

Choices and Consequences

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[0 : 00] Let's turn now briefly this morning to Genesis chapter 13. We're going to look at this chapter as we continue looking at the life of Abram. Genesis chapter 13.

So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and lot with him into the Negev. And he journeyed on from the Negev as far as in 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.

Now we saw last time how Abram's failure is described when he had gone down to Egypt and tried to pass off Sarah as his sister with the consequences that that had, where he was eventually told to leave Egypt.

Pharaoh gave the orders to send him away. But of course as we saw he went away a very rich man and took that with him. Now as he comes back to the land of Canaan as he makes his way as we'll see here back to where he first of all pitched his tent at the very beginning of his entrance to the land of Canaan here between Bethel and Ai.

What we see in the passage here is that Abraham is again facing challenges that he needs to meet with, that he needs to meet in faith.

[1 : 24] The challenge that he met in Egypt he had by and large failed and that had consequences. The challenges that he now meets as he's back in the land of Canaan are also going to be significant here and in the future.

But he needs to approach them and meet them and overcome them in faith. And that's really pretty much where many of the lessons for ourselves from these passages are to be seen in the way that Abraham is seen as a man of faith throughout all of these circumstances.

And whereas faith as it comes to the fore shows the wonder of God's grace and the wonder of God's provision that on which the faith of Abraham actually rests.

So three things in the passage here this morning. First of all there's a very important renewal for him in verses 1 to 4. And then secondly there's a very necessary separation from between Abraham and Lot and the various servants and so on that they have each of them.

Verses 5 to 9. And then thirdly there's a study in choices as we've called it because Lot was given the first choice by Abraham of where he would like to go with his people and have his share of the land.

[2 : 42] So he made his choice very ominously near Sodom. And we'll see what that meant. But Abraham then was given further direction by God and further assurance by God that all the land that he could see God was going to give to him and to his offspring after him.

And he was invited to walk through the whole of the land and to examine it and to explore it in detail. And we'll see at the end what that means to for ourselves spiritually.

So here's a first of all here's an important renewal. Abraham has come back from Egypt he and his wife all that he has and you notice how he deliberately makes his way back to Bethel to the place where his tent had been between Bethel and Ai.

Now why is that important? It obviously describes it geographically. This is the route that he took. This is where it terminated. This is where it ended. But there's a lot more than geography there because what Abraham is doing is retracing his steps back to this very important place where he first of all set up his camp where he raised an altar to the Lord where he actually set his mark as one who was the Lord's man.

Somebody who was saying about this place that he had entered into in Canaan as a place that was dedicated to the Lord. In other words, from the failure of Egypt the failure that you find him as we saw in Egypt the failure that you see about Abraham in Egypt he has now actually come back and retraced his steps if you like to his spiritual roots in Canaan to the place associated with his first altar to the Lord with his encampment as a man of God coming into the possession of the promise of God of the land of Canaan.

[4 : 42] Abraham, or Abraham as he still is, needed to come back to these spiritual roots so that he would actually renew, if you like this relationship between himself and God in terms of the promise of God giving him this land as an inheritance.

Abraham had failed in Egypt Abraham is coming back to Canaan and in Canaan he's coming back to this place associated with his beginnings in Canaan and therefore he is coming again to restore or renew this relationship to the Lord.

And that's how it is for every one of us too because we all have failures just as Abraham had failures even if a man like Abraham had failures as we've seen it's pretty evident that you and I are going to have times of failure times of lapse times of backsliding times of coming away from a close walk with God times when we don't actually use this word to the extent that we should times when we are lacking in prayer times when we have these periods of decline of spiritual decay setting into our lives.

We have to expect it if it was true of Abraham we have to watch against it that it's going to be true of ourselves. So what do we do? What do we do at a time of failure? How do you come back from a time of failure?

What is it you do when you know that you have lapsed? When you know that you have not been true to God? Well you do what Abraham did you come back to your roots you come back to the place associated with your relationship with God you go in your mind back to your meeting place with God you go back in your mind to that establishment of a relationship with Him you go back in your mind to what happened when He brought you to know Himself when He actually gave you His promise when He showed you the great inheritance that belongs to those who put their trust in Him you go back to that and God meets you there.

[6 : 49] There's a wonderful episode in the life of Elijah another man of God a man you would imagine would never fail in his own spiritual pilgrimage but after the contest and the trauma on Mount Carmel you know that he then ran from Jezebel who threatened again to end his life so he ran away he escaped into the wilderness and he made his way to Horeb the Mount of God it took him a long time he didn't get there immediately he took 40 days and 40 nights that's itself symbolic but we won't go into that but when he came to Mount Horeb where the place associated with God and with meeting God God meeting His people God giving His law

God actually coming to demonstrate His power and His might His glory amongst His people His promises to His people His requirements of His people what happened?

He met with God God wasn't in the fire He wasn't in the earthquake He wasn't in the wind these three dramatic elements as Elijah experienced them there on Mount Carmel and after them a still small whisper like voice and Elijah covered his face with his cloak because he knew that God was there and God re-established him in his service and said go back go back to the work that I've given you to do and that's what Elijah did that's how God and we ourselves need that's how we need to come back to God that's how God meets us as we retrace our steps back to our spiritual roots back to where we are grounded in God Himself we are afraid sometimes to do that we are afraid that somehow God is not going to regard us wholeheartedly and give us a reception again because we failed and we tend to focus on the failure in such a way and to such an extent that we actually lose sight of the fact that God is so gracious that God is so open armed toward us even as we come back from our failures and Elijah and Abraham are examples for us of how necessary it is for us to go back to our roots from time to time and from our failure to make our way back to where we had erected our altar at the first and there to meet again with God maybe that's what you are needing today maybe this is a reminder to yourself of where your power really lies of where your spiritual vitality and your spiritual life is really to be found maybe this is a reminder to you of how far away from your roots you've come of how much you need to get back to your spiritual roots and back to reestablishing this proper relationship with God don't be afraid to do that it's essential that you do that if that is really the case today take your cue from Abraham because he went back to where he had made his altar at the first and there he called upon the name of the Lord you see the two things that come together there an altar and a prayer to God when you come back from any failure to God when you come back even when you come even for the first time back to God so that you will know him as your God you don't pray on the basis of your own merits of your own goodness your prayer is joined to an altar is joined to Christ joined to the sacrifice of Christ that he himself gave for his people and as we come to pray to God and seek to have his forgiveness to cover up our failure and our sin we come on the basis of what Christ has done we join our calling upon the name of the Lord with the altar that God himself has for his people that's why we come with confidence we don't get accepted because we've prayed we don't get accepted because we've come back we don't get accepted because of anything we do ourselves we get accepted through those things but not because of them we get accepted because

God delights in Jesus Christ because God in Christ has given us and provided for us an everlasting foundation upon which we can build and which we can use in order to come to him and pray to him and know that we for Christ's sake will receive blessing so that's an important renewal for Abraham and it fits with our need to come back to God to renew our relationship with him to have our heart restored by him in his grace secondly there's a necessary separation now we read in verses 5 to 7 how this came about how the background Jude lot Abraham's nephew who went with him he had also flocks and herds and tents so that the land could not support both of them dwelling together for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together and there was a strife between the herdsmen of

Abraham's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock at that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites were dwelling in the land so Abraham then gave Lot the option as to where to settle with his own people and that he would actually take whatever Lot had not chosen but you see how it actually arose the competition the rivalry that set in between the herdsmen of Lot and the herdsmen of Abraham wasn't between Abraham and Lot themselves as the head of each of these homes or houses or groups if you like it was between the herdsmen people who worked for them and you can imagine why that came about because the land was only able to sustain a certain amount in any one place because they had so much between them and so the rivalry was such that the herdsmen would fight over who was going to get the best of the grazing and perhaps try and drive the others on from there and then that led to dispute and strife and you know what dispute and strife leads to it leads to all kinds of problems between those who should live at peace and there you have a picture for us of the church of God a picture if you like of the necessity of peace and of unity between

[14 : 23] God's people it's not just simply a competition either in verse 7 there the Canaanites and the Perizzites were dwelling in the land you see the Canaanites and the Perizzites obviously will not like the fact that all of these people have suddenly come upon what they regard as their land and the more Abraham's people and Lot's people fight together the more likely it is that the Canaanites and the Perizzites will be able to overcome them anyway they need to retain their strength against the inhabitants of the land and to do that they need to live at peace so what do they do well they agree to separate and sometimes that's the best thing in circumstances separation in itself maybe is never such a good thing but if it's done amicably if it's done peacefully if it's done with right intentions if it's done knowing that the alternative is to stay together and be at constant strife have a constant strife and be at each other's throats that's going to be destructive that's going to actually destroy any progress properly and when you apply that to our situation in churches and congregations that sometimes is how it comes about in the providence of God people who believe the same things essentially should be together but there are other things that are maybe not essential truths things that are sort of secondary importance that sometimes people will elevate to make them important to them to themselves and that's when you get strife setting in when these sorts of things are emphasized above other things and when people can't live at peace with each other what do you then do well you try and make peace and keep people together but when it isn't possible what then do you do you have to separate there's an essential time of separation in the history of the church and I think what makes the world critical of the church is not so much separations but the mismanagement of them the fallings out the strife that continues and is exacerbated perhaps over separations this was not a separation that was anything other than amicable it was for the better of both parties it was for the greater good and if at times we come across such situations that's what we need to actually accept it's difficult to work out when that will need to be done but sometimes the Lord makes it obvious the important thing is that it's done in brotherly spirit amicably peacefully because you see the alternative here was for them to say we can't separate we've got us three together we're brothers we are kinsmen and if they had stayed together then their strife would probably have destroyed them because strife ongoing strife quarreling is a destructive thing and it is destructive to the gospel especially when you find it in the church and what you and I have to always say is what is best for the gospel's sake what is best for the Lord's name's sake what is best for the advance of the gospel and sometimes it will not be that everybody just stays together in the one place

I know that's something that's difficult to comprehend something that's difficult to fit in with the importance of unity amongst God's people but yet here by separation in a sense Lot and Abraham preserved their unity as kinsmen even though they went their different ways in terms of where they settled so there was a necessary separation and that's something that applies to our circumstance too in life and in the church particularly thirdly there's a study in choices Abraham said to Lot is 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 Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord 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 there's a choice made by Lot first of all and it's a choice made from worldly considerations because when you look at verses 10 to 11 especially it's very evident from that that Lot made his choice based on his worldly considerations based on what he could see and calculate and reckon with naturally he looked at the land and really said to himself now what's best for me and my herds what's best for me in terms of my life here and now that's what's going to determine my choice there's no word about what is of eternal consequence there's no word about what God's will might be in it there's nothing in it but sheer worldly considerations and so as he sees what looks best to himself that's way rather selfishly and in a very worldly sense that's what he chooses and it's very pleasant it's a very good land it's a very good part of the land it's well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord like the land of

Egypt in the direction of Zohar it's very productive there'll be no problem of grazing unless there's another massive famine everything there is pleasant and suited to his needs in the present world but there's an evil at the heart of it there's a place called Sodom and Lot goes to settle among the cities of the valley and he moved his tent as far as Sodom there already as we anticipate what's coming in chapter 18 and 19 particularly where the Lord comes with his judgmental destruction of the cities of the plain including Sodom there's a ominous note already that Lot moved his tent as far as to Sodom in other words the writer is telling us here Lot did not just go into the area of the vicinity of the cities he actually came eventually or when we don't know or whether he did it immediately but he certainly moved his tent fairly quickly it seems as far as to

Sodom he built his tent on the very edge of hell that's where he went and if you build your tent on the edge of hell the danger is that you're going to fall into it and Lot very nearly did the consequences for himself for his family were catastrophic he chose something that appeared good to his natural vision appeared good for the time being appeared good in this worldly terms but actually there was such an evil at the heart of it that would lead Lot into serious trouble and you notice what it's saying about the men of Sodom in verse 13 the men of Sodom were wicked great sinners against the Lord were exceedingly wicked sinners against the

[23 : 11] Lord that's an important emphasis it's what makes sinfulness really serious not what people say of it not what people think about it not what human opinion about it is not whatever changes people may have one generation after another as to what is and isn't right and wrong in people's behavior what makes behavior right or wrong is what the Lord thinks about it what makes sinful behavior sinful and serious and dangerous is that it is sinful before the Lord and against the Lord the people of Sodom didn't worship the Lord the people of Sodom didn't care much about the Lord they dismissed the Lord they didn't actually want to have the God of Abraham as their God did that really make any difference as far as their circumstances were concerned just because they didn't acknowledge the Lord did that somehow mean that their circumstances were improved or that they weren't really going to be in danger of judgment after all no and it doesn't matter in your day in our day what people will say about what the Bible calls sin whether it's the kind of sins that Sodom were involved with or any other sin the fact that people dismiss the idea that that's somehow against a God a God that they don't believe in doesn't make any differences to God they're still pitching their tent on the edge of hell even if they think it's in the most pleasant place in the world that's why we fear for people that's why we pray for people that's why we pray that people who engage so willingly and with such an aggravated sense of resistance and antagonism to God to the idea of God especially this

Christian God that's why we pray that God will open their eyes that they will see where they have pitched their lives that they will see that because they are in fact sinners against the Lord they're in danger of destruction and will be destroyed sadly if they don't come back from there you know that's one of the things we need to bear in mind when we're engaged not just in preaching the gospel but in evangelism and witnessing to Christ before people we need to really remember what the Bible says about people who are in a lost condition their lives are pitched in the vicinity of hell and if they're not rescued from it they'll be destroyed by it do we see it with such urgency if you saw somebody putting up a tent very near the edge of a cliff that you knew was crumbling away you wouldn't just look on casually you wouldn't say well that person is stupid but it's not my business you'd go and say to that person do you realize what you're doing do you know the danger you're in can you not see where you are and what the consequences will be if you stay here people may not accept it people will still choose in some cases at least to say that we're off our heads that they will just choose where they want to live anyway irrespective of what the

Bible says fair enough but surely it's our place to tell them the facts of life as they are in relation to God the men of Sodom were wicked great sinners against the Lord where's our life pitched where's our life rooted where's our tent set Lot moved his tent as far as Sodom seems a kind of casual remark doesn't seem all that importance in the context and even when you take in verse 13 how the men of Sodom were wicked great sinners against the Lord many people would say well so what that's how they chose to live that was their choice yes but then you go to chapter 19 and you see the destruction that came on Sodom and you realize what

Lot is doing moving his tent as far as to Sodom that he's actually forming an alliance to a great extent at least with the power of hell itself that's Lot's choice from worldly considerations and you remember what Paul said about resurrection and about our view of Christ and of our hope in Christ if for this life or in this life only we have hope in Christ we are of all people most to be pitied in other words he's saying whatever you do don't base your life on worldly considerations on living for the present on just confining things to the borders of this present world this present life you live look outside it go beyond it look upwards remember there's eternity remember there's a judgment to come remember

God is the God you will have to face but secondly Abraham has an inheritance of everlasting duration the study in choices there's Lot's choice and Abraham was very magnanimous and kind to give him this first choice but he knew Abraham knew that the land was actually going to be his and that of his offspring anyway God had promised it and whatever choice Lot made it wasn't going to affect Abraham's portion Abraham's inheritance which is now what God confirms God said to Abraham lift up your eyes after Lot had separated from him lift up your eyes look from the place where you are northward southward eastward and westward for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever he didn't lose by giving Lot the first choice he didn't lose anything the land still belongs to him God is going to give him this inheritance and to his descendants and you see it's after Lot separated from him as if the

[30 : 27] Lord is really saying Lot's descendants will not have any portion whatsoever in this inheritance Lot's descendants the Moabites and the Ammonites came into being through an incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughter that's what Sodom did to Lot and historically they became enemies of Israel God is saying to Abraham Lot's descendants have nothing to do with this this is for you and for your descendants I'm going to give you this land and to your offspring and they shall be more numerous than the dust of the earth and he then gives them an instruction arise and walk through the length and breadth of the land for I will give it to you so Abraham moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre which are at Hebron there he built an altar to the Lord you saw last time as he went on he built altars to the Lord he was marking the places for God but you see the invitation or the instruction

God gave him arise and walk through the land the length and breadth of the land in other words Abraham is being invited to explore this inheritance that God has just said as reiterated he is giving to him Abraham is being invited after Lot has gone to go through the whole of this land for himself and explore it find out more about it discover all its treasures and all its riches it's you says God and I want you to really explore it and come to appreciate all that's in it for yourself and so it is with all that God gives us to in our inheritance in Christ he doesn't just say to us here is your salvation here it is and I'm just depositing it with you and you don't really need to do much with it until you leave this world and then when you get to heaven you can actually enjoy it that's not what God is saying to us he's saying to us explore it enjoy the length and the breadth of it go through it how do you do that spiritually when you read your bible you hold communion with God you interact with other

Christians you learn more about God's ways you use the means that God has given you to explore the wonders of this inheritance to do as much as you can to get further knowledge of what it means to be a Christian what it means to have God as your father what it means to know the Lord Jesus Christ as your savior explore it God is saying go through every single bit of it in detail stop at certain places and take in the scene what it means to have forgiveness what is forgiveness what is justification what is it to be adopted what is sanctification what is being prepared for heaven what is it to actually have all of these things stop at all of these places as you go through this spiritual land that God has given you examine them and actually say of yourself what a precious precious inheritance I have and I need to explore the more of it the more you go into it the more you actually realize just how rich it really is and how rich you are in having it and you see the two words that still go on describing

Abraham's life two very simple words but they're so important he moved his tent and he built an altar the words tent and altar by and large describe the ongoing life of Abraham it's the life of a pilgrim and it's the life of a worshipper and together in his life pilgrimage and worship are conjoined that's really what his life is about living as someone who is following the Lord as a pilgrim in this world until he comes to the final inheritance of heaven itself that's why Hebrews says about him that he lived by faith in tents with Abraham and Isaac inheritors two of the same promise for he looked for a city that has foundations whose builder and maker is God a tent and an altar you might say there's not much in that there's traveling light there's everything in that does it mark your own life today is your life marked by a tent and an altar by being on pilgrimage with God and being a worshipper of him let's pray gracious

Lord and our heavenly father we pray that your blessing will accompany the teaching of your word to us today Lord help us to know how how blessed we are in having a life that's lived in pilgrimage in communion with you and with your people and as we go from place to place in our life's journey Lord help us to continue to erect our altars and to be seen as a people who worship you graciously bless us now for Jesus sake Amen