

Genesis 13, The Beginning of Hope in the Promises of God: A Life of Abraham,

Preached by Michael Gunn @ Harambee Church on January 20th, 2008

"I don't think the story is about gender relationships or the patriarchal oppression of women. I don't even think it's about the character of Abraham. I think it is about a being called Yahweh, coming out of the blue, with a preemptory demand for obedience and faith who says, 'I'm going to start a new movement in this human family, and you've got to come along.'"

Lewis Smedes

Commenting on the meaning of this story

Intro

Last week we saw the humanity of Abram; he showed that his trust (faith) in God was certainly limited. In our passage today he is returning in disgrace. He was possibly disgraced in the eyes of Lot, and most likely in the eyes of Sarai. It is almost certain that Abram is mortified of his conduct in front of the Pagan Pharaoh, who seemed to exercise stronger character than Abram did. This says something about the people of God, and the "pagan" world. The fact is we are told in Romans 2:14-15 that God has given everyone a conscience, they are able to know what is right and wrong, and the "People of God" do not have a corner on morality. As a matter of fact, as this story demonstrates, it is often the people of God who are shamed by the "godless." Our calling by God into His family doesn't make us righteous through ourselves; we are righteous through Christ; that ought to humble us so that we can interact with non-believers in humility and confidence. We are humbled by our capability to sin (and we do), and we are confident that in spite of our sin, we are righteous in Christ.

Today we will see that Abram's heart is fixed on obedience and carrying out his call, despite his confusion and often fear to journey on. We also see that moving to the altar of repentance alters your perspective on your circumstances.

From the Head...

Abram moves out of Egypt to the Negev (South Land) of Palestine, toward Bethel where he had previously built an altar. It is there that he "calls upon the Lord." This may be one of those places in Abram's life that he had to go inward, and then upward. It is most likely that much of his wealth was gained from his dealing in Egypt (see **Genesis 12:16**). It is interesting that this wealth, which may have been gained from questionable character, also helped Abram establish his name, which lent to his protection in the valley. God just keeps sovereignly acting in the lives of his people. I'm sure Abram felt horrible about what had happened, and had to learn a lesson in its regard; but God in his mercy continued to provide for Abram and Sarai.

Abram is truly the leader and father of his group, and as we already have noted he is watching over his brother's son, Lot. Abram himself has no children, but he is a man that most likely sees and loves Lot as his son. But as often happens, great wealth has a great price: Lot realizes that they can no longer hang together with such a large herd, especially when the area already has Canaanites and Perizzites in them.¹ It has been thought that pastoral nomads like Abram and Lot would be at odds with the more sophisticated agricultural/suburban city dwellers that already existed.

It is interesting that Abram was the cause of strife in chapter 12, but he is an agent of peace in chapter 13. Maybe it was a result of coming to terms with Yahweh in Bethel, or perhaps Abram's issue didn't stem from money as much as it did from security. Maybe the ostensible wealth of the Jordan valley didn't appeal to him as much as his protection did when he entered into the land of Egypt. It's hard to tell, but we do know that he is now acting in maturity and magnanimity. Isn't that how we all are? Aren't there some things that are not issues for us, while other sins beset us with regularity?

Note verses 10 and 14. They both, "lifted their eyes," but Lot saw only what looked good to him, while Abram saw the whole, the "Promised" land. Lot chose what appeared to be attractive, comfortable, and profitable; Abram was at the mercy of Lot's choice, but more importantly Abram was in the hands of a sovereign God who was working in his life to bring him to the land God had promised. In spite of the beautiful and seemingly secure Jordan Valley, the author makes sure we know that the, "*Men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord.*" This is most likely placed here to set up chapter 19, but also reminds us that there is grave danger in the most secure places in this world.

This chapter closes out with God visually showing Abram what He had promised him in chapter 12. The juxtaposition of chapter's 12:11-20, and chapter 13 are not a mistake. Together they present faith as it really is. One moment, you are anxious for what tomorrow will bring, and the next you are a bastion of belief. Isn't this the reality of Romans chapters 6 and 7? We are broken people called by God, and in the process of being healed. Our faith is messy, sometimes confusing and frustrating, but always moving through the sovereign hand of God who is present in our times of stumbling and our shining moments. We are accepted because of His actions, and it is because of this that we have hope and continue on!

...to the Heart

¹ Many commentators think that this is more of a reference to those who dwell in Walled Cities (Canaanites) and those that live outside of the walls (Perizzites) than it is a particular people.

During our lives we do things that we can be proud of, and we do things that we are ashamed of. As a believer that understands the grace of God, we can be less surprised when we do things that are shameful and more excited when we do things that glorify our Father in Heaven. We do this by coming to God's altar daily, confessing and repenting of our sins and appropriating that forgiveness in our dealings with other people. God wants us to see the blessings that are before us and He will continue to put circumstances in our lives to bring us to that place; showing us that He is involved in everything that happens to us, both good and ugly. The fact is God can turn our ugly into good as we continue to seek His face and obey His will.

Books for further study: *Genesis*, Waltar Brueggemann, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Genesis*, Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis*, Bruce Waltke, *The Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis*, Gordon J. Wenham, *The NIV Application Commentary: Genesis*, John H. Walton, *Creation and Blessing*, Allen P. Ross

Next Weeks Verses: TBA

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