

September 18, 2011

Sermon Overview:

While Genesis 13 is one of the lesser known stories from Abraham’s life, much of its beauty and truth is conveyed through its literary technique. In order to discern its meaning, we looked at three of its major components: The Setting; The Conflict; and The Characters.

The Setting: Abraham has returned from the debacle in Egypt and now is back where he started, in the very center of the promised land, at the altar that he built between Bethel and Ai. Significant is that there were no altars in Egypt, leaving the land of promise meant leaving the experience of intimacy with God. The altar that now stands before him is a tangible reminder that the promises of God stand as well. Abraham calls upon the name of the Lord and knows intimacy before God’s presence once again. From the setting we gather that Abraham has a renewed assurance in God’s unconditional promise and one-way love. For anyone who can relate to Abraham’s failures in Egypt, this setting provides bright hope.

The Conflict: Whereas the adversity Abraham faced before was a severe [heavy] famine (12:10), now adversity comes because Abraham was very rich [heavy] in possessions (13:2). Taken together, the text is pointing out that both the hardship of poverty and the blessing of wealth come with challenges. The abundance of Abraham and his nephew Lot resulted in a scarcity of resources, which in turn caused strife to break out between Abraham’s herdsmen and Lot’s herdsmen.

The Characters: The text juxtaposes the responses of Abraham and Lot. Rather than deferring to his uncle, Lot is passive. It is Abraham who shows maturity and takes the initiative. Knowing that the blessings of God are gifts to be continually received and not rights to be claimed, Abraham offers Lot his pick of the land. This constitutes an act of faith, for the only way Abraham could give so freely is by trusting that God would somehow keep his promise and eventually give him the Land.

Lot, the text makes crystal clear, chooses by sight (vv10–11). Basing his decision on what his eyes could see makes him susceptible to the lie that paradise could be had in the here and now. Lot moves east, away from the promise land, away from God (cf. Gen 3:24; 4:16; 11:2). Abraham’s faith is followed by sight. In the end it is Abraham, not Lot, who looks over the land and hears God reaffirm his promise (vv14–17). Whereas Lot moves away from God, Abraham moves towards God and his promised kingdom (v18).

Passage for Discussion: Luke 12:13–34

Old Testament Scholar W. Brueggemann notes how Abraham’s faith in the promise of God gave him a different perception of even the economic realities he faced. Abraham confronts the ideology of scarcity with the power of God’s promise. Through worship, his desires were oriented towards the kingdom that God had promised. In Luke 12:13–34, Jesus contrasts the economics of the kingdom—an economy based on the promise and provision of God—with the economics of “all the nations”—an economy based on the ideology of scarcity. It is the former economy which leads Abraham to seek the kingdom (cf. Lk 12:31) and the latter which leads Lot to seek after “all these things” (cf. Lk 12:30). This text provides us with an in-depth look at the kinds of heart dynamics at work in the outlooks of Abraham and Lot.

Questions for Preparation and Discussion: *(NOTE THAT SOME QUESTIONS ARE DESIGNATED FOR PREPARATION [P] AND SOME FOR GROUP DISCUSSION [D].)*

Getting to Know Each Other:

1. Could you ever be part of a family business? Why or why not? What challenges might you face in your family? [D]

Looking at the Bible:

1. Read Luke 12:15–21. God clearly does not approve of this man building larger barns (see v20).
 - a. Does it surprise you at all that the man is rebuked for building larger barns in which to store his grain and goods? Why or why not? [P]
 - b. Why do you think God has such a negative view of the man’s actions? [D]
2. Read Luke 12:22–34.
 - a. Can you find words, phrases, or ideas that connect these verses to the parable Jesus just told? How do the two passages relate? [P/brief discussion]
 - b. Verse 22 commands us “do not be anxious about your life” and v32 has a similar command “Fear not.” In between these two commands, v28 exclaims “oh you of little faith.” In what ways does this text relate anxiety/fear to doubt? [D]
 - c. Jesus opened the parable of the Rich Fool by warning: “Keep guard against all covetousness...” In what ways do these texts relate our doubts and anxieties not simply to what we fail to believe, but to misplaced desires and affections? [D]

Looking at Our Hearts

1. Do you find yourself acting more like Abraham or Lot? In what ways? [P]
2. What covetous desires do you find in your life that manifest a lack of faith in God’s promises? [D]
3. Verse 31 commands us to seek the kingdom. What practical steps might be needed for you to have your covetous desires reoriented towards the kingdom of God? [D] Are there practical things your small group could do together so that you all might grow in your love for the kingdom? [D]

Praying for Each Other

(Here are some ideas from the study to help focus your time in prayer as a group. Use along or with other prayer requests).

- Pray for specific desires that need to be reoriented.
- Pray that God would show you practical things he wants to use to reorient your desires toward him and his kingdom.