

“God Will Provide” Genesis 13:1-18

One of the things I liked about growing up in Alberta was that I could get a driver's licence earlier than most other provinces. I could get a learner's licence – the equivalent of an “L” in BC, at age 14. That meant, in theory, I could be driving alone by age 16, for we needed to have our learners for two years. Well, the Provincial Law said I could get a learner's license at 14 years of age but I lived under a higher law: my parents! As long as I was under their roof I abided by what they said, and they felt 14 was too young to start driving: my sisters and I had to wait until we were 15. And since a learner needs a licensed driver with them to drive it made sense to listen and obey what my folks had to say!

But to get that learner's license I had to do what every BC resident does to get their “L”: I had to study the rules of the road and pass an exam. I had to pay to write the exam so I did not want to fail, so I studied hard. And since my older sister got her license the first time she wrote, you know I had to succeed the first time I wrote as well. I studied hard and I passed the exam first time – I was so proud of my learner's license. It felt so good to pass this test.

Our study these past weeks has allowed us to look into the life of Abram, father of Israel and example of faith. But what we have already discovered is that though God has promised him some great things – he would be the father of a great nation – Abram still had some lessons to learn. Trusting God was one of those lessons.

We have followed Abram as he left his country and family and headed off to the Promised Land God would give him. He gets as far as Bethel, about 19 km from Jerusalem, and then heads south to Egypt when a severe famine hits the land. There he fails miserably by using deception to protect himself, rather than trusting God. Nonetheless, God rescues him and he escapes Egypt a wiser – and richer – man. In chapter 13 we see God test Abram once again, to see if he has learned to trust God and his promises or not. How does he do?

The situation:

Abram arrives back in the land of Canaan with all his wealth, and with him is his nephew Lot, who has also acquired a great deal of wealth. They have so much livestock that the land cannot provide for both camps. Abram's servants are starting to fight with Lot's servants over the grasslands and water.

Abram knows something must be done. They need to put some space between them so that there would be room for all the flocks. So Abram makes a proposal.

The Test

Here is where we see Abram tested. He is the older of the two, and has the right to choose first. No doubt there would be some areas that were better than other areas. It would be easy to spot the well-watered valleys, where there would be trees for shade and maybe fruit, and grass for the livestock. And the dry wilderness was also easy to spot....

Abram could easily choose the path he thought was best, like he did when he fled down to Egypt and got himself in so much trouble. Or he could trust God. If God was truly going to bless him, then it should not matter whether he went right or left, God would be there.

So Abram did something that day that actually took a lot of faith: he let Lot choose first.

Put yourself in Abram's sandals. You stand on the hill and look out over the land. You see lush green valleys and dry, barren valleys. It doesn't take a genius to figure out which way Lot will go – to the obvious signs of wealth and prosperity. Sure, there are some Canaanites and Perizzites down in those lush valleys – for they know a good thing when they see it too – but the land is so fertile there certainly must be room for everyone.

Abram is willing to trust God that whatever way he must go to put distance between him and Lot will be the way God will bless. He will trust God to lead him.

Have you ever been in a position where you had to make a choice, and it seemed so clear that one way was certainly better than any other option. The only thing is, you did not think this was God's way for you.

I have been reading a historical fiction book called Auschwitz by Joel Rosenberg. It tells of Jacob, a young Jew who ends up at the infamous Nazi death camp. When he arrives, after days of travel by train in a cattle car without food and water, he was taken into a room where he was ordered to take a shower. As he heard the water starting to come through the pipes he wanted to lift his head up and drink the water. He was so thirsty. But he heard a voice say, "Don't drink the water." Twice he heard that voice, so when the water finally came on he did not drink the water. It seemed like a foolish thing to do seeing as he was so dehydrated and thirsty, but the voice said "No."

The next day many of the men were sick to their stomachs and Jacob had to conclude it was because they drank the water from the showers. It was not clean. He was so glad he did not do what seemed like the obvious choice – drink the water. He was glad he listen to that voice, for he came to know it was the voice of God...

Abram could selfishly take what appeared to be the best land for himself. He could choose what he thought would make life easier for himself. He could devise his plan to prosper – or he could choose to trust God in this, and believe God could bless him even when it did not look like there was a way. Abram could trust God, or trust himself.

The Choice

Lot looked over the land and spotted the fertile valley where the Jordan River ran through. It is described as a garden of the Lord. It would be perfect. True, there were Canaanites there with their false gods and immoral lifestyles, but he was sure he would be okay. He would take the fertile valley. He moved into a city called Sodom.

Abram would moved his family and possessions into Canaan. It did not have the appeal the Jordan Valley had but it was where God was leading him. He would trust God to provide this time instead of trying to take matters into his own hands.

The Consequences

Did you hear what happened when Abram trusted God? Verse 14 tells us that the Lord showed up and spoke to Abram. He said:

“Lift up your eyes...”

Though this was an invitation to see all the land around him, it seems to have a double meaning for us today. Lot only looked high enough to see the green valley and chose to go there. Abram is being challenged to look higher – to look to God.

Some of you may have read the post I put on the church Facebook page this week. I told about being the last car on the ferry, a situation we found ourselves in on Monday. To wait and wait for the ferry and then find it is full and you have to wait for the next ferry is not very pleasant. Another two to three hours in the parking lot on a hot day is no fun. So as I said in the article, sometimes being last is still a win. We don't mind being the last car on the ferry, as long as we are on it.

What I did not say in the article is that as Lise and I hurried to the ferry terminal we could have sped down the highway to get ahead of some of the other cars. We chose not to do that. We could have stressed, looking at our watches and stewing. That day we chose not to do that. No, we lifted up our eyes, for as we drove into the ferry terminal Lise said a simple prayer, “Lord, please get us on this ferry, even if we are the last car on.” As the line crept forward, stopping and starting, we watched as two more cars got on. Then three more. Then five. Then two and finally as we got to the front of the line we waited for the flagman to hold up his hand to stop us... but he did not. He stopped the car behind me. We drove on... the last car. Do you believe the prayer made the difference? I do! We looked up to God instead of at our circumstances and God blessed.

Abram was invited to lift up his eyes and trust God... and when he did that, listen again to what God said:

“I will give you and your offspring all this land you see...” (v. 15)

“I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth...” (v. 16)

“Walk the length and breadth of the land because I AM giving it to you...”

God had already started to fulfill his promises to Abram! Our chapter ends with Abram building an altar to God, to say “thank you” for what was going to come to him. That is faith.

Conclusion

Last week we saw Abram tested to trust God to provide for him during a drought, and what does Abram do? He packs his bags and heads to Egypt. There he ends up being deceptive and dishonest to save himself from Pharaoh. Unfortunately, he has to sacrifice the integrity of his wife to do this. God is not pleased, and soon reveals the truth of the situation to Pharaoh. Abram is chased out of the country.

Abram must make a choice once again: choose the obviously nicer area to live in or trust God to provide despite appearances. Abram chooses to trust God, and God once again pronounces his blessing on him. Abram passed the test!

In what ways is God challenging you to lift your eyes to him and trust him to provide? Several members of our congregation have written tests recently, and from what I heard everyone did well. You passed your tests. Now, where is God asking you to look to next? Where will He take you? Will you trust him, or find your own way? How will you do on this next test?

Someone has suggested our world is governed by scarcity. Hold fast to what you have, protect your interests; look out for yourself first and foremost. We saw this when COVID 19 first hit our land. People rushed to the stores to hoard supplies, especially toilet paper and disinfectants. We find our security in what we have in our hands.

Meanwhile Christians face life differently. They don't just look at what is in their hands, but they lift their eyes up to God. And because of this the Christian behaves differently as well. There is a willingness to trust God which allows for generosity and compassion despite the pandemic. I see how you continue to give faithfully to your church, showing you are trusting God, not hoarding your resources. I know God will bless you, and I am sure He is! I know your generous, trusting attitude is taking meals to people, delivering cookies and baking, bringing help and hope to others.

I believe you are finding many ways to show you trust in the God who is...

“... able to do immeasurably more than all you ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us. To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

You have passed this test. Keep up the good work....