

Text: Genesis 13

Title: "Crossroads in the Land of Canaan"

Time: May 4, 2008 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: From Bennett's *Book of Virtues*: "King Richard the third was preparing for the fight of his life. An army led by Henry, Earl of Richmond, was marching against him. The contest would determine who would rule England.

"The morning of the battle, Richard sent a groom to make sure his favorite horse was ready.

"'Shoe him quickly,' the groom told the blacksmith. 'The king wishes to ride at the head of his troops.'

"'You'll have to wait,' the blacksmith answered. 'I've shod the king's whole army the last few days, and now I've got to go get more iron.'

"'I can't wait,' the groom shouted impatiently. 'The king's enemies are advancing right now, and we must meet them on the field. Make do with what you have.'"

"So the blacksmith did his best but lacked a nail for the fourth shoe. He secured it the best he could and hoped for the best. As the battle raged on King Richard's horse lost a shoe and stumbled. He fell along with it, and with him his ability to rally his troops. His men retreated and his kingdom was lost in spite of his desperate cries: 'A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!'"

"And since that time, people have said,
For want of a nail, a shoe was lost,
For want of a shoe, a horse was lost,
For want of a horse, a battle was lost,
For want of a battle, a kingdom was lost,

And all for the want of a horseshoe nail.”

Like that story about 15th century England, Genesis 13 teaches us some important lessons about the far-flung consequences of the decisions we make at the crossroads of life. We all know what a crossroads is. We have one described for us in v. 9 of our passage. To the left or to the right? Abram and Lot faced “Crossroads in the land of Canaan,” and I want us to learn some spiritual truths about the crossroads of life that we face from their example this morning.

I. Restoration can correct a wrong choice at the crossroads of life (13:1-4).

Illustration: Have you ever broken something that seemed like it could not be fixed after you were through breaking it? We go through that a lot at the Hobi house. One of my sons proved to be too much for my favorite arm chair one day not long ago. He was sitting improperly on it and actually broke the whole chair off of the base that the chair was designed to swivel on. The key to the ability to swivel on that chair was this round piece of iron that had been torn in two by the event.

Weeks later some of our men were working on our bathtub and brought over some great drills and screws, and I screwed the base back into the chair, but now it doesn’t swivel. Now there is probably a craftsman or furniture maker somewhere who knows how to get a spare iron swivel mechanism for that chair, install it, and so fix the piece correctly. I am not that craftsman, so I had to settle for a far less effective fix job.

Application: The life of Abram reminds us how good we are at breaking things spiritually. We are often in circumstances and situations that need to be fixed because we failed. We need restoration. Abram had made some wrong choices at some former crossroads, and now he needed to recover from

them at this time of his life. As he experiences restoration he teaches us two things about our prospects for spiritual restoration when we make a wrong choice like he did.

A. Restoration is possible because God's grace is greater than our sins.

Note the significance of the phrase, "he and his wife." We saw last week that Abram had almost lost her. And yet we saw also last week that even as Abram and Sarai were in the pit of the mess they had made for themselves, God was already working the fix (Gen. 12:17). But the ultimate fix for Abram's sin was the same as the ultimate fix for our sin: He built an altar and called on the name of the Lord.

1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." To be forgiven and cleansed from all unrighteousness is to be fully restored, to be completely fixed. But notice that John is careful to say that when God does this in response to our confession of sin, He is both faithful and just. He is just because there was a sacrifice for our sins – the same sacrifice depicted by Abram's altar. Jesus Christ died and paid the penalty that justice demands for our sin. And He is faithful because He is a covenant-keeping God. Abram called on the name of Yahweh. *Yahweh* is God's covenant name; it describes God as one who keeps the promises He has made to care for His people.

Our sin simply cannot change His justice nor His faithfulness. Restoration is always possible because God's grace is greater than all our sins.

B. Restoration is possible when we are willing to return to the place we got off track (v. 3, "at the beginning"; v. 4, "which he had made there formerly").

Illustration: My drilling the base back on to that arm chair was kind of a phony fix, wasn't it? The chair won't tip over now, but neither will it swivel.

Application: We need to reject phony substitutes for true restoration. Abram's restoration meant that he was willing to go back to the point at which he had gotten off track and begin again there to do what is right. Sometimes rather than going back to that place, we decide to just try to get on with life and let by-gones be by-gones. This is not true restoration because it is not true confession. The problem has not really been dealt with. To say that things can never be the same between me and so-and-so again is to say that I know nothing about the Lord's power to conquer our sin and to restore.

II. Repetition is a part of facing the crossroads of life (13:5-9).

Illustration: It can be difficult to face a crossroad when you are trying to get somewhere, but when you face repeated crossroads it can make you feel like you are in a maze. I have begun to do a little jogging with the warmer weather, and I like going down Lyndeboro Road here because it is relatively flat. There are some pathways off of Lyndeboro that go into the woods that have intrigued me, and I finally tried taking one of those a couple of Fridays ago.

Well, there were a lot of crossroads out there in those woods. I had to make a lot of decisions, and I was lost out there for about an hour before I finally made my way back around to River Road over here across from the hardware store.

Application: Abram does not get to rest for long before he is confronted with another challenge, another difficulty, another decision to make. Repetition is a part of facing the crossroads of life. Abram is even going to face the challenge of what to do with his wife in a foreign land again, and he is going to fail again. Here in chapter 13 he has better success.

I want us to see three things about the repetition of crossroads or difficulties in the life of Abram.

A. Difficulties are a part of God's blessings upon us (vv. 5-7a).

Application: The strife of herdsmen, the difficulty, was caused by the growth of the herds, the blessing. As God blessings come, they often bring new challenges and difficulties. It is not true that the difficulties we face are indications that we are not experiencing the fullness of God's blessing. At times, the difficulties indicate that we have known the blessing of the Lord.

B. The world is watching to see how we handle the difficulties God gives us (v. 7b).

Application: The strife between Abram and Lot had an audience. The Canaanites and Perizites were around. These two believers needed a united front in view of the danger their real enemies posed for them. That unity was important to their protection, but also to their testimony. Christ said, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another." The world around needs to know of our love for one another, for other faithful disciples of Christ, and because they might not like what they find out, we need to be ready to do battle together against the enemies we face, rather than being content to make enemies of one another.

C. Brothers in the faith handle their problems differently than others do (v. 8).

Application: Abram considers Lot's well-being more important than his own. This is the key to facing the crossroads of dissention correctly. Paul tells us as much in Phil. 2:3, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."

Leupold: "How readily Abram might have insisted on his rights: he was the elder; he had come to this country at God's behest, not Lot; to Abram's seed the land had been promised. With utter selflessness and in true faith, which knows that God cannot fail in the keeping of His promise, Abram takes the difficulty in hand. In the wisdom of faith he acts before the peace between him and Lot has been marred. In the courtesy of faith he speaks very kindly: note the double "please," (na') [v. 9] which softens even the kindly suggestions. With the tactfulness of faith he appeals to proper motives: 'for we are brethren'" (435).

We need that proper motive and kindly faith to be our guide when the difficulties we face involve our brothers and sisters in Christ.

III. Remuneration can deceive at the crossroads of life (13:10-13).

Application: Lot makes a decision based on a desire for more of the material blessing that God had given him. Note 3 things about this desire for more.

A. A desire for more can cause the loss of the Lord's best blessings. Note that Abram had been materially blessed by God, but these material blessings did not become the love of his heart. When he faced a crossroad, he did not do so with the aspiration for more. Lot is a contrast to his uncle in this regard. Whatever else may be said about Lot's decision, v. 12 indicates that it took him outside the borders of Canaan, the land that God had promised to give Abram as a blessing. Lot was truly on his own now, and it was a desire for more possessions that did this to him. When we face the crossroads of life, we must make certain that it is not a desire for more earthly possessions that dominates our motives and desires.

B. A desire for more can deceive us. Note the progression from pitching a tent toward (13:12) to dwelling in (14:12) to sitting in the gate (19:1). Compromise with the wrong desires of sin is a progression that moves deceptively slowly in nearly imperceptible steps and stages. Each step seems to be such an insignificant distance from the one before. Compare Psalm 1.

C. A desire for more will be judged by God. Note that the people of Sodom were not only sinners; they were sinners against Yahweh. This speaks to Yahweh's universal jurisdiction. Sin is sin because it is against Yahweh's will.

IV. Reward from the Lord awaits those who choose correctly at the crossroads of life (13:14-18).

Application: Though a man whose failures at crossroads are not hidden by Scripture, Abram became a man whose choices were rewarded by the Lord's reward.

A. There is a specific tenderness in the Lord's reward.

Illustration: As I write this sermon I have some pictures of my Dad holding his newest grandson, my sister Kristin's boy Samuel. Samuel is all dressed up in a green and gold Green Bay Packers outfit, and Dad is grinning approvingly as he makes the baby giggle and enjoys Samuel's company. There is a tenderness in a grandfather's desire to reward his grandson with a cute baby outfit.

Application: The Lord says "please" 4 times in Scripture [Gen. 13:14, 15:5, 22:2, Exod. 11:2], and three of these are addressed to Abram as he asks him to come see the reward he has promised him. One of these instances is in verse 14 of our passage ("now" is the same word as "I pray thee" in vv. 8-9). Abram had treated his nephew tenderly, and God now speaks that way to Abram. Abram gave Lot the opportunity to lift up his eyes, and God now tells Abram to lift up his eyes. There is a

specific tenderness in the Lord's reward. He is a good and kind God who delights in rewarding the labors of His people.

B. There is a specific timing to the Lord's reward.

Applicaton: Note that when Abram lifted his eyes, God helped him to see things that would accrue to him only after his death – things merely promised, not possessed, in this life. They become possessions only in the after life. Lot, however, lifted up his eyes and saw things that he could have right now. He wasn't much concerned about living for treasures that can be enjoyed only in the next life.

Conclusion: This is the ultimate crossroad we all face each day of our lives. Do we live for the things of heaven or the things of earth, the things we must wait for, or the things we can have right now. Abram told Lot, "You must go right or left." Every day we must answer the question, are we going to live for up or for down, for then or for now. The apostle Paul said: "Set your affection on the things above, not on the things that are on earth." Abraham found that when we do that, we get both heaven and earth in the deal some day.

"A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction – the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

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