

Abram's choice

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- [0 : 0 0] Has anyone heard of Jeff Bezos? Put up your hand. One, two, three, four, like five, six, seven people. All right. Jeff Bezos is the founder and CEO of Amazon.com.
- Anybody used Amazon to do online shopping? There are a few people. So you'll know. Actually, he's got your money now, basically, or some of it. And many other technology businesses Jeff Bezos is in charge of.
- And last year, 2018, he surpassed Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft. You know, the one that always doesn't shut down your computer because it's doing updates, that one. As the world's wealthiest person.
- Jeff Bezos is currently the world's wealthiest person with an estimated net worth of \$131 billion. Now, for those of you who don't use dollars every day, that's approximately \$1,986,615 million rand.
- All right. Now, just get your head around that. It would be something just to have a million rand, right? Just to have a million rand would be quite something. You'd be able to put it in the bank in an interest-bearing account and pretty much live off the interest if you had just a million rand.
- [1 : 1 6] But now imagine for every rand of that million rand, you had another million rand. Well, that's what Jeff Bezos has. In fact, he's got almost double that. That's quite a lot of money, right?
- Now, I want you to think seriously. If you had that money in your bank account, that amount of money, \$1,986,615 million rand, what would you do with it?
- Be honest to yourself. What would you do if you had that much cash? Did I here give some of it to your church? Good. Excellent.
- I hope you would. But you would probably start by going on a nice holiday, I imagine. I, in fact, would probably start just by renting the most expensive room in the silo hotel in the waterfront for a night, just for the fun of it.
- I looked it up. It's R84,500 rand for the night to rent the penthouse suite in the silo hotel. And you'd think, wow, what a waste of money. But you spend that, you'd still have \$1,986,614,915,500 rand.
- [2 : 2 8] You wouldn't even notice it. But where else might you travel if you had that amount of money and you had the whole world open up to you to go anywhere you wanted? Well, maybe you would go to a villa in the beautiful Necker Island at 1.2 million rand per night starting rate.
- Or maybe you like France and you would go to Alain Chateau in France, which you can rent out for 621,000 rand per night. Or a chalet in Zermatt Peak in Switzerland at 864,000 rand per night.
- Or maybe you're more adventurous and you want to visit Antarctica for the day at the small price of 3 million rand. But imagine that.
- Where would you go? Just being able to go and enjoy all of the beautiful, stunning places of the world without any limit, without having to worry how much they cost.

Wouldn't that be great? And after that, you'd still have millions of millions. So what would you do then? After you've had a nice holiday and you've enjoyed, you've seen everything you want to see and you come back home, what would you do?

[3 : 35] Well, you'd probably upgrade your house, I imagine. Maybe get a car or two. Get a nice, beautiful garden. Set up your entertainment center. And then you start thinking further afield.

You realize you've still got a whole lot of money. So you pay for all your children and grandchildren's education. Set up some funds for them. Hopefully then you employ a financial manager to set up a fund to support mission work and charities and help develop poor areas in South Africa.

I mean, we all, when we look around in our country, know that there's desperate things to be needed. People in desperate situations. And so I imagine if we had that much money, you would set up something like that to help bring people out of poverty.

See, there's a lot you can do with 1,986,615 million rand, isn't there? But I want you to notice something.

As you think through all of those things that you could do with that amount of money, all of those things, this is what I want you to notice this morning.

[4 : 36] All of those things are actually attempts to undo the curse that we are under. Think about it. Now, if you've been with us so far in Genesis, you'll know that the curse is a result of human sin and us rebelling against the authority of our Creator in His world that He made.

And He put us in this world for a purpose, for a reason. But we decided to do things, do what we wanted instead of listen to Him and what He put us here for. That's what Genesis 1 and 2 and 3 are there to show us.

And what that resulted in at the end of Genesis 3 and onwards, that curse, that us moving outside of the authority of our God and Creator, resulted in us not being able to enjoy all that His creation has to offer us.

It broke the system. We broke the system, and that's why it's malfunctioning to this day. So we can't actually enjoy all those things that creation has to offer, to the extent that many people can't even enjoy the simplest things, like food and shelter.

Many people in our country are suffering. And ultimately, it's because of the curse. And given that we are all under the curse, and we all feel that curse every day, to a greater or lesser degree, and we feel the results of that curse in our personal relationships, frustrations at work, in our own sin, that we want to stop doing and yet we can't, and that battle within us, those are all results of the curse, but physical results of the curse as well, just sickness and frustration and all of these things.

[6 : 13] We feel those every day, and therefore, what we will invariably do with our money, whether we have a lot or a little, is to use it to undo certain aspects of that curse in our lives, and perhaps the lives of others.

Or, to put it another way, to put it in terms of Genesis, what humans tend to do with their money, is to try and get for ourselves, the very same things that God promised to give Abraham and his children in Genesis chapter 12, which we looked at last time we looked at Genesis.

You know that great covenant promise that God made to Abraham, that he was never going to withdraw? Look at it again, turn back to Genesis 12, verse 2 to 3.

And this promise is really foundational to the rest of what happens in Scripture, right? God says to Abraham, So, blessing is the heart of what God is promising to Abraham.

And we saw last time, blessing, what blessing means in the Bible, is opposite to curse. It's undoing of the curse. And God promised Abraham that he would bless him, that he would undo the effect of the curse for him, and that he would also, Abraham and his family, would be the way that the curse is undone for others around the world.

[7 : 54] That is why it's the central promise in Scripture, and that's why the rest of the Bible is about God carrying out this plan to use Abraham's offspring, Abraham's family, Abraham's children, to undo the effects of the curse in all nations.

And that plan is still being carried out, by the way. But what I want you to see, for us to understand why Genesis 13 is here, is that this blessing, this undoing of the curse, that everyone is actually chasing after in our world, that's what everyone is doing.

That's what everyone is busy doing. At the end of the day, if you boil it down, no matter what people are actually busy with in front of them, they're doing it to try undo the effects of the curse, to try get some money, to try get over a sickness they have, to try, you know, improve their marriages, to try get a better house.

But those are all desires of trying to undo the frustration and curse of this world. So everybody is chasing after that. But what everyone is chasing after, the undoing of the curse, is the same thing that God promised to give us, through Abraham and his family, not through our money, or any other way we might think of getting it.

Do you see that? Those things that we all actually want, whether you call yourself religious or not, whether church is boring for you or not, you want what God promised to Abraham, and so you should be listening up.

[9 : 20] Except God promised that he would give it to you and me, through Abraham and the covenant he made with Abraham, and no other way. And so we should be paying attention to what happens to Abraham's family, from here on out, in the Bible.

Most people, of course, are trying to get blessing in their lives, apart from Abraham and that covenant, but through their own means. And they never succeed. And that is also why Jesus said that money is so dangerous.

And it's in the Bible. Jesus spoke about money. One of the things he spoke about the most, he spoke about money and the dangers of money. Not that it's dangerous in and of yourself. It doesn't. That money that's in your wallet, in your pocket, isn't going to, by itself, do any harm to you.

Don't worry. But it's dangerous because if we have money, what it tends to do is cause us to look away from God's promises to Abraham as our only real hope of undoing the curse in our lives.

And we think we can do it some other way. Which, of course, we never can. And that is what this story about Abraham and Lot is all about.

[10 : 32] That's what it shows us. It shows us the difference between someone who looks to what this world can give them for blessing and undoing of the curse, as opposed to what God promises in his covenant with Abraham, and someone who looks to those promises.

That's the comparison that is made between Abraham and Lot. So let's look at the story. Follow with me in your Bibles, Genesis 13. Now, Abraham and Lot, at the beginning of the story, were both stinking rich, okay?

And it's because God made them that way. As part of his promise to bless Abraham and his family, part of that promise was physical blessings, financial blessings. So we read in verse 2, Okay, those are pretty much the three forms of currency in the ancient world, silver, gold, and livestock.

And he had a lot. In fact, there's just a little note in the text. The word for rich or wealthy there is the same word in Hebrew that's used to describe the extent of the famine in the previous chapter.

Remember there was a famine in the land and Abraham had to go to Egypt? Well, that word used to describe the severity of the famine is the same word to describe, essentially, the severity of how rich Abraham has become.

[11 : 54] So he was severely rich. That's really the emphasis of this text. And the question, of course, at the beginning of chapter 13, when we read that is, Well, what are Abraham and Lot going to do with all this money?

And that becomes a critical question when we read on the story, and it turns out that they've actually got too much wealth for the land to support both of them.

That's how rich they are. Imagine how many sheep that is, that the land actually can't support both of them. And so that's the problem in the story. You know, this is the Jeff Bezos and the Bill Gates of the ancient world right here.

These are rich guys. The world is their oyster. They can go anywhere they want and do anything they want, and the land they're in is actually not suitable for these rich guys.

That's the problem here. They can go and do whatever they want, and the land they're actually in is not very suitable for them to enjoy their riches. It's time for them to move up in the world, especially Abram, if he's going to enjoy his wealth that God has given him.

[13 : 03] It's time for him to move on and to enjoy his wealth and to find the best place to settle, and that's why what happens next is so surprising. He doesn't do that.

In fact, he lets Lot decide where to go. Look at from verse 8. So Abram said to Lot, 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, and if you go to the right, I'll go to the left. Now this is, if you were an Israelite reader and you had been reading up until now, this would come as a big shock.

This is a very unexpected thing for Abram to do because the land is Abram's covenantal right, the land that they're in, not Lot's. Abram could have just told Lot where to go and taken the best land for himself, and so what's happening here is quite shocking.

It's like, it's like as a kid, having a younger sibling who moves into your room. I don't know if you've ever had that when you were growing up, but imagine you had the best room, right, and your little sister or your little brother has to move in to your room.

[14 : 29] It's still your room, of course, but they want to come move in. Now this is like, after you start getting on each other's nerves, which siblings inevitably do, this is like the older sibling, whose room it actually is, saying to the younger one, you can choose the best room and I'll go to the other one.

Now when has that ever happened in the history of siblings, right? Never. But that's what Abram is doing for Lot, his nephew here, who should have submitted to him.

And so of course, Lot's going like, wow, okay, cool, I'll do that. Lot chooses the best land for himself. There's no, no, Abram, you take it, it's fine.

No, he goes, okay, fine. And so from verse 10, Lot looked around, or looked up, and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan towards Zoa was well watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt.

This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out towards the east. The two men parted company.

[15 : 36] Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. Okay. This now, in the story, is where it starts to get really interesting.

If we read the text carefully, we're told two things about the land that Lot chose. Two very important things the narrator tells us about this land that Lot chose.

Firstly, I wonder if you noticed, Lot chose, Lot chose the land based on what most looked like the garden of the Lord. Did you see that?

So, he chose the land because it looked most like what the garden of the Lord, the garden of Eden, would have looked like. It was well watered, it was lush, it had great potential for growth and investment and all of that.

It was good land for Lot to enjoy his wealth in. And it was near enough to the cities so that he could enjoy all the amenities of urban life as well. So, that's the first thing we're told about the land.

[16 : 39] It was a good land. It was well watered, it was a great place to live. But look what else we're told about this land. On either side of the verse that tells us where Lot chose to go, there's actually a note so that we don't miss it.

On verse 10 and then verse 13. And look what the notes say. Verse 10, this was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. And verse 13, now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord.

So, things are not what they seem in paradise. but further, there's a tiny little mention, another note the narrator makes at the end of verse 11.

Lot set out after he chose the land. He set out towards the east. Now, that might just be a geographical marker but if you've been reading Genesis, you'll know something about the east.

You'll know it's also a symbolic reference because remember, every time the east has been mentioned so far in the book of Genesis, it was mentioned in terms of moving away from Eden.

[17 : 48] You remember? Movement eastwards has always so far signified moving away from the ideal world that God intends for us. So, Adam and Eve moved, we're told, to the east after they were banished from the garden.

Cain moved more to the east when he was banished from God's presence and the builders of Babel moved east before they built their great tower. is this eastwards movement and in Genesis, eastwards, therefore, is not always just a geographical reference, it's also got a symbolic meaning which I think it has in this passage too.

In which case, what it is saying is something very profound. What it is saying is that Lot's attempt to live in the land of blessing, to gain blessing from himself which looked most like Eden, actually took him further away from Eden, from God's ideal and from real blessing for him, not closer to it.

When he tried to chase this blessing for himself, he actually moved further away from God's ideal blessing for him. Do you see that? It's very important to see that that's what's happening in the story.

Lot's moving further away from Eden, not closer to it, even though he thinks he's moving closer to it. In fact, what he was moving towards was a land that was destined for destruction.

[19 : 12] And it lands him up in all kinds of trouble in later chapters, we'll see. But then on the other hand, we've got Abram who didn't chase after the blessing.

So what happened with him? Where did he end up? Well let's read from verse 14 onwards. The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, look around from where you are or literally look up from where you are to the north and south to the east and west all the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever.

I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth so that if anyone could count the dust then your offspring could be counted. Go, go walk through the length and breadth of the land for I am giving it to you.

Walk through the length and the breadth of the land for I am giving it to you. Walking through the land is a sign of claiming your territory.

It's an ancient practice that people would walk the borders of their land, a king would get on his horse and walk the borders of his land. We don't often see it today. We do in certain circumstances.

[20 : 25] So for example there's this town in Britain called Berwick. I don't know if you know it or if you've been there. It's right at the north of Britain on the border like 4K is from the current border between England and Scotland and throughout history when wars happen and borders changed Berwick would sometimes be Scottish and sometimes be English and so the people had a real identity crisis, the people of Berwick and so what they do today now that it's the border is pretty much confirmed hopefully is that they have an annual tradition on getting on their horses and what's called beating the bounds of Berwick.

They go and they walk the border just to remind themselves this is our land this is where we live and the land actually belongs to us and no one else.

So beating the bounds is this tradition walking the land is this tradition of recognizing this land belongs to you. And that's what God wanted Abram to do for the land of Canaan.

Despite the fact that there were people living there despite the fact that it wasn't yet God talks in the I will give it to you he still wants Abram to recognize that this land really was going to be the land of blessing that he promised him and that Abram was going to own even though it didn't look like it now.

So that's what God is saying to Abram here when he says beat the bounds go walk the land go walk through the trenches go walk up the hills go walk in the rivers just realize this land is really going to be yours but why does he do that now?

[22 : 08] Why does God now appear and give Abram this reaffirmation that the land is his after what Lot just did? After Lot has just run off to a better land?

Well it's because God is confirming to Abram and to his children that they needn't chase after those blessings for themselves like Lot did because they will certainly get them.

That's what's going on here. Lot is saying to Abram you don't need to chase after the blessings for yourself like Lot did when he went to the land that looked like Eden because you will get them you will get the land you will get the blessing even if you can't see it now and that is why Genesis 13 is such an important story for us today as Christians.

So important because we just like Lot let's be honest we tend to look to what we can get here and now in this life the things that we can see with our eyes to undo the curse and to make us happy don't we?

We look up we look at what this world has got to offer and we chase after those things and we save up for those things and we work for those things because we think those things that we're looking towards and saving up for can undo the curse in our lives can bring us happiness can bring us rest can bring us peace can bring us life rather than looking towards what God has promised that we can't yet see as a means to undo the curse in our lives you're either doing one or the other you're either looking to what you can see to undo the curse and bring you happiness and blessing or you're looking to what you can't yet see but what God has promised and so when we focus our lives and our minds on our holidays and our careers and our houses and our cars and our entertainment to take away the effects of the curse in our lives and to make us happy well then not only can none of those things actually do that but they take us away and they distract us from where we really should be looking and the warning of the story is that the more we do that the more we fixate our minds on the things that we can see and the things that everyone around us is chasing after the more we fixate and think about those things and make those things the topic of our discussions and the topic of our thoughts the more we seek

[24 : 48] Eden now in what we can see the further away from the real Eden we risk moving and the real land of blessing that God wants us to live in one day and the more we risk investing ourselves and our energies in what will one day be destroyed like the land of Sodom do you want to do you want to invest what God has given you your time and your energy and your skills and your resources in what is just going to be burnt up one day or as Jesus says do you want to store up treasures in heaven treasures of the age to come things that count for eternity but of course what we're challenged therefore here in this passage is to consider our outlook to prevent us from investing ourselves in things that are going to be destroyed we need to consider how we look up at the world around us and where we look to for the removal of curse in our lives so did you notice that this is very interesting phrase

I did point it out earlier he looked up or he looked around depending on what translation you have or he looked about or he lifted up his eyes it appears twice in this passage and it's a very important phrase so in verse 10 is the first one lot looked around or he lifted up his eyes and he saw this land that he wanted to live in and then verse 14 we see it again the Lord said to Abram after lot had parted from him lift up your eyes look around look up from where you are and see what I'm going to give you okay so those two mentions of that phrase actually give us a hint as to what the emphasis of the story really is and that is to compare how lot looked at the world versus how Abram looked at the world and then for us to evaluate which one of those two perspectives we have so lot looked at the world through the eyes of flesh through what he could see in front of him through what looked good while

Abram looked at this world through eyes of faith certain about what he couldn't yet see something he had to wait for and you know what he did have to wait for that land in fact he died without receiving it the Bible tells us he never received that land in his life to this day he still hasn't received that land it's currently well owned by the Israelis or Palestinians you decide but it's not Abram's which means either Abram still will receive that land that he walked or God is a liar and God is not a liar and so Abram is still going to receive that land promised to him one day after the resurrection that land that he walked that land that he walked up the hills and down into the valleys and across the rivers all those thousands of years ago he and his family will live in that land one day under God's blessing with the curse removed with no pain or toil or death enjoying all that creation has to offer them and that's a blessing that no amount of money could ever buy and you know what that's good news for Christians because as we read further in scripture we discover those who trust in

Christ and have been baptized into his name become part of that extended family of Abram we have essentially quite literally get adopted into that family even if we're not blood relations of Abram and that is how we you and I today in 2019 enter into that covenant that God made with Abraham thousands of years ago and how we can have eternal life in the land without having to die because our sins which cause us to die have been washed away taken away through what Jesus did on the cross for us so that we can not only live in the land but live in the land forever so that we too who have come under Christ's rule and salvation who have come under the rule of the king of Israel the seed of Abram those of us who are under his rule and trust in his blood on the cross for us we too will inherit that land one day the land that Abram walked and so much more because in the end we will inherit this whole earth and Abram believed that he believed those covenant promises when he looked around when he walked that land he knew he was going to get it all one day and so he didn't worry about where he lived in the meantime but is that what you see when you look around at this world if you're a

Christian if you're a member of that covenant do you see this world as something that you are going to inherit one day that it will all be yours because that will drastically change how you think about things this physical world that you walk on every day that is currently owned by a whole lot of rich people do you see this as your future inheritance when you look at those pictures of Nekka Island and Zermatt Peak in Switzerland do you realize we will own all of that one day as Abram's children all of those places are our inheritance all those things that we don't own now and we don't need to and so all those rich people who are not in that covenant living it up and enjoying all that wealth and enjoying their fancy cars and enjoying their mansions and enjoying their hundreds of thousands per night places to stay you know what let them because that's all they've got and they only get to enjoy it for this life the short life on earth it's actually quite sad after the resurrection that's all ours and so don't feel like you have to chase after what those rich people chase after because you'll get it without chasing after it one day and you have more important things to do in this life anyway with your money and with your time and with your energy because you're a member of God's kingdom as Jesus says in

[31 : 54] Matthew 6 the pagans run after these things let them rather you seek first his kingdom Abraham didn't have to chase after the things of the world because he was a man of faith he saw this world through the eyes of faith he knew he was going to get it one day and so before we finish I want you to notice what that enabled Abraham to do because he had those eyes of faith it actually affected his relationship with Lot and it affected how he lived which is what we also see and therefore this enabled him to be meek and humble and generous towards Lot it enabled him not to have to claim his rights but rather to let Lot go first and that is what meekness is humility because Abraham knew he didn't have to compete with his nephew and if we his children and heirs of his same inheritance see our world with those same eyes of faith then it will enable us to do the same things and live like that we can live humbly meekly and generously without having to compete with the people in the world around us as we focus on doing

God's work knowing what Jesus said in his sermon on the mount is true blessed are the meek because they will inherit the earth and so if you're a Christian when you look around at this world don't look at it through Lot's eyes and chase after what you can see rather look at it through Abram's eyes and trust God's promises of what you can't yet see like Abram be assured that this land that we walk upon today and that is owned by other people will be ours one day where we will enjoy the presence of God again and all his blessings and the removal of the curse without end and so we can do what Abram did right at the end of the story have a look verse 18 so Abram went to live near the great trees of Marmory at Hebron where he pitched his tents there he built an altar to the Lord stop worrying about what you don't have realize that you are just passing through this short life you are not a permanent resident so don't make the mistake like Lot did of investing in what will one day be destroyed rather like

Abram focus yourself here and now on worshipping God fixing your eyes on him listening to his voice and doing his work as you look forward to the day that Christ returns to undo the curse once and for all to redeem this world and to give it to those who are waiting for him let's pray Lord we do thank you for your great and gracious promises to Abram to undo the curse not just of his life but of this whole world through his family and thank you Lord that through Christ we can be part of that family and so we pray that you would help us to look to Abram as our example not to be like Lot and fix our eyes on what we can see but to fix our eyes on what you have promised what you will give us one day so that we can spend our lives on this earth in a way that matters for eternity and we can do your work fruitfully in

Jesus name Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen