**MAKE CHOICES BASED ON FAITH IN GOD’S PROMISE**

November 12, 2017

Genesis 13:1-18 / Key Verse: 13:15, “All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever.”

Last week, we learned God’s calling to Abram. It was God’s one-sided and sovereign grace that Abram was called by God to be a blessing. We also learned the importance of one ordinary person’s obedience by faith**.** Like Abram, we are all ordinary people with many weaknesses and shortcomings. But in God ordinary person can be extraordinary. God uses our obedience to bless not only ourselves but also many others through us. So, we are all encouraged to trust in God and obey his word even in a small thing. Today we are going to learn continually why it is important to make choices based on faith in God’s promise. In today’s passage Abram and his nephew Lot separate. They made different choices and their different choices gave them different fruit of life. Abram continued to grow in his faith and became a good role model to life of faith. But Lot would bear very tragic and miserable fruit. Let’s learn how our choices make our life different; blessed or miserable.

1. **Abram and Lot separate (1-13)**

In verses 1-4, Abram returned from Egypt and when he returned from Egypt, the first thing he did was to go to the altar he had built before and call on the name of the Lord. This implies that he restored his faith in God. In Egypt, he made a big mistake by lying about his wife to Pharaoh. But God intervened his messed-up life which he couldn’t fix in his own. God showed his protecting love toward Abram and his wife in his one-sided grace. Abram must have been greatly moved and encouraged by God’s protecting love and so thankful to God. So, he made a new decision of faith to put his whole trust in the Lord.

Look at verses 5-7. Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. Who was Lot? Abram’s father Terah had 3 sons; Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Lot was Haran’s son but Haran died early in Ur. Abram had no children and Lot lost his father. So naturally Abram took care of Lot like a son. Lot followed Abram when he answered God’s calling. Lot had gone with Abram to Egypt, and now he also returned with him and he also became very wealthy. Abram loved him like a son. Lot, however, had his own idea. He and his flocks moved about with Abram, but he kept his possessions separate, looking forward to the time when he would go out on his own.

Soon a practical problem arose. It was a side effect of excessive wealth obtained in Egypt. The land could not support them both while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. There was no enough water and grazing land in one place for them both. And because of this, quarreling arose between Abram’s herders and Lot’s. To further complicate matters, the Canaanites were also living in the land at that time. Abram and Lot were strangers in the Canaan. If they quarreled and fought each other, they could be easy prey for hostile and ungodly Canaanite.

Perhaps Abram would have liked it if Lot had made a commitment to live with him like his son, but he realized that the time had come for Lot to make a decision of his own. Abram did not want material things to come between them. In Egypt, Abram had learned a bitter lesson that he must not put material things first in his life in any situation but trust in God who protect and provide. So, this time, he put people before material things. His relationship with Lot was more precious than material things. In verses 8-9, he called Lot and said, “Let’s not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herders and mine, for we are close relatives. Is not the whole land before you? Let’s part company. If you go to the left, I’ll go to the right; if you go to the right, I’ll go to the left.” So he gave Lot first choice of the land. Abram had his right to use the first choice between them. But he didn’t want to use his right. Instead he yielded his right to Lot. Love is yielding and giving. How did Lot react to Abram?

Lot was selfish. He didn’t think about stepping back and giving his old uncle first choice. He didn’t even consider reducing his herds and flocks to stay with Abram. He looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan. He saw that it was well watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt. The garden of Eden was man’s lost Paradise. Living in such paradise is all men’s dream. The land of Egypt is the land of fertility because of Nile river. In short, the land that Lot saw was the best land for living in materialistic point of view. So when Lot saw such gorgeous land, without a second thought, he chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. But the Genesis author implies in his parenthetical comment what Lot overlooked in his choice. It says, “This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.” The place that Lot chose was physically fertile and very attractive place but spiritually and morally it was harmful place because it was close to notoriously corrupt cities; Sodom and Gomorrah which God would destroy because of their wickedness. But Lot did not consider this fact. What does this tell about him?

Lot really liked the culturally advanced city life in Egypt. Abram had had bitter lesson in Egypt and through the bitter lesson in Egypt, he had learned about God more and he grew one step in his faith. On the other hand, Lot had not learned about God further in Egypt. He had just enjoyed culturally advanced life in Egypt. Probably, he missed it. So, when Abram gave the first choice of the land, without a second thought he chose the land near Sodom because it was so fertile land and he could have chance to enjoy the benefits of city life of Sodom. He might have thought that it would be better even for his daughters because there would be better advantages for them; such as school or future husband candidates and so on.

Initially Lot’s decision looked smart and seemed to have no harm but it was a great mistake. The separation of Lot and Abram set two different direction of two lives. Verse 12 says, “Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom.” Verse 13 goes on to say, “Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD.” Abram lived in the land of promise, the land of God’s blessing. Lot did not go into Sodom at first, but he moved closer and closer. Later he became a city officer in the gateway of the city Sodom. Probably, he thought that he could live in Sodom and enjoy the world, and at the same time, keep his faith. Lot surely did not intend to abandon his faith. He did not intend to become one of the those who joined the people of Sodom in sinning greatly against the LORD. He only wanted to enjoy some of the benefits of living near Sodom-and later, in Sodom. But unlike his will, Lot’s intension did not work well. In Genesis 19, we will see the tragic consequences of Lot’s decision to move away from Abram toward Sodom.

Lot’s example gives us a very clear warning that Jesus also warned to his disciples in Matthew 6:24. Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” A Christian cannot deliberately choose to live a compromised life and be blessed. Rather a Christian who tries to do so will suffer even more than one who totally belongs to the world. Lot is an example of such Christian that is so called “worldly Christian.” A “worldly Christian” is a person who has put their faith in Jesus Christ, but still loves the world and the things of the world and follows the worldly way of life just like all non-believers do. But we must remember that such worldly Christian’s life is not happy nor fruitful at all. And they become useless before God. One time, Calvin mentioned about “missionary dating”. It is not dating with an missionary but dating with non-Christian with the motivation of human attraction such as physical beauty or handsomeness. They justify their dating by hoping to help their non-believing partners to believe in Jesus later. But in most cases, their justification doesn’t work well. They end in wound and pain. It is simply because there couldn’t be two masters in them. They should choose one; either God or their own desire.

1. **God’s promise (14-18)**

Let’s look at verse 14. It says, “The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, ‘Look around from where you are, to the north and south to the east and west.’” Lot’s departure left a big hole in Abram’s life. Perhaps he had known for a long time that Lot would leave him. In a sense, Lot was a casualty of his own failure in Egypt. But when Lot actually left, it was hard. He missed Lot. He was lonely. To Abram, Lot was like a son. He had not felt his childless problem so keenly as long as Lot was moving about with him. Now, his childlessness really hit him.

So, just at this time the LORD came to him. The LORD gave him some physical exercise. He made Abram come out of his small tent, climb a high hill and look out over the land. Then he told him to take a long walk, to walk through the length and breadth of the land, and to walk with his head high, like the owner of the land. God promised to give him and his offspring all the land his eyes could see-including the land he had just given to Lot. Not only this, God promised to give him offspring as numerous as the dust of the earth. Humanly speaking, it was unbelievable promise.

But Abram believed this promise because it was God’s promise. In verse 18, Abram went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he pitched his tents. There he built an altar to the LORD. Building an altar to the LORD was act of worship and act of faith. God did not give Abram any tangible land yet but just the word of promise; the promise of land and descendants. Abram believed this word of promise. When he believed this word of promise, even though he did not receive any visible and tangible reward, he was free from his sense of loss, material security problem, loneliness in his childlessness. This was the very life that God intended from Abram and called him for. In Abram’s life there would be more crisis-at least 3 more times. Each time God helped him with the same word of promise without giving any tangible thing. As a result, Abram could grow very mature in his faith in God and he could offer even his one and only son Isaac as a burnt offering. So, Abram became a role model of those who are called the righteous by living by faith. When we see how God helped Abram to believe the word of promise without receiving any tangible thing, what God really wants from us is to have trust and love relationship between God and us above all other visible, tangible, and worldly things.

In today’s passage, we learn that our choices are very important. We learn that we must make choices based on faith in God’s promise, not based on human calculation, or material benefits or worldly pleasure that this world can offer. Bible is filled with many promises of God. Among many promises of God, the most important 3 promises are these; the promise of forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ, the promise of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in believers, and the promise of resurrection and everlasting life in Jesus. When we believe these three promises of God, we can truly trust God’s love and have trust and love relationship with God without any visible or tangible human condition. Those who have such trust and love relationship with God can grow in God’s very image; the image of his love. This life is most blessed and beautiful and soul-satisfying life. This life is the very life of a blessing which God intended from Abram and anyone who follows Abram’s footstep. *On the other hand, Lot’s life is a divided life which one leg is in God and the other leg is in the world.* Such life initially looks like giving something to us. But later we come to realize that there is no honorable fruit in it. Rather, it gives us lots of pain and regret and shame as we see in Lot’s life.

I grew up in a poor family. My dream and goal were always to work hard and enter SNU which was top university in South Korea and make success in the world. I entered SNU and worked hard for my future security. But after I met God through UBF bible study, my life goal was changed. I became crazy not to my success in the world but to God and I got nick name walking Bible (because I always spoke about the word of God). But after some failures in my evangelical life, I was not sure about God’s calling for specifically UBF campus mission. After graduation and before going to Korean army service I prayed God for his guidance of my future direction. God answered my prayer showing that God called me to serve UBF campus mission. After this conviction, I married with M. Langue with God’s one word of promise; John 12:24. “Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seed.” After I met God, my life goal and mission became to serve God’s life saving work. John 12:24 told me about how I could bear fruit of life. This word became God’s promise to me and I chose to live my life based on this word. After this decision of faith, God has blessed my life not outwardly with much visible fruit but inwardly with inner change. God gave me freedom from envy of worldly success. I don’t envy worldly successful men. God has been blessing me to grow in knowing the love of God all the more and develop trust and love relationship with him just like he did to Abram. Though I don’t have much visible fruit yet, I still have desire to live according to John 12:24 and I believe that I will see the fruit of love in my life.

In conclusion, through today’s passage, we learned our choices are important. Blessed are those who make choices based on faith in God’s word of promise. Those who make choices based on human calculation and material benefits are not blessed. May God bless each one of us to make decision and choice to live according to God’s word of promise! I pray in Jesus name. Amen.