

Key idea: Abram deals with another promise obstacle by trusting God. The result is markedly different, and the contrast is crucial.

FCF: Dealing with life with the wrong eyes...

Application: Give thanks for Jesus, and look at life with the right eyes...

1. Eyes...

How do you look at life?

I remember a few years ago, just after the attack in Paris on a group of journalists, there was much analysis of Islamic terrorism, and its view of the world – the world is a battlefield, the battle is for the honour of Islam, the opponents are all those who are not Islamic, glory and the end of the world are received and hastened by armed violence.

If you view the world this way, then certain actions are inevitable, or at least expected. It is often the way – how we view the world – the eyes we use to look at the world – necessarily affect our behaviour.

At the heart of today's passage is an occasion of two men looking – searching the world intently with certain eyes. On one level, it is basically a story of how two men sort out their agricultural arguments. On another level, it is a reminder of the importance for how we view the world – what eyes do we use to look at this world?

Place: NAC

Date: 11/10/20

Passage: Genesis 13...

PRAY...

Today, we are returning to Genesis, the first book of the Bible. It lays out the beginning of all things (created by God, in order, out of nothing by his word, according to his design). It lays out the purpose of all things (to rest with God, under his word, as his people). It lays out the cause of the breaking of the world, and what a broken world looks like (it was broken by human sin – the attitude and action that says, ‘I am God and God is not’). It lays out the judgement and grace of God. It lays out the commitment of God, through the family of Abraham, to roll back sin and its brokenness, and bring God’s approval – God’s people, in God’s place under God’s rule by his word.

When we finished last year, Abram – his name will not change until Genesis 17 – had had a disastrous sojourn into Egypt....

2. A man come home (13:1-4)

Egypt has not gone well for Abram. Pharaoh has been offended, his wife has been dishonoured, and Abram has been exposed a frail and fallible human like the rest of us. Pharaoh’s soldiers have frogmarched Abram and his family and his goods out of Egypt – he is not welcome. As he returns to the land of Canaan, he returns a dishonoured but wealthy man – **look at verses 1-4...**

READ.

We need to recognise how wealthy Abram is. In modern day terms, this is a man with significant assets AND with cash in the bank. On every level, Abram is wealthy – and very much so.

Place: NAC

Date: 11/10/20

Passage: Genesis 13...

His return to the land of Canaan is one of stages. Starting down in the bottom south-west corner, in the Negev desert, he travels slowly back up to the place where he had been living when famine struck the land. This is a man coming home.

But he is a man coming home in terms far more significant than his postal code. Did you notice **verse 4**? **Let me read it again... READ.**

Abram has returned not only to the place where he had pitched his tent – he has also returned to the place where he has positioned his life. Abram has returned to the altar he had set up back in **Genesis 12:8... READ.**

This is a significant statement – where Abram returned to – on a number of levels:

- First, it should cast our mind back to what we have already read about Abram. Abram is the recipient of three significant promises from God – that God will give this man a large family (nation) and a land and through this man's family, God will bless the world. In fact, this is God's plan to restore a broken world – a world which he created so that God could dwell with his people, in his place and bless them by ruling them. Human rebellion (sin...) has damaged and broken God's world. Humans now sit under God's judgement for their rebellion – and that is death. And, yet, God doesn't neglect his creation – he promises to restore his world. And it will be through this man, Abram, and his

family. Through his mob, God will bring his perfect mix of justice and mercy and deal with human sin.

- Second, Abram responded to God's promises rightly – by trusting God: he took him at his word. So, Abram set off for this land that God had promised. When he got there, he did two significant things – he built altars and worshipped God – in Shechem (in the north) and then at Bethel (in the middle); second, he then toured down to the Negev, at the far south of this land. Now, Abram faced some significant obstacles to trusting God's plan (a barren wife and a promised land already occupied). But, his initial journey into this new land was a significant statement that he trusted God – he looked at the land through the eyes of the promises of God.
- So, third, when Abram returns to the land and immediately works his way back to one of those original altar sites – and then worships God, this is a significant moment. I think we are meant to see that Abram has re-committed himself to the promises that God has given him. Cunning plans fail, human ingenuity only leads down – he seems to have learnt his lesson. Rather than approaching the world in the normal, shrewd, cunning way that had enriched him so far, he explicitly states that he is coming under God's promises: he will look at the world through those eyes!

3. A problem (13:5-7)

Abram's nephew Lot has reappeared in the story at this point – the focus in Egypt was on Abram, and so Lot was not mentioned. But, the mentioning of Lot twice in the opening verses suggests

Place: NAC

Date: 11/10/20

Passage: Genesis 13...

that he has a major part to play in these scenes – and so it proves
– **look at verses 5-7... READ.**

Abram has received the promises of God. Through Abram, God will bring salvation to the world. But, there are significant obstacles in the way of these promises. I have already mentioned two – the fact that Sarai is barren, and the fact that the ‘promised land’ is already occupied. Abram’s excursion to Egypt raised other problems. And, now, in the form of Lot, we have another obstacle: this land is not big enough for the two of them.

Lot is a man of significant resources, too – there, in verse 5, he is mentioned as having ‘flocks, herds and tents’. Now, he is not ‘very rich’ like Abram, and his wealth is tied up in assets – perhaps this is why he has not branched out on his own – but we know he is wealthy. In fact, his assets and Abram’s assets are now competing and creating conflict.

This is a significant problem for Abram and the promises of God. There is a contender for the land, and he is connected to Abram’s family. Could he kick Abram’s family out? Could he destroy his uncle and take the land? And what about those who are already in the land – the Canaanites and the Perizzites? They are watching all this family squabbling, planning a corporate takeover at the point of a spear!

What will Abram do? What ‘cunning plan’ will he devise? How will he use his considerable ingenuity to solve this problem?

4. Not a ‘cunning plan’ (13:8-9)

Place: NAC

Date: 11/10/20

Passage: Genesis 13...

READ verses 8-9...

Now that is not what we expect! In baseball parlance, that is a curve-ball! That is not a 'cunning plan'!

We must not forget that Abram had every right to kick Lot out of the land – Abram was the senior, more wealthy member of the family. Even if he wanted to play the 'God card', Abram had every right – God had made promises to him. Abram is in position of familial, cultural and social superiority here.

And yet he plays this card. He is generous. He is humble. He is kind. He is thoughtful. He is seeking to preserve the family relationships. He is a completely different man to the one we met in Egypt.

What has brought this change? What has engineered such a remarkable transformation in Abram?

I think the key lies in **verse 4... READ.**

Let me put it very simply: Abram trusts God and so he behaves like he trusts God (**REPEAT**). Abram trusts the promises of God and it shows in how he behaves. Because God's promises are firm, because God has shown himself to be consistently faithful in keeping his promises, Abram trusts him and acts accordingly. Abram can be generous, because God is generous to him. Abram can be humble, because God has shown him generosity he does not deserve. Abram can be kind, because God has extended to him unwarranted kindness. Abram can afford to hold onto his

Place: NAC

Date: 11/10/20

Passage: Genesis 13...

material possessions lightly, because God has been overwhelmingly generous to him.

And so, instead of looking at the world – and this obstacle – through the eyes of a cunning plan, Abram looks at the world through trust in the promises of God. Abram trusts God. Abram looks at the world like he trusts God. Abram behaves as if he trusts God.

5. Eyes? (13:10-17)

Well, Lot steps up and takes a look.

In fact, 'looking' language is very prominent in these verses. It is as if the author – Moses – is trying to draw our attention to the way in which these two men looked at the world around them. Our attention is drawn to the way in which what we believe affects how we see and, therefore, how we live.

Lot steps up and has a look – a close look – **look at verses 10-13... READ.**

Lot looks east. He looks east. The land is magnificent – any plot of land described as being like 'the Lord's garden' has to be a good bit of grazing land. It is well-watered – crucial in a region known for drought and famine. And so, budding pastoralist that he is, Lot looks and decides – 'The best pasture is for me'.

On any natural level, he has made a sound decision. And you can almost hear the bank manager applauding his client's wisdom. And yet... And yet...

Place: NAC

Date: 11/10/20

Passage: Genesis 13...

I don't think it is a mistake to see another description of the land attached to 'the Lord's garden'. This land is also like the 'land of Egypt'. Now, given the delta, that means that it is good land for a growing mob of sheep. But our last experience of Egypt was not crash-hot.

And there is this continued reference to a byword for immorality, sin and human rebellion against God – see there in verses 10, 12 and 13: 'Sodom and Gomorrah'. The original readers of this text – Israel – would have heard those names and shuddered. That is a place that any child of God steers well clear of. That is a byword for perversion, corruption and sin at its most vile. And yet, for the sake of good pasture, for the sake of a source of water, for the opportunity to get ahead in his financial pursuits, for the sake of his empire, Lot takes that land. Moreover, he doesn't just take that land – he pitches his tents in the shadows of the town of Sodom – and listen to the description of that place – **verse 13... READ.**

Lot looked. Lot saw. Lot decided.

He is a lot like us! I think we are given enough hints here about how Lot looked at life – the eyes through which he viewed the world. It is a way of seeing and living that seems right, that is naturally sensible – BUT... You see, there is a foolishness here that is exposed. I mean, why would you camp there? Why would you expose yourself to such risk, even for the success of the empire you are building? Why would you overlook the real risk in order to gain the real estate?

Lot looked. Lot saw. Lot decided.

Poor Abram!

On a natural level, Abram seems diddled. He has made a gross tactical error. Financially, he seems to have shot himself in the foot. He has blown a significant opportunity to grow the empire, to get ahead, to take advantage of his opportunities. What a foolish man! What a goose! How silly!

But that is not the view of the author...

Did you get the hint in **verse 12? READ...**

‘Abram lived in the land of Canaan’. That is such an important phrase. Lot gets the pastoral land, Abram stays in the Promised Land. Lot looks after himself, Abram looks to God. Lot exposes himself to the sinful stew of Sodom, Abram stays put. Lot is a ‘wise’ fool, and Abram is just plain wise.

That phrase – ‘Abram lived in the land of Canaan’ – reminds us that Abram has been brought back under obedience to the promises of God. Abram’s eyes are remarkably different. His view of the world is founded on the promises of God and the character of God.

READ verses 14-17...

Abram now looks. And Abram now sees. And, Abram lives accordingly. He stands in the same place as Lot. He looks not just at the best real estate – he looks at the whole land laid out before

Place: NAC

Date: 11/10/20

Passage: Genesis 13...

him. As he does, God speaks to him. God reminds him of his promise: he has promised him this land, and he has promised him a great family. Through this man's family, God will bless the world. Abram is to walk through the land, looking at it not through the eyes of a growing pastoralist, but through the eyes of trust in the promises of God.

If Lot looked at the world through natural eyes, Abram is called to look at the world through eyes of faith. (**REPEAT**)

But, left on its own, that is a meaningless platitude. Many in the world want to 'live by faith', and it just means anything. No – Abram looked at the world through eyes of faith, and this faith was specific and clear: this faith was trusting God's promises, trusting God and taking him at his word, trusting that God would do as he said. That is what we mean when we say 'looking at the world through eyes of faith': that we trust that God will do as he says.

And Abram settles down under that promise – **look at verse 18... READ.**

The bookends of this passage are clear. At either end, Abram settles down, secure under his trust in God. His life is settled under what God promises – and he gives God what God deserves: his whole life. The obstacle to the promises is overcome by trust in God, and not a cunning plan.

6. Eyes

Jesus looked at the world through those very same eyes. The great.... descendant of Abram faced – right at the start of his

Place: NAC

Date: 11/10/20

Passage: Genesis 13...

public work – stood like Lot and Abram and looked out at the world. It was a vital proving moment for his life – and the work God had sent him to do. What eyes will Jesus look at the world through? What impact will this have on his life?

In essence, that is what happens in the temptation of Jesus at the start of Matthew's/Luke's biography of Jesus. The devil presents Jesus with three opportunities to look at the world through his eyes – naturally and, by all worldly accounts, in a wise way. The devil presents Jesus with three opportunities to prove himself, to 'succeed', to 'achieve' what he came to do, to show himself the 'Son of God' – it will just mean camping real close to the stew of sin, to Sodom. It is much easier than God's plan, it will bring much quicker success, and it will be far less painful than rejection, humiliation and rejection! It will look like a success, like trusting the promises of God, BUT...

And Jesus reveals the eyes he uses: three times he rejects the offer of the devil. Three times he quotes God's clear promises and commands. Three times he bids the devil leave him. Three times he shows that he is looking at the world through eyes of faith: trusting the words, plans and promises of God.

I am thankful that Jesus did! Jesus – like his great ancestor Abram – looked with eyes of faith. He then fulfilled the very promises he was trusting in: he is the culmination of the plan and promise of God made to Abram. Because Jesus died for our sins, we can be reconciled to God, and be made God's mob: God's people living with God, under God's rule and in God's land.

Place: NAC

Date: 11/10/20

Passage: Genesis 13...

That is a great fulfilment! That is a reminder of the goodness of pitching our tents under those promises! That is a reminder of how significant and crucial it is to look at the world through the right eyes!

And, it then turns us to the contrast at the heart of the account we just read. We must see this contrast between Lot and Abram. As we give thanks for the fulfilment of God's plans by Jesus – who looked at the world through eyes of faith – we must also consider the same question for us, as we follow Jesus: What eyes do we use to look at the world?

Lot stands as a reminder of the fallacy and fallibility of looking at the world a certain way. It is foolishness to look at life so that you succeed in all natural ways, but have pitched your tent next to Sodom. That is just foolish! That is so unwise! That behaviour is to betray and reveal what eyes we really use – and the temptation is constantly there. In work, in family decisions, in marriage, in relationships, in leisure – in all those areas of life, we must consider the eyes we use and the actions they lead to. The opportunity might be good – in all natural senses – but is it the way that camps under the promise of God?

You see, God promises to provide all that his people need to be his people (REPEAT). Now, that might not be success, and that might not be ease, and that might not be progress (in a natural way) – but it is God's promise. He has done it once – through Jesus, dealing with our biggest problem: sin. He will continue to do it.

Place: NAC

Date: 11/10/20

Passage: Genesis 13...

If we trust God and his promise – if we view the world through eyes of faith – then we can have no concern about God providing what we need to be his mob. In this sense, looking at the world through those eyes of faith can lead to a way of life that – like Abram in this episode – is exceedingly generous. Here, then, is the root and source of true generosity and humility: ‘I trust that God will do as he says – and he already has in Jesus – so that means I can be generous with what I have, and humble in what has been given to me’. Here is the evidence of people who look at the world in a certain way: a people who camp under God’s promise.