

Just A-Passing Through
Genesis 13:5-18, May 5th 2024

The story is told of a wealthy businessman who was traveling through Russia and decided to take the opportunity to visit the world-famous rabi who lived nearby. As he approached the home, the businessman was surprised by the humble, one-room dwelling. He knocked, and the rabi opened the door and invited him in. But upon entering the home, the businessman was shocked to see only a table, lamp, and a cot... along with many books. The businessman asked, "Sir, where is all of your furniture?" The rabi responded, "Where's yours?" Confused by the question, the businessman replied, "I didn't bring any. This place is not my home. I am only a visitor here." The rabi smiled, and said, "So am I."

Far from some gnostic call to poverty, this story shows us something of the proper mindset of Christian believers towards this world with its problems, pleasures, and possessions. Peter called us "foreigners and aliens" (1 Peter 2:11). The writer to the Hebrews spoke of Christians as "strangers on earth" (Heb 11:13) who have "no lasting city [here], but... seek the city that is to come" (Heb 13:14). That is to say, we're not home yet. We are sojourners not settlers. Turns out the Christian life isn't one of ease in the Promised Land, but one of walking by faith with Jesus through the wilderness of this world with our hearts set on our heavenly home. *But what does the sojourning-life look like? We'll find answers by picking up where we left off in Genesis 13. My aim tonight is to show you that **the Christian is a sojourner in this world.***

First, let us consider the *situation*. We're only 24 verses into the life of Abram and already it's been a wild ride. Though Abram faithfully answered the Lord's call to leave his home in Ur & journey to Canaan, he fled in fear when a famine hit. *Where did he go?* He ran down to Egypt where we discovered the hole in his holiness. When Abram got backed into a corner, when his theology and his trials collided, he went his own way even if it meant forsaking the Lord & hurting those closest to him, like Sarai, his wife whom he surrendered to Pharaoh to save himself. Though Abram had forgotten God's promises of provision & protection, the Lord hadn't. With a mighty hand, God saved Sarai by afflicting Pharaoh's house with plagues until he released her & sent Abram and his people away, heavy with Egyptian riches. So, Abram went back to the altar which he had built at the first to start again.

But in no time Abram goes from the frying pan and into the fryer: from the trial of famine into the trial of fortune. You see, Abram and his nephew, Lot, returned from Egypt rich men & they had to learn the hard way: more money more problems. For they were so heavy with wealth, the land couldn't support them. The Hebrew literally says, "the land was not able to carry them."

Since getting married in 2010, Jordan and I have moved quite a bit. In all those moves; I've learned a bit about boxes. It was our first move & I went to HD to buy boxes and had to choose between s, m & l boxes. My 2D man brain concluded: bigger boxes means fewer boxes. So, I bought large boxes & got each room boxed up. When it came time to move the boxes into the truck I made an embarrassing discovery. The boxes were too heavy. I couldn't lift them (astonishing, I know). I did manage to lift one for a moment until the bottom tore out!

The land couldn't lift and carry Abram and Lot. They were too heavy! The bottom was fixing to tear out, Specifically, their livestock had grown so plentiful that their herdsmen kept bumping into each other in search of the best grazing lands and watering holes until relations became tensions. All this before an audience (v7). *Why does Moses mention these Canaanites & Perizzites?* Because this conflict between Abram and Lot, wasn't happening in a vacuum. The unbelieving world was watching. So, Abram deferred to Lot. He surrendered his seniority, his right, and allowed Lot to choose his portion of the land first. (8-9)

It's no different today! The Lord has prepared our tables in the presence of our enemies. The world is watching you, waiting to justify its own unbelief, dishonor Christ, mock his truth & destroy his church. That's why the world cheers when Christian marriages dissolve in divorce, when pastors fall in scandal, when church's divide over trivial matters and wither into fruitless husks of their former selves. *When conflict comes, how can Christians uphold the honor of the Lord before a watching world?* By being willing to surrender our rights for the sake of peace with our kinsmen. **1Cor6:5-7** "Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers? ... Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?" *Do you value your own rights more highly than the honor of King Jesus who, for your sake, laid his rights down at the foot of the cross and died the most shameful death of a criminal?* May we then be willing to be defrauded; to surrender our rights; for his sake & for peace in his church.

In what follows we see the stark contrast between Lot, the settler and Abram, *the sojourner*. (10-13). *Lot makes a terrible first impression, doesn't he?* Though Peter says that he was a righteous man, justified in the sight of God (2Pt.2:7) he's terribly immature in his faith and makes it into the *Top 10 Genesis Fails* more than once. Lot is like the friend you take to dinner who, after you tell him you're paying, orders steak and lobster. Children, Lot's the kid that always takes the last cookie or slice of cake. His catch phrase could be, "Don't mind if I do." He's selfish and inconsiderate. *Does he make any effort to deflect Abram's kindness & defer to his uncle?* No! When given the chance, he snatches what he wants.

Geographically speaking, Lot's given the pick of the litter. *Where does he choose to live?* The Jordan Valley on the banks of the Dead Sea into which the Jordan River empties, outside the Promised Land. *Why?* Because, "he lifted his eyes" v10 & liked what he saw. The Jordan Valley was the smart and obvious choice! It was well-watered, lush, & green. It was just like Eden & Egypt! Surely there would be no famines there. *What could go wrong?!*

Have any of you children ever stepped on a sticker-weed in your yard? *Barefoot frisbee in the field*. They're almost impossible to see until you plant your foot on it and it sinks its barbs into your skin. Ouch! There are sticker-weeds in the grass of these verses; ominous clues that tell us Lot's in trouble.

In v11 we read that Lot journeyed east. Like Adam out of Eden, like Cain into Nod, like the builders of Babel, Lot journeyed East, a geographical picture of drifting away from God. In v12 Lot settled among the cities. Like eastward movement, city-living is weighted with theological significance in the OT. Cursed Cain defied God by building a city. Babel was built because people wanted to make a name for themselves by staying put instead of spreading out as God commanded. Cities represent humanity's vain quest for immortality and glory apart from God. Lot lifted his eyes and saw the city's high walls and promise of security. But his eyes lied.

Just like one of my favorite sharks: the tasseled wobbegong. Its skin is streaked & speckled in tans, browns and blacks that make it disappear against the coral reef backdrop. Its chin is adorned with skin tags, tassels that look just like fingers of coral making the shark virtually invisible in its lair. There, it lures unsuspecting fish in close by gently waving its tail, mimicking the movement of other reef fish, creating the allusion of safety. When a fish gets too close, the tasseled wobbegong inhales it and in the blink of an eye and it's gone.

Blinded by the allusion of prosperity and security, Lot fails to see the evil lurking in S&G. And he gets sucked in. 13:12-he started out living near Sodom. But by the time we come to ch.19, we see that he's become a prominent citizen of sin city & has pledged his daughters in marriage to Sodomites. You see... Lot's eyes of flesh lied to him. **Prov14:12**-*"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death."*

When Lot lifted up his eyes of flesh they lied to him. *But what about Abram's eyes? v.14-15.* Abram looked through the eyes of faith, the eyes of a sojourner, and saw the land the Lord would give to him & offspring 1 day!

NSEW! That's a lot more than just the Land of Canaan: it's the whole world! *But who is the offspring?* Paul peels back the outer layers of this promise in *Gal3:16*: "Now the promises were made to Abraham & to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "& to your offspring," who is Christ." Once again, God is preaching the gospel to Abram. The good news that the Son of God & son of Abram was coming to vanquish evil, destroy the works of the devil, cure the curse by bearing it and dying beneath it on the cross, only to rise up in triumph from the grave and ascend up into heaven to his royal throne at the right hand of God the father from which he'd rule the earth in perfect justice, power & love, from which he would one day return, not in the weakness of his first coming but in power and glory to gather his own to himself, vanquish all evil, and make heaven and earth one forever. God promised! But Abram had to wait for it. He had to look past the Canaanites living in the land, past his own age & the barren womb of his wife & keep walking by faith, "the assurance of things hoped for the conviction of things unseen." Lot chose the city he could see. But Abram **Heb.11:10**"[looked] forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer & builder is God."

*Which are you? How do you navigate your course through this world? The settler or sojourner? College? Major? Work? Dating? Marriage? Live? Children? #? parent? \$? Church? These are daily decisions we all must make. The **settler** lives horizontally, as if this world is all there is. The settler believes he really is living his best life now. So he trusts his eyes and makes his choice. But the **sojourner** lives vertically, his head in the clouds, heart is in heaven, his hope in the life to come, his feet are cemented in the Bible. When a **settler** comes to a fork in the road- he follows his heart. But the **sojourner** remembers **Jer. 17:9- The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?** So, when the sojourner comes to a fork in the road, he doesn't lean upon his own understanding... he leans upon the Lord-by calling out to Him in prayer, combing the Scriptures in search of wisdom, & seeking Godly counsel.*

*Friend, do you not feel the bondage & the vanity of life under the sun? Search your soul! Hear it crying "You were meant to live for so much more than this!" That's why Jesus is such a wonderful savior. By his cross he has crucified this world to you and you to this world. His blood has sealed your forgiveness- yes! but also your freedom! He has burst the chains of our spiritual bondage. He has given our souls wings to fly over the sun and to live as a sojourner in this world with our hearts in heaven and your hope fixed on the life to come, knowing as Abram did-the best is yet to come. Christian, that's a truth worth holding on to: the **best is yet to come.***

The year was 1909. The missionary Henry Morrison & his wife were coming home to the U.S. after 40 years of faithful service in Africa. When their ship steamed into NY Harbor, Henry couldn't believe his eyes- a crowd of people had gathered on the dock beneath a banner that read "welcome home!" As the two old missionaries made their way down the gangplank the crowd cheered & a band began to play. Henry looked to his wife with tears in his eyes; they hadn't been forgotten! But as they walked through the crowd, no one greeted them. No one even looked at them. The people remained fixed on the ship. When Henry turned to look, he saw why: TR, who'd been away on safari had returned on the same ship & was standing at the railing, waiving to the people. Henry turned to his wife with a heavy heart, "I don't understand. We gave our lives in ministry & service. And not a single soul has come to welcome us home! How can this be?!" His wife took his hand & said, "Because, my dear, we're not home yet."

"This world is not my home I'm just a-passing through My treasures are laid up Somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckon me from heaven's open door And I can't feel at home in this world anymore."