

In Trust or by Sight?

Gen 13:5-18

Main Thought: Following Jesus is a life walking in trust, not by sight, as Abram did.

Call: 1 Kings 8:23, 56-58

Scripture: 2 Cor 5:6-10

I. Introduction

Our scripture reading provides the theme for our study this morning. In verse 7 Paul says that, we, followers of Christ, *walk by faith, not by sight*. We walk in trust of the living God and his promises.

As I was preparing this sermon, the person that kept coming to mind was the man George Mueller. Do you know that name? Mueller lived in the 19th century. He was a bit of a troublemaker in his young adult years, developing a reputation being a thief, a liar and a gambler. But after attending one small group meeting in a friend's home in 1825, God transformed him into a man of faith. Are small groups important? Yes! One small group meeting changed his life. God put him on a different trajectory, and he immediately began spending hours a day in prayer and Bible reading. And, God gave him eyes to take notice of the plight of orphans on the streets of Bristol, England. Eleven years later, he opened the first of many orphanages, which is what he ultimately is known for. Over his lifetime, he cared for over 10,000 orphans and established over 100 schools that offered a Christian education to some 120,000 children. Through it all, Muller never asked for money. He never asked for financial help, and he never went into debt, even though his projects cost many hundred thousands of pounds. He walked by faith, trusting God in everything, evidenced by his constant prayers and nose in the Scriptures. On one well-documented occasion, all the orphans in one orphanage were sitting around the table ready to eat breakfast, though there was no food in the house. Thanks was given for the meal as the plates were all empty. Before the prayer was finished, the local baker knocked on the door. His carriage had broken down outside and he needed to get rid of his bread. He had enough fresh bread for everyone. As the baker was leaving, the milkman brought in plenty of fresh milk because his cart had broken down just outside. There was enough food and drink for everyone. Indeed, Mueller and his wife are great examples of what it looks like to trust in the living God.

Do we walk by faith in our daily lives? Or do we walk by sight? That's the question we will explore this morning.

Review

Well, we are in the middle of our studies in the lives of Abram, better known as Abraham, and Sara, better known as Sarai, the two most important people of the ancient world. Last week we saw Abram throw himself onto himself and a lie which put God's program to bless the world in serious jeopardy. They end up in Egypt in serious trouble. But, God, interrupts and intervenes, saving Abram and Sarai for the sake of Sarai. God, in his grace, brings them back to the land

where Abram builds altars and worships God. It is important to remember that through the fiasco in Egypt, Pharaoh did enrich Abram and Sarai. So, they are back in the land with a lot of possessions.

II. The Situation (5-7)

5 And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, 6 so that the land could not support both of them dwelling 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. At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites were dwelling in the land. (ESV)

A. Great Blessings

So, they are back in the land after the crisis of Egypt, only to be confronted with another crisis. Isn't it like that in the life of faith? We think we'll get through one crisis and be able to breathe, only to be confronted with another one.

And, this crisis involves Lot. As I said last week, Lot is an ambiguous character. People are mixed on whether he should have traveled with Abram or not. Abram was called to leave his father's house. I tend to think that Lot should not have traveled with Abram, because every time he shows up in the story, we find trouble. Trouble follows Lot. This is why when I teach this story to teenagers, I always have them boo when I say Lot's name.

Well, God promised that he would make Abram's name great and would bless Abram and his family. And, we see that God is indeed blessing him. We see physical evidence that it is happening. And, his blessings are overflowing to Abram, and Lot receives the overflow. Simply by being near Abram, because Abram was living the with-God life, others are receiving blessings. It's like Abram is a full cup of water and everyone who bumps into him receives the splash. This is God's program. He blesses us, we bless others. We don't even need to do anything special. We can simply include them in our fantastic adventure of trusting God.

B. Great Strife

But, in a land where pasture is at a premium, the herdsmen of the two families begin fighting. There isn't enough land for all the herds. It is also at this point that the omniscient narrator tells us that the Canaanites and Perizzites are living in the land. Could it be that with all of the possessions between Abram and Lot, there was also friction with the locals? Perhaps they are infringing on the local's pastureland as well. Separation seems to be the best option.

III. The Separation (8-13)

*8 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. 9 Is 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." 10 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 was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) 11 So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan Valley, and Lot journeyed east. Thus they separated from each other. 12 Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom. 13 Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the LORD. (ESV)

A. Lot Lifts Up His Eyes

So, Abram and Lot come together on a high ridge near Bethel to survey the land. They decide the strife is too great between their people, so they must separate. Uncle Abram, as leader, takes the lead. This is only the second report of Abram speaking. His first was when talking to Sarai and instructing her to lie out of fear. Here, we see a very different Abram, one who is trusting the Lord. And, what is amazing is that Abram, as leader of the family, has the right to decide first and tell Lot where to go. However, in a move of utter selflessness and as a great peacemaker, Abram gives Lot first choice.

And, Lot, driven by his sight, lifts up his eyes (key phrase in this passage) and the omniscient narrator gives us Lot's perspective on what he sees. Lot sees the fertile land of the Jordan Valley, and sees that it is well-watered. In fact, from Lot's perspective, the land resembles the Garden of Eden. And, that's a good thing *except* that's where the fall happened. And, our verbs here provide an allusion to the Fall. In the garden, Eve sees the shiny fruit, sees that it is delightful to her eyes, and goes for it. Here, Lot lifts up his eyes, sees the shiny land and goes for it. Lot is attracted by the sight of this fertile land and the promise of the good life of prosperity. The narrator is sure to tell us that this is before the Lord destroys Sodom and Gomorrah, which implies that the land by the Dead Sea was very fertile at one time. Lot's perspective also likens this land to the land of Egypt. And, on the surface, that's a good thing too, *except* that their recent trip down there was a disaster from a faith standpoint. So, here, neither a reminder of the Garden or a reminder of Egypt is positive from a faith standpoint. So, while Uncle Abram is slowly learning how to trust this God with the eyes of faith, Lot does not share the same vision.

Lot sees the shiny land and decides to journey eastward. Up until this point in the book of Genesis, every movement east has been away from God. So, this one too. But, in Lot's mind, he would be a fool to not go for the good land to get the good life!

- Think about what his wife would say if he didn't choose the place where food was abundant.
- Think about what his kids would say if he didn't choose such a great place to swim in the water and enjoy the well-watered grass.
- Think about how all his friends would laugh at him if he didn't choose such great pastureland!

He would be a fool not to go for the shiny, fertile, well-watered land! So Lot goes for it, even though he must know what the narrator says in verse 13, *"The men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord."*

Notice the progression of Lot's movement:

- Verse 11: He lifts up his physical eyes, sees the fertile land, sees that it is good for the eyes and chooses to move in that direction.
- Verse 12: He then, moves his tent as far as Sodom. He moves near to Sodom. Not into Sodom yet, but near it. The wickedness of Sodom seems to be drawing him.
- The next time we see Lot, in chapter 14, verse 12, he is dwelling in Sodom!

Within a few months or years, Lot chooses Sodom, moves nearby Sodom, then moves into Sodom, the place that is full of wickedness, great sinners against the Lord. Lot's life, walking by only physical sight, exemplifies the downward spiral of sin. As he walks by sight, the shiny object draws him farther and farther away from the faith of his uncle. As Calvin said, "Lot fancied he was dwelling in paradise, but he was nearly plunged into the depths of hell" (in Waltke, 224). As someone has said, everyone is looking for the good life, it's just that most of the time we look in all the wrong places to find it. Lot is looking in all the wrong places to find life.

James 1 describes Lot perfectly. *14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.* When we walk only by sight and refuse to consider spiritual matters, we endanger ourselves to the downward spiral of sin. This word "lure" is a powerful word. It means "to draw away from the good, by the pleasures at hand."

It's a fishing word too, which provides the perfect analogy. I'm a terrible fisherman, but I happened to go fishing this summer for my son's birthday. And, because we paid someone to take us, we actually caught something. But, it made me think what goes through a fish mind when they see the lure, the shiny thing that continues to bounce around them as they are swimming. And, at some point, the shininess overwhelms them and they give into the lure. At some point, the lure draws them away from the good, in their case from life, because it looks so pleasurable. And, off they go to the frying pan.

I know it's a simple analogy, but it fits. If we only walk by sight and refuse to consider spiritual matters, we endanger ourselves to the downward spiral of sin. And, it's not that the physical world is not good, but there is simply more to consider than just the material world.

B. Abram walks in trust

Lot walks only by sight and journeys east, taking no spiritual matters into account. And, over against him, is Abram. Abram surrenders his rights out of trust in God. He lets go of his rights! As I said earlier, he has the right to choose first since he is the leader of the family. He has the right to tell Lot where he ought to live. No one would have critiqued him or resented him or become angry at him if he had chosen first and told Lot where to go. In utter selflessness and as a great peacemaker, Abram surrenders his rights. It's a profound statement of trust in God. He has come to such confidence in God's word that he no longer has to grasp for things to go his way. He no longer has to grasp for control. He can relinquish control of his life to the living God. What a statement of trust! Abram shows concretely what walking in trust of the living God looks like.

Oh if we could follow in these tracks of trust! When we demand and insist on our rights, civil rights, cultural rights, whatever it may be, it is a sign that we are not trusting God; rather, we are focused on self. Did you ever notice that the word “rights” or the concept of “rights” is not a Biblical concept? That word and the concept come directly out of the 18th century Enlightenment. The time when God was removed from the center of life in our Western world, only to be replaced by humanity, as if the clay became the potter, to quote Isaiah (Is 29:16). The Biblical word and concept is not “rights.” The Bible’s word is righteousness, which I like to define as right-relatedness. Righteousness is being right-related in our relationship to God, to others, to myself and to creation. The righteous shall live by faith (Rom 1:17). Right-related people live by trusting God, by throwing their entire weight upon him. In fact, Scripture consistently instructs a denial of one’s rights in order to live in right-relationships. Jesus is the primary example. In Philippians 2, in one of the most moving texts in all of scripture, we read,

“5 Have this attitude among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Have this attitude. What attitude? The same one Jesus had. Jesus did not grasp. Jesus emptied himself. Jesus let go of his rights and took on the form of a servant. The word there is “doulos.” Doulos, in Greek, is the word for someone who has no rights. Jesus surrendered his rights! Jesus sets aside the privileges of deity. Jesus sets aside his rights. Have this same attitude, not living to be served, but to serve.

If we want to follow him, we deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him. We walk by faith, trusting in the living God. This is the way to the good life, although it is an upside-down life and counter-cultural life, because it is the way of sacrifice, servanthood and agape love.

Abram surrenders his rights. In utter selflessness, he lets go, which frees himself up to be a peacemaker. Abram shows that God’s kingdom is a kingdom of peace and harmony and reconciliation. When we deny ourselves, and surrender our rights and let go of grasping, it frees us up to become peacemakers. Blessed are the peacemakers for they are called children of God (Matt 5:9). Is not the lack of peace in our world a direct result of people grasping for what they want, grasping for their rights? Is not the lack of peace in our churches and in our families a result of people living the attitude of my way or the highway? Have this attitude. Have this attitude. Peace has a chance when people surrender their rights.

Lot walked by sight and chose poorly, while Abraham, walked by faith and chose wisely. And, for this, God shows up again.

IV. The Affirmation (14-18)

14 The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; 15 for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever. 16 "I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered. 17 "Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you." 18 Then Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and there he built an altar to the LORD.

A. "Lift Up Your Eyes"

Lot has moved away from Abram and God shows up again. God tells Abram to now lift up his eyes and look all around him. He then promises Abram all – not part of – but all the land. God affirms Abram's faith, and reaffirms the promise of land. Notice Abram doesn't lose out by surrendering his rights! Abram doesn't lose out by letting go! Abram doesn't lose out by relinquishing control. We don't lose out by surrendering to God, which means we don't need to grasp for more stuff. It means we don't have to always have the best things. It means we can surrender our stuff to him by giving it away. We don't lose out by surrendering to God. God affirms Abram in his surrender. God will give Abram *all* the land.

As you can see, this text invites a comparison between lifting up of eyes. Lot lifts up his physical eyes, and sees only the shiny land in front of him. He reasons that he would be a fool to not go for the shiny things. He doesn't consider spiritual things in his decision making. Sodom is a wicked place. Lot walks solely by sight. On the other hand, Abram is instructed *by God* to lift up his eyes, which is in itself, an act of trust. He does lift up his physical eyes to see all the land, but only after listening with the eyes of his heart, to hear what God says. He lifts up the eyes of his heart, and sees the unseen things which are eternal (2 Cor 4:17-18), for Hebrews tells us that Abram can let go because with his eyes of faith, he looks forward to the eternal city with foundations whose architect and builder is God (Heb 11:10).

B. Abram Walks

God then instructs Abram to make another faith pilgrimage, walking through the land, enjoying this great gift that the good God had given him. In this time period, it was common for kings to walk through the land to symbolize their acquisition of it. He then settles in Hebron, the highest town in Canaan and builds an altar, claiming it for the living God. If you remember from last week, their re-entry back into Canaan began with Abram building an altar, and ends here with him building an altar. Abram is walking by faith, trusting in the living God, the altars a physical symbol of this spiritual reality.

V. Conclusion

A. With Eyes Lifted Up

Today, we are invited to lift up our eyes like Abram in trust. In fact, we are invited to lift up our eyes and fix them on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (Heb 12:2), the bread of life, the living water, the good shepherd and the lover of your soul. It's the most important

discipline of our lives. It's what Mueller did after that one small group. Let Jesus fill your vision! Our friends, our colleagues, even our families will sometimes look at us and think we are fools for living this way. But, this is the life of faith, lifting up our eyes and fixing them on Jesus.

It is difficult to live life this way but this is the walk of faith. It is especially difficult in the modern world where our gaze is consistently being lowered. We are encouraged by our culture to focus on the things of earth, on health, wealth and happiness. And, we are encouraged to seek the good life by focusing on health, wealth and happiness. Our gaze is constantly being drawn downward toward the shiny things of earth. And, this tethers our hearts to the earth, causing us to gain the whole world yet forfeit our souls (Matt 16:26). When I find myself grasping, or insisting, or holding tightly onto the treasures of this world, I know I've lost the vision. I've lowered my gaze, and I must re-focus on Jesus.

I must re-fix my eyes upon the one who let go of his rights so that I could be forgiven. I must re-fix my eyes upon the one who set aside his privileges so that I could have the privilege of being called child of God. I must re-fix my eyes upon the one who did not grasp and gave his life so that I could have life and life eternal. For, that is what we ultimately look forward to, life eternal when our vision will be filled completely with him. Amen.

Benediction:

- Jesus said, blessed are you who believe without seeing. As you go this week, fix your eyes on him. Let him fill your vision, for he goes with you, and will never leave you. Go in anticipation of what he will do in and through you this week. Amen.

Resources

Waltke, Bruce, *Genesis: A Commentary*