

Series: "Genesis: The Beginning Continued"

Sermon: "Looking Up, Not All Will See"

Text Genesis 13:1-18

RGGJR/FBCCS/5-9-21 **UNEDITED**

- What if it is just possible that the fulfillment of God's plan of redemption for this universe doesn't depend on me?
- What if the success or failure of what God is up to today doesn't rise or fall based on how well I perform today?
- What if I can't figure out all the details of his plan for my life and maybe your life in advance and then carry them out perfectly?
- We have just dedicated our children to the Lord. We believe God loves them and wants them to follow his truth and live life his way. We have committed to being part of that through praying, encouraging, teaching, modeling, exercising godly authority and speaking God's truth in love.
- We probably all know the proverb that says, "***Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it.***" We sometimes wonder on the spectrum of general wisdom that is generally true to absolute promises from God where this proverb falls. Parents can do their best at training and their children sometimes contradict this proverb. What if I can't raise perfect kids? Does that destroy the work of God?
- What if a church of believers in Jesus doesn't have all the certain answers about the future? What if **not** every believer who is part of that church lives a perfectly sinless life all of the time? Does this mean that church cannot serve God together? Does it mean that church must be frozen in place until the moment all the parts of the body are perfect so that church will not make a mistake and mess up God's eternal plan?
- What does this have to do with *Genesis* 13 our passage for today?
- I have tried to keep us aware that the book of *Genesis*, as much as is possible with our limited capacity, is providing truth from a ***perspective*** that is often foreign to how we human beings tend to

see things. This was true for the readers in Moses' day and true for us today as well.

- This picture and chart purports to prove, from the Bible, that the earth we live on is flat.
- From a certain perspective—a certain way of viewing things—that could make sense. I mean, if the earth is actually curved why are cars all made perfectly flat instead of curved?
- From a certain perspective—a certain way of viewing things—most of us probably believe the earth is not flat but rather shaped as a sphere. Let me play with you just a bit. Are you sure the earth looks like this. Is this truly "reality" as the picture claims? It depends on your perspective. You see this is actually a flat picture of a circle and I must bring a mindset to the picture—a perspective—that shapes all the data coming to my brain through my optic nerves—to call this "reality."
- I've shown you this before and I show this to the "Yutes" every week I teach these days. One of the most important pictures I ever borrowed for my PowerPoints is this one ("***Me at the Center of the Universe***" PIC).
- This is a cartoon picture of ***perspective***—a certain way of viewing things. Not everyone likes it when I suggest this, but I think we human beings tend to view many things from this perspective including God's Word and God's plan.
- We look at things out of these eyeballs and process them inside these heads of ours and we almost can't help but feel at first that we are at the center. From our limited perspective we are!
- This is the reason I asked you those questions at the start. They were questions about me (and you too) potentially messing up God's

eternal plans for the universe by my failure to know everything and respond perfectly to everything in life.

- That impulse in us comes because we nearly always begin with seeing things from the perspective of us being at the center of it all.
- BTW: when we won't admit this tendency, it very often leads to us needing to find ways to feel in control even if we aren't actually in control. I've already gone too deeply into this for why I brought it up so I'll finish by asking if just perhaps all of this stems from Eve's sin of wanting to be like God?
- I've brought this up here because I continue to find that most commentators, teachers and preachers I encounter in connection with where we are at in the book of *Genesis* treat the material from a certain perspective. It is a human-centric perspective. It is a perspective that makes the point of these narratives about a man named Abram. It is a perspective that then finds the truth of these stories to be human-centric and applies them that way.
- I have proposed to you that the book of *Genesis* is first-of-all God-centric not human-centric. This is way it often doesn't answer the questions I—a human—might like answered from my human-centric perspective.
- We saw this with the record of Creation in *Genesis*. It doesn't provide us with all the details we would like to know from our human-centric stance which, although it is changing as we speak, in our time and culture had become a rational, scientific stance.
- More importantly for today, we saw this last week as the second half of *Genesis* 12 didn't answer all the questions the exegetes and we wanted answered. From our human perspective that tends to put us at the center and, in that place, create in us a need for control, many

of us wanted to know the moral answers so we could get things right.

- Was it right for Abram to leave Egypt trying to save his family in a famine? Was it right for him to tell a half-truth about Sarai being his sister without mentioning the little fact that she was also his wife?
- In our day, that even raise an ethical question we would like answered. Was it OK that Abram married his half-sister Sarai in the first place?
- Moses, and that means God, doesn't tell us here. The morality of these matters is not the central matter of the passage even if it is the first thing that might occur to some of us because we need to get things right so we don't mess up God's plans—you know, being that we are at the center of God's universe and all!
- But, what if it is possible that the plan of God for this universe doesn't rise or fall on the moral perfection of Abram? What if God's redemptive plan will not fail because Abram sometimes seems to act with faith in God and other times seems to do very questionable things trying to be in control?
- As I said last week, what if this is the message these early narratives are teaching that next generation of Israelites and us? If we allow ourselves to see all this from outside of our center-of-the-universe stance—what if God is teaching that one way or another his plan will come to pass?—one way or another He will fulfill every single promise he makes?—one way or another he will remain perfectly righteous as he works in time and space?—
- AND, one way or another he will work in and through human beings? These human beings, even the best of them from our perspective, will be inconsistent morally and inconsistent in their trust of God, but that will not thwart God's plan.

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- We do realize don't we, that this is what makes Jesus of Nazareth, a true human, different humanly speaking than all other humans. He was the only human ever in the history of all humans to live in perfect righteousness and faith in the Father.
- Now, in chapter 13 of *Genesis* we have another narrative I want to push us to see from a different perspective than we might naturally want to read it.
- It is the story of Abram and his nephew Lot, who was certainly like a son to him ever since Lot's dad had died—how the two of them had to separate.
- This narrative unlike the end of chapter 12, does hint at the consequences of choices that humans make that can move them toward God and alignment with God's unfailing redemptive plan or away from God and that plan. There will be more details about that when we get to Sodom.
- There is more in this narrative about human perspective as well. What you are looking for matters. It is difficult to see something different when you are not looking for it.
- But, still, the human choice is not what makes God's plan work or fail even as the choice impacts the human's relationship with God and his blessings. Remember I see God's blessings on any human as God's empowerment to carry out His plan.
- Once again, the message is about God working and the human response. Here, once again as well, we are going to encounter the theme of **separation**. Not all humans will trust God and align with his plan. This can result in some painful separations—even separations from people we love.
- Let's read chapter 13 of the book of *Genesis*. **READ Genesis 13:1-18**

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- As I said, there are hints here of perspective and even human motivation. Because most of us know what is coming in a couple six chapters from now, we can sniff out Lot's focus from these hints.
- To begin with, 13:1 seems almost to tack on the information, "**and Lot went with him.**" That might simply be the narrator's way of reminding us Lot was involved and still present. However, when you get to 13:5 the level of Lot's connection and thus, maybe even the level of Lot's commitment to all this trusting YHWH's promises stuff becomes more apparent.
- Moses says, "**Now Lot who was moving about with Abram...**" The statement suggests Lot was just there because it seemed to work to his advantage and he hadn't thought of any other plan. He was there because he was just used to being with Abram and the family.
- It's an argument from silence so it is weak and it is made even weaker because you could apply it to Sarai as well—but still, have you noticed nothing is ever said of Lot building any altars to the LORD or Lot calling upon the LORD? He is **with** Abram and he is **moving about** as Abram moves about but we have no hint that he is doing this out of faith in the LORD and with a bigger purpose than having what now amounted to having a good earthly life for that day.
- In contrast, Abram, whether going to Egypt had been the LORD's will or not, upon returning to the Promised Land, worked his way back up to near Bethel. He had camped there before and it was where he had first built an altar to the LORD he was trusting for the promises.
- There, Abram called upon the name of the LORD. Abram believes his God is doing something even when Abram doesn't have all the answers and perfectly clear directions for the details. So Abram worships and Abram expresses his trust.

- The LORD and his plan is a focus of Abram. Not so much a focus of Lot. His *"eyes are on something else."*
- Abram had become **very** wealthy from his sojourn in Egypt. Lot also seemed to be doing well enough. The two of them were wealthy enough in livestock they were bumping up against each other in the fields as well as against the territorial claims of the Canaanites and the Perizzites.
- "Perizzites" likely means something like villagers or even country folk so they were certainly competing for the resources for their flocks in this crowded space.
- Fights were breaking out between Abram's herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen. In the next chapter, Abram and his herdsmen defeat a number of the Canaanite City-kings in battle. I suspect Abram could have simply put Lot and his men in their place if that was what mattered most to him.
- He could have won the stuff of the land in his own power but he didn't. Again, Abram doesn't seem to be concerned about the same things as Lot. Instead of using overwhelming force against his nephew, Abram offers a generous choice. Lot can take his pick of the land and Abram will move away.
- This is an odd offer for the customs of the day—the older, more powerful potentate being gracious to the younger competitor. Some suggest, again that this offer was a sin because God didn't tell Abram to make it. They ask, *"What if Lot would have chosen parts of the Holy Land needed to fulfill God's plan."* Here, once again, Moses doesn't answer this question or suggest Abram did wrong by being gracious and taking a risk—at least what might have looked risky on the surface.

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- BTW: Our desire for Abram to know all in advance so he could get it right is a reflection of that human-centric focus. If Abram gets it wrong will it descry God's plan? That's hypothetical so I can't say but it sure looks like these examples teach us one way or another God's plan will come to pass.
- We sometimes read the story of Abram and then Abraham's life in a compressed way. We see the places where God does come to Abram and does speak directly and we assume he must have done that all the time.
- By my count God appeared and gave direct revelation to Abram no more than 8 times in the 75 years of his life when Abram was living to carry out God's plan.
- Could it be that the rest of the time Abram was trusting God even as he was trying to figure out what God wanted him to do but hadn't revealed to him directly? Could it be that that aspect of Abram's life was more like mine and yours?
- We have God's revealed promises in his Word. We know the outline of God's plan. However, God has not told us to take a right turn at the next intersection—certainly not every time we have needed to decide something.
- Could it be we long for that because we see a need for control from our human-centric perspective of the universe and God's work in it? Just a thought.
- I think the implications are clear. Upon hearing Abram's offer, Lot looked up, saw well-watered plains that would make a good life for him in this world and chose on that basis. Moses hints that choosing on that basis takes one in a wrong direction. Here, that direction is "to the east" which seems always to signal a wrong choice of direction in these early chapters of *Genesis*. Specifically here, that

choice took Lot closer to those who rejected the LORD for whom Abram built altars and whose name Abram called upon.

- It moved Lot closer to the lineage of humans who had chosen autonomy and its great sin rather than faith and God's purpose of imaging Him.
- As it was more than once in both the Old and New Testaments, the important stuff was said after a separation—after someone who just can't see from a different perspective than them being at the center of the universe has left the room.
- In verses 14-17, the LORD has Abram lift his eyes as Lot had done. Bit, Abram sees something different that Lot never saw because Abram's eyes of faith are fixed on God's plan and God's promises not simply having a good life in this world.
- God's promises are repeated and expanded. All the land you see is yours and your offspring's. AND, that offspring will be so many to count them would be like trying to count the particles of dust that blow in desert storms.
- *"Check it out again Abram. Walk it. Believe it."* Abram did and his response could be nothing but building an altar of worship to the LORD of the promises in whom he was trusting.
- As we have watched God work thus far in *Genesis*, we have seen a pattern emerge. God often works by **separating—by making distinctions with a purpose**. You see hints of that in the earliest words when land was separated from water and day from night.
- God separated the human lineages for his purposes--Seth from Cain—Noah from the rest of humanity—Shem from Noah's three boys—Peleg from all his descendants—Terah from his and then Abram from his.

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- God separated believers from autonomous humans at the tower. He separated Terah from UR of the Chaldees—then Abram from Haran to separate him from the remnants of his old way of life.
- Now Abram is separated from a beloved nephew, Lot. Whether it was his choice or God told him to do it, it becomes clear that the separation needed to happen.
- Was it necessary because fights were breaking out? Was it simply a matter of best practices for herding flocks in a limited space? Both of these were true.
- However, I think Moses wants us to recognize the separation was eventually necessary because when the two men "looked up," they saw two different things because they looked from two different perspectives.
- Lot could not escape the perspective of a human centered universe. Thus, he is a man, rich, comfortable and successful, who ultimately thinks it is about him. He is not a man of faith. He is not very interested in God's plans and promises.
- Abram, by contrast (and separation usually highlights contrasts) Abram is a man who looks up and sees a bigger picture with the LORD at the center of the universe working out his plan.
- Abram is by no means a perfect man—a sinless man. We already see this. Abram doesn't always get it exactly right. Abram doesn't always have perfect faith. But, Abram has chosen to see the world and his life from a different perspective that has the LORD at the middle of the universe and makes the LORD's plan something that matters.
- Lot's problem is not his imperfection. His problem is his perspective. When Lot looks up from his center-of-the universe perspective, he doesn't expect to see God at work on his plan inviting him to faith.

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He expects to see the next well-watered plan that might make his life what he wants it to be.

- Growing up as a Fundamentalist Baptist, I often heard sermons at youth camps especially of separation. **"Come out from among them and be ye separate says the LORD!"**
- What they meant when they preached this was that we were not supposed to do the sinful things other kids who didn't know Jesus did.
- Does God teach separation? Yes. There is quite a pattern of separation in Scripture. Is that separation sometimes from the sins of the world? Sure. Was separation about us being behaviorally perfect sinless little humans as the sermons seemed to suggest? I think not! What I have found is that those behavioral texts are secondary outcomes to a different—more basic form of separation.
- Our lives are not to be lived from the perspective of those who cannot see when they lift their eyes.
- We are to live lives that are different, that is, **separated** lives because we see something different.
- We cannot walk the path of those who cannot see and the path of God's plan at the same time. We will indeed need to come out from among the world in that sense and be separate.