

Genesis 13

A Better Country

Introduction: how grace can present spiritual challenges; it was the Lord's making Abram heavy (rich, vv1-2, 4-6) that brought him to the situation in which he finds himself at the end of v7. The original recipients would have understood this (cf. v2 with Ex 3:22, 10:26, 11:2, 17:3; and cf. v10 with Ex 16:3, 17:3) as a teaching of this text. So, the Lord gives them in this narrative two priorities that we must have and one that we must avoid if we are to enjoy righteously His covenant blessings.

- I. Worship: the righteousness-producing priority of praise and prayer (v3, 18).
 - a. Experiencing God's grace leads to showing grace like God's (the seeing of the whole land and the lifting of the eyes make this point in vv9-10 and 14-15). God is saying "you are what you worship" (more precisely: you become like whom you worship). When life is driven by the worship of God—when you continually remember who God is, what He has already done, and what He has promised to do—you are freed from the self-preservation mindset that got Abram into trouble last time. Spending time with God reminds you of His almighty power and gracious providence so that not only are you reinforced against anxiety and freed just to do what is right, but we gain a new goal of actually desiring to please and bring praise to the One who is so good and so great.
 - b. Here is a goal that is truly circumstance-independent; it can *always* be fulfilled (v18, cf. Php 1:20b). The sense of the text is almost that he was picking the best place in the land for worshipping Yahweh. The truth is that he could have done it anywhere. There is no prison, no hospital bed, no bank account ledger that can keep you from worshipping God!
- II. Worldliness: the soul-neglecting priority of ease and pleasure
 - a. "in the world *but not of it*"—Lot did *not* draw near Sodom in order to be salt and light. Surely he knew of the wickedness, but that does not here enter into his consideration. It's water sources, not wickedness, that Lot has on his mind. Could he have told himself that this was an opportunity to show them how to be righteous? Might this have been one of his rationalizations as he moved closer and closer until we find him in ch 19 living all the way in the city? Cf. 2Pet 2:6-9. How very deceitful a thing is the heart... when our priority is comfort and ease and pleasure, we can dress it up well, can't we? O may God grant us to see whether we are making our decisions with eternal spiritual things truly in mind. May He keep us from making decisions that have our own comfort and ease as priorities. Application to school decisions, work decisions, moving decisions, activity decisions, recreation decisions.
 - b. The desire for ease is understandable; placing it above the spiritual good of your family is inexcusable (v13 is there on purpose!, cf. 14:16, 19:8, 19:26, 19:30-38). Remember that this is "righteous Lot." His soul was tormented over the wickedness of Sodom, and yet he couldn't bring himself to move from the water source until God had to drag him out of the city as it was being destroyed.

- III. Word: the faith-producing priority of God's promises
- a. God gives Abram what he needs more than food, vv14-17. Don't we expect something like "and Yahweh caused water to spring up from the ground to care for Abram's flocks"? We whose minds are so set on earthly things, when God starts talking about eternal inheritance, don't we catch ourselves thinking "but what about the flocks?!" The flocks can wait. Water sources can wait. What Abram needs from God, even more than water, is His Word. I wonder if that's how you feel in the midst of crisis: you face it manfully; driven by worship, you do the right thing, the generous thing; at that point, which is more important to you—which do you see more needful—resolution of the crisis or your continued enjoyment of the word of God?
 - b. God repeats His promises and expands upon them, vv16-17. There's a progression here. Whereas God had promised him the land already, he now adds expansive boundaries (that include the valley Lot has chosen!) and clarifies the duration of possession: forever. Whereas God had already given Abram the promise that he would become a great nation, He now adds numeric superlatives to that promise: "as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth"—the repetition of the words is emphatic. The invitation to walk through the land is not just an inspection tour but a privilege of ownership.

Conclusion: We are Abram's true seed (Gal 3:29—And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.). And we seek an even better country, every bit as earthy, but of a quality and glory to which the current tract in Palestine is not to be compared (1Pet 1:3-4—Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you). Would you have God's Word of promise, this promise to Abram in Gen 13 and the 1Pet 1 promise? He has spoken these promises perfectly in His Son, given to be born, live, die, and rise for you. Why was Abram so glad to see Jesus' day? Because it is in Jesus that all God's promises are sure, that they are all fulfilled (2Cor 1:20—For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.) Let us, then, utter our Amen to God for His glory!

PRAYER

[This sermon originally preached as part of the worship of Harvest Community on 26-Oct-08. The Harvest Community congregation gathers for worship at 10a and 6p each Lord's Day on the campus of Unity Christian High School. Call 712-395-0983 or visit <http://harvestoc.net> for more information.]