

Great Possessions or the Great Possessor

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[0 : 00] And so we're going to turn to our Bible reading. And we're continuing our series in Genesis today with our Senior Minister, Willie Phillip. And we're going to be studying chapter 14.

So do turn up Genesis chapter 14. And we're going to read the whole chapter together. So Genesis chapter 14.

Beginning at verse 1. In the days of Amraphel, king of Shinar, Ariok, king of Elessar, Chedalarmur, king of Elam, and Tidal, king of Goyim, these kings made war with Bera, king of Sodom, Bersha, king of Gomorrah, Shinar, king of Adma, Shemaber, king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, that is, Zoar.

And all these joined forces in the valley of Sidim, that is, the Salt Sea. Twelve years they had served Chedalarmur, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled.

In the fourteenth year, Chedalarmur and the kings who were with him came and defeated the Rephaim in Ashtaroth, Karnayim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Shaveh Kiriathiam, and the Horites in their hill country of Seir, as far as Elparam, on the border of the wilderness.

[1 : 34] Then they turned back and came to En Mishpat, that is, Kadesh, and defeated all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites who were dwelling in Hazazon Tamar.

Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Adma, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, that is, Zoar, went out, and they joined battle in the valley of Sidim with Chedalarmur, king of Elam, Tidal, king of Goyim, Amraphel, king of Shinar, and Ariok, king of Elessar, four kings against five.

Now the valley of Sidim was full of bitumen pits, and as the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some fell into them, and the rest fled to the hill country. So the enemy took all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their provisions and went their way.

They also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who was dwelling in Sodom, and his possessions, and went their way. Then one who had escaped came and told Abram, the Hebrew, who was living by the oaks of Mamre, the Amorites, brother of Eshgal and of Aner.

These were allies of Abram. When Abram heard that his kinsmen had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, 318 of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan.

[3 : 05] And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them and pursued them to Hubah, north of Damascus. Then he brought back all the possessions and also brought back his kinsmen, Lot, with his possessions and the women and the people.

After his return from the defeat of Chetal-Armor and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Shaveh, that is, the king's valley.

And Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said, Blessed be Abraham, by God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.

And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. And the king of Sodom said to Abram, Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself. But Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lifted my hand to the Lord, God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, I have made Abram rich.

I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten and the share of the men who went in with me. Let Iner, Eshcol, and Mamre take their share.

[4 : 37] Amen. This is God's word. I'm going to return to it shortly. It was the founder of the Salvation Army, William Booth, who once said that the secret of a man's power lies in the measure of his surrender.

And it's a secret that God makes plain to us in Genesis chapter 14 here, a chapter all about great possessions, but also about the great possessor.

If you were here last time, you'll remember that there were warning bells sounding at the end of chapter 13 as Lot headed off towards Sodom, seeking prosperity, blissfully unaware, it seems, of what lay ahead.

And this dramatic chapter shows us more of where decisive choices like that in spiritual life tend to lead. It's a story about battles between those who want to possess power and wealth on earth. But of course, it reveals much deeper truths than that. It's about what human hearts are really possessed by. And we discover that real security, real liberty and power in this world comes not from temporal possessions or worldly victories, but rather it comes from what the truly sovereign possessor of this world confers upon those who humble themselves and surrender everything in earth to worship him alone.

[6 : 17] That's what we're going to see. So let's have a look at this dramatic story. It describes, first of all, a disastrous rout, then a daring rescue, and at the end, a decisive refusal.

First, then, a disastrous rout. Verses 1 to 12 show Lot and his apparent protectors who thought that they had so much. It shows them dispossessed by the ruthless and the unpredictable forces of this world.

We see the frailty, the insecurity of the people and the powers of this world and the sheer folly of those people, including believers, who stake their prosperity and their protection on these powers. It's a bit complicated to read. Josh did a good job with all these names. But basically, it is, as verse 9 says, a story of four kings against five. Four kings of the east, Mesopotamia, the Shinar, in verse 1, is Babylonia, and the chief king, Chedor Larmor.

Let's call him the big cheese. And they were the dominant kings in this area, and they were exacting tribute from all the rest, and that included the five kings of these cities of the plain in the Jordan Valley where Lot had chosen to live.

[7 : 39] Verse 4 tells us that for 12 years, they'd been paying up that tribute, but then they'd had enough, and so they rebelled. And of course, that brought very swift reprisals.

Four overlord kings go on a campaign to teach them a lesson. And verses 5 to 7 relate how they take their time, they make their point, by defeating and by plundering six separate people groups all around.

I won't go over all the names again, but many of them are renowned warriors in their own right. So the Rephaim, verse 5, they're the giant-like people we've heard of already. There's the Amalekites, verse 7.

Well, they are no mean force, as you'll see if you read on in the Bible story. So they make mincemeat of these six whole nations, and they sweep down the east of the Jordan Valley.

That's through present-day Syria and Jordan. And then they turn north around the southern end, the southwestern area of the Jordan Valley. That's called here the Valley of Sidim in verse 3.

[8 : 42] It's now the area that's covered partly by the Dead Sea. And the bold five kings of that area, the valley cities, come out to meet them and are utterly pulverized.

Verses 10 to 12 tell, don't they, of a disastrous rout. They are literally tarred and plundered. And that's the history. That's the story. And it's the real world.

It's the world as we know it. It's the world of power politics where force is used to gain possessions and territory and so on in this world. Interestingly, most scholars think that the bulk of this account has actually been lifted out of ancient accounts of the day.

And that's what kings did. They wrote annals about their victories. And verses 1 to 11 may very well indeed be from the court of King Cheddar Lammer. Can't be sure. But it's certainly the stuff of the world that we recognize.

The politics of global dominance and power play. In those days, the issue was controlling the great trade routes between the fertile crescent of Mesopotamia and North Africa, the upper Egypt area.

[9 : 57] And of course, the passage through Palestine was absolutely key to that. If you control that, you control all the tax, all the tariffs, in and out. It was really quite big business.

And that's the way it's all been through history. Still is today. Controlling trade routes, controlling sea passages, controlling canals, remember sewers, and all of these sorts of things.

And wars are fought again and again, aren't they? Trade wars and hot wars over all of these things. Whether it's pipelines coming under the sea from Russia to Europe. Or whether it's oil supplies

coming out of the Gulf states.

Or whether it's sea routes in East Asia and the China Sea. We know very well, don't we, that wars are being fought for these very things at this very time. And this is the real world.

Nothing actually very much has changed in 4,000 years or so. And history records countless episodes of oppressors and then rebellions and then repression and revenge.

[11 : 04] And these verses remind us that the story of God's people and God's purposes, well, it's played out in the real world. They're escaping these realities.

God's eternal purposes do not bypass the realities of a world that is torn apart by human sin and by greed and by violence. then we've got to be realistic about that because we can't imagine that as Christians somehow we can be closeted off and be unaffected by these things in the world.

And yet, verse 12 here reminds us that there is more always to events in the world than the secular historian will ever recognize.

No doubt, it was verses 1 to 11 that filled the newspapers of the ancient world for a time. That would be the story that people were talking about, everything that people would remember. But in fact, you see, the real story, the story that God is interested in showing us, is just this little cameo here in verse 12.

They also took Lot, the son of Abraham's brother, who was dwelling in Sodom, and his possessions, and went their way. See, all of this history is relevant because it affects God's people.

[12 : 25] And God's story is involved in all of this. And in fact, God's story is the most important part of all. And that is true also in all world history.

In the end, all of it is only relevant at all in so far as it plays a role in God's story.

God's story is the far more important eternal history of his recreation of this whole universe through his plan of redemption, through Jesus Christ. And it's not that the Christian story sort of fits in somewhere into the world story and world history.

It's quite the reverse. And we need to remember that as Christians. We need to see that. That's what the Bible is telling us. The world will never see it, but we must see it. If you read the pages of history today and you read the newspapers today, it's all full, isn't it, of stories about the rise of China and the rise of India, the growing population in Africa and so on, the place that they play in world powers and the economy of the world.

But friends, that is not the real story. The real story, certainly in China today and in Africa today, is the emergence of a vast church, is the emergence of huge numbers of believers coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

[13 : 51] And that's the story all through the developing world, the world of so-called emerging markets. It's the world of the church of Jesus Christ growing and emerging. But all that secular historians, all that secular commentators see is just one superpower against another, the rise and fall of nations.

Five kings against four, as we see in this chapter. You see, God wants us to focus here on verse 12. And in fact, verses 1 to 11, they're only here at all because verse 12 is at the heart of it.

Lot, you see, made his choice. He sought security among the powers of this world. And what we can see here is just how quickly that was all lost.

He was just swept away by things that were totally beyond his control. Notice verse 12 tells us he was now dwelling. That is, he was settled.

He was static. Not just near Sodom, but in Sodom. So he sought security and safety and prosperity by, well, as we would call it today, going into the city.

[15 : 01] Well, his choice of security from a thankless world led to him being dispossessed very, very quickly without warning.

And that's what's happened so often, isn't it? Just remember back a decade or so to the world financial crisis wreaking havoc all over the world. I can still remember the CEO of Bear Stearns Bank that was at the heart of that.

It was a man who was worth a billion dollars. And overnight, in one night, 98% of his wealth was just white tight. See, the message is very clear here, isn't it?

If you seek the security and the possessions of this world, then you are seeking a very precarious and a very powerless protector.

The world will turn around and inflict a disastrous right again and again and again on those who put their trust in her.

[16:03] And we see it all the time, don't we? We see proud, successful people suddenly exposed to ignominy, to ridicule. Be very careful who you give your WhatsApp messages to.

Look at verse 10 here. That's what it's describing, sheer ignominy. These proud kings in all their self-assertion but now they're fleeing to the hills. They're literally jumping into pits of tar to escape. They are a laughing stock. Have you ever tried to get tar off your skin? They would be weeks, perhaps months blackened as they walked around for everyone to see.

Sheer disgrace, humiliation. Once these kings were fettered by everybody but now they're just the butts of jokes and no doubt facing the anger of their people because the world is very unforgiving. The world is very ruthless. But that's the world that Lot chose for his security and therefore he joined in their downfall.

[17:10] It's a real warning, isn't it? The psalmist says, put not your trust in princes. Moses was warning his people because he wanted them to learn that very clearly.

They were on the brink, weren't they, of entering the promised land, the first people who read these words. And he is constantly warning them, don't be ensnared by the ways of the cities of the land of Canaan.

Do not seek your security there but fear God alone, walk with him. He is the one who will protect you. He is the one who will drive your enemies from you.

And our Lord Jesus gave the same warning, didn't he? Don't lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal. Don't put your security there. But you see, poor Lot was a man who had become possessed by the treasures of earth. He chose to invest himself wholly and ally himself with the world's culture, with the world's treasures and possessions.

[18:16] But he was utterly dispossessed by the ruthless unpredictability of this world. What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, said Jesus, and forfeit his life?

Well, that was Lot. Or, it was very nearly Lot, were it not for the second scene here, which relates a daring rescue. Verses 13 to 16 tell us of Abraham, who alone is able to repossess helpless Lot. God. And it takes, you see, it takes an outsider, it takes a man not caught up in Sodom's follies and Sodom's thinking to do so. And these verses show us the power of a man who is fully in this world and engaged with this world, but not of this world.

Do you notice verse 13 calls him Abraham the Hebrew? Again, that might be evidence of this being part of an ancient secular text that Moses has incorporated into his account.

And if so, you see, it looks at it from the perspective of these defeated cities. And they speak of Abraham the Hebrew. He's the hero of the hour, the rescuer of Sodom's wealth and its people.

[19:37] And that was God's promise, wasn't it, back in chapter 12? Abraham's name will be great, said the Lord, and he would be a blessing to others.

And God had promised to protect him and to be present with him. And he did. Because these rampaging kings didn't come near Abraham, did they? No doubt, as they marched through this land, they thought, well, we own everything that we set our foot on.

But no, God had made Abraham the owner and the ruler over this land. And he was untouchable. He wasn't captured and carried off. And Abraham's motivation in this rescue, you see, was much more than just social.

He wasn't just trying to do a good turn to Sodom. It was much more than that. It was spiritual. Because he had to act in line with God's promise for his future.

He was to be a blessing to others. And that began with Lot, his kinsman. Literally, verse 14 here, the word kinsman is his brother. His brother had been captured.

[20:45] I don't think Abraham's attitude is quite striking here, given what happened in the previous chapter. He doesn't say, well, it serves Lot right. Let him stew in his own juice. He went to Sodom, let him suffer.

Abraham is a man touched by grace. And his reaction to a brother who has stumbled, who's been caught up in his own sin and folly, his attitude is to seek to restore him.

Just as Paul says, our attitude should be in Galatians 6, verse 1. And that's the mark, isn't it, of real spirituality. Because you're someone who knows your own heart and your own mistakes and your own follies.

And no doubt Abraham hadn't forgotten God's grace and mercy to him back in chapter 12 in his folly going to Egypt. See, Abraham sensed what Paul would later put into words this way, that we

who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak.

And Abraham knew that he was his brother's keeper. He's got a responsibility to him because of God's gospel promises to Abraham. And so he's willing to risk everything at great personal cost to go and save his brother.

[22 : 06] I wonder if you would do that. We're thinking about it, isn't it? Because the Bible tells us that attitude is a family trait. It's a mark of those who are true descendants of Abraham.

Paul says, one will scarcely die for a righteous man, but while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. You see, that attitude can only really flourish in someone who is detached from this world's thinking.

He is a man who is able to bless the world because he is in it, but he is not of it. He is not possessed by it. So off Abraham goes, verse 14, against all the odds, he has a tiny force, 318 men of his own, plus no doubt some from his three allies, Mamre and Eshcol and Einar.

But still, it's a tiny number, isn't it, to attack a vast invading army that had laid waste to six nations and destroyed five kings and their armies. But not only does he affect a daring rescue, he defeats the four kings and he chases them right out of sight, verse 15, way north of Damascus.

And he returns, verse 16, with all the possessions of the cities, including Lot and his possessions and his people. Now one can understand why the annals of Sodom record this great feat and extol the name of Abraham, the Hebrew.

[23 : 35] But why does Moses want to record this for his people? And why does the Holy Spirit preserve it for us as believers today? Well, first of all, I think to remind us that despite the unpredictability of the powers of this world, despite the destruction and the misery that they often wreak, we must see, mustn't we, that God's plan and purpose cannot be thwarted and will not be thwarted.

That was very important for Israel to know as they were on the brink of the promised land of Canaan. Very interesting actually, the route that these kings and their armies took is the exact reverse of the route that the people of Israel took on their way into the land.

You can read about that in Deuteronomy chapters 1 to 3. And you'll see there that again Moses rehearses how in their day, in Israel's day, God used one nation against another to defeat one another, one king to subjugate another, to make way for the Israelites to pass on in safety.

Because all that was going on in the world was serving God's plan and purpose for his people. And actually some of the names of the peoples that are mentioned here in verses 5 to 7, they're there again in the first few chapters of Deuteronomy, defeated by one another, just as they are here.

And the message is clear, isn't it? God has promised Abraham this land. And God will give Abraham and his progeny this land. And he'll use the ebb and flow of world powers, he'll use them to pave the way for that, often without Abraham even having to lift a finger.

[25 : 17] In fact, he hardly ever does have to fight for the land. But if a direct threat to God's promise comes, and sometimes does arise, then God will always ensure that if his people are seeking first his promise and his kingdom purpose, then he will be with them to prevail, even against insuperable odds.

Read on in the Bible, you'll see, think of the story of Gideon, just as one example. And Moses people, you see, they needed to hear that because they were faced with the geopolitics of their day. And we need to hear it because we're just the same.

And it's easy to be fearful, isn't it, when we see the powers of this world so apparently invincible, and so opposed, so often to the kingdom of Christ. Joshua's praying about the rising anti-Christian secularization in our Western world.

More and more laws being passed which are an affront to Almighty God. We read about Islamification in parts of the world where there's real persecution, physical, bodily persecution of Christians in many places.

But you see, God is saying to us, fear not, don't fear. Remember, as Peter says, the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials. The Lord knows how to deal with his enemies in judgment.

[26 : 49] God is to God's love. God is to be willing to stand up and fight. There may be times when as heirs of Abraham's God and heirs of Abraham's seed, God's people do have to be willing to stand up and fight.

There may be times when we're not to fight, and Abraham never did fight for personal gain or for possession of the land. But when there was a direct threat here to God's clear gospel promise to

him, well, he had a responsibility to defend the truth of what God had given to him by revelation. He had to defend the truth of the gospel. He had to defend the integrity of the message of the kingdom of God. And it's the same way in the New Testament, isn't it? The apostle Paul always refused to assert himself for his own rights, for his own personal gain, but he would defend to the last the truth of his gospel.

when it was under attack, when it was under threat, even at great personal cost. And sometimes we may have to do the same. But above all, I think this passage is here to show us very clearly that Abraham's very ability to be a blessing in the world, both to his brothers in the faith, but also to his pagan neighbors, it's because he was so wholly detached from the world and from its possessions and from its powers and from its priorities.

Notice a very striking contrast here in verses 12 and 13 between Abraham and Lot. You notice that Lot, we're told, was dwelling in Sodom. That word means he was settled, he was rooted, he was fixed there.

[28 : 36] Whereas in verse 13, where we're told Abraham was living by the oaks of Mamre, that word there literally means tenting, he was camping. So although he was the true heir, the true ruler of the promised land, he actually lived in it, acknowledging that he was but a stranger and an exile on this earth.

That's what Hebrews 11 tells us very plainly. Abraham lived in the world, yes, but his eyes and his heart were fixed on the world to come. And that is why he could be the kind of man who effected a daring rescue for God.

That's why he was the man who could be a blessing to this world all around because he was not possessed by it, not ever. Not that Abraham was some kind of weird ascetic, of course not.

He knew that God had given him the land to enjoy and he did enjoy it, made use of it. Abraham knew, just as Paul says, that everything that God has created is good.

It's to be received with thanksgiving. But you see, Abraham also knew that the greatest blessing of the land was that it was the place where he could walk with his God.

[29 : 55] Abraham could see through everything to that, which was the very heart of it, that everything was about rejoicing in the presence of God himself. To use Paul's words to Timothy, Abraham had taken hold of that which is truly life.

He didn't fall into the trap of idolatry, didn't fall into the trap of worshipping the land, the gift of God, the mere possession. No, Abraham worshipped the possessor, God himself.

And you see, someone like that is actually someone who is liberated to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous, to really share their life. It's a great mistake when some Christians today say, look, never mind heaven, focus on the earth.

Our task is to focus on social justice, on peace, on all of these things. But you see, the reality is that throughout Christian history, it's when believers have been most focused on the eternal gospel of God, on the priorities of the eternal kingdom of God, above everything else.

It's those people who have spilled over in blessing so much to bless this world all around. Just think of the great social reformers in this country, the 18th and 19th century.

[31 : 22] Think of William Wilberforce, the Earl of Shaftesbury, all of these sort of people. These were people who put the gospel first above everything. The very freedoms of any benefits that we take for granted in our western civilization, these are only ever possible because they were grown from the soil of true Christian heritage that came from the gospel.

See, the great rescuer of the pagan cities of the plain here was Abraham the Hebrew, an outsider who was living in their world but not of their world and not possessed by that world.

That's why he was liberated, to be a blessing to that world. And that's still true, you see. The best way to be a blessing to this world of folly and of wickedness is to see it for what it is.

It's lost. It's wicked. It's precarious. And it is very near destruction. And to set light in that world, you see, to camp like Abraham in that world, knowing that it is not our permanent home.

Not setting our hopes and all its uncertainties, but rather taking hold on what is truly life. 1 Timothy 6, verse 19.

[32 : 42] That alone, you see, is the way for Christian believers to be liberated, to be rescuers, to be rich in good work, as Paul says, to be generous, to share our blessing and to be a blessing to this world and its people.

That was Abraham here. That was the secret of his ability to be the great rescuer. And that is what's reinforced, you see, in the final scene where we have spelt out a decisive refusal.

Verses 17 to 24. They show Abraham unpossessed by all the lures, all the prizes, all the rewards of this world because he has been decisively possessed in his heart by the great possessor himself.

Verse 22. God most high, the possessor of heaven and earth. These verses show us that the secret of Abraham's power did indeed lie in the measure of his personal surrender to the Lord, the God of heaven and earth.

And actually, in some ways, this scene was perhaps the greatest battle of all for Abraham to fight. Far greater than fighting those four kings and their armies.

[33 : 59] Because here's Abraham come back victorious. Here's Abraham being blessed by God and vindicated by God in the eyes of all the world. The stock of Abraham, the Hebrew, had never been higher in that whole place.

And you see, here's the thing. It's often true, isn't it, that it's after great high points. It's after great successes. It's after victories in our life of faith that we are actually most vulnerable.

Because often you see these things bring a critical time of testing into our lives. Remember in Jesus' ministry in Luke chapter four, after that glorious affirmation and the word from heaven at Jesus baptism, this is my beloved son, with him I'm well pleased.

After that, what do we read immediately? He was driven into the desert to be tempted by the devil.

And that's just what happened with Abraham here, you see, in this encounter with his two kings.

Look at verses 17 and 18. Two kings come out to meet him. But they could hardly have been more different or represent more starkly opposing choices for Abraham.

[35 : 15] One, the king of Sodom. His name is Bera, we're told in verse two. That means wickedness. The other is the king of Salem, Melchizedek.

His name means righteousness. So here's Abraham, the returning general, victorious, bearing all the bounty. And he's confronted here in the valley of the kings by these two kings.

Which king is he going to honor with his exploits? The king of righteousness or the king of wickedness? The king of heaven or the king of hell?

Look at what they offer Abraham. First of all, the king of Sodom, verse 21, comes with a very wonderful offer. Abraham, you keep all the treasure.

It's yours. You deserve it. You're the hero. You keep it. Claim your right. And you'll be the greatest in the land. You'll be the master of all you survey. The whole land is at your feet now.

[36 : 18] Abraham, the Hebrew hero. That is a very tempting offer, isn't it? After all, that was God's promise to Abraham.

And he had given him the victory. It was his. Maybe this was God's way to exalt Abraham in the promised land. But what was the king of Sodom really saying in those words?

Well, the unspoken word was this. Take it from me, Abraham. And see, this will make us allies together, won't it? Abraham and Bera will be invincible.

And by the by, of course, you'll know, won't you, that it's me. It's me who's made you what you are. I've given you your wealth. I'm the real kingmaker here. I'm your real lord.

Very familiar, isn't it? Because one of Abraham's offspring heard very, very similar words. All these kingdoms of the earth I'll give you. You just bow down and worship me.

[37 : 23] What about the king of Salem? What does he offer? Well, verse 18, precious little by way of comparison, it seems. A simple meal, bread and wine to provide for his basic needs.

And, look, a public opportunity to humble himself and bow down and give all the credit and all the glory for this great victory to God alone.

Verse 20, blessed be God most high. It's he who has delivered all your enemies into your hands.

That Valley of the Kings, it's a very familiar terrain, isn't it?

For every Christian believer. Abraham walked it. The Lord Jesus walked it. You and I walk it every day. And we walk it especially after every victory or every success in our life of faith, in our own lives, or indeed in our life together as a fellowship, as a church.

Every time we face the same choice, don't we? The king of hell says, take glory now because you're entitled to it. Come on. Come and join in the world's recognition.

[38 : 31] Think what God could do with all of that. But the king of heaven says, remember your true Lord, who's given you the victory.

Will you forget who really deserves all the glory? See, that's the mark of true faith, isn't it, according to the Lord Jesus. Whoever, he says, is truly of the light acknowledges that all that has been done is God's doing alone, that he deserves the glory.

John 3, verse 21. Well, how does Abraham respond? Well, look at verse 22. But Abraham said to the king of Sodom, I have lifted my hand to the Lord, God most high, possessor of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, I have made Abraham rich.

I will take nothing. A decisive refusal to bow down to the worship of this world, to be beholden to this world's ways and its rewards.

Abraham won't be budged from this vow that he obviously took before setting out to rescue Lot, that if the Lord had granted him success, he would refuse all glory for himself and any gain for himself, lest his witness to God as his soul Lord would be compromised in any way.

[39 : 58] That was the vow he made. It's easy to make vows like that. It's easy to pray like that, isn't it? Lord, if you just do this, I'll give you all the glory. Easy to pray like that, isn't it?

Much harder to keep that vow when you're faced with a very big share of the glory. In one sense, there'll be nothing wrong for Abraham to take the booty. It was his by rights as victor.

Verse 24 says, he gives his allies their fair share. But you see, like the Apostle Paul in his ministry, what was his by right, he would refuse, he would sacrifice, lest it could ever be said that Abraham's God needed Sodom's help.

Or lest it could ever be thought that Abraham's gospel was somehow about gain in this world's terms. And so it cost Abraham dearly, giving up all that he could have had by way of property and glory.

But he gave it up, didn't he? Gladly. And you see verse 20. He also gladly gave Melchizedek a tenth of what was his already, to publicly acknowledge that everything he did have and everything that he was belonged by right not to the king of the world, but to the true king of the world, God himself, to the Lord Most High, who possesses everything in heaven and earth.

[41 : 28] I wonder what the king of Sodom and his people and the released captives thought of that. I wonder what Lot thought of that. Seems as if he was as mystified as the pagans must have been, because as we'll see, Lot just went straight back to Sodom to make his future there and for history to repeat all over again.

But Abraham stood fast. He decisively refused to be a man whose praise comes from men. He determined, rather, against all the lures of his contemporaries to lay up for himself treasure in heaven, where moth and rust cannot destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. He took hold instead of that which truly is life. As Jesus put it, to know you, the one true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

Now friends, what faced Abraham there again and again throughout his life is going to face you and me again and again throughout our lives.

We will be walking the valley of the kings tomorrow at work and all week and the week after and on and on. And the king of Salem will call us to give all the glory to God Most High and to show it by giving our best to him.

[42 : 59] But the king of Sodom will be offering us everything. If only we'll have a prosperous partnership guaranteed to beat the world his way.

In a thousand different ways, you and I will walk that valley till the very end of our days. And so here's the question. Will you be able to keep your vow to the possessor of heaven and earth like Abraham did?

Will you? Will I? Seems impossible, doesn't it, in so many ways. But listen, the message of these chapters is not look to Abraham for strength.

That's a way of despair. Now the message is, remember, if you are Christ's, then you also are Abraham's seed. You are heirs to the promise of this same wonderful God.

And ask yourself this, how did Abraham bear up in faith in the face of those extraordinary lures from the king of Sodom? How did he? Well, look again at verses 17 to 21.

[44 : 06] See, in between verse 17 and 21, the appearance and the lures of the king of Sodom. In between, almost miraculously it seems, appears this unique, mysterious figure, Melchizedek.

He's never been seen before. He's never seen again. But unmistakably, we're told he is there as a priest sent from God Most High.

He's a king who's a priest. And indeed, he's a wonderfully caring shepherd, isn't he? He ministers to God's child Abraham. He feeds him and refreshes him with bread and wine.

He literally prepares a table for him in the very presence of the enemy. And he walks the valley with him to comfort him, to strengthen him, and to bless him, and to gently lead him into the presence of the Lord, the only God Most High, the possessor of heaven and earth.

And it's by the grace and the blessing given in the ministry of that great high priest of God, Melchizedek, that Abraham, the friend of God, finds the strength to stand tall in the face of the king of hell and to win that great victory against him.

[45 : 22] And here's the thing, friends. You see, as heirs of Abraham, the man of faith, we also have just such a high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And Hebrews tells us that he has become the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. He has been designated a priest after the order of Melchizedek.

But he is greater by far, even in this great one, because Jesus, we're told, is the guarantor of a better covenant, a better hope, even than Abraham. Because he continues as a priest forever.

And so he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him. Because he always lives to make into session for them.

It's a strange paradox, isn't it, that it's not only in our great failures that so desperately we need Jesus, our great high priest, because in our failures we're very conscious of that, aren't we?

[46 : 28] We tend to run to him. But in the triumphs and in the victories that God gives us, we're far less conscious of our need.

And perhaps then we need him more than ever to remind us that the greatness of our power, the power to bless, the power to rescue, the power to deliver for the sake of the kingdom, the greatness of that power lies always, always.

In the measure of our surrender to the most high God. To he who alone is the true king, the possessor of heaven and earth.

Friends, if we are to have power in this world for the gospel of Christ, then he must possess us just as surely as he possessed Abraham.

Amen. Let's pray together. He showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, all these I will give you if you will fall down and worship me.

[47 : 44] Jesus said to him, be gone, Satan. For it is written, you shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.

And since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens. Jesus, the son of God. Let us hold fast to our confession.

And help us. Oh Lord most high. As we come to you, our priest and our apostle. To receive at your hand all the mercy and all the grace we need.

Which you have promised. Promised to all. Who surrender their lives to you. Help us. And possess us.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.