

A MAN WHO WON AND THEN LOST

"And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar." Genesis 13:10.

In some mysterious way there came to Abraham a call from God to leave his home in Ur of the Chaldees and to go out into a strange land. To him God said, "Get thee out." The call of God is always away from the world, away from sin, and away from the old life. There were three things that Abraham was to leave -- his country, his kindred, and his father's house. All three of these things were good, and not sinful.

God promised Abraham that, if he would go and do what He commanded him, He would make of him a great nation. God blessed him with His presence, His protection, and His power.

In response to the call and command of God, Abraham went forth without knowing whither he went or what the future held in store for him, and without asking any questions of God. However, Abraham's obedience was only partial. In spite of the command to leave his kindred, Abraham took his father, Terha, with him; also his nephew, Lot. They only went half the distance to their destination. They spent six years in Haran, but they were wasted years. The place of partial obedience, or of disobedience, can never be the place of joyous, full, and complete blessing. He did not move on until God removed his father by death. How much easier it would have been for Abraham to have left his father behind in Ur of the Chaldees, as God had commanded him, than to bury him in that strange land. Had Abraham obeyed God, as he should have done, he would have saved himself many heartaches and a lot of disappointment. God had to bring death and sorrow to his household in order to move Abraham into the land of promise.

The lessons that God taught Abraham were not unique or unusual. When the children of Israel walked in the ways of Jehovah and did that which God commanded, they prospered; they enjoyed the blessings of health; and they were always triumphant over their enemies. Defeat came as a result of disobedience. When Israel came out of Egypt, God expressed His desire for the nation to Moses: "O that there was such a heart in them that they would fear my name and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever!" (Deuteronomy 5:29). God does not take delight in the afflictions of His children. He does not rejoice in their sufferings and sorrows, but in "the peaceable fruit of righteousness" which He knows will result from His chastening.

Like Abraham, Christians, who endeavor to follow the Lord and do His will, will often make mistakes; but they will learn through experience what they cannot learn in any other way. Experience is sometimes a severe and expensive teacher. But it has taught many Christians that God's way is best for them always. When we accept God's plan, walk according to His will, and allow His purpose to be fulfilled in our lives, our joy is increased and the heavenly prospect grows brighter.

While Abraham and Lot were in Egypt they acquired great wealth. Materially, Abraham was far richer because of his sojourn in Egypt, but, spiritually, he was poorer. He and Lot got rich down in Egypt outside the will of God. Here for the first time, though not the last one, wealth proved to be a source of trouble among relatives. Contentions have arisen in many families over possessions. Many families have spent years in love and harmony until they were called to share the property that had been bequeathed to them. Not for the first or the last time in human experience was it found more difficult to bear prosperity than adversity.

After their return from Egypt into Canaan, there took place an incident which made it necessary for Lot to make a choice. The remainder of his career was greatly affected by his choice. They brought back with them some cattle in addition to the flocks of sheen. This is the first mention of cattle among the possessions of Abraham. Before he had gone into Egypt he was a shepherd, but, when he returned, he was a cattleman also, and these cattle became the occasion for the sad story of the strife between him and Lot.

As soon as they became stationary they discovered that the land was not able to furnish their herds with sufficient pasture and water. Consequently, it seemed wise to divide the land.

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. He well knew the value and blessedness of peace. How much better it is to prevent contention than it is to cause it!

Abraham's proposal was very generous. He waived his rights, and cheerfully conceded to Lot whatever portion he chose to take. He left the whole decision with Lot. In substance Abraham said, "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.

Lot 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. Lot greedily took the best, and he pitched his tent toward Sodom. Earthly prosperity was all that occupied his mind; the welfare of his soul was not considered. Lot's motive in making his choice was to advance his worldly interests. What a pity that Lot made that selfish, worldly, and foolish choice! In making his choice there was no thought of God. He completely ignored God, which was the most foolish thing he could have done. If Lot had looked at Sodom from God's viewpoint, he would have seen the terrible sin of the city. He would have realized how unholy was the atmosphere into which he was bringing his daughters; he would have thought of those wicked, licentious men whom his daughters might marry. Yet he deliberately took his family into that unholy atmosphere.

If Lot had only considered, he would have known that by following this course he could not win. When he 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 the temporal are foolish and fatal. It is always disastrous to neglect or to ignore God. One must estimate values as God estimates them. When any man sets himself up against the will of God he always finds unrest of soul, regardless of how prosperous he may be. No doubt, Lot was quite proud of his daughters, 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. Lot lost his influence in his own house. What a sad situation in any life when one's own kindred have lost confidence in him and when they laugh at his testimony, as was the case with Lot!

Tragedy upon tragedy followed faithless Lot. He not only lost his possessions and his influence, but he was compelled to witness the sudden and terrible death of his wife, and to bear the terrible sorrow that came to him through the knowledge that his own daughters had been corrupted in the filthy city of Sodom. He was able to pull his wife out of the city by force, but he could not keep her from looking back. When she was turned into a pillar of salt, that became to him an everlasting reminder of the fact that he had made the wrong choice.

Lot had won the fruitful plain of the Jordan, but his loss was far greater than his gain. If he had stayed in the place of separation from sin, God would have blessed and prospered him. It is far better to choose the barren plains and reap Abraham's reward than to choose Lot's riches and suffer his loss.