

The Two Paths

by F.B. Meyer

F.B. Meyer explores the consequences of choosing between worldly gain and faithfulness to God through the story of Lot and Abraham.

Scripture: Genesis 13:9, Psalm 37:4, Proverbs 3:5-6, Isaiah 40:31, Matthew 5:5, Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 6:17-18, Hebrews 11:8-10, James 4:4, 1 John 2:15-17

Topics: "Trusting God's Promises", "Choices and Consequences"

Description

F.B. Meyer explores the choices made by Abraham and Lot, emphasizing the consequences of choosing worldly gain over spiritual integrity. Lot's decision to settle in the well-watered plains of Jordan, driven by selfish ambition, ultimately leads to his downfall and separation from God. In contrast, Abraham's faithfulness and willingness to trust in God's promises result in divine blessings and a deeper relationship with the Lord. Meyer warns that many Christians today mirror Lot's choices, prioritizing materialism over spiritual values, and encourages believers to seek God's will in their decisions. The sermon concludes with the assurance that God rewards those who separate themselves for His purposes and trust in His provision.

Transcript

"Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me." -- Genesis 13:9.

Abraham and Lot stood together on the heights of Bethel. The Land of Promise spread out before them as a map. On three sides at least there was not much to attract a shepherd's gaze. The eye wandered over the outlines of the hills which hid from view the fertile valleys nestling within their embrace. There was, however, an exception in this monotony of hill, towards the south-east, where the waters of the Jordan spread out in a broad valley, before they entered the Sea of the Plain.

Even from the distance the two men could discern the rich luxuriance, which may have recalled to them traditions of the garden once planted by the Lord God in Eden, and have reminded them of scenes which they had lately visited together in the valley of the Nile. This specially struck the eye of Lot; eager to do the best for himself, and determined to make the fullest use of the opportunity which the unexpected magnanimity of his uncle had thrown in his way. Did he count his relative a fool for surrendering the right of choice? Did he vow that he must allow no false feelings of delicacy to interfere with his doing what he could for himself? Did he feel strong in the keenness of his sight, and the quickness of his judgment? Perhaps so. For he had little sympathy with the pilgrim spirit.

But the time would come when he would bitterly rue his choice, and owe everything to the man of whom he was now prepared to take advantage.

"Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well-watered everywhere... as the garden of the Lord. ... Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan" (13:10-11). He did not ask what God had chosen for him. He did not consider the prejudicial effect which the morals of the place might exert upon his children and himself. His choice was entirely determined by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. For the men of Sodom were "sinners before the Lord exceedingly."

How many have stood upon those Bethel heights, intent on the same errand as took Lot thither! Age after age has poured forth its crowds of young hearts, to stand upon an exceeding high mountain, whilst before them have been spread all the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them; the tempter whispering, that for one act of obeisance all shall be theirs. In assurance and self-confidence; eager to do the very best for themselves; prepared to consider the moralities only in so far as these did not interfere with what they held to be the main chance of life -- thus have succeeding generations looked towards the plains of Sodom from afar. And, alas! like Lot, they have tried to make stones into bread; they have cast themselves down from the mountain side, for angels to catch; they have knelt before the tempter, to find his promise broken, the vision of power an illusion, and the soul beggared for ever -- whilst the tempter, with hollow laugh, has disappeared, leaving his dupe standing alone in the midst of a desolate wilderness.

Let us not condemn Lot too much because he chose without reference to the moral and religious conditions of the case; lest, in judging him, we pronounce sentence on ourselves. Lot did nothing more than is done by scores of professing Christians every day.

A Christian man asks you to go over and see the place which he is about to take in the country. It is certainly a charming place: the house is spacious and well-situated; the air balmy; the garden and paddock large; the views enchanting. When you have gone over it, you ask how he will fare on Sunday. You put the question not from feelings of curiosity, but because you know that he needs strong religious influences to counteract the effect of absorbing business cares, from Monday morning till Saturday night; and because you know that his children are beginning to evince a deepening interest in the things of God. "Well," says he, "I really have never thought of it." Or perhaps he answers, "I believe there is nothing here like we have been accustomed to; but one cannot have everything: and they say that the society here is extremely good." Is not this the spirit of Lot, who bartered the altar of Abraham's camp for the plains of Sodom, because the grass looks green and plentiful?

Have mothers, professing Christians, never gone into society where evangelical religion is held in contempt, for no other reason than to make a good match for their daughters, so far, at least, as the world is concerned? Ah, the world is full of breaking hearts and wrecked happiness, because so many persist in lifting up their eyes to choose for themselves, and with sole reference to the most sordid considerations.

If Abraham had remonstrated with Lot, suggesting the mistake he was making, do you not suppose that he would have answered petulantly: "Do you not think that we are as eager as you are to serve the Lord? Sodom needs just that witness which we shall be able to give. Is it not befitting that the light should shine in the darkness; and that the salt should be scattered where there is putrefaction?" Abraham might not be able to contest these assertions, and yet he would have an inner conviction that these were not the considerations which were determining his nephew's choice. Of course, if God sends a man to Sodom, He will keep him there; as Daniel was kept in Babylon: and nothing shall by any means hurt him. He shall be

kept as the eye is kept: guarded in its bony socket from violence, and by its delicate veil of eyelid sheltered from the dust. But if God does not clearly send you to Sodom, it is a blunder, a crime, a peril to go.

Mark how Lot was swiftly swept into the vortex; first he saw; then he chose; then he separated himself from Abraham; then he journeyed east; then he pitched his tent toward Sodom; then he dwelt there; then he became an alderman of the place, and sat in the gate. His daughters married two of the men of Sodom; and they probably ranked among the most genteel and influential families of the neighborhood. But his power of witness-bearing was gone. Or if he lifted up his voice in protest against deeds of shameless vice, he was laughed at for his pains, or threatened with violence. His righteous soul might vex itself; but it met with no sympathy. He was carried captive by Chedorlaomer. His property was destroyed in the overthrow of the cities. His wife was turned into a pillar of salt. And the blight of Sodom left but too evident a brand upon his daughters. Wretched, indeed, must have been the last days of that hapless man, cowering in a cave, stripped of everything, face to face with the results of his own shameful sin.

It is, indeed, a terrible picture; and yet some such retribution is in store for every one whose choice of home, and friends, and surroundings, is dictated by the lust of worldly gain, or fashion, or pleasure, rather than by the will of God. If such are saved at all, they will be saved as Lot was -- so as by fire. Now, let us turn to a more inviting theme, and further consider the dealings of the Almighty God with Abraham, the one man who was being educated to hold fellowship with Jehovah as a friend.

(1) GOD ALWAYS COMES NEAR TO HIS SEPARATED ONES.

"And the Lord said unto Abram, AFTER THAT LOT WAS SEPARATED FROM HIM." It may be that Abraham was feeling very lonely. Lot and he had been constant and close companions: and when the last of the camp-followers had moved off, and Lot had disappeared into the long distance, a cold chill may have enveloped him, as a November fog does the man who has arisen before the dawn to see his friend away by the early mail. Then it was that God spake to him.

We all dread to be separated from companions and friends. It is hard to see them stand aloof, and drop away one by one; and to be compelled to take a course by oneself. The young girl finds it hard to refuse the evening at the theatre, and to stay alone at home when her gay companions have gone off in high spirits. The young city clerk finds it hard to refuse to join in the "sweepstake," which is being got up on the occasion of some annual race. The merchant finds it hard to withdraw from the club or society with which he has long been identified, because there are practices creeping in which his conscience refuses to sanction. The Christian teacher finds it hard to adopt a course which isolates him from brethren with whom he has had sweet fellowship, but against whose views he is obliged to protest.

And yet, if we really wish to be only for God, it is inevitable that there should be many a link snapped; many a companionship forsaken; many a habit and conventionalism dropped: just as a savage must gradually and necessarily abjure most of his past, ere he can be admitted into the society and friendship of his European teacher.

But let us not stand looking on this aspect of it -- the dark side of the cloud. Let us rather catch a glimpse of the other side, illuminated by the rainbow promise of God. And let this be understood, that, when once the spirit has dared to take up that life of consecration to the will of God to which we are called, there break upon it visions, voices, comfortable words, of which the heart could have formed no previous idea. For brass He brings gold, and for iron silver, and for wood brass, and for stone iron. Violence is no more heard, nor wasting, nor destruction. The sun is no more needed for the day, nor the moon for the night.

Because the Lord has become the everlasting light of the surrendered and separate heart, and the days of its mourning have passed away for ever.

"Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing: and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you; and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having, therefore, these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit" (2 Corinthians 6,7).

(2) GOD WILL DO BETTER FOR THOSE WHO TRUST HIM THAN THEY COULD DO FOR THEMSELVES

Twice here in the context we meet the phrase -- "lifting up the eyes." But how great the contrast! Lot lifted up his eyes, at the dictate of worldly prudence, to spy out his own advantage. Abraham lifted up his eyes, not to discern what would best make for his material interests, but to behold what God had prepared for him. How much better it is to keep the eye steadfastly fastened on God till He says to us! -- "Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art -- northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever" (13:14-15).

God honors them that honor Him. He withholds "no good thing from them that walk uprightly." He "meets him that rejoices and works righteousness." If only we will go on doing what is right, giving up the best to our neighbor to avoid dispute, considering God's interests first, and our own last, expending ourselves for the coming and glory of the kingdom of heaven, we shall find that God will charge Himself with our interests. And He will do infinitely better for us than we could. Lot had to ask the men of Sodom if he might sojourn among them, and he had no hold on the land; but it was all given unasked to Abraham, including that verdant circle on which Lot had set his heart. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

It is difficult to read these glowing words, NORTHWARD, AND SOUTHWARD, AND EASTWARD, AND WESTWARD, without being reminded of "the length, and breadth, and depth, and height, of the love of Christ, that passeth knowledge." Much of the land of Canaan was hidden behind the ramparts of the hills; but enough was seen to ravish that faithful spirit. Similarly, we may not be able to comprehend the love of God in Christ, but the higher we climb the more we behold. The upper cliffs of the separated life command the fullest view of that measureless expanse.

In some parts of the Western Highlands, the traveller's eye is delighted by the clear and sunlit waters of a loch -- an arm of the sea, running far up into the hills. But as he climbs over the heathery slopes, and catches sight of the waters of the Atlantic, bathed in the light of the setting sun, he almost forgets the fair vision which had just arrested him. Thus do growing elevation and separation of character unfold ever richer conceptions of Christ's infinite love and character.

God's promises are ever on the ascending scale. One leads up to another, fuller and more blessed than itself. In Mesopotamia, God said, "I will show thee the land." At Bethel, "This is the land," Here, "I will give thee all the land, and children innumerable as the grains of sand." And we shall find even these eclipsed. It is thus that God allures us to saintliness. Not giving anything till we have dared to act -- that He may test us. Not giving everything at first -- that He may not overwhelm us. And always keeping in hand an infinite reserve of blessing. Oh, the unexplored remainders of God! Who ever saw His last star?

(3) GOD BIDS US APPROPRIATE HIS GIFTS

"Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it." This surely means that God wished Abraham to feel as free in the land as if the title-deeds were actually in his hands. He was to enjoy it; to travel through it; to look upon it as his. By faith he was to act towards it as if he were already in absolute possession.

There is a deep lesson here, as to the appropriation of faith. "Be strong and very courageous" was addressed six several times to Joshua. "Be strong" refers to the strength of the wrists to grasp. "Be very courageous" refers to the tenacity of the ankle-joints to hold their ground. May our faith be strong in each of these particulars. Strong to lay hold, and strong to keep.

The difference between Christians consists in this. For us all there are equal stores of spiritual blessing laid up in our Lord; but some of us have learnt more constantly and fully to appropriate them. We walk through the land in its lengths and breadths. We avail ourselves of the fullness of Jesus. Not content with what He is for us in the counsel of God, our constant appeal is to Him in every moment of need.

We need not be surprised to learn that Abraham removed to Hebron (which signifies fellowship), and built there an altar to the Lord. New Mercies call us to deeper fellowship with our Almighty Friend, who never leaves or forsakes His own. And, as the result of his dealings with us, let us build fresh altars, and make a new dedication of ourselves and all we have to His blessed service.

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