

Take Your Pick

Genesis 13

May 30, 2010

I. Introduction

- A. Have you ever done something, and then afterward wished you hadn't done that?
 - 1. Or said something, and then wished you could take the words back
- A. I almost feel that way about the title I chose for the message this morning
 - 1. *Take Your Pick* sounds more like it could be the name of some TV game show
 - a. Rather than the title for a sermon about the seriousness of making choices
- A. But then I realized that in itself is a good illustration of how we sometimes
 - 1. Make choices in life without giving them as much time or thought as we should
- A. And so I am hoping that if the title sounded a bit hokey to you
 - 1. That you will practice the same forgiving spirit that we depend on God for
 - a. When we make other choices that aren't very good

II. This story of Abraham and Lot, in our scripture today, is obviously about making choices

- A. And, as we look at the broader story, we will look at some of the consequences
 - 1. Of the choices that were made by these two people and others
- A. But the Bible is never **just** a story about people, it's also about God
 - 1. And behind this story from ancient history is an underlying theme
 - a. That we find throughout all of scripture
- A. The often unstated assumption that God is present and at work in the world
 - 1. Sometimes working alongside individuals and nations to accomplish God's purpose
 - a. Or sometimes bringing about God's ultimate plan for the world
 - (1) In spite of the choices we make
- A. So, as we look at this particular scripture passage this morning
 - 1. One small portion of the larger story of God calling out a people to be his own
 - a. I trust that we will be able to make the connection between what happened then
 - (1) And the way God continues to be at work in our world today
 - 2. Bringing to fulfillment God's ultimate plan and purpose for all of creation
 - a. But also, on a more personal level, bringing about the fulfillment
 - (1) Of God's plan and purpose for each one of us
- A. Remembering that the decisions we make do have consequences
 - 1. Costs or rewards that may follow us, and impact others, throughout this life

2. Were it not for God's mercy and grace, we would have no hope at all
 - a. Because we are so much like Lot, prone to making decisions
 - (1) Based on our own wishes and desires, rather than looking to God in faith
 - (a) For his guidance in making wise choices and decisions in life

A. The tricky part about the choice Lot was given in our story today

1. Is that, like so many choices we are faced with in life
 - a. There doesn't seem to be a clear choice between good and evil, right and wrong
2. It's only with the advantage of looking back at the decision
 - a. And knowing some of the terrible consequences that resulted from his choice
 - (1) That we can see how things might have turned out much differently
 - (a) If Lot had made a better decision about where to live
3. Even then, we will see that there was opportunity for Lot and his family
 - a. To steer clear of the temptations and pitfalls that resulted from his choice
 - (1) If his heart and mind had been open to God's wisdom and direction
4. But we're getting ahead of our story a little bit

III. The setting for our scripture text begins back in Chapter 12

A. When a man named Abram, later Abraham, receives a word from God saying –

1. Leave the rest of your father's household in Haran
 - a. And go to a land that I will show you
 - (1) For I am going to make of you a great nation
1. That becomes the promise that forms the basis of an ongoing covenant relationship
 - a. Which God established with Abram and his descendants –
2. I will bless those who bless you, curse those who curse you
 - a. And from you, all the nations, or families, or the earth will be blessed
 - (1) We will spend more time with that covenant next week
3. But for now, we just note that Abram took God at his word
 - a. He packed up his family, including his nephew Lot, and moved out

A. The journey leads Abram through the land of Canaan

1. Then, because of a famine in the land, they move down into Egypt for a while

A. And that brings us to our text that begins with them going up out of the land of Egypt

1. Abram and his wife, with all that their possessions, and Lot still with him

A. We hear next that Abram has accumulated much wealth by this time

1. I've read estimates that suggest perhaps hundreds of camels, thousands of sheep

- a. Cattle and goats, dozens of servants, along with silver and gold
- 2. Abram was what might be referred to today as a rich Arabian sheik
 - a. And Lot apparently has accumulated a similar amount of possessions, too
- A. Then we are told that there are already people living in the land of Canaan
 - 1. As a way of helping us understand the problem that soon arises
 - a. With people already settled in what was likely the best part of the land
 - (1) Grazing land for the huge flocks of Abram and Lot is somewhat limited
 - 2. And, as they make stops along the journey, bickering breaks out
 - a. Between the servants of Abram and the servants of Lot
 - (1) Over the best pasture on which to graze the flocks
 - (a) And perhaps the best places to water the flocks as well
- A. It's a perfectly understandable quarrel – who of us can say that we never argued
 - 1. Over the biggest piece of cake/pie, or who gets to ride in the front seat
 - a. Or, perhaps secretly, envied the guy who has the better job, the nicer house
 - (1) The newest car – it's all the same principle
 - 2. We don't have to learn this skill, it is born right into us
 - a. We want the best for ourselves, whatever we happen to be seeing right then
- A. And so we have a conflict between these servants over the rights to the best pasture
 - 1. And of course, they could rationalize their quarrel – it's not for me that I want this
 - a. It's my master's rights that I'm looking out for here
- A. We're not told just how long this bickering went on, all we hear is
 - 1. That it became so bad that the two families "could not live together"
 - a. And so the first of several choices was made regarding this matter
- A. Abram, perhaps because he was the older of the two, seems to have taken the initiative
 - 1. We read that he went to Lot first, to try and resolve this quarrel
- A. Now most of us, as we read or hear this story, probably take it for granted
 - 1. Abram, being the kindly person that he is, just naturally lets his nephew choose
 - a. Which part of the country before them he would rather move into
 - 2. The lush plains around the southern end of the Dead Sea
 - a. Or the hill country that lay to north and the east
 - 3. But it didn't just happen by chance that way – Abram made a deliberate choice
- A. If you are involved in any kind of disagreement, with someone you work with
 - 1. Or a family member, or a friend from school

- a. How quick are you to say – oh, let’s not fight about this
 - (1) You just choose what you want, and I’ll settle for whatever is left
- 2. I know, some of us, because of our personality
 - a. Will do almost anything to try to avoid conflict
- 3. But we tend to stick up for our rights, and Abram, being the older man
 - a. Could well have said – Lot, I think we need to separate ourselves
 - (1) I’ll take the land over this way, and you go the other way
- 4. We don’t know how Lot would have responded, but it could be
 - a. That even if he went along with his uncle, there might have been room
 - (1) For resentment, jealousy, even anger
 - b. Who knows how that might have played out over the years to come
- A. Abram valued the relationship with his nephew more than he valued his possessions
 - 1. More than his own interests or wishes in this matter
 - a. And that priority is what caused him to make the choice that he did
- A. You might think that Lot would have noticed that, and acted in a similar manner
 - 1. But we don’t see any hint of that in Lot’s choice
- A. Our text says that Lot lifted up his eyes and looked at the territory around them
 - 1. And seeing that the plain along the Jordan was well watered
 - a. No doubt the grass looked taller and better there
 - (1) Lot said, I think I’ll choose that direction
- A. Let’s note just a couple of things about this decision that Lot made
 - 1. One, we’ve already mentioned – Lot was probably the younger of the two men
 - a. Out of respect, he could have said – No, Uncle, you should have the first choice
 - 2. Or, at the very least, Lot could have said – Let’s talk this over
 - a. And come to an agreement that works for both of us
- A. From the way it is recorded here, it sounds like Lot didn’t even think of doing those things
 - 1. He just made a decision without giving a second thought
 - a. To any of the possible consequences of his choice
 - 2. Just like so many decisions we make on a daily basis
- A. And it probably didn’t seem like that big of a deal at the time
 - 1. After all, the issue was really about bringing an end to the conflict
 - a. Over the pasture land and water for the herds and flocks
 - 2. It was just a matter of choosing one way or the other, wasn’t it?

- A. But immediately, the writer of our scripture passage points out something
 - 1. That gives us a clue to the future consequences of this decision
- A. So Lot chose for himself the plains near the Jordan and moved off in that direction
 - 1. Abram settled in the hill country describes as the land of Canaan
 - a. Although God would come to him again with the promise
 - (1) That he would be given all the land as far as he could see
- A. While Lot settled among the cities of the plains,
 - 1. And pitched his tent near the city of Sodom
- A. And the narrator of our story adds this notation –
 - 1. Now the people of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord
- A. I don't know about you, but that sentence sounds very ominous to me
 - 1. If this were a movie, I think the music would sound very discordant about now
- A. And if we were to look on through the next chapter of Genesis
 - 1. We would see this note of warning borne out
- A. As kings from different cities in the Jordan valley go to war against each other
 - 1. The city of Sodom is on the losing side, and Lot and his family are taken captive
 - a. Abram hears the bad news, and takes an army of his servants
 - (1) The same ones who had quarreled with Lot's servants earlier
 - b. And rescues his nephew, "with all of his goods, his women, and all his servants"
 - 2. You might think that would have caused Lot to reconsider his decision
- A. Instead, if we jump ahead to chapter 19, we pick up the story
 - 1. This time, with Lot sitting in the gateway of the city of Sodom
 - a. Do you notice the progression in the choices that Lot is making?
- A. Messengers sent from God have come with the warning to leave town immediately
 - 1. Because the wickedness of the city is about to be punished
 - a. With fire and brimstone from above
- A. Lot and two of his daughters make a narrow escape
 - 1. But the rest of the family, and all of his possessions, are completely destroyed
- A. The part of that story that we may be most familiar with is the part where Lot's wife
 - 1. Hesitates to leave, or turns back as they are fleeing the city
 - a. And scripture records that she became a pillar of salt
- IV. The story doesn't end there, if we pay close attention, we would find later references
 - A. To the descendants of Lot, primarily when they are in conflict

1. With the children of Israel on their journey to the promised land
 - a. But God doesn't write them off completely
- A. Ruth, the woman from the land of Moab, who became the grandmother of King David
 1. In the heartwarming story of loyalty to her mother-in-law
 - a. May well have been one of those descendants of Lot
- A. Could Lot have known all of the sorrow and pain that he would one day suffer
 1. As a result of the choice he made up there on the hill with his uncle? No
 - a. And it would be wrong to conclude that everything that followed
 - (1) Was a result of that one choice
- A. However, Lot's choice of where to settle led to certain other choices
 1. Neighbors that he would associate with in the city of Sodom
 - a. Sharing in the destruction that came upon the city
- A. It is almost never true that the course of our lives is determined by just one choice
 1. More often, our future depends on a pattern of choices we make
 - a. Choices that reflect God's wisdom and leading
 - (1) Or choices that we make based totally on our own will and desires
- A. As I mentioned earlier, Lot made other choices at other times in his life
 1. That could have completely changed the outcome for himself and his family
 - a. But there is one hint regarding the difference between Lot and his uncle
 - (1) That we sort of passed over before
- A. Again, it probably doesn't tell the whole story, but we hear repeatedly
 1. That as Abram journeyed, and then when he settled down in the land
 - a. That God promised to give to him and to his descendants
 2. One of the first things that he would always do is to build an altar
 - a. Where he could offer his sacrifices and worship God
 - (1) We never hear that said about Lot
- A. I will leave it to each one of us to decide whether, or how, that applies to our lives
 1. Which model, or example, we will choose to follow – take your pick!