

26 JULY 2020 – 9AM CHURCH ONLINE

KINGS & NATIONS [GENESIS 13-14]

Introduction

I don't know about you, but this morning's passage is pretty juicy isn't it? Abram goes from a man who passes off his wife as his sister, to Braveheart-like warrior who unleashes justice upon an international coalition of oppressive armed forces. It makes for some pretty gripping reading!

Now with two chapters, there is a lot of ground to cover this morning, but perhaps the most useful thing we see in the examples of Lot and Abraham is how God wants us to walk by faith and not by sight. Indeed, this is a prevalent theme in Genesis 12-25. In the words of Hebrews 11:1-2, **Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.** Or as 2 Corinthians 5:7 says, **for we walk by faith and not by sight.** To see this and what it means for us, I want to consider in turn Lot, Abraham, Jesus and then us.

1. Lot – By Sight, Not By Faith

If Abram is an example of what it is to walk by faith and not by sight in these chapters, then Lot at this stage is an example of the opposite.

You'll recall from verses 8-9 that Abram gives Lot the opportunity to take his pick of the land given the tension arising from their growing wealth. This was a very gracious offer from Abram would could have easily pulled rank. What does Lot do? Let me read again from verse 10 –

Lot looked around and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan toward Zoar was well watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.)¹¹ So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company:¹² Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom.¹³ Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord.

Lot walks by sight, not by faith. He moves east toward the outer reaches of the promised land because it looks pleasing to the eye – the plain was fertile and offered strong economic prospects. Never mind that he was moving away from the geographic centre of God's promises, never mind that he was becoming entangled with a city in open rebellion against the Lord, Lot walked by sight.

In so doing, Lot followed in the footsteps of Eve, of whom it is said in Genesis 3:6, **When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.**

Eve's catastrophic act of disobedience was not fuelled by faith but by sight. She knew that God had said not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, she knew that God had said the punishment for such an act would be certain death, but tempted by the serpent she went with what appealed to the eye over and above what God had decreed. She walked by sight and not by faith.

The response of Lot and Eve is lamentable but understandable isn't it? It is much easier to walk by sight, or by feelings, rather than by faith in what God has promised. Is this true of you? Perhaps real hardship has come into your life – serious illness, unemployment, relational breakdown – and you wonder how on earth God could let this happen to you. You begin to disbelieve that God really is good, that God really is loving, that God really does have a plan for your life. Instead of walking by faith in what God has declared at the cross, that he really does love you and really is good, you give priority to what you see and feel and conclude that God is not for you, but against you.

Or perhaps the opposite has happened to you. Far from hardship coming your way, like Lot you've come into prosperity, but you've become so enamoured by your wealth that you're now entangled in it. You've begun to prioritise the treasures that you do see over the infinitely greater treasures that you *don't* see. You're prepared to uproot the kids from their church community in pursuit of that promotion. You're ready to trade in time with God in order to secure that sale. Like Lot, you convince yourself that you'll put boundaries down, after all, Lot only pitched his tents *outside* Sodom. But in the end, when you walk by sight and not by faith, you become compromised, after all, look where Lot ends up by the time we reach 14:12 – he's now living in Sodom.

2. Abram – By Faith, Not By Sight

Let's now turn to consider the example of Abram. Though in Egypt, Abram has resorted to manipulating and manoeuvring so as to try and secure God's promises, we see here that he has reverted back to faithful trust in God. Faced with the strain on resources with Lot, he open-handedly and peaceably allows Lot to choose what would suit him. Abram knows that he doesn't need to grasp at the promises of God, that he doesn't need to manipulate or manoeuvre, that God is going to keep good on his promises whatever Lot decides.

Yet it is in chapter 14 that Abram's faith really shines. To help us appreciate how brightly it shines, a bleak backdrop is painted for us in verses 1-12. Behind all the strange names and unknown locations, is an international coalition of Kings that had been oppressing the peoples of the Transjordan, the Sinai and Dead Sea regions. Notably the first king listed in this coalition is the king of Shinar, aka Babylon. In other words it is an overwhelming and international military force that abducts Lot and which Abram finds himself up against.

At this point an understandable response from Abram might have been one of neutrality, treaty or retreat. Yet on hearing the news, Abram resembles less the Egyptian wife swapper and more Liam Neeson in *Taken*, or Mel Gibson in *Braveheart*. In the face of overwhelming military odds, he gazes north and utters ominously, "Not today." He knew these enemies forces would soon regret the day they ever laid hands on Lot and set foot in Canaan. Abram saddles up, rallies the boys, unsheathes the sword, and the rest is history.

What prompted such courageous action? Let me read God's promise to Abram from 13:14, **The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. ¹⁵ All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever...¹⁷ Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you."**

Though no one yet recognised it, Abram knew that by rights he was the God appointed ruler of Canaan. Though he was yet to possess a kingdom, Abram knew that he was God's king in the land. As King of the land, Abram would not sit idly by whilst serious injustice and violent border incursion had taken place, so he responds to enforce justice in the land and bring rescue to the captives.

No doubt Abram was additionally emboldened by God's promise in Genesis 12:3, **I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse.** Having brutalised Abram's relative, these raiding forces unwittingly find themselves on the receiving end of God's fury. And it is indeed God whom we see at work. Notice that the emphasis in verses 13-16 is not on Abram's swordsmanship or military strategy (all we are told is that he simply divided the men!), but rather is on the unlikely outcome that a mere force of 318 were able to enact a devastating defeat on the enemy. This victory was clearly the work of God.

Knowing what was his by God given right, Abram walks by faith and not by sight. So should we. He lived like God's king even though he didn't yet look like or feel like God's King.

3. Jesus – By mercy & not by merit

Now we don't have time this morning to get into Melchizedek, I'll refer you to the study notes for week 2 for that. But I want to consider how Abram's example this morning points beyond himself and on to Jesus, the true King of the Promised Land.

Consider how undeserving Lot was of Abram's assistance and how potentially costly Abram's decision was to go and rescue him. Lot spurned Abram and chose the choice land. Not only so but he made the incredibly foolish decision of entangling himself with the city of Sodom which was in rebellion against God. If anyone was undeserving of Abram's assistance, if anyone should have been left to their own devices, it was Lot. Yet not only does Abram go to rescue Lot, he does so in the face of overwhelming military odds, in the face of a potentially large and devastating cost.

Yet as Abram walked by faith and not by sight, his example points us forward to Jesus doesn't it? If anyone was undeserving of God's favour it was us in our sin. We walked away from God, we choose to dwell in the midst of iniquity rather than be with Him. In sin we were under God's rightful judgement and in a mess of our own choosing. Yet how did Jesus respond? Did he stand idly by? Did he leave us to our own devices? No, he mounted up to come and rescue us. Wearing not a crown of gold, but of thorns. Receiving not the adulation of the crowds but their mockery. Receiving not the submission of soldiers, but their beating. Facing not just an international coalition of kings, but the weight sin and evil. Jesus' decision was costly, but in love he rampaged sin and death to rescue us.

Like Abram, Jesus operated by mercy, not by merit. He didn't treat us as our sins deserve. As a result we have found forgiveness in Him and have become part of God's covenant people – heirs of the promises made to Abram. God's promised blessing to the nations through Abram has come to us and one day we will inherit God's Promised Land in eternity. Because of Jesus we have been redeemed from being enemies to heirs, rebels to royals, criminals to children.

4. Us – By Rights, Not by Sight

So, if all this is true of us in Christ, the call to us this morning is to live by faith not by sight. To put it differently, by rights not by sight. Recall Abram's example, he knew that by virtue of God's promise he was by right the ruler of Canaan and acted accordingly. This was something he knew not by sight, but by faith. Though to nobody else was he recognisably the ruler of Canaan, he walked by faith in what he knew to be true. By virtue of God's promise, he knew what was his by *right*.

And so, it should be with us. We may feel ordinary, our circumstances may indeed be difficult, nobody around us may be able to notice. But God has made us a promise in Christ that by faith we are sons and daughters of the King and heirs of his eternal kingdom. John 1:12 says, **Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the *right* to become children of God.** Of course, we do not deserve this, we deserve only judgement, but through his blood shed on the cross, Jesus purchased the right for us to know that we are children of God. He now calls us to walk by faith in this reality, or to walk by rights not by sight. How might we do this?

Just consider the way that Paul speaks to the church in Corinth who felt unable to mediate in disputes and bring peace in the church. Hear 1 Corinthians 6:2-3, **Or do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? ³ Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!** By sight we may feel as though we are unable to help resolve disputes around us and bring peace. But if by faith we understand that we will reign and rule with God in all eternity and so judge the angels, we know that with God's help we can live as mediators and peace-makers in the relationships around us.

Or consider 2 Corinthians 5:20, **We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.** By sight, we may work insignificant jobs or feel that there is not much consequential about us, but by faith God tells us that he has given us diplomatic privileges, that we represent him as his ambassadors. Though it may not be recognised in our secular society, by faith we know that there is not one square inch of our nation that God doesn't claim as his own, and accordingly, he calls all people everywhere to repent. By sight, it might feel like we are severely outnumbered and outdated as followers of Christ, but by faith we realise, that with King of Kings on our side that far from being outnumbered, whenever we walk into a room, it's an ambush.

Or consider these words from 2 Corinthians 5:6-8, **Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.**⁷ **For we live by faith, not by sight.**⁸ **We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.** By sight we may feel as though we are trapped in our ailing bodies and that our sicknesses or pains will be the end of us, but by faith we know that the best is yet to come, that death is not the end, and that one-day Jesus will raise us from our mortal bodies to inhabit our heavenly bodies and be with him forever.

By faith, along with Abram, we can look injustice in the eye and in God's power say, "not today". By faith we can stare our struggles with sin in the face and say "not today." By faith, even when we don't feel it, we can declare that in Christ we are God's beloved children, and that this is our privilege by blood-bought right! Let me pray as we seek to live by rights not by sight.