

Lot's Choice: A Word on Present Advantage

Genesis 19

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon highlights the contrast between Lot's unbelief and Abram's faith, and the consequences of unbelief in a believer's life.

Scripture: Genesis 13:10

Topics: "Faith vs. Worldliness", "The Consequences of Unbelief"

Description

John Nelson Darby contrasts the lives of Lot and Abram, emphasizing the differences in their faith and relationship with God. While Abram walks closely with God and enjoys peace and joy, Lot, despite being a righteous man, is vexed by his surroundings due to his worldly choices. Lot's decision to choose the well-watered plains of Jordan reveals his lack of faith and leads to trials stemming from his unbelief. Darby illustrates that true faith requires a heart set on God's promises, while worldly-mindedness results in uncertainty and spiritual vexation. Ultimately, the sermon calls believers to recognize the importance of walking in faith and the dangers of compromising with the world.

Transcript

There is much profitable instruction in tracing, in contrast, the characters of Lot and Abram. Both were saints of God, yet how different as to their walk! how different also as to their personal experiences in regard of peace, joy, and nearness to God! And there is ever this difference between a worldly-minded believer and one, through the grace of God, true-hearted. In the scriptural sense of the term (2 Pet. 2:8), a "righteous man," Lot was "vexing his righteous soul from day to day." Abram walked before God.

The Lord cannot but be faithful to His people, still He does mark in their path that which is of faith and that which is not of faith, and Lot's trials are the consequences of his unbelief. There is one thing very marked in his course throughout - great uncertainty and obscurity as to his path, and as to the judgment of God, because of not realizing that security in God which would have enabled him to walk straightforward, whilst there is no hesitation in things connected with this world. And it is thus with ourselves if we have not taken Christ for our portion heartily. Abram's was a thoroughly happy life - he had God for his portion.

Lot is seen rather as the companion in the walk of faith of those who have faith, than as one having and acting in the energy of faith himself. This characterizes his path from the beginning. Therefore, when put to the test, there is only weakness. In how many things do we act with those who have faith, before having it

for ourselves! It was thus with the disciples of the Lord, and the moment they were put to the test there was weakness and failure. The soul will not stand, when sifted through temptation, if walking in the light of another.

God's personal call of Abram at the first is mixed with a sort of unbelief in Abram, much like the reply in the gospel, "Lord, suffer me first to go home and bury my father." He sets out, but he takes Terah, his father, with him, and goes and lodges in Haran (he could not carry Terah with him into the land of Canaan). Now God had called Abram, but not Terah. He left everything except Terah, and entered into possession of nothing. But he tried to carry something with him which was not of God, and he could not. It is not until after Terah's death that he removes into Canaan, to where God had called him. (Compare chap. 12:1 and Acts 7:4) "So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him, and Lot went with him . . . they went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan they came."

146 Lot (though having faith) goes in the path he treads as the companion of Abram. As to actual position, he stands with Abram. He is truly a saint of God, though afterwards we find him treading the crooked path of the world's policy.

God blesses them. The land is not able to bear them so that they may dwell together (chap. 13). They have flocks, and herds, and much cattle, and there is not room for them both - they must separate. Circumstances, no matter what (here it is God's blessings), reveal this.

They are in the place of strangers, that is clear ("the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land"). They have nothing in possession, "not so much as to put a foot upon"; all rests on their valuing the promises (Heb. 11:9). They have just two things, the altar and the tent. Journeying about, and worshipping God, they are strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Abram confesses that he is such; he declares plainly that he seeks a country,* "wherefore," we are told, "God is not ashamed to be called their God." (He is never called "the God of Lot.") This acts upon the whole spirit and character of Abram.

{*In chapter 12 Abram goes down into Egypt. This is evidently a mistake; for he comes back again to the place of the altar which he built at the first. He had no altar in Egypt.}

The land is not able to bear them that they may dwell together, there is a strife between their herdsmen, they must separate. Abram says, "Is not the whole land before thee?" take what thou wilt, do not let us quarrel "if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left" - the promise is my portion; I am a thorough stranger, the city of God is open in glory before me. His heart is upon the promises of God, and everything else is as nothing in comparison. It might seem a foolish thing to let Lot choose - to give up to Lot the right to do so is certainly his own; but his heart is elsewhere, his faith goes entirely free from earthly advantage.

147 Not so Lot; he lifts up his eyes* - the plain of Jordan is well watered everywhere, even as the garden of the Lord, and he chooses it. There is nothing gross or wrong in itself in his choosing a well-watered plain, but it just distinctly proves that his whole heart is not set upon the promises of God. Thus is he put to the test; and thus, in the way of the accomplishment of God's purposes, character is displayed. Abram's conduct has for its spring a simplicity of faith which embraces God's promises (Heb. 11:13), and wants nothing besides. Faith can give up. The spirit of a carnal mind takes all it can get. Lot acts upon the present sense of what is pleasant and desirable; why should he not? what harm is there in the plains of Jordan? ** His heart is not on the promises.

{*"And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, 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 I give it, and to thy seed after thee," etc.}

{**A man says, What harm is there in the well-watered plains of Jordan? are they not the gift of Providence? I answer, The devil has planted Sodom in the midst of them.}

The companion of Abram, he is brought to the level of his own faith.

But he will dwell in the cities of the plain if he chooses the rivers of the plain. It is not his intention to go into the city, but he will get there step by step. (He must find trouble in the place he has taken pleasure in.) There is not the power of faith to keep him from temptation. When there is not the faith that keeps the soul on the promises, there is not the faith to keep it out of sin. It is not insincerity, but people's souls are in that condition, and God proves them.

Abram's path all the way through is characterized by personal intimacy with God, constant intercourse with God, visits from God, the Lord comes to him, and explains His purposes, so that he is called the "friend of God" (2 Chr. 20:7; Isa. 41:8; James 2:23); and this not only as to his own portion, but as to what God is going to do with Sodom - the judgment He is about to bring on - Sodom, though personally he has nothing to do with it, and the promise is his hope (chap. 18). So now He tells His people what He is going to do about the world. Though their hope is connected with their own views, with the promises, and the heavenly Canaan, He takes them into His confidence as to what is to happen where they are not to be.

148 Lot the while is vexing his righteous soul - does he know anything about the purposes of God? Not a word. He is saved, yet so as by fire; though a "righteous soul," his is a vexed soul, instead of a soul in communion with God - vexed "from day to day" (there is, so far, right-mindedness that it is a vexed soul). He is there before the judgment comes with his soul vexed (whilst happy Abraham is on the mount holding conversation with God); and when it does come, how does it find him? with his soul vexed, and totally unprepared for it, instead of in communion with God about it.

"The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation," and He delivers "just Lot." But whilst thus vexing his righteous soul with their unlawful deeds, the men of the city have a right to say to him, 'What business have you here?' ("this one came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge," v. 9) - you are quarrelling with sin in the place of sin.' They have a perfect right to judge thus. All power of testimony is lost by reason of association with the world, when he ought to be witnessing to his total separation from it; there is vexation of spirit, but not power. When Abram got down into Egypt, he had nothing to do but to go right back to the place of the altar he had built at the first. Lot testifies, but he cannot get out of the place he is in; the energy that ought to have thrown him out is neutralized and lost by his getting into it; his daughters have married there; he has ties where his unbelief has led him. It is far more difficult to tread the up-hill road than the down-hill road.

Whenever the counsels of God are revealed to faith, it brings out the spirit of intercession. The word to the prophet, "Make the heart of this people fat" (Isa. 6), at once brings out, "O Lord, how long!" So here Abraham pleads with the Lord to spare the city. (But there are not ten - there is not one righteous man in Sodom, with the exception of Lot.) As regards his own position, he is looking down upon the place of judgment. And in the morning, when the cities are in flames, he finds himself in quietness and peace on the spot where he "stood before the Lord" (v. 27), not at all in the place where the judgment had come, solemnized, indeed, by the scene before him, but calm and happy with the Lord.

The Lord sends Lot out of the midst of the overthrow. Angels warn him, and faith makes him listen. But his heart is there still. There are connections that bind him to Sodom, and he would fain take them with him. But you cannot take anything with you for God out of Sodom, you must leave it all behind. The Lord must put the pain where you find the pleasure. "While he yet lingered"; there is hesitation and lingering in the place of judgment, when the judgment has been pronounced; he ought to have left it at once; but the place, and path, and spirit of unbelief, enervate the heart - "the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters" - the Lord being merciful unto him - "and they brought him forth, and set him without the city." And now it is, "Escape for thy life, look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain, escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed," v. 17. As for the goods, the sheep, and the much cattle, he must leave them all behind. If the Lord's faithfulness is shewn in saving Lot, it is shewn also in breaking the links that bind him to the place. His mind is all distraction; he says, "Oh, not so, my Lord. I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die." He has lost the sense of security in the path of faith. Such is ever the consequence of the path of unbelief in a saint of God, he thinks the path of faith the most dangerous path in the world. Lot has become used to the plain, and the mountain (the place where Abraham is enjoying perfect security and peace) is a mountain. The Lord spares Zoar at his request, and lets him flee thither, but on seeing the judgment, he flees to the mountain, forced to take refuge there in the end.

149 This is an extreme case; we shall find the same thing true in various degrees. Abraham could give up (that sacrifice always belongs to faith); but there are trials to the believer because of unbelief - because he is a believer, but in a wrong place. Lot was a "righteous man"; but when he did not walk in the path of faith, he had vexation of soul and trouble - a righteous soul, but where a righteous soul ought not to be. Observe his incapacity simply to follow the Lord. Observe also his uncertainty. So will it be with us, if we are walking in the path of unbelief, there will be trouble which is not our proper portion, but which comes upon us because we are in a wrong worldly place, the trial that belongs to unbelief. We may be seeking the compassion of the church of God, when we are only suffering, like Lot, the fruit of our own unbelief - the simple path of faith having been departed from, because we had not learned to count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord. Giving up is our proper position, simple sacrifice, in the knowledge and present consciousness that "all things are ours." But the promise is "a hundredfold more in this present world," and that is not vexation of spirit.

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