

As Far As Your Eyes Can See

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[0 : 00] If you have your Bible with you, please open it up to Genesis chapter 13. Genesis chapter 13.

I want to begin this morning with a question to you. As you make big decisions or plans, what's your starting place?

How do you typically begin that process of making decisions? Whether it's the decision to have a change of job or to move or a large purchase.

Do you sit down and write out a list of pros and cons? Do you stop and pray and ask that God would show you what to do?

Do you talk to some of the other people that are your friends or family about what they would do if they were in the same situation?

[1 : 19] What's your process as you think about making bigger decisions in life? And what happens when there's a little bit of a roadblock?

You've kind of made your plan or your decision and something comes up. How do you wrestle through those kinds of things? Do you stick with your original decision?

Or is that kind of indication that that's not the right decision and we're going to go this way? These are the kinds of questions that are stirred up and answered for us in the story that we're going to look at this morning.

We're tracking through the story of Abraham. Last Sunday we saw how there was a severe famine in the land and he packed up the whole household and everybody went down to Egypt.

We saw how down there he really blew it with regards to his wife and Pharaoh. He kind of, he failed.

[2 : 30] And yet God blessed him. God was gracious to him. In a sense he ended up plundering Pharaoh and carrying back all of these animals and wealth and servants back to Canaan.

And that's really where we pick up the story this morning. Chapter 13, verse 1. And there, and where he had first built an altar.

There, Abram called on the name of the Lord. So here's Abraham. You've got to wonder what the people living in the land would have been thinking.

They saw him going away because things were scarce. And now they see him coming back with even more than he left with. And here he is coming into the land.

And he goes to the place that he had been before where he had built an altar. And he calls on the name of the Lord.

[3 : 52] He worships the Lord. Moses lets us know that he had become very wealthy. And the sense here is that most of this, or a lot of this, came from Pharaoh and his trip down to Egypt.

His herds are growing. His flocks are getting bigger. There's silver and gold in the money pouch. Things seem to be going pretty well.

But then something unexpected happens. Verse 5. Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents.

But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. And quarreling arose between Abram's herders and lots.

The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time. So everything seems to be going well for Abraham until he realizes that it's not.

[5 : 09] He starts hearing complaints, reports from his herders who are in conflict with the herders of his nephew. In one sense, it's a good problem to have.

We've got so many animals and the herds of flocks are so large that we don't have enough space for both of our herds, both of our flocks.

And of course, animals need places to graze. They need pasture. They need places where they can have water to drink. And Moses reminds us, in case we've forgotten, that the Canaanites and Perizzites, they're already living in the land.

And so Abraham and Lot, they're kind of, they're living off of the scraps that are left over in this land. The best parts of the land, they're already occupied.

There's already people there with their animals and their farms. And so they're doing what they can to kind of grow their herds and make out their existence there in this land.

[6 : 14] And there starts to become some fighting, some quarreling, some arguments. What are we going to do about this?

Verse 8. Abram said to Lot, Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herders and mine, for we are close relatives.

Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right. If you go to the right, I'll go to the left.

At this moment, they are between Bethel and Ai. It's in the hill country, where probably from where they are, they can look around and see the land all around them.

And Abram kind of comes up with this solution. Our herds are growing. They need food. They need water. So let's part company. But notice the reason that Abraham gives for why.

[7 : 22] We might expect that it's because my flocks are not getting the water that they need, or because your herders have been doing this and that, or because there's not enough grass here for my animals.

But there's no indication of that from Abraham. What are his reasons for wanting to go separate ways? He cares most about the relationship between him and his nephew.

He says, let's not have any quarreling between you and me, because we're close relatives. We're kin. We're family. So let's, let there not be any fighting or disputing between us.

Let's go our separate ways. And then Abraham does something beautiful. He takes him up, we assume, onto a hill or to a vantage point from where they can see the land all around them.

And he says, is not the whole land before you? Lot, where would you like to live? Where would you like to, to graze your animals? Where, where do you want to go and settle?

[8 : 32] Take your pick. If you go over here, I'll go over there. If you want to stay here, I'll pack up and move, move along. But you can have the first choice.

This is a beautiful moment. It's, it's, uh, for two reasons.

First, it's a beautiful picture of love. For Abraham to, to treat his nephew this way. To, to desire that his nephew do well and have that opportunity to choose the best, to, to pick where he's going to go.

So it's kind of reminiscent of what Paul says, do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility, consider others as more important than yourselves.

Looking not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others, which is the same attitude that, that Jesus himself had. As he came down from heaven into our world, to see that our need was met and at great cost to himself.

[9 : 44] This is God's kind of love. And this is a moment where Abraham really shines. I mean, down in Egypt, not so much with how he treated his wife there, but here he really does shine as someone who is, who is living God's kind of love in the way that he treats lot.

But this is also a moment in which Abraham's faith is seen as well, because God has made them the promise. I'm going to give this land to you and to your offspring. Lot, he's, he's the nephew.

He's not quite in that family. He's kind of been tagging along all the way since Ur. He's got his own dreams and aspirations and plans.

He's, he's kind of, he's been there, but the Abraham doesn't say, well, the promise was made to me. So this is my land. I'm going to live here and you need to go over there.

We see a glimpse of his faith here in this moment in his willingness to kind of just surrender and say, say to lot, you can take the pick anywhere you want.

[10 : 56] You choose, you go there in his heart. We can kind of see that he's trusting that the Lord will sort this out, how he will keep his promise.

So what does lot choose? Verse 10, Lot looked around and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan towards Zoar was well watered like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt.

This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. So lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company.

Abraham lived in the land of Canaan while lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord.

So what does Abraham do? It's not the whole land before you. Take your pick. Lot looks up. He looks around and his eyes settle on that well watered land to the east where it's especially green compared to all the other land.

[12 : 24] It's green like the stories of Eden. It's green like the land of Egypt where we just came from. He looks at it and desire rises in his heart.

That's where I want to go. That's the kind of place that I want to settle. No more of this scrounging for places for our flocks to graze.

I mean, look at that over there. There's plenty of that over there. I want to go there. And he makes his choice. And he sets out and he goes.

But there's a couple ominous notes in Moses' description of this choice. First is that statement in parentheses there.

This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. This land to the east was kind of, it was near the Jordan. It was rich, fertile land. It was also near the Dead Sea.

[13 : 27] It was, it says the plain, but it was kind of the Jordan Valley. It's kind of on the edge of the land of Canaan. But there's two cities there, Sodom and Gomorrah.

And Moses lets us know that they're going to be destroyed. They were destroyed. As he looks back on this, this moment.

And then again in verse 13. Now the people of Sodom were wicked. And were sinning greatly against the Lord. The emphasis here is very strong.

They were wicked. They were evil. And they were sinning. And not just sinning. They were sinning greatly against the Lord. And those of us who have read the story, we know how things turn out for Lot.

We're not actually going to cover that in this series. But if you want to, you can read it in Genesis 18 and 19. Things don't go well for Lot. For Lot. He pitches his tent near Sodom.

[14 : 38] And he goes there hoping to get this good and prosperous life. And he ends up losing almost everything and barely escaping with his life.

He and his two daughters. God later destroys those cities because of the outcry against them and the wickedness that's going on there.

And so Lot, he looks around and he sees. He sees the rich, fertile land. He desires it. Yes.

That's the place where I can thrive. That's the place where my animals, my herds will increase. The more they increase, the more money, the better things will go.

It reminds him of back in Egypt. And yes, this is my chance to live the dream. That's what he sees as he looks out and makes his choice.

[15 : 43] But he overlooks this deep, disturbing reality of what's going on in that region. And we kind of got to wonder what his thought process is here.

I mean, he's been journeying with Abraham all this time. And so he's no stranger to this idea of the Lord, of Yahweh, Abraham's God.

Abraham has been building altars here and there to him. He's been worshiping him very visibly, very publicly. Lot has seen how things have gone for Abraham. Just down in Egypt, how things went really well for him.

And we have to know that Lot would have known what was going on in this region. These cities, their reputation was well known.

They're not living the way that Abraham's God would want. In fact, they're known for doing some pretty terrible things to the people around them.

[16 : 51] And so Lot looks out and he sees, he desires, but he misses, he overlooks this deep and dark, unseen reality of what's going on.

And at the end, it almost costs him everything. It's kind of a living parable of those words that Jesus spoke thousands of years later.

It reminds me of them anyway. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul? And so as we think about making decisions, making plans, what is it that we are looking to make our decision on?

What are we basing our decision on? Lot makes his choice and he goes his way. And then with him gone, verse 14, The Lord said to Abram, after Lot parted from him, Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west.

All the land that you see, I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted.

[18 : 26] Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land for I am giving it to you. Abram's just been up on the hilltop and looking around.

This moment kind of just happened. He was up there with Lot. He said, Look around. Take your pick. And then after he's gone, in a sense, the Lord takes Abraham up to the hilltop and says, Look around.

Look north. Look south. Look east. Look west. Look all around. But he doesn't say, Take your pick. He says, All the land that you see.

In every direction, all around you, as far as your eyes can see, all the land that you see, I will give to you and your offspring.

Wow. What a promise. What a moment. I mean, this is not a new promise. We already heard that as Abraham first came into the land, the Lord said to him, To your offspring, I will give this land.

[19 : 45] But it must have been wonderful to hear it again from the Lord in that moment. To have him reaffirm it, especially after having left the land, gone down to Egypt, blowing it there, and then coming back to have the Lord say it again.

And this time, the Lord adds to the promise. The first time it was to your offspring, I will give this land.

Now the Lord adds, not just to your offspring, to you and your offspring. I will give this land. And not just for a time.

He adds forever. Wow. Wow. What a promise. He goes on.

He says, I will make your offspring innumerable, beyond numbering. That if, just like the dust of the earth can't be counted by people, because it's just too many.

[20 : 50] The day that it can be counted is the day that someone will be able to number your descendants, your offspring. And then he tells Abraham to go on a little tour.

Go. Walk through the land. Walk through the length and the breadth of the land. Prepare your heart to receive this. For I am giving it to you.

What a promise. Abraham's response. How I wish we had more details here about what he's thinking as he hears this from the Lord.

All we get is what's in verse 18. So Abraham, presumably after he went on his tour, went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he pitched his tents.

There he built an altar to the Lord. Sounds pretty informational, but I think that there is something there. I mean, these are big promises.

[22 : 05] If Abraham thought that the Lord was lying to him or that these were empty, would he be building an altar and calling on the name of the Lord and continuing this relationship? I don't think so.

So the sense that we get here, the picture we get here, is that he accepted the Lord's word. He believed it. He trusted him. He was going to continue to worship him and call on his name.

But the question that we're kind of left with at the end of all of this is, is now what? I mean, Abraham has been given these amazing promises.

Let's remember for a moment just what they are. Back in Ur, I will bless you. I will make you into a great nation. I will make your name great.

I will protect you. And I will bless all the families of the earth through you. When he first enters the land, I will give this land to your offspring.

[23 : 09] And now he's heard something new that the Lord has added to his promises. I will not just give this land to your offspring. I will give it to you. To you, Abraham.

Now, of course, this morning here, we know how the rest of the story goes, but I want us to get into Abraham's head for a moment. He doesn't know how the story goes.

How is he processing this? How is he thinking about this? To me? All this land that I can see, the Lord's going to give this to me?

I mean, what would he have to do to make that happen before I die? That's what it means to you, right?

Not just to your offspring, but to you. Somehow, the title deed of this entire region is going to be given to me. What about that word forever?

[24 : 17] To you and your offspring, I will give this land forever. What does that mean? What is he thinking of? As he hears that, from the moment God gives this to me and I receive it, it will be in my possession, it will be in my control from that point on forever.

From then on, there will always be my descendants in this land, living here, in control of this land, possessing this land. And descendants that are beyond number.

What kind of picture is this stirring up in Abraham's mind? He looks out at this land and he imagines it's full of people, full of families with children working and playing.

And they're all his descendants. And not just for one moment in time, but generation after generation after generation after generation of his descendants in this land.

This is their home. How is this going to happen? These are great promises.

[25 : 51] This is what Abraham has been given to go on. And this is kind of what I, my imagination of, of, of how he's processing this and taking this in.

And yet, what does he see when he looks around? He looks at his wife, Sarai, beautiful, and yet beginning to show signs of age, already 70-ish.

For decades, they've been unable to conceive. He looks in his mirror himself and sees the signs of age.

He's in his 80s-ish. How is this going to happen? This would take a miracle. I mean, statistically, this is, this is borderline impossible.

He looks at this good land as he walks through it, as the Lord told him to do. And what does he see? He sees a lot of other people.

[27 : 00] The Canaanites, the Perizzites. He sees other people who have laid claim to this land, who have built homes, who are running farms, who have their flocks and animals here and there scattered throughout the land.

He sees cities that they've built and are living in with walls. He sees kings and powerful men who have been getting their way.

How is this going to happen? How is the Lord going to take all of this land and give it to me?

You've got to know that's the question that's rolling on in his mind. And the answer for this moment, I don't know. I can't even imagine how this would come to be.

But what am I going to do? I'm going to pitch my tent right here in this land because this is the land that the Lord has promised to give me.

[28 : 08] I'm going to build an altar to the Lord and call on his name and worship and wait and see. What a picture of faith, of trust.

At this point we're probably wondering, I mean, what does Abraham really know about the Lord? In the next chapter we get a little bit of a clue and I'm not going to read the whole story.

It's the story of how Abraham goes on a rescue mission to get Lot after Lot is captured. And at the end of this rescue mission Abraham has a conversation face to face with the king of Sodom.

And what does he say to the king of Sodom? verse 22 of chapter 14 he says, With raised hand I have sworn an oath to the Lord Yahweh God most high creator of heaven and earth.

What a thing to say. These are big promises that the Lord has made to Abraham. Yes, but little by little Abraham is learning to trust Yahweh the Lord.

[29 : 30] Little by little as he has made his way all the way from Ur to Canaan little by little as he went down to Egypt and saw how the Lord turned that situation in his favor Abraham is learning that the Lord does keep his promises.

He is protecting him. He is blessing him. And now it's come to the point we've seen how he's kind of grown.

I mean he he cowered in fear before Pharaoh and now just a chapter later this is not long that much longer after he's telling the king of Sodom my allegiance is to Yahweh.

And he's not just one of the many gods like Nana the moon god that we serve back in Ur he is God most high the most high god not only that but he is the creator of the heaven of heaven and earth.

Abraham's understanding of who God is is growing and yes these are big promises but this is a big god that Abraham has believed in.

[30 : 56] The Lord the creator himself. It would have been easy for Abraham to laugh about these promises.

How is that how is that going to happen? Yeah right. I mean look at this place. Look at my wife and me. But he doesn't.

He chooses to pitch his tent here and to trust and wait and see. There's a lesson to be learned here and I don't think it's a coincidence that Lot and his story is sandwiched right up against Abraham and his story.

Lot he looked at the land all around him and he made his decision his plan his way by what he could see right here and now.

And he missed the unseen danger and consequences of making his home among the wicked and it almost cost him everything.

[32 : 17] Abraham is the exact opposite. He is now pitching his tent building an altar based on what he can't see what is unseen the reality of these promises which God has given to him.

If that's how it's going to be if you're going to give me this land then I'm going to pitch my tent right here. Complete contrast.

And so we kind of are moved to this question of who or what are we making our decisions by, our plans.

How are we making our way here in this world? are we doing it like Lot? And so often that's kind of the tendency we have isn't it?

We just look around well that looks really good. I'm going to go after that. I need that. Look at that nice house over there. It's nicer than the one that I've got.

[33 : 28] I want that. This new car, this gadget, this vacation package, this whatever. Like Lot, we so easily just look around and our eyes come to rest and we desire, but at what cost?

What are the deeper unseen realities at work in this situation? Abraham teaches us that we should make our decision first and foremost on the basis of those unseen realities?

That we should listen to the Lord and to his word and do our life according to it. Pitch our tent according to the promise that we've been given.

Even if everything around looks like how is that even going to work? How is that going to be possible? people? As I think of Abraham, here he is in a foreign land, he stands out like a sore thumb, and I don't think it was just because of the tone of his skin or because of his accent being from far away.

Those probably factored in too, but he stuck out like a sore thumb because here's a guy who actually believes in and worships Yahweh. Look at him, he's building an altar to him.

[35 : 02] That's not who we worship around here, we worship Baal. Can you believe that? That guy would actually subscribe to him?

But that's not all unlike how things are for us today, is it? We live in a world that basically says the same thing. look at those guys.

They actually believe in the God of the Bible, that God who condemns homosexuality and talks about sin and how we're all guilty of it and how we're going to be punished for it and hell and all that stuff.

I mean, who believes that anymore? Abraham gives us this incredible example of faith.

If he really is the Lord, then absolutely I'm going to live in allegiance to him. I'm going to build altars to him and worship him.

[36 : 10] I'm going to let other people see. I'm going to stick out like a sore thumb. Isn't that what God has brought Abraham here for?

To be a witness, a testimony to his grace, a blessing to all the families of the earth, starting with the people around him? there's so much we can learn from Abraham about how we make our decisions and our plans.

We too have received promises from God, the word of God. It looks a little different. We have it here in a book. We have not just what Abraham heard, but we have more.

We have the son of God himself described in these pages in his words here. Abraham had some pretty big promises made to him, but we have some even bigger ones, which came through Christ.

An inheritance in the kingdom of God that is coming when Jesus returns. We have a forever promise too, eternal life in that kingdom.

[37 : 30] God promised to bless him, to be gracious to him, and we have received the greatest of graces and blessing through Christ. And the question is, will we make our way by this, by this good news, as we consider what we'll do in our lives, or will we do like Lot, and just go after what on the surface looks like it will fulfill us, it will make us happy.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word, and we proclaim you are the great and glorious Lord of the universe, as we talked about in Sunday school this morning.

Your son is supreme over all, we worship you. Help us to live by faith as if all of this is true as it is.

No matter what anybody else thinks, we want to bring glory to your name, and we thank you for the grace that you have given to us and promised us.

Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Here we go.