

SESSION #4

- the next incident in Abraham's life provides a **counterpart** to the previous story
- now we see a marvelous model of **faithfulness** in how Abraham acts

D. FAITH IN ACTION AGAIN

Gen 13:5-12

⁵ Lot also, who went with Abram, had flocks and herds and tents. ⁶ Now the land was not able to support them, that they might dwell together, for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together. ⁷ And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock...

⁸ So Abram said to Lot, "Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we *are* brethren. ⁹ *Is* not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If *you take* the left, then I will go to the right; or, if *you go* to the right, then I will go to the left."

¹⁰ And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it *was* well watered everywhere (before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar. ¹¹ Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other. ¹² Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched *his* tent even as far as Sodom.

- as the elder family member, Abraham did not need to give Lot a choice
 - but he believes God's promise concerning the land, and so risks everything by permitting Lot to make the first choice
- in the **famine/Egypt** story, Abraham did **not trust** God's promise
 - so he acted rashly on his own, motivated by fear, with the outcome being **disasters** (curses)
- now his **trusting** in God's promise makes him gracious & generous, and results in **blessing**
- Abraham's actions produce consequences; but so too do **Lot's**
 - no time to explore his story here, but note the **tragic choice** Lot makes here
 - apparently his contact with wealthy Egypt and his own increase in net worth when they left there, thanks to Abraham's generosity to him, stimulated a taste for even more material wealth
 - so Lot makes his choice here on the basis of *external* appearance and *selfish* interests ("it was well watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt"), but completely ignoring the unseen **spiritual reality** ("the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord.")
- ...choosing where to live solely on the basis of *economic gain* at the *expense of spiritual life* would later prove to have a disastrous effect on him and his whole family
- it's a lesson that some of **us** ought to consider carefully as we make family decisions

- as ‘children of Abraham’ (Gal. 3:7) our **actions also matter**; they have consequences for us & for others (“*you will always reap what you sow.*” – Gal. 6:7)
- but at the same time we must recognize that regardless of our decisions **God** will still be **faithful** to His promises
- “Do you think... faithlessness cancels out his faithfulness? Not on your life! Depend on it: God keeps his word even when the whole world is lying through its teeth.”* (Rom. 3:3-4 The Message)

Gen 13:14-17

¹⁴ And the Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: "Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are – northward, southward, eastward, and westward; ¹⁵ for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants* forever. ¹⁶ And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, *then* your descendants also could be numbered. ¹⁷ Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you."

- God now provides some additional, wonderful details concerning what His promise to Abram will involve in terms of the extent of the Land and the number of his offspring
- notice: Abraham was told by God to “lift up [his] eyes...and look”
 - the one who in his dealings with Lot had refused to live by *sight*, but by faith in the unseen promises of an unseen God, was now told to “**look**”!
 - St. Augustine wrote, “Faith is to believe what we do not see, and the reward of this faith is to see what we believe.”

E. So...What does it mean to embrace the call of God?

- I saw a cartoon a while ago in which the pastor was addressing his congregation from the pulpit: “I’ve stopped expecting you to make **leaps** of faith, but it would be nice to see a **hop** now and then.”
- ...leaping or hopping – what’s involved in the life of faith?
- Os Guinness in his book, “The Call”, wrote –
- “...God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we **are**, everything we **do**, and everything we **have** is invested with a special devotion, dynamism, and direction lived out as a response to his summons and service.”

What, then, does it mean to embrace the call of God?

1. Shifting the focus for our security

- “No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve both God and Money.” (Mt. 6:24)
- we dare not be ‘schizo-Christians’; God calls us to commitment to One Master alone

2. Obeying the unseen God with His unseen promises

- this requires “faith” – “Believing the promise without any visible evidence” as Brueggemann puts it
- in other words: “trust without reservation”

3. Trusting God's faithfulness not our faith

- through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, *God calls us* as He did Abraham
 - His call rests on promises to which we respond in faith
 - but our **focus** must remain on the **GOD** of those promises, *not* on our faith (which will falter at times), and *not* even on the promises themselves

4. Becoming a worshiper of God

- two physical things characterize Abraham's walk of faith – note 12:8 (“he went on... he pitched his **tent**...he built an **altar**”) and similarly in the final verse in this passage (13:18 – “Abram moved his **tents**...to Hebron, where he built an **altar** to the LORD.”)
 - ...he **pitched tents**, and he **built altars**
 - his frequent building of **altars** shows that Abraham was a worshiper of God
 - he often built altars to God, and revisited them (this was particularly significant in 13:4 **after his failure** in Egypt – he got back on track with God)
- if you want to embrace the call of God, are you building any altars?

5. Becoming a pilgrim

- by building **altars** Abraham made *permanent* statements about the God who was solid as a rock, who “does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17)
- but by living in **tents**, Abraham was a faith **pilgrim**, constantly on the *move*
 - ...he was a stranger/pilgrim in this world (Heb 11:13-14 tells us that the patriarchs “confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they *seek a homeland*.”)
- Brueggemann writes that “*Faith* ...is the capacity to embrace [the] announced future with such passion that the present can be relinquished for the sake of that future.”

A **fugitive** is one who is running from home.

A **vagabond** is one who has no home.

A **stranger** is one away from home.

But a **pilgrim** is someone who is on his way home.

- and we who share Abraham's faith must also be ‘**faith pilgrims**’
 - ...**building altars to God** but not putting down permanent roots here
 - ...**renouncing short-term ‘gains’** in the present in order to embrace the future
 - ...**focusing our faith** not *downward* on that which is visible, but *upward* on Him who is invisible and who calls us – all of us – to center our hopes & faith in Him alone