

Eyes on the Prize

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[0 : 0 0] We come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word. We're going to jump back into our series in Genesis, but before we do that, I want to say two things.

First of all, Andy Perch is not here with us because he's with his National Guard training in Louisiana, so you can pray for him the next couple weeks. Pray for Jenny while he's away.

Second, you may have gotten an email from me on Friday, and one of the things I said in that email is there's an old saying that goes like this, if the church isn't crying, then it's dying, which is a way of saying, hey, we as a church want to see young children coming up in our congregation.

That's a sign of life and help, and so as we have many criers here this morning, I want to remind you of what a great blessing that is. We don't want to take that for granted. We praise God for having so many young children among us.

We want that to continue. Speaking of continuing, we are continuing our series in the book of Genesis on the life of Abraham, Genesis chapter 11 through 25, and we are doing that for a couple reasons.

[1 : 1 2] First of all, it prepares us for our series in Romans when we go back to chapter 4, which is about Abraham. Second, it's a great way for us to ask the question, what does it look like to follow God in faith?

And as we ask that question, we have a couple examples, both last week and this week, two separate, two different threats to faith. So last week, we saw Abraham gave in to the threat of fear and pragmatism.

That got in the way of him trusting God's promises. This week, we're going to see his nephew Lot given to the threat of comfort and wealth. And so it's with that, I invite you to turn with me to Genesis chapter 13.

You can turn in your Bible. You can turn on your phone. You can turn in your worship guide. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's word. Proverbs chapter 30, verse 5 tells us, And so for that reason, I invite you to read with me now 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 Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold.

[2 : 3 5] 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. Verse 8, Then Abram said to Lot, Let there be no strife between you and me, and 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, 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, 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.

[4 : 07] 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.

Verse 14. The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward.

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.

And there he built an altar to the Lord. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we do praise you and we thank you again that you haven't left us alone, but you've given us your word to guide us and direct us, and most of all to show us Christ, that we would be reconciled and reunited to you.

[5 : 30] We ask that you would be at work in a powerful way this morning, that we would be able to understand everything that you've written for us in your word, that we would see it, we'd believe it, and we'd follow you in faith and obedience.

We ask that you would do this not because we've earned or deserved it, we know that we haven't, but instead we ask for it in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Last week at the end of chapter 12, you'll remember we saw that Abraham was driven essentially from the promised land because of a famine, so he heads down to Egypt where he's able to get a hold of some food, and while he's there, he's afraid that they're going to kill him because of his wife Sarai.

He thinks, well, Sarai's so beautiful, and so they're going to take me out to get to her, and so he convinces her to tell a lie and to say that she is just his sister.

And so Pharaoh, you'll remember, takes Sarai as one of his wives, and Abraham chooses fear and pragmatism over faith.

And yet, the story drips with God's grace as God still remains faithful to his promises, protects Abraham, strikes Pharaoh and his family, so that they're released, sent out of Egypt.

[6 : 55] Okay, that's the background. The point was this, that God keeps his promises despite his people's failures. That if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself.

That's the background for chapter 13, because the very first verse, we see this, Abram went up from Egypt. In other words, that episode is over. Now it's back to the main plot.

He and his wife and all that he had, which we find out in verse 2, is quite a lot. Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold.

Why is Abraham so rich? If you were paying close attention last week, it's because he just plundered Egypt. What did they do for him because of Sarai, his wife?

They gave him all sorts of things. Pharaoh showered him with livestock, and we find out gold and silver as well. And so he doesn't just return from Egypt.

[8 : 02] He returns from Egypt with his net worth a lot higher than it was before. But as it often does, wealth actually creates challenges and problems for Abraham.

And that's where we jump to the meat of the story. He and Lot have both become so wealthy that the land actually can't support them. That's what we see in verses 5 and 6. It's not just, verse 5, Abraham that has so much.

Lot has so much as well. Verse 6, the land could not support them. In other words, there's a finite resource problem. There's not enough grass.

There's not enough water. And if the story, in fact, turns, it hinges on that challenge. The limited resources lead to conflict.

That's verse 7 between Lot's herdsmen and Abraham's herdsmen. And that's where, verses 8 and 9, Abraham comes up with a solution. The first part of his solution is not surprising.

[9 : 05] Let's separate. The second part of his solution is, Lot, how about you pick first? And that's where we get into, really, the two points of this passage, which is two examples, the example of Lot, the example of Abraham, that show two very different hearts towards God and his kingdom.

Two very different approaches to the promises of God. So we're going to look at Lot first since he comes first in the narrative. He, this is verses 10 through 13 now, goes with what looks really good.

Okay? If you look on verse 10, we're told he lifted up his eyes. He saw the Jordan Valley. And what is going on there? Well, there's lots of water. What was the problem before? Not enough water for him and Abraham.

It looks like a garden. What was the problem before? Not enough grass to feed on. Like the land of Egypt. Oh, wow, this is beautiful. Like the place we just came from.

And so he chooses it. Hey, I can see the best spot. That's going to be mine. And that makes sense, right? We can't condemn Lot just for that. He's been given the first choice.

[10 : 27] Makes sense. He's going to want what's the best, what's good, what's going to prosper him. Except for one thing. Verse 13.

Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord. Verse 10. This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.

Lot is less concerned with staying close to God's land. And he is more concerned with how wealthy he can get.

In other words, the point is this. Lot is willing to cozy up close to wickedness for the sake of abundance.

Lot is willing to live right next to Sodom. We're going to find out later. He basically lives in Sodom.

[11 : 34] He's willing to do that if it will help him prosper. Lot gives in to this temptation. It's the temptation to love the good life more than the kingdom.

Lot is more interested in comfort than in the promises of God. He is so focused on wealth he either doesn't see or doesn't care that he is moving in right next to Sodom.

He both remembers and forgets the first rule of real estate. Location, location, location.

He remembers it when it comes to water and gardens. He forgets it when it comes to wickedness and rebellion.

Now, I don't want you to hear what I'm not saying. There is a theme that runs throughout Scripture of enjoying the good gifts that God gives us in this world.

[12 : 53] I hope that all of you become fabulously wealthy. I hope that you're able to get the best education you can for your kids.

I hope that you are able to go to a fancy restaurant. And while you're there, time stops. And you're able to connect with people you love and care about more than you would have if you weren't there.

I hope that you make fantastic investments. I hope they pay off. And I hope that you have more than you need. If.

If you can hold it lightly. If you don't lose the plot.

Whatever you do, Do not choose those things over God and his kingdom. I hope that you have it all.

[14 : 07] If and only if you remember what's most important. This is on the back of your worship guide.

Lot was the kind of man who would certainly choose heaven over hell if given the choice, but not heaven over earth. Material prosperity was the bottom line.

He was the example of believers who choose professions for their children or encourage marriages that will elevate the family's prosperity and power with no thought of what it will do to their souls.

Lot chose a piece of land with no thought of what it would do to his soul.

If advancing your career means that year by year you have to make bigger and bigger compromises, then I will tell you right now, you've made a bad deal.

[15 : 18] It's not worth it. If your lifestyle gets in the way of being with God's people on Sunday morning, then something is backwards.

If your fear of being excluded from the right social group means you don't talk about Jesus, then something is out of order.

And if you meet someone and you have amazing chemistry like you've never had before, but they're not a Christian, that person is not for you.

Whatever you do, do not go outside the promised land. No matter how good it looks over there.

By the way, if you don't believe me, before too long, we're going to get to Genesis chapters 19 and 20. The story does not end well for Lot.

[16 : 37] Lot sees the water and the gardens of this section. He thinks that's where he's going to end up. And when we leave Lot, he's actually living in a cave.

That's how his story ends up. Lot has lost the plot. He's lost the big picture. Why is Lot so rich to begin with? He's rich because he's close to Abraham.

He leaves Abraham. He leaves the blessing. Remember, two or three weeks ago, I gave you this quote from David Gibson. In the created world, you can only truly enjoy what you do not worship.

And we sang it again this morning. In his glory is my good.

That's what Lot forgets. Thankfully, we don't just have a negative example, though. We have two responses. We have the response of Lot and the response of Abraham.

[17 : 51] And Abraham gives us a positive example. To get at Abraham's positive example, I'm going to tell you a story. When I was a child in my family growing up, there was an enormous amount of conflict over dessert.

And the conflict revolved around whether one of the three Capone boys got a bigger piece of cake or more ice cream than another. And so at one point, my parents instituted a rule that if you complained, you got no dessert.

And so my brother said one night, well, I'm actually not complaining. I'm making an observation.

And I'm making the observation that one of my brothers has more ice cream than I do. It's not a complaint. It's just an observation. Okay. There's another rule that if you cut the cake, you got to pick your piece last.

Why? Well, you want to have the greatest incentive to cut the pieces of cake just as evenly as possible. Because if you're picking last, everyone else is going to get the best pieces first, right?

[19 : 03] If you let the person who cuts pick first, what are they going to do if they're in elementary school? No brainer. You're going to pick a big piece and then you're going to take it. What does that have to do with Abraham?

Well, the principle is this. There is an advantage to picking first. If you're starting a company, it's called a first mover advantage.

If you can secure a market before anyone else does. And that's what's shocking about verse 9. Abraham is older. Abraham is the uncle, not the nephew.

Abraham is the one to whom God has made his promises. Abraham should pick first. Right? It should be Abraham that grabs the biggest piece of cake.

Notice what he does. Then Abraham talks to Lot. Verse 8, verse 9. Is not the whole land before you?

[20 : 08] 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. Abraham gives up his privilege and his right of first choice.

Why? Because unlike chapter 12, Abraham trusts God. God has made him a promise that the promised land will be his.

Lot's choice cannot get in the way. So Abraham's freed up. He doesn't need to protect himself. He doesn't need to figure out the smartest way to divide real estate.

No. God is going to do what he said he's going to do. There's something else that Abraham does that Lot doesn't.

I told you before, even just in the last few weeks, that bookends in stories are important. What happens at the beginning and the end of this story?

[21 : 24] At the beginning, verse 4, Abraham returns to the altar he made in chapter 12. And there he calls on the name of the Lord.

In other words, this story begins with Abraham worshiping God. And how does it end? Same way. Verse 18.

Abraham moves his tent. There he built an altar to the Lord. Abraham has remembered what he forgot last week.

That his life, first and foremost, is to trust and worship God. And because of that, Lot gets to pick the first piece.

Abraham remembers that in his glory is my good. That you can only enjoy what you do not worship.

[22 : 30] John read for us again from Hebrews chapter 11 this morning. We've read in the last few weeks the section about Abraham. John read for us the section about Moses, which says this in verse 26.

He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.

Did you hear that? Greater wealth. It doesn't say the Egyptians didn't have wealth. No, it says Moses considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth.

Did he enjoy the good things of Egypt while he was there? Absolutely. And as God's people always must, he held it lightly.

Christian, there is something better than ease and comfort and pleasure now. There is something better.

[23 : 39] There is something better in the sense we're told about Moses. He was looking to the reward. The Christian looks forward to the delights and glories of heaven.

We talked about that, I think, three weeks ago. But it is not simply or merely just a pie-in-the-sky hope. It's not a pie-in-the-sky hope, and it's not just a future hope. The experience of the Christian is one of joy now.

Now, if you buy a nice car, and I hope you do, it will not cover your shame.

Only Jesus can do that. If you pay for a fancy meal, and you get bottle service, and I hope you do, it will not heal your family.

Only Jesus does that. If you downplay Christianity, and your peer group approves of you, it will not quiet the insecurity in your heart.

[24 : 54] Only Jesus calms that. And I fear at times that we've become so entitled in the West, and I include myself in this, of course, that we think we're always going to have both.

We're always going to have the riches of Egypt, and the riches of Christ. You know what? Sometimes you will. And sometimes you're going to have to make a choice.

Whatever you do, don't leave the promised land. Don't go outside the boundary of God's people. In her book, *Candles Behind the Wall*, Barbara von der Heide tells the story of Christians under communism during the Soviet Union, and she especially tells the story of Christian teenagers who chose not to join the Komsomol, which is the communist youth.

They chose their faith in Christ rather than joining that organization because it was an indoctrination program, essentially for communism and the Soviet Union. The problem is this.

If you did not join the Soviet Union, the Soviet youth, it would close off opportunities for you and your future when it came to career and education. And so if you refuse the communist youth, you refuse a comfortable future.

[26 : 27] As she tells us, in this book we learn about a woman named Marsha Vera who had a dream of becoming a surgeon. Marsha was a Christian, was not part of the communist youth, and so she has to go to an interview for graduate school to determine whether she's going to become a surgeon.

And the panel asks her, expectedly, why are you not part of the communist youth? Is it because you're a Christian?

And in that moment, Luke chapter 12 came to Marsha's mind where Jesus says this, And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God.

But the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God. And the book tells us this, As Martha stood before the committee of 30, all of whom were waiting for her answer, she remembered this verse.

She imagined the company of heaven looking on at that moment to see how she would answer the question. She knew what answer she had to give regardless of what the commission thought.

[27 : 45] Yes, she said, I am a Christian. Martha's application to graduate school was rejected. In that particular situation, God honored her faithfulness.

A family friend at a different school was able to grant her admission, but that was the exception for Christians in the Soviet Union, not the rule.

He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we do praise you and thank you that you offer better things than the world tempts us with.

We ask that you would remind us of what is of greatest value, that we would believe more and more that it's in your glory that we find our good.

[28 : 48] We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.