

When the Russian comedian Yakov Smirnoff immigrated to the United States... he said that the thing he loved most about America was the grocery stores. ... He said,

"I'll never forget walking down one of the aisles and seeing powdered milk; just add water and you get milk. Right next to it was powdered orange juice; just add water and you get orange juice. Then I saw baby powder, and I thought to myself, What a country!"

Here in America we certainly live in an instant society. An article in *The Boston Globe* claims that our "demand for instant results is seeping into every corner of our lives." The need for instant gratification is not new... but our expectation of "instant" has become faster. The article states:

Retailers are jumping into same-day delivery services. Smartphone apps eliminate the wait for a cab, a date, or a table at a hot restaurant. Movies and TV shows begin streaming in seconds. But experts caution that instant gratification comes at a price: It's making us less patient ...

We've come to expect things so quickly that researchers found people can't wait more than a few seconds for a video to load. One researcher examined the viewing habits of 6.7 million internet users. How long were subjects willing to be patient? Two seconds. After that they started abandoning the site. ... After five seconds... the abandonment rate is 25 percent. ... When you get to 10 seconds... half are gone."

When Timex (the watch company) asked people how long they would wait before taking action in a wide variety of situations, researchers discovered that we'll consent to wait only:

- thirteen seconds before we honk at a car in front of us that's stopped at a green light;

- twenty-six seconds before we shush people who are talking in a movie theater;
- twenty-six seconds before we take the seat of someone who's walked away;
- forty-five seconds before we ask someone who's talking too loud on a cell phone to "keep it down";
- thirteen minutes for a table at a restaurant;
- twenty minutes for a blind date to show up before we leave;
- and twenty minutes for the last person to show up for Thanksgiving dinner before we dig in.

Imagine yourself in the following situation: God says that if you move out of your house... He is going to give you a new house that is all yours... free and clear. ... So you find a house that is for rent and settle in... waiting for the day when it is yours. ... Then comes the shocker — it is not going to actually belong to your family for another **four hundred years**... and for most of that time... you will not live in it.

This is comparable to what happened to Abram... but it is not unique in history. Consider the promise of Christ's return... now some two thousand years anticipated at any moment. ... Yet Peter reminds us that the Lord is not slow as some understand slowness... for with the Lord... a day is like a thousand years... and a thousand years like a day (2 Peter 3:8-9). And we have all seen that the timetable for Christ's return... has eluded the church's expectations for more than two thousand years.

It is important for us to realize that God has no obligation to live up to our expectations... for how (or when) He will work in history... or in our lives. ... His ways are not our ways... and His plans are often obscured from our sight.

When Elisabeth Elliot and Rachel Saint began praying for the Auca Indians... it probably ***never*** occurred to them that their prayers would only be answered... through the sacrifice of their husbands' lives. On January 8 1956... 28-year-old American missionary Jim Elliot... and fellow missionary Nate Saint were martyred... along with two missionary partners and friends. ... Jim Elliot left behind his young wife (Elisabeth)... and their 10-month-old daughter Valerie.

These four men were surrounded and killed when they landed their plane on a sandbar next to a river... in order to meet the Huaorani (or "Auca") Indians... a small and fierce unreached people in the jungle... and tell them about Jesus. Only later through other brave efforts... the Auca Indians were reached for Christ.

But who would expect to pay such a price? Though God often may not do things according to our expectations... we must always be prepared to acknowledge that God's way is the best way.

Not only do God's plans often involve difficulties that we do not expect... they often involve a different time frame than what we expect. ... A life of faith waits for God. It knows that God is in control... and it can wait for God's best... But those who walk by sight... act in haste. They want to grab the first opportunity that seems good and desirable – even though

seizing the opportunity involves ignoring... or minimizing various signs of evil.)

Walking by sight - verses walking by faith... is the lesson that we come to this morning in our study through Genesis. We will be looking at a contrast of waiting for God's promised blessing with the eyes of faith (a constant knowing that God is in control) – verses expediently taking hold of what is immediately before us... in walking by sight (which aggressively thinks that "God only helps those who help themselves.") We will find this contrast today through the lives of Abram and his nephew Lot.

Throughout Scripture... we find the Holy Spirit frequently brings together two men of widely different character... and placing them side by side (in comparison)... so that we would not miss the lessons they would teach us. Abel and Cain... Moses and Aaron... Samuel and Saul... David and Solomon... are well known examples of this principle.

And this is what we find in today's passage. In almost every respect Lot compares unfavorably with Abram. ... Abram walked by faith... Lot walked by sight. ... Abram was generous and magnanimous... Lot was greedy and worldly. ... Abram looked for a city whose builder and maker was God... Lot made his home in Sodom (a wicked city that was built by man... and destroyed by God.) ... Abram was the father of all who believe. Lot was father of those who choose to walk by sight... and end up living with... and... as part of the world.

In the last two previous sermons we followed Abraham from Ur of Chaldea... to Haran... and from Haran... to Canaan. ... We saw that after

he had arrived in the land to which God called him... a famine arose... and his faith failed him in the hour of crisis. ... Abraham... accompanied by Lot... sought refuge in Egypt. ... The famine was a test of faith which Abraham failed miserably. ... And while in Egypt... Abraham failed even more... by lying about Sarah. ... Egypt only encouraged poor conduct in Abraham. ... Abram was like us... (a paradoxical mixture of self-centered reliance and trust in God.) ... And when we are outside the will of God... our conduct (like his) will become more and more deficient in holiness. It spirals downward.

But (at the end of our passage last week)... we saw that God... in His grace and mercy... rescued Abram. After the disaster of Egypt... Abram headed back home to Bethel.

Failure and disaster can make or break us. (It can make us tender or harder toward the Lord.) ... In Abram's case... he drew closer to the Lord.

Like Abram... you and I will have our faith tested. And it is tested in the same three ways: 1) through impossible looking circumstances that we face; 2) through difficult people; and 3) through the way we handle our possessions.

In our previous passage... Abraham had failed these first two kinds of tests: his test of circumstances (how he responded to the famine as a challenge to God's promise)... and his test with people (what Pharaoh might do to him.) Today he will be tested again. This test will involve the third type - possessions. This time we will see Abram pass his test with

great success. (Apparently... his prior two failures made Abram more tender toward the Lord... instead of harder)

Genesis 13:1-4

God often uses our trials and troubles to drive us back to the will of God. ... Note that Abram returned to God and the promised land. ... He could have returned to Ur of the Chaldees... or to Haran... or even to some other country and land. ... Unquestionably... he and Sarah were discouraged and downcast... feeling deep guilt... shame... and embarrassment. ... Every believer who is weak in faith and wanders off needs to repent and return to God.

Abram left Egypt... chastened and silent. ... His journey from Egypt... to the Negev... to Bethel... was apparently a pilgrimage of repentance... through which he desired to recapture his previous walk with God... Abram ultimately returned to the altar... where he first called on the name of the Lord... He returned to where he had been at his peak (spiritually.)

Abram (once again) "called upon the name of the Lord." He renewed his lapsed obedience. ... He proclaimed that Yahweh was Lord... like he did before... in dark... pagan Canaan. The sin and fiasco of Egypt was now behind Abram. This was a fresh start.

Genesis 13:5-7

Abram treated Lot like a son. Lot was Abram's nephew. When Lot's father (Haran)... died... Abram took Lot in... and reared him... just as he would his own son. ... But as we are about to see... Lot paid little attention to

spiritual matters. ... This is what this passage is all about. ... It gives us a picture of a carnal... worldly believer who has a selfish faith – verses a spiritual believer... who has an unselfish faith.

The land of Canaan had a limited number of water sources... as well as limited grazing areas. ... The Canaanites and the Perizzites had their herds that were already there using those already limited resources. It is not surprising... then... that the needs of Abram and Lot presented an even greater problem to what already existed. ... Neither Abram... Lot... or the Canaanites and Perizzites had title to the land. Titles and land deeds did not exist at that time... The only law that existed was you can use whatever spot you can find that is currently unoccupied. Oh yeah... there may have been one other (unwritten) law – the law of power and might. If you already have a spot for grazing and water... and someone stronger than you comes along and wants it... they will challenge you for it. ... This is probably what prompted the disputes between Abram's servants and Lot's herdsmen.

Genesis 13:8-9

It took a big man to tell Lot this. ... In other words... Abram is saying that Lot could choose what he wanted and Abram would take what was left. ... The proposal made by Abram to his nephew was exceedingly generous. It was a magnanimous offer by Abraham... and such a gracious courtesy! Abraham gives Lot first choice of the land.

Abraham could have insisted upon his rights here — he had seniority... and had taken care of Lot. ...The reason Lot had his wealth was because of Abram. ... But Abraham gives Lot first choice.

During his previous two tests... Abram was consumed with his own survival. ... In Egypt he had trusted nothing but his own shrewdness. ... While in Egypt... Abram thought first about himself. ... But when he returned to his altar in Canaan... he put God first... and others next. Abram is so remarkably different.

How had Abram ascended to such heights? ... Abram had renewed his faith. ... Once again... he believed God's word... the very word upon which he had rested everything. ... God had said... "*To your offspring I will give this land*" (12:7) — and therefore Abram knew that even if he gave the land away a thousand times... it would go to his descendants. ... By his faith... Abram's vision of the unseen... was renewed. Abram was not living by sight. ... Abram's renewed faith had made all the difference! ... Abram had learned his lesson about the danger of trusting in the physical circumstances of life... as opposed to trusting God. He even took the risk of being cheated!

Fellow believers... when we truly believe the promises that are ours in Christ... (when we truly understand and believe that we are seated ***right now*** in Him... in the heavenly places... when we understand that all things are ***ours*** in Christ)... we will cease our grasping. ... We will place less of our energies in asserting ourselves... and scrambling for our rights... and cutting in before other people... so as to get the best places for ourselves. ... Instead we too (like Abram here)... will leave God to order our steps (and all our ways)... And do you know what? ... Our souls will be wrapped in perfect peace.

Abram gave up a chance for the land... eventually to gain the land. ... David gave up the chance to be king by refusing to kill Saul twice when he had the chance... He trusted in God's timing and God's ways... and he eventually gained the throne. ... Christ gave up a chance for all of the worlds kingdoms. Instead... He waited for God's timing and way. He will ultimately gain all the kingdoms.

When preparing ourselves for our role in God's plan or to receive God's blessing... it is often counterproductive to take the easy way to the goal. It can be disastrous to simply seize what lies before us.

Take a look (now) at Lot...

Genesis 13:10-13

Selfishly, Lot "*lifted up his eyes*" to look for the best region of the land. Lot jumped at the chance to get the best region. The idea is that he ***immediately*** *lifted up his eyes*... and began to survey the land to see where the most watered and fertile region was. ... This should ***not*** have been the first thing he did... but it was. ... Lot was selfish and greedy.

Why do I say this? ... Because he should have "*lifted up his eyes*" to Abram... the man of God... and the head of the family. Lot should have insisted that Abram choose first. ... But Lot simply "*lifted up his eyes*" and immediately began to survey the land... looking for the very best land to claim. ... Without any acknowledgment of Abram's position and contribution to his life... Lot only wanted the very best for himself.

Lot's "lifting up his eyes" was the commencement... (outwardly)... at least... of a decline which ended in the utmost shame. ... The eye-gate is one of the avenues through which temptations assail the soul:

1 John 2:16 (ESV)

For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.

As believers... walking by sight... is the cause of most of our failures and sorrows. ... It has been this way... since the beginning of time:

Genesis 3:6 (ESV)

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

Consider also... the confession of Achan:

Joshua 7:21 (ESV)

when I saw among the spoil a beautiful cloak from Shinar, and 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels, then I coveted them and took them. And see, they are hidden in the earth inside my tent, with the silver underneath."

How significant are the closing words of verse 10 in our passage today... *And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar...* This shows us... how much Lot was still attached to "Egypt" in *heart*. It shows us *what* it was that His eyes dwelt upon.

To the worldly eye of Lot... all the plain appeared "*well watered and as the garden of the Lord*"... but to the spiritual eye of faith... something else was

seen. In addition to the well-watered land... the plain was populated by those who were "exceedingly wicked sinners before the Lord."

Lot is really condemned in his choosing... because the chief guide... was his material prosperity. ... (LISTEN!)... It is not necessarily evil to buy your gas or groceries where the price is the lowest. ... It is not necessarily wrong to buy farm land which is the most fertile. ... Choosing something because it is more economical... is not necessarily evil. ... That is not the condemnation we make of Lot here.

The condemnation of Lot... is because **material advantage**... was all that guided him. He never considered anything else. He was not concerned about spiritual or moral perils (such as Sodom). It was not food for the soul that guided his choice... but food for his sheep and cattle. It was not fellowship with the saints or with God that guided his choice... but fortune in his pocket. ... Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God and His righteousness ought to regulate our every decision.

The guide Lot used to make his choice is... (unfortunately)... the guide that most people still use today in making important choices. ... No wonder we have so many shipwrecked lives in society... and among believers!

Lot thought he was getting the best apple on the tree... but it was all full of worms. ... The plain of Jordan looked so inviting. But it was greatly contaminated by Sodom which was an extremely wicked place. ... God would later have to run Lot out of Sodom so He could destroy the wicked place. ... When that happened... Lot lost everything he thought that he gained... and all the possessions he took there with him... including his

wife who turned into a pillar of salt. Lot dies destitute in a cave (Genesis 19:30.) What had Lot gained...? ... NOTHING!

When you ignore moral and spiritual values and only look at material values when making your choice... you will end up losing materially... morally... and spiritually. ... The history of Lot is living proof of the disaster of ignoring moral and spiritual values when making a choice.

First Lot lifted his eyes and saw a desirable land... then he left and pitched his tent near Sodom. In the next chapter (14:12) we will see that Lot lived in the city of Sodom. By the time we get to Genesis 19... we will see that he had become so much a part of this wicked city... that he was one of its leaders. He sat at the gate... as an elder. His two daughters had married sodomite men. ... Like leprosy... sin has a way of beginning small (from purposely placing your eyes on something... "*Hey... I'm just looking*"... all the way to a dreadful end.

Lot is our example that we must never be misled by appearance... by the lust of the eyes... and by what looks good. ... All that glitters is not gold. And there is far more to life than the physical and material... far more than the bright lights... pleasures... possessions... positions... and wealth of this world. ... He is also a warning to any believer who tries to live as close to sin as they can. Soon it will envelope you.

Genesis 13:14-18

Abram had not lost a thing. ... Those rolling grasslands (greedily seized by Lot) were still his... every stick and stone. ... The promises of God were not to be thwarted by the unselfishness of Abram... and the materialism of Lot.

God's arithmetic is not like ours. According to us... if we subtract one from one we have nothing. ... But... according to God... if we subtract one from one we still have everything.

Matthew 19:29 (ESV)

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.

That is God's arithmetic!

In verse 17... God told Abram to arise and walk through the entire land that God was giving to him. "*Lift your eyes and look*" for Abram was followed by God's command to "*Lift up your feet and walk.*" ... In other words: "*Claim your inheritance by faith, Abram!*"

The earliest Jewish commentaries point out that taking a walk around a certain property was part of making a deal to acquire that property. It was a symbolic act that signified legal acquisition. ... So... as Abram walked the land... God's great promises must have coursed through his veins. He believed. He was seeing the unseen. ... Abram took it all into his heart. Whether he looked up at the stars... or down at the dust... he was assured that he would be the father of a great nation. ... His tour of the land was a victory tour. He worshiped God.

Sometimes you and I need a victory tour around the promises of God. We need to walk the land by looking over His promises to us that are contained in Scripture.

Hardly any other chapter in the Bible portrays the reality of faith so marvelously. Here was the patriarch as a genuine believer in and worshiper

of the Lord—one whose faith functioned in the midst of conflict. Lot's choice was self-seeking and self-gratifying. Such a choice was dangerous and short-lived... for all was not as it appeared to be on the surface. ... It would take spiritual discernment... not physical sight... to see what was wrong with the place.

Abram... on the other hand... walking by faith... generously gave up the choice land to Lot. (LISTEN!)... Generosity is the evidence of a living faith... Faith does not selfishly seek its own desires... Instead it is self-denying and magnanimous.

Since Abram was trusting the Lord... he was not selfish. He had learned that it was not by his own plan... or by jealously guarding what was his... that he would come into his possessions. ... He acted righteously and generously.

Satan wants to use circumstances... people... and things... to tempt you... and bring out the worst in you. ... But God also wants to use those very same elements... to test you... and bring out the best in you. Abraham failed the first two tests because he resorted to faith in man's wisdom... instead of faith in God's Word. ... But he passed the third test with great distinction... because he believed God was in control.