

Pick Your Path – Genesis 13

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Wednesday On Sunday*

1. I've been excited over the last several weeks to see the great turn out on Wednesday evenings for our mid-week study.
 - a. while many churches are canceling their mid-week services for lack of interest,
 - b. our lot is full and more and more folk are coming.
2. People are hungry for the Word of God and on Wednesdays we have a simple program of just going right through the Bible; book by book, chapter, by chapter and verse by verse.
3. Now, I know many of those who come on Sunday mornings don't come on Wednesdays,
4. So I thought this morning we would change pace a bit and do the kind of study we do on Wednesday evening so those of you who haven't been to a mid-week study can get an idea of what it is we do.

B. *Chapter 13*

1. This morning we'll cover all of Genesis 13 –
2. 18 verses that at first glance seem to be simple historical narrative of the early life of Abraham.
3. But as we've come to see time & again, what at first looks simple, upon reflection holds some wonderful insights for our walk with God.

II. TEXT

A. *Set The Scene*

1. It's always a good idea to set the scene as we dive into the text.
2. in Ch. 12 we discover that Abraham has been called by God to leave his home in the cosmopolitan urban center of Ur in Mesopotamia and move west into Canaan.
3. There God has promised to make of him and his descendants a mighty nation through whom God will bring the Redeemer.
4. Shortly after Abraham arrived in Canaan, a famine settled over the

- region and not knowing what else to do, he packed up his household and moved south into Egypt where there was food.
5. This proved nearly *disastrous* for Abraham and teaches us an important lesson about following the Lord.
 6. God had told him to move to *Canaan* and live *there*; He never said anything about finding refuge in Egypt – *Canaan* is where Abraham belonged.
 7. When faced with a crisis, instead of seeking guidance from God, Abraham followed the practical & pragmatic course of taking matters into his own hands and looking to his own wisdom and counsel.
 8. What he *ought* to have done was wait on the Lord for His direction.
 - a. Isaiah 30:18 says – “**Blessed are those who wait for the Lord.**”
 - b. one of the foundational truths the follower of Christ needs to embrace is the counsel of Proverbs 3:5-6 – “**Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.**”
 9. When you don't know what to do, **DON'T!**
 - a. instead, *wait* on the Lord for His direction and guidance.
 - b. the crisis that's come into your life is ordained and allowed *by God* to renew your dependence on Him: When you find yourself in a trial, don't seek a way out – *Seek God!*
 - c. it's the backdrop upon which He wants to reveal His power and love to you.
 - d. the problem is, like Abraham, all too often we jump in and take the easy way out and never give God the opportunity to work.
 - e. we take the first solution that presents itself.
 - f. *so what* if it's not precisely what God wills? – we had to do SOMETHING!
 - g. No! – What we need to do, is remind ourselves that God is Sovereign over All Things, over everything in our lives and that even the trials, the crises, are *allowed* by Him for our perfecting and growth.
 10. We'll never know how God intended to bless Abraham in the midst of famine in Canaan because Abraham never gave God the

chance.

11. He took matters into his own hands and went down to Egypt.
12. And as I said, that little side trip proved nearly disastrous for Abraham and his family. We'll see why this Wednesday.
13. So, that sets the scene for ch. 13 –

B. V. 1

¹Then Abram [who will later be renamed Abraham] went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, to the South [Negev].

1. Notice the way Abram's journey from Egypt is described – He went **UP** from Egypt.
2. When he went *to* Egypt, it says he went **DOWN**.
3. We tend to think of this up and down as North & South, but the people of the ancient world did not see it that way – the *author of scripture* certainly didn't see it that way!
4. Canaan was the place of promise, the location and center of God's will & favor.
 - a. Egypt represents the world.
 - b. when God's people move toward Egypt, they are going *down*.
 - c. when they turn from Egypt and return to Canaan, they're going *up*.
5. What direction are you headed this morning?
 - a. *up* to the place of promise & fellowship with God?
 - b. or *down* into the lure of easy living in the world?
6. If you've ever driven to Las Vegas at night you know that many miles before you get there, the lights of the city cast a massive glow into the sky.
 - a. the city itself lies hidden behind several mountain ridges,
 - b. but as the highway snakes its way across the desert, you can see the glow.
 - c. then at last you finally come over the last pass and there below you is Lost Wages, NV in all its glory!
 - 1) it's an awesome spectacle that pulls you like a magnet with its bright lights and colors, the huge signs and tantalizing images.
 - 2) the best and brightest of Madison Avenue have been used in

devising ways of attracting your attention and urging you to enter their particular hotel & casino.

- d. you find a parking place, get out of your car and start your walk down the Strip.
 - e. that's when you begin to notice what you didn't see at a distance;
 - 1) the seediness of the city - the appeal to the basest and lowest.
 - 2) the sidewalk is dirty, and there's a strong odor of smoke, exhaust, and right on the edge of your sense, decay.
 - f. when you walk into one of the casinos it becomes even more obvious -
 - 1) the ornaments and decoration are all a thin façade,
 - 2) a cheap veneer trying to hiding a massive system that has only one aim,
 - 3) and that's to empty your pockets before you climb back in your car and head home.
7. Las Vegas is nothing but the World writ large!
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8. Some years ago I went on a geology field trip to the mountains above Las Vegas.
- a. we were in an isolated and rather desolate place, an old copper mine with nothing else around it.
 - b. one evening after dinner, I left my classmates and went off by myself to spend some time with the Lord. I found a nice flat rock and sat down.
 - e. there I was, up in those hills, looking down into the basin that held Las Vegas, probably a good 20 miles distant.
 - f. darkness fell and the lights of the city came up.
 - g. a part of me yearned to go there and enjoy the fun.
 - h. but another part reminded me why I was sitting on that rock – to seek God.
 - i. in that instant I was overwhelmed with the sense of His presence and pleasure.
 - j. in the depth of my soul I knew who I was and why I'm here.
 - k. it was the kind of satisfaction, peace, and fulfillment that you can't express to another – but those who've experienced it know *exactly* what I'm talking about.
9. It all became so clear in that moment for me -
- a. there I was in the hills *above* Las Vegas, in a desert place –

- completely satisfied!
- b. while every one of my ventures *down* into Las Vegas had always left me financially broke and spiritually empty.
10. God has made us for Himself, and our souls are restless until they find their rest in Him.
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11. So Abram left the Las Vegas of his day and headed back toward the place of promise.

C. Vs. 2-4

²Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold.

³And he went on his journey from the South as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, ⁴to the place of the altar which he had made there at first. And there Abram called on the name of the LORD.

1. When Abram first came from his original homeland in the East, he settled in the region of Bethel.
 - a. he pitched his tent between the cities of Bethel and Ai.
 - b. *Bethel* means “House of God” / *Ai* means “Heap/Mound/Dump”
 - c. what a great picture this is –
 - 1) Abram’s journey of faith, based on the promises of God, placed him between the *house of God* on one side and the *heap of this world* on the other.
 - 2) his life was always bounded by these two options;
 - a) To walk with God
 - b) Or to walk in the world.
 - d. though Abram pitched his tent between Bethel and Ai, we read he always pitched it *toward, closer* to Bethel.
2. Like Abram, while you and I walk *on* this Earth, our course must be ever *toward heaven*, not toward the world.
3. While we travel through life, let’s always pitch our tent *in the direction of* The House of God.
4. There’s a good reason why Abram returned to this site.
 - a. he needed to go back to the place where he’d started and *renew* his walk with God.
 - b. coming up out of Egypt, he realized the terrible error he’d

- made and that he'd walked away from God.
- c. so he determined to go back to the place where he'd first worshipped, the place of his first altar and commitment to the Lord.
5. God welcomes us with open arms when we turn back to Him.
 - a. in the OT we find God pleading with His people time and again through the prophets to return to Him.
 - b. His constant message is, "Return to Me, and I will return to you."
 - c. God is a God of renewal, reconciliation, restoration!
 - d. when Peter asked Jesus how many times he ought to forgive the one who offends and then repents, Jesus said that we ought to forgive 7 times 70 times - in other words – don't keep track!
 - e. we're called to walk in love and love keeps no record of wrongs.
 - f. if this is the standard of forgiveness and reconciliation *we're* to use with one another, *how much more* is God ready and willing to forgive us when we blow it.
 - g. all He waits for is our humble and sincere repentance!
 6. God is the God of the Fresh Start, He is the God of Renewal!
 7. You might be interest to know that every name and title for Jesus in the Bible is divisible by 8, and 8 is the number of new beginnings!
 8. Have you, like Abram spent some time recently in Egypt, in the world?
 - a. have you fallen away for the Lord?
 - b. was there a time in the past when you worshipped God but some crisis arose or you simply slipped away and ended up wandering back down to life in the world? Come back to the Lord!
 - c. go back to that place of that beginning and start again!
 9. In Rev. 3, to the people of the church at Ephesus, Jesus said, "Repent, return and do again the first works."
 10. That's what Abram did here – he went back to the first place in repentance and once again called on God to be his God, his life, his all.

D. Vs. 5-9

⁵Lot also, who went with Abram, had flocks and herds and tents. ⁶Now 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. ⁷And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. The Canaanites and the Perizzites then dwelt in the land.

1. V. 2 tells us that Abram was a rich man with many flocks.
2. His nephew Lot who lived and traveled with him was also wealthy with a huge household.
3. As their fortunes increased, their joint holdings began to overburden the land.
 - a. there simply wasn't enough pasture.
 - b. so some jostling and conflict broke out between Lot's & Abram's shepherds.
4. The greater danger in all this was that as their holdings grew, they would become more and more *noticeable* to the native Canaanites who lived there.
5. More wealth and possessions made for a fatter and more appealing target,
 - a. and if the strife between Lot's and Abram's households grew into outright warfare,
 - b. then it would certainly draw in the Canaanites as raiders who would come to take advantage of the conflict.

⁸So 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. ⁹Is 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."

6. Abram proposed a solution to Lot.
 - a. it was obvious they couldn't maintain their past arrangement of mixing their households;
 - b. it was time to split up.
7. Abram gave Lot the choice of where he would go.
 - a. if Lot chose left, Abram would go to the right

- b. if Lot chose right, then Abram would go to the left - it was up to Lot.
- 8. Abram had learned an important lesson from his failure in going to Egypt.
 - a. back then, he'd seen a problem and need and just set about to take care of it himself.
 - b. now, instead of making a decision and pressing forward to implement it, he casts His fate into the Lord's hands!
 - c. Abram had the right as the Patriarch & leader of the clan to choose which direction he would take.
 - d. why it was to him the promise of God had come – this was His land – ALL OF IT!
 - e. but he'd learned that the best course to take is to surrender to the Lord as the God *even* of his circumstances –
 - f. so he leaves the choice to Lot, trusting that God will steer the ultimate decision in Abram's favor.
- 9. Let's see what Lot does and HOW he makes his choice . . .

E. Vs. 10-13

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. **13** But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the LORD.

- 1. In making his choice on where to go, Lot failed to follow His uncle's example.
- 2. He never consulted God, He never sought out the Lord's direction.
- 3. He simply looked around for the most *visually appealing* location and moved in that direction.
- 4. The Jordan Plain was a vast lush and fertile area.
 - a. one of the things tourists today find surprising about the Jordan plain is just how green it is.

- b. the region around the City of Jericho is gorgeous and in ancient times was the breadbasket of the entire area.
- 5. Because of the rich vegetation and the fact that it's a part of the Great Rift Valley, one of the major highways of the ancient world passed through there.
- 6. The cities that lay along that highway grew fabulously rich from the trade that passed by.
 - a. Sodom and Gomorrah were two of these.
 - b. but they were located at the distant, southern end of the Jordan Valley.
- 7. What happened was this –
 - a. when first presented with the choice of where to go, Lot looked from the hilly region of Bethel and saw the verdant fields of Jordan –
 - b. prime grazing land; so he moved there.
 - c. once there, and out from under the influence of his godly uncle, he got caught up in the culture and lifestyle of the area.
 - d. v. 12 tells us that he moved his tent *closer & closer* to the *cities* of the plain.
 - e. he began to forsake the *life* of a nomadic shepherd in favor of the *life* of the city.
 - f. and as he became more and more accustomed to that *lifestyle*, he migrated to the main city of the region – the Las Vegas of the day – Sodom.
- 8. Later in Genesis we find that Lot forsook the nomadic life altogether and was not only living *IN* Sodom, he's one of the civic leaders – sitting on the *City Council!*
- 9. In v. 13, were told that Sodom was already a grossly immoral place.
- 10. Why then would Lot move towards it?

- 11. Lot's story is the story of many here this morning.
- 12. He was the *nephew* of Abram, whom scripture calls the friend of God, the man of faith.
- 13. Lot was wonderfully blessed because of his close affiliation with Abram.
 - a. as long as he traveled with him and followed his uncle's example, he too was blessed: As Abram grew in wealth, so did Lot.

- b. the blessing of God overflowed from Abram onto those around him.
14. And so it is in the family and household of those men and women, those husbands and wives, mothers and fathers who love the Lord and follow Him faithfully.
- a. their family's blessed! They enjoy the overflow of the goodness of God as He pours it on those who look to him.
 - b. how many husbands are blessed because of the love and devotion of their wives to the Lord?
 - c. how many wives enjoy the overflow of grace God pours on their husbands?
 - d. how many children are steeped in the goodness of God because of the faith of their parents?
15. The sad thing is that like Lot, they *don't realize* the blessing they enjoy is just that – the blessing and favor *of God* poured out on their wife, or husband, or mother & father.
- a. then there comes a point in their life when they're faced with a decision, a choice.
 - b. God brings them to the place where they can no longer remain to enjoy a *second-hand* relationship with Him -
 - c. they need to have *their own* relationship with God.
 - d. the blessing they've enjoyed can no longer continue as an *overflow* from someone else;
 - e. God wants to bless them *directly* and make them the source of overflow onto *others*.
16. This is what happens in many Christian homes with children.
- a. Mom & Dad are believers and enjoy the grace and blessing of God.
 - b. they may not be rich in the things of worldly wealth but they're rich in love.
 - c. and because they obediently follow the Lord, they're saved from the distressing results of sin that plague the lives of so many others.
 - d. those children grow up going to Sunday School, youth group, and church
 - e. but when they get to be young adults and no longer HAVE to go to church, they often drop out.
 - f. when it comes time for them to separate from their parents and

- establish their independence, as Lot did here –
- g. instead of looking to the Lord for guidance, instead of honoring the God of their Mother and Father by making Him *their* God, they begin to live their life by the ways and wisdom of the world.
 - h. and once they pick that path, once they move out from under the influence of their godly parents, they fall under the influence of this fallen world with all its appeal to the flesh.
 - i. like Lot, it begins with the easy life of just moving away from the place of obedience to God to the satisfying of the lust of the eyes.
 - j. but then it moves toward the embracing of the lifestyle of the world, going after the satisfying of the lusts of the flesh.
 - k. they adopt the ways of the world more and more, just as Lot moved closer and closer to the cities.
 - l. and soon, before you know it – they’re living in Sodom, pursuing the pride of worldly life.
17. I need to say a word to the young people here this morning –
- a. know this – there will come a day, & *for some - it's already come*, when you will face a choice.
 - b. that choice will be to chose God for yourself!
 - c. no one can live the life of faith for you – no one can carry you in the Christian walk.
 - d. you can enjoy the overflow of God’s blessing on others, but that’s not enough! God wants to bless YOU!
 - e. it *begins* with you making that crucial choice, that most important of all decisions that *everyone* faces– To live for God or the world.
18. Every one of us comes to a fork in the path of life –
- a. to the left is the path Lot chose;
 - 1) to live by sight rather than faith;
 - 2) to follow the wisdom and counsel of the world instead of God;
 - 3) to embark on that path will lead *at first* through green pastures and verdant hills,
 - 4) but it’s a slippery route which quickly winds through sinister and subtle traps that are aimed at destroying you, while all the while telling your you’re having a good time!

- b. to the right is the path that leads to life – this is the route Abram chose
19. Look at v. 14 . . .

F. Vs. 14-18

14And 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; ¹⁵for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever. ¹⁶And 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. ¹⁷Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you.”

18Then Abram moved *his* tent, and went and dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre, which *are* in Hebron, and built an altar there to the LORD.

1. Abram offered Lot a choice, trusting that God would use whatever decision Lot made to bless him.
2. Lot chose, not by faith but by sight.
3. Because Abram’s choice was by faith, God came to him with the promise of even more blessing!
4. Lot chose the eastern path, Abram chose God.
5. God said to Abram – “Look in every direction – ALL that your eye sees I give to you!”
6. “Abram, because you didn’t chose land, because you chose ME! I’ll give ALL the land to you!”
7. The man/woman who reaches out to take the world will find his hand grasping nothing but air. // The one who reaches out to God will find their life overflowing with all goodness!
8. Jesus said, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and everything else will be added to you.” [Matthew 6:33]
9. When God told King Solomon that He would give him whatever he asked for, Solomon asked for *wisdom* so he could govern the people – God granted him his request and added all the things he

could have asked for but didn't; wealth, fame, and power.

10. And yet, good as Solomon's request was, it wasn't *the best* – He only asked for wisdom; not the God of Wisdom!

11. His father David asked for and received *the best* – Psalm 27:4

One *thing* I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life.

To behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple – [that is the One Thing I desire!]

12. Solomon had grown up knowing the blessing of God on his father.

a. he knew how to talk the talk

b. but when it came right down to it, he forsook the walk of faith in God.

c. his reign began in the blessing of God's favor because of his father's faith

d. but it ended in horrible idolatry and apostasy.

13. The key to success in life is not to seek the *blessing* of God, but God *Himself*!

14. David knew this. Abram knew it. Do We?

III. CONCLUSION

A. *Cities Or Tents?*

1. Look at the last v. of ch. 13 once more as we end today.

18th Then Abram moved *his* tent, and went and dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre, which *are* in Hebron, and built an altar there to the LORD.

2. Even though God promised Abram the whole land, he lived in a tent and moved from place to place.

3. The only thing Abram left behind, the lone testimony to his presence were the altars he built to worship God.

4. He built no cities, no permanent dwelling place, even though God said the land *belonged* to him.

5. His life of faith in following the Lord is symbolized by that tent and those altars.

6. The evidence of Abram's presence, the testimony he left behind was that he was a worshipper.
7. When Lot moved into the Jordan plain, he moved his tent closer and closer to the cities, until eventually he left his tent to live in Sodom.
8. Here's the point – the life of faith will appear *crazy to the World!*
 - a. the marks of worldly success are to make a name for yourself and leave behind a large estate.
 - b. buildings, monuments, businesses and schools with your name on them – these are the things the world counts as success.
 - c. tents and altars? The world puts no value in such things – the world despises such.
9. But God does not reckon success as the world does; His criteria is far different.
 - a. He doesn't look for buildings, but for hearts that beat in time with His.
 - b. He looks for those who say. "Lord, where you lead, I will follow."
 - c. "So I will live in this tent so when you say, 'Go!' I can quickly respond."
10. Am I saying we should all sell our houses and pick up tents at SportMart?
11. No – I'm saying that if you *do* own a house, count it as *little more than a tent!*
 - a. keep your touch with the world *light*
 - b. don't let this world or the things of this life get a grip on you and tie you down.
 - c. don't let yourself be defined by where you live or what you own.
 - d. it's not about what you own but Who owns you!
 - e. you are a worshipper!
 - f. that ought to be the testimony we leave behind.

B. The Wealth

1. Even though Abram lived his entire life in a tent, as we saw here, he was very rich!
2. The life of faith is the blessed life!
3. Even while we keep our touch with the world light – God will

pour into us His goodness in countless ways.

4. Our wealth may not register as a vast bank or savings account or investments in the stock and bond markets –
 - a. it may not be many possessions
 - b. but it will be far-reaching in the things that make for *real life* –
 - c. love, joy, and peace in the Holy Spirit.

C. What Path?

1. What Path are you on today? Which route have you chosen?
2. Are you like Lot, steering a course by sight through the streets of the world?
3. Or are you like Abram, living by faith, trusting God to guide you , one step at a time, one place to pitch your tent at a time?
4. Our friend David Guzik left this last week for Germany to start a Bible College.
 - a. he and his family of 5 owned a nice house in Simi Valley
 - b. he had a wonderful ministry in a great church
 - c. he was influencing man lives through his ministry
 - d. but because he lives and walks by faith, when God told him to strike his tent and move, he promptly obeyed.
5. May you and I be as yielded as that!
6. If God were to make it clear to you that He wanted you to move – would you go?
7. If God told you to quit your lucrative career and become a missionary or pastor, would you do it?
8. If God told you to sell your half-million dollar house and move into an apartment in some Far East Russian city, would you obey?
9. If the Lord told you to go to Israel would you trust Him?