

Genesis 13

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 May 2017

Preacher: Matt Coburn

[0 : 00] Genesis. I don't have a page number, but it's the first book of the Bible, so it's probably about page 10. Nine. That was a pretty good guess. So we are going to look at what, if you grew up in Sunday school, is one of those stories you've heard about, but maybe have wondered, what in the world do I make of this? And hopefully by the end of the evening, you will have a slightly better understanding. I know for me, I started preparing this, not having quite an idea of where this would go, and it's been a rich time reading it together. So let's read the story, Genesis 13, the story of Abraham and Lot separating, and we will read and pray, and then we'll walk through this together.

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. Now Abraham was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold, 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 Abram called upon the name of the Lord. And Lot, who went with Abram, also had 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 strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. At that time, the Canaanites and the Perizzites were dwelling in the land. Then Abram said to Lot, let there be no strife between you and me, between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen. Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right. And if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left.

And Lot lifted 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. 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. Abram 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.

The Lord said to Abram after Lot had separated from him, lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northwards and southwards and eastwards and westwards. For all the land that you see, I will give to you and to your offspring forever. I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.

Arise, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I will give it to you. So Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron.

[3 : 35] And there he built an altar to the Lord. Let's pray. Lord, thank you for your word, and thank you for the way that in it you reveal yourself to us. You show us the way of the human heart, both for good and for evil. And Lord, how you point us to your great work of salvation in the world.

Help us tonight to see these things. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. So, the writer of Genesis is a great storyteller. And if you've ever done literary analysis and looked at stories, it's really fun to walk through a narrative and to just see how the story itself helps us see what the point of the passage is. Because stories usually have a beginning that kind of set up the situation, introduce you to the characters in the scene, and then there's some kind of crisis or some kind of problem that develops, that leads to this point, this high point of the story, where the question is, how is this going to turn out?

It's the place in the movie where you want to stop and focus in. It's a place where you, where you, if you're watching in the theater, you may be inched to the edge of your seat to see what's going to happen next. And then what happens then is the resolution. And in that point, you then see often what the purpose is. And then you see the results flowing out of it. And very much our passage sets up along that line. So, we're going to walk through it along those lines, and we're going to see how

this passage tells us a little bit about the walk of faith. Abram in the, in the New Testament is commended as a man of faith, as, as a man who was righteous because of his faith. And what we're going to do is we're going to look at, at how this passage helps us see that in his life tonight. And then we're going to think about some of the implications for ourselves along the way. So, that's what we're going to do. So, look with me in verses 1 through 4, because verses 1 through 4 is the setup, right? If you were here last week, you remembered, or if you've been here for the couple weeks, what you've heard already from chapter 12 is that God initiated with Abram and came to him and said, I want you to uproot from where you are over in Ur of the Chaldees, and I want you to take everything you have and go somewhere else, and I'm going to lead you to a place. And he made great promises. I'm going to make you the father of a great nation. And I, and you, in your, in that, in that great nation, I will bless you, and I will make you a blessing to the whole world. And so, Abram, by faith, picks up and follows God's leading. And he goes from Ur of the Chaldees, and then up to Haran, and then down into the promised land. And then, as we saw, he kept going, and he ended up in Egypt because of a famine. And in Egypt, he failed miserably, having started out trusting God and uprooting his whole life to follow him. Then he went to Egypt, and instead of continuing to trust God, he became afraid. Became afraid of what might happen to him because his wife was beautiful. He lied. He put her in danger. He put her by implication. And the promise that God would give him many offspring in danger. And God rescued him. God supernaturally intervened and let a pagan king of Egypt, the Pharaoh, know what was really going on and exposed Abram's lie. And God rescued Abram from his own foolishness. And not only that, but in the midst of it, the Pharaoh then lavished on him all sorts of great gifts. And so, he comes out as a very rich man. And this is what we see as we begin the story. Abram went up from Egypt. So, now he's returning to the promised land that God had already pointed out to him. And he came with his wife and all that he had. And Lot, who was his nephew, had traveled with him on this whole journey. And now Lot was continuing with him. Okay? And they were coming up through what is now the Sinai Peninsula, up through there into the lower part of

[7 : 51] Israel. If you have, I think there's a map in your program. Is that right? So, you'll see Bethel is marked there. And you'll see that, I think Hebron is on there. And you'll see the red, not the Red Sea.

What is it? The Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is the big piece of water that's off of the, that's right next to Jerusalem. And the, and it basically is the promised land. Most of what we're looking at is going to be on your map. It's going to be just to the, I got to do my map right for you guys. So, if you're looking at it, you want to look just to the left and just below the Dead Sea. This is the area that we're mostly concentrating in tonight. And Abram comes back into this place where God had promised him that he would be able to settle. And you have to imagine that Abram, who, as he becomes known for, through the rest of the Bible, is, is coming into this with great anticipation. God has given these grace promises. Not only that, but God has dealt graciously with them. Even in his failure, God has preserved him and is bringing him back into this land where all these promises are going to be kept. That sounds great.

The anticipation of God's goodness must be a part of his story. And so, he enters into this land, and immediately there's a problem. Immediately, the promised land doesn't quite seem to fit, does it? Abram and Lot move into the land, and all of these things happen. The land was not enough. Why? Well, because there wasn't enough room. There wasn't enough room for the grazing. The herdsmen were fighting with one another. There wasn't enough. It's interesting. He says they couldn't live together, and it's not quite clear why. There wasn't enough place to encamp and to keep all of their silver and gold.

It doesn't say that clearly, but clearly it says Lot and Abram, who had been traveling together up to this point in one band, could no longer do so. And not only that, but the writer throws in, oh, and by the way, the land was full of people who didn't, probably wouldn't be super excited about a group of people with large herds moving into their pasture land and starting to graze their sheep and their goats and their cattle or whatever it was that they had. So, the promised land suddenly doesn't seem quite so welcoming as maybe Abram had anticipated. And Abram probably wondered, God, what are you doing here? You've just rescued me out of my own foolishness. You're bringing me into the place of promise. And now it's hard, not easy. Now there's a problem that I don't know how to solve. Maybe you've been there. Maybe God's taken you through some paths. You've seen him work graciously in your life, but then you enter into a new situation, and you think, and you

anticipate,

[10 : 58] God's going to bless you. But instead, it's been hard, harder than you imagined. And you wonder, God, where are you? What could you be doing here? Don't you want me to prosper in your blessings?

What do you want me to do? And at this point in the story, this is the crisis question that this story points us to. How is Abram going to respond to this problem? How is Abram going to do it? Because he had just faced a situation in Egypt where he threw off his relationships, he threw off his trust in God's promises, and he tried to solve it all by himself.

And God brings him in, and then he gives him another situation and says, okay, what are you going to do? Will you take control, or will you trust me?

Abram had all the power. He could have said, Lot, you can go to that really rocky desert area that looks like a terrible place to graze and farm. I'm going to give you that part, and I'm going to take this part over here. It's green. It's lush. It looks really great. He could have asserted his authority as the uncle. He could have asserted his authority as the receiver of God's promise.

[12 : 25] He could have used all of his powers to manage this situation on his own. Maybe you've wondered, is that how I get out of my situation too?

We so easily want to solve our problems on our own schemes and plans and trusting ultimately in ourselves. Whether it's we're going to work so hard that we're going to overcome any possibility, any problem. It's going to be up to us. If we're tough enough, if we're smart enough, and if we work hard enough, we can do it. Sometimes the temptation is, I know what it might look like to trust God, but I'm afraid that that's not going to be successful.

And I think there's another way in offering for me. But I know it's a scheme. It's a little shady. It's living way in the gray areas of life. It might not be something I would normally do, but I feel like I have to because that's the only way I can solve this problem. That's the only way I can respond to this situation that seems so hard.

We easily fall into self-saving plans. Some of them may seem like just good hard work. Some of them may seem like we know we're crossing the line and doing something that's probably not quite right in order to get ahead to where we want. Abram faced this question. What is he going to do? Verses 8 and 9, we see Abram's response. We see Abram respond not by taking control, but ultimately by trusting God. I believe that's what it means. The text doesn't say that. All you see is his actions. Look with me at verses 8 and 9. What does Abram say? Abram says, hey, we've come into this land. Lot, my nephew, look around. What do you think? You take your part, and I'll take the rest. You go to the left, I'll go to the right. You go to the right, I'll go to the left.

[14 : 41] Abram trusts God. He gives up control in the situation. He gives it to another. He's living out his calling to be blessed by God, trusting that God will bless him and that he will be a blessing to Lot by giving him this choice and by surrendering control and trusting God in the midst of it.

And it's fascinating to see. I don't know if you've thought about this, how it feels to do that, to trust God.

In those moments when you're so afraid of what's going to happen, when you're not sure how to work yourself through the situation you're in, because it feels at times like foolishness to give up control.

It feels like you're putting yourself in a vulnerable position. What you most want, what you most hope to achieve, what you most desire, what you've set your heart on, you're, by giving up control and trusting, you're giving up the ability to know that that's going to come. At least it seems like it. And it only makes sense if God is real and if his promises are true. And the results, the writer of Genesis, is showing us how God blessed Abram as he made this decision.

[16 : 20] It's fascinating. Look at verses 10 through 13. We've got to read this because it's fascinating. Lot lifted up his eyes, right? It doesn't seem like there's anything wrong with that. He lifted up, he looked with his eyes, and he said, where am I going to go? If I look over here, it looks like a lot of fairly dry Middle Eastern pasture land, which isn't great. It's not Iowa or Nebraska. Think Idaho or Utah.

Utah. That's what it looks like. Lot looks over here to his right, and he looks and he sees, again, this is where the river, the Jordan River flows out of the southern end of the Dead Sea.

There's water there. Because there's water there, it's green. That seems to all make sense. But do you see how the writer of Genesis tells us how as much as looking by with his own human eyes,

this makes sense? The writer of Genesis is saying, warning, danger, danger. This is not a good place to go. Look at what he does. Read this with me. He lifted up and he said, it's like the garden of the Lord. That sounds like a good thing. Secondly, like the land of Egypt. That sounds like a bad thing.

God had taken them out of Egypt. They're not supposed to go back to Egypt. And then he goes on and he says, in the direction of Zoar. Now, Zoar is probably not on the map. It's the region right at the bottom across the Jordan River on the eastern side of the Jordan River at the bottom of the Dead Sea. And it is where the cities Sodom and Gomorrah were. Now, Sodom and Gomorrah haven't even, like, hit the radar yet. No one knows in this time. Lot isn't looking at it saying, oh, Sodom and Gomorrah, whew, you don't want to go there. It's like going to Las Vegas or whatever. You know, he, it's, Lot doesn't necessarily know that. But the writer of Genesis is telling us that's what he's chosen. He's chosen what looks good in his own eyes, and yet it's filled with sin and wickedness. That's what he clarifies right at the end in verse 13.

[18 : 39] The men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord. Lot, by looking with his eyes, chose what seemed to be better.

But in doing so, he chose the place where he was planting the seeds for his own spiritual downfall and separation from the Lord. Now, we'll get there. What? Genesis 14.

God, Abram has to rescue him. Keep going. A few more. Chapter 18. It's not going to end well for Lot. Lot. It's not going to end well for him in Sodom and Gomorrah. It's not going to be a place of fruitfulness as he desires. We'll deal with that as we go along and read the story. You'll see the outcome of the arc of what happens with Lot later. But here, the main character in the main story is Abram. And Lot is a foil against Abraham and his decision of faith. Because in contrast, what looks good with his own eyes, but ultimately is not good spiritually, look at me with verse 14.

Does Abram lift up his eyes and see how good Canaan looks? No. Again, the storyteller is so brilliant here. The Lord said to Abram, lift up your eyes. It was the Lord who said, now look, you who have trusted me, look, look north and south and east and west. This is the land of promise.

This is the place that I am giving to you. And you, as you live in this land, and he reaffirms the promise. The promise in chapter 12. I forgot to look this up. Which one is it? Is it stars or sand?

[20 : 39] In verse 12. In chapter 12. The promise. Who preached on it? Is it stars or sand? Stars in the sky or sand on the beach? I can't remember. I forgot to look it up. Sorry. So, right, there are three different, there are three different images that God uses in this cycle to talk about how great the descendants of Abram are going to be. Right? I think it's stars.

If I can remember. The promise to Abram. There we go. Chapter 15. Right? Or verse 15. So, as many as the stars are in the sky, so your descendants will be. Right? And the idea is that's innumerable. It's uncountable. Here, in chapter 13, what we see is as much as the dust of the earth. If you can count the dust of the earth, you can count how many offspring you will have. Abram is, or God is affirming to Abraham, you have trusted me. And as you trust me, you will bear, you will experience the fruit of the promises that I have given to you. And he reaffirms it with this other, with another image. Because you have trusted me and not taken control, I am giving you this land.

Walk around. Use your eyes to see all the land that I'm giving you. Take hold of it. And know that this is going to be yours. This is where I'm going to bless you. And the remarkable thing about it is then in verse 18, it says, so Abram moved, right? Bethel is sort of a bit of a borderland.

Lot moved this way. Abram moved this way up into the center of the promised land, the center of Canaan near Hebron. And interestingly, do you see what he did at the end? He built an altar and he worshiped the Lord. Which, if you remember, is how God had introduced Abram back into the promised land way back in verse 4. When God came up to Bethel, the writer reminds us he came back up to the place where he had built an altar. And it was on that place that he called upon the Lord. Having come out of his failure in Egypt, back up into the promised land, he was ready to trust the Lord. He was ready to see what God would have for him. And to not trust in his own schemes, in his own plans, nor even trust in his own eyes to see what would be good and right and to pursue it. But to trust in the promises of God.

[23 : 35] Now here's the thing for us today as we think about what this means.

We are not Abraham. And the promises that we are given are greater than those given to Abraham. Abraham. Because Abraham, in the beginning of the Bible, was given promises that was preparing the world for something greater than that. Just as God called Abraham to begin this great work of making a people for his own glory, of making his own people in the world, a people that he would

bless and then make a blessing to the whole world so they would know that he is a God who desires good for his people, who is raising out of the sinful brokenness and fallenness of the world, a people who will know him and trust in him and will know that he is a gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in loving kindness to multiple generations who will forgive our sins as we trust in him. The story of Abraham begins this whole story of the whole Old Testament that is preparing us for the central work that God would do in history of sending Jesus Christ. And just as this story showed Abraham's invitation from God to trust him, so the whole Bible storyline speaks to us today calling us similarly to trust in God and in his promises that he gives us in Jesus Christ. What does that mean, briefly?

We know that God created the world of people to know him, but we know that humanity has rebelled. And just like Abram in Egypt, we all as humanity chose to reject God's provision for us and instead to seek our own life apart from independent of God. This is the very core of sin to say, God, I do not trust you to believe that you can give me life. I'm going to go make my own life my own way. I'm going to choose my own strategies and trust in my own wisdom to do that. And this is at the very core of sin. And this rebellion and this rejection against God leads us to spiritual death.

But God loved his creation and is committed to making a people for his own glory. And so he sent his son, Jesus Christ, to rescue us from that. Jesus came as the descendant and the fulfillment of Abraham to rescue us from this death and to give us new life. He came and through his life he exhibited what it looked like to trust God fully. He trusted God all the way to the cross where he offered up his life for ours.

[26 : 54] The one who perfectly trusted God gave himself up for us who don't perfectly trust God and who so easily want to do it our own way. And he died and he rose again from the dead to defeat the power of sin and death and to offer us a life that, as the writer in 1 Peter says, is imperishable, unfading, and kept in heaven.

A new life that begins now but will stretch for eternity. That is not something that we have schemed or worked to make on our own, but something that is completely from God himself. This is what true Christianity is about. Not in making ourselves good enough so that God will give us the life that we want or deserve, but that instead it's that we would fall on our faces before God and say, God, I can't do it. I can't do this.

In my sin and in my fallenness, there's no way I could do this. And so I repent of all of those things. And I come to you empty-handed asking that by faith I might receive what you have done in Christ. So rather than going and trying to get the promises on our own, we find ourselves in, by faith, receiving from God what we could never get on our own.

This is at the very core of what Christianity is about. This is what the gospel means for us, is that we're people who, rather than seeking to save ourselves, we trust in God, that he has saved us in Jesus. And all we have to do is trust in him. And that does seem foolish sometimes.

And it does seem vulnerable sometimes. But it enables us to trust God, not only for this most central and most important part of our life, which is our relationship with God, but out of that flows an ability to live this life of faith where we can trust God for all sorts of other things. We can trust God as we face the loneliness of singleness and walking a road without someone else to come alongside of us. We can trust God when we're lacking work and not knowing where we can find new work, not knowing where the next paycheck comes from, not knowing where the next meal comes from.

[29 : 28] We can trust God when the spouse that we thought would lead us into the promised land ends up to be imperfect and sometimes difficult to live with. We can trust God in the middle of that. We can trust God when after a really hard day, rather than drowning our sorrows in a pint of ice cream or a six-hour binge on a video game or whatever little pleasure that you may try to drown your sorrows in, you can find a God who loves you and who will comfort you in the midst of that.

This is what it means to walk a life of faith, is to trust that God will care for us and God will provide for us because the promises that we have in him may not make us rich in this world. They may not make us happy in the way that we want everything to just work out perfectly, but what it does do is give us a right relationship with God that is more important and deeper and more valuable than any of those things. And most importantly, because it is a part of eternity. As we read at the beginning, the Apostle Paul tells us to fix our eyes not on the seen things that are transient, but on the unseen, eternal things of Christ and of his kingdom.

And if God, who did not spare his son, but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things in him? As Paul says in Romans. This is a life of faith. And this is what this little story about Abram and Lot separating and going in two different directions, the beginning of Genesis, tell us about a life of faith. Let's pray.

Lord, tonight, even as we've talked about these things, I pray that by your Spirit you would be reminding us, reminding us of your invitation and of your call to trust in you. Lord, I pray that if there are those here tonight who don't know you, Lord, that they would hear your voice calling them and that they would pursue knowing Christ and trusting in him.

Lord, I pray for those of us who have trusted in Christ here tonight. I pray that we would learn to trust in you more in the everyday circumstances, to forsake our own schemes and our own plans, that trust in our own ability to produce the results that we want, and to rather trust you and to believe that you, who did not spare your son, will also give us all things.

[32 : 36] Thank you, Lord. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.