

Going? Or Going *along*?

Lift your sights higher

(Extract from a sermon on God's grace - New Testament readings and commentary omitted for this purpose.)

Text: Genesis 12:1-4; Psalms 121;

Genesis 12: 4 told us "So Abram left, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him."

So we see Abram going, *as the Lord had told him*, in testimony to that great faith which was credited to him as righteousness. But what of Lot, who was the only other person named in our text? All we are told is that Lot *went with Abram*. Is that all it was to Lot, I wonder, *He went along*? I am tempted to suspect so. For a time though, if you continue to read the story of Abram, you see Lot doing quite well (it seems), by simply going along. By the next chapter, Abram has become very wealthy – though we won't go into the means of that today. All we're told about Lot is that he "was moving about with Abram, and also had flocks and herds and tents." In fact, together they had too much and some friction was building up. So Abram, in what seems quite a grace filled gesture, tells Lot he must choose whatever land he wanted and Abram would go somewhere else with his flocks. You choose first. You take the pick of what's available – and he points out there is *plenty* to choose from. Genesis 13:10 tells us that "Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered" - so he chose that. Lot "looked up" and saw ... rich land, a good earthly prize, and he took it. Our Psalmist today looked up to the hills too, but that was not what he saw. He saw instead the *Maker* of those hills, of heaven and earth. He saw from Whom his help, his protection, his true and lasting rewards, come. Should Lot have looked further, like the Psalmist?

In verse 14, we read "The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "*Lift up your eyes ... and look north and south, east and west. All the land you see I will give to you and your offspring forever.*" I think most of us are familiar with the rest of this story, though it is worth closer study. But we generally know that when Lot chose the land, he "pitched his tents near Sodom." Not perhaps the wisest choice. First, he and all his family and possessions were taken away captive, but Abram went and rescued him. Then it sort of went further downhill from there! The next thing we see is, through the efforts of Abram again, he is rescued from Sodom just before the two angels destroyed the whole town, and he ends up living in fear in some cave, with just his two daughters, with whom he sires two sons, whose descendants constantly oppose the descendants of Abraham, the people fashioned by God for His redemptive purpose.

*Is there not evidence in the Church today that we have to take more seriously the call from God to leave the familiar situations or spheres we feel at home in, whatever they may be individually, stop just accepting the status quo we've grown comfortable with, and step out in faith to claim some new territory for Christ? Whether we are 25, 55, or 75 like Abram, we need to get going in faith and give God the opportunity to show us what He wants to do, amongst new people as well as 'family' - and like Abram we have to just do it. Even if sometimes we get it wrong for awhile. The story of Abraham makes it clear that if we continue in sincere belief in God, He will pull us back on track, rescue us from our imperfections and reward our work abundantly in ways we could not imagine. But He will keep demanding that we have true faith. From Genesis 15: we read that "Abram believed the Lord, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Yet in 17:1, God is still telling him "*walk with me and be blameless*" and, later, "*you must keep my commandments, you and your descendants*" (which now include us, as heirs through our belief in Christ to that righteousness of Abraham).*

It's all the way to chapter 21 before Isaac, the long promised son, is born. Then in chapter 22 again Abraham's faith is put to the greatest test of all. God's grace accepts us as we are with all our imperfections, but doesn't *ignore* them or give *us* the luxury to choose to do so. Gen. 18:15 notes what seems almost an aside: "Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said 'I did not laugh.' But [the Lord] said, 'Yes, you did laugh.'" And then there is no more on this subject. Just that. We might think it strange to find it there. After all, we can understand a *little* lie like that!

We can easily convince ourselves that to deny it will save face for the other person as much as ourselves. And we'd kind of think it doesn't seem big enough for the Lord to stop and argue about. But He did. 'Yes, you did doubt me.' Is that often what we call our conscience?

I also think there is evidence all around us, even in the Church, that too many of us are not going *anywhere* in obedience to God. If we're not being obedient to Him, but seem to be going in the right direction for awhile, it's just because we are only *going along*, like Lot, with the ones who have the faith to go where the Lord has told them. But from Lot we have seen that you can only *go along* like this for a while. Sooner or later you are going to be given the opportunity in grace to make your own choice. And when you look up you'll be blindsided by what is right in front of you: the worldly hill that fills your sights, whether it's a quick buck, power, sex, laziness, or a sense of hopelessness, the need to repair a shattered home you didn't expect to have to face, the despair of an abusive relationship, you name it. You're not going to see the glory *beyond* the hill, the Source of your real, lasting joy, help and sustenance. You cannot see the greater opportunity in all directions that Abraham saw when he looked up. You cannot see the Kingdom of God, because, as Jesus said to Nicodemus, to do so you would have had to have truly believed. And because of this, too many of our people have surely pitched their tents too close to Sodom.

And they are being taken captive. Surely we who are now blessed to be Abraham's descendants have to hone our plan, as Abram did, and go and rescue them and their families and bring them back where they belong. We have the space for them! This is not a time for the Church to give up. I hope you have been noticing how often scientists in so many fields, like astronomy, medicine and psychiatry, are now admitting that there definitely appears to be more to life and to the universe and to child development, etc., than biology, chemistry and physics. They are finally discovering that the human brain, whether in severely brain damaged patients or rebellious teenagers, responds to the voice of love. And that is what Christ in His grace has equipped His believers with, the miraculous power of love that is pure. Surely, therefore, we must help our people, young and not so young, rich and poor, abused and abuser, to see the greater opportunity, the greater joy, that lies beyond the immediate hill that is obscuring their vision. **Since love and care cannot be indifferent, surely we must help our people to lift up their eyes, truly raise their sights, and see that there is something better to aspire to, to hold out for, so much better than what so many are now settling for.** Surely we are called on to get down on our knees and beg God to spare them, even if, as with Lot's family, some refuse to be rescued because they can't see the destruction drawing in on them. Some will come back, and that is what we are called on to do, share the grace, the great opportunity, given to us by the *God who so loves us all.* Amen.