

August 17-21, 2020 Edition

The "BIG Story" Of The Bible #12

Finding Jesus In The Old Testament
Abram, Lot & 3 Different Ambitions

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;D) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday Reflection: This week we'll be looking at the story of Abram (a guy who would have his name changed to Abraham later in the story) and his nephew- Lot. But before we dive into this week's story let's spend some time catching up with Abram.

Abram was the last of the descendants of Seth- the one shining light in the first 11 chapters of Genesis. But Abram was far from where God wanted him to be and so God "called" Abram to go to a land that God would show him. God didn't tell him where. God only told him, I'll let you know when you arrive. What would you do? That's a pretty radical "call" if you ask me. But Abram does it:

The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you." So Abram departed as the Lord had instructed, and Lot went with him. Genesis 12:1-4 (NLT)

And God leads them to the land of Canaan. Why there? Why not somewhere else? I always wondered that. As far as we know there's nothing terribly special about that place other than it's got a ton of pretty barren desert in it. Why would God call that place the "land of promise"? I don't know if you read any of the reflections from the week when we were discussing the tower of Babel but there's been a suspicion running through my brain ever since I got back from Israel (thankfully I got to go BEFORE all this Covid stuff got ramped up)- that the Garden of Eden was/is in the place that Jerusalem now sits. I won't get as science-fictiony this week as I did that week but there are just so many hints that I'm coming across especially now as we go through the BIG story of the Bible that I'm going to be more surprised if that isn't than case than if it turns out it is.

Anyways, Abram takes his nephew Lot and they go to the land of Canaan and God promises to give the land to Abram's descendants:

Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "I will give this land to your descendants." And Abram built an altar there and dedicated it to the Lord, who had appeared to him. After that, Abram traveled south and set up camp in the hill country, with Bethel to the west and Ai to the east. There he built another altar and dedicated it to the Lord, and he worshiped the Lord. Then Abram continued traveling south by stages toward the Negev. Genesis 12:7-9 (NLT)

I find it fascinating that Abram lives his entire life without receiving any of the promises God had made to him with two exceptions- Abram did receive the son promised to him and Sarah and God did bless Abram. But the land and the descendants so numerous you couldn't count them? Abram lived and died with those promises on the horizon somewhere. He is the Bible's go-to when discussing a life of faith. When Paul tries to describe what Christianity is all about and uses an example from the Old Testament he doesn't use Moses or King David- he uses Abraham. Why? Because most of us will live and die on this earth with the promise of a home in the land of promise still being experienced only by faith. That's the initial part of the story of Abram and we'll continue to witness his journey together tomorrow but for today maybe spend some time

trying to understand what exactly faith is and what it means to live a life "by faith"- the way Abram did.

Tuesday Reflection: So when we left Abram and Lot they were in the hill country between Bethel and Ai- just a few miles north of where modern day Jerusalem sits. It's pretty country but it's not exactly what you'd call lush. And yet that was the land-of-promise so that's where they settled. Until something comes along to test Abram's famous faith:

At that time a severe famine struck the land of Canaan, forcing Abram to go down to Egypt, where he lived as a foreigner. As he was approaching the border of Egypt, Abram said to his wife, Sarai, "Look, you are a very beautiful woman. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife. Let's kill him; then we can have her!' So please tell them you are my sister. Then they will spare my life and treat me well because of their interest in you."
Genesis 12:10-13 (NLT)

Two things here. First Abram gets-out-of-Dodge as soon as famine rears its ugly head. It doesn't sound like Moses (who wrote the book of Genesis) is condemning Abram for leaving but based on Abram's famous faith I'd expect a story here about how Abram trusted God and thrived in the midst of the famine. I mean, that's sort of what God's plan for Abram's descendants is- to live in a land that isn't the best setup for a nation to thrive in so that when they thrive there can be no explanation other than the hand of God in their lives. So whether it was a bad idea for Abram to go to Egypt in the first place or not we do see in this part of the story a massive failing of Abram's- he tells Sarai (his wife) to lie and tell people that he's her brother rather than her husband. His rationale is that then rather than killing him so they can take Sarai for their own wife, people will treat Abram well hoping he'll give her to them in marriage.

What Abram doesn't see coming is Pharaoh taking an interest in Sarai. When the king takes an interest in your "sister" he doesn't ask permission as it turns out- he just takes her into his harem. He does rain gifts down on Abram but Abram does nothing to stop this from happening. If you've read the rest of the story of Abram and Sarai you know their marriage is strained. Yeah, you think? Here was have the first in a long list of heroes of our faith who make foolish decisions that end up unleashing untold heartache and pain not just in their own lives but in the lives of many. In some cases Abram will make foolish decisions that still impact our world to this very day (we'll talk about Hagar & Ishmael- the father of the Arabs in a few weeks). Where is Abram's famous faith in this story? It has faltered here. But this is one of the things that sets the Bible apart from every other ancient book written about a culture's history and religion- the Bible is the only ancient text of history and faith that chronicles not just the victories of their heroes but also the massive failings of their heroes.

There is not one single perfect person in the Old Testament. Every hero of our faith also makes massive mistakes. Every. Single. One. And I for one am so glad our heroes of the faith had their mistakes white-washed from the pages of the Bible. I mean, if all these men and women were perfect what hope would I (or you for that matter) have when we consider following in their footsteps. Faith in the Bible DOES NOT equate with perfection. Faith in the Bible is the story of ordinary men and women like you and me who stumble through this world attempting to live a life of faith in the midst of their flawed humanity. Aren't you glad that's the case? I know I am.

Wednesday Reflection: So yesterday we left Sarai in the Pharaoh's harem and Abram pretending to be her brother so that Pharaoh wouldn't kill him to take Sarai for his own wife. I hope it wasn't too traumatic for you waiting to see what fate awaited Sarai and Abram. Here's the rest-of-the-story:

And sure enough, when Abram arrived in Egypt, everyone noticed Sarai's beauty. When the palace officials saw her, they sang her praises to Pharaoh, their king, and Sarai was taken into his palace. Then Pharaoh gave Abram many gifts because of her—sheep, goats, cattle, male and female donkeys, male and female servants, and camels. But the Lord sent terrible plagues upon Pharaoh and his household because of Sarai, Abram's wife. So Pharaoh summoned Abram and accused him sharply. "What have you done to me?" he demanded. "Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' and allow me to take her as my wife? Now then, here is your wife. Take her and get out of here!" Pharaoh ordered some of his men to escort them, and he sent Abram out of the country, along with his wife and all his possessions. Genesis 12:14-20 (NLT)

Isn't this a fine barrel of monkeys (what? You don't like that saying? I like it so I'm sticking with it- after all a barrel of monkeys would cause an awful lot of havoc and so did these events)? The Pharaoh of Egypt shows more integrity than our hero of faith (at least in this story). God steps in and gets our story back on track and Abram & Lot are headed back to Canaan:

So Abram left Egypt and traveled north into the Negev, along with his wife and Lot and all that they owned. (Abram was very rich in livestock, silver, and gold.) From the Negev, they continued traveling by stages toward Bethel, and they pitched their tents between Bethel and Ai, where they had camped before. This was the same place where Abram had built the altar, and there he worshiped the Lord again. Genesis 13:1-4 (NLT)

So now Abram & Lot have come full circle. They are back in the center of the call-of-God in their lives- to go to the land-of-promise. It's the last place Abram had been in a place of righteousness with God. Now before we go on we'd better stop and define that term- righteousness. Growing up I'd hear that word and think it meant perfect, goody-two-shoes, holier than thou- that kind of thing. But it doesn't. Does that sound like Abram to you after reading about his misadventures in Egypt. Nope. Not even close. So then what does it mean?

Righteousness is nothing more and nothing less than being a "right" place with God. Some of the most messed up people who have ever lived were men and women of righteousness. Let's think about it like this- if you write someone a check (I know- what are those? For those of you who don't know what a personal check is google it ;o) and it bounces then technically you would be in a place of unrighteousness with that person or business. In the old days you could walk into many stores and you'd see bounced checks hanging on the wall waiting for a customer to come in and settle their accounts. It was one of the purest forms of shame-culture and it often worked quite well for the store owners. As long as you owed money to that store you couldn't do business there. But if you went in and paid the money for the bounced check you were "justified" in your relationship with that store/owner and you now stood in a place of righteousness with that store/owner.

The Old Testament is a long and colorful story showing us that we cannot "justify" ourselves and we can't provide our own "righteousness". That's what the New Testament and Jesus is all about.

Jesus' death paid every debt we've ever incurred and now we stand in a place of righteousness not because we paid off our own debt but because Jesus paid it for us and shares his own status of justification and righteousness with us:

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NLT)

That verse will make you shake your head and wonder what you just read, won't it? So let's break it down. We had a debt (our sin). Jesus took on that debt (and in so doing somehow "became sin" and that'll keep you busy all week just trying to sort out what that means but it seems to mean God transferred ALL the debt from ALL of our sins so that when He died on the cross he cancelled the debt of anyone who would trust/believe/have-faith-in Him. And when we do what happens? We become the very righteousness of God. Now because of what Jesus did weak, flawed, messed up Ed can stand in confidence before the very throne of God knowing that when He looks at me He sees the righteousness not that I've accrued (which isn't very much) but rather He sees the righteousness that Jesus has accrued (which in case you're keeping score is all of it).

We've gotten off track from our story of Abram so let's finish with him. Abram ends up back in the hill country between Bethel and Ai and once again worships-the-LORD. What we will see is Abram is once again a man of righteousness. Why? Because of his own record? Nope. Because of Jesus' record. Huh? Jesus hasn't been born yet, right? Right. So then how could Abram be "righteous" because of what Jesus did? Because Jesus' payment of sin doesn't just go forward from the cross to you and me- it went backwards too:

Abraham was, humanly speaking, the founder of our Jewish nation. What did he discover about being made right with God? If his good deeds had made him acceptable to God, he would have had something to boast about. But that was not God's way. For the Scriptures tell us, "Abraham believed God, and God credited him as righteous because of his faith." Romans 4:1-3 (NLT)

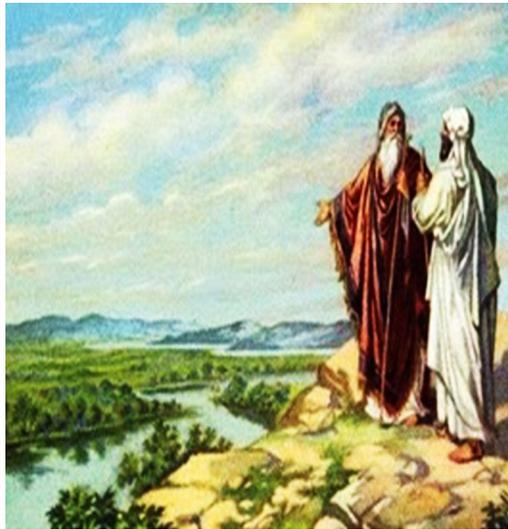
God "credited" Abram with righteousness. How? Because of Jesus. I'm pretty sure that's what help everything together from the moment Adam & Eve ate the forbidden fruit and unleashed sin into this world. Why didn't they die immediately? Why didn't the creation completely unravel? Because of what Jesus would one day do. Abram was FAR from perfect. Know anyone personally that is FAR from imperfect? Then you'll be happy to know it's not your record that you'll be judged on (if you're a follower of Jesus)- it's Jesus'. Spend some time today running this thought through your mind: "I believe God, and God credited me as righteous because of my faith."

Thursday Reflection: Ok so now we are ready to talk about Abram & Lot splitting up:

Lot, who was traveling with Abram, had also become very wealthy with flocks of sheep and goats, herds of cattle, and many tents. But the land could not support both Abram and Lot with all their flocks and herds living so close together. So disputes broke out between the herdsmen of Abram and Lot. (At that time Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land.) Genesis 13:5-7 (NLT)

Why were disputes breaking out? Because as so many great cowboys have said at one point or another, "there's not enough room in this land for the both of us..." And it's true- have you ever

seen the hill country between Bethel and Ai? I'm going to include two maps in today's reflection to give you an idea of what's going on here. Because Moses mentioning that the Canaanites and Perezites were in the land wasn't just some added commentary- he was telling us why Lot ends up looking in the direction he ends up looking towards when looking for a new place to call home. The Canaanites were to the northwest and the Perezites lived to the southwest of the hill country Abram and Lot resided in (you can see in the attached map if you'd like to get a visual for it). And as far as why there wasn't room for both Abram & Lot with all their herds? I'll ask again- have you ever been to the hill country between Bethel & Ai? It's not exactly barren desert but it's not a rain forest either. In fact on the continuum between desert and rain forest the hill country where Abram & Lot lived was a lot closer to desert than anything else. I've also included a picture of what that land looked like and what Lot saw when Abram made his pitch:



Finally Abram said to Lot, "Let's not allow this conflict to come between us or our herdsmen. After all, we are close relatives! The whole countryside is open to you. Take your choice of any section of the land you want, and we will separate. If you want the land to the left, then I'll take the land on the right. If you prefer the land on the right, then I'll go to the left." Genesis 13:8-9 (NLT)

What's going on here? Something pretty radical and countercultural as a matter of fact. Abram & Lot live in a patriarchal world where seniority was everything. Abram was the leader of their clan. Abram could have told Lot exactly what was going to happen and Lot couldn't have said much. So why does Abram give Lot the choice? Well, because Abram had different values than Lot. There are 3 relationships at stake in this story: 1. A relationship with God. 2. A relationship with family. 3. A relationship with money/wealth. Abram ends up valuing his relationship with God and his relationship with family over his relationship with his wealth. Why? He had changed and he saw what was truly important now. So he gives Lot the choice even though he could have just commanded him. And what does Lot choose? Well, take a look at the pictures again and ask yourself which way you'd go. This is what Lot does:

Lot took a long look at the fertile plains of the Jordan Valley in the direction of Zoar. The whole area was well watered everywhere, like the garden of the Lord... Lot chose for himself the whole Jordan Valley to the east of them. He went there with his flocks and

servants and parted company with his uncle Abram. So Abram settled in the land of Canaan.
Genesis 13:10-12 (NLT)

There is SO much here. First of all this is a watershed moment in the **BIG** story of the Bible. Moses is writing down this story around 500 years later. Everyone who will initially read this story is an Israelite. They all know what this moment means- this was when the family fractured. Lot left and ended up leaving the land-of-promise and settling in the area on the other side of the Dead Sea. His descendants would become the nation of Moab. The Moabites were mortal enemies of Israel- everyone knows that (at least they did when Moses was writing). But there was a day coming when a reunion of sorts would take place. Almost 1,000 years after Abram & Lot go their separate ways a woman named Ruth (a woman from Moab) would meet a man named Boaz (a descendant of Abram's who lived in the town of Bethlehem) and they would marry and settle down together and their great grandson would be a boy named, David. It's a really neat story (although it should be rated NC17) but it's more than that- it's also the moment that Abram & Lot symbolically reunite. Turns out the Holy Spirit (who inspired all the writers of the Bible) is a REALLY good storyteller.

But beyond that there's also something that this text is telling us about Lot's ambition or motivation. It's tough for us to see in the English translation but I'm told that if I was a Hebrew reader I would have seen it immediately- it all comes down to that phrase, "The whole area was well watered everywhere, like the garden of the Lord..." That one little phrase theoretically tells us everything we need to know about Lot. Abram valued family and relationship with God over his own wealth which is why he allowed Lot to choose. Lot ends up valuing his wealth over both his relationship with Abram and his relationship with God because he leaves both to go to a place where it would be (theoretically) easiest to increase his wealth. But in so doing Lot moves out of the land-of-promise and abandons the call-of-God that up until now he and Abram had both been answering.

Hebrew scholars will tell you that in the above passage of scriptures the first sentence is obviously the narrator who is telling/writing the story (Moses). But the second line is a quote straight from Lot's heart, "The whole area was well watered everywhere, like the garden of the Lord..." What does it mean? That Lot saw how green it was to the southeast and it made him think of Eden. So what? Well, Eden was the last place that people had experience complete shalom (peace). The Hebrew concept of shalom though goes far beyond what we think of when we think of the world peace. Shalom was a sense that all was right in the world between a person and every single relationship that person had. That all was right between me and God, between me and the relationships I had with the most important people in my life, that all was right between me, myself and I and that all was right between me and the Creation. When one has that then one has achieved total "shalom".

But nobody has every fully experienced that this side of Eden. So when Lot looks to the southeast and sees the land on the other side of the dead sea that is green and lush and far from the dangerous Canaanites and Perezites Moses is trying to get us to see into Lot's heart- that he thinks that if he moves there he will find everything he needs for complete shalom. If he moves there it will be like it was when humans lived in the Garden-of-the-LORD. Only one problem- Lot wants the Garden-of-the-LORD without the LORD. He's leaving the land-of-promise to try to find something that only exists within the will of God.

Now before you get too down on Lot it's probably time to recognize we do this ourselves. It's what's at the heart of all idolatry. We've talked a bit about that already in the The **BIG** Story of the Bible and we'll talk a lot more about it in coming months. But basically idolatry is what we're engaging in any time we try to find complete shalom anywhere other than in the presence of God. People as it turns out are idol factories and we try to achieve complete shalom with substances (booze and drugs which lead to addiction), money, power, success, pleasure and even relationships. We do it all the time. All. Of. Us.

Every. Single. One. Of. Us. (yes that includes you ;o)

Go ahead and read the rest of the story of Lot if you want and see how that works out for him. Spoiler alert- not too good. We'll finish up this part of the **BIG** Story of the Bible tomorrow but for today maybe spend some time thinking about all the ways you have tried and continue to try to experience complete shalom by pursuing the Garden-of-the-LORD without the LORD.

Friday Reflection: Ok- so yesterday we looked at the ambition of Lot who as it turns out let his relationship to his money/wealth drive the decision he made. We talked about the insidious nature of idolatry- that if we're not careful it will drive our decisions too. And remember- idolatry is much more than simply bowing down to a carved statue and worshipping some "thing". Idolatry is what happens anytime I make something other than God the foundation of my life. And what makes idolatry so prevalent in our world even today is that we don't recognize the danger of idols still exist. But the gods haven't gone away- they've just gotten sneaky and will get us to sacrifice the best of our time, energy, resources, health and even our relationships at their "altars".

That's exactly what happens to Lot. He makes his decision based on what he values most and I'm guessing he didn't even realize that was what was driving him. But it still controlled and navigated his life:

Their idols are... the work of human hands... No sounds come from their throats. People who make idols will be like them, and so will those who trust them. Psalm 115:4-8 (NCV)

Turns out we shape our idols without even realizing it and then our idols shape us. They impact every area of our lives. They dictate every decision we make and the trajectory of our lives.

Unless we recognize their agenda. The rest of Lot's life will be shaped by this (and future decisions) that are guided by this (what I'm guessing is a hidden) agenda of a life built on a foundation of the worship (idolatry) of wealth and comfort.

Does that mean wealth and comfort are bad or wrong? Nope. Abram is fabulously wealthy and successful and never once is that in any way condemned. So what's the difference between Abram & Lot? Foundations:

Even when he reached the land God promised him, he lived there by faith- for he was like a foreigner, living in tents... Abraham was confidently looking forward to a city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God. Hebrews 11:9-10 (NLT)

Abram (just like Lot) had 3 relationships he had to consider when it came to the issue he was facing. In case you've forgotten what that issue was let's read all about again:

Lot, who was traveling with Abram, had also become very wealthy with flocks of sheep and goats, herds of cattle, and many tents. But the land could not support both Abram and Lot with all their flocks and herds living so close together. So disputes broke out between the herdsmen of Abram and Lot. (At that time Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land.) Finally Abram said to Lot, "Let's not allow this conflict to come between us or our herdsmen. After all, we are close relatives! The whole countryside is open to you. Take your choice of any section of the land you want, and we will separate. If you want the land to the left, then I'll take the land on the right. If you prefer the land on the right, then I'll go to the left." Lot took a long look at the fertile plains of the Jordan Valley in the direction of Zoar. The whole area was well watered everywhere, like the garden of the Lord... Lot chose for himself the whole Jordan Valley to the east of them. He went there with his flocks and servants and parted company with his uncle Abram. So Abram settled in the land of Canaan. Genesis 13:5-12 (NLT)

So what was the "issue"? The issue was all about how to handle the problem of stagnating wealth and family harmony. Both families were bursting with new "wealth" (in those days wealth was measured by how many flocks one owned and more flocks require more room to feed and water those flocks) but there was now tension over grazing land and water rights. So what does Abram do? Well, he weighs the same three relationships that Lot did- relationship with God, with family and with wealth. And what does Abram do? He chooses family and faith over his wealth. Lot makes a different choice and the rest of their lives will be impacted profoundly by their decisions. Why was Abram able to make the decision he did? Foundation. He had built his life on a foundation of faith and family rather than wealth. Again- it doesn't mean wealth is bad- it just makes a lousy foundation for one's life. The libraries of the world are filled with the biographies of men and women who have made their most important decisions based on wealth or success or power or pleasure or one of a dozen other things that we often "worship" without even knowing it. These biographies tell a story of a person who made it to the top of their field while neglecting faith and family and are warnings to anyone who will listen not to do what they did.

So what happens with Abram after Lot leaves? You can read all about it:

After Lot had gone, the Lord said to Abram, "Look as far as you can see in every direction- north and south, east and west. I am giving all this land, as far as you can see, to you and your descendants as a permanent possession. And I will give you so many descendants that, like the dust of the earth, they cannot be counted! Go and walk through the land in every direction, for I am giving it to you." So Abram moved his camp to Hebron and settled near the oak grove belonging to Mamre. There he built another altar to the Lord. Genesis 13:14-18 (NLT)

God once again renews his covenant with Abram. If you remember what happened when Abram went to Egypt you might wonder, why would God do that? Abram messed up BIG TIME! Why would God be willing to continue working with him? Because weak, messed up, ordinary people are all that are available to God. He's not looking for perfect people (because they don't exist). What He's looking for is women and men of faith- and there's that word again. Faith. What does it mean? What does it look like? Turns out it looks like Abram. You want to know what a life of faith looks like you study the life of this man of faith amid his own weaknesses and struggles.

Turns out faith is WAY more than what we think. Abram never once doubted the existence of God (which is what I always thought faith was- belief that God exists). So then what did it mean that he displayed "faith"? It means trust. It means commitment. It turns out faith is more about who you trust than what you think. So let's change the terminology of Galatians 3:6-7 ("Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith." The real children of Abraham, then, are those who put their faith in God.) just a tad to reflect a fuller understanding of the word "faith":

Abram (believed/had faith in/trusted/committed himself to) and God counted him as righteous because of his (faith/belief in/trust/commitment)." The real children of Abraham, then, are those who put their (faith/belief in/trust/commitment) in God.

So now go live a life of faith.

Saturday Reflection: It's been a couple of weeks since I did reflections so let's add a Saturday bonus reflection to this week, shall we? If you are a pays-attention-to-details kind of person (which I usually am not) then you might have been asking about the third ambition in this story. I said at the beginning of the week that this story reflects 3 ambitions but so far we've only talked about 2 ambitions- Lot's and Abram's. Where is the third kind of ambition?

Well, this is not just the **BIG** Story Of The Bible lesson series- it's also the Finding Jesus In The Old Testament lesson series (we can do both and in fact I'm starting to realize the more you understand the **BIG** story of the Bible the more you will find Jesus infused within that story at its very core. So where is He in this story of Abram & Lot going their separate ways each driven by very different ambitions and motivations? Well, in order to see Him clearly here we have to look at what the early church admired most about Jesus.

Sprinkled throughout the New Testament are what scholars will tell you are the most ancient hymns of our faith. Songs that were sung (probably more like chanted) in the church as they remembered Jesus together and celebrated His life/death/burial/resurrection/ascension while sharing communion together and telling stories about His life meant to inspire us to follow in His footsteps. There are hymns found in John chapter 1, Colossians chapter 1, 1 Corinthians 15 and then there's this one:

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:5-8 (NLT)

These earliest of Christian hymns give us a unique insight into Who the earliest Christians believed Jesus to be and what they focused on the most about Him in their worship gatherings. This one in Philippians 2 shows us that Jesus took a very similar journey to Abram (earlier in the week I mentioned that whenever Paul tries to give us an example of what it means to live the life of a Christian/follower of Jesus that he doesn't use Moses or King David as the relatable

example but Abram which is kind of interesting). Abram left his native country and his father's house to go to a strange and foreign land answering the call-of-God. Jesus leaves His native "land" and His Father's house and goes to a strange and foreign land answering the call-of-God. Abram was asked to put the needs of his descendants above his own (in fact Abram would live and die without ever receiving the promise that God had made to him regarding a massive family and the land-or-promise as his "home"). Jesus was asked to put the needs of His children above His own. They both answer the call. And both receive a reward for putting faith and family above every other value.

Turns out Abram's story is just a shadow or rumor of what God would one day do in the life of His Son. So why do we need to study the story of Abram if Jesus just did what Abram did only better? Because that's how God works in our lives.

In psychology people are taught about models to pattern our lives after. There's the mastery model where someone does a particular task perfectly. Most of us have a tough time relating to those mastery models because we can't come close to achieving what the "master" achieves seemingly effortlessly. So there's also the coping model. Ordinary people who are putting into practice the lessons of the "master" but doing so with varying levels of success and perfection.

We need the story of Abram and the other heroes of our faith because if all we have to look to as a pattern for life is Jesus (the Master) then we'll be left feeling like all hope is lost because we could never do what He did/does so effortlessly. But- if we look to Abram we see a weak, flawed, ordinary man who lived an extraordinary life because of one thing- faith. That faith is expressed throughout his life with varying levels of success and imperfection and while I won't say I've reached the level of faith that Abram has patterned for all of us I can this- I'm Ed and I'm a weak, flawed, often messed up and incredibly ordinary human being that has experienced more than my share of miraculous and abundant life NOT because of my mastery of the pattern laid down by Jesus but rather because for the most part I have made a life of faith the default setting for my choices and decisions (at least I like to hope I can say "for the most part").

But there's one more place we see a connection in this story between Abram & Jesus. Remember what happened after Lot left the hill country in between Bethel and Ai to abandon the land-of-promise and the call-of-God? God takes Abram up on a hill to show him the land that one day will be his descendants possession. I got to go there in January of 2020 when I was blessed to be able to visit the land-of-promise. There's a place where you can stand on what Americans might think of as a scenic view point. There's a spot where you can basically look any direction and the land of Israel is spread out around you. God took Abram there and promised that all the land he could see would belong to his descendants.

While Satan was tempting Jesus something similar but not exactly the same happened:

Next the devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. "I will give it all to you," he said, "if you will kneel down and worship me." "Get out of here, Satan," Jesus told him. "For the Scriptures say, 'You must worship the Lord your God and serve only him.'" Matthew 4:8-10 (NLT)

Now I don't know if Lot heard the voice of temptation when given that same view and offered the choice of what land he would inhabit or not but I do know this- Jesus was taken to the top of a mountain and showed the Kingdoms of the world and their glory. The devil pressured Him

to change His motivation and ambition. But Jesus wouldn't do it. His ambition was set. His values were set. He valued faith and family more than comfort and wealth.

So there's the 3rd ambition in the story of Abram & Lot. Jesus. His ambition is similar to Abram's - only perfect. Now the only question left for you and me is to ponder what ambition we will go through our lives with as the default setting?