

BFFs FOREVER

Studies in the Life of Abraham

Text

Genesis 13:1-18

Topic

Given his choice of grazing land,
Lot chose the lush fertile plains of Jordan

Title

"The Plains! The Plains!"

Introduction

A new monk arrives at the monastery. He is assigned to help the other monks in copying the old texts by hand.

He notices, however, that they are copying *copies*, not the original books. The new monk goes to the head monk to ask him about this. He points out that if there were an error in the very first copy, that error would be continued in all of the other copies.

The head monk says "We have been copying from the copies for centuries, but you make a good point, my son." So he goes down into the cellar with one of the copies to check it against the original.

Hours later, nobody has seen him. One of the monks goes downstairs to look for him. He hears a sobbing coming from the back of the cellar, and finds the old monk leaning over one of the original books crying. He asks what's wrong.

The old monk sobs, "The word is *celebrate*."

Monks represent to us a sort of ultimate separation from the world in order to walk with God. I think, however, monks give separation from the world a

bad name. They make separation from the world seem as though it is something to be *endured* rather than something that can be *enjoyed*.

While no one here thinks that a believer must become a monk, we might nevertheless have the attitude that separation from the world is something that is to be endured rather than enjoyed.

In our text Abraham is going to example what it means to live separated from the world. Lot is going to provide the opposite example.

The key to enjoying separation is very simple. It has to do with who you allow to make your choices in life. If you let God choose, you will enjoy living separated from the world. If you let **you** choose, you won't.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Let God Choose For You And Separation From The World Will Be Enrapturing, and #2 Let You Choose For You And Separation From The World Will Become Elusive.

#1 Let God Choose For You And Separation
From The World Will Be Enrapturing
(v1-9 & 14-18)

We often summarize the biblical Doctrine of Separation by saying, We are **in** the world, but we are not to be **of** the world.

There are numerous verses that encourage separation. None is more concise than First John 2:15-17.

1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

1 John 2:16 For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world.

1 John 2:17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

That's all great, but how do we actually put it into practice? Do we simply make a list of things to separate from? Is that real, biblical separation? Is separation removing the 'r' from *celebrate* to remain *celibate*?

We should learn to think *inward*, not *outward*. Separation from the world is a matter of the heart and your love for God.

Abraham is our example. In these verses he makes a clean separation from the world, but he does it because he'd rather hang out with God.

Genesis 13:1 Then Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, to the South.

Genesis 13:2 Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold.

Genesis 13:3 And 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,

Genesis 13:4 to the place of the altar which he had made there at first. And there Abram called on the name of the Lord.

In chapter seventeen Abram's name will be changed by God to Abraham. Mean time I'll read what the text says but call him Abraham.

We covered these first four verses in our last study. The backslider was back: Abraham was back in the land, back at Bethel, back to worshipping God at the altar. If you've backslidden, "*Get back!*"

Genesis 13:5 Lot also, who went with Abram, had flocks and herds and tents.

Lot was Abraham's nephew. His father had died and Abraham was perhaps a sort of guardian to him.

Genesis 13:6 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.

Genesis 13:7 And 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.

This is what I call a high-class problem. They were too rich for the land to support them!

Still, it was a problem that needed resolving. It was a spiritual problem. In fact, the spiritual aspects of it were the most important.

How was it spiritual? The "Canaanites and the Perizzites" were watching. Abraham and Lot were the guys representing to them the one true God. If

they had strife, and if it went unresolved, well then maybe their 'God' wasn't so powerful after all. If Abraham and Lot couldn't solve their problems, why follow their God?

Genesis 13:8 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.

Look for the bigger spiritual impact of your difficulties. Think of your testimony. Subordinate your will to that which will bring glory to God.

Genesis 13:9 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."

The word 'magnanimous' comes to mind. Abraham was the uncle; Lot his nephew. He could have told Lot what to do.

Why did Abraham let Lot choose? There are at least two reasons:

1. First, it was a way of letting God choose for him. He would leave it up to Lot and thereby leave it in God's hands.
2. Second, Abraham gave Lot an opportunity to choose for himself whether he would pursue a spiritual path or a carnal one. You can't really force spirituality. At some point a person must choose for themselves.

Lot is going to choose for himself the better grazing land. It was a poor choice. In a moment we will return to discuss Lot's poor choice. For now let's stick with Abraham and the results of his letting God choose for him.

Genesis 13:14 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;

Genesis 13:15 for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever.

Would you rather have a season or two of good grazing land or the promise of an everlasting spiritual inheritance for you and your descendants? Well, when you put it that way, letting God make the choice seems better.

God didn't say, "Let Lot choose 'cause I've got something better for you." God didn't have to say it because Abraham believed it by faith. He trusted in God's choices for him - even if they seemed foolish from the world's point of view.

You may as well understand that when you let God choose you might end up in circumstances that seem foolish from the world's point of view. No matter. The fellowship with God you gain is your reward. His whisper to your heart about the heavenly inheritance awaiting you is priceless.

Genesis 13:16 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.

This was a pretty big promise to an old guy who had no kids. It looks beyond Isaac and the children of Israel to the spiritual children of God - all those who, like Abraham before them, would believe God and to whom He would account it for righteousness and justify them.

This was **enrapturing**, meaning it moved Abraham to a delight without measure. In a culture in which land holdings and offspring were how you measured wealth and success, to be promised land in every direction as far as you could see and more descendants than could even begin to be numbered, this was the bomb.

You see what happened? It was time to separate - from Lot, from the world. Abraham's idea of being separated was to let God choose for him. The result was a more difficult path in the world, for sure, but an enrapturing, enthralling revelation of God to his heart.

Separation wasn't some monastic torture to be endured. It was a spiritual delight to be enjoyed.

Genesis 13:17 Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you."

This wasn't something Abraham got up and did all at once. It wasn't a final walk-thru before the deal closed. It was God's way of telling Abraham that

wherever he went in the land, wherever he found himself, God was with him to remind him of the spiritual promises He'd made.

You and I are promised that one day we will be resurrected or raptured to Heaven to be with the Lord. From there we will return to rule and reign with Him over the earth for a thousand years.

There's a sense, then, that everywhere I walk, wherever I am, I'm gonna one day rule.

How might that affect us? It might make us like Philip in the New Testament. God told him to go sit along a desert road. Along came the Ethiopian eunuch. Philip might seem a poor beggar sitting by the side of a desert road while the eunuch was at the top of the world, being carried along in a caravan. Led by the Holy Spirit, **Philip ruled that encounter** - going up to this worldly treasurer and sharing with him the treasure of the Gospel.

So, you see, the idea of being a monk, locked away in some monastery, away from nonbelievers, is in some ways the exact opposite of biblical separation.

Genesis 13:18 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.

One of the meanings of "Mamre" is *richness*, and "Hebron" means *communion*. Abraham was rich in communion with, in fellowship with, God.

Separation isn't me making a list of don'ts. Neither is it me insisting I can take my Christianity right to the limit, to the edge, of what might be considered sin to some people.

No, separation - according to Abraham, the friend of God - is letting God choose for me. It is listening to the still, small voice of God the Holy Spirit telling me what will tend to increase my fellowship with God versus what will interfere with it.

I will say that the more I listen and let God choose, the less like the world I will look, and the less I will like the things of the world.

Or, to put it the opposite way, if I look and act worldly, then I'm not really listening to the Lord and letting Him choose for me. Separation isn't a list of 'don'ts,' but if I am doing all the usual 'don'ts,' then I'm probably fooling myself about my walk with Jesus.

If God isn't making my choices, then I am... And that is exemplified for us by Lot.

#2 Let You Choose For You And Separation
From The World Will Become Elusive
(v10-13)

The place to start talking about Lot is in the New Testament. The apostle Peter gives this commentary about him:

2 Peter 2:7 [God] delivered **righteous** Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked

2 Peter 2:8 (for that **righteous** man, dwelling among them, tormented his **righteous** soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)

Peter calls Lot "righteous" *no less than three times*. Perhaps God the Holy Spirit knew that the emphasis would be necessary to convince you that Lot really was a child of God! There is very little in his behavior to suggest that he believed in the Lord. Nevertheless you must accept God's testimony: Lot was declared righteous.

If you look at Lot's conduct, then listen to Peter's commentary, you have to conclude that it is possible for a Christian to be carnal. *Carnal* is a word that describes a Christian who sets their mind on the things of the world. In the context of our theme this morning, Lot is the Christian who chooses for him or her self rather than submitting their life to God.

Genesis 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.

Lot was concerned mostly about “water.” In the New Testament water becomes a symbol of the abundant spiritual provision of God to His faithful children as they walk with Him in obedience. Lot preferred the water that leaves you thirsting for more rather than the spiritual ‘water’ that flows from you to others.

Lot compared Egypt to Eden. Eden had been Eden because of fellowship with God - **not** because of its water and vegetation! Lot thought of fellowship in terms of immediate material blessings.

Genesis 13:11 Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other.

“Ze plains!” Lot could have deferred to Abraham. He could have prayed about it and let God choose for him. Instead he “chose for himself.”

I can only wonder how many times I have, at a spiritual juncture, chosen for myself based on what appeared to be the best from a physical and material mindset. It’s the yellow pad thing I’ve referenced a few times recently - how we make a list of pro’s and con’s on a piece of paper and go with what seems to make the most sense.

That’s what Lot did - and it led to a life lived backsliding.

If God chooses for you to live in some ‘Sodom and Gomorrah,’ then He will be with you there. He was with Daniel in Babylon, for instance. But let it be His choice and not yours.

Genesis 13:12 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.

Genesis 13:13 But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord.

Just for emphasis the Holy Spirit lets us know that Sodom was no place for a believer in those days. Had Lot said from the get-go, “I’m moving to Sodom,” it would have been obvious he was backsliding and not listening to the Lord.

Instead he approached Sodom in stages:

1. First he looked longingly at the plain before Sodom.
2. Then he pitched his tent as far as Sodom. In Chapter fourteen he was living in Sodom.
3. By Chapter Nineteen he was one of the leaders, like a city councilman, in Sodom.

Ask yourself, “Am I on a course that is more worldly or more other-worldly?”

It's pretty easy, in one sense, to look back on my life and see if I am becoming more separated from the world or more worldly. To see if I am really closer to God, really a better friend to Him, than I was previously. I'm tracking one way or the other.

The world around us is like Sodom and Gomorrah and we are called to live in it. But we don't have to be like Lot. We can be Abraham's - enjoying rather than enduring.

I'm tempted to say, “The choice is yours,” but really it's a matter of whether you will let God choose for you.

The other day we surprised CJ by taking her to Disneyland. Sunday after church she came home and we asked her if she wanted to do something super-fun. She said she wanted to go swimming. So we asked her, “If you could go anywhere and be at the most super-fun place, where would you want to go?”

She said, sort of questioning, “Play some games?”

We finally just told her we were taking her to Disneyland. Then we surprised her again, when we got there, because her mom and dad were there already.

Her choices were OK - swimming and games. **Our choice for her was better!**

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God's choices for you are always better. They are spiritual in nature, drawing you closer to Him, so don't set your heart on the things of this world which are passing away.

