

The Generous Worshipper

Genesis 13

Introduction Two Latin phrases set the tone for our text today. *Carpe diem* means, “seize the day”. It calls for us to grow into our purpose and grab what is immediate. It is the heart throb of our lives. But it leaves us often empty and sometimes ruined. But then there is *carpe Deum*. Embrace God. This is the call of the Bible. It is a call that radically changes our lives. It is a call that sometimes brings earthly suffering. But is always a call that yields eternal satisfaction.

Two characters in the narrative before reflect these very different phrases. Lot is a man who lived *carpe diem*. He seizes the day. Abram was a man who lived *carpe Deum*. He embraces God.

This is the beginning of the Abram-Lot cycle. As it follows the stories of Abram and Lot, Moses is showing the difference between living by faith and living by sight. He has launched this with chapter 12. There, Abram begins by faith and fails by fear. He follows the Lord as he believes the Lord. He fails the Lord as he doubts the Lord. Abraham’s faith and Lot’s folly are woven through the narrative. As we consider this, we will want to pay attention to the blessing and curse motif that is here. Abram’s ever growing obedience of faith is contrasted to Lot’s growing disobedience in the flesh.

One other point I think is important as we enter this section. We will highlight it later. Lot is called in the New Testament a righteous man (2 Peter 2:7). His soul was vexed by the sin around him and trouble he had gotten himself into. So we must take heed to the warning here: even the righteous can walk by sight and get into all kinds of trouble.

Riches and its Conflict

(v.1-7)

Abram and Lot here are both men of great wealth. They are men of faith. Their life situations are similar and shared. Yet, all will not be well. Moses again is highlighting the advances and obstacles in the movement of redemptive history. He is not saying that God is being thwarted, but rather that God’s plans are actually being advanced. So, there will be many advances and obstacles in the life of God’s people. But God is never frustrated in His purposes. He is using both to advance His agenda, what He has determined to do.

The Advances by Faith

(v.1-4)

In a brief sentence, Moses records a long journey. They return from Egypt. Abram and all his clan, his tribe, are doing what Israel in the receipt of this letter are doing. They are making their way up from Egypt. For Abram, this is a return to the place of promise. This is also a return to the place where his faith faltered, where doubt in his heart directed his steps to Egypt and fear framed deceit. Yet, during this time Abram has become even richer than he was. Israel, like him, had been given enormous wealth while in Egypt.

In their journey, they arrive where they began, where they first built an altar. Here is an advance as well. The man of faith has returned to the place of sacrifice and worship. If Abram is going to be blessed by God after being corrected by God, he has to come to the place of sacrifice, where sin is taken care of. It brings him once again between Bethel and Ai, between the *house of God* and a *place of ruin*.

There, they call on the Name of the Lord. Now the man of faith worships. Being at the place of sacrifice, being near an altar is only a geographical reality. Calling on the Name of the Lord is the spiritual act. Humbling himself and recognizing His great God, he worships God. As a man of faith, the great issue is going to be settled: will he have a worship driven life? Will the recognition of his own need of God as signified by the altar and the affirmation of the greatness and worth of God drive his life?

This is the great question for all people. We are made to worship. Worship is the core of our heart functions. Worship is who and what we believe and who and what do we desire for and delight in. Romans 1 tells us that sinners' hearts are afflicted with disorders of worth and worship. They exchange truth for a lie, the transcendent God for creature, and holy living for depraved wickedness. God then hands them over to the lies and lusts they have embraced. But it is still all about worship.

For us as Christians, we are aware that we are worship driven. Therefore, we aim to be conscious about what organizes and orients our hearts. We must examine our beliefs and wants. We will be clear in our own souls that we will believe and bow to God in every movement of our souls and lives. We will aim in a worship driven life to exalt God, to live for His glory, to magnify His supreme worth in ourselves and for all peoples.

But a worship driven life is not free of trouble. Great advances in faith obedience and calling on the Name of the Lord, great growth and transformation in a Godward life may be accompanied by the most severe and surprising difficulties.

The Obstacle of Conflict

(v.5-7)

The obstacle for Abram and Lot is their great wealth. They are living together as nomadic tribesmen, moving with vast herds of life stock and large numbers of people. In a surprising irony, the land is not able to bear the combined livestock. While they are in the land of Canaan, they are having to share its resources. Lot has seemingly become an obstacle to Abram's full and sole occupancy of the promised land.

Conflict arises between their servants, presumably over grazing and water rights. The word here represents more than just verbal disagreement. There is an escalating conflict that threatens to erupt in open war. Each of the herdsman is defending the prosperity of his respective master. The wellbeing of the live stock is at stake. Since they are together and both are unwilling to concede to the other, conflict arises.

Again, Moses give us that ominous sentence we have heard several times. The Canaanites and Perizzites were dwelling in the land. They are not the only ones

living in the region. It is inhabited by a number of tribes and peoples. So Abram's title to the land and the resources of the land are being challenged by these two major groups of people.

So what will a worship driven man of faith do? How will he respond when he is titular head of his clan, the rightful recipient of the promise and the land, and the one through whom all attached to him will be blessed? Will he assert his rights? Will he exercise his authority?

Resolution and its Choices

(v.8-13)

We can well see the great obstacle and danger here. This conflict can destroy them. Range wars for grazing and water are well-known, not just in American western history, but across centuries and cultures. These wars have been vicious and destructive. The danger to Abram and Lot's families is very real. Further, they have the reputation of the Lord to uphold as worshippers of Yahweh.

As a man of faith, Abram takes the initiative to propose a resolution. Here are the heart and actions of a man of faith and a worship driven life. Moses will show us the difference between the man who walks by faith and the man who walks by sight.

The Generous Offer

(v.8-9)

Abram shows us that those who walk by faith can be great hearted, generous. In a heart that accepts God's promises as completely true and with a heart whose wants and desires are submitted totally to God, the child of God will respond to conflict, to being sinned against, with great graciousness and generosity. Rather than being poised to enter into conflict, his humility before God poises him to move quickly to resolve conflict.

Abram is willing to not defend his rights. All the land that God has promised is stretched out before them including the Jordon River Valley to their east. He does not assert the right he actually has; that is, he does not tell Lot to move somewhere else. His heart looks to others interest first and his hand sweeps across all the rich and desirable land.

Further, Abram has learned to trust the Lord for the consequences of other's decisions. This is a very hard thing for many. But Abram so believes God that he is willing to let Lot make the choice. He appears to be confident that God will work out everything for Abram's good through the keeping of His promises.

So, Abram's worship of God has humbled him and made him generous. He no longer fears the famine or fears the Pharaoh. He has learned much about what trusting God and desiring God means. He will walk by faith, not by sight.

The Greedy Choice

(v.10-11)

Lot shows us that those who walk by sight can be easily deceived, greedy. In a heart that is seeking its own first and measures what is best by what is seen, Lot makes a choice that begins a long, slow and terrible slide into the slough of sin. This will end in his daughters getting him drunk, committing incest with him and his begetting the Amorites and the Moabites, the great enemies of Israel.

In contrast to Abram, Lot is looking out primarily for his own interests. He chooses serving his wants. Rather than looking to the gracious offer of his uncle and seeing such great faith, he turns with heart delight to choose what he wants. This is the effect of walking by sight. Our heart's beliefs and wants will focus the gaze of our eyes on the things that are seen. We will then choose them and often suffer because of them.

Sadly, Lot does not see the dangers because he is governed by sight, not by faith. All he can see is the beauty, the pleasure, the profit, the good. Moses reminds the readers that what is the Dead Sea Valley was once a great lush and fertile valley. This is what entices Lot. He cannot sense the depravity. He cannot smell in his soul the corruption. He is oblivious to the slippery slope. While still a righteous man, he is a believer who walks, lives by sight. In the Scriptures, faith is an eye, not a hand. It sees, not necessarily grasps. Real living faith sees the invisible and thus is not shaken in the impossible. Thus, faith is consistently contrasted to sight, not reason. Faith is as reasonable as believing the Word of God. But walking by sight exposes us to all sorts of spiritual danger and difficulty.

So, Lot's worship of God is deficient and has allowed him to become worldly. Unlike his uncle, he is not spoken of here as calling on the Lord and building an altar. He casts his eyes, not in trust and submission to God, but on what he can get for the moment. A worship driven life is not like this. By faith, the worship driven life receives God's promises, embraces God's purposes and submits to God's precepts.

The Grave Results

(v.12-13)

Abram settles in the land of Canaan. This exposes Abram to two dangers: the danger to his livestock and the danger from the other tribes living there. But he is living in and making claim to the land God promised. So while there may be grave dangers, there is also the beginning of receiving the fulfillment. Yet, all Israel hearing this read to them, knows that will be a very long time, almost 500 years, before the fulfillment will be complete. But even then, not yet. Not until the Lord Jesus Christ rises from the dead and ascends into heaven is the final Promised Land entered victoriously.

Lot settles in valley among the cities, finally moving closer to Sodom. This exposes him to great sinners living there and their debased carnality. While Abram sojourns in the land of promise, not yet receiving the city he is seeking whose builder and maker is God, Lot is moving towards the city where sin abounds.

Moses is powerfully presenting two lessons for the nation of Israel. These lessons are part of the justification for the conquest.

Lot left the land of Canaan, he was not expelled from it. Moab and Ammon have no legitimate claim to the land. It was right for Israel to come in and remove them. They were illegitimately living in the land promised to another.

Abram occupies the land of Canaan because of God's promise. Israel was not an invader, claiming what was not theirs. The promise made to Abram was going to be fulfilled initially to them. They had a God-given right to that land.

Reaffirmation and its Covenant

(v.14-18)

Now that the obstacle has been removed, now that Lot has moved away from Canaan and Abram moved in, God speaks to Abram and reaffirms the promise.

God is Faithful to His Word

(v.14-17)

God instructs Abram to lift up his eyes and look at what God has promised. In contrast to Lot who lifted up his eyes and looked at what he wanted, Abram is lift up his eyes and look at all that God has promised. God will be faithful to His Word in giving Abram all this land, all that he can see. And frankly, as we now know because of the New Testament, O so much more as well.

God reminds Abram to believe promises which have not yet any physical reality. Do you see this? Abram is to believe God for the land that he can see now. But he also to believe God for the son, the descendents he cannot yet see. If one part of the promise is true, so is the rest. If this is the land, then the son is coming. Not only will there be a son, but there will an innumerable company of children. Abram is thinking primarily physical descendents. But God will bring in even more than he can imagine for all the descendents of Abraham are those who are spiritual sons by faith.

God commands Abram to faithfully obey in doing his part in walking the land. Abram's faith, his worship driven life, is not one of retirement, retreat or passive waiting. It is an active life. It is a faith that believes God in an obeying way. "Go and walk because I will give," God says. This is so true for us. Most of what God promises to our faith and provides through His grace causes us to be willing to do what He commands.

Abram is Faithful to His God

(v.18)

Abram responds by obedience. Too many have tried to turn believing God into sitting and waiting on God. Believing God means walking with God, being active in our obedience to God. A worship driven life will be intensely practical. It will be filled with obedience. It will go where God has given. Abram sojourns to Hebron.

Abram responds with worship. He builds an altar. This last sentence is the marker over Abram's life in this chapter. You want to be a person of faith, have a worship driven life? You must be committed to the altar, to the cross of Jesus Christ. You will see your need of a sacrificial substitute for sinners. You will rest your trust on the lamb. You will believe what God says. You will bow your hearts desires and wants to our Redeemer and Ruler. You will both receive what you can see by faith, and be willing to believe and wait for what you cannot.

Lessons

Let me wrap this up by screwing some truths deep into your hearts.

In a worship driven life, we will have the attitude of Abram and the mind of Christ:

We will be poised to resolve conflict when it is in our power to do so.

We will seek the best and interest of others.

We will not assert our rights, but rather hold them loosely before God.

We will so believe God to carry out His promises as our Sovereign God that we will entrust to Him the decisions of others.

We will commit ourselves to the justice and glory of God even when others walk by sight and possibly even sin against us.

Two ways are set before you, to walk by faith or to walk by sight. Will you believe the promises of God or the promises of the world?

Will you trust in God alone for your salvation? The world and its religions offer all sorts of enticing and entertaining alternatives. But they are not offering the gospel, the death, burial and resurrection of the Son of God come as a man, the Lord Jesus. Therefore, they are not offering you salvation.

Will you trust in God alone for your transformation, for your growth in grace? Will you grow in practical holiness God's way? The world and its systems of legalism and psychology with its reliance on the flesh and on human wisdom tells you how to live. But it is not God's way. It is the way of sight. It is the way of the world. It will lead you to ruin.

Will you trust in God alone for your satisfaction? Here is another way to ask what you worship. Whose approval do you crave? What promises of pleasure, power, provision and purpose dazzle the eyes of your heart? What baubles of worldly stuff displace a longing for heaven and God? What candy or popcorn fills you up and ruins your hunger for God and taste for His delights? Will you in fact walk by sight over your spouse, your children, your singleness, your cars, your stereos? Or will you believe God in an obeying way?

Here in this story is the greatness of the humbleness of Christ. Just as Abram looked more after the interest of Lot, did not assert his own rights and was willing to simply obey God, the Lord Jesus came. He came for our interest yet served to obey His Father and to glorify Him. He gave up His right to be acknowledged as God. He shed heaven's glory and put on earth's dust. He refused to strike back at those who sinned against Him. He went voluntarily to die. And he did not die just any death, but the vile death of a criminal's execution. Therefore, God has exalted Him. At His Name every knee will bow. Every tongue will one day confess He is Lord to the glory of God. To long for that in a way that loves and lives for the glory of God is truly, the worship driven life.