

Text: Genesis 13

Theme: Test of Plenty

Sermon delivered by Reverend Dele Agbelusi during All Age/Family Service on 20/09/2015 at 10.30am

In the concluding verses of Genesis 12 we have a picture of Abraham painted in a not so glowing colour. The great Abraham developed wobbly feet in the arena of **adversity**. Facing poverty can be a great test. His next text which is conducted while he is **in plenty** brings much hope. It shows that just as faith-filled good people are not always consistent, those who have tasted failure are very capable of beginning afresh by God's grace. Yesterday's stupidity should not dictate our present or future. God does.

Let us consider verses 1-4

'So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, with his wife and everything he had, and Lot went with him. Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold. From the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been earlier and where he had first built an altar. There Abram called on the name of the LORD.'

Abram retraced his steps and went back to where he met the Lord- to the place where he once worshipped the Lord when he erected an altar to His name. This is the model for repentance. This fact is re-echoed in the warning to the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2:4-5. *'Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first...'* Abraham was never tired of going back to Bethel because that is the place he finds forgiveness acceptance and affirmation. It is noteworthy that in Egypt, Abram had built no altars and there was no reference to calling on the name of the Lord. If we have gone wrong, like Abram we are to retrace our steps, go back to the place God met us and call upon his name. For Abraham, that was Bethel.

Verses 5-16. Test of Plenty

So, how will Abram fare in his next text that came as a result of his going to Egypt in the first place and thereby acquiring so much that he and Lot became so rich! It's Abraham's compromise and deceit that made him and Lot so rich that they could no longer live together. Verses 5-7: *'Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. And quarrelling arose between Abram's herdsmen and the herdsmen of Lot...'*

The land could not support both of them. Evidently the Canaanites and the Perizzites controlled most of Palestine, which meant that Abraham and Lot had to live in the neglected areas. That was no problem when they were middle class herdsmen, but now that they have moved up the ladder, they both needed more space. It is often the case that lack of money is the number one cause of arguments between husbands and wives. But here, the problem in the household of Abram is having too much money!

Here is a tale of two men- Abram and his nephew Lot, and two responses- faith and sight. Both men are now rich so much so that conflicts of interest have started to arise. What do you do when you can't get along? Sometimes the best thing you can do is simply go your separate ways. Why spend all your time fussing and fighting? In this case, the crucial question is, who's going to make the first move? It's precisely at this point that we see Abraham's greatness.

Abram could have played the senior partner card, call all the shots and grab the best looking land for himself. That is almost certainly what pre-Egypt Abram would have done. But now, it seems he has learnt his lesson.

First, he displays wisdom, v8-9 *So Abram said to Lot, "let's not have any quarrelling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and mine, for we are brothers. 'What is the point of having this unnecessary antagonism; it is doing no one any good.' Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left."*

Somebody's got to step in and stop this nonsense but it won't be Lot. He's too worried about getting the best land for himself. Even though Abraham had the right to choose first, he gives up his right in order to settle the conflict. He makes his appeal based on common kinship. "**For we are brothers.**" (v. 8) Most of our problems in the church would be solved if we would just remember those four little words.

Both Abram and Lot did some site surveying. But while Lot sees fertile land beyond Canaan and immediately wants it, Abram saw an arid and barren land, probably because of the recent famine. But when we look at what God wants us to see and what He is promising us, what seems paltry would be the best for us. Abram demonstrated deep trust in God for he was willing to leave the consequences to Him. That's the secret. He did not allow anxiety to eat away at him, 'If I do this then this may happen, or if I do that who knows what will take place?' No, he shows a godly contentment, he is going to let God be God and leave the outcome to him. And, that is real trust, isn't it?

And although God is no man's debtor, he does reward that kind of faith as we see in verses 14- 17 *The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you."*

Not only are the original promises of chapter 12 reiterated, note the threefold 'your offspring', they are also amplified '*all the land that is seen will be given to him for ever.*' Abram *begins* with faith and ends with *seeing* the tangible tokens of God's blessings. Do you see what happens as we trust God? We go deeper and deeper into his blessings.

Abram doesn't seek a *new* blessing, a new promise, he simply receives the same blessing and promise but more wonderfully applied. And so it is with us and the Lord Jesus Christ. We are not to go seeking blessings beyond Jesus; we can't for there aren't any. What we need to do is to go deeper into the blessings we already have in him, the answers to prayer made in the name of the Lord Jesus, the peace he offers which passes all understanding, the new lives made as we share the gospel with people, as well as enjoying the richness of fellowship as we encounter Christ in one another as we meet like this. Yes, faith does have its rewards in the here and now.

Abram would be much encouraged by God's affirmation. If Abram was feeling a bit cheated, a bit discouraged here was a wonderful opportunity for God to remind Abram of the promise. All of this land will belong to Abram and his descendants. Abram has done the right thing. He made the right choices. And his nephew took advantage of it, and made a land grab. This is the way it is with us too. It often seems that in this world, it truly does happen according to the saying, "The nice guy finishes last." And while that may be true in the eyes of the world, in God's eyes, things are completely different. What appears to be attractive, popular, and even fun can soon become a snare. This is the test of plenty, and Abram passed this test glowingly. The point is that believers in Christ are not to be led by sight- the things that we see only - but our decisions should be based on the word of God which is received by faith. From time to time we should ask the question: 'what will be the wise thing to do? What will help me and others in my spiritual walk and what will glorify Christ?'

Something to say about Lot and his choice of Sodom over Canaan

So, Lot could choose any part of the Promised Land. North, South, East, West-it didn't matter. It's like winning the coin toss. The choice was his. The Bible makes it painfully clear what was motivating his decision: "Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the Lord" (v. 10). It seemed to Lot that the Jordan valley was like the Eden come to life before his very eyes. As he gazed, he saw lush fields for his cattle, plenty of room for vineyards, vast open areas for homesteading, and above all else, he saw that there was plenty of water. Water! That was as precious those days like an oil field today! For centuries men have fought and died for access to fresh water in the Holy Land. So Lot made his choice based on the availability of water. As he and Abraham parted company, Lot moved toward Sodom while Abraham moved toward Hebron. One man went east, the other west.

Who Won?

Who got the better of this deal? From outward appearances, it certainly looked like Lot won. After all, he got the best land and Abraham had to take what was left. But the Bible says that Lot "pitched his tents near Sodom." Later developments would confirm that you can't compromise with evil and come away clean. You can't sleep in the sewer without getting dirty. You can't dance with the devil without paying the devil's price. By choosing to live near Sodom, Lot was exposing himself and his family to gross moral evil. I'm sure if you asked him beforehand, he would have defended himself by saying that he never intended to make friends with the men of Sodom. He only lived there because that's where the best land was. Either he was ignorant of the sin of Sodom or he just didn't care. Even if he had not known about the activities of the people of Sodom (which is unlikely), he soon would have once he got near the town and yet he still goes forward. You see, what looks good isn't necessarily good. It is very interesting that while in v 13 he pitched his tents near Sodom, by chapter 14:2 he is living in Sodom.

Verse 18

Genesis 13:18. *So Abram moved his tents, and went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where He built an altar to the Lord.*

Conclusion

God had a plan and a place for Abraham. Abraham trusted this. We see his trust displayed when he built an altar to the Lord. He believed God would make good on His promises (Gen. 12:1-7). He didn't feel the need to fight with Lot or battle for his own preferences. This is contentment in action.

As Christians we have the ultimate provision from God. We don't necessarily have a piece of land; we have a Person. God gave His Son for us. He died and rose again to secure our place with Him (Jn. 14:1-4). That is why we can be content. We have Him as our portion and treasure. Are you able to trust God's provision? Do you believe God has a plan and a place for you because of what Christ did (Rom. 8:28-29)? Will you rest content in Him?

Let us pray.