

## Choosing Wisely - Genesis 13

Like many of us, I enjoy movies. One of my favorite movie series of all time is Indiana Jones. If any of you have seen those movies, you may recall that the third installment in the series was called Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade. This follows the adventures of Dr. Jones as he and his father search for the Holy Grail. The Holy Grail was the cup that Jesus used during the last supper and according to legend in the movie, anyone who drank from the cup would have eternal life. The Jones' go on a wild adventure searching for the treasure. Of course, by the end of the movie, Indy and his father have discovered the location of the Holy Grail. You may recall the tense scene as Indy had to solve various riddles and navigate deadly traps and finally arrived in a hidden room that contained the grail. However, the grail was guarded by a knight that had evidently been around since the time of the Crusades. The room contained many cups of varying sizes and designs. Just as the knight begins to explain who he is, the leader of the bad guys and his female sidekick come into the room. If you have seen the movie, you may remember that the bad guy asks the knight which one is the holy grail. Do you remember the knight's response? He told them, "You must choose. But choose wisely. For as the true grail will bring you life, the false grail will take it from you." The lady believed she could choose correctly, and she picked the cup which appeared to be the most beautifully adorned one in the room. She gave it to the commander, and he filled it with water and drank. After a few seconds the man begins writhing in pain and essentially disintegrates in front of them. The knight simply replies, "He chose poorly." Indy then chooses a cup, but instead of choosing the fanciest cup, he chooses one that is simple and that looks like it was probably made by a carpenter. The knight replies, "You chose wisely."

And so, it is in the Christian life. So often we are like the bad guy who chose poorly. We choose based on what is pleasing to the eye or appealing to the flesh. We invest our time and money in temporary things, things that have no eternal value. Because of sin, we are tempted to rely on sight rather than faith in God to guide our decisions and determine our course of action. The things that appeal to our flesh; things such as success, wealth, popularity, power, have the ability to cloud our judgement. These worldly trappings, though not necessarily evil in and of themselves, become detrimental when they cause us to choose that which is not honoring to God, or which may lead us down a path that leads to sin. However, throughout the course of redemptive history, God has shown His people that as they trust in His promises and walk by faith, he will be a lamp to their feet and a light for their path. He will help them choose wisely. God wants his people to trust His redemptive promises, as Abram did. But we are so weak. In fact, we are unable to trust in the promises in and of ourselves. Therefore, we must look in faith to the one who trusted God's promises perfectly and always made the wise choices. We must look to Christ. When we are secure in Christ, we do not have to rely on sight but can rely on faith and can trust in the promises of the one true God to help us make wise decisions. But how do we rely on faith rather than sight? How do we make wise, God-honoring decisions? I think we see three examples from our passage today that can help us rely on faith rather than sight to make wise choices. You can see them in your worship guide. Like Abram, we can trust in God's promises, we can trust in God's provision, and we can trust in God's commands.

Let us look at our passage. Verse one of chapter 13 tells us that Abram went up from Egypt, back toward the land of Canaan, the land that God said he would give Abram. And notice what it says in verse two, “now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold.” The Hebrew word for rich literally means weighty. It is intended to show us that Abram was weighed down with a large quantity of goods. And what is the point of this? It is to show us that God is faithful to his promise. As Pastor Stacey taught us two weeks ago, God is merciful and gracious to his people. And so he was with Abram, in spite of his stumbling in Egypt. And so, he is with us, in spite of our stumbling.

Remember who is writing this account. It is Moses. He is writing it while he is leading the Hebrew people out of exile in Egypt and journeying with them to the land of Canaan. Do you recall what the general attitude or disposition of the Israelite people was as they were journeying through the wilderness with Moses? They were complaining and grumbling against God and Moses.

But God’s intention in having Moses write this account is to show the people of God, which included the Israelites of Moses’ time as well as believers today, that God is faithful to his people and faithful to his promises. When they heard the story of Abram leaving Egypt for Canaan, the Israelite nation would understand their calling was to do the same. Not only had he brought Abram up out of Egypt and back to the land of promise, but God brought him out with great wealth. In the same way God not only brought the Israelites out of Egypt, but He brought them out with great wealth. You see God is providing for his people as they walk by faith and not by sight. Abram can continue his journey because he realizes that he can trust the promises of God. God continues to honor His promise.

In Psalm 105, we read “For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.” When we meditate on God’s faithfulness we more aptly trust in His promises. Yet, we know that we still struggle to always trust His promises. So, we fix our eyes on the one who perfectly depended on God and completely trusted in God’s promises, the Lord Jesus Christ. You see Abram and Moses knew that they were called to trust in God and yet so often fell short. They realized their need for help. Therefore, they relied on the one who could give help, the one true God. Believers today have the benefit of reading about and trusting in God’s ultimate cure or provision for our struggle, the Savior Jesus Christ.

Look at verse 5 “And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, so that the land could not support both of them dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together, and there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram’s livestock and the herdsmen of Lot’s livestock.” It is difficult to tell exactly what the nature of the conflict is here. It may be suggesting that with the other tribes in the land there’s simply not enough space and resources, therefore Moses and Lot needed to separate. Other commentators suggest that the herdsmen of Lot may have become jealous because Abram’s wealth and possessions were greater than Lot’s. Despite the exact nature of the strife between the herdsmen, the point is the same – the blessing of wealth and possessions had become a

stumbling block for Abram's family. How would Abram respond? Would he respond in faith or once again try to take matters into his own hands?

We read in verses 8–9 “Then Abram said to Lot, let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen. It's not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left.” We see that Abram acts in faith. The obvious solution is for them to separate so there might be enough room for each of their families and flocks to thrive. As the elder and leader of the clan, Abram has every right to choose where he will live. Yet, he is gracious and unselfish. Abram does not exercise his right of authority and leadership but in kindness graciously defers to Lot. Such willingness displays great confidence in the Lord's promise, as well as great faithfulness to act in the same way God did toward him – graciously.

You see Abram trusted in God's provision. Abram's offer was possible because he was confident God would indeed give him a good land, the promised land, even if he had to give up the portion of it that seemed the best. Abram had already seen God provide for him in his travels thus far. Therefore, Abram trusted God with the land. He trusted that God could provide despite what portion Lot might choose. The Reformation Study Bible tells us that faith in God's sovereignty gives Abram the freedom to be generous. How about you? Have you looked at God's provision in the past and trusted in his provision for the future? Have you done this even when things look bleak or foreboding? If we are honest, I think we will most often see ourselves acting like Lot and not like Abram.

In verse 10 we read, “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. So, Lot chose for himself all the Jordan Valley, and Lot journeyed east.” Lot could have responded to such a gracious suggestion by endeavoring to share the most fertile parts of the available land with his uncle. But in contrast to Abram, Lot chooses according to the “lust of the eyes”. In 1 John 2:16-17 we read, “For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life – is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”

Lot chose what appeared most appealing at the time. Lot takes the best for himself. I am going to go out on a limb here and say that all of us can relate to this. We can probably relate to this struggle by Lot in multiple ways. However, there is one simple example that comes to my mind. Maybe you can relate.

It is shopping at the grocery store when you are extremely hungry. This example came to mind because it happened to me yesterday. Gretchen and I went grocery shopping around 11:30am. It had been at least, at least three or maybe two hours, since I had eaten a decent breakfast. So, naturally, I was famished. Suddenly, everything started looking delicious. And the worse it was for me, the more I wanted it. Just the most sugary, processed, blood sugar raising stuff you can imagine. I mean I started picking up stuff I had never even seen before. Luckily, Gretchen

talked me down from my hunger lust. However, I couldn't help but make the connection to what I had been studying this week. Now certainly, this example is fairly innocent, but I think it is indicative of how we often handle serious and consequential choices. Our choices, our desires are so easily influenced by our flesh. And so often the flesh wants what is contrary to God's desire for us. Point and case is Lot. Lot takes what looks most fertile. However, looks can be deceiving. What appeared to be physically appealing and bountiful, was spiritually barren. Dr. Currid writes, "there is a great contrast between what Lot sees at the time and what eventually happens to the area of his choosing." We get a foretaste of what is going to happen in a type of parenthetical note in verse 13. "Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord." So even by this point the Sodomites had a reputation for being very wicked. Lot did not take the spiritual consequences of his decision into account but instead went for what appeared to be the best land.

Lot's choosing is in direct contrast to Abram, who could defer choosing because of his faith and confidence in the promises of God and the provision of God. Lot chooses according to what is pleasing to the eye, but Abram chooses according to faith in God.

After Abram and Lot separate, God addresses Abram. Verse 14, "look up your eyes look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you."

God reiterates the promises he made to Abram in chapter 12:1-3 -- Abram will have an exceedingly great number of descendants and they will inherit the land of Canaan. But Abram does not look in one direction or to one district: he views large stretches of land in every direction. The command is to survey the land. And Abram, as has been his custom, obeys the command of God. He walks through the promised land. God was affirming Abram's inheritance and the ownership of the land to his descendants forever. Abram knows he can trust the commands of God. And we see in verse 18, Abram moved his tent and settled by the oaks of Mamre and he built an altar to the Lord. The more precisely Abram adhered to the command of God, the more his faith was strengthened and the more he could continue to walk by faith and not by sight. But it was only by faith and trust in God; in the promises of God, in the provision of God, and in the command of God, that Abram was able to look to the things that are unseen rather than the things that are seen.

What about for us? If we are to walk by faith and not by sight, if we are to choose wisely, we must trust in the promises of God, in the provision of God, and in the commands of God. But we are not able to perfectly trust in these things, are we? So, what do we do? We look in faith to the one who *did* perfectly trust in God's promises, God's provision, and God's commands. We look to Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith. The one about whom 2 Corinthians 1:20 says, "For all the promises of God find their Yes in Him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory." The promise of God to the people of God, i.e., the descendants of Abram, belong to the Israelites of the Exodus and to the church today. As we

look to the Lord in faith, keeping our eyes upon the one who was crushed for our sins, our choices will become more aligned to the things that would honor God and less controlled by the desires of the flesh. Another way to say it is the things of heaven, including the Savior, will become more lovely, while the trappings of the world become less lovely, and we will “choose wisely”. Let us pray.