

Choices

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Date: 30 April 2017

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to the chapter we read in the book of Genesis, chapter 13. Genesis, chapter 13. And just looking at this chapter way back, we started to look at the life of Abraham, so I thought I'll pick it up again.

Maybe if we go to verse 4, there we'll find that it says of Abraham that we find over at verse 3, And 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.

And there Abraham called upon the name of the Lord. So we had, if you can cast your minds way back, we had begun to look at the life of Abraham, but I would like to continue that.

And one of the things that, in the very short time, that we were looking at Abraham's life, we saw that the Lord leads us step by step.

That is the way faith works. I'm sure we would ideally love the Lord to set out a kind of a plan of our lives. And it would be all kind of mapped out for us.

[1 : 17] And he would kind of say, Well, here you are. This is your life. This is how it's going to be. And there will be this, and there will be that, and there will be these turns, and there will be these twists, and there will be these downs, and there will be these ups.

But I will be with you all the time. Part of us says, you know, we would quite like to have that. And yet, it would be awful if we had that. Because I am sure, some of you here, you will be saying, If I knew what was going to come, or what I had to experience in life, I would have said, Oh no, I don't know how I will deal with that.

God in his mercy hides a lot of these things from us. But what the one thing he has promised is, that he will direct our paths, and that he will give us the grace sufficient for us on each day.

And that was one of the things that Abraham discovered in his journey, not only going towards Canaan, but his journey throughout his time in Canaan.

Now we saw that Abraham, his life from after he left, he had been, remember, in our other colonies, he had moved on, and as he made his way into Canaan, two things characterized his life, the altar and the tent.

[2 : 30] They were the two things that you keep seeing over and over again. Abraham, he built a tent, or he had his tent, pitched his tent there, and he made an altar there.

He was often, you find him making an altar and sacrificing. And you'll always find that as long as Abraham had this focus where the altar was, and the altar, of course, was where he was calling upon the name of the Lord and sacrificing, worshiping God, everything went well for him.

But you remember how famine had come into the land, and he journeyed and he went down to Egypt. And from a human point of view, you could say to yourself, well, I can understand that, because Abraham had a big household.

There was a huge, a lot of servants, there was a lot, he was a very rich man. And he would be saying to himself, well, the land here isn't going to support us, we'd better go down to Egypt.

But he left his altar, he left that, and he went down to Egypt. And the thing is that the decision he made wasn't a decision that he made, it would appear prayerfully.

[3 : 38] It was what you would term a practical choice, or a practical decision. And I'm not saying we're not to use our common sense. Of course we are. God has given us common sense.

And it's kind of stupid to go against common sense. But we ought also to be always asking God, Lord, what do you want me to do here?

What should I do? Should I go? Should I stay? And I believe when God makes it very clear for a person to go to a particular place, that they should stay there until the Lord tells them otherwise.

Remember when the Lord sent Elijah to live by the brook, he stayed there. Even when the brook started to run dry, he stayed there until the word of the Lord came to him again, telling him to get up and go to Zarephath, and that a widow woman would look after him there.

So the biblical idea is really that when the Lord directs us somewhere, we stay there until he shows us otherwise. But it would appear that Abraham just, he used, he thought, oh well, here's the famine, let's go to Egypt.

[4 : 47] And Egypt wasn't a good experience for Abraham. Remember how he had to, in order to save his own skin, he lied about his wife Sarah, said she was his sister, and the king had taken Sarah.

But anyway, eventually he left Egypt. And he and Lot and his nephew and all that they had, and of course the king of Egypt had given them a lot of things. So Abraham came out of there an incredibly rich man.

But there were things that happened in Egypt which were going to change Abraham's life for good. But the important thing we find in this chapter is that Abraham is retracing his steps.

That's the first thing that we see. He's retracing his steps. He journeyed, verse 3, we read that, on from the Negev as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning and to the place where he had made an altar at the first.

And there Abraham called upon the name of the Lord. See what Abraham's doing? Abraham realizes, I got it wrong. He came out, yes, he came out of Egypt.

[5 : 58] He wasn't a changed man. That was the great thing. Lot was changed in, it would appear Lot was changed in Egypt. Abraham wasn't. But he realized that he had made a mistake.

And so he retraces his steps and he goes back to where it was at the beginning. And he offers again and he calls upon the name of the Lord. And that's a very clear picture for ourselves as well because throughout our lives, and don't let us for one moment think, that when we become Christians, that we just journey on and on and on.

At one level we do. But there are slips and there are dips and there are falls. And there are very, very, very few Christians. I don't know if I've ever met a Christian who will say, you know this, from the moment I started following the Lord, I just went straight on.

I never deviated on the path once. I never found myself straying in the slightest. I never knew what it was ever to backslide.

I don't know if I've ever met a Christian who would say that. But the important thing for a Christian, when we find that things aren't where they should be and that we're not as we ought to be, is that we have to go to the Lord and say, Lord, have mercy on me.

[7 : 19] Forgive me. And try and get ourselves back to where we were. To enjoy once again the fellowship and presence of the Lord. Because sometimes we don't realize how far away we go until we get back.

And then we say, now I know. I highlighted that the other night at the meeting. That sometimes when we start eating, we realize how hungry we are.

Sometimes we don't feel hungry. And then we start eating. Maybe you're at dinner. And you think, oh, I didn't realize. Quite often we say, I didn't realize how hungry I was until you start eating. And it's the same spiritually.

Sometimes it's when we again start feeding upon the Lord, we realize just how hungry we are for Him. Well, that would look like how it was for Abraham.

And if there's anybody here who has strayed or that you're not where you should be. Because you know yourself. You can attend church. You know, you can read your Bible day and night.

[8 : 22] But you skim through it. Nothing's going in. And it's like you're just stamping the card. Maybe you're going to work stamping the card in and stamping the card out. But it's not doing any good.

It's just sort of, it's maybe solving your conscience. When we come to the Word, we've got to mean business. You don't have to read a lot of it.

But read it meaningfully in order that the Word will go into your heart and affect you. So we find that Abraham has made his way back. Back to the beginning.

Back to where he was before. And we find then that Abraham, when he came back from Egypt, he had come back, as we said, very, very wealthy.

He had a lot of cattle, a lot of sheep, and so had Lot. But all that he had acquired in Egypt became a problem to them.

[9 : 23] Because the land couldn't cope with them. Now we've got to remember there had been famine in the land, and so when they came back, probably the land hadn't had time to sort of recuperate after the famine, and growth maybe had been very sort of slow.

In Egypt, of course, he also got the servant girl, Hagar, who was to become an incredible problem for the home, of Abraham's home. It wasn't Hagar's fault, but that's further down the line. But his journey into Egypt affected Lot. Maybe it didn't affect Abraham, but it affected Lot. And maybe when we find, remember how the angels had come to tell Abraham what God was going to do to Sodom and Gomorrah when Lot lived there, and we find Abraham pleading and pleading and pleading to save Sodom.

And he was pleading and pleading to save Sodom, largely because Lot was there. And I get the feeling that Abraham may have felt an element of guilt about Lot.

Because we find, we'll see that in a moment, about Lot's choice. Lot's choice had been affected by his journey into Egypt. And maybe Abraham had seen a huge change take place in Lot.

[10 : 50] I don't know. The one thing we do know is that Lot, although his life appears incredibly sordid, the latter part of it, he was a righteous man.

Whatever people may think. The New Testament makes that very clear. It talks about righteous Lot. So, he was a believer. Lot was a believer.

But Abraham may have noticed this huge change in Lot. And he's saying to himself, you know, that's my influence. It's me, because of what I did, that has brought about this change in Lot.

And that can affect us as Christians as well. Because, sometimes, we can affect people for good, but sometimes, we can affect people for ill.

And that's a huge thing upon our own lives. How are we affecting people? And so, it might have been part of what was making Abraham pray the way he was for Sodom.

[11 : 50] But anyway, here they were in the land, and it tells us, at that time, the Canaanites and the Perisites were dwelling in the land. Now, you'd almost think that's just kind of thrown in, as it were.

But I also think that it highlights, yes, the Canaanites, the Perisites, are there, plus Abraham and Lot and the huge herds and all the rest, so the land wouldn't have enough for everybody.

But here are these heathens, and they'll be watching. They're watching these families who've come in. What are they like? Oh, see, this man Abraham, he's building an altar. He's always building an altar.

He's always sacrificing. He's always worshipping God. And they'd be watching him as to what kind of person he was. And we've now come to one of the great moments, really, in Abraham's life.

Because we find, in verse 7, that there was strife between the herdsmen of Abraham's and the herdsmen of Lot's.

[12 : 55] You see, there wasn't enough grazing for the whole lot of them. And so Lot's herdsmen and Abraham's herdsmen started to fight. And Abraham didn't want any conflict within the family.

And you know, that's one of the wonderful things. Here's this great man. And he's great in so many different ways. And one of them was, Abraham was a peacemaker. He didn't want conflict within the family.

And that is such an important thing. You know, it's the easiest thing in the whole wide world to have conflict within the family. It's the easiest thing to have conflict within the family of God's people.

And in fact, the history of the church down throughout the years, everywhere, sadly, tragically, is full of conflict. The last place where it should be.

Because the Lord commands us to be peacemakers. He commands us. And one, you know, this is part of the problem so often is because people, because of people's pride, because of people's determination to get their own way.

[14 : 07] An awful lot of problems in the history of the church down throughout the centuries is because of these very reasons. Well, Abraham is the classic example of how to avoid these things.

So, here we have the situation. There's strife, as we say, between Abraham's herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen. And it would be very, very easy for Abraham to call Lot in and say, right, Lot, see what's happening here.

There's conflict here. And there mustn't be conflict. Right, God has given me this land. So, I'm the main man here. So, it's been nice knowing you, Lot, but sling your hook, away you go, find somewhere else.

this is my place. Is that what Abraham does? No. Even although he's the one who's looked after, he's been guardian of Lot, although he's provided for Lot, even although Abraham is the one that all the promises of God came to, Abraham does something wonderful.

Abraham says to Lot, you choose. wherever you want to go, I'll go in the other direction.

[15 : 30] At that moment, Abraham is showing something of the, just, what an amazing man full of God's grace. Abraham is prepared not to be first, not to be second, not to be third.

Abraham is showing the spirit of where he's prepared to be nothing in order that God's name will be honored and God's name will be glorified. He doesn't want that the Perisites and the Canaanites will be looking around and saying, ah, see these people, they can't get on, they're at war, they're striving.

Abraham is prepared to be a nobody for the good, for the sake of the cause. And it's an amazing moment in Abraham's life. He stands up and shows, I am prepared to be second in this.

Lot, I'm handing it over to you. Amazing. And Lot, Lot is showing a totally different spirit.

You would think Lot would say, oh, Abraham, I can't do that. You're the main man here, Abraham. You're the one who has made all the decisions and choices. You're the one who has followed God. You're the one the promises have been made to.

[16 : 44] I have to hand it back to you. But no, Lot grabs the opportunity. He's an opportunist, obviously. And so, it tells us that Lot lifted up his eyes and he began to scan the horizon.

And Lot was making a choice purely and simply on what he could see. And Lot is really, he's coming to this conclusion.

He lifted up his eyes and he saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everhood, like the garden of the Lord. Notice, like the land of Egypt. So, straight away, Lot is saying, right, I want to go somewhere like Egypt.

Because obviously, the journey into Egypt had stayed in Lot. Egypt didn't stay in Abraham.

Abraham went into Egypt and he came out of it.

We're in the world but not of it. And Abraham was an example of that. Lot, unfortunately, wasn't. He went into the world and the world stayed in him. And so, when he looked up, he was going to make a choice based upon the best that he could see.

[17 : 56] It wasn't a prayerful choice. And he says, ah, I see the best part that anybody can see and that is going to be mine.

And so, Lot lifted up his eyes. But it doesn't tell us that he lifted up his heart. It doesn't tell us that he prayed. And the word of God doesn't tell us that our eyes are to make the choice but our ears.

Because faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. And that's how Abraham made his choices. By hearing the word of God.

Abraham built his choices upon God's word. The only times he didn't, trouble came his way. But Lot, there's no word of listening to God's word.

He has his eyes to guide him. And the Bible makes it very clear, although sight is a great blessing, that our eyes get us into an awful lot of trouble. because, you know, the Bible tells us that the eye is never satisfied with seeing.

[19 : 00] Have you thought about that? You know, you look out and you see something. It doesn't stop there. The eye isn't satisfied with seeing. It develops.

Desire is born within the heart. That's what happened in Eden. Eve saw that the tree was good for food. She saw it was beautiful.

She saw all these things. Satan focused her attention upon what she was seeing. And she began to desire it. And she took it and we know what happened. Same with Achan in Jericho.

God said you're not to take any of the stuff. Normally they were allowed to. But in Jericho, no.

Achan, remember he saw the wedge of gold.

He saw the beautiful clothing. And it tells us he saw, remember what it says, and he coveted. Ah, I've got to get that.

[19 : 59] And he took it. Nobody else knew and he buried it in his tent. And he brought trouble in Israel. David, he saw Bathsheba washing.

He saw her. The sin wasn't in the seeing. It was in the desire that was born into the heart. And then he had to have her. that's why Satan took Jesus up in the temptation to view the whole world. And he says, I'll give it to you. It's all I will give it to you. See what you're seeing. I'll give it to you. You bow down before me. And you see, this is a danger of her eyes.

And that's why the psalmist said, turn thou my sight and eyes away from viewing vanity. And it's so easy, you know, and often we look at things and the look can begin to linger.

And the lingering look begins to create desire within. So we've always got to be careful. So Lot made his decision in the wrong way.

[21 : 07] He made it on what he could see. Abraham made his decision on what he had heard and that from God's word. And so we see the decisions that have been made and we find that Lot goes off and I'm quite sure that as Lot went away and he headed away down towards the valley and down to the plains there he would say to himself, I have got the best deal.

And it's possible that even Abraham as he saw Lot go away there might have been a moment in his thinking, I don't know, and he said, Lot sure got a good deal there.

Humanly speaking, Lot got the best deal, there's no doubt about it, for a wee while. Because these well-watered plains and that beautiful lush flowing valley, rich for the cattle, was soon going to become a barren wilderness as a result of the fire and brimstone coming down on Sodom and Gomorrah.

Lot couldn't see beyond the present and that's why it's so dangerous for us to make our decisions purely on what we can see and on the present and only God can see into the future and that's why we must ask the Lord, Lord, guide me, guide me, show me, because I don't know, I'm only seeing the here and now, can't see beyond.

Anyway, Lot went away and he made his way towards Sodom. It wasn't long until Lot was actually in Sodom and as we'll follow the story through, he was eventually sitting in the gates of Sodom, in other words, he had a prominent place within the city.

[22 : 57] That's the way that sin works. I don't know how exactly Abram would have felt at that moment when Lot went away. But a very powerful moment comes because after Lot has gone away, it tells us in verse 14, the Lord said to Abram after Lot had separated from him, lift up your eyes, now it's time, Abram, you've been listening to me now, Abram, you lift up your eyes, look from the place where you are, look north, look south, look east, look west, look all around, as far as you can see, every bit of it, I'm going to give to you, and to your descendants after you.

Isn't that amazing? Lot was somebody, Lot chose and took what he wanted, but God gave to Abraham.

and you know, that's a huge difference between taking and giving, and God is the one who gives us, and you know, it's always worth waiting upon God, sometimes we might have to wait a while, sometimes we might have to wait until there's even a time of separation that there was between Abraham and Lot, but Abraham received amazing blessing at that time.

Verse 17, Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I'll give it to you. And we find Abraham, he moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, and which are at Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord.

There he is settling down in his tent again, and again the building of the altar. Abraham's back, big style, following the Lord, or worshipping the Lord.

[24 : 49] And there is nothing greater we can do as well, because you know, here we are, and we're faced with it. These are the choices in life we're always having to make. Do I base my choices on what I see, on what's happening right now, or do I wait upon the Lord and ask Him to guide me?

Sometimes the Lord will guide you purely on what you see. And as I said earlier on, we're not to close our mind to using our common sense, because sometimes there are very obvious things that we just have to make the choice on, and make our decisions on what is staring us in the face.

But there are times we've always got to ask, even in these things, Lord, what will you have me to do? Well, I know who was the more content, who would have slept better.

Lot might have at night, he might have said to himself, oh, I've got a great deal here. And he slept well for a while, but he didn't sleep well for long. Abraham, I would imagine, must have had the most wonderful sleep that night, after the Lord had appeared to him.

And the Lord had blessed him, not just by saying to him, this land is all yours, but the Lord would have drawn close to him. Abraham would have had a new sense of the identity, and the presence, and the communion, and the fellowship of God at that time.

[26 : 15] And his response, to that, was to worship him. And I pray that we will also have that within our own hearts, because as we come together into God's house, that's one of the things that we're seeking, that we will know, that fellowship, that presence, that communion of God, and that it will bring the response in our own hearts of worship towards him.

Let us pray. Oh Lord, our God, we give thanks for the great examples you set out before us, in the word of God. Help us to realize that they are there for our benefit, for our edification.

They're not just simply there as stories from the past that have been brought aspects of history, but they're there. Yes, they are aspects of your history, the history of your people in this world.

But we're told very clearly in the New Testament that they're set out, these people and their lives, as examples to us in order that we will learn from them. Give us the spiritual understanding to take to heart these things.

Lord, watch over us, we pray, and bless us. Bless cup of tea, coffee in the hall, and bless all that is to be done even in this day in your name. Take away from us our sin.

[27 : 32] In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. Amen. Amen.