

17. Desires, Decisions and Destinies (2007)

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[0 : 00] I'll do turn, if you would, to the passage we read there in Genesis 13. And it's a passage all about desires, decisions, and destinies.

Here's a question. If God really is sovereign, if he really is in control of the universe and this world and history and our own personal lives, then are we responsible in any way for our own destiny? Do the decisions that we make, however large or small in our lives, do the decisions that we make have any real consequence at all? I wonder what you think about that.

That kind of question is the sort of thing that's given rise to all kinds of debate and discussion down the centuries. Many complicated theological tomes have been written about that sort of thing. And no doubt a lot of confusion, a lot of anxiety too, among many believers. But let me just encourage you this morning. God has answered that question. And he's answered many other questions like it that seem so difficult in the pages of the Bible.

[1 : 19] And he's answered it actually in ways that are very plain to all of us. You don't need degrees in theology or philosophy to understand it. And in fact, we get a very clear answer to just that kind of question right here in the passage before us today in Genesis chapter 13, in the next part of the story of Abraham, which as we've been seeing is so clearly in our Bibles the beginnings of true Christian faith.

According to the New Testament, remember, Abraham is the father of all the faithful. His faith is our faith. And that's because, of course, his God is our God. Galatians 3 verse 29 tells us that if we are Christ's, then we are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

And that's why these stories in Genesis are such an encouragement to us. Not so much because we look to Abraham as an inspiration and as an example, although, of course, there is some truth in that.

But above all, because we look to Abraham's God. And we look to him with the joyful knowledge that he also is our God. And therefore, the same faithfulness and grace and mercy that never left Abraham will never leave us or forsake us either.

Because we are heirs of the same promise. In fact, the New Testament tells us, doesn't it, that we have better promises even than Abraham because of the fulfillment of all of those promises in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[2 : 48] And the great gospel that he preached in advance to Abraham but now proclaims to all the world in the Lord Jesus. So when we read Abraham's story, we can see with absolute clarity just how God does deal with his chosen ones, with the people of faith.

Now, I use those words carefully because the text that we've seen is very plain, isn't it? Just how Abraham and his household became God's people.

It was God's sovereign choice, wasn't it? Remember, Abraham was a pagan, living in a pagan land, worshipping pagan gods when God's sovereign call came into his life and called him with both a command and a promise.

Chapter 12, verses 1 to 3, remember, go from your land and your father's house and your kindred and go to the land I will show you and in that place I will bless you.

There's no initiative at all of Abraham, no initiative of man. It's the sovereign intervention of God that transforms that pagan into the patriarch, the leader, the head of the family of God.

[4 : 01] I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy, says the Lord. And so then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who has mercy.

That's what Paul says in Romans chapter 9. Couldn't be clearer. And yet, as we follow Abraham's story from chapter 12 and as we will follow it right through to chapter 25, it's plain that this sovereign God leads Abraham through a life of trying and of testing of his faith and obedience and that the

decisions and that the responses he makes really do matter.

They're momentous in their consequences. We saw that last time, didn't we, in the near disaster of Abraham's foray down into the land of Egypt where he very nearly lost his wife Sarah to the Egyptian king.

And our chapter today certainly underlines this great biblical truth that although, yes, God is unquestionably sovereign and his promise and his call is immutable, nevertheless, his promise always also commands our obedience.

And just because God is a sovereign Lord, then we are absolutely responsible to obey him and to trust him.

[5 : 27] Always. And so when we face challenges and obstacles to our faith and obedience, the decisions that we take and the responses that we make really do matter.

They matter because they reveal something deep. They reveal our heart's desires for what they really are in relation to God and his kingdom, don't they?

And they matter because since that is true, they will inevitably also shape our true destiny in the plan and the purpose of God. A God who has sovereignly decreed that the way of trust and obedience to his word is the way of blessing.

So let's look at this chapter then, all about decisions that reveal the desires and the destinies of those whom God has declared righteous in his sight. If you look at it, you'll see that the action falls into four scenes.

First of all, in verses 2 to 4, there's Abraham's return to the altar. Then in verses 5 to 7, there's the herdsman's rift over animals. Then in verses 8 to 13, we see the two kinsmen reviewing the atlas.

[6 : 40] And then finally, verses 14 to 18, we have the Lord's response and announcement. So let's look first at verses 2 to 4, Abraham's return to the altar.

And the message of this section is to show us the restored consecration of true faith. It's all about restored consecration, isn't it?

Look at verse 3. Abraham journeyed on as far as Bethel to the place his tent had been at the beginning, to the place where he had made an altar at first. And there, Abraham called on the name of the Lord.

It could hardly be clearer, could it? The wanderer has returned. Once again, he's a worshipper. Remember, all through the last part of the narrative, all through that journey down to Egypt, there was no altars, no mention of prayer, no calling on the name of the Lord, just disaster after disaster, stumblings and folly.

But now, after God's intervention to rescue him from his own disastrous escapades, well, Abraham's back on track, isn't he? He knows instinctively that he can't do that without real communion with God.

[7 : 51] And because he is a true man of faith, well, he has confidence, as we might put it in the book of Hebrews. Confidence to draw near to the throne of grace, to receive mercy and grace and help in time of need.

A wonderful truth, isn't it, about the God of Abraham and our God, that there is restoration, restoration from our sin and from our folly as believers.

There is, as the old chorus says, a way back to God from the dark paths of sin. There is a fresh start even after the disastrous mistakes that we make in our lives of faith, even from the times when God has had to rescue us by the skin of our teeth from our own absolute stupidity and folly.

I reckon Moses was very determined, wasn't he, to encourage his people about that, do you remember? His generation of the Israelites, they were standing on the brink of the land.

He wanted to show them that restored consecration with God is possible even for them. Remember what had happened to them? In Deuteronomy chapter 1, you can read it.

[9 : 00] They're on the brink of the land, but Moses reminds them of their disastrous rebellion. Remember, they turned their back on God. They refused to enter the land way back, the generation before, when the spies had come back.

And a whole generation of Israel was lost in the wilderness, wasn't it? And Moses reminds them of that, but he goes on to say, yet God has brought you back.

Here you are on the brink of the land and there's a fresh start. True commitment, true consecration to God's plan and purpose for your life is possible.

I'm sure that's what Moses was wanting to tell his readers when he wrote this. But they too must be like Abraham if they're to be like that.

Not because Abraham is a model of perfection, well he's not, but because he was a model of real penitence and faith in response to the rebuke of God, to the admonition of God.

[10:01] And that is the mark of the true believer, isn't it? Whether in Moses' day or whether in our own day. Faithful believers want to obey God's commands and yet, of course, they recognize their many failings.

They know that they have to come often and again to the altar of God's forgiveness to seek that renewed fellowship that only comes by God's grace. And Moses' encouragement to his people surely must be a great encouragement to us, mustn't it?

There is a way back from wandering to true worship. There is a way back to restored consecration to Jesus Christ. As the chorus says, there is a door that is open and you may go in.

At Calvary's cross is where it begins when you come as a sinner to Jesus and when you come again as a stumbler to Jesus. Because we too have an altar, don't we?

That's what Hebrews 13 tells us. Not like Abraham's any longer, no longer the blood of animals, but the sanctifying blood of our Lord Jesus through whom we can have confidence to enter the most holy place of communion with God.

[11:14] We come to him, don't we? In the temple that is his body. And, says John, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.

From all sin and stumbling. I don't know, maybe that's a word very special for some of us this morning. Maybe you have been a wanderer, stumbling like Abraham, but God has been pricking your heart and you've come back as a true worshipper.

Well, there is a way back to restored consecration. And it begins just like Abraham with a journey to the altar. Calvary's cross is where it begins.

And God promises to all who call on his name there that there will be grace, that there will be restitution and restoration. restoration. So be encouraged, friends, if that's you, be encouraged.

There is a journey to the altar and there's a sure and certain answer to be had there. But at the same time, don't be confused because that fresh start is only the beginning, isn't it?

[12:25] It's only the beginning of God's restoring work. It's not the end. It's not the goal. No real restoration is inseparable, isn't it, from renewed obedience to God's plan and purpose for our lives of faith.

God wants spiritual adults. He doesn't want immature infants. The Bible tells us the Lord Jesus himself learned obedience through what he suffered. That is, he also was tried and tested in faithfulness.

And so it is for God's children. That's how we learn the meaning of real obedience to God. Only through the trials and the testings that God places in front of us in our lives.

See, we tend to complain, don't we, about the obstacles and the difficulties that we have to face in life. We say, why does this have to happen to me? Isn't that how William Still puts it?

Our obstacles are our opportunities. They may determine our advancement in faith. But if we avoid them, these same obstacles may be lost opportunities, resulting in our remaining infantile forever.

[13:30] God doesn't want that for his chosen ones. Not for Abraham, not for you. And so we shouldn't be surprised at what the very next verses in our chapter here present to us.

Look at verses 5 to 7. Ostensibly, it's all about the herdsman's rift over animals. But again, the message is clear, isn't it? It speaks about the repeated challenges to true faith, that there must be and that there always will be, just because all who are called to be loyal, all who are called to follow the one sovereign God, must learn to be loyal and follow the one sovereign God alone.

You see, in these verses, Abraham is essentially faced with another famine, just like the last one in verse 6. There's not enough pasture to support them in the land. It's another direct threat, isn't it, to the sufficiency of the land that God has called him to occupy.

Now, this time, the problem is precipitated by his wealth. God has blessed him so much that it's become a burden to him and caused another famine. Sometimes that can be the way, can't it?

God's blessings to us can actually often be his biggest test of us. Isn't that true? It's very often the case that somebody's greatest gifts are actually the things that potentially are the biggest hindrances, the biggest snares to them.

[14:56] And certainly, in terms of wealth, the more you have, the more you have to lose. And the harder it's going to be, isn't it, to rightly order your thinking in this world. It's easy to see the relevance, by the way, for the people of God under Moses, isn't it?

Remember, they had left Egypt and what had they left with? Piles and piles of the wealth of the Egyptians, remember? Plundering them. And yet, maybe that very thing was something that became a factor in warping their memories of the realities of Egypt.

Do you remember? They often grumbled and said, oh, let's go back to Egypt. It was great there. Forgotten all about the slavery and everything else. Maybe all they could remember about Egypt was all these pieces of gold and jewelry that they had with them.

Material blessing from God can become a very real snare. Isn't that right? That's why Paul says to Timothy, remember, as for the rich in this present age, charge them not to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God.

So friends, if God is going to bless you with money and with substance, then I guarantee you he's going to put tests of your true loyalty in your way.

[16:10] He's going to put tests and trials that will reveal the true desires of your hearts. And the decisions that you take do matter. See, that's what's going on here.

Because Abraham and Lot together are being tested by God's largesse. But it's really the same question as before when the famine came in chapter 12. It's a repeat challenge to Abraham's faith and obedience.

How is he going to react to the challenge of this famine, to the challenge of strife, to the challenge of, well, real danger in the land? I take it, I think verse 7 is pointing us to that, telling us the Canaanites and the Perizzites were in the land.

No doubt, absolutely ready to exploit any division that they saw. Amongst this new company of nomadic people. You see, just getting back into the land for Abraham isn't enough, is it?

It's just the beginning. And no doubt, Moses wanted his here, is to grasp that for them. That it would be just the same, wouldn't it? Not just crossing the Jordan and getting into the land.

[17:12] No, life with the Lord God, well, that was always going to be full of challenges to faith and challenges to obedience. Challenges to trust and obey in the face of the many dangers and toils and snares that would face them as they journeyed on in life with him.

And of course, the New Testament makes it absolutely plain. It'll be just the same for us, doesn't it?

That's so important to grasp. So important to grasp, friends, especially if you're a new Christian.

Let me say this to you particularly. Don't fall for any of these ideas that you might hear that if only you can get some special spiritual experience, some great new consecration, some blessing, some experience of renewal, if only you can reach that, then all your struggles will be over and everything will be great forever in your Christian life.

That's the very opposite of the truth that the Bible teaches. The exact reverse. no sooner had Abraham reconsecrated himself here than a fresh and an even greater challenge awaited him.

Isn't that right? Just as with the Lord Jesus. No sooner had he gone through that seminal experience of baptism in the Jordan River and the Holy Spirit descending on him in fullness as a dove.

[18:32] What happened next? That he was propelled straight into the desert for forty days of intense temptation at the hands of the devil. That's genuine faith.

That's genuine discipleship. It's a life of repeated challenges to obedient faith and trust. And friends, it's going to be that right till the very, very end. Right till the end.

Till your last breath. That's why James, remember, in the New Testament begins his letter like this.

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.

For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness and let steadfastness have its full effect. That you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Because there's no other way to maturity as a Christian believer. Well, is that the way you think? Is that the way we react to challenges to obedience that God places before us?

[19:41] We need to be clear, don't we? Because our decisions, our responses to these critical challenges really do matter. Because they reveal the true desires of our hearts.

And so inevitably, they also reveal and shape our destiny. And that's what becomes clear as the next scene unfolds in verses 8 to 13.

The picture here of these two kinsmen reviewing the atlas of the land. At first sight, it does just seem to be something of a geography lesson. And from where they stood there near Bethel and the heights of Judea, they could look down and see virtually the whole of the land and the Jordan Valley.

But these verses aren't just about geography. They're about spiritual geography. Because these verses, they speak eloquently of the revealing choices of truly committed faith and of faith that is of quite a different character altogether.

See, the decisions we make in facing the challenges that come our way reveal the true desires of our deepest hearts. If you look carefully at these verses, you'll see that the very structure of the writing shows us that verses 10 to 13 are at the very heart of this whole story.

[21 : 00] Look at verse 8 and 9. See, Abraham speaks and he offers land with great generosity. Look at verses 14 to 17. It's identical, isn't it?

Except it's God speaking and offering land with great generosity. And in between these two sections lies verses 10 to 13. And these verses record, don't they, the parting of the ways between Abraham and Lot.

And again, if you look at verses 10 to 13, you'll see, again, there's a symmetrical pattern, isn't there? Look at verse 10 and verse 13. It begins and ends with a description of the place of Sodom. And then if you look at verse 11 and the second half of verse 12, you'll see that we're told twice. Verse 11, Lot chose the Jordan Valley. Verse 12b, Lot settled in the cities of the valley.

And what's right at the heart? What's the very epicenter of this whole story in the first half of verse 12? There's just four words in the Hebrew language, seven in our translation, but what important words?

[22 : 07] Do you see them? Abraham settled in the land of Canaan. Despite the famine, despite the strife, despite the danger of its hostile inhabitants, Abraham at last shows decisive obedience, responding to God's command.

He determines he won't waver this time. He settles. He puts his tent pegs down hard in the land that God has called him to be in. Let's just think for a minute about Abraham's great decision.

See, this passage is all about contrasting decisions. And the first great contrast is with the Abraham that we saw last time in chapter 12, isn't it? See, there he was out of the land. Yes, he was living in palaces.

He was laden with prosperity and worldly terms. And yet, he was fearful. He was alienated from God. He was being unfaithful. He was far away from God's purpose for his life.

Well, here we have Abraham back in the land. Well, he's just in tents again. And in fact, his wealth is very much under threat. But he's in the land of God's blessing.

[23 : 21] He's being faithful through his call. He's not fearful about his future. He's trusting God. And his whole approach to this challenge and the generosity of grace that he extends reveals the clear desire of his heart and the belief and trust in God and therefore the obedience to his command that doesn't care about the cost in worldly terms, doesn't mind about the potential material loss that he's going to make.

The verses 8 and 9, they describe great generosity, don't they? You take what you want, lot. I'm going to refuse to fight about things and mere possessions. I'm quite content to make do.

That's an attitude, isn't it, that always speaks of real mature faith. That's an attitude that always speaks of lessons that have been learned about what really matters in the life of faith.

It's the mark of a man, isn't it, who's not looking at the visible, but is seeing the invisible. It's the mark of a man who knows that the greatest gain in life is godliness with contentment.

Abraham's saying, as long as I'm in this land, that's all that matters now. I'm happy to have God choose the rest of these things for me. I'll take whatever path he wants of me in terms of where I live or what I do or how much I have in material terms.

[24 : 44] They're all quite secondary. He's a man who's learned from God's unceasing faithfulness to him and from his own failures and messing up.

He's learned to trust God's promises of the gospel, to believe that promise of chapter 12, verses 1 to 3, that God will protect him, that God will provide for him in all the way that he takes.

And that's why he's glad to obey this gospel command and to live in the land of God's choosing. He's glad to do that while he waits patiently, as Hebrews 11 tells us, for the heavenly city whose architect and builder is God.

And that's why Abraham is liberated to be so gracious, to be so generous with Lot. He graciously gives up his own right as the senior one, as the patriarch, to choose first for himself. He generously offers everything to Lot, totally just trusting in God that what's left over will be good enough for him. And so true, is it, in the Christian life?

[25 : 48] A generous and a gracious spirit like that is a truly liberated spirit. It's the evidence of someone who's abundantly discovered God's grace.

It's evidence of that grace at work in their heart as they yield real and fruitful consequences of their faith in this world. It's evidence of somebody whose true heart's desire is actually for God himself and for his reward, not just for this world, not just for the temporary rewards that we all seek here. You see, if you are a tight-fisted Christian, if you are a mean Christian, that means you are a cold-hearted Christian.

That's the real truth about you. You haven't been liberated from love of this world. The only cure for that, friends, is to start systematically giving away a lot of what you have.

Keep doing it until you begin enjoying it. Sometimes it takes a long time. You've got to be very persistent at it. When you really start to enjoy being generous, then you can give it up, except you won't want to because you'll enjoy it so much.

[27 : 02] That's what Jesus says. Go home and read Mark chapter 10, the rich young ruler, and what goes afterwards. He wrote it for people like us. It's just the same, you see, if you're a self-promoting Christian.

Or a self-protecting Christian, always determined to have your rights and your position and your privileges ahead of others. You see, that kind of thing just reveals that actually you're just insecure, you're defensive, you haven't found your real identity in Christ alone and in his plan and purpose for you eternally.

not at all just in this world's valuation of you. But you see, Abraham had. That's why he was able to be so generous and gracious and open-hearted.

And you see, he's urging his nephew Lot, isn't he, to see the same priorities by example. He's urging him to seek the same inheritance. If you look at verse 9, I'm sure you noticed. He says to Lot, the whole land is before you.

That is the land of promise. There's plenty of room in this place that God has called us to for both of us. I'll do everything that I can, says Abraham, to allow you to exist with me in this place of God's choosing, the place of blessing under God's hand.

[28 : 17] He wanted Lot to enjoy the liberation of knowing God that he did. But alas, that wasn't to be, was it? In verse 10, Lot lifted up his eyes.

But you see, his eyes were drawn by very different considerations from Abraham's, weren't they? When Abraham lifted up his eyes in verse 14, at God's command, it was to gaze solely on God's chosen spiritual inheritance.

But not so with Lot. And that's the second great contrast in this passage, isn't it? Between Abraham, who sees the invisible, the glory of the call of God's purpose for his life.

And Lot, who it seems, can see only the visible. The most favorable option for his earthly stocks, for his wealth, for his family, for his business, for his career. Now friends, don't misunderstand Lot. And don't feel superior to Lot. I don't think at all that we're meant to see Lot's fault here as being especially selfish or greedy or far less that he was somehow attracted by the wickedness of the cities of the plain of Sodom.

[29 : 32] No. The New Testament, in fact, tells us absolutely plainly that is not so. Peter, in his letter, says he was unambiguously righteous, Lot. He tells us that Lot was tormented in his soul by the wickedness that he would see later on in Sodom.

Lot, says the Bible, is a believer. Lot is somebody who is counted righteous by God, just like Abraham. And yet there's still a great contrast between them, isn't there?

Because they have very, very different horizons in their outlook on life. They have different desires deep down in their hearts. And when push comes to shove, the things that really shaped their crucial decisions in life were absolutely different.

Abraham, above all, was a man of the word. And no matter what the material or the earthly loss, he obeyed God.

He sought God's reward. And yet it's perfectly plain in these verses that Lot was really being shaped by the things of this world. I guess just like many of us, probably just like most of us.

[30 : 48] Because the appetites of this world are so strong, aren't they? And they can so easily overcome and suppress the appetites, the desires for the invisible world.

It's just natural. See, that's just what Lot did. Lot just did what comes naturally to all of us. He put the need for a good house and a decent career and a better salary and a good school for the kids and all sorts of other totally reasonable things.

He put those things first. over and above his spiritual destiny and the spiritual destiny of his family. Just as many, many believers do today.

And many decades later, they too, like Lot, can live to regret having lost out immeasurably from having had to forgo, for example, a living church to nurture their faith.

They'd moved away from for other reasons. Or perhaps the sphere of Christian service that they'd had to give up in order to gain these other things that at the time just seemed so essential to life.

[31 : 57] It's really summed up, isn't it, in verse 11. Lot chose for himself. And what he chose was to distance himself from the place of God's blessing.

He chose to live near cities that were either on the very, very border of the land of Canaan or very most probably actually outside the boundaries of the promised land altogether because verse 12 seems to contrast his place with Abraham's place in the land of Canaan.

And that was a decision, wasn't it? Fraught with destiny. We're going to discover that in the chapters that come. And it's clear that Moses wants to leave us in no doubt of that right here.

You see in verse 10 and verse 13. It's very ominous, isn't it? With the mention of the garden of the Lord and Egypt and Sodom. The Israelites certainly would get the picture when they read this.

This was all going to end in tears. And it does. We'll see that. And it always does. It always does.

When anybody, even believers, think that they can find for themselves a garden of the Lord in a place that is outside the kingdom that the Lord has chosen us to be in and to find our prosperity and put all our future hopes and desires into.

[33 : 20] Remember Eve. Remember the men of Babel. That's what they were seeking. Well, that's Lot, you see. A righteous man. But not a man.

Not a man as Abraham was who had been gripped totally by the promise of God. So totally as it actually shaped his very heart's desires. And that's manifest to us in these crucial decisions that he made.

Which in turn shaped his destiny. Lot is perhaps the great example of what Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 3 and what Jude describes in Jude 23 is a man who is saved but only as one snatched out of the fire.

Let's look briefly at the last scene. Verses 14 to the end. The Lord's response and announcement to Abraham's decision. These are wonderful verses, aren't they?

Verses that speak of the rich consequences of true faith. See, God responds to and God richly rewards the response of faith by his chosen ones.

[34 : 30] And he does it absolutely bountifully. See, Abraham has risen to the challenge to his faith. He's obeyed God at great personal cost. No doubt it was very hard for him to separate from Lot, his nephew.

It must have been like the son that he never had. It must have been very hard to commit to solitude in a foreign land where he was very vulnerable, where he was very uncertain. But God is the rewarder of those who seek him.

Says Hebrews 11 verse 6. Not that our obedience deserves it. It wouldn't be reward then, would it? It would be wages. But God does generously reward those who seek him.

And there are some things perhaps that God cannot reveal to his loved ones until they reach that place of contentment and of trust and of submission in God's hands. And there is an intimacy with God which seems only to be possible.

Something that's borne out only of deep obedience. Jesus talks about that, doesn't he? In John 14. Where he says, Whoever keeps my word, whoever obeys me, I will love him and I will manifest myself to him.

[35 : 42] That's just what we see here. God manifests himself in a new way, in a deeper way to Abraham. Verse 15. He gives them an extraordinary assurance of future blessing in this land and personal blessing.

All the land you see I will give to you personally and to your offspring. He gets more revelation than he's ever had before about the extent of the promise that God had given about the seed of this

great offspring.

It will be like the dust of the earth, says God. And in verse 17 he actually experiences the possession of the land, doesn't he? He literally walks himself into a greater knowledge and experience of walking with God, of the things that have been promised to him by grace.

And that is, isn't it, the reward of the desire for more of God's purpose on your life. It's an experience of more of God's purpose for your life.

Obedience through challenges to our faith leads on to more obedience and more faith. See, that's gospel arithmetic, isn't it? Remember Jesus? To the one who has, he will be given more.

[36 : 54] And we'll have an abundance. But for Lot it was very different, wasn't it? You see, he wanted to have the best of both worlds. And he ends up with neither.

But Abraham sought first before everything else the kingdom of God. And what did he discover? Yes, all these things were indeed added to him with abundance.

God is no man's debtor. Not ever. He's the abundant rewarder of those who seek him. We were watching with a family just the other week.

Once again, that great film Chariots of Fire. And do you remember the story of Eric Little who refused to run his race on the Sunday because he wanted to put the honour of God first? And then, you know the story instead of his own race, the hundred metres, eventually, he's entered into the other one instead.

And just as he's on the starting block, somebody runs onto the track and puts a piece of paper in his hand and it has the verse in it, Them that honour me, I will honour.

[38 : 00] Do our decisions matter? In the small challenges that we face in life and in the great central tests that we face in our life of pilgrimage as Christians.

Do they matter? Yes, they do. Abundantly so. Because they reveal the true desires of our heart and therefore, inevitably, they shape our destiny in the sovereign plan and purpose of God.

And this passage, as all Scripture, has a real challenge for us, as well as a great encouragement, doesn't it? The challenge is surely this, it asks this question to all of us, Are you truly living as a man or as a woman of the Word?

Or do do the decisive defectors in your decisions, do they really reveal that the desires and the appetites of this world are actually choking out the desires of the kingdom and the demands of the kingdom in your life?

I can't tell you the answer to that, but you can. And we all need to remember, don't we, Paul's words, we reap what we sow. That was true in Genesis, that was true for the Galatians he was writing to, that's true today for you and me.

[39 : 19] Be warned. And let's be faithful with one another to encourage one another. That's real Christian fellowship, isn't it? Not having a cup of tea or coffee, but having our responsibility real to be our brother's keeper, our sister's keepers, to challenge one another.

Are we really putting the kingdom as first in our lives? There's a challenge, but listen, there is an encouragement. Don't fear the trials and the tests that will face us, that must face us in our Christian lives.

God sets these challenges before us as a blessing, not to trip us up. He sets them before us and says to us, choose life because he wants to bless us. He doesn't want to harm us. He does it because it is his plan and purpose that each of us should be conformed to the likeness of not just a great man like Abraham, but one far greater, the Lord Jesus himself, Abraham's seed.

He humbled himself. He chose obedience. He gave up all earthly gain for the way of the cross. But the rich consequences of his faith was that God has highly exalted him and given him and given him the name above every name and surpassing glory.

And God wants us to see that. God wants each of us to understand that glory in this world and glory in Christ's kingdom can't go together. They can't coexist. Not ever.

[40 : 49] You can't serve two masters, Jesus said. But if you'll see with the heavenly eye of faith, the eye that sees the invisible glory of Christ's kingdom that is to come and desire that inheritance above every other, then you, friend, you will be truly liberated.

You'll be liberated even now in this world. You'll be liberated to be a generous and a gracious and a magnanimous Christian believer all the days of your life right till the end.

Not always coveting somebody else's place or position or calling, but secure in the calling that God has given you. not clinging to the material things that you so much think that you need, but rather

bold, bold in your giving of your time and of your talents and above all of your money, of your substance because you trust God and you believe that whoever sows bountifully will reap bountifully.

The God of all grace, the one who loves a cheerful giver. He loves a cheerful giver because he loves hearts that are set not on the cities and the valleys of this passing world, but on the city that is to come, the home of righteousness.

I'm sure that's the kind of believer that we all want to be, isn't it? How can we be like that, like Abraham? Seems so impossible, doesn't it? Well, it's not impossible.

[42 : 20] And we can be like that, just the same way that Abraham was. Abraham trusted God's promise. He trusted a future that was still unseen.

He trusted a seed who was still unborn, but he trusted and obeyed. And his desires shaped his decisions which forged his destiny in the grace of God. And the answer, friends, to us is not to follow Abraham, but to follow Abraham's example in trusting the great promise of Abraham's God. Building an altar to him alone right at the very center of our lives and all along life's journey and calling out to his name, to his Lord who is our Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who will help us. You see, if you are a believer, then you are an heir of Abraham's faith. And Paul says, you are in Christ. And Christ is in you. And the old you has gone, just like the old Abraham had gone. It's dead. It's crucified in the cross of Christ. And the life, says Paul, that you now live is by the faith of the Son of God who loved you and gave himself for you so that his life, so that his spirit might be in you.

[43 : 36] Think of it. The spirit of the one who trusted and obeyed the Heavenly Father in all things. The spirit of the one who turned his back on even what rightfully belonged to him in this world.

All for the joy set before him, the glory of his eternal home. His spirit lives in you and walks with you all the way to glory.

Abraham trusted and obeyed the promise of God. And his determined decisions of faith revealed the desires of his deepest heart and shaped him in a destiny of abundant blessing and glory.

And an earthly life of generosity and of grace that overflowed to others in abundance. And that's just what we're called to as well, as heirs of the same promise.

A promise now wonderfully fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. It's the only way to a life eternal of destiny in glory. And it's the only way to liberation and joy and contentment in life now.

[44 : 42] The true generosity of grace and of faithfulness that will make you like an Abraham and not like a lot. So will you follow him?

Will you and I trust and obey the promise of the gospel in all the decisions of God that come into our paths? Will you do it today and in this coming week at work and in this year that's lying ahead and in the rest of your life?

Well, when decisions face you, when tests and challenges come, remember Genesis chapter 13. And trust and obey. For there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.