

“God Renews His Promise”
(Genesis 13)

What are the things you really want out of life? What are your goals? What are the things that drive you, that motivate you to do the things you do? Do you want people to like you? Do you want to be everyone’s friend? To be popular in the crowd? Do you want fame, to be a famous sports hero, a war hero, an actor, or a politician? Do you want to be rich, have all the good things in life -- all the nice clothes, fancy cars, and expensive houses? Or are these things really not that important to you? Is what drives you spiritual, rather than carnal? Do you instead desire to be a humble servant, poor in spirit, content with what the Lord gives you, but with a great hunger and thirst after Him? The one who is fleshly seeks after the things of the world. But the one who is spiritual seeks after the things of God. Now it’s certainly true that God sometimes gives much of the world’s riches to His own, and there is certainly nothing wrong with that if He chooses to do so. But very often He doesn’t. James writes, “Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him” (2:5)? Generally, the Lord has chosen those who are poor, not those who are rich. The Christian doesn’t care how much of the world’s riches he has, as long as he has God. To him, to have God is to have everything. Not to have Him, even if he should have all of the world’s treasures, is to have nothing. God is his greatest treasure, and if he has Him, he can be content with whatever else the Lord gives or withholds from him.

We see something of these two attitudes in the two characters in our passage this evening, although in this case both of them are truly godly or gracious men. As we saw this morning, those who are born again can certainly live in the flesh from time to time, and they will always struggle with it. One of them doesn’t really care about the things of the world, because he has the promises of God. But the other has his eyes set on the things of the world, and it eventually costs him very dearly. From this account of Abram and Lot this evening, I want us to be reminded that it is the things of the Lord that should be most precious to us in life -- the promise of communion with Him, of fellowship with Him --, not the things which the world has to offer.

Now the story begins with Abram and Sarai’s return from Egypt to the land of promise. Lot was also with him, and was probably with him when he went down into Egypt. Since everyone in those days would have constantly been open to attack by enemies, families usually traveled together for safety, just as Joseph and Mary traveled with their relatives when they went from Nazareth to Jerusalem for the Passover, when Jesus was about twelve years old. Abram was now returning to the place he had built the altar, to the place between Bethel and Ai where he had first called upon the Lord in that land, probably to worship Him and to thank Him for preserving his life and the lives of his family while in that pagan land.

But it is here that a problem begins to arise. Abram was rich. He had a lot of silver and gold, and many animals (v. 2). Lot also appears to have prospered, as he also had “flocks and herds and tents” (v. 5). I told you that sometimes the Lord blesses His own with many the world’s riches. He doesn’t always, nor should we expect Him to or demand Him to, as many today claim, but He certainly does sometimes. The problem here though was not that they were ensnared by their wealth -- at least it wasn’t in Abram’s case --, but that the land could not sustain them both while they were living together. They had too many animals for the land to

provide for. There wasn't enough grazing land. This pressure was causing strife to break out between Abram's herdsmen and Lot's (v. 7). And so that they might have peace, and that they both might provide for their families and their flocks, it became necessary for them to separate and go their different ways. We read, "Then Abram said to Lot, 'Please let there be no strife between you and me, nor between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers. Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me: if *to* the left, then I will go to the right; or if *to* the right, then I will go to the left'" (vv. 8-9). Now Abram was being very gracious. He was giving Lot the first pick of the land. You know how important first pick can be when choosing teams, or when giving someone the opportunity to choose what they want before you take what you want. The way it works with most people is that they will take the best first and leave the worst for you. But not in Abram's case. He wanted Lot to have the first pick, which shows us something of the self-denying character of Abram. This is certainly something the Lord would have us to imitate as well: to take the worst when we have first pick, or to give someone else the opportunity of choosing first, when it's up to us. The Lord tells us the first will be last and the last first (Mark 9:35). This applies in all areas of life. We shouldn't always want the best for ourselves, but to be happy to let others have it. We need to do this if we are to love others as much as we love ourselves (Matt. 19:19).

But this is also where Lot's worldliness begins to come out. Having been given the first pick, he should have chosen the land that didn't look as good, rather than that which did. Moses writes, "And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the valley of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere-- *this was* before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah-- like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you go to Zoar. So Lot chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan; and Lot journeyed eastward. Thus they separated from each other. Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the valley, and moved his tents as far as Sodom" (vv. 10-12). Lot thought it would be better to choose the land that had the good water supply. From a physical standpoint, that would have been the wiser choice. The valley of the Jordan had plenty of water. Without water, you couldn't raise your crops, you wouldn't have what you needed to drink, you wouldn't be able to live. Obviously there were others who realized that as well, since there were already many cities that had been built in the valley. But from a spiritual standpoint, this wasn't a good choice. Moses writes, "Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the Lord" (v. 13). Lot should have tried to stay as far away from that place as possible. But we read that when he arrived, he moved his tents as far as Sodom (v. 12). In the next chapter, we will find him living in that city (14:12), showing us that the world can eventually find its way even into the hearts of God's people, so much so that the world can eventually possess them for a time.

Abram, on the other hand, chose the land of Canaan. It was also well watered, but not like the valley of the Jordan. Canaan's water depended on what the Lord gave it in its seasons from heaven. Those who would live in the land would have to trust God for it. To a carnal man, this would have seemed like a bad choice. But not to a man of faith like Abram. If this is what the Lord had for him, if this is where the Lord's blessing was, then this is where he wanted to be. And now that Lot is gone, and Abram is alone with his family, the Lord again appears to him and renews the covenant He had previously made with him, the covenant of Grace, but extends it even further. He tells Abram to look up from where he was and look all around him in every direction. All the land he sees -- and he probably could have seen it all fairly clearly for miles back then, since there wasn't any smog, and it was a dry climate --, all that he saw, the Lord was going to give to him and to his descendants for an everlasting inheritance (vv. 14-15). This was

the land of Promise. And speaking of his descendants, even though Abram and Sarai were now old and didn't have any children, the Lord again renews His promise to make their children as numerous as the dust of the earth (v. 16). He had chosen the best path, because it was the Lord's path, and the Lord was going to bless him for it. And so "Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord" (v. 18). Abram believed the Lord and worshipped Him.

Here we see the history of our salvation through Jesus Christ advanced a little further. There is the renewal of the promise of the land. The land of Canaan, we mustn't forget, was a type or a picture of the new heavens and the new earth. It is the whole world redeemed in Christ, the final home of all the faithful who have trusted in Christ. And there is the renewal of the promise of the seed which would be many, and yet later the Lord will tell us that it is One, namely Christ. Christ is the promised seed of Abram who would give His life as a ransom for many, for as many as would trust in Him for salvation. These promises were but shadows of the reality which were still far off, but yet Abram believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.

Those who follow the Lord and are faithful to Him will certainly be more blessed in the end than those who do not. Abram kept his eye on the promise and was blessed, while Lot, sadly, kept his eye on the world and ended up being severely disciplined. Not only will he and his family soon be carried away by a foreign army, but he will narrowly escape being destroyed with Sodom, lose the companion of his youth, and eventually be degraded by his daughters. So often we tend to live more like Lot than like Abram. We have our eyes on the things of the world more than on the things of the Lord. How often are the things of the world on our lips, rather than the things of God? How often do we find ourselves seeking those things, instead of God? How many times do we hear of professing Christians who move to another city for a better job, only to find that there aren't any good churches in the area? Seeking to have more of the world's goods, they sacrifice their spiritual blessings. It's far better to find out what the cost will be to us spiritually, before we ever make a move to benefit materially. If it costs us anything with regard to our relationship with the Lord, it's not worth it. We need to let go of the world, before we ever let go of anything that we have of God. We need to pray that the Lord would open our eyes more to this fact. Our relationship to God and to Jesus Christ should mean more to us than anything else we have or ever could have. We should love Him more than anything else in heaven or on the earth. Asaph the psalmist once wrote regarding God, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (73:25-26). Paul wrote, "But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ" (Phil. 3:7-8). Christ's meat and drink was to do the will of the Father and to bring Him glory, because of His infinite love to Him. These are the longings of truly godly men, and they should be ours as well. May the Lord teach us through this example of Abram and Lot to choose the way of blessing, to choose God for our whole portion, rather than to throw our blessings away by embracing the world. Amen.