

GENESIS 13:1-18 (THIS LAND I GIVE TO YOU)

Introduction: What does “being rich” mean to you? Today one of the points I’ll talk about is just that. If you walk from where we are right now to the public restrooms by the road, you’ll see those nice tropical looking picnic tables with the palm roofs by the lagoon.

On the last one, right where the view of the lagoon is best is where a guy named Wally lives. He’s lived there for years. You might have even noticed him at one time or another. He rides a tricycle around Siesta Key every day and enjoys life to the fullest.

He has almost no possessions and yet he’s one of the coolest cats in town. He’d tell you that he’s perfectly content with life. He has a place right on the water, takes a shower at public expense every day, gets a paycheck from the military and so always has enough for a steak, and he even has a grill that he can use for free.

There are hundreds of people within ¼ of a mile of us who have paid millions of dollars to live here and many of them are as miserable as they can be. Wally doesn’t pay a penny and he’s as happy as a lark. Which are the poor ones and which is wealthy?

Text Verse: (Luke 1:68-75) “Blessed *is* the Lord God of Israel,
For He has visited and redeemed His people,
⁶⁹ And has raised up a horn of salvation for us
In the house of His servant David,
⁷⁰ As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets,
Who *have been* since the world began,
⁷¹ That we should be saved from our enemies
And from the hand of all who hate us,
⁷² To perform the mercy *promised* to our fathers
And to remember His holy covenant,
⁷³ The oath which He swore to our father Abraham:
⁷⁴ To grant us that we,
Being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
Might serve Him without fear,

⁷⁵ In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.

May God speak to us through His word today and may His glorious name ever be praised.

I. Returning to the Promised Land

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

As a reminder, last week we saw Abram's journey to Egypt which occurred because of a famine in the land of Canaan. While they were there, Abram had told his wife to tell anyone they met that she was his sister.

He did this in order to protect his own life in case someone wanted to kill him so that they could have her because she was an extremely beautiful lady. While in Egypt, Pharaoh's house eventually took her in so that she could become Pharaoh's wife.

But in the process of this, God afflicted them with plagues to keep her from being taken as his wife. When Pharaoh found out what happened, it says this –

And Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What *is* this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she *was* your wife? ¹⁹ Why did you say, 'She *is* my sister'? I might have taken her as my wife. Now therefore, here is your wife; take *her* and go your way." ²⁰ So Pharaoh commanded *his* men concerning him; and they sent him away, with his wife and all that he had.

And so in this first verse today we see the fulfillment of Pharaoh's demand. Abram and all who were with him headed northeast out of Egypt and back to the land of Canaan. The verse says they went up from Egypt to the South, but that doesn't mean they headed south.

Instead, they travelled to the South of the Land of Canaan which is an area known as the Negev, which means "south." This would be like saying we travelled from Sarasota to the Deep South, which is actually north from

where we are because Sarasota, Florida is technically not a part of the Deep South.

Because of this, different translations of the Bible will translate this differently – they will either say the South or the Negev. It is a place and not a direction.

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

Even before he had gone to Egypt, Abram was already wealthy and had servants and goods, but while he was in Egypt his wealth increased even more when Pharaoh took his wife Sarai. When he did, he treated Abram well and gave him a great deal.

The Hebrew term for “very rich” is *kaved meod*, and the words indicate heaviness. In other words, he was heavy in livestock, in silver, and in gold.

As people, we generally look at others who have a lot of stuff or expensive things as more important than people who don’t have as much. We want to be associated with rich or important people more than those who are less so. If we ever meet someone famous, we want to tell others about it – even years later.

But the Bible doesn’t teach this. If a person is rich or famous, it isn’t always an indication of divine favor. And if a person is poor it is no indication of divine disfavor. A good job that earns a lot of money or fame doesn’t guarantee happiness, and more often than not it brings about just the opposite.

Sports stars and movie stars make millions of dollars and yet they’re the ones who are continuously going through divorce after divorce or who put guns in their mouth because life is so crummy.

The heaviness of wealth, such as Abram had, is something that requires great care or it becomes a burden too heavy to manage and the blessing can easily become a curse. Solomon, the richest man ever to live, gives this thought on wealth –

¹⁰ He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver;
Nor he who loves abundance, with increase.
This also *is* vanity.

¹¹ When goods increase,
They increase who eat them;
So what profit have the owners
Except to see *them* with their eyes?

¹² The sleep of a laboring man *is* sweet,
Whether he eats little or much;
But the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep. Ecc 5:10-12

Any of you who know me well enough know that I love to sleep. Outside of Jesus and my family, it is my favorite thing. If being rich will deprive me of my sleep, I'd rather not ever be wealthy.

And in Luke 16, it says this about the possessions we prize so highly, like big houses, fast cars, or expensive watches –

¹⁴ “Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him. ¹⁵ And He said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.”

Some of the people I hold in the highest regard are the people who live rather simple lives and who spend a lot of their time doing things for others, both nice things for friends and charity work for others. One of them is here right now and she's surely not wealthy by the world's standards.

But I'm sure that the life she lives is far more rewarding than if she were weighed down with wealth and status. I don't know if she thinks so or not, but she is blessed because she is a blessing. What more could one want at the end of their life than to know that God was pleased with how they lived?

Something that will never impress me is how much money you have or how big the house is that you live in. I clean toilets in a mall and take out the

garbage there every morning of the week except Sunday and I'm neither ashamed of it, nor do I mind a bit.

It pays the bills and helps meet our needs. What more should I ask for? Abram was blessed with a great deal and maybe someday you or I will be that way too, but what God favors is our faith, not stuff.

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, ⁴ to the place of the altar which he had made there at first. And there Abram called on the name of the LORD.

These verses take us back to Chapter 12, to the place where he had built an altar sometime soon after first coming into the Promised Land. If you remember, I said then that Bethel means "House of God" which is a picture of heaven and Ai means "Heap of Ruins" which would be a picture of hell.

Abram is living between these, both physically and spiritually, and for a second time he calls on the name of the LORD. While living on earth, between the only two possible destinations of the after-life, Abram sets his eyes and his affections on the Lord.

Despite being a man of great wealth and power, his eyes are right where they should be – focused on Him. If we can just learn from faithful people like this, then our lives will be so much better off. All the money, fame, and power in the world aren't worth doodly squat when we come to the end of our lives.

And so if you think about it, it doesn't hold any real importance now either. If honoring the Lord is all that matters at the end of our lives, and we don't know what moment will be the end of our life, then honoring Him is all that matters throughout our lives.

Think it through... any one of us could die as we leave here today. If the only thing of true value is our walk with the Lord at that moment, then it is the only thing of true value at any moment, because any moment could be our last moment. It's so simple to see, but most people never really see it.

II. If You go Right, I will go Left

When I was young, I heard about a town that had only two cars in it. This was when automobiles were just invented and there were no established road signs of any kind and even roads didn't really exist. Wherever the wagons went is where cars went. Despite having the entire town to drive in with only one other car on the road, the two cars had a head-on accident.

It seems funny now, but it's kind of the same things as walking down the sidewalk and getting into a "which way do I go" when running into someone else. You step right and he steps left and you're both still in each other's way. Then you step left and he steps right and the same thing happens again.

Another funny example is something I saw on TV just a couple weeks ago. I was watching a news story about the delivery people in New York who ride their bikes making local deliveries. Kevin Bacon did a movie about them called Quicksilver back in the 80s.

The guy in the story said that when he's going by a crosswalk, if a person starts doing what he called "the dance" he knew they would have an accident. If the person would just stop until he passed, things would go ok, but if not, then there would be trouble.

Abram and his nephew Lot are going to face "the dance" in the next few verses and we'll see how it turns out –

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

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.

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.

Abram isn't the only one who has flocks, servants, and property. Lot has also been blessed with a lot too. In fact, together they've got so much

between the two of them that living together isn't an option anymore. Depending on the time of the year and where they are living, there simply isn't enough grass to feed all the animals.

And so the dance begins. Lot and Abram are probably close to home and enjoying life, but their servants are out in the field. There's no real division of property and so whoever gets to a nice spot first gets the claim. And if they come to the same field from different directions, they will both claim they got there first.

As unlikely as this story may seem, especially considering that more than 6 million people live there today, it's not that tough to imagine. First, whatever lands a person moves into need to be cleared and they need to be maintained.

And also, it says that the Canaanites and the Perizzites lived in the land too. Any land they'd cleared would be land they claimed and Abram and Lot would do their best to not interfere with them. These people moved there before they did and would have established communities and more people than them.

And so they face the dance. The question is, will they both stand still, will one dance and the other hold fast, or will there be more trouble. Because they are relatives, we can only hope they get along and don't side with their own servants...

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.

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.*"

Abram graciously stands fast and calms the situation deferring to his nephew Lot. He is the head of the clan because he is the son of Terah. But this is a good indication of something I said a few sermons ago.

Lot was probably older than Abram. Abram's older brother Haran was 60 years older than he was and Lot was probably born even before Abram. So even though he's Lot's uncle, he's probably younger than him.

And so despite being the head of the clan he shows respect to the elder family member by offering the choice of resolving the matter. If Lot goes to the left, Abram will go right, and if Lot takes the right, Abram will go left.

In these verses we can apply a few things to our own lives. The first is that there is an order in deferring to others in every culture and we need to learn that order and pay heed to it.

In the Bible we're taught to show respect in a variety of ways. We're to respect our parents, we're to respect those who are older than us, we're to respect those who are in positions of authority, and in fact in Philippians Paul says –

“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴ Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”

And how did Jesus Himself say it? “If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.”

Abram may have been the head of the family because of his birth position, but he understood that sometimes deferring to another is the wisest choice and the one which brings about peace.

Another thing we can learn from these verses is what Abram said, “We are kinsmen.” If you look over your dealings with others in this light, then in fact everyone on earth is your kinsman because we all have one father in Adam.

When we lift ourselves above another person, we are really only showing contempt for God who created each of us. And this is certainly why Paul told us to act in lowliness of mind and esteem others as better than ourselves. It's not easy, but it is right.

And finally, we can look back to what God already promised to Abram – that **his descendants** would possess the land. So why should he worry about the decision Lot made, whatever he decided wouldn't affect what God had already determined. And this is true for each of us.

God has already promised eternal life to anyone who has called on Jesus... it's done. He's already given us the sealing of the Spirit and the Lord is already building us a home that we can rest in.

Just as Abram knew that the land would be his, every one of us who has accepted Jesus has a better promise – one of glory that will never fade away. So why should we strive about temporary things that have no true importance? But strive we do...

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.

Lot probably didn't take long in making his decision. He looked toward the plain of the Jordan where the land was lush and well-watered. Unlike the other areas of the land which were highly dependent on the rain cycle, the plain of the Jordan received water and nutrients from the Jordan as it flowed south.

This would be especially true during the flooding season just like the Nile in Egypt, which Lot would have seen when they were there. Instead of worrying about famines, which sent them to Egypt in the first place, there would be a much better chance of having grass and crops even when there was no rain.

Kind of an interesting thought about this verse and one which I am pretty certain is correct, some scholars have taken the words "like the Garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt" ke-gan Yehovah ke-eretz Mizrayim" not as two comparisons, but one. In other words, this is the spot where the Garden of the Lord was and the land of Egypt is being compared to it.

Having a Hebrew scholar on our staff at Church on the Beach, I checked with him and he verified that this is a possible translation based on other precedents set in the Bible.

Let's stand back and think about it. Adam was created and then was placed in the Garden of Eden. When he disobeyed, he was sent east of Eden and Cain went further east, to the land of Nod. After the flood, the same area that Cain went to is where Nimrod went.

But God called Abram back to the place where the Garden of Eden was and this is the same land where God's presence dwelt in the Temple and where Jesus walked. And it is the same place which will look very similar to this period again in the millennial reign of Christ according to Ezekiel chapter 47.

Let's take a minute and read those verses –

¹ Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and there was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east, for the front of the temple faced east; the water was flowing from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar. ² He brought me out by way of the north gate, and led me around on the outside to the outer gateway that faces east; and there was water, running out on the right side. ³ And when the man went out to the east with the line in his hand, he measured one thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the water *came up to my* ankles. ⁴ Again he measured one thousand and brought me through the waters; the water *came up to my* knees. Again he measured one thousand and brought me through; the water *came up to my* waist. ⁵ Again he measured one thousand, *and it was* a river that I could not cross; for the water was too deep, water in which one must swim, a river that could not be crossed. ⁶ He said to me, "Son of man, have you seen *this?*" Then he brought me and returned me to the bank of the river. ⁷ When I returned, there, along the bank of the river, *were* very many trees on one side and the other. ⁸ Then he said to me: "This water flows toward the eastern region, goes down into the valley, and enters the sea. *When it* reaches the sea, *its* waters are healed. ⁹ And it shall be *that* every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live. There will be a very great

multitude of fish, because these waters go there; for they will be healed, and everything will live wherever the river goes. ¹⁰ It shall be *that* fishermen will stand by it from En Gedi to En Eglaim; they will be *places* for spreading their nets. Their fish will be of the same kinds as the fish of the Great Sea, exceedingly many. ¹¹ But its swamps and marshes will not be healed; they will be given over to salt. ¹² Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all *kinds of* trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine.”

The Land of Israel is where all things started and it is the place where all things will find their completion. No wonder the whole world has and will continue to covet this land and to come against it. It is where the Lord dwells and where His favored people live.

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.

Back to our story –

Unfortunately for Lot, he didn't pay attention to the lessons of the past. Mixing with the ungodly is what brought about the Flood of Noah, and the world didn't yet have the words of Paul that said, “Do not be deceived: “Evil company corrupts good habits.”

In the chapters ahead, we're going to see where Lot's wrong choice of moving into the land of Sodom would leave him in very sad straits and which would even cost him the life of his wife.

Again, we have a valuable lesson in these verses for each of us. We're told by James, “Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

Lot moved to Sodom and dwelt among those who worked in wickedness. He may have maintained his own righteousness, but it affected his life and his family in the same negative way that living like this will affect your own life and family. In the end, he thought he would find paradise, but instead he found hell.

We all have choices to like this to make and ultimately, the sad state of affairs we find ourselves in is more than usually brought on by our own bad decisions.

III. Read Your Bible More than Once

This is our final thought for the day and I'm going to tie in to it your responsibility as a Christian in a way which will, I hope, convict you of the thing you need to do in order to keep from making the same mistakes as Lot and so many others in the Bible.

You may know that I traveled around the country in 2010 and I preached at every capital in the US. When I did, I made a challenge to anyone following me to read their Bible for 30 minutes a day. God gives you a similar challenge as well, and we can see it in the following verses –

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;

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

In chapter 12, we read this – “Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites *were* then in the land. ⁷ Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your descendants I will give this land.” And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

God has now twice promised the land to Abram. The Lord is repeating His word to him to remind him about what he had already been told.

Let me ask you, who here has read the book of Philippians at least once? Has anyone read it more than once? Now, can anyone here quote Philippians 4:6, 7? Let me give you the first four words of it – Be anxious for nothing. Can you quote the rest? Let me just quote it for you...

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Why did God remind Abram of the promise? Because he wanted him to remember it! Why should we read the Bible more than once, more than twice, even every day of our life? Because God wants us to know it and remember it!

In fact, long before Jesus came, when the people had only the Law of Moses, only the first five books of the Bible, God said this to the people of Israel in Deuteronomy 6 –

⁴“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD *is* one! ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. ⁶“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

At the time when there were only 5 books in the Bible, God asked them to meditate on it day and night and during every activity that they were engaged in. How much more should we be meditating on the same word now that we have 61 more books than they had!

The Bible tells us of Jesus and Jesus reveals the Father to us. I could say this a thousand times and it wouldn't be enough. The only way to know God intimately is through His word. If you're relying on the Holy Spirit to reveal

God to you, guess what – He has. He breathed out the Bible through His prophets... for you.

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.

¹⁷ Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you.”

There are two things going on in this promise to Abram. The first is that the land is being given to him and his descendants and the second is that his descendants will be like the dust of the earth in number. These two promises are connected, but they are different.

The promise of the land to his descendants is a physical promise, not a spiritual one. It is a promise to the physical descendants of Abraham – not to the church. This has become evident, not only from the Bible, but in history too. And the history confirms the precept. When Israel was exiled, the land laid fallow. Only when the people of Israel returned has the land again become usable.

The land promise which is made to Abraham is reiterated to his son Isaac and then his son Jacob. We are not physical descendants of Isaac or Jacob. On the other hand, the promise of a multitude of descendants is a promise concerning all people of faith in the work of Jesus. It is not a physical right, but a spiritual one.

The Bible confirms the precept in both the book of Romans and the book of Galatians. It is through faith that one becomes Abraham’s seed. In Romans, Paul says, “For the promise that he would be the heir of the world *was* not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.”

To be an heir of the land, one is born physically into the people of Israel, but to be an heir of the promises of God which lead to eternal life, one must be born spiritually through faith and the imputed righteousness of God through Christ Jesus.

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.

This brings us to the last verse of chapter 13. Abram walked throughout the length and breadth of the land and eventually pitched his tent by the terebinth trees of Mamre at the ancient city of Hebron. Hebron exists even to this day and it's the spot where Abraham's tomb is located.

In this area, he built an altar. This "altar" in Hebrew is a place of sacrifice. Abram is the patriarch of the family and so the responsibility for sacrificing belongs to him. This will continue up until the time of Moses when corporate sacrifices for the people of Israel are instituted under the clan of the Levites.

As God directs the nations and the people of the earth, His purposes are being worked out for all of us. Abram sacrificed to the Lord in anticipation of the coming Redeemer. Since Christ came, the sacrifices are done. We now have His cross as our point of meeting with the Creator. Let me explain how Jesus' life and death are significant to you...

The Lord's Promise to Abram

Abram went up from Egypt with all that he had
And his nephew Lot was with him too
From the land of Egypt many goods they did add
And they came to the South and kept on passing through
And he journeyed to Bethel where his tent had been before
To the place of the altar between Bethel and Ai
And there he called on the Lord, a duty he wouldn't ignore
Abram was a man of faith, and he was a faithful guy
Lot was with him and he had flocks, herds, and tents
And the land couldn't support them both they had so much stuff
And so fighting resulted, some very trying events
They realized the land where they were just wasn't enough
The Canaanites and Perizzites, they dwelt in the land
Abram had to tread carefully to avoid their fighting hand

Then Abram said to Lot, let us not live in strife
And between our herdsmen, let there be peace
For we are brethren, let us protect each other's life
Let us separate so that this fighting will cease
The whole land is before you, is it not?
Please separate from me, my handsome nephew Lot
If you take the left, why then I'll go to the right
If you take the right, then to the left I will go
Come nephew, let this not result in a fight
Let us part amicably, let it be so

Lot lifted his eyes and favored the Jordan's plain
The beautiful spot, the Garden of the Lord
It was like the land of Egypt, that didn't need the rain
It was watered from the river, when he saw it he was floored
And so they separated from each other, to the east went Lot
And Abram dwelt in Canaan, he really loved the spot
And the Lord said to Abram after Lot separated from him
Lift now your eyes north, south, east, and west
This land I give you forever, you will fill it to the brim
As the dust of the earth they will be, see how you are blessed
If a man could number the earth's dust
Then your descendants could also be counted too
This is a sure promise, one you can trust
It is a vow from your Creator to you

Arise and walk through the land, up and down and side to side
I'm giving to you everything that you have eyed

And so Abram moved his tent to the place of Mamre's trees
They are in Hebron which is still there today
And he built an altar to the Lord, an offering to please
And there in Hebron is where he did stay

Hallelujah and amen...