

Lot: A Beacon

by J.C. Ryle

The sermon warns against the dangers of a lingering, Lot-like religion and encourages believers to walk closely with God to be useful and saintly.

Scripture: Genesis 19:16, Matthew 6:24, Romans 12:2, 1 Corinthians 15:33, Ephesians 5:15-16, Philippians 3:20-21, Hebrews 12:1, James 4:4, 2 Peter 2:7-8, 1 John 2:15-17

Topics: "Spiritual Complacency", "The Danger of Lingerin"

Description

J.C. Ryle emphasizes the story of Lot as a cautionary tale for believers, illustrating how even a righteous man can linger in sin and complacency despite knowing the impending judgment. Lot, who was justified and righteous, hesitated to leave Sodom, demonstrating a troubling tendency among Christians to know the truth yet fail to act upon it. Ryle warns that such lingering can lead to spiritual stagnation and ineffectiveness in witnessing to others, as Lot's life showed little impact on those around him. He urges believers to avoid the pitfalls of worldly choices and associations that dull their spiritual sensitivity, reminding them that true faith requires active engagement and separation from sin. Ultimately, Ryle calls for a revival of earnestness in faith, encouraging those who feel stagnant to seek renewal in Christ.

Transcript

"He lingered."

Genesis 19:16

The Holy Scriptures, which were written for our learning, contain beacons as well as patterns. They show us examples of what we should avoid as well as examples of what we should follow. The man who heads this page is set for a beacon to the whole Church of Christ. His character is put before us in the words, "He lingered."

Who is this man that lingered? He is the nephew of faithful Abraham. And when did he linger? The very morning Sodom was to be destroyed. And where did he linger? Within the walls of Sodom itself. And before whom did he linger? Under the eyes of the two angels who were sent to bring him out of the city. Even then "he lingered!"

What was Lot? This is an important point. Many, perhaps, would say that Lot was a bad man, an unconverted man, a child of this world. But Lot was nothing of the kind. He was a true believer, converted,

justified, a righteous man. The Holy Ghost has placed the matter beyond controversy by calling him "just" and "righteous" (2 Pet. 2:7,8), and has given us good evidence of the grace that was in him.

One evidence is that he lived in a wicked place, "seeing and hearing" evil all around him, and yet was not wicked himself. He "vexed his soul with the unlawful deeds" he beheld around him. He was wounded, grieved, pained, and hurt at the sight of sin. He "vexed his soul from day to day" and did not at length become cool and lukewarm about sin, as many do. Familiarity and habit did not take off the fine edge of his feelings. Such a one was Lot--a just and righteous man, a man sealed and stamped as an heir of heaven by the Holy Ghost himself.

What does the text tell us about Lot's behavior? The words are astounding: "He lingered." Lot knew the fearful judgment coming down on all within the walls of Sodom. The angels had said plainly, "The Lord has sent us to destroy it." He believed there was danger, for he went to his sons-in-law and warned them to flee. "Up!" he said, "Get you out of this place, for the Lord will destroy this city." He saw the angels of God standing by waiting for him and his family to go forth. He heard their voices ringing in his ears to hasten him: "Arise! Take your wife and your two daughters which are here; lest you be consumed in the iniquity of the city." And yet "he lingered."

As astounding as this may appear at first sight, I fear there are many of the Lord Jesus Christ's people very much like Lot. They appear to know far more than they live up to, see far more than they practice, and yet continue in this state for many years. They hold to Christ and love the truth, yet they are constantly doing things which disappoint the expectations of their ministers and more advanced Christian friends. They believe in heaven, but faint is their longing for it; they believe in hell, but little do they fear it. They love the Lord Jesus, but the work they do for Him is small. They hate the devil but often appear to tempt him to come to them. They know the time is short but live as if it were long. They know they have a race to run, yet they often look like people sitting still. These may be classed under one sweeping description: they are all brothers and sisters of Lot. They linger.

Let us consider the reasons that may account for Lot's lingering. To know the root of a disease is one step toward a remedy.

One thing I observe in Lot is that he made a wrong choice in early life. There was a time when Abraham and Lot lived together. They both became rich and thus could live together no longer. Abraham, in the true spirit of humility and courtesy, gave Lot the choice of the country, when they resolved to part company. And what did Lot do? We are told he saw that the plains of Jordan, near Sodom, were rich, fertile, and well-watered. It was a good land for cattle and full of pastures. It just suited his requirements, and this was the land he chose. It was near the town of Sodom, but he cared not for that. The men of Sodom, who would be his neighbors, were wicked, but it mattered not. They were sinners before God exceedingly, but it made no difference to him. Lot chose by sight and not by faith. He asked no counsel of God to preserve him from mistakes. He looked to the things of time and not to those of eternity. He thought of his worldly profit and not of his soul.

I observe also that Lot mixed with sinners when there was no occasion for his doing so. We are first told that he "pitched his tent toward Sodom." But the next time he is mentioned, we find him actually living in Sodom itself. The Spirit says expressly, "He dwelt in Sodom." He occupied a house in the very streets of that wicked town.

Make a wrong choice in life and settle yourself down unnecessarily in the midst of worldly people, and I know no surer way to damage your own spirituality and go backward about your eternal concerns. This is the way to make the edge of your feeling about sin become blunt and dull. This is the way to give the devil vantage ground in the battle, to tie your arms in fighting, to fetter your legs in running. I call on every reader to mark well what I am saying. If ever you would be safe from "lingering," beware of needless mingling with worldly people. It is not enough that the house is comfortable, the neighborhood pleasant, the living cheap. You must think of your immortal soul. Is the Gospel preached within an easy distance? Remember this in choosing a profession in life. It is not enough that the salary is high and the advantages numerous. Think of your immortal soul. Will you have your Sundays free and be able to have one day in the week for your spiritual business? Gold can be bought at too dear a price.

Let us now inquire what kind of fruit Lot's lingering spirit bore at last. There are not a few who will feel disposed to say, "After all, Lot was saved. He got to heaven. I want no more. If I do but get to heaven, I shall be content." I will always contend that eminent holiness and eminent usefulness are most closely connected, that happiness and following the Lord fully go side by side. If believers will linger, they must not expect to be useful in their day and generation or to be very saintly and Christlike.

Let us mark, then, for one thing, that Lot did no good among the inhabitants of Sodom. He probably lived in Sodom many years. He no doubt had many precious opportunities for speaking of the things of God and trying to turn away souls from sin. But Lot seems to have effected nothing at all. He appears to have had no weight or influence with the people who lived around him. He possessed none of that respect and reverence which even the men of the world will frequently concede to a bright servant of God. Not one righteous person could be found in all of Sodom outside the walls of Lot's home.

Let us mark, for another thing, that Lot helped none of his family, relatives, or connections toward heaven. There was not one among them all that feared God. His wife left the city in his company, but she did not go far. She had not faith to see the need of such a speedy flight. She looked back in spite of the plainest command not to do so, and was at once turned into a pillar of salt. Lot's two daughters escaped, but only to do the devil's work. They became their father's tempters to wickedness and led him to commit the foulest of sins. In short, Lot was not the means of keeping one soul back from the gates of hell! And I do not wonder. Lingerer souls are seen through by their own families, and when they are seen through, they are despised. Their nearest relatives understand inconsistency, if they understand nothing else in religion.

Lot left no evidences behind him when he died. We know but little about him after his flight from Sodom, and all that we do know is unsatisfactory. We are told of the last days of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and David, but not one word about Lot. There is a painful silence about his latter end. He seems to go out like an expiring lamp and to leave an ill savor behind him. If we had not been specially told in the New Testament that Lot was "just" and "righteous," I truly believe we should have doubted whether he was a saved soul at all. But I do not wonder at his sad end. Lingerer believers will generally reap according as they have sown.

We live in days when a lingering, Lot-like religion abounds. The stream of profession is far broader than it once was but far less deep in many places. To belong to a certain church, to buy popular religious books as fast as they come out, to attend meetings, to be enthusiastic and excited about every new form of sensational religion which crops up--all these are now comparatively easy and common attainments. They require little or no sacrifice. They entail no cross.

But to walk closely with God--to be really spiritually minded, to be distinct from the world in the use of our time, in conversation, in amusements and in dress--is a rare thing. To bear a faithful witness for Christ in all places, to leave a savor of our Master in every society, to be prayerful, humble, unselfish, good-tempered, quiet, easily pleased, charitable, patient, meek, jealously afraid of all manner of sin--these are not common among those who are called true Christians, and, worst of all, the absence of them is not felt and bewailed as it should be.

If you would be useful, if you would be happy, do not be a lingering soul. What do the times demand? The shaking of nations, the overturning of kingdoms. Would you be ready for Christ at his second coming? Would you enjoy strong assurance of your own salvation in the day of sickness and on the bed of death? Would you be useful to the world in your day and generation? Would you draw men from sin to Christ? Would you have a great crown in the day of Christ's appearing and not be the least and smallest star in glory and not find yourself the last and lowest in the kingdom of God? Then do not linger.

Does any reader feel that he is a lingerer? Think not for a moment that your case is past recovery. Think not that there is no hope of revival just because you have been living long in a dry, sleepy, and heavy state of soul. Is not the Lord Jesus Christ an appointed Physician for all spiritual ailments? Doubt not, but earnestly believe that he will yet revive his work within you. Confess your folly and come. Come at once to Christ and linger no more.

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