

Signs of a heavenly pilgrim

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Preacher: Rev Hugh Ferrier

[0 : 00] Well, I'd invite you to turn with me to the passage we read in Genesis chapter 13, Genesis chapter 13. And we're going to be considering the whole of this chapter, but if you could look with me at verse 18, Genesis 13, and looking at verse 18.

We read, Abram is a pilgrim of heaven.

Abram is someone whose feet are on this earth, but he is a man whose mind and whose thoughts are on the heavenly city.

Abram is one who has his citizenship in heaven. And Abram's calling to be a pilgrim of heaven isn't a calling that is unique to Abraham.

It is a calling of every single person who has received Jesus by faith and is resting on Jesus by faith. And so this afternoon, I want us to answer the question, what does a pilgrim of heaven look like?

[1 : 29] What does a pilgrim of heaven look like? Now, the scene is set for us in verses 1 to 7. And we're told right away where Abram has been. Verse 1 we read, And Abram went up out of Egypt.

Verse 1 doesn't allow us to forget that Abram has been in Egypt. That Abram has been in a bad place spiritually. That Abram has been in a backslidden state.

Egypt was the place where Abram saw the Lord as supplemental, not fundamental, to his life. Egypt was the place where Abram lived a life of deception, where he covered the whole truth with half-truths.

Egypt was the place where Abram got himself into a hopeless and a helpless situation, as Sarah, his wife, was taken from him. And all God's covenant promises seemed to be hanging on a knife edge.

Egypt was the place where the Lord faithfully and graciously intervened to deliver Abram. And verses 1 to 4 go on to tell us where Abram now goes.

[2 : 37] How does Abram respond to his past failure? We read that he goes back to square one. Genesis 13 verses 1 to 4 is essentially a retracing of the steps that Abram took.

In Genesis 12 verses 10 to 20, Abram goes up from Egypt. Abram enters the Negev. Abram returns to Bethel, where he had built an altar to the Lord.

And Abram calls on the name of the Lord. He celebrates the Lord's character and the Lord's deeds. As he reflects on the Lord's faithful and gracious deliverance often.

Abram responds to his failure with a return to the Lord. And here is the question for us. What kind of faith do we have? Does failure drive us away from God or back to square one?

Does failure drive us away from God or back to the altar? Back to the place of sacrifice? Back to the place of calling on the Lord? Faithful Christians fail.

[3 : 46] I'm sure every one of us today has known failure at some point in our Christian experience. Where we say, why on earth did I say that? Or why on earth did I do that?

Maybe you're sitting here wondering whether you should go to the Lord's table at all tomorrow. Because all you see is failure after failure starts up before you. Faithful Christians fail.

The difference is when we fail, we don't fall away. When we fail, we return to the Lord. When we fail, we call on his name. When we fail, we seek his forgiveness.

And as Hebrews 8 verse 12 says, The Lord declares, I will forgive their iniquities and I will remember their sins no more. And all of this founded firmly on the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ. And then in verses 5 to 7, we read of the quarrel. Abram and Lot are both prospering as we read in verses 5 and 6. Abram, we're told, prospered materially while in Egypt.

[4 : 53] And you get the impression that Lot, his nephew, very much piggybacked off him in his success and prosperity. And we read in verse 6 that their possessions are so great that the land

cannot support them.

Now the word great is very interesting. Because the same word is used in chapter 12 verse 10. In chapter 12 verse 10, we're told that Abram experienced a severe or great famine.

Now in chapter 13 verse 6, Abram enjoys a severe or great amount of possessions. It is a remarkable change in fortune. But the prosperity of Abram and Lot creates quarrels between Abram's herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen in verse 7.

You know, I think we're often tempted to think to ourselves that if we had many possessions, life would be easier. Life would be better. Our relationships would be so much more straightforward if we had more money, more possessions.

But how often do we hear of couples winning the lottery and divorcing a few years later? How often do we hear of families splitting up when a wealthy relative dies, leaving behind an estate which is to be divided?

[6 : 10] And it is the same with Abram's herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen. Their prosperity polarizes these two groups. And you can imagine the shouts that were going on.

This is our well. This is our pasture. We got here first. You have no right to be in this part of the land. And the quarreling leaves Abram and Lot vulnerable.

Just as quarreling always leaves a church vulnerable in a world that is very hostile to Christ and his people. You see, this tribal infighting may seem harmless enough.

It's just over land. It's just over pasture. But verse 7 mentions the Canaanites and Perizzites. It reminds us that Abram and Lot's herdsmen are exposing themselves to potential danger, not only from the inside, but also from the outside.

And as we look at Abram's response to this problem, I want us to note four characteristics of the pilgrim of heaven. And for those of you who are taking notes, they each begin with the letter A.

[7 : 13] The first thing we see is the attitude of the pilgrim. The attitude of the pilgrim. Verses 8 and 9. And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen, for we be brethren.

Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me. If thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right. Or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.

And what we see here is that Abram is happy to put the interests of others before his own interests for the sake of peace.

Abram is happy to put the interests of others before his own interests for the sake of peace. In verse 8, Abram wants to see an end to the quarrelling.

Abram takes the initiative and he says to Lot in verse 8, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen, for we are brethren.

[8 : 15] Abram is a man whose ideal is seen in the words of Psalm 133. Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to live together in unity.

Abram is a peacemaker. I was chatting with some close friends recently about the way that we react differently to different people in different situations. And some of us smoulder and we go very quiet.

Others of us just blow the top and it's all over. And others of us blow the top and then we smoulder and it lingers on. We find it hard to be peacemakers and maybe you find it hard to be a peacemaker.

But what we see here in verse 8 is that Abram is a peacemaker. And Abram, this great peacemaker, comes up with an astonishing proposal. He recognizes that it is impossible for he and Lot to remain together with all of their possessions in this limited geographical space.

And so he encourages Lot to take whichever part of the land he wants. Say in verse 9, Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me.

[9 : 28] If thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right. Or if thou wilt depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left. Now that is astonishing.

Abram is the senior and Lot is the junior. Abram is the uncle and Lot is the nephew. And Abram demonstrates a wonderful nobility and humility and generosity of heart.

He is no longer the deceptive, conniving, cunning character of Genesis chapter 12, verses 10 to 20.

He is unthreatened. And he happily says to Lot, Lot, I recognize that you're younger than me.

I recognize that you're my nephew. But Lot, I am going to treat you as my brother. And I am going to treat you as my equal. You just choose the land that you want. And I will take the leftovers.

If you go right, I will go left. And if you go left, I will go right. I'll take the leftovers. You make the choice. Abram is happy to put the interests of others before his own interests for the sake of peace. [10:37] Now friends, as we look at Abram, not insisting on his own rights, but willing to give them up in the interests of others for the sake of peace, do we not see a glimmer of Christ Jesus as he is presented in the gospel?

The Apostle Paul tells the Philippians that Jesus had the same humble attitude, where he writes that Jesus wasn't simply a man.

He was in the very form of God. He wasn't simply a good man. He was the God-man. And every word that we see Jesus speak, every action that we see him demonstrate in the gospel, are the words and the deeds of the one who is fully God.

He is the invisible made visible. He is the spiritual made flesh. But Paul tells us that this Jesus didn't consider equality with God something to be grasped, something to be taken advantage of.

He didn't stand on his own rights and only look for his own gain. No. Paul tells us that Jesus made himself what? Made himself nothing. He writes that Jesus was born into the likeness of men.

[11:53] And he was found in human form. And he doesn't take any human form. No, Paul says he takes the form of a servant. Where he is mocked by his family.

Do you remember what his family say in Mark's gospel? He's out of his mind. Where he is rejected by his own village. Where he is ordered about by his mother, telling him to make water into wine. Where he is rebuked by his own followers. And he humbles himself further and further, going down, down to the abyss of death.

And Paul says, Even death on a cross. Now we are all familiar with the cross. We have songs that are written about the cross. We have gravestones that are in the shape of a cross.

We have pictures of crosses. There are films that have been made about the cross. We might wear jewellery of the cross. But when Paul says, Even death on the cross. He wants to reinforce to us, that the God-man died the most humiliating, degrading, despised death, known to mankind.

[13:00] Paul wants to wake us up, and say, Look at what Jesus went through for you. And why does Jesus do all of this? So that there might be peace, between God and man.

By his making himself of no reputation, and humbling himself all the way to this sacrificial death.

And so we might say that both Abraham's example, and supremely Jesus' example, demonstrate to us, that the attitude of the pilgrim, is to be one of putting the interests of others first.

You see, in the gospel, there is always the indicative of what Christ has done. But at the same time, there is the imperative of what Christ requires from his people.

And Paul tells the Philippians in that same passage, Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. Paul is saying, When you survey the depths of what Christ went through for you, how can you insist on always getting your own way, and getting what you think you deserve?

And so when we find ourselves grabbing hold of things, when we find ourselves grasping onto things, insisting on what we believe is rightfully ours, and blowing the top, or smouldering when we don't get our own way, let's hear Paul's words afresh.

[14:25] Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. A pilgrim is happy to put the interests of others before their own interests for the sake of peace.

But this brings us into the antithesis of the pilgrim. The antithesis of the pilgrim. And that's in verses 10 down to 13. We read, And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar.

Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east, and they separated themselves the one from the other. Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.

But the men of Sodom were wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly. And what we see in these verses, is that Abram's nephew Lot, demonstrates what a pilgrim doesn't look like.

Abram's nephew Lot, demonstrates what a pilgrim doesn't look like. We see what Lot saw and chose in these verses. Lot is standing with Abram, on the hills of Bethel, which gave wonderful panoramic views, of the whole country.

[15:45] And Lot looks up, and he sees the plain of the Jordan, and he notes a number of things about it. He notes that it's well watered. He notes that it's like the garden of the Lord.

It's like Eden itself. And he notes that it's like Egypt, in its prosperity. Now the land of Canaan, was barren. It was rugged. And Abram and his descendants, would be dependent on the Lord, for their daily bread.

But this area is different. This is a land where Lot can prosper. And Lot likes prosperity. It captivates his heart. But you know, there's a number of warning signs, in these verses.

When people are learning to drive now, they have to sit what is known, as the theory test. And part of the theory test, involves what's called, the hazard perception test. Where you're able to look at, road driving conditions, and spot potential hazards, along the way.

What we see in these verses, is Lot is focused, on the perks of this land, but not the perils of this land. Lot fails, the hazard perception test.

[16:54] Because we're told, that the land that Lot chooses, is compared with Egypt. Now that's not a compliment. It is a warning. Those who look for safety in Egypt, get their fingers burned.

Go through the prophecy of Ezekiel, and you'll see the Lord, telling his people, don't trust in Egypt. Because they will bring you down. Not only that, these verses mention, the Lord's destroying, Sodom and Gomorrah.

And this is the ominous cloud, that will hang over, chapters 13 to 19. The Lord's judgment, is coming upon, Sodom and Gomorrah. This place, that Lot, is choosing to dwell.

Not only that, the direction that Lot turns, is a warning. What direction does Lot go in? He journeys eastward. Just as Adam and Eve, journeyed eastward, when they were expelled, from the garden of Eden.

And this eastward direction, is taking Lot, not into the center of the land, but to the very periphery of the land. He is turning his back, on the God of the covenants. He is turning his back, on the God of the promises.

[17:59] And not only that, the description of the men of Sodom, is a warning. They're described as being wicked, and sinning greatly, or exceedingly, against the Lord. And any time those words, sinning exceedingly, are used in the Bible, it refers to sinning so greatly, that you incur, the divine death penalty.

And this is the land, Lot has chosen to call home. And as we look, at Abram's life, Lot proves, again and again, to be a case study, in the dangers, of compromise.

It doesn't seem to matter to Lot, that the land that he is choosing, is on the edge, of the promised land. It doesn't seem to matter to Lot, about the moral, and the spiritual bankruptcy, of the land that he is moving to.

It doesn't seem to matter to Lot, about how this land, and its inhabitants, will affect both, his, and his family's, eternal souls. Lot doesn't take these things, into consideration.

Lot compromises, and this path of compromise, leads Lot to live, near the land of Sodom. Then it leads him, to live, in Sodom. And eventually, we find Lot, as the gatekeeper, of Sodom.

[19:14] Having a very high position, in that city, until eventually, Lot is almost destroyed, with the inhabitants, of Sodom. Lot is like a frog, who won't jump, into a kettle, of boiling water.

But he's happy, to remain in the cool water, not realizing, the water has been, slowly heated, until it's too late. That is where, compromise leads. John Calden says, Lot fancies, that he was dwelling, in paradise, and was nearly plunged, into the depths of hell.

Abram's nephew, demonstrates, what a pilgrim, doesn't look like. And this afternoon, as we look at Lot, and his being, the antithesis, to what a pilgrim, looks like, we might note, that Lot's main problem, is his materialism.

Lot, has a spiritual, heart problem. Lot, regards the Lord, as being supplemental, not fundamental, to his life. Lot, prefers goods, to God.

And that is always, the case with materialism. There are many people, who are eager, to go to heaven, when they die, but they have no interest, in heaven's God. Many people, want to go to heaven, imagining, it will be very much, like this life, just a bit better.

[20:32] It will be a place, where there are golf courses, and no sand traps. It will be a place, where there is surfing, and no water hazards. It will be a place, of heavenly mansions, and no mortgage to pay.

It will be a place, filled with friends, and family, and no feuds, and no bereavement. But here is the question. Would you be happy, to have a heaven, filled with all of these things?

A heaven, where there is no sickness. A heaven, which is filled, with all your friends. A heaven, that is filled, with your favorite foods. Filled with your favorite, leisure activities.

Filled with your favorite, natural beauties. Filled with everything, that your heart, could desire. and no God. And no God.

No God in his glory, filling every sphere of it, and dominating the praise, and worship of it.

Christians, pilgrims of heaven, long for heaven, because they long to be nearer, the presence of God.

[21 : 39] Christians, journey through life, as pilgrims. Seen and savoring God, as their treasure. Echoing the words of Psalm 37, that we read, that we sung, where a psalmist speaks of the Lord, being the delight, of his heart.

And so as we look at Lot, we are given fresh opportunity, to say, Lord, when I lift up my eyes, enable me to see you. And when my heart, is filled with affection, and adoration, may you be, my deepest treasure.

May you be, the strength of my heart. May you be, my soul's basis, for rejoicing. There is nothing wrong, with the things, that this life offers us. The problem is, when we, prefer goods, to God.

And that is Lot's problem. But it's not Abram's problem. And this brings us thirdly, to the assurance of the pilgrim.

The assurance of the pilgrim. Verses 14 to 17. And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place, where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward.

[22 : 50] For all the land, which thou seest to thee, will I give it, and to thy seed forever. And I will make thy seed, as the dust of the earth, so that if a man can number, the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed, also be numbered.

Arise, walk through the land, and the length of it, and in the breadth of it, for I will give it unto thee. And what we see in these verses, is that Abram is nourished.

Abram is strengthened. Abram is sustained by the Lord's gracious promises. Abram is nourished, strengthened, and sustained by the Lord's gracious promises.

In verse 14, we read that the Lord speaks to Abram. That's significant. Abram's not heard the Lord's voice, since the Lord appeared to him at Shechem. But that was before he went down to Egypt.

That was before he engaged in a period of systematic backsliding. And perhaps Abram wondered if the Lord would ever speak to him again, even after his failure in Egypt.

[23 : 51] And now Lot is gone. And when Abram feels so alone, when he feels so vulnerable, when he feels so exposed, the Lord speaks to him. And the Lord tells him to lift up his eyes, just as Lot lifted up his eyes.

And the Lord tells him to survey every point of the compass. He says, Abram, look north. Look south. Look east. Look west.

And the Lord makes promises to Abram. And the Lord speaks words of promise to Abram about the land. Now originally, the Lord had promised to give the land to Abram's descendants.

What does he promise in these verses? He promises to give the land to Abram and his descendants. Not only that, the Lord speaks words of promise to Abram about his seed.

Originally, the Lord had promised to make Abram a great nation. What does he promise in these verses? He promises to make Abram's offspring like the dust of the earth.

[24 : 56] Uncountable. And I wonder, friends, do you see the grace in all of this? Abram has failed the Lord. Abram has failed the Lord massively while in Egypt.

And now the Lord comes to him not saying, well, you've failed me, Abram, and I'm grudgingly going to keep my side of the bargain, but I will give you the very bare minimum from now on.

Not at all. Abram has failed the Lord in Egypt. And the Lord now comes to him saying, Abram, I'm going to bless you above and beyond what I had previously promised.

And friends, does that not bring a smile to your face? When you see a God who looks at this failure of a follower and he says, I'm going to give you even more than I originally promised.

What promises to strengthen and fortify Abram's soul? It just takes our breath away. Abram doesn't deserve any of this, but this is the mathematics of God's grace.

[25 : 56] It is his undeserved favor. Reminds us of the Gospel of John, doesn't it? Where John writes, from Jesus we have received grace upon grace.

From Jesus we undeserving sinners have received overflowing grace above and beyond what we could anticipate and above and beyond what we deserve.

Abram, is nourished, he is strengthened, he is sustained by the Lord's gracious promises. And this afternoon pilgrims prize the promises of God.

Abram held on to those promises of God. Sometimes they were all he had to go on and they were precious to him. And sometimes that is all we have to go on as Christians.

The promises of God and they are precious to us. we do not yet experience all the good that God promises us in the Gospel. We live in a fallen world.

[26 : 57] We live in this gap between the promise of what God says will happen in the future and the reality of what we are currently experiencing. But we live knowing that Jesus has promised in John 14 do not let your hearts be troubled.

You trust in God, trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms and if it were not so I would have told you and I am going there to prepare a place for you.

And if I go and prepare a place for you I will come back and take you to be with me where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going. We lean on those promises.

But pilgrims also lean on the God who makes those promises. Why did God give Abram promise after promise? So that Abram would rely on him.

So that Abram would wait on him. And that is why God gives us promise after promise in the gospel. So that we would wait on him. So that we would rely on him.

[28 : 02] God gives us promises so that we could say with the psalmist Whom have I in heaven high but thee O Lord alone. And on the earth who my desire besides thee there is none.

My flesh and my heart may faint and fail but God will fail me never for God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. God gives us promises so that we can say with Jeremiah and lamentations the Lord is my portion and therefore I will wait quietly for him.

the Lord is good to those whose hope is in him to the one who seeks him. It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. God gives us promises so that we can say with Habakkuk though the fig tree doesn't bud and there are no grapes on the vine though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no fruit though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stall yet I will rejoice in God my Saviour.

I will rejoice in the God who is my strength. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer. He enables me in his strength and power to go in the high places.

God gives us promises so that we can say with Peter Lord to whom else can we go? You have the words of eternal life and God gives us promises so that we can say with the writer of the Hebrews let us fix our eyes on Jesus because he is the author he is the perfecter of our faith.

[29 : 32] Pilgrims prize the promises of God and they lean on the God who makes those promises and tomorrow we come and gather at the Lord's table confident and assured of those truths those promises promises that have been purchased with the blood of Christ.

finally we have the adoration of the pilgrim the adoration of the pilgrim verse 18 we read then Abram removed his tent and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre which is in Hebron and built there an altar unto the Lord and what we see in this verse is that Abram worships the Lord Abram worships the Lord we read here that Abram changes location in obedience to the Lord he moves from Bethel and he walks the length of the land and he walks the breadth of the land and eventually he moves his tents and he goes to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron and this will be where Abram remains throughout the rest of his life this will be where Sarah is buried where Abram is buried where Isaac and Jacob and their family are buried now Abram is still a pilgrim his attitude his assurance his adoration demonstrating that his citizenship is in heaven and he is eagerly awaiting that heavenly city whose builder and whose architect is God himself but now Abram ceases wandering and he pitches his tents in this central location and while in Hebron Abram builds an altar to the Lord now building an altar is an expression it is a public profession of Abram's trust in the Lord Abram's thankfulness to the Lord Abram's belief in the promises of God Abram's building an altar is Abram's defiant act in public that in the midst of all the idolatry of Canaan he loves he serves he worships the living and true God the whole aroma of verse 18 is one of worship one of a God besotted Abram as a pilgrim Abram worships the Lord and this afternoon worship occupies and it preoccupies every Christian pilgrim worship occupies and it preoccupies every Christian pilgrim we might say that worship is our highest privilege as

Christians where we get to celebrate who God is and what he has done what he is doing and what he pledges to do for us through Christ and like Abram with his altars in pagan Canaan we get to commit an act of defiance as we engage in worship we get to commit this act of defiance as we gather together and confess a Lord who many have disdained and many have rejected like Abram with his altars in Canaan we get to commit an act of defiance as we come together and despite what circumstances have hit us what providences have rocked us what hard times have come our way we in defiance say this is my Lord and I stand with him and I worship him like Abram with his altars in pagan Canaan we get to commit an act of defiance as we come to take the Lord's supper tomorrow where we take the bread and where we take the wine and we remember that those elements point us to a fool and a free and a final salvation and forgiveness found in a crucified and risen saviour now that brings us a message to this foolishness to many who are perishing but to those of us who are being saved it is a message in which the wisdom and the power of God is contained it is good news to the pilgrim and the pilgrim worships in the light of this so a pilgrim is occupied and he is preoccupied with God's worship and the wonderful thing is that worship doesn't simply take place within the walls of the sanctuary of the church that worship also takes place behind the kitchen table behind the checkout counter in Tesco as you're driving behind the steering wheel wherever you are you are occupied and preoccupied with the worship of the God who is a hundred percent for you through Christ and Christ alone in whom our hope is found and in this we stand in the love of God Amen let us pray for you Amen Amen