

SUNDAY, MAY 02, 2010

## Sunday, May 2, 2010: Walking by Faith, Not by Sight

Walking by Faith, Not by Sight  
Genesis 13: 1 – 18.

### I. Introduction.

Last year, I read three biographies of Texas Baptist pastors: B.H. Carroll, J. Frank Norris and George W. Truett. B.H. Carroll is credited with founding Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and the Baptist General Convention of Texas. J. Frank Norris was the fundamentalist pastor of First Baptist Church, Fort Worth and a thorn in the flesh of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. He was accused of arson twice and murder once, but never went to trial. There was not enough evidence. George W. Truett was pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas. He had a college degree, but never went to seminary. He was credited with “saving Baylor University” before he ever entered Baylor as a student. George Truett and B.H. Carroll traveled all over Texas raising money to retire Baylor’s debt.

Truett’s biography was different from Carroll’s and Norris’. According to Truett’s biography, he never made a mistake. He was always godly, always faithful and his motives were never questionable. There are three problems with this view of Truett. First, no human is perfect. Second, the biography was written while Truett was still alive. Third, the biography was written by Truett’s own son-in-law. He probably didn’t want his wife to read anything negative about her father.

This is not the same picture we have of Abraham in the Bible. Abraham was fully human. He is the model for faithfulness, but he made his share of mistakes. Last week’s sermon is a good example. Abram was forced to leave the land of Canaan because of a famine. He went into Egypt for food but was afraid of the Pharaoh. So, Abram told a lie. He told Pharaoh that Sarai was not his wife. She was his sister. And Abram sold Sarai to Pharaoh to become one of Pharaoh’s wives.

Abram’s faithlessness put all of God’s promises in jeopardy. He saved his own life, but he made life difficult for the others around him. However, God intervened and saved Abram from himself. When Abram lost faith in God, God continued to be faithful. When Abram gave up on God, God never gave up on Abram.

This is one of the ways we know the Bible can be trusted. The Bible does not tell us only the good things about our heroes. Sometimes, our heroes look and act like heroes. Most of the time, our heroes don’t look and act very heroic.

The Bible does not present us with all the good and none of the bad. The Bible tells us the truth—warts and all.

Fortunately for us, Abram got back on track. Faithlessness was not the end of Abram’s story. He returned to the land God promised him. He returned to a life of trusting in God.

Read Genesis 13: 1 – 18.

Last week we witnessed Abram’s faith as it stumbled. Today we return to the common idea that Abram is the model of perfect faith.

In the story of Abram, the land of Egypt represents a place where he sinned against God. The land of Canaan, on the other hand, represents the place where Abram heard God and worshipped God. We witness this as the Bible retraces Abram's steps for us. He doesn't just go back to Canaan. He goes back to all the places where God has spoken to him in the past. It seems that Abram realizes that he messed up in Egypt and now wants to get things right with God. When Abram returns to Canaan, he also reconnects with God.

After returning to Canaan, Abram discovers for the second time that the land cannot support him. The first time was a famine. This time, it is because Abram and his nephew, Lot, have become so wealthy. Abram and Lot both had sheep, cattle, donkeys and camels. Their animals needed grass and water. The land was good enough to support one of them, but not both.

This seems to be a common occurrence for Abram. Every time God speaks to him, he experiences a spiritual high point followed by a spiritual low point. God called Abram and promised to bless him. Immediately, a famine struck. Abram reconnected with God at Bethel. Immediately, a quarrel breaks out between Abram's herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen.

Abram realizes how important it is for him to live peaceably with his relatives. After all, they are surrounded by foreigners in a foreign land. We should learn from Abram's example, because this is the same situation we find ourselves in as Christians.

Inside the church, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. Outside the church, the rest of the world is against us. This land is not our true home. The people who inhabit this land are not our true brothers and sisters. Therefore, it is important for us to find peaceful ways to get along...peaceful solutions to our disagreements with our true brothers and sisters.

Abram takes a radical step to create a peaceful solution. He offers to divide up the land with Lot. There are two things worth noting about Abram's offer.

First, the land he was offering to Lot was already inhabited by the Canaanites and Perizzites. They may be living in the land now, but God had promised the land to Abram and his descendants. This simple—but ironic—act of dividing up the land is a statement of faith. Abram believed God's promise more than he believed his own eyes. If Abram trusted only what he could see, he would not have taken possession of the land. He would have abandoned the land and probably returned to his homeland in Haran.

Second, Abram let Lot choose first. Abram was Lot's uncle. Therefore, Abram had the right to take whatever he wanted and to assign the rest to Lot. Abram was the one whom God had promised the land. Therefore, Abram had every right to tell Lot to find his own land. This land was Abram's promise. Lot had no legitimate claim on the land.

When Lot made his choice of land, he did what any of us would have done. He inspected the land to find out which choice would provide best for his needs. After all, Lot had a family to provide for. He had male and female servants. He had flocks of cattle, sheep, donkeys and camels. Verse 10 tells us that Lot chose the land that was on the plain and was well watered. The land Abram received by default was dry and rugged. Lot made his choice based on what would be best for his crops, his animals and ultimately his family.

This is another one of those stories that has been a struggle for me. I remember hearing this in Sunday School as a child. The teachers told us that we should always let the other person choose

before us. And, when someone lets us choose first, we should never take the best for ourselves. I never understood why people should not choose the best for themselves.

This is not a story about making a humble choice and allowing another person to have better things than you. Instead, this is a comparison and contrast between Abram and Lot. It is a contrast between spiritual blessings and material blessings.

## II. Abram Acted in Faith.

Abram's behavior shows us what faith—and spiritual blessings—looks like. By allowing Lot to make the first choice, Abram placed his future in God's hands. In the end, Lot had only himself to blame. In the end, Abram could only give thanks to God.

How many times have you tried to take credit for good things in your own life? For example, we are often tempted to claim wisdom in making good decisions; strong work ethic when we succeed; or even personal thriftiness when we avoid financial ruin. Abram could not claim any of these. He ended up in the land of Canaan as a result of Lot's decision, not his own.

By giving Lot the first choice, Abram was allowing God to bless him in spite of the circumstances. This is the way God often works. God's people discover God's faithfulness best when things are not perfect. When things are perfect, we think we are responsible. When things are not perfect, we have to let God do his work on our behalf.

## III. Lot Was Seduced into Sin.

The biggest difference between Abram and Lot was the way they looked at the land. Lot looked only with his eyes. Abram looked through God's eyes.

The author of Genesis wants us to think of the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden when we read this story. We see this in verse 10... **“Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, toward Zoar. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.)”**

Remember what happened in Genesis 3. The serpent tempted Eve by showing her the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Eve saw the fruit. It was pleasing to the eye. But, what happened when Eve ate the fruit and gave the fruit to Adam to eat? Sin and death entered into God's creation.

There is a parallel between these two stories. Both Eve and Lot were seduced by evil. It was beautiful. For Eve, this beauty was in the form of forbidden fruit. For Lot, this beauty was in the form of well watered land. The fruit Eve ate led to death and destruction. The land Lot chose was destroyed in God's judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah represent two things in the Bible: the epitome of evil and the suddenness of God's judgment. Lot was so enamored by the beauty of the land that he failed to recognize the wickedness he was getting himself into. Lot eventually moved into the city of Sodom and was living there when it was destroyed by God's judgment.

#### IV. God's Promise to Abram.

Abram didn't look at the beauty of the land. Instead, he looked toward the promises of God. Abram did not concern himself with how he could meet his own needs. Instead, he tried to live according to God's plan for his life.

Imagine what Abram could have done in Canaan. He had every right to expel Lot and all Lot's property. After all, this was Abram's land. God had promised it to him. Or, Abram could have selected the good land for himself. After all, God had promised to bless Abram and his descendants. Abram could have viewed the good land as a blessing from God and necessary for all those promised descendants.

Yet, that is not what Abram did. He trusted God's promises more than his own eyes. Abram trusted God to provide for all his needs in the present and in the future. He knew that if God made the promise, God would be the one to fulfill it. God never makes a promise and expects us to achieve them for ourselves.

Lot thought he could achieve blessings on his own...by choosing the beautiful, well-watered land. What was God's promise to Abram? God promised to bless Abram and to use Abram as a blessing to all peoples of the earth.

God had a plan for Abram's life that was bigger than Abram himself. If God's plan was simply to bless Abram, then any land would suffice. Abram could live on the well watered plain. He could raise crops and herds of all kinds. He could get wealthier and wealthier. He could live a rich and comfortable and blessed life. But, God's plan was bigger than Abram. God wanted Abram to be a blessing to others.

The contrast between Abram and Lot is fairly easily applied to our own lives. Nearly every decision we make in life, we have to choose between serving our own needs or serving God's plan for our lives.

Sometimes we act like Lot. We can be seduced by the deceptive beauty of worldly things. They look attractive. They promise fun times. They tell us that we can take care of our own physical needs and our emotional and relational needs. But, worldly beauty leads to death and destruction.

Sometimes we act more like Abram. God has a plan for your life that is bigger than you. God's plan for your life includes meeting your physical, emotional and relational needs. But it goes beyond that. When God is the source of your life and the blessings in your life, you no longer feel the need to hang on to worldly things. You can use God's blessings to bless others.

It comes down to the answer to one question: To whom does my life belong? If my life belongs to me, then I must do everything I can to survive on my own and to meet my own needs. If my life belongs to me, then the greatest blessing in all of life is to make myself happy. If my life belongs to God, then God is responsible for my survival and for meeting my needs. If my life belongs to God, then the greatest blessing in all of life is to make God happy.

#### V. Conclusion.

I think we can say the same thing about our church. What is God's promise to Lufkin's First Baptist? Has God promised us that we will live a rich and comfortable and blessed church life? Or

does God have something bigger in mind for us?

I think God has something bigger for this church. We are blessed in order that we might bless others.

Think of it this way...To whom does this church belong? If this church belongs to the pastor, then make the pastor happy. If this church belongs to the deacons, then make the deacons happy. If the church belongs to the members, then make the members happy.

But, what if this church really belongs to God? Then, God will be responsible for our physical, emotional and relational needs. God is the one we should please.