

Faith at a Crossroads

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Date: 18 August 2019

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[0 : 00] together now to the book of Genesis to chapter 13 and we're going to read at verse number 8. Genesis 13 and at verse 8.

Then Abraham said to Lot, let there be no strife between you and me and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen for we are kinsmen. It's not the whole land before you. Separate yourself from me.

If you take the left hand then I will go to the right or if you take the right hand then I will go to the left and so on. Now today I guess if we want to learn anything about what it is to have faith and to live by faith we have to consider the story of Abraham. He is described in the Bible as the one who is the father of the faithful. He is also described in the Bible as the one who is the friend of God. And so these two things alone remind us that if we want to learn about faith here is the character that we need to study and to examine together. And up until this point in the story we can see the way in which faith works. It works in response to God's call at the beginning of chapter 12.

It gives obedience to God's call in chapter 12 at verse 4. It worships God in chapter 12 at verse 8. Sometimes faith fails as we see towards the end of chapter 12 but God recovers faith. And in that short summary that we have in chapter 12 of the life of Abraham it tells us so much about faith. So much about what faith can achieve and so much about how sometimes faith will fail. And today as we come into this chapter I want us to see that faith is at a crossroads.

And geographically that is exactly the case because if you can imagine Abraham he is at Bethel.

[2 : 18] It's in the northern part of the promised land. He is at a crossroads in all of the ways and the channels for traveling people in his own day. If he goes north he goes towards the direction of Babylon.

If he goes south he goes towards Jerusalem. If he goes west he goes towards the Mediterranean Sea. If he goes east he goes towards the River Jordan and the Dead Sea.

And he is standing at this crossroads and important things are going to be said and done which shows the kind of person Abraham is which shows some of the decisions he has to make and which also shows in that story the kind of person that Lot is.

And so today together we are at a crossroads on our journey through this world. It's a crossroads in the presence of God. What can we learn from this moment in the experience of Abraham the father of our faith.

I want to see first of all that we have a struggle. And the struggle is quite clear and it arises because of the way in which God has blessed Abraham.

[3 : 42] It's remarkable that the struggle arises because of that and in that context. And we read at verse 2 in this chapter Abraham was very rich in livestock and silver and in gold and he joined on from the Negev.

He has been to Egypt and Pharaoh has rewarded him down there because of all the things that happened down there. And God is continuing to prosper with Abraham in accordance with his promise to Abraham at the beginning of chapter 12 that he would bless him.

I will bless you I will make your name great and you shall be a blessing. And I see Abraham at this crossroads and he's a great man. He's a great man for God.

He's a great man because of the blessing of God and he's a great man because of the way in which God has prospered with him. Faith is blessed by God.

But Abraham has a companion. And right from the beginning of this journey of Abraham from the hour of the Chaldees we read repeatedly Lot went with them.

[5 : 00] And we find that this companion of Abraham's that he himself also has great possessions. In verse 5 Lot who went with Abraham also had flocks and herds and tents.

He had come with Abraham he himself has prospered and he's a rich person. He has grown in a great number of livestock and that has happened to him because of his relationship with Abraham. Abraham. And it's remarkable as we journey on through life the way in which other people can benefit from the blessing of God in your life.

And people can be very close to us in life who may not have faith in their own hearts but they are blessed by God because of you. And that's something else of what God had promised to Abraham in verse 2 of chapter 12.

Not only did he say I will bless you but I will make you a blessing. And here we see Lot and we can say about him that he has been swept along with the current of Abraham's faith.

[6 : 18] It's a powerful moment that has begun in the experience of Abraham because of the call of God. And Lot is sailing along with him benefiting from everything that's happening to Abraham.

and he grows rich and he prospers. And the church does work like that because of the blessing of God and because of the influence of the faith of the people of God on the lives of others.

And it's worth thinking about the reality of that today that maybe your faith is the means of blessing for others. and that maybe the blessing and the prosperity that you have is because of someone else's faith.

The blessing of God. The blessing of faith. But that blessing creates a problem. It creates a problem because they are dwelling in the land.

They are dwelling in the promised land. And Abraham has come here because of the way which God has sent him out to a land that I will show you.

[7 : 38] And so he brings him into this promised land and there he's going to bless him and there he's going to provide for him. But his faith enters into a crisis. He has a great number of livestock.

Lot has a great number of livestock. There are great demands on this promised land. There are great demands on pasture in this promised land. And there are so many livestock on both sides that the herdsmen of Abraham and Lot that they begin to quarrel and there is a strife among them.

And we see then the discovery of Abraham that the land in which God had promised to support him is no longer able to support Abraham.

He finds himself facing what seems at a natural level at least that this land is not what it was called to be and what it was meant to be and that in some way he finds himself here and asking himself the question has he been deceived?

Has he misunderstood what God has said? Is he in the wrong place? It raises these fundamental questions with regard to his faith. And the fundamental questions with regard to his faith accompanied also by the way in which there are other people in the land.

[9 : 16] So the struggle is between him and Lot but also at the end of verse 7 at that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites were dwelling in the land.

There is a struggle because of the demand on the resources and the struggle is made worse because of the inhabitants of the land that are going to be driven out there according to the promise of God.

It's a situation of strife, it's a situation of struggle, it has arisen because of the blessing of God and what happens next and where does Abraham go from here.

And today your faith might be at such a crossroads. There may be so many things going on in your life that it has sucked out of your life the riches of the blessing of God.

There may be so elements in your life, in your heart, in your life, in your relationship with other people that your life has become so complicated that you have gone from the place where you sensed and felt the rich blessing of God and the presence of God and you find yourself today like a bugger that has been turned upside down and you're empty.

[10 : 42] and the things that you found satisfaction in the past, you've lost all of that. It's all evaporated. And you are struggling to come to terms with that.

And you come to the point to which Abraham himself must have come when he came to realize the simple fact that this land was not big enough for himself and Lot.

the land is not big enough for the both of us. And so often the crossroads of faith must come to exactly that decision.

That your life is not big enough for both of these things and for all the things that clutter it up. That your journey of God is within a particular boundary and once other things interfere with that, it does rob you of the very blessing of God and of the peace that you had.

And today you might be dissatisfied with God. You might be saying that you're getting nothing from God. You might even be saying that God is letting you down.

[11 : 59] But today God is asking you to examine yourself and to try and find out why that should be the case. are there people in your life keeping you from the blessing of God?

Are there things in your private life robbing you of the very closeness of God? Are there things in your heart that have taken the place of God, dislodged him in this experiential way and filled your heart with other things?

must you say about certain things in your life that my relationship with God is not big enough for both these things and that my life and my journey with God, that the struggle that I go through constantly in my faith is because there are things in there making demands, making demands on my time, making demands on my energy, making demands on my space, so that I go from God filling up my spare time and my quiet time and my private time and I have him squeezed out of that part of my life, squashed in such a way because other things are beginning to invade and encroach and perhaps even taking over the struggle of faith.

Are you satisfied today in God? Are you hungry for him? Do you feel that sense of hunger and thirst for him? Have you lost every feeling of that kind?

And have you normalized the experience that is an experience without the blessing of God and normalized an experience where you're content to go along and to say this is the way it has to be.

[14 : 06] The struggle, the crossroads, the serious questions that arose in Abraham's mind and the serious questions that must be in your mind with regard to your relationship with God.

The struggle. The struggle. secondly, there is a solution. And in the solution, we discover the kind of people involved in the story.

We discover what they are like. And the solution comes because of Abraham's faith. And the solution is that Abraham does not want there to be strife between himself and Lot.

And that's what we read in verse number eight. Let there be no strife between you and me and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen for we are kinsmen.

He is concerned about the struggle because it is causing a breakdown in his own family and his relationship with Lot. And his concern is to resolve that and to remove that in any way that he can.

[15 : 28] And his solution is quite surprising. God has taken him into this land. He has promised him that he will give this land to his offspring.

This is his by right. And the surprising thing is that Abraham is willing to surrender everything. Faith comes to the point because of the struggle that he turns around to Lot and he asks Lot to look at the land that is around you.

It's not the whole land before you. He sees the vastness of this promised land of Canaan which God in his covenant love and mercy is going to give to his people.

And he is saying to Lot at this cross look northwards look eastwards look westwards look southwards serve the whole land. You choose what part of it you want.

He has surrendered everything to Lot and at the same time he is surrendering everything to God. Faith is willing to give everything up to resolve the issues that separate us from God.

[16 : 44] and here is Abraham showing to us the very nature of his faith. That it is a faith which is committed to God.

Committed to what God will do in providence. In other words committed to the sovereignty of God. He is the person who has learned to trust in God. He is not standing here and concerned what if Lot chooses the best part.

He is not self centered in the least. His main concern is to resolve the struggle. His main concern is to continue to have the blessing of God.

Lot you go and you choose whichever part of this land that you want. Is that the kind of response that you would make?

Are you willing because of your faith, are you willing to surrender everything? Even the things closest to your heart, even the very thing perhaps that God has promised to you, are you willing to surrender that for the sake of your relationship with God and for the sake of the peace of that relationship with God.

[18 : 13] Abraham had gone to Egypt in the previous chapter. He did that because he failed to trust in God. But now he has learned his lesson. And he demonstrates that faith here and it reminds us of the way in which Jesus in the Gospels calling out to his disciples unless somebody takes up

their cross and deny themselves they cannot be my disciples.

It's surrendering everything. It's giving everything up. And in some ways it reminds us of the test of the character of the Lord Jesus himself.

Where he was taken up to a high mountain and Satan showed him all the kingdoms of the world. And Jesus said to Satan, be gone you shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.

It's the tactic of the test is to demonstrate the kind of person that you really are.

And today your faith if it is real saving faith will demonstrate itself in your willingness to give everything up.

[19 : 36] for Jesus Christ. At your crossroads today will you do that? Will you look at around you in life?

And will you put a cross against all the things that must go? Because you realize that faith is vitally important and that nothing can get in its way.

Nothing can interfere with it. Are you willing to surrender everything? That's what genuine faith does.

It gives everything up for the sake of relationship with God. God. And if we discover something about Abraham we discover something about Lot.

And if Abraham's faith is genuinely focused upon God we discover that Lot has no such view of life. We begin to realize that he was really carried along by the current of Abraham's faith and we can imagine him at this crossroads and he's serving all of this land.

[20 : 55] And he wants to identify the best part of this land for himself. It's all about material things. It's all about the things that his eyes will see.

And whatever his eye will fall upon that seems attractive to him, that seems certain to provide him with satisfaction, he will choose that.

And he looks eastward and what does he find as he looks eastward? He looks and sees a place that looks like the paradise of God.

It's so lush with pasture, it's so moist and so full of water, it is really the kind of place where you would decide to be and want to be for your own fatness and for the fatness of your livestock.

That's where I must be. And as soon as he saw the attraction of that, he chose it for himself.

[22 : 01] It was his decision. It was completely free. And Abraham had given him that opportunity. His free choice choice was to select this place east of the Jordan, the land of Saur.

And today for you it's your free choice. Look at the whole of your life. And look at the things where you think you will find satisfaction.

Because ultimately that's what you will choose. and maybe today that is the big problem. You're just like Lot. You have no view of what God has said.

Your view is only of what you see around you. And you see this and you see that and you think that will satisfy me. That's the very thing that's going to give me what I'm looking for.

And you cannot wait for your choice to move you into action and for you to take your feet or to take your train or do whatever to take it to the place of your choosing.

[23 : 15] And Lot did that. He went off. He journeyed eastward. Eastward in the Bible is away from God.

Away from the paradise of the Garden of Eden. It's moment away from God. And the Bible itself alerts us here to the very danger of the choice which he made.

Now in verse 13, now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord. He saw it so attractive, but he failed to see that the people offered, who were going to influence him, that they were great sinners against the very God of Abraham.

Beginning to expose himself and exposing himself, moving away from the influence of Abraham, which was the blessing, the overflow of the blessing of God, and going under the influence of the people of the land of Zohar, of Sodom and Gomorrah, under their influence, who were great sinners against God.

And as we read the ongoing story of Lot, we see the way in which they dragged him down, and the way in which he would have been lost in that destruction unless God had just plucked him out of the danger.

[24 : 47] He didn't want to leave there. He was so comfortable there. It was his home, and despite the sin and the immorality and the darkness of that place, he was at home there because he was

looking for satisfaction in the very things that were visible, the things that were pleasing to the eye, and he lost sight of God.

And maybe today you have been on your journey eastward for some time, and you have left the place where God had promised to bless you, and you've turned your back upon it, because something caught your eye, something you wanted to achieve, something you wanted to have, something that you thought your life would be complete with, it caught your eye, and you left God behind.

And you still haven't found the satisfaction you were looking for, but you're still persuaded that you will, and your back is still upon God, and your face is towards the very things that you think will bring you satisfaction.

And underlying all of that is the reality of Sodom, underlying it all, that a journey with your back to God, away to the things that you think will provide you satisfaction, ultimately, is a journey into deeper and greater alienation from God, and ultimately the separation from God.

And Lot separated himself from Abraham, and the full significance of what that meant surely didn't come home to him.

[26 : 37] Maybe it did much later on when he realized where he was, but on this occasion he couldn't see anything else.

the solution. How far must you go from God before you realize that you will never find anything, the journey that you are taking?

I was going to mention a little story earlier on, and I remember it again just now, and I will mention it now, and it's to do with losing that sense of God in life, and losing that sense of the power of God in life, wanting to make wrong choices and wrong decisions.

And the story was told by someone in a previous generation on the question day, and describing the way in which sometimes the blessing of God seems to vanish out of life.

And this gentleman was saying that it reminded him of when he used to play board games with his children, and when he used to play especially snakes and ladders.

[27 : 50] And there is, he says, a snake which appears at 99, when you're just a step away from victory, and you follow it down, and it takes you down to seven or five or somewhere, takes you right back to the beginning.

And he was using that as an illustration to show that that from the very place of the blessing of God that the wrong step, the wrong number, and everything evaporates, and we're back to square one. Where are you today in your relationship with God? Can you go to your 99 position and remember a time when, while God was in that place, a time when God was speaking into your life, and when there was no question about the reality of God, and your need for God, and indeed your desire for God?

And today that has been swallowed up, and you're back to where you were before. The solution is separation.

there is no other way to recover that living sense of God, his power, and his life.

[29 : 13] The solution. Thirdly, the satisfaction. we are not surprised that the solution of faith leads to satisfaction.

Lot went and he dwelt in that land, but read in verse 12 that Abraham settled in the land of Canaan. The struggle had gone.

He was now settled where he should be, in this place that God had promised to give him. He had said to Lot, in his willingness to give everything up for God, in his willingness to surrender everything, he said to Lot, look at this whole land, north, south, east, and west, look at it and choose whatever you want.

And now God invites him to do the same. And he says to Abraham in verse 14, lift up your eyes, and look from the place where you are, northwards and southwards and eastwards and westwards. Saying to Abraham, what Abraham said to Lot, is this another test. And we realize that it is the reinforcing of the blessing of God and of the promise of God.

[30 : 45] He serves this whole land, which is the land of promise. promise. And he says to Abraham, for all the land that you see, I will give to you and your offspring forever.

He was willing to surrender it. And the very place, the very point of his surrender became the place of the greatest blessing yet.

He had never known this before. and we follow the story of the promise of the land, and up until this point, the land was promised to his offspring. But here, in this moment, at these crossroads in his life, the land is promised to himself.

All that God had said to him with regard to the people of God, now becomes personal to him. all the land that you see, I will give to you.

How do you think Abraham must have failed? How do you think he was going to respond? That God is coming in this personal way to fill his life with his promises and with his life and with his blessing, to enrich him in ways, that he hadn't been made rich before.

[32 : 15] And today, that's how God rewards your right choices and your right direction. That he will make himself so personal to you that your heart will break because of his redeeming love, that your head will be so turned around that you can never go east towards again, but that you will go back to the place where God is found and where God dwells.

Your whole life will never be the same again. love you. And there is nothing quite like discovering the personal nature of God's salvation.

I will give you this land unto your offspring. And the fullness of the blessing is brought to our attention by the words of Paul in Galatians chapter 3.

the promise he says in verse 16 was not given to Abraham and to his offspring as of many, but to his offspring as of one, which is Jesus Christ.

I firmly believe that when this blessing came to Abraham at this crossroads, I firmly believe not only was his heart filled with a sense of the rich blessing of God and his promises, but his heart was filled also with how that promise was going to unfold.

[33 : 53] That this land was symbolic of the heavenly glory of the people of God and that his seed, his offspring, his descendants, that it was leading towards and including and coming at last to focus upon the son of God who came into the world, the Jesus of history, the son of eternity and the Jesus who died on the cross.

And you may explore the thought that he might have seen all of that. but he saw the day of Jesus. And as we go from here, that is the way in which God rewards the right choices.

Not only will your life be in order, not only will the struggles be removed that kept you from God, God, but he will give you a focus upon the passion of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, the one who bore our sins, the one in Galatians 3 who was made a curse for us in order to redeem us from that same curse.

And life will never be the same again. that satisfaction that you will find in Jesus. And as we close today, I plead with you to ensure that in your struggles, that you do make the right choices, that you go in the right direction because the promise is so great and so enriching and so fulfilling that you will find your complete satisfaction in God and in Jesus Christ and in a life devoted to him.

May God grant that it should be so unto me. Bless his word to us. Let us pray.