

Sermon — 10/04/20

Text — Genesis 13:8-13

So Abram said to Lot, “Let’s not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herders and mine, for we are close relatives. Is not the whole land before you? Let’s part company. If you go to the left, I’ll go to the right; if you go to the right, I’ll go to the left.” So, Lot looked around and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan toward Zoar was well-watered — like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company: Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord.

Theme — “Abraham and Lot”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today we begin what will be four sermons on episodes from Abraham’s life. This one focuses on the relationship between Abraham and his nephew, Lot. The verses I just read really kind of sum up both men for us, at least in terms of their character. But before we can get to that discussion, we need to set the stage: why were these two men (along with their families and flocks, their herds and servants) even there in the first place?

If you are a serious Bible student, you might remember Abraham’s background and upbringing. He is first seen living in the city “*Ur, of the Chaldeans*” — that is, in what is today southern Iraq. He came from a family of idolators who worshipped false gods. He apparently was successful in business and was wealthy. But his family life was NOT so successful: Abraham and his wife, Sarah, could not have children. And then, one day, the Lord appeared to Abraham and told him to leave his father’s household, his friends, his business, his home. To pack up up everything and go. That God was calling him to be His own, that Abraham would have a son — and that eventually his descendants would be as

numerous as the stars in the sky or the sands on the seashore. That through Abraham would come the Savior, who would give heaven. What great promises, indeed!

But the Lord would not tell Abraham WHERE he was to go! He was simply to start out, and let God direct him as he went. And Abraham went! Imagine that. An unknown God suddenly appears, out of nowhere, with the most amazing (even wild) promises, and tells Abraham to give up everything he holds dear, to leave it all behind and go who-knows-where — and Abraham does it! What great faith! It's the sort of trust that makes Abraham such a great example and model for us. But, we should also note, his nephew Lot also goes along. That is, he too trusted God's promise — a promise that he did not hear personally as did Abraham — and he too left behind family, friends, business, and home. He also trusted that God would bless Abraham. He also looked forward to that coming Messiah and Savior. And so, Lot is also an example of faith for us. (pause)

So, these two men gather their households (wives and children — for Lot DID have children, as well as their servants and employees and their families), they gather what belongings they can bring with them on their nomadic trek, they round up their herds and flocks and whatever else they had. And they set out. For who-knows-where. All because some unknown God had told Abraham to do so. Much like Noah in last week's sermon, these men take the greatest leap of faith imaginable. Despite the ridicule, the questions, the doubt they must have endured.

There's a great lesson there for us too, isn't there? God tells us to trust Him. That we are to follow where He takes us. That we are not to worry, but trust that He will provide; that He will bring us safely to our journey's end, the true and eternal Promised Land. That we are to be willing to give up **everything** and rely entirely on Him. Even if we have no clue what is to come next. That is hard. But that is faith. (pause)

So they go, Abraham and Lot. They blindly follow the Lord's directions. Going here and there. Through this region and that. Driving their flocks and herds, always on the look-out for pasture and water for the animals. Always on guard against robbers and thieves, against predators — human and animal. Always moving, never sitting still, never having a home. But, surprisingly, God not only provides for them — He even increases and enlarges and blesses them! Their flocks and herds grow and grow. Their animals get sleek and fat. Their wealth multiplies. They become important and notable, even to the peoples through whose land they are wandering.

But there is a danger in that. Eventually, those other people — the owners of the land — get jealous and hostile. Eventually, the flocks/herds of Abraham and Lot became so many that it became harder and harder for their shepherds to find adequate grass and water for all of them. Fights broke out between Abraham's men and those of Lot — each group trying to get to those resources first. Not that there was trouble between Abraham and Lot personally — there was not, they continued to live in harmony and peace as befitting children of God — but it was becoming clear that soon they would have to split up, before the fighting got worse. Before the herds suffered. Before their relationship suffered. Before the people of the land turn on them, and drive them out. And so, Abraham speaks the words of our text. He and Lot view the vast expanse of land open before them, and Abraham graciously gives Lot the first choice.

Now, Abraham did not have to do that. After all, he was Lot's uncle and, as such, custom and culture demanded that the younger give way to the older. Furthermore, Abraham was the acknowledged leader of the clan. But, most importantly, God had made His covenant and promise to Abraham, not Lot. And yet, here is Abraham sacrificing his own wants and desires, his own wealth and future, his honor and place — all for the sake of Lot. How Abraham mirrors and reflects God's love in all of this!

So, what does Lot do? Does he return the favor and tell his uncle that HE should choose, that he would be happy with whatever Abraham decides to give him? Or does he act impulsively, in his own self-interest? Well, you know — you heard the story. Looking at the two choices — the fertile, settled, rich plain of the Jordan (like the Garden of Eden, it says, for its beauty and wealth), or the more rugged, barren, empty land of Canaan — Lot chooses the greener pasture. He claims the richer, the fatter, the better land. He sees its fertility, he sees its great cities (Sodom and Gomorrah, among others, of which we will speak more in a few weeks), he sees its advantages — and he grabs. Rather than sacrificing in love (as did Abraham), rather than trusting in God to provide, Lot acts selfishly. It was a poor choice, as we know. It will lead to his downfall, to his losing everything — his flocks and wealth, his home and reputation, even his family. That too will be part of an upcoming sermon. But Lot has made his choice.

And so Abraham is left with Canaan. Not as attractive and appealing. Not as rich and fertile. Not as populous and cultured. Dusty and dry, rocky and rough. And yet THERE God will bless and keep His beloved child. THERE God will provide. THERE God will fulfill all His promises — including that of a son from whom would come the Savior of the world. And Abraham lives contentedly in that faith. (pause)

Now, we need to talk about what this Bible lesson means for us. What do we see and learn when we look at Abraham and Lot? Let's first talk about Lot. As we said, Lot too was a believer, a man of faith. Even great faith. That much should be clear from his willingness to leave everything behind and go with his Uncle Abraham. And yet, in our text, he was tempted — and fell — into selfishness and greed.

You see, it is not just those “wicked” unbelievers who sin, is it? No, it is ALL of us. And so, we need to be vigilant and watchful, aware that the devil is hunting us. Laying bait and traps. Just waiting to spring and pounce. It might be greed, as it was for Lot. It might be anger for others. Or jealousy, or

lust, or gossip, or any other manner of sin and vice. We need to know our weaknesses. But even more, we need to know our Strength — that is, our Lord Jesus Christ. He is our only hope. And if we fail and fall (as we all do, sometimes), He is also our Salvation. He has perfectly kept the commandments, He has unfailingly resisted Satan’s temptations, He has paid for all our sin. In Christ, we stand. And if we DO fall, in Christ we rise again.

In 2 Peter, the Lord calls Lot a “righteous man”. The Good News is that Lot, despite his sin — and his greed in our text is but one example of that — despite his sin, God forgave and saved Lot. And that is Good News for us too, we who sin daily and are in need of much forgiveness and salvation. Let Lot, then, be an example for us — as a believer, but also as a sinner who threw himself upon the Lord’s mercy.

Now Abraham. In him, we see a believer who lives in imitation of his God. He did not put himself first — even though it would have been natural, even right, for him to have done so. No, he sacrificed himself for Lot. And he could do that because, first of all, God sacrificed and gave to him. Abraham certainly deserved no good thing from the Lord — he was a sinful idolator, remember. And yet God came to him. God called him. God forgave him his sin. God promised him a Savior, from his very own family. Then, as he and his household traveled through lands and countries, amidst strangers and hostile people, God had always provided and protected. Never did Abraham and his group starve, never were they attacked and beaten, never did God fail them. And so, Abraham trusted that whatever choice Lot made, the Lord would continue to bless and provide for him and his own. Let Lot have the rich, green, fertile, populous land. God will still be with Abraham in Canaan. God will still guard and keep him. Because God is faithful.

It is also important for us to take note that Abraham loved Lot. Even more than simply being his nephew, Lot was his brother in faith. And Abraham would not let anyone or anything come between

them. That too is good for us to keep in mind. For the fact is that we do NOT always have that attitude and love. So, when the devil reminds us of a slight or insult from a neighbor, friend, family member, or fellow parishioner, we need to remember Abraham. Remember his love that would not allow Satan to divide God's family. We have been made one in Christ, so we dare not permit the devil to tear us apart. Cling to Christ, and cling to one another!

And the last thing about Abraham that I want to mention today is his focus on the coming Savior. Sure, Abraham rejoiced in the other promises of God: wealth, land, honor, a son and countless descendants. But what mattered most was that coming Savior. Because He alone could give eternity. He alone could satisfy our sin. He alone could give what Adam had tossed away. As good and wonderful as are the blessings of this life — and they ARE — what really matters are the eternal blessings that only Jesus can give.

Abraham had that grace, that blessing, that salvation because he trusted in that Savior. You have them too, because you also believe in Him. So, whether we have much or little in this world and life, the truth is that we have EVERYTHING in our Lord Jesus. And, like Abraham, we rejoice in that. We give thanks for the earthly gifts the Lord gives, but we focus our gaze sharply on heaven. On our Lord Jesus. And we live in peace and contentment. Because God has been good and gracious to us, poor sinners though we be. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

OS — Nicene Creed
FE — Offertory/Prayers