

3. Two ways to live

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[0 : 00] Well, good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the Tron Lunchtime Service. It's great to see you. Hope you've been enjoying the nice weather. We finish off our current series looking at Abram, so please do open your Bibles to Genesis chapter 13.

And you'll find that on page 9 of our church Bibles. Genesis 13, and we begin reading verse 5. Hear the word of the Lord.

And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, so that the land could not support both of them dwelling together.

For their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together. And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abraham's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock.

At that time, the Canaanites and the Perizzites were dwelling in the land. Then Abram said to Lot, Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen.

[1 : 05] For we are kinsmen. It's 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. Abraham 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. The Lord said to Abraham, 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.

[2 : 15] 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 could count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.

Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you. So Abraham 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 remember once chatting to a World War II veteran, and I'll never forget his recollection of what it was like being on the front line.

He said to me that it was like being hit by wave upon wave upon wave of pressure. He and his fellow soldiers would come out of one time of difficulty, only to find themselves immediately in another time of difficulty.

It was wave upon wave of pressure. And friends, the Christian life, the life of faith, is no different to that, really. That is what we see in the life of Abraham, our great forefather in the faith.

[3 : 26] Abraham comes out of one time of trial, only to find himself in another time of trial. Now just remember that Abraham is the father of the Christian faith, not the Jewish faith, as I've highlighted this over the past few weeks.

The New Testament is very clear on this point. Just read Romans 4, Hebrews 11, Galatians 3. For they all hold up Abraham as our forefather in the Christian faith.

And in fact, in Galatians 3, verse 8, Paul says that when the Lord appeared to Abraham and commanded him in Genesis 12, verse 1, to go, Paul says that the Lord was actually preaching the gospel to Abraham.

Not a different gospel to the one that we've received, but the same gospel. As you'll remember from what we've seen in the past few weeks, Abraham received not just a command from the Lord, but promises as well.

That if Abraham obeyed the gospel call, he would receive unimaginable blessings. Blessings that are summed up by Dale Ralph Davis as the quad promise. I wonder if you can remember the four parts.

[4 : 31] They all begin with the letter P. People, place, protection, and a part of the Lord's program to bless all the nations of the world. All the families of the earth will be blessed through Abraham and his offspring.

And as we saw back in chapter 12, verse 4, Abraham responded to the gospel by the obedience of faith. He did as the Lord commanded. He packed up all that he had and left the land of his father, turning away from his old life that was held by the darkness of pagan idolatry to instead walk in the light of the Lord's revelation.

And in 12, verse 7, the Lord appeared to Abraham and confirmed that the land of promise that his offspring would receive was none other than the land of Canaan.

And Abraham again responds in obedience and worship and prayer. He does that publicly. He builds altars to the Lord and he starts to publicly call upon the name of the Lord in front of the Canaanite neighbors who were living in the land at that time.

He showed undivided loyalty to the Lord. But as we saw last week, it wasn't long before the father of our faith learned the hard and humbling reality that he was prone to wander and prone to leave the Lord that he loved.

[5 : 51] He faced his first time of trial back in chapter 12, verse 10. The Lord brings a severe famine on the promised land. And instead of calling on the name of the Lord and asking the Lord to act upon his promises, Abraham acts as though the Lord was never even there.

He stumbles and falls and he leaves the land that the Lord had shown him. He moves out of the will of God and goes down to Egypt.

And on the cusp of entering Egypt, again in fear, in order to try and protect himself and his own skin, he hatches a deceptive plan to disguise his wife Sarai as his sister.

And again, he acts as though the Lord was never even there. And the result is carnage. Sarai ends up enslaved to Pharaoh, part of his harem.

And that was a disaster. For as long as Abraham and Sarai were separated, there would be no chance of them coming together as husband and wife to conceive and have offspring. And so Abraham's crisis of faith seems to have derailed the Lord's program to bless the world through Abraham's family line.

[7 : 00] Can't have a family line if you can't be with your wife. What a mess his sin caused. But as we saw at the end of the passage last week, even through his failure and through his pain, Abraham learned another lesson.

A lesson of great hope that the Lord is so gracious and merciful to his wayward and needy people. In chapter 12, verse 17, the Lord rescues them from Egypt and they leave the land together, able to live again as husband and wife.

The Lord takes the things that Abraham has derailed and he re-rails them. The sovereign Lord's salvation plan to bless all the nations of the earth through Abraham's line is unstoppable.

It will never be thwarted, even by Abraham's unfaithfulness. And in response to that grace, Abraham shows real repentance. In chapter 13, verse 1 to 4, you see that he's eager to come back under the will of the Lord.

And you can see that in his geographical movements. In 13, verse 3, he traveled back to the place where his tent had been in the beginning, to the place where he'd made an altar at the first to the Lord.

[8 : 12] He's expressing the inner reality of his heart and his movements. He's come back to serve the Lord again, having learned from his first time of trial. But just like a soldier fighting in World War II, one time of pressure is immediately followed by another time of pressure.

This time, the trial doesn't come about by a time of famine. It actually comes from the fact that the Lord has blessed Abraham and Lot so much that the land is struggling to provide for all their livestock combined.

Please look at verse 5. And Lot, who went with Abraham, also had flocks and herds and tents, so that the land could not support both of them dwelling together.

For their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together. So the Lord is testing Abraham once again, but this time, he's testing Abraham by blessing Abraham.

The Bible's clear that this is just one of the ways in which the Lord tests his children. It's not just through bad stuff, but it's through things that we would probably call as good things, blessings. [9 : 20] Read James chapter 1, for example. Abraham's herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen find themselves in conflict with each other over the way in which their animals have to compete for food. The flocks have become so large that the land cannot sustain them together.

They must separate. But the key test for both of these men is, where will they dwell? Where will they dwell? And what Moses, the author of Genesis, wants us to see in this episode is that both of these men respond to this time of trial in two different ways.

Let me just say that we need to be careful here because the Bible is clear that both Abraham and Lot are believers. In 2 Peter chapter 2, the apostle says that Lot was a righteous man with a righteous soul.

So both Abraham and Lot are believers, but one of them makes a very wise choice and ends up dwelling in a good place with greater assurance, whereas the other man makes a very poor, foolish choice and he ends up dwelling in a dangerous place with dire consequences for his faith.

So let's look at these two believers in turn. Firstly, let's look at the wise believer, Abraham. Please look at verse 8. Then Abraham said to Lot, Let there be no strife between you and me and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen.

[10 : 48] It's not the whole land before you. Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left. And you might think, well, what is Abraham doing here?

Is he being careless and reckless? Well, no. He's actually displaying the type of behavior you would expect to come from the heart of a believer. Abraham has clearly learned to trust in the Lord's providence.

That's what he's doing here. One commentator says this, Abraham was magnanimous with Lot. He didn't press his seniority. He gave him, as we say, first crack.

This suggests Abraham's faith in God's promise. The Lord had promised the land to Abraham's seed, and Abraham seemingly rests in that promise. No matter what choice Lot makes, God will see to the promised part.

No need to try and manipulate things, like he did back in Egypt. He places himself under God's providence, and under God's grace. Here is a man that's been changed in his heart.

[11 : 51] He's learned his lesson from his time of trial. God's grace has been working in his inner life. Well, in verse 10 to 13, Lot chooses for himself a land that's paradise.

And we'll think a bit more about that in a moment. But just look where Abraham chooses to do well in verse 12. Abraham settled in the land of Canaan. He's rooted in the promised land, a land that probably wasn't very attractive to the eye.

We aren't actually told that the famine of chapter 12, verse 10 had ceased. It's most likely that Abraham was looking over a barren wasteland. But Abraham chose to settle there, because he's learned to obey the Lord and trust in his promises.

Abraham is saying, Yes, I can see that there are many other lands that probably will offer me good things in the here and now. But the Lord has told me that this is the land I need to be in. And I must walk by faith in what the Lord has said, as opposed to how things appear.

And as a result of that obedience, the Lord rewards Abraham. Look at verse 14. The Lord said to Abraham, after Lot had separated from him, Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northwards and southwards, eastwards and westwards, for all the land that you see, I will give to you and to your offspring forever.

[13 : 10] I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth. So that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring can be counted. And what you notice here is that Abraham receives an expansion of the promise from the Lord.

Something is added to the place promise. Look at verse 14. All the land that you see, I will give to you and your offspring. So the Lord had previously promised the land to Abraham's offspring back in 12 verse 7.

But here it's also promised to Abraham himself. And then notice there's also an extra in the people promise. The Lord had already promised to make Abraham into a great nation.

But here in verse 16, look at this. He vows to make Abraham's offspring like the dust of the earth. You can't even count the amount of dust in my house. And there's a lot of dust in my house.

Don't tell my wife I said that. Or else I'll get into a lot of trouble. But imagine all the dust of the earth. And the Lord says, that's what your offspring will be. This is what your line will be. Massive. Not just a nation. So many people you won't be able to count them.

[14:16] You see what the Lord does? He responds to Abraham's obedience. He expands his promises. And he gives him greater assurance. That's also what verse 17 is all about. Verse 17.

The Lord said to Abraham, Arise. Walk through the length and the breadth of the land. For I will give it to you. You might think, well how's that a gift of assurance? If you know me, you know that I hate walking.

Walking is probably a form of torture for me. But there you go. Some people like walking. And if you do, then good for you. But not for me. But this walk, this sort of thing, was actually very significant. Because back then, kings did this sort of thing. In Hittite and Egyptian sources, it was common for a king to go on a ceremonial walk around his land to symbolize his sovereignty over it.

And Abraham's walk would be like a claiming of his dominion. The Lord is calling on him to receive a foretaste of what he would receive in the future. And let me just say, we know from elsewhere in the Bible that whilst Abraham walked around looking at the physical land, the eyes of his heart were really getting to see another land.

[15:25] Just listen to the words of the writer to the Hebrews. It says this, By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance.

And he went out not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land. Listen. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

What does that tell us? Well, it tells us that as Abraham walked around looking at the earthly land, by faith he was really fixing the eyes of his heart upon the heavenly promised land.

In other words, Abraham was looking forward to the new creation. And that's what God is assuring him of, of this walk. Well, let me just quickly recap the pattern of the wise believer that we see displayed in Abraham.

It starts in his heart. His heart is changed by God's grace. He learns through his time of trial to trust in the Lord's promises. And that change of heart, that's been shaped by God's grace, enables him to make wise choices and obedient behavior.

[16:39] He doesn't live for the now, but he lives for what is to come. And as a result, he receives greater assurance that he will receive what has been promised.

He's assured of his place in God's glorious future dwelling place. And friends, that's the pattern that you and I are called to follow today as the people of God. We are called to let the grace of God change our hearts so that we will trust in God's promises and our hearts will be content to trust in his providence.

And if we do that, if we let God's grace shape our hearts, we too will make godly decisions in our lives. We will obey the Lord in our behavior. And as we do that, it will bring greater assurance to our souls that we are really headed for a glorious place in the future.

The same glorious place that Abraham was fixing the eyes of his heart upon. If we ask the Lord to treat our hearts the same way that he treated Abraham's heart, then you will have greater assurance and certainty of what is to come for all those who are in Christ.

But you know, the opposite is true. If you want to trash your assurance, if you want to torture your soul in this life, then you can choose to follow Lot's example.

[18:01] Please look at verse 10. 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 Zohar.

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.

Abraham settled in the land of Canaan while Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom. Now at one level, you could look at Lot's choice of land and say, well, it was so much better than Abraham's choice.

The land looked like paradise. Wonderful descriptions there. It had plenty of sustenance for his livestock and his people. It was just like Egypt and Eden in the sense that it had an abundant water supply.

And so it was full of life. Drought and famine would have been extremely rare in that region. And so at one level, Lot's choice looked like a very good one in earthly terms.

[19 : 06] He and his family would be secure. But actually in reality, it is clear that his choice of land was very dangerous. Let me just highlight four reasons from the text that shows this was the case.

Firstly, notice the contrast between how Lot sees things and how Abraham sees things. Verse 10, Lot lifted up his own eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was pleasing.

Contrast that with Abraham. What does Moses tell us about Abraham's eye activity? The Lord told Abraham to lift up his eyes. Not so with Lot.

He looks out of his own initiative, out of his own desire. And friends, I cannot help but think about another scene earlier on in Genesis. Genesis chapter 3 verse 6 in the garden when the women saw that the tree was pleasing and it was a delight to the eyes.

In other words, the women walked not by faith in the Lord's word but by sight and how things appeared. And I think Moses is alluding to that incident right here. Lot lifts up his own eyes but not like Abraham.

[20 : 16] Abraham's sight was guided by the Lord. Second detail in the text that tells me this is a bad move is the fact that Lot chooses to move outside of the land of Canaan.

Outside of the promised land. He was taking him outside of the land that would be so integral to the Lord's plan of salvation. Lot seems to have been so taken by the beauty in front of him that he's forgotten the promises of God.

The eyes of Lot's heart are not focused on the things that Abraham's are. Lot is very much fixated with the here and now. Third detail that tells me this is a bad move is in verse 11.

Very little detail but I think significant. Lot journeyed east. So far in the book of Genesis if you go home and check this and make sure I'm not just making it up. So far in Genesis any mention of someone moving east has been thoroughly negative.

Genesis 3 after Adam and Eve rebel against the Lord they are sent away from the Lord in exile out of the garden to the east. In Genesis 4 after Cain has killed his brother we're told that he is sent away from the presence of the Lord into the east.

[21 : 31] And so when we read of Lot choosing to dwell and journeying exclusively to the east I think that should set alarm bells off in your head. But fourthly and most explicitly in the text it tells us that Lot's move to this land was dangerous because of his new neighbours.

Twice we're told in verse 10 and verse 12 to 13 Lot was moving close to Sodom and Gomorrah. Places where he would be surrounded by people who were renowned for committing evil against the Lord.

Listen to John Calvin's comment on this it's very striking. He says this Lot when he fancied that he was living in paradise was nearly plunged into the depths of hell.

And if you were to fast forward in your Bibles to Genesis 19 you will find that Lot suffers terribly in that place. He loses his moral backbone he loses his family for God and most of that arises from his disastrous decision here.

Now just remember what I said earlier despite all of these things Lot is a believer. 2 Peter chapter 2 tells us that this is the case and so the contrast here between Lot and Abraham is not unbeliever with believer.

[22 : 49] No. Listen to James Philip and if you're going to remember one part of this service remember this this is a gem of a quote and if we have time I'll read it twice. Listen to this he says the contrast here is between two different levels of spiritual experience.

Lot's eyes were on the prizes of this world Abraham's were on the promise and God saw that this was so and he dealt with them accordingly ordaining that when a man tries to get the best of both worlds he gets the best of neither.

And when a man puts the things of God first all these things shall be added to him. Let me read that again. Lot's eyes were on the prizes of this world Abraham's were on the promise God saw that this was so and dealt with them accordingly ordaining that when a man tries to get the best of both worlds he gets the best of neither and that when a man puts the things of God first all these things shall be added to him.

Moses is presenting to us here two ways to live the life of faith. We can follow Abraham let the Lord change our hearts through times of trial and testing so that our hearts are content to trust in the Lord and in his promises so that it will make us make wise decisions ultimately to live for what is to come and not for the here and now.

Or we can live lives like Lot so preoccupied with the things of this world so obsessed with getting security and comfort in the now that we stop staking our all on the promises of God and stop living for the new creation.

[24 : 33] But friends if we do that or try to do that, try to gain the best of both worlds we will get the best of neither. I think of a Christian friend I knew who some years ago was offered just an amazing job a job I could probably only dream of in another part of the world.

This job promised to raise his salary and his professional profile and so he took it and he moved away. At one level it was a very good move a very good job but in reality it was a very foolish choice because where he moved to there wasn't a decent church for miles and I remember a few of us talking to our friend and challenged him on this point and he said well listening to sermons online that will be enough I don't need to be part of a church to keep going well let me tell you that as time has gone by I have seen this friend become more and more and more downcast in the faith they still believe the gospel but their assurance has been shot to pieces if we try to get the best of both worlds then we will get the best of neither what will you choose let's be quiet for a moment to respond to the word of

God in our own hearts and then I'll pray for us heavenly father please lift up the eyes of our hearts so that by faith we may be able to truly see the things of this world in their proper light please forgive us for the times when like lot we've been so preoccupied and obsessed with living for the things of this world that we've totally neglected living for the world that is to come father please have mercy on us in the lord jesus fix our eyes on that same city that abram fixed his eyes upon give us a heart desire to live for the coming of that city we pray all these things in the name of our savior the lord jesus amen