

Genesis 13

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[0:00] Please do open up your Bibles again to Genesis 13. Genesis 13. The main sport I grew up playing was basketball.

! So when some of you were playing football or rugby or cricket, I was playing basketball. And Paul Levy always rips it out of me for playing basketball. I don't know why, he's a big rugby man. But basketball is one of the best sports out there.

I love it. And one of the first things that I was taught in basketball, and I still do to this day whenever I can play, it's when you shoot, you keep your eyes on the back of the hoop.

So you don't look at your hands when you shoot, you don't look at the ball, you don't look at the defender, you don't look at what's around you. From catch to release, you keep your eyes on the back of the hoop. And when you do that, just everything else falls into place.

The ball, your hands, your feet, your positioning, it all just falls into the right place when your eyes are there. But if you take your eyes off it, your shot can go all over the place.

[1:01] Your hands will start to move, the ball goes in a weird direction, but look where you want it to go, and that's where it's going to land. The same is true in farming.

So before they had GPS, if farmers wanted to plow a straight line, they would lock their eyes onto a point at the other end of the field, stare at it, head in that direction, and the plow would just kind of stay on course.

The line would be straight. Everything would fall into place. But if he took his eyes off it, and just started looking at the soil, looking what's going down below him, the line would end up being a mess.

He could end up in a ditch. And so just look where you want to go, and that's where you're going to land. And it will shape everything as you go.

Well, here in Genesis today, we see exactly that. Where you set your eyes shapes the whole course of your life. We have here two men with their eyes set on two very different things.

[2:09] And that shapes their lives in two very different ways. One man with his eyes fixed on heaven, and one man with his eyes fixed on earth.

And just like in basketball and in farming, that shapes the course of their lives. And so I want us to see in this chapter that the two mindsets that we can have in this life, two places that we can fix our eyes, there is the heavenly mindedness of Abraham, who fixes his eyes on the world beyond, and that shapes his decisions and his life in all the right ways.

And then there is the earthly mindedness of Lot, who keeps his eyes on the soil here, and the course of his life, as we will see, it does not become a straight line.

And so I want us to look at these two men, these two mindsets, these two sets of eyes, and I hope you will see where exactly our eyes needs to be fixed.

Because without a doubt, where you look will change the course of your life. And so, just two minds and eyes to look at today.

[3:23] And the first set of eyes I want us to look at is this. Lot's earthly mindedness. Lot's earthly mindedness. So last week was a near disaster for Abraham, wasn't it?

Canaan is where the promises are for Abraham. That's why God said to go and wait for all the blessings and greatness. But Abraham walked away. A famine hit Canaan.

He got scared. He doubted what God had promised. And he went to Egypt and settled for something else. But we saw graciously that the Lord brought him back. Brought Sarai back and brought Abraham back to the promises.

Back to the land. And that is where we pick it up this week. Abraham begins this chapter with a fresh start. In fact, he's doing really well, isn't he?

Look at verse 2. Now Abraham was very rich in livestock. In silver and in gold. So Abraham has been promised greatness in this land.

[4:25] Promised blessing. And now we're starting to see it. With these possessions, his name is slowly becoming great. And these are the blessings in action.

But it also comes with a problem. A good problem, you could say. He's living in Canaan with his nephew Lot. And Lot is doing really well for himself too.

The blessings are emerging for both of them. And you might wonder, why is this Lot character given so much time here?

Well, Lot is a bit like Abraham's son. So remember, Abraham and Sarai at this point don't have any children. And so when they went to Canaan, they took Lot with them.

Kind of like a son. And when you stick close to Abraham, when you become part of this stream of blessing, what do you get? You get blessing along with him.

[5:23] You get all the promises of God. But what did God say? I will bless those who bless you. And so Lot is actually really significant here. Because Lot is an heir of the promise.

You could say he's just like any Christian here today. We are the children of Abraham, aren't we? We are the inheritors of the promise. And Lot, in that sense, he is a child of Abraham.

You could say, as we look at Abraham and Lot, these are two Christian men building their lives on God's promise. And so that's why the blessings are emerging for Lot as well.

But there's a problem. Abraham and Lot, they're next door neighbors. And they have so much stuff. Animals, flocks, tents.

They can't all fit together. Verse 5. And Lot, who went with Abraham, also had flocks and herds and tents. So that the land could not support both of them dwelling together.

[6:27] For their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together. Don't you hate it when you have so many cars? You can't fit them on the driveway to your mansion. It's such a pain, isn't it?

Well, that's the problem here in Canaan. So much stuff they can't live together. And so it goes to show money doesn't make your problems disappear, does it?

It just creates different problems. So money in itself is not bad. In fact, it's a blessing from God here, isn't it? Money opens up more opportunities for us.

But at the same time, it opens up more problems. And so the problem here, it isn't famine anymore. It's the opposite. It's overabundance.

It's overabundance. Abraham and Lot can't fit together. Which presents a key decision for both of them. We have the promises.

[7:23] We have the money. But what are we going to do with both of them? How are we going to handle these two things together?

God's promises and money. And it's a key decision because if land is the issue here, this might turn out to be another Egypt situation.

Maybe it's looking like the promises and a comfortable lifestyle are clashing here. And so they're at a crossroads. And so how are they going to make this work?

Well, thankfully, Abraham comes up with a solution. Verses 8 and 9. He says to Lot, let's stay in the land, but just spread out.

And in fact, he gives Lot all the options. Verse 9. Is not the whole land before you? The whole land of Canaan. Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right.

[8:24] Or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left. Abraham presents Lot with a choice. In fact, all the choices, really. He basically says, Lot, take whatever you want.

But let's just make sure we stay here in Canaan. So Abraham presents Lot with this generous offer. And with all his money, he really can do anything.

Move anywhere. The world is his oyster at this point. But what does Lot choose? Verse 10. And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord.

Like the land of Egypt. In the direction of Zoar. Verse 11. So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan Valley. And Lot journeyed east. Lot looks up and he spots a nice bit of land in the Jordan Valley. So that's on the very east border of Canaan. So it's like if I give you the choice of you can live anywhere in England and you choose the white cliffs of Dover.

[9:32] You're just hanging on the very edge, right? You pitch up a house there. He's on the very edge of the promised land. And what did you notice about how Lot makes this choice?

What does he use? Verse 10. Lot lifted up his eyes and saw the Jordan Valley. As he takes his next steps in life, where are his eyes set?

It's down here. At the visible stuff here on earth. And look why he picks the Jordan Valley verse 10. It's well watered. It's prime real estate.

It's paradise here on earth. It has the driveways. It has the space. It has a big playroom for the kids. It's simply just a nicer life than Canaan.

And so he picks up the basketball. As he picks up the basketball and he picks up his plow, where are his eyes? They are set down here on earth. And can you see it in the language in verse 11?

[10:37] He chose for himself. He's not thinking about the promise. He's not thinking about eternity. He's thinking for himself. He's thinking about what he can get now.

Which means, as he moves to the edge of the promised land, he's really moving to the edge of the promise. It's like he's pushing God's promise to the side, and now he's kind of teetering on the edge of it.

And so this move is actually a move toward a spiritual wasteland. In fact, look how the land is described.

It's like the garden of the Lord. Like the land of Egypt. He sees it. It looks like Eden. And it looks like Egypt.

And what are those two places associated with? Well, Eden, it's the fall. And think of last week, Egypt. It means walking away from God's promises.

[11:48] You know in films, when the bad guy approaches, and you hear the sinister music in the background. So like Darth Vader walks into the room, and you get the imperial march, don't you? And so you hear the music, and you know something is bad up ahead.

Well, as Lot looks at the Jordan Valley, the dark theme tune is playing. But he doesn't hear it. And so without even realizing it, he packs up his bags, heads towards it, and heads toward a spiritual wasteland.

Look at verse 11. What direction does he go? East. Just like Adam and Eve. And he heads to a place called Sodom.

And how is Sodom described? Verse 12. Now the men of Sodom were wicked. Great sinners against the Lord. It's a spiritual wasteland. With the decision of money or promises, he puts money first, and sidelines the promises.

He says, I won't leave the promised land, but I won't put it out of the center. I'll live on the edge of it. That way I can have my paradise as well, but I don't need to sacrifice anything.

[13:08] But what does that mean for him? He ends up in a spiritual wasteland. Just like the farmer, his eyes are on the ground, and he heads toward a spiritual ditch.

And this may seem like a far-off story for us. We may think, well, there is no promised land like this anymore, that the promises aren't attached to a place in the Middle East anymore.

This may seem far off, but actually, we can be far more like Lot than we realize. A few years ago, I knew a Christian and his family who went to a good church.

They were cared for and loved by their church, but they struggled for space in their house. And they lived in a pricey part of the country, and they just longed for that mini paradise.

And so they found a nice big house in a cheaper part of the country. They got their own lovely little garden of the Lord. And you take a photograph of it, and it's beautiful.

[14:16] But it was actually a spiritual wasteland. They moved there without really thinking about church. They knew one was kind of nearby, but it was all just kind of an afterthought.

But really, there were no good churches nearby, and so they just started to attend the nearest church, which was pretty bad for them. And he and his wife really spiritually declined. And even today, they're still not in a good place. Why? Because they were at a crossroads, and their eyes weren't set on heaven.

But they were staring at the dirt of this world. And it's subtle. They didn't walk away from the promises altogether. They didn't abandon the faith.

They knew they were heirs of the promise, but they thought that they could push the promise to the side and just kind of live on the border. Paradise here mattered more than paradise ahead.

[15:22] They were farmers staring at the ground. When I was graduating from uni, I was wondering where to live and what to do.

And my minister said something which I wish Lot could have been told. He said to me, you wouldn't go to Mars without oxygen, so don't move somewhere without a good church.

Well, this family forgot the oxygen. And there is that temptation in all of us. We want paradise here, don't we?

Especially when space is such an issue here in London, isn't it? It's just like Abraham and Lot in many ways. And what do we do with that issue?

We lift up our eyes. We can look on right move. And we see the house prices anywhere else in this country. And we realise we can get a mini paradise compared to what we can afford here.

[16:25] The kids could have their own rooms. We could have an office. We could have a garden. And our eyes want it, don't we? But too many times, Christians have made that move at the expense of the promise.

Heading to a nice house first and foremost, but church has come further down the list of priorities. And sadly, too many Christians have moved to a spiritual wasteland.

Now, please don't mishear me here. This doesn't mean we all just have to stay in Ealing now and now we're stuck here forever and you're going to be like Lot if you move, right?

It's not that. Definitely not. There are other great churches out there. And sometimes it is good to move. It's the right choice. It was right for Lot to move somewhere.

Abraham suggested it. It was the right thing to do. People here in this church will be moving on soon. And they have prayerfully and wisely made that choice. And it's a good, good move.

[17:28] So please don't mishear me here. This isn't saying we can't move. But the question is, what kind of spiritual land are we moving to? Where are our eyes fixed when we make these decisions?

Are we putting the promises first or are we putting this world first? And this applies to all sorts of decisions we make in life.

We can see the job with the highest salary, but will we take it if it means working every Sunday? We can see the place where there are people my age and are more likely to get married, but will we choose that at the expense of being an heir to the promise?

Whenever we make decisions in life, we always have to have both heaven and earth to think about, of course. But the question is, what will we prioritize first?

Which one is guiding us in these decisions? Now, again, let me be clear. Sometimes you can have both. Sometimes there is a great job with cheap houses and an amazing church and it's near extended family, maybe, and it's just a no-brainer.

[18:45] Of course, go and take the job in that case. Move there. Tell me where it is and I'll join you. Of course. But the question is, when heaven and earth are at loggerheads, what will our eyes be set on?

And God calls us, keep your eyes on heaven. And like the farmer, the line of your life will follow. Which is what we see with Abraham.

And this is what I want us to look at next. Abraham's heavenly mindedness. Abraham's heavenly mindedness. In one sense, Abraham is in the exact same situation as Lot.

All the money, all the choices, the world is his oyster. But look how he responds, verse 9. He's doing whatever he can to make it work, isn't he? Just look what he's saying.

Lot, whatever we do, we need to stick here. We have to live in peace. These promises are for both of us. And so, what do you want to make this work? You want north Canaan?

[19:50] Fine. It's yours. Take it. You want the south? Great. It's all yours. You want the best part of Canaan? The biggest section? Fine. I'll

get rid of some of my sheep.

I'll get rid of all my sheep. I'll have less. Fine. Just whatever it takes, Lot, this is where the promises are. And why is he so determined to make this work?

It's because of where Abraham's eyes are set. He could have moved back to Egypt. He could have forced Lot out of the way. He could have said, let's just pack our bags.

This land isn't big enough. But we have the money now. The world is our oyster. But his eyes are set on heaven, on the unseen world to come. And so Abraham knows this land and these possessions and all these riches and all this greatness, this isn't the end goal.

He knows life on this land isn't all that there is. He's living with his eyes set on the heavenly kingdom to come, a better land, a new creation.

[20:54] And he's staring at what is about to come over the horizon. And as he approaches this crossroads, this decision, his eyes are shaping the course of his life and decisions.

Yes, space is a problem here. But one thing is sure, I'm sticking with God's promises. That's the priority. He's living his life with this heavenly mindedness which just shapes everything.

Just like shooting the basketball, just like plowing that line. It shapes how he's living. And it makes him prioritize God. It makes him prioritize the spiritual state of his family.

And also, it transforms how he thinks about his possessions. Because Abraham shows such incredible generosity here, doesn't he?

He's just so quick to give up his property and sheep and land and money and profits. He's not tight-fisted in this moment, is he?

[22:01] He just happily hands over what he can. He basically says, I don't care what I have here, just as long as we have God's promises. And that is what heavenly mindedness will do to you.

It makes you live holding on to the things of this world very loosely in your hands. Because you know this isn't your real home.

Which is why the generosity in this church is just so encouraging. People are so generous with their time and their finances and opening up their homes and serving in so many ways.

And that generosity, it shows all sorts of things. A love for God. A love for people. But it also shows the same thing as Abraham. It shows a heavenly mindedness.

That is the church holding on to the things of this world very loosely. Because we know this isn't our home. Why else would you give up your time to help out with language classes and kids clubs, unless you know you have an eternity of time to come?

[23:15] Why else would you tithe and use your money for the sake of the gospel, unless you know there are infinite riches stored up for you in heaven? Why else would you open up your home week after week, unless you know your real home is to come?

There's a phrase you might have heard. People might say, oh, he's so heavenly minded, he's of no earthly good. That phrase is a bunch of baloney.

It is the most heavenly minded who are of the most good here on earth. Because it makes us live with hands open. And so heavenly mindedness, living with this constant view of eternity, it is liberating.

Heavenly mindedness breeds a deep, peaceful contentment in life. Just like setting your eyes at the end of the field straightens out the line, well, eyes on heaven straightens out our desires.

And it's liberating. I don't have to grip tightly to the things of this world. It's okay if I don't get the right house, or those cars in the driveway, or that six-figure promotion.

[24:33] I don't have to be plagued with this discontentment of, but I still need more. Because our eyes are set on heaven.

Which is a real challenge to us as well. Because when that discontentment does bubble up, and we look at our lives, and our house, and our flat, and our finances, our clothes, even our bodies, and we see on Instagram, and what we could have, and we're not happy, it should make us think, where are my eyes focused?

Do I realize I have a home somewhere else? Or are my eyes really set here on earth? When our eyes are down here, heaven starts to dim, and houses start to glow.

But if you keep heaven in your sight, everything else starts to dim, and your true home starts to outshine everything else. And it's liberating.

We can hold on to the things of this world loosely. We can be content with the imperfect house, or the smaller garden, or no garden. Because this isn't our real home.

[25:52] And so let this be an encouragement. As we wait for the world to come, and you are very aware, that this life now isn't paradise. Realize, that's okay.

This isn't meant to be paradise. And so you can let go, of whatever you are gripping to, very tightly. You can let go of that, because God has promised you so much more.

You get to live looking toward heaven. That's what God says to Abraham, verse 14. Lift up your eyes, and look.

Look to everything that is about to be yours. Keep looking to that world unseen. The Lord Jesus has riches stored up for you in heaven.

He's waiting for you there. And it will outshine everything else. And so if you are exhausted, trying to find paradise here on earth, and it is exhausting, you can stop looking.

[27:01] The Lord Jesus has opened the way to heaven, and the true paradise awaits. So set your eyes there. Live your life walking there, and you will never go off course.

Let's pray. Thank you.