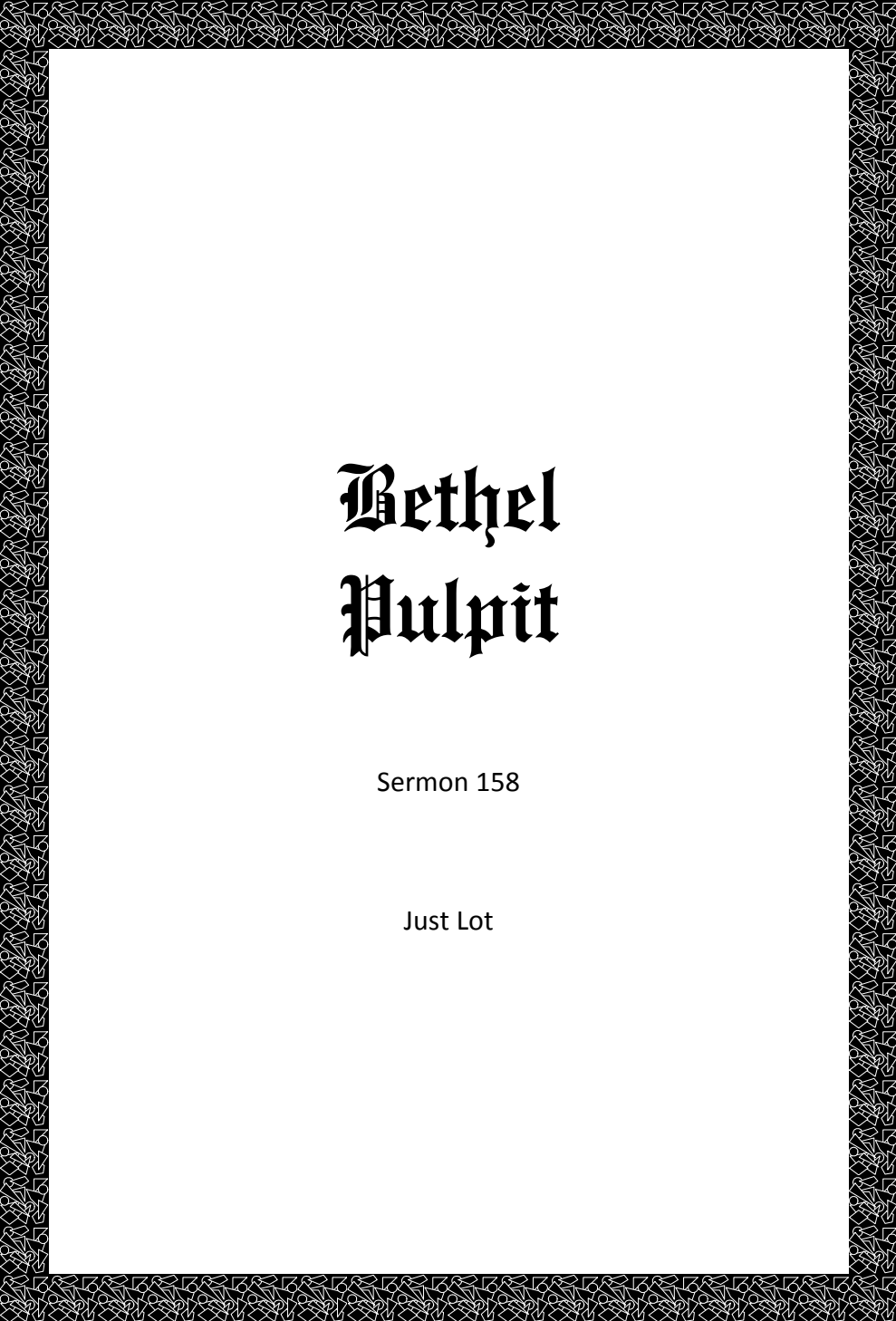




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 158

Just Lot

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 21st June, 1998**

Text: “Behold now, Thy servant hath found grace in Thy sight, and Thou hast magnified Thy mercy, which Thou hast shewed unto me in saving my life” (Genesis 19. 19).

Lot is one of the solemn characters of the Word of God. There is one thing that describes him: a lingerer. He lingered, with death, destruction facing him, with death, destruction staring him in the face. He lingered, and he is left on record in the Word of God as a beacon, a warning to us. Do not linger. Never be a lingerer. Never play with the things of God. Never dally. And so we have this awful, solemn chapter, and we have Lot set before us as a beacon. You know what a beacon is. Perhaps there is a dangerous cliff or precipice, and there is a beacon light there lest you should go tumbling over.

Lot in Scripture is a beacon, and the only way you and I could describe him is a lingerer. But one of the amazing things in all Scripture, which calls heaven and earth to witness in amazement, the aboundings of grace over sin, the immensity of mercy: the New Testament does not call Lot a *lingerer*. It calls him *just Lot*. Tonight he is in heaven singing the Saviour's praises eternally. Natural people would say he got there just by the skin of his teeth. We know in the sovereign, everlasting purposes of God it was impossible that Lot could perish, impossible that he could be lost, but perhaps he came nearer to being lost than any recorded child of God in the Word of God.

There are two in the Old Testament – Samson and Lot – and if the New Testament had not told us clearly, we should not have known whether they were right or wrong, whether they were saved or lost. I think most of us, trying to look at the subject carefully, would have to conclude that Lot was a lost character, and yet the Word of God makes it clear to us that despite all his sin and all his faults and all his lingerings, he was a saved character. The New Testament calls him *just Lot*. “And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul

from day to day with their unlawful deeds;) the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations” (2 Peter 2. 7-9). But these things are left on record, not that we might presume, but rather that we might tremble, that we should fear, and as a living witness of the aboundings of free grace and the immensity of mercy.

The way I want to bring this solemn subject before you this evening (solemn and yet it had a good end), is first of all to look at the character of Lot, and his lingering, and his faults and his failures, and O how far he went, and how he must have perished had grace prevented not; these things a warning, a beacon. And then at the end to look at the aboundings of grace and the immensity of mercy, that one who wandered so far away as Lot did should at last be “saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.”

You girls and boys, you young people, there is very, very much for you when you come to consider the life of Lot. It all began with Lot making a wrong choice, an unwise choice. You remember that Abraham had come from Ur of the Chaldees. Lot, who was his nephew, was with him and both of them had prospered. They had many herdmen and much cattle. There was a quarrel between Abraham’s herdmen and Lot’s herdmen, and Abraham felt it was right for one to go one way and the other to go the other way, and very graciously and kindly he gave Lot the first choice. He said, “Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.” You see much grace and much humility in Abraham. “And Lot lifted up his eyes.” But he did not lift up his eyes to heaven. He did not lift up his eyes in prayer. He lifted up his eyes and looked at *things*. He looked at prosperity. He looked at the prospect. He looked on what would be good for him naturally. It was completely carnal. He saw the plain of Jordan, which was well watered. It was even as the garden of the Lord, and he chose that plain. The world would say Lot was a wise man, a prudent man. He thought it out carefully and he made his choice. The Holy Ghost has recorded this: “But” – this awful *but* – “but the men of Sodom” – those where Lot went to dwell – “the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly.” Do you know what the next sentence is? “And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which thou

seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. ... Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.”

But it is this: beware of careless choices. Beware of careless decisions. You perhaps have a choice to make. It is perhaps about where you are going to live. It is perhaps about some prospect in life. It is perhaps some job, some fresh work. You have this decision. It is a choice. May you lift up your eyes. May you lift them up like Abraham to heaven. “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.” Do not lift them up like Lot and see how much money you can get, and how much comfort, how much prosperity, how much pleasure. It seems with Lot that God was not in all his thoughts. And he was a child of God, a child of God making a wrong decision. He suffered for it afterwards. You never know what you may have to suffer if the Lord leaves you to yourself to make a wrong choice. May it be the honour and glory of God. May it be His will. If it is choosing a house, not where you can get the most pleasant situation, or the loveliest house, but how close it is to where the Lord has recorded His name and where His honour dwelleth. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God.” Lot did not; Abraham did. Abraham made his mistakes, and his sins are recorded, but the spirit of Abraham was the honour and glory of God. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.” O beware of making Lot’s choice!

Well, very soon afterwards there was a battle, five kings against four and four against five, and Lot was captured, and you see the grace and the humility of Abraham again – he was not a warrior, not a war-like man – going into battle in order that Lot might be restored, pursuing after the enemies, recovering all. “And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people.” You see much grace reigning in Abraham. And that time when angels came from heaven and told Abraham of the Lord’s purpose to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, and for Lot’s sake Abraham interceded. That was a lovely hymn we sang just now (1145), and it is an encouragement for us today to pray for those we love, to pray for those in trouble we love, to pray for England, to pray for our churches. If there were but ten righteous men, in answer to Abraham’s prayer of intercession, the Lord would spare Sodom and Gomorrah. But there were not even the ten righteous men. Now England still has its ten righteous. May we still

be able to plead and pray that in deserved wrath the Lord will remember us in mercy.

Sodom and Gomorrah had to be destroyed. The measure of their iniquity was full. And the great sin of Sodom and Gomorrah seemed to be this sin which later had the name of sodomy, this awful uncleanness, man with man, woman with woman, homosexuality. Nothing is spoken against more solemnly in Scripture than this awful sin, in the Old Testament and the New. The Roman empire perished through exonerating this sin and excusing it. It seems this is going to be England's downfall. What years ago was counted a crime, is now being permitted even in ministers of the Church of England and Members of Parliament.

“There came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom.” Whatever was a godly man doing sitting in the gate of Sodom? He went there, he sojourned, he stayed, he settled, and at last he sat in the gate. In other words, he was one of them. You are all familiar with the first Psalm, the wicked man and the righteous man. It is a beautiful Psalm. Lot had the opposite of the character of the godly man: “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.” First of all, Lot walked in the counsel of the ungodly. Then he stood in the way of sinners, and at last he sat in the seat of the scornful. How terrible! When these two angels came from heaven and he courteously invited them to go in his house and stay all night, they said, “Nay, but we will abide in the street.” What a terrible thing if your home and my home is like that, that if an angel came to visit us he would not even enter through the doors, but said he would rather stay in the street all night. And this was the house of a child of God, but it was a house where the Lord's name was not honoured. There was no witness to the truth. Lot left nothing behind of any value, and when he came out, he brought nothing with him save the clothes he was wearing, and he even lost his wife. What about this decision he took, this wonderful prosperity? He came out penniless. If you are a child of God and you put the things of the world before the things of God, the Lord will deal solemnly. There was the chastening, the bitterness, that at last he might be saved by fire and taken to heaven. You see also all the appalling sin and wickedness, the men of the city coming to the door, seeking that they might be able to commit immorality even with these angels. It is no wonder they were struck with blindness!

The awful thing to me is when the angel told Lot to hurry, he lingered. It seems he was loathe to leave a city about to be destroyed with fire, and this is a child of God, and he is warned by an angel from heaven. The love, the kindness, the mercy of Almighty God to send two angels from heaven to warn this poor, erring, wandering child, and yet he lingers! You have that word, “He lingered.” Poor Lot, touched in his conscience, condemned in his conscience, he spoke to his sons in law who had married his daughters and he warned them: “Up, get you out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city,” and they laughed at him. His witness was valueless. There was no weight at all, no authority, no reality in it. He spoke solemnly to these young men and they just looked at him and laughed at him. The next day dawned, that solemn day. Before it ended, Sodom and Gomorrah were to be destroyed with fire. “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

And the Lord Jesus took it up. He said, “Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot ... even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed” (Luke 17. 28, 30). They were eating and drinking, buying and selling, until that day when the Lord destroyed them with fire from heaven. A very interesting point to me, and I have thought about it for a long time, is that the Lord is speaking about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. He is speaking of the destruction of this world, the end of all things. What does He say about these unbelievably ungodly cities? They were eating and drinking, buying and selling, building and planting. When you think of the evil things He could have said they were doing – He took the best of Sodom and Gomorrah. What is wrong with eating and drinking? You have been doing it today. What is wrong with buying and selling? Some of you will be doing it tomorrow. What is wrong with building and planting? Some of you may be building and planting. It was this: they were completely swallowed up with worldly things. The point is this: you may not be guilty of the awful sins of Sodom and Gomorrah, but if you are so swallowed up with your eating and drinking, buying and selling, building and planting, that you have no time for the things of eternity, you will perish like Sodom and Gomorrah.

“While he lingered.” This awful day dawned, and the angels hurried Lot. This poor man seems to be tottering on the brink of everlasting woe. The moments are drawing nearer when there is going to be fire from heaven, and he knows it. The angels said, “Arise, take thy wife, and thy

two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city.” And what do we read? “He lingered.” O what a warning this is, what a beacon, to warn us against lingering – those of you in an unsaved condition, with death and the judgment day and eternity before you, and those who love and fear the Lord’s name, because Lot did. “Just Lot.” The Holy Ghost describes him as “just Lot.” The Holy Ghost describes him as “that righteous man.” Yet left to himself in this awful, backsliding condition, he is hesitating, lingering.

Now this sixteenth verse, for a long time I have felt it was a most beautiful verse: “While he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand.” Just like a kind, loving father would with a naughty child who is running to destruction. “The men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters.” This is beautiful: “The Lord being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city.” There is love and mercy there. We think of that hymn, “Grace is a firm but friendly hand, put forth by God to save His own.” That is really what happens in the new birth, in effectual calling. There is a sinner here. His name is in the book of life. He is one of the people of God. The time has come for his effectual calling. There he is, tottering on the brink of everlasting woe, and grace lays hold of his hand, “the Lord being merciful unto him,” and brings him forth and sets him without the city. How many of you here tonight have known that experience, the Lord being merciful to you, laying that almighty hand upon you? “Compel them to come in.” “Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power.” And bringing you out with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. “The Lord being merciful unto him.”

What about Lot’s wife? She was brought out of the city. But there was a command to them. “Look not behind thee ... escape to the mountain.” And Lot’s wife “looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.” Many years later the Lord Jesus solemnly said, “Remember Lot’s wife.” Remember that there was only one family on earth who knew the truth; she was one of them. Remember that she had converse with angels from heaven. Remember she was married to a child of God. Remember she was there with Abraham when the covenants were made. Remember she was even brought out of the city of Sodom by an angel from heaven. Yet she perished in her sin. “Remember Lot’s wife.” And the word of the Lord Jesus was this: remember just how far a person

can go in religion and at last perish in his sin. In many, many things Lot's wife went a lot further in religion than anybody in this chapel tonight, yet she perished in her sin. "Remember Lot's wife." When you are tempted to give it all up, when you are tempted to turn back, when the world begins to allure you, "remember Lot's wife." Remember in *Pilgrim's Progress* Christian and Hopeful were travelling and wandering out of the way. They were taken in Doubting Castle and seized by Giant Despair. Then afterwards as they went along the roadside, they said, "What is this ancient monument?" And the one said, "It looks like the monument of some woman." And they read what was written on it: "Remember Lot's wife." O the effect it had on Christian and Hopeful after their fall! "While he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife ... and they brought him forth, and set him without the city." The great sin of Lot's wife was not just turning round. She had left her heart behind in Sodom and Gomorrah. She had come out in her body, but not in her heart.

"And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed." There is a beautiful application of this verse in a gospel sense, thinking of Mount Calvary. I rather think many years ago now here at Bethel I did try to speak from that verse, "Escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed," in a gospel way.

"Fly, ye sinners, to yon mountain,
There the purple stream does flow,
There you'll find an open fountain
That will wash you white as snow."

"Escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed. And Lot said unto them, Oh, not so, my Lord: behold now, Thy servant hath found grace in Thy sight, and Thou hast magnified Thy mercy, which Thou hast shewed unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die." And he begged permission to go to the little city of Zoar, and the Lord granted him that permission. I want to speak very carefully, very advisedly here, because many of the old, godly people called their chapels *Zoar*, a little place of refuge. Some of the old Scottish divines used to speak of a sinner being brought out of the Sodom of this world and escaping to the Zoar of Christ's righteousness. So we need to

be very, very careful how we speak. Yet in the context here, it seems very sad. This was disobedience on the part of Lot, even after this amazing deliverance. He said, “Not so, my Lord,” exactly the same as Simon Peter said, when the Lord said, “Rise ... and eat,” and he said, “Not so, Lord.” That is a contradiction in terms, to say, “*Lord*,” and yet contradict Him. You say, “Lot, the Lord has brought you out of Sodom and Gomorrah and you cannot trust Him to look after you in the mountain!” “Behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: Oh, let me escape thither, (is it not a little one?)” That cry has been going on right down the ages concerning the sins and pleasures of the world: “Is it not a little one?” “Everyone does it.” “It does not really matter.” “There are other things more important.” Beware of being like this. Beware of a religion like this.

The Lord answered that prayer. “See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city.” But sometimes it is this: “He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.” Sometimes it is better if the Lord does not answer our prayers how we want them to be answered. Have you noticed that when Lot entered into Zoar, he did not stop there? There was all this argument with God, all this pleading. What is it? Not only lingering, but instability. “And Lot went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the mountain.” And then we have all these appalling happenings in the closing verses. Had Lot’s daughters learnt this wickedness in Sodom and Gomorrah? Be careful where you take your children, how you bring them up. Lot went to Sodom and Gomorrah. These daughters were born there, and this is what happened.

So beloved friends, I have spent most of this evening speaking about the character of Lot, the life of Lot, and Lot a beacon, Lot a warning. O may we consider the life of this man, even though he was a child of God, and may we beware. Yet the point that attracted me to this verse was really the abundance of free grace and the immensity of mercy, that despite all this sin and backsliding and lingering, Lot was saved at last with an everlasting salvation. The Lord brought him through. The Lord delivered him, and the Holy Ghost in 2 Peter 2 says, “Just Lot ... that righteous man.” Then grace is free indeed. But surely this should be the language, not just of Lot, but of every sinner “saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation”: “Behold now, Thy servant hath found grace in Thy sight.” That is the only way in which you and I can ever be forgiven, the only way

we can ever be prepared for heaven, the only way we can ever be right at last, on the ground of grace, free grace alone. It is as a sinner to find grace in the sight of a holy God, for Jesus' sake. If you and I are going to get to heaven, it is completely unmerited, completely undeserved. It is all of grace from first to last. With Lot, and with you and me if we are right,

“Grace all the work shall crown,
Through everlasting days;
It lays in heaven the topmost stone,
And well deserves the praise.”

“Behold now, Thy servant hath found grace in Thy sight.” To be found at the feet of Jesus. Lord, why is it that I, such a sinner as I, have found grace in Thy sight, that Thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?

“Behold now, Thy servant hath found grace in Thy sight, and Thou hast magnified Thy mercy.” I think this is a most beautiful expression: “Thou hast magnified Thy mercy.” If you take a magnifying glass and scrutinize something through it, you do not make it bigger than it is, but you have very clear views of it, and if ever in the Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, Almighty God magnified His mercy, it was in the everlasting salvation of Lot. He did not deal with him after his sin, nor reward him according to his iniquity; otherwise He would have left him to perish in Sodom and Gomorrah. While he lingered, He laid His hand upon him. “The Lord being merciful unto him.” Magnified mercy! O the greatness of mercy as it was displayed from all eternity in the purposes of God! O the greatness of mercy seen in the cross of Christ! “’Twas Jesus, my Friend, when He hung on the tree, who opened the channel of mercy for me.” And O the mercy of God when He calls a sinner by grace, the mercy of God when He pardons his sin, raises him up to a sweet hope, and the mercy of God in bearing with him, forgiving him, keeping him, not casting him off, His mercy upholding him and then bringing him safe to heaven.

“Thou hast magnified Thy mercy.” O tonight may you and I have clear views of the mercy of God. May Almighty God magnify His mercy in our midst, in the preaching of the gospel, in our hearts and in our lives. “Thou hast magnified Thy mercy, which Thou hast shewed unto me.” God’s mercy is great, but we want Him to show it to us. “In saving my

life.” Literally Lot’s life was saved. Spiritually his life was saved. And there are ten thousand mercies in Jesus, “mercies countless as the sands which daily we receive.” But the greatest of all mercies is that which is shown in saving our life eternally through the work of Jesus, through the invincible work of the Holy Ghost, through the aboundings of grace. Beloved friends, we see it in all its fulness in the salvation of Lot, abounding grace and the immensity of mercy, and it is still the same today. May you and I be able to see it, see it in the gospel, in our lives, our own experience, and may we be able to magnify the Lord and our spirit rejoice in God our Saviour.

“Behold now, Thy servant hath found grace in Thy sight, and Thou hast magnified Thy mercy, which Thou hast shewed unto me” – such a sinner as me – “in saving my life.”