

A SELFISH CHOICE

Gen. 13:1-13

When Abraham went out from his own country into the land of Canaan, one of those who went with him was his nephew, whose name was Lot. His father, Haran, died while Lot was a youth of tender years. Lot was taken into the family of his uncle, who seems to have acted towards him as an affectionate father. Together they left their native hills and for years they were companions in wandering. After their return from Egypt into Canaan there took place an incident which made it necessary for Lot to make a choice. This choice greatly affected the remainder of his career.

Lot's prospects in life were exceedingly bright. He came from good stock as he was a nephew of Abraham. He had good intentions. Underneath everything else was the desire to be right and to do right. He was the type of a man who thought that he would always choose the good, but who often made the mistake of choosing the bad when the alternative came to him.

Driven to Egypt by hunger and want of rain, Abraham and Lot returned as men of substance, rich in flocks and herds. It is notable that when Abraham came back from Egypt he went straight to the place where he had built an altar.

Abraham was a very rich man now, and Lot had shared in his prosperity, and here for the first time, though not the last one, wealth proved a source of trouble among relatives. Wealth is almost universally considered as a source of happiness, and for that reason it is most eagerly desired. But it is much more often a source of trouble and vexation than of satisfaction and comfort. In how many families have contentions arisen from this source! How many have spent years in love and harmony until they were called to share the property that has been bequeathed them! Not for the first time, nor the last one, in human experience was it found more difficult to bear prosperity than adversity.

No sooner had they become stationary until they discovered that the land was not able to furnish their flocks and herds with sufficient pasture and water. When the flocks and herds were driven to the wells in the evenings, clashings, bickerings and quarrels broke out between the herdsmen of the two men. Consequently, it seemed wise to divide the land. Abraham saw that this quarreling must not be permitted to go on. He was too wise, and too statesmanlike, and too God-like to tolerate it.

So Abraham took Lot out on a hilltop from whence they could get a wide view of the surrounding country and where they could talk the matter over. He suggested to Lot that in the interest of peace they should separate, each to his own domain. He knew that the existing state of affairs was untimely, unseemly, unwise, unrighteous and unnecessary. Abraham's conduct on this occasion was such as became his exalted character. It was conciliatory. He well knew the value and blessedness of peace. He refused to participate in contention because he knew that no man could tell when or how it would terminate. Hence he was desirous of promoting peace. How much better it is to prevent contention than it is to cause it or to be a party to it!

His conduct was condescending. As standing in the superior relation of an uncle, while Lot was only a nephew and an attendant, Abraham might well have claimed the deference and submission that were due to him. But, instead of asserting his own rights, he was ready to act the part of an inferior; rightly judging that condescension is the truest honor. Accordingly the proposal came from him that, since circumstances demanded a separation, they should separate in a manner that became their holy profession. He said, "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen;

for we be brethren." His proposal was exceedingly gracious and beautiful. He was the senior, and the one to whom God had promised to give the land, yet, he generously waived his rights. There was no insistence on any rights for himself. He was entirely free from any spirit of strife.

His proposal was very generous. Common justice required that in the division of the land Abraham should have equal advantages with Lot. But Abraham waived his rights, and cheerfully conceded to Lot whatever portion he chose to take. He wanted Lot to occupy whichever he preferred, and leave the other to him. With a magnanimity that is very captivating, Abraham left the whole decision with Lot. He said, "Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: 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." With all that nobility of character which characterized him always, Abraham said, in substance, "Lot, take your choice, and I will take what is left." "You choose the part of the country that you want and I'll take the rest." There was not a trait of selfishness shown in his conduct. Most people insist on having their rights but Abraham was willing to give up his rights for the sake of peace.

I wish you would notice another significant statement which he made, namely, "And the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land." He mentioned that fact in order to emphasize the seriousness of strife in the presence of such lookers-on. Those people took great pleasure in the quarrels of the herdsmen, just like the world and its newspapers now are secretly delighted at any dissensions among God's professing people. Enemies are always looking on and nothing what happens among those who profess to be believers. It is certainly a poor testimony if there is strife between professed Christians. There is nothing which hurts the cause of Jesus Christ as much as strife between those who call themselves Christians. The Holy Spirit is grieved when the people of God cannot get along.

Admirable as was the example of Abraham, we observe a perfect contrast in the choice of Lot. In this great crucial test of Lot's character he, as no doubt he often did before, met Abraham's generosity with selfishness. Lot might have said, "It is not for me to choose. You take your choice and give me what is right." But the world had taken possession of him. He was glad for an opportunity to take advantage of the privilege of increasing his wealth. The unselfish offer of Abraham ought to have called forth a similar expression from Lot but the quality was not there. The selfish man will take advantage of the generous man, but always to his own hurt. Instead of refusing to choose, insisting that his uncle should have the best, he greedily took the best. His soul had been taken captive by the desire to be rich. Worldly advantage was the first element in his choice.

When Lot looked upon the magnificent well-watered Jordan Valley and the fine pasture lands adjacent to Sodom, with its business and social opportunities, he thought of the advantages he would have there and how he could increase his fortune there. So he decided to pitch his tent toward Sodom. Worldliness and covetousness were the governing principles of his heart. His selfishness was deeply reprehensible. His conduct argued too little regard for the interests of his soul. As he left Abraham without regret, so he went to dwell in Sodom without fear, and knowing full well the character of the people there. What benefits he was losing, and what dangers he was about to rush into, he little thought of; his earthly prosperity was all that occupied his mind; the welfare of his soul was not considered. This conduct everyone must blame; yet how many there are who pursue the same heedless and pernicious course. Let us guard against the love of this world. Love of this world generates unhappy dispositions and produces unworthy conduct.

Lot's motive in making his choice was to advance his worldly interests. It was a selfish choice. He took into account his own worldly circumstances, the suitability of the Jordan Valley to advance them, his ambition to become much richer, and his desire to excel Abraham in worldly goods.

What were some of the results of his living in Sodom?

1. A deep unrest.

Unrest of soul is always the result of a lack of submission to the will of God. When a man sets himself up against the will of God he always finds unrest of soul, regardless of how prosperous he may be.

2. His children were ruined.

He was quite proud of them but they were ruined because he moved into Sodom. What a price to pay for his business prosperity! What a price to pay for any kind of a life, however great and glorious and splendid, that would ruin his children! Lot never was able to get those children back to the place where they were when they moved into the city.

3. He never made anybody any better.

This is true because his motive was bad, so how could his influence have been good? The underlying motive of life has a great deal to do with a man's influence.

When Lot pitched his tent toward Sodom, he faced in the wrong direction. The outcome of any life is a matter of the direction in which it faces. Any choices that take in nothing but the seen and temporal are foolish and fatal. It is always disastrous to neglect or ignore God. What we admire in another, let us cultivate in ourselves.