defend us when Satan casts a subtle temptation at our heart; and a sword to fight with, when he says boldly, "Give up Christ, come back to the world, and follow me!" Oh, may we say, in such hours of trial, "Soul, remember thy Saviour's warning! Soul, soul, hast thou forgotten His words? Soul, soul, 'REMEMBER LOT'S WIFE!'"