

Getting your priorities right

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[0:00] Well, maybe start reading verse 10 just to get that little bit of extra context in. Genesis 13 and verse 10. And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt in the direction of Zohar.

This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan Valley, and Lot journeyed east.

Thus they separated from each other. Abraham settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom.

Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord. Verse 12 especially, we read these two men going their separate ways.

We read, Abraham settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom.

[1:19] Well, this evening I want to look with you at the priorities, the choices of two believing men.

We have Abraham here, or Abraham as he was called at that time, and Lot, relatives, and both believing men, both righteous men.

Not that they always did what was right. We have enough evidence, even in the passage that we read this evening, to know that they didn't always do what was right, but they're called righteous.

Lot is called a righteous man in the New Testament.

Peter talks about that righteous man, Lot. And I don't really need to tell you, I'm sure, about Abram's credentials. He was chosen by God.

He is the father of the faithful. He is the friend of God. Abram is the one to whom that covenant was given, and the seed was promised.

[2:28] We are looking here this evening at two righteous men. And I want to examine with you the choices that they made, and how the choices that they made tell us about the priorities that they set in their life.

And these things are given to us, as we're told in the New Testament, for our benefit. They're given to instruct us, to teach us, to admonish us, to make us wise, that we'll choose what's right, that we'll enjoy the Lord's pleasure, and the full benefits of life as a believer.

One of the great, perhaps the greatest danger to the church in our land in these days, and our own free church is not accepted from it, is from choices and priorities.

One of the great dangers that we face in this time in which we live, and, well, I haven't lived through many generations, so I can't speak about the times that went before, but I can certainly look around and see the times that we live in now, and there is a danger of worldliness.

There's a danger of worldliness. Yes, it sucks people away from the faith, so that they're never saved. We know that from our Lord's parable of the sower and the seed, and there was some seed fell on thorns, and it was the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches.

[4:08] It choked out the word. They were never saved. They never bore any fruit. There's always a danger of worldliness to keep people away from the faith, but there's a danger of worldliness for believers as well.

There's a danger to our church. There's a danger to our nation when believers are not choosing what is wise and what is right and what is safe.

And so we come to this passage in Scripture, and we have two believing men, and their choices are examined. Well, we're going to examine them.

The Scripture certainly sets them before us so that we can examine them and learn from them. There's something I want to notice with you, something else about these men at the beginning, before we look into this a little bit more and examine their choices.

I want to notice with you that we're told that they were both rich. Well, the word rich, very rich, is used of Abram. And you might not think too much about that, except it's quite interesting.

[5:25] This is the very first time in the Bible that anyone's called rich. And after that, we read about lots of people who are rich, and it's not always a positive thing. It's not always a good thing.

It doesn't always do people much spiritual good. Well, we read that about Abram. And, well, we're not told that Lot was rich, but we're told in verse 5, Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents.

And verse 6, we're told, their possessions were so great, he was too really wealthy, believing men. And I think that's quite significant here, quite significant.

There's something about wealth. It opens up choices for you. It puts the whole world at your disposal.

You know, we have that saying, the world's your oyster. Well, wealth, a little bit of prosperity, it really gives you so many choices that you just might not have had otherwise.

[6:34] We probably have more wealth, as in more personal wealth, as a generation, than probably any generation that went before us.

Probably. If I spoke to you, you wouldn't say you're very rich. Probably not very many if you would. But, you know, compared to previous generations, we've got so many things we can choose, so many things we can do.

But previous generations just couldn't. Well, Abram and Lot, they had experienced a little bit of this. They knew what it was to be wealthy.

They knew what it was to be able to choose. Things that other people couldn't choose. And that left them, well, it left them to choose, to show where their priorities really were.

Well, you might think, I'm just going to talk about Lot making a choice here. But I want to start by looking at Abram's choice. Lot certainly made a choice. We read that he chose a particular place to live.

[7:53] And it tells us a lot about Lot and his priorities. But Abram made a choice as well. And I'm going to go back to the beginning of the chapter to look at that with you. Sorry, that's the beginning of chapter 13.

Abram made a choice. I would summarise Abram's choice like this. Abram chose what was spiritually safe, safe.

He prioritised spiritual safety. He prioritised spiritual strength. He prioritised fellowship with the Lord over earthly benefits.

Abram chose what was spiritually safe. When we come to this, well, we read on, I started in chapter 12, and we read on to chapter 13 there. And we read about Abram being very rich and coming out of Egypt.

And in verse 3, we're told where he chose to live. Where he went after he came out of Egypt. He journeyed on from the Negev as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place where he had made an altar at the first.

[9:13] And there Abram called upon the name of the Lord. That was Abram's choice. He came out of Egypt. He had made a lot of money in Egypt and a lot of possessions he had gained.

But he went back to Bethel. He went to the place, and it's stressed, it's repeated a couple of times for us. He went to the place that he'd been at the beginning.

He went back to the place where the Lord had met with him. He went back and there he called on the name of the Lord. Again, just as he'd done before. I want to suggest to you that in this action of Abram, we see that he was craving spiritual stability.

He was craving spiritual safety. He wanted to get to that place where he had once before had fellowship with the Lord.

And he wanted to renew that fellowship with the Lord. He wanted to know it again and experience it. That was his choice. Abram had been in Egypt.

[10:27] And I suppose we could say quite a lot about his trip to Egypt. Some people say he shouldn't have gone at all. I'm not sure. I think there's something about Abram's trip to Egypt that was, well, it was, it was practical.

There was a famine in the land. Some people say, well, he should have just stayed there. God would have provided for him. Maybe. But he chose to go down to Egypt so that he could have food. And he wasn't going for, he didn't intend to go there forever.

We read in, in verse 10, he went to sojourn there. He was only going to go there temporarily. Well, maybe you fault Abram for it.

Maybe we should, I'm not sure. But we certainly fault him for what he did next. He told his wife, just say that you're my sister. I'm scared.

I'm scared of what they might do. They'll kill me and keep you alive. Say you're my sister. And she was his half-sister. So, it wasn't that much of a lie, or so it seemed.

[11:36] But, that wasn't, that wasn't practical. That wasn't prudence. That was pragmatism. Abram was seeing how he would use his own human wisdom to preserve himself.

And it had its consequences. I mean, if you looked at it from a human point of view, he did very well out of it. Abram, Pharaoh took his wife, took her into his own palace, but he treated Abram well.

And Abram had all these things. He got his, he increased his sheep and his oxen and his male donkeys and his male servants and female servants and female donkeys and camels.

His wealth increased. Pharaoh treated him well from a human point of view. You could say, that worked. That's what pragmatism does. It says, let's do something that works, humanly speaking.

But spiritually, it was wrong.

It wasn't what he should have said. And afterwards, a pagan, as far as we know, Pharaoh was a pagan, said to him, what's this you've done to me? He rebuked him.

[12:45] And Abram had nothing to say. He had done what was wrong. He had lied. And off he got sent out of Egypt again. And that's when he made his choice. What would he do?

Would he do that again? Would he do something that would give him more earthly wealth? He'd tasted the benefits of a civilization. He'd enjoyed the benefits of Egypt.

But Abram shows, no, that was a blip. That was wrong. That didn't satisfy him the way that he desired to be satisfied.

And he went back up to the hill country. He went back to where he built his altar. And he called upon the name of the Lord once again. That is what he desired.

What do you desire? It's a question we should all ask ourselves. What do I desire? Do I want spiritual safety?

[13:53] Have you ever experienced something like that in your life where you've made your wrong choice? And it has all these unintended consequences. consequences. And it weakens you spiritually.

And it's astonishing just how our choices, just the one little foolish choice leads on to so much trouble for us.

Perhaps you've experienced it. In fact, I'd be surprised if there's any believer here or unbeliever for that matter who hasn't experienced something like that. And when you experience that, do you not want to get back again?

It's important to have times in our lives where we have known fellowship with the Lord, when we have known a spiritual safety.

And to remember it. to bask in it almost and remember what it feels like. You know when rock climbers go up some big rock faces and sometimes it looks pretty foolish to the rest of us who aren't rock climbers.

[15:16] Are they really going to climb there? And there's no rope holding them on at the top. But as they go up, they put in they put in markers.

They put in anchor points. And then they'll find a little bit more. And the reason they put in the anchor points is if they do fall, well they know they're not going to hit the bottom. They're going to get back to that place that was safe and they're going to have to start again.

But they know where there's some safety. We need to do that as believers. believers. We need to remember the times that we're safe.

I say that personally and I'm sure as a believer you will remember times when things were safe. When you knew fellowship with the Lord and you knew fellowship with those around you. I say it personally. I say it about churches as well. I think we should look to the times when it was safe.

[16:26] I'm not saying that the world was ever completely spiritually safe. I'm not saying that. I'm not saying that you can ever totally preserve yourself and everything that's out there. Of course not.

We live in a fallen, sinful world. But it does seem very often that our priorities, our desires is progress.

I'm not against progress but instead of safety. We'd rather go an untested path than remember the times that brought us fellowship and brought us harmony and brought us close to God.

Well Abraham shows by his choice there he shows the craving of his heart. That he wanted close with God. He wanted to get back and start again at that anchor point that he'd had before.

Well what about Lot? Well you know things can't stay the same forever. Lot was there with Abraham.

[17:34] He was experiencing that spiritual safety things back back to normal and in a way well it could have continued like that but you know the way that life is things happen things change the whole world is always changing all around us and circumstances catch up and the problem for Lot and for Abraham was that they were so wealthy and they just couldn't live together anymore.

they had so many servants and I don't think we're meant to understand that Abram and Lot had fallen out they weren't arguing together but their servants were arguing with each other fighting over the grass for their sheep and who would get to use the well here or the well there.

There just wasn't space for them and they were falling out and so Abram said look Lot we're brothers let's not fall out and it wouldn't have been good to fall out because we're told end of verse 7 the Canaanites and the Perizzites were dwelling in the land it would be terrible for the Lord's people to be there bickering together while these pagans these Canaanites were there there's a little lesson for us there's a big lesson for us in that in the response of Abraham let's not bicker let's not fall out we're brothers let's maintain that but the practicalities of this moment say we have to go separate ways and Abraham was prepared to leave if necessary he would leave his safe place if necessary and go somewhere else if it was for the good of his brother and for the good of the cause but he left a choice to Lot Lot you choose we have to part it's right you choose and if you go that way

I'll go that way and if you go that way I'll go that way you choose Lot well here we see we get an insight into Lot's priorities and we read there in verse 10 Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord like the land of Egypt in the direction of Zoar Lot Lot had experienced Egypt look at just the little hint that he liked it they'd been down there near the near the palace of Pharaoh where city life was flourishing he'd experienced a little bit of it he'd seen the well watered Egyptian plains and all the productivity that came with that and all the culture that came with it and all these earthly benefits and he lifted his eyes and he looked and he saw just on my doorstep there's a place like that it's the

Jordan Valley it's green there's plenty grazing for my livestock and there's culture there there's Sodom and Gomorrah flourishing cities there were hives of activities we have a few things said about Sodom and Gomorrah most of it's pretty negative but we certainly know from the scriptures that they were flourishing they were wealthy places they didn't really lack for anything it was if you've read Pilgrim's Progress it was a little bit like Vanity Fair you could do whatever you wanted you could have whatever you wanted choice choice was just all around you and Lot lifted and looked and he saw that's good land there's benefits benefits there and he chose it and of course the scripture doesn't you know it doesn't do all the hard work for us it doesn't give us the sermon it doesn't tell us you know word for word exactly what we're to understand but it just gives us a hint it tells us think about this weigh it up because it says in verse 12 at the end of it that Lot settled among the cities of the valley he wanted a city life but he was going to stay on the outside he moved his tent as far as Sodom and verse 13 the men of Sodom were wicked great sinners against the Lord that's a strong clue what was

[22:26] Lot doing what was Lot thinking we have another little clue in this passage I'm sure you know the story you know what happens afterwards you know what happens to Sodom it doesn't exist anymore that valley doesn't exist anymore a cataclysm struck it and the Dead Sea is there goes way down below sea level a great rift opened up in the earth and swallowed those cities and they're gone that was God's judgment on these cities and we have a little hint of that at the end of verse 10 this was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah it looks so beautiful just looks like death now the men were wicked great sinners see the difference Lot looked and he said he didn't say I'm going to give up my religion no he didn't say that at all he didn't say I'm just going to throw in my lot with these people but he didn't say that at all

I'm going to stay apart from these people that's what he said but I'm going to get all these benefits what benefits there are for me Lot chose chose the benefits of the world over spiritual safety he didn't choose wisely it's one thing for Lot to think that he could keep himself separate but what about all the others what about his servant what about his wife our Lord Jesus tells us in the New Testament remember Lot's wife I think we could say quite a lot about her even though there's not that much said about her how much she was an influence on Lot and how much she wanted to get into the city and reluctant to leave it Lot as far as we can know he lost his wife in what followed he lost two of his daughters at least we understand because it talks about his sons in law he lost his family he lost everything from a worldly point of view and it all started here with wrong priorities he was a righteous man he wanted to please

God but how he let worldly things draw him in a certain path how he let them shift his priorities how he let earthly benefits shape his choices thanks a ass aSteep to más los whose a lot These things are written for an age like the age that we live in.

With all our wealth and our benefits and our choices. These things are written not just to unbelievers to warn them.

Although let all take note. But they're written for believers. You know in the New Testament. In the New Testament church.

[25:46] The persecution from outside. Against the New Testament church. It never really damaged them. Paul's persecution against the church.

It all backfired. As Gamaliel said it would. You're fighting against God. Just leave them. Don't fight against them. Well Paul.

Saul as he was fought against them. And he ended up becoming one of them. And bringing the gospel. To the world. Persecution from outside.

Only ever seems to strengthen the church. We read about when James was killed. And then. And then Herod was going to go and kill Peter as well.

Persecution from outside. But afterwards. Of course the Lord dealt with him. And afterwards we read. But the word of the Lord grew and multiplied. The church became strong.

[26:50] We long for the church to be strong. But in the New Testament. We learn it. It's weakened. By the choices of its own people.

And maybe you'll sit here and say. But I am a believer. And you are a believer. Lot was a believer. The Bible talks about those who are saved. But as through fire. They lose everything. I think that's particularly talking about ministers.

Actually. But the same principle applies. You can lose so much. You can lose a reward. An eternal reward. Not salvation. And you can lose all the benefits of this life.

Because of unwise choices. Lot. Chose. In a worldly way. We're probably at that time of year.

[27:49] When. Well worldly things. Come to the fore. Probably more. Than at any other time of year. It's a chance for Christians.

To show. Wisdom. To distinguish themselves. And to show that. Whatever we choose. We're going to choose it. For spiritual benefit.

Seek first. The kingdom of God. And his righteousness. That doesn't just mean be saved. That means. Having been saved. Seek God's righteousness. Seek his kingdom.

And all these other things. He'll add to you. All these other benefits. Will come your way. Trust in the Lord. For these things. Well we read about.

Abram. After Lot. Had separated from him. Well the Lord. Didn't tell Abram. Look. That was so foolish. Why did you let your nephew choose?

[28:49] You should have taken the best thing. No. Of course the Lord. Didn't say that to Abram. The Lord saw. That he was a man. Who had humbled himself. Because Abram. Had humbled himself.

And let Lot choose. And been willing to accept. Whatever. Was left for him. But after Lot. Had separated. We read about the Lord. Appearing to Abram.

In verse 14. Lift up your eyes. And look. From the place where you are. Northwards. Southwards. Eastwards. Westwards. I will give. All the land that you see. I will give to you. And your offspring. Forever. Did Abram lose? Did he lose in an earthly way? No he didn't. He prioritised spiritual things. And the Lord. Gave him. All the rest. There's lessons here. For believers. There's lessons here. For each one of us. In these days in which we live.

[29:46] There's lessons here. If we want our churches. To be strong. If we want to change. Our nation. As we do. As the Lord's people. It starts here. It starts.

With. Spiritual choices. It starts. With prioritising. The things of the Lord. And not letting the world. Pollute us. And the world.

Weaken us. And drag us down. Well may the Lord. Bless to us these things. And may the Lord. Give us wisdom. As we choose. Wait. When. Fly.

I will. Once. Way. Go with. See you. I will. Peace. Bye. All. I will.