

Abraham: Lift Up Your Eyes

Genesis 13:5-18

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Most of us have sustained great trauma in life perhaps a tragic grief; a divorce, unemployment, a drug or alcohol problem, or obstinate and rebellious children. As we look back over the landscape of that challenge we ask ourselves how we ever got through it and we honestly don't know how we did it but we do know we didn't do it alone. In hindsight we see the unseen hand of the Almighty working in ways we didn't see or imagine at the time. The Bible says, "...in all things God works for the good of those who love him who have been called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28) This is what it means to live a life of faith. It doesn't mean we will escape all conflict and striving, it doesn't mean we will instantly understand the purpose and see a solution to every problem life throws at us. It means that we trust that: 1) we will make it through and 2) God will help us.

The story before us in Genesis 13 is one about conflict and struggle between Abraham and Lot. It is a conflict that seems poised to swallow up God's promise. Incredibly, Abraham puts the whole Promised Land up for grabs. For some unexplained reason—perhaps its just impulsive foolishness, Abraham puts his future and all of God's promises to him into Lot's hands. What was he thinking? He could lose it all here—the sacrifice he made leaving his homeland in Haran, the long journey, the personal promises God made to him in chapter 12, the suffering of the famine and the trip to Egypt. What was he thinking? He's put his faith and his future at risk by letting Lot make the most important choices in his life. Wow.

You should never hand the leadership of your life over to the most negative voices in your life. Stephen Covey tells the story of a woman who had a job in home health care. She was taking care of a very wealthy but invalid old man. Despite his position in life, he was embittered about life. He was resentful and grouchy about every little thing around him. Working for him was exhausting. His sour mood seemed to spread like cancer in her soul so that when she went home after a day's work she was depressed and resentful. Then one day she came to her senses and realized this old grump was running her life. She had handed him the leadership of her life. From that day forward she realized that she could chose her own reactions to life, she didn't have

to let him choose for her. She went on to take pride in the work she did caring for him. Her sense of personal fulfillment returned as she chose to see her own life and work in a new light.

Never surrender God's call and promises to you. Never hand the leadership of your life over to the most negative voices. The mission of your life is not to please other people or fit in with the latest polls, it is to believe and live in God's promises to you in Jesus Christ. Abraham has put everything into Lot's hands and all of God's plans to save the world seem to hang on a thread.

Lot on the other hand acts with the darker angels of his nature. He chooses the whole plain of the Jordan for it is rich and it will make him wealthy even though he knows that it is a place characterized by wickedness and great sin. Even though Lot knows the promise that God will bless those who bless Abraham and through Abraham all the peoples of the earth will be blessed, Lot forsakes Abraham. He chooses selfishly and with greed for gain.

The Proverb 14:12 says, "There is a way that seems right to a man but its end is death." This decision Lot is making seems right to him but it will result in a narrow escape from slavery in a foreign land and dying in poverty and bringing shame upon his family.

How do you choose the way of your life? Do you look for the shortcuts to prosperity and ease? Jesus said there are basically two ways to travel through life the broad way and the narrow way. "Wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few find it." The biggest crowds are to be found on the wrong road of life. If everybody's watching it, drinking it, smoking it or doing it—that in itself is a pretty good indication you are headed to destruction.

I know a grandfather whose whole life changed when he was driving with his 9-year-old grandson. The kid had the annoying habit of reading all the traffic signs as they passed them. The kid announced the speed limit, 55 mph. He glanced at the dash and asked why Grampa was going 65. "I'm just keeping up with traffic" he said. "Oh, I see," said the boy, "you only have to obey when you might be caught." Whoa! Suddenly the man realized he had just inadvertently taught his grandson a dubious lesson in ethics. Lot didn't figure he was doing anything wrong. He was just making a choice for himself that crowds of people have made for themselves. He would be rich and live in luxury but he would also be placing himself under the wrath of God. Who chooses the way of your life: The big crowd on the broad way or the small crowd on the narrow way?

In verse 14 Abraham is alone with God who asks him to lift up his eyes to see the Promised Land again. God repeats the promise he made to Abraham in chapter 12 and asks Abraham to walk through the land a second time too. At this point God sees a need to impress upon Abraham more clearly what he has been promised. In contrast to the rich and well-watered land of the Jordan around Sodom; the land Abraham looks at is dry and barren hills; mostly rock and scattered brush. How could anyone believe a great nation would come out of this? The land Abraham looks at is already full of Canaanites and Perizzites, how could there ever be room for Abraham and his descendants?

Deerfield United Methodist Church had an average attendance of 40 when I served it years ago. The total membership was 100 and our annual budget was approximately \$36,000. We had two Sunday school rooms—count ‘em: TWO! As the congregation added classes they decided they needed more space. The church had a large basement and it was decided to investigate installing folding doors. The estimate came in at \$18,000. After the meeting the most influential leader of the church said to the contractor, “Thanks for coming, but we won’t be calling you back. This is never going to happen.” Not much faith there. Not much passion there. Not much vision there. You’ve got to admit though the man was reasonable. It’s just not conceivable that 40 people are going to be able to add another 50% to their yearly income. The man was just being reasonable, realistic. He was thinking with his feet on the ground; except for one thing: he was wrong. Within a year those doors were installed and completely paid for.

God can make something out of nothing. When God gives a promise or a dream, it is usually something so big, so incredible that you would never think it up yourself and you certainly wouldn’t believe it. From dry and barren land will come a wealthy nation? From an old and fragile man and his wife will come a son? Faith defies the world. Faith is never about accepting possibilities or probabilities. Faith is about believing in miracles. To live in faith is to accept the reality that nothing lays beyond our reach if it is the will of God.