**10th February 2013**

**Genesis 13**

Last week we looked at how God called Abraham and blessed him. God promises Abraham ‘ “I will make you into a great nation and I will *bless you*; I will make your *name great,* and *you will be a blessing* ….and all peoples on earth will be *blessed* through you.” ’ (vv.2–3).

In our chapter today we find Abraham in conflict with his nephew Lot.

Conflict is inevitable in life, especially when you are working closely with other people, whether in a relationship, or a business, or a community such as the church. The more you work together, the more you get to know someone; the more you will realise you are different and therefore more likely to disagree. Conflict can be creative though – by working through your differences it can bring you closer together and also help you find the right way forward.

The plans for the youth centre and using the rest of the Parsonage linking into the upper hall are out. We will have a consultation on Wednesday 20th February to discuss them with the architect. Inevitably there is competing demands – those who want the stage to stay, those who want a larger hall and refurbished kitchen with serving hatch, what we use the spare rooms in the Parsonage for? All that fun will be coming to a church meeting soon! I pray we can talk gently with each other and try and find a way forward that will accommodate us all somehow.

I was talking to our MP Neil Carmichael yesterday, after he turned up at the public consultation for the youth centre. He was telling me about how much grief he was getting over the gay marriage issue, even from within his own party. I said it was refreshing to have an open debate about such matters and even disagreements within the same party rather than everyone feeling as though they had to toe the party line. Of course this has been a momentous week with the MPs voting to consider legislation for same sex marriages, with many denouncing this as a fundamental change to the definition of marriage. This isn’t the place to go deeper into those issues – I spent a good two hours doing that recently at one of our Genesis Live discussions and my thoughts are still available on the Tab website as a primer for discussion. Inevitably people will disagree and hold different positions. As Christians how we disagree is I believe as important as what we can agree on.

Public Church rows have a detrimental effect on our mission and the hearing of the gospel. The American Church leader Tony Campolo told the following story at greenbelt this year. Campolo told how recently in the State of California – proposition 8 was to be voted on by the population. It was an attempt to take away from gay people certain rights and privileges that the courts had previously given them. Evangelicals believed that gays had no right to marry and churches organised themselves to campaign to take the right away from them. 1000s of volunteers knocked on doors - not to tell them about Jesus and love of God but to get them to vote against gays. Spent over 82 million dollars for ads on TV and media to vote against gays. Day after election the evangelicals were clapping hands.. We won we won they shouted. But what did they win asked Campolo. Did Harry and Bob not climb into bed that night? Did Mandy and Linda not regard themselves as married because proposition 8 had been passed. Nothing had changed. But what had changed was that the following weekend thousands of gays marched streets in San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York and other cities screaming their hatred of the church as if bible was written to beat them into submission and Jesus was the enemy. Campolo said ‘if you call that winning you and I are not on same page. They thought they had won but they had actually lost.’

How we disagree is all important. For Abram, everything isn't smooth sailing! After his return to Canaan from his disastrous trip to Egypt, there arises a conflict between himself and his nephew Lot. It was a conflict that had serious ramifications and had to be resolved. How this conflict was settled is the focus of the message this evening.

Just like Abram, there are times in life when conflicts and troubles arise. How we deal with those conflicts and troubles reveals more about our characters than we want to admit. Because what you are when the pressure is on is what you really are!

*In 13:5-7a, “Now Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. And the land could not sustain them while dwelling together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to remain together. And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram’s livestock and the herdsmen of Lot’s livestock.”*

 Like Abram, Lot became rich in Egypt (cf. 13:2, 5). No doubt, Uncle Abe blessed Lot with some of the gifts he received from Pharaoh (cf. 12:16). Maybe this act of generosity alleviated some of his guilt for giving away his wife, Sarai, to Pharaoh (12:10-15). Regardless, both Abram and Lot were “living large.” In fact, their “possessions” had become so large that they could no longer dwell together.[4](http://bible.org/seriespage/tale-two-men-genesis-135-18%22%20%5Cl%20%22P7_3330) This point is repeated twice in 13:6-7 for emphasis.

The wealth of Abram and Lot consisted of flocks and herds. As nomadic tribesmen they had to travel about looking continually for pasture for their sheep and cattle. Since the land was already inherited, there wasn’t a lot of pasture to choose from. Consequently, each man’s herdsmen sought water and the best pasture for the animals of their master. This competition inevitably led to conflict (cf. Jas 4:1-3).

In these three verses, two biblical truths are apparent. ***First, we may have riches so long as riches do not have us.***[6](http://bible.org/seriespage/tale-two-men-genesis-135-18%22%20%5Cl%20%22P10_4982) I know many wealthy Christians that live far below their means and use their wealth to help others and serve God’s kingdom. There is nothing wrong with being rich, as long as you do not horde that which God has given you. When our "***things***" control us, then we are headed for trouble...

***Second, wealth can be a blessing and a curse in a person’s life.*** We can understand and appreciate the blessing of wealth but we often forget that more money equals more problems. One of the many reasons is money can divide families.

In 13:7b, there is a significant parenthetical phrase: **“Now the Canaanite and the Perizzite were dwelling then in the land.”** This brief commentary suggests that the conflict between Abram and Lot was on full display before the unbelieving Canaanites and Perizzites.[7](http://bible.org/seriespage/tale-two-men-genesis-135-18%22%20%5Cl%20%22P12_5777) Whether you realize it or not, unbelievers are watching your life: how you treat your spouse and kids, how you conduct yourself—at work, on the road, when you’re under stress, when you think no one is watching. And what they see will either draw them to Jesus Christ or repel them.

Two Christian ladies had to share the same office. They fought like cats and dogs. One always wanted the window open; the other wanted it closed. “I feel I am going to suffocate in here!” said the one. “I’m going to die of a cold!” retorted the other. Finally, a co-worker came up with a suggestion. “Why don’t you keep the window closed until one of you dies of suffocation and then keep it open until the other dies of pneumonia. Then we’ll have some peace around here!”[8](http://bible.org/seriespage/tale-two-men-genesis-135-18%22%20%5Cl%20%22P14_6867)

We laugh at this story, but it’s true to life. When Christians have disputes, it hurts the testimony of the Lord. On the eve of His death, Jesus prayed that His people might be one that the world might believe (John 17:20-23). I think that Jesus was on about a deep unity – not a superficial unity where we all agree – but where we continue to love each other and accept we are one in Christ even if we can’t agree about all things.

In the face of this family feud, Abram speaks to Lot in 13:8-9: *“Please let there be no strife between you and me, nor between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers.****[9](http://bible.org/seriespage/tale-two-men-genesis-135-18%22%20%5Cl%20%22P17_7513)*** *Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me; if to the left, then I will go to the right; or if to the right, then I will go to the left.”* In these two verses, we learn a great deal about how to appropriately handle conflict.

***First, we should seek to resolve conflict*** (see Matt 5:23-24). Abram took the initiative to resolve the conflict with Lot. Abram could have said, “Now, look here, Lot, this land belongs to me. God has promised it to me, not to you. You’ll simply have to move on.” Instead, he surrendered his personal rights and sacrificed his interests. Remember the advice of Paul in (Phil 2:1-11). *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interest but to the interest of others*. The lazy way is to let the conflict drift and become steadily worse.[10](http://bible.org/seriespage/tale-two-men-genesis-135-18%22%20%5Cl%20%22P19_8661) Yet, the Bible is clear; when there is a conflict with a brother or sister we should take the initiative. The life of faith involves learning to live with brothers and sisters.

With that said, there are times when brothers and sisters must separate for the sake of peace (see Acts 15:39 where Baranabas and Paul seperated).[11](http://bible.org/seriespage/tale-two-men-genesis-135-18%22%20%5Cl%20%22P21_9054) This side of heaven, believers will not always see eye-to-eye. Therefore, there are occasions where a parting of ways is appropriate. For example, in a local church, if there are strong preferences or opinions that cannot be resolved, it can be appropriate for a member to depart for the sake of harmony and to bless them as they go. We must be “diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3).[12](http://bible.org/seriespage/tale-two-men-genesis-135-18%22%20%5Cl%20%22P22_9528)

***Second, believers should exhibit tenderness.*** Abram’s words to Lot were explicitly tender. He appealed to their kinship—**“for we are** **brothers /kinsmen.”** Unlike Cain, Abram believed he was his brother’s keeper (cf. 4:9). He diffused any anger or defensiveness that Lot may have had and he refused to argue. Now you cannot have a fight if one person refuses to be party to it. It takes two to tangle.

When I was growing up, I always wanted to wrestle with my older brother, Andrew. Unfortunately for me…and fortunately for him, he typically refused. He is nine years older than me – so had more sense. There is nothing more frustrating than wanting to have a good fight, only to discover that the other person is unwilling to fight. May we follow in the footsteps of Abram and refuse to fight or argue. Instead, may we exhibit tenderness with the goal of unity.[13](http://bible.org/seriespage/tale-two-men-genesis-135-18%22%20%5Cl%20%22P24_11082)

***Third, believers should wait on God.*** When confronted with worrying circumstances that seemed to be clamouring for his immediate action, Abram’s first reaction was to do nothing. He simply waited. He was confident that God would soon make His way clear.[14](http://bible.org/seriespage/tale-two-men-genesis-135-18%22%20%5Cl%20%22P26_11396) On this occasion, Abram refused to take matters into his own hands which contrasts how in the last chapter when the famine hit he went off to Egypt, without any word from god, and ended up doing some bad stuff.

I sense that Abram had a great deal of confidence because he knew, by faith, that no matter what Lot chose, God would fulfil His covenant promises in his own life.! Abram didn’t get ahead in life by looking out for number one. No! It was God who exalted him because he placed the interests of others ahead of his own (see Phil 2:3-11).[15](http://bible.org/seriespage/tale-two-men-genesis-135-18%22%20%5Cl%20%22P28_11924) The world’s way of getting ahead is to look out for number one. **But God’s way is to look up to number one and to be a blessing to others.**

People who truly believe God’s promises of provision can be generous with their possessions. You don’t have to be worried about “losing” if others are blessed. So be generous! Help others succeed! God will see that kind of Christ like faith and you will be rewarded!

Lot of course, given the choice by Abram. Looks up see the more fertile plain and decides I’ll have that. He is a perfect description of many in our day. Everything is about "***my rights***", "***my wants***", "***my needs***", "***my life***", "***my way***", etc. You live life like that and you will always be mad at somebody over something. You will always have your feelings hurt about some issue or the other

Any of you who have had children will know that slicing a cake into equal portions is a challenging act. No matter how small the difference, with a mere look your children know what slice, scoop, or cup is the largest.[20](http://bible.org/seriespage/tale-two-men-genesis-135-18%22%20%5Cl%20%22P36_15762) That same kind of look I’m sure was evident in the eyes of Lot.[21](http://bible.org/seriespage/tale-two-men-genesis-135-18%22%20%5Cl%20%22P37_15954) He saw that the valley of the Jordan was lush, green, growing, and well watered… It was a place where Lot could add to his considerable wealth and status.

Lot’s primary concern wasn’t the glory of God, the benefit of his family or Abram’s, or even his own spiritual welfare. His primary concern was, “What’s in it for me?” The simplest and fairest separation would have been to make the Jordan River the boundary between the two men. What would have been fairer than to have chosen one side of the river to dwell in and to leave the other to Abram? But Lot chose all of the land for himself.

Lot **“settled in the cities of the valley, and moved his tents as far as Sodom.”** At first, Lot simply pitched his tent *near* Sodom. But in 14:12, we discover that he had traded in his tent for a townhouse *in* Sodom. Then in 19:1, we find that he was *sitting in the gate* as a leader of these wicked and godless people! At first, he simply set off in that general direction (cf. 13:11). But once our direction is set, our destination is often determined. Some decisions may not seem very significant, but they set a particular course for our lives. The decision may not seem very important, but its final outcome can be tragic.  ***Lot chose his occupation over his family.*** Lot had “flocks and herds and tents” (13:5) but he did not have an altar (cf. 13:4). As a result, he did not ask, “Is this a good place to raise children? He asked, “Is this a good place to raise cattle?” He did not ask what God had chosen for him. He did not consider the impact that living in sin city would have on his wife, his children, and himself. His choice was entirely determined by material gain. When you are contemplating any move, one of the first questions you should ask is: Will this move draw me and my family closer to Christ?

Sodom and Gomorrah, genesis 19, are infamous and associated with depravity and sexual immorality – particularly homosexuality. It is another X rated passage in the Bible. I did make reference to how we interpret it in the Genesis Live talk I gave. The sin in question was attempted gang rape by a majority of presumably heterosexual men. The homosexual element in the act held no particular interest to the author of genesis and other commentators in the Bible. The violation of hospitality would have counted far worse a category of crime. For example in. Matthew 10.14-15 where Jesus uses the example of Sodom in the context of the gospel not being welcomed in certain towns and villages. Can one gain ethical guidelines from this ancient primitive story – where it is assumed perfectly right for Lot to offer his two daughters to be raped as substitutes for the two men?

Sodom does stand, however,

 as a symbol of Lots’ folly – and how he chose the wrong way. As a result of this careless choice, his wife would turn to a pillar of salt; his girls would commit incest with him.

 In 13:14-16, “The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, ‘Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever. I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth’

Previously, Lot “lifted up his eyes” (13:10) and had seen the land before him with the eyes of one weighing financial promise. Here, Abram **“lifted up his eyes”** (cf. Deut 34:1-4) also and he saw the whole land as far as he could see in every direction. Abram was without an heir. However, the Lord appeared to Abram at this crucial time and reconfirmed the promise of land that He said He would give to Abram’s offspring (13:15). Genesis 13 closes with these telling words: “Then Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and there he built an altar to the LORD” (13:18). Despite occasional failures, Abram was a man of faith. In the face of unbelievable odds, he builds an altar to the Lord. Do you know what he is saying by building that altar? “Lord, I don’t know how it is going to happen. I don’t know how You are going to do it. It sounds impossible. But if You said it, I’m going to build an altar and trust You for the impossible.”

Let us continually lift up our eyes to god who is our help and our redeemer. Lift up your eyes to him in times of conflict. Lift up your eyes to him when tempted to make wrong and destructive choices. Lift up your eyes to God to seek his blessing and promise for your life.

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