

“Seeing in a More Sanctified ( 成圣的 , 圣洁的 ) Way” Text: Genesis 13.

By Pastor Rand Lankheet, for New Horizon URC, first service, March 11, 2018.

Introduction: In this chapter we find two different ways of seeing;

two different ways of looking at things. In vs. 10 we read that the nephew of Abraham, the man Lot, “looked up and saw” a certain piece of land.

Obviously it was a fertile ( 肥沃的 ) and rich land. /Later Abraham is told by the Lord to “lift up his eyes.” To look and to see other land. The land the Lord was giving to him.

It would be easy to say that one way of seeing is the way of unbelief.

And the other way, is the way of faith. But both men are believers. In 1 Peter chapter 2, we are told that Lot was “a righteous man.” Like his uncle, Lot also was a believer in the Lord.

But surely Lot was living in immaturity ( 不成熟 ) , on a low level of sanctification.

Though a believer, Lot seems to be yielding to the lust of his eyes.

His eyes were focused on wealth, more than on pleasing the Lord.

Any of us can give in to this temptation ( 试探 ) , at any time in our lives. And we do that as believers.

We do it, sometimes, even with good intentions. Sadly, it is often in hindsight that we see where we went wrong. Where we were too focused on wealth, or things of this world,

rather than being focused on the things of the Lord.

1. It starts with **A DISPUTE**. A dispute between two households.

By this time, both Abraham and Lot had grown quite wealthy.

They each owned herds and flocks; they had many servants who tended those animals.

We read that those servants started arguing over land rights.

Whose flocks and herds should have priority to graze ( 放牧 ) in the best pasturelands ( 草场 ) ?

-Notice that Abraham takes the role of peacemaker. Now we should be clear:

this is not a matter of mere morality, Abraham being the more mature, the more generous.

Remember that keeping the peace is a particular fruit of the Holy Spirit. Being a peace-maker, a true peace-maker, is a result of being converted ( 转变 ) . Of putting genuine trust in Jesus. And having his Spirit within us. Jesus says: “Blessed are the peacemakers.”

Paul says in Romans 12: Believers, “live in harmony with one another.”

Also, remember that Abraham’s faith was not his own doing. It was by God’s grace,

shown to him when he was still an unbeliever. By grace, the Lord God made a covenant ( 约 ) with Abraham. And out of that covenant, from his descendants, someday, Jesus would be born.

So all of this is part of God’s greater plan for Abraham. To save Abraham by Jesus.

Abraham takes the initiative.

[Vs. 9. “Lot, you choose what area you want... choose the pasturelands you prefer. I will take what you don’t want.” What maturity Abraham is showing! What wonderful sanctification! As the older man, Abraham could have demanded the better pastures.

It was his right as the senior man. But he gives the choice to his nephew.

It reminds me of a later teaching in the Bible. The apostle Paul says that when there is a

financial dispute between members of the church, we must not take our brother to court. In those cases, Paul says in 1 Cor 6, it is better to be cheated than to file a lawsuit ( 法律诉讼 ) .

Sadly, I have rarely seen this principle put into practice in our churches. Instead most members will loudly demand their financial rights. They demand that the other one pay them in full. They even will go to court. No wonder God’s judgement sometimes falls on us.

By God’s grace, by His Holy Spirit, Abraham gives Lot the better parcel of land.

At least, from Lot’s viewpoint, it LOOKED to be the better parcel.

2. But here’s a second point: they have a DIFFERENCE in perspective ( 观点 , 角度 ) .

Abraham and Lot have a different perspective.

In vs. 10, Lot looks to the east. This may be a hint to us, a hint that something is wrong in Lot’s

viewpoint. In the early chapters of the book of Genesis the “east” indicates a direction away from God.

When Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden of Eden, the angel with a flaming sword was set on the “east side” of the Garden. And remember when Cain kills his brother Abel? And God judges Cain, putting

that mark on him?

We read in Genesis 4 that Cain “went out from the Lord’s presence.”

In which direction did he go? Quote: he “lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.”

Away from the Lord’s presence...to the east.

Interestingly, ten chapters later in the Book of Genesis we read that Lot looked to the east.

He looked and saw the rich pasturelands. And he moved there.

And we are told that was dangerous territory. [Read vs. 12-13.

Lot moved to the east, near to city that was “wicked” and where people were “sinning greatly against the Lord.” The same city is later destroyed by the Lord, for its great wickedness.

But none of this seems to matter to the Lot. He is looking only at the green pasturelands.

Land that would make his cattle and sheep very productive. Land that would make him wealthy.

Now, today, most of land in our area is well-watered land. The province of Ontario enjoys many

streams and rivers. It also receives a good amount of annual rainfall. Crops grow easily in most places in Ontario. But in ancient Canaan, well, most of the land is desert land. Even the so-called rainy season is not that rainy. Most crops will not grow well in Canaan.

And, therefore, grazing animals often cannot find enough green vegetation to eat.

Without enough vegetation, sheep and goats remain skinny. Sometimes they die.

Often they do not bear enough young.

They do not give enough milk, and the wool on the sheep remains thin.

So in those days, having the right pastureland made all the difference between success and failure. Between riches and poverty.

Lot is looking at that...we could say he is only looking at that: at financial success.

At storing up riches for himself. More and more and more riches. It was his main focus.

Now Abraham is also a rich man. There is nothing wrong with money, not in itself.

But money must not be the main thing in our lives. Riches must not be our main focus in life.

Our main focus is to be the Lord. Seeking first His kingdom and His righteousness ( 义 ).

Then, all these other things will be added to us, including, at times, riches.

In Genesis 12:1, God had told Abraham to leave his people. To separate himself from his father’s household. To go to a new land. To become a new people. His ancestors had worshipped pagan ( 异教 ) gods. But now Abraham was worshipping the true God. [See 13:3-4

Oh, last week we learned that Abraham was still a sinner, a sinner saved by grace. In his flesh,

Abraham at times was weak. In his fear, we learned in chapter 12, that he lied to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. In so doing he risked the entire plan of God. Humanly speaking.

But now, it seems that Abraham had learned an important lesson. To not only put faith in God, but to live out of that faith. To do things in God’s way, not in his own way.

And this, of course, was not in his own strength. Again, we read God was directing Abraham.

[Read vs. 14. Lot had lifted up his eyes and looked only to the east... To the direction of money, and financial success. But Abraham was letting his eyes be guided by the Lord.

He was looking where the Lord told him to look. Not only in the direction of money, to the east.

Remember that this phrase “to the east” is a code word for life apart from God, life under God’s judgement.

Instead Abraham was focusing on other land. And all that land would become for him: a land for his descendants, someday. A land for God’s covenant people... a land that God was giving to them, by His grace. A land in which, someday, Jesus would be born. Jesus would live and die in that land. And in that land Jesus would be raised from the dead, for our salvation.

As a result, from out of that land, the gospel would go forth...into all the nations of the world.

In Hebrews chapter 11, we are told that it was “by faith” Abraham made his home there, in that land. The land of Canaan. The land God gave to him.

Application: Now I cannot easily apply this to your situation today.

We can so easily deceive ourselves. Sometimes we might move to a new area, for the wrong reasons. But sometimes we might stay put for the wrong reasons. Sometimes we accept a job for the wrong reasons. Sometimes we stay in a job for the wrong reasons. And we can so easily justify ( 证明...为正 ) our decisions. We can sound so spiritual ( 属灵的 ).

And this is not a sermon against riches. Nor is it a sermon against the big city, a big wicked city.

I can imagine some preachers use this text to warn their members about Toronto. But please understand that we can easily look at the wrong things... in making our decisions in life.

Yes, sometimes we look wrongly at money. But poverty is no guarantee for having strong faith. And there can be sometimes more wickedness out in rural areas, than in urban areas.

Please go deeper...go to your heart. Learn what is wrongly attracting you.

Learn what may be subtly weakening your faith. Learn to seek the advice of good and godly people---wise, Christian people. Appreciate those who raise warning flags in your life.

People who will ask you: "Are you praying about this decision?" Are you doing it for the right reasons? Are you seeking first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness?

Are you being tempted to take a short-cut to riches? Are you being too tempted by wealth?" We should love people who dare to ask us these things. They are true friends.

It is speculative, but it is interesting to ask what might have happened if Lot had sought the advice of his uncle. True, godly advice. "Uncle, what would be the best thing for me and for my family?" I get the sense that Abraham would have urged his nephew to stay close.

They would figure out a way to keep their servants from quarreling.

Or, surely, Abraham would have warned the young man about the dangers of moving east, near to those very wicked people.

3. That's a final point this afternoon: that A DIVISION is often necessary. A division between us and the ungodly. Some kind of spiritual division, a spiritual separation. We see it again and again in these chapters. For Abraham to remain devoted to the Lord, he had to stay separate. Oh, we still have to live in the world. And we must always be salt and light in our world.

As witnesses for Jesus Christ. But the danger for Lot, is the danger for all Christians.

And that is to become too close to the world. To allow their values to become our values.

To allow their fun to become our fun. To allow their priorities to become our priorities.

And it begins so easily, so subtly ( 微妙地 ) .

I am sure that at first Lot stayed somewhat separated from Sodom, and from the wickedness of that city. He probably set rules for his children, strict rules at first. But it is at least thirteen years later, we find Lot living INSIDE the city of Sodom. He started out near the city.

But he ends up inside the city. [Chapter 19:1.

We even read that his two daughters were engaged to be married to men of Sodom. [19:14.

Remember, as I mentioned, Peter calls Lot a "righteous man."

Even in this low moment of his life, evidently, Lot was still a believer in the Lord.

But, over time, the wickedness of the nearby people greatly influenced Lot. And, perhaps even worse, influenced his children. His descendants, sadly, were completely unbelievers. And they became enemies of God's people.

We can say: maybe just a little bit of the world's so-called fun.

Maybe just a little bit of the world's values. Maybe just a little bit of riches, for the wrong reasons. What harm can it do?

But sin is like the weeds of the garden. They start out small, harmless, seemingly insignificant. Hardly noticed. But then, one day, we find they have put down deep, deep roots in our soul. And then it becomes very, very difficult to pull them out.

How different was the future of the man Abraham, looking with the eyes of faith.

Focusing on the truly important things in life. [Read 13:18.

Lot moved to the east, near to Sodom. But Abraham lived near to God.

Hebrews 11:9 says this about Abraham: "By faith [that is, by trusting in God, Abraham]...

made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents... For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."

TWO DIFFERENT WAYS OF LOOKING. TWO DIFFERENT WAYS OF SEEING.

By God's grace, may we and our children keep our eyes focused on the right things.

The coming of God's kingdom in Jesus Christ.

The coming of the new Jerusalem.

The new, beautiful city, coming to earth someday, when Jesus returns. LET US PRAY.

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