

98-10-04a

Let's begin our worship this morning with a word of prayer. Father, we thank you for the privilege we have of assembling and being nourished in our souls through the power that is contained in your word. We thank you for the ministry of your spirit that enables us to perceive and comprehend the truth that is contained in the pages of your word and not only to recognize it and understand it, but also to see its application in our daily lives.

We know that the goal of our existence is to fulfill the calling that you have issued to us to become Christ-like, to have him formed in us and be prepared not only to live and walk in a way that is pleasing in your sight in this life, but also to be prepared for everything that you have for us in the eternal future. We pray for those who are not with us this morning. We pray that you'll grant safe travel.

We thank you for healing in the cases of illness that we have experienced. We thank you for your preserving grace in both the seen and the unseen realms. We pray this morning as we worship together that our attention will be undivided, that our comprehension will be clear, and that we will see and understand the things that you would have us see in the portions of scripture we examine this morning.

We pray that you will bless our fellowship and our worship this morning, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Turn with me this morning for our scripture reading to Psalm 90.

Psalm 90. The Psalms are divided in the Hebrew scriptures into five books or five sections. Psalm 90 begins the fourth of those five sections.

And it is subtitled, A Prayer of Moses, the Man of God. You find the occasion for this over in Deuteronomy chapter 33. But we look at it this morning in the hymnal for Israel.

Psalm 90 deals with the viewpoint that Moses leaves Israel with, the perspective that he challenges them with, that he bequeaths to them as he relinquishes his leadership role to Joshua and basically leaves this life to go to glory. It begins as a prayer to God. He says in Psalm 90 verse 1, Lord, you have been in our dwelling place in all generations.

Before the mountains were brought forth, wherever you had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God. You turn man to destruction and say, return, O children of men. For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past and like a watch in the night.

You carry them away like a flood. They are like a sleep. In the morning they are like grass which grows up.

In the morning it flourishes and grows up. In the evening it is cut down and withers. For we have been consumed by your anger and by your wrath we are terrified.

You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins, in the light of your countenance. For all our days have passed away in your wrath. We finish our years like a sigh.

The days of our lives are 70 years and if by reason of strength they are 80 years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow. For it is soon cut off and we fly away. Who knows the power of your anger? For as the fear of you, so is your wrath.

So teach us to number our days so that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Return, O Lord, how long? And have compassion on your servants. O, satisfy us early with your mercy that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Make us glad according to the days in which you have afflicted us, the years in which we have seen evil. Let your work appear to your servants and your glory to their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us and establish the work of our hands for us.

Yes, establish the work of our hands. This song could easily be the subject of an entire lesson or series of lessons. And in reading through it, we see a little bit of tension or a little bit of uncertainty when you look through and here's Moses near the end of his earthly life talking about the wrath of God and the anger of God and God's affliction on his people.

And you think, well, this is not a very happy viewpoint of life. But at the same time, in talking about the short duration of our life, it's like the grass that withers and the flower that fades. When Moses is standing at the end of life and looking back and at the end of his career as the leader of Israel and looking back, what do you think about when you think of Israel before they enter the Promised Land? Coming out of Egypt, there's great deliverance.

But then in the next 40 years of wandering, there is a constant bell-tolling of divine discipline. They make some progress and then there's a failure in God's disciplines. They eat the quail in the desert and have the terrible after effects.

They have the earth opening and swallowing individuals up. They have the plague of serpents. They have the leprosy that comes on Miriam.

They have time after time after time, God is expressing his wrath. The golden calf incident and the water from the rock on two different occasions. These are the people of God and yet their history, in Moses' view as he looks back, is characterized by discipline, by the anger of God being expressed over and over again.

What is the perspective that Moses expresses here when he looks back over these things? He says, we've been consumed by your anger and by your wrath we are terrified. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your countenance. Why is God doing that? Is he just looking for someone to judge? Is he looking for

someone to show how righteous he can be and how sinful they can be? The purpose is to try to turn their attention from the immediate to a longer term view.

And Moses talks about this in this psalm as well. He says, our days pass away, they're like a breath and a vapor. If you live 70 or 80 years you still find that you're soon cut off and fly away.

God is trying to get the attention of Israel. When they're focused on the short term, they're focused on provision, they're focused on circumstances, they're focused on imminent disaster. They say, we're about to die, we're going to starve, we're going to die of thirst, we're going to be militarily defeated.

And God expresses his anger and disciplines them. What's the point? Moses says, look, life is short. You can't be consumed in the short term view.

We talked about this Friday night with the little test that the psychologist gave the four-year-olds with laying a marshmallow on the table. And he says, I need to go run an errand. I'll be right back.

You can eat that marshmallow if you want to, but if you'll wait until I get back, I'll give you two marshmallows. And one-third of the kids, as soon as the man walked out of the room, they grabbed the marshmallow and ate it. Another third of them waited a little while and then got impatient and went ahead and grabbed the marshmallow and ate it.

And then the last third would sit there patiently. No matter how much they wanted the marshmallow, they'd wait for him to return, knowing that they would get two marshmallows at that point. And then, of course, they tracked them down in later years.

Another man went 14 years later and tracked all these children down in their late teens and embarking in adulthood to see what the pattern of their life had been. And the ones that had the self-control and what the technical term they like to use is the ability to delay gratification, those people were the most successful. They were the best students.

They had a plan. They had not fouled up their lives at the age of 18. They looked like they had a bright future.

The ones who had immediately grabbed the marshmallow, these were the troubled ones, the ones that had already made bad decisions and gotten themselves in trouble. And that this ability to see the long-term view, even in the secular perspective, is important for success in life and for navigating your way through life. Well, this is what God is trying to teach Israel.

You've got to wake up and see that there's a bigger picture than the immediate circumstance. And that's what this psalm deals with. He says in verse 14, after saying, Return, O Lord, and have compassion on your servants.

He says, Satisfy us early with your mercy. If we can reach the point of being satisfied with God's mercy, God's grace, rather than needing to be satisfied from circumstances in the moment, this is when we begin to fulfill the purpose of God. That's how we can rejoice and be glad all of our days.

Verse 16, he says, Let your work appear to your servants, and your glory to their children. If we start seeing the work of God in daily life, we tend to think, well, Sunday is a good day to look at the work of God and the glory of God. We see a little bit out of the Bible.

But then we dive back into our life for the other six days of the week. Moses is expressing here the purpose of God throughout this history of the nation of Israel, in his view, which is to try to wake them up to the fact that life is short and then you die. Life is hard and then you die.

No matter how successful or how much you fail in trying to navigate circumstances, one way or another your life is over. This is the same perspective you get when you go to Ecclesiastes. And the same message is contained there.

We are forced at some point to stop and examine the deeper, longer-term realities. It is possible for the, in verse 17, the beauty of the Lord our God to be upon us. God can establish the work of our hands for us.

And he repeats that phrase in the last verse. Establish the work of our hands. That's something permanent.

That's something that lasts, goes beyond the moment. The reason this is important as we return to our study in Genesis is that this is the essence of the failure that we've seen with Abram when he leaves the land. Remember in chapter 12, we saw Abram forsake.

He's responded to the call of God in the same way that we have responded to the call of God for salvation. We've trusted in Christ as our Savior. We've recognized that he's our Redeemer, that eternal life comes through him.

The only meaning and purpose in life comes when our relationship with God is established. We've responded to that. We've recognized that we are insufficient, that there's no meaning to life apart from eternal things, and that we are hopeless and helpless in the grip of sin apart from God, apart from the saving work of Christ.

We've gone to God and we have claimed Christ as our Savior, as our Redeemer. We have been transformed. We've been transferred out of darkness into light.

We have an eternal future now. All of these eternal things are now potential for us. In the same way, you get the picture of Abram responding to the call of God in Ur, and eventually arriving in the promised land.

God appears to Abram at Bethel. Abram builds the altar and worships God. And so in verse 8, you have him pitching his tent with Bethel.

This is 8 of Genesis 12. He pitches his tent with Bethel on the west, Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord.

But then in the very next verse, after having done a great job of responding to that first call, Abram journeys going to the south. And eventually we saw him go into Egypt, and he's driven there by famine. He doesn't think the land of promise will sustain him and his family and his flocks and herds.

And so he leaves it. He doesn't think that daily provision is there. He doesn't go to God with that problem.

He doesn't go back to the altar and say, Lord, you called me, we've made this long journey, here we are in the land, but I'm running out of chow. I don't have any pastures for my flocks and my herds. We're running low on everything.

You called us here. You've made promises that we have this great future. Well, where's the provision? Abram doesn't go to God in the daily circumstances of life.

He tries to cope with them himself. And he says, well, I know what to do when there's a famine. You move to where there's provision.

So he starts journeying to the south. The famine just gets worse. The further south he goes, the less and less provision there is.

And so he decides he's got to go into Egypt. Now he's operating based on fear. He's being controlled by circumstances rather than dictating, in his own mind, what the circumstances need to be.

He is reacting instead of planning and trusting God. And so he's driven by fear. He's driven by uncertainty rather than going to God and resting in faith.

In the choice between fear and faith, he's operating on fear. So it just gets worse. He says, well, if we go to Egypt, who knows what might happen.

They might kill me to get my beautiful wife, so let's lie. We saw the results of that last week. And we also saw this pattern in Genesis three different times.

You have a man saying, my wife is, in fact, my sister. Abram does it twice. Isaac does it once.

We looked at those. But what happens? We saw the comparison and contrast between those three things last time. But think about Abram.

Because he has responded to the call of God. He's gone to the land. And this already separates him from others.

How many other people did God ever call out of Ur? There were other believers there. We know that when they go back to the family, they go back to the clan to get wives and so forth, Rebecca and some of these others, they're believers in God. Rebecca's brothers recognize the hand of God in Isaac's betrothal and marriage to Rebecca.

And they say, this thing is from God. We're not going to stand in the way of it. She's free to go and so forth.

There are believers there. How come those people back up in Haran or in Ur, how come they didn't get this call and this promise from God of being a great nation and a blessing and so forth? Why is it Abram? Well, there are a lot of people that say, well, this is an unconditional covenant. God in His sovereignty sort of put His divine finger down on the map and there was Abram underneath it, so he's going to be the man.

He's going to be the channel of blessing. There wasn't anything about Abram that made him different than anyone else. But that's not true.

And what we're going to see as we trace the career of Abram is God works with Abram because Abram responds. When there is a choice, it doesn't mean that Abram is not going to fail or that he's not going to fall off the wagon, as it were. But the pattern of his life is return to God.

The pattern of his life is going to be faith in God. And when he does experience a failure, God is going to use that to teach him something. And he is going to respond to that and he's going to learn something that he didn't know before.

This, by the way, you see in the lives of other men like Moses and David and others in the Old Testament scriptures. Why did God choose David to be king over Israel? Did God do something to him to make him a man after God's own heart? David, even though he experiences great failures and commits murder and adultery and everything else, God can use these things to teach him and he responds. Abram has a great failure here when he goes to Egypt, but he responds and he learns something.

Why is this important to us? Because, like Abram, we are going to lose our perspective. We're going to get caught up in the moment. We're going to be thinking in human terms.

We're going to use the same solutions that the people around us in the world try to use. What's going to happen? What is God's response going to be? Well, we see the pattern here in Abram's life. God doesn't come down and strike Abram with lightning.

He doesn't appear to him in a flaming pillar of fire and say, Abram, Abram, get thy shoes from off thy feet, get thee back up to Bethel, does he? He doesn't say anything directly

to Abram when he goes down to Egypt and when he tells this lie and gets himself in all kinds of trouble with Pharaoh. And God isn't necessarily going to do that with us either. But if we are those who respond to the call, if we are those who are teachable, if we are people who can learn from mistakes and from experiences in life, God is going to use those experiences, He's going to use our circumstances to teach us things and to build us up and enable us to grow.

He can turn cursing, turn failure into blessing. The key is we have to be people who see that and respond. We have to be teachable.

We have to learn. We have to know and desire the life of faith. There are some of us who do and there are others of us who do not.

Abram is one of those who is. And the encouragement is that in that scenario, if you have a person who's teachable, if you have a person who fundamentally, as the long-term climate in their life, desires to please God and to walk by faith, these things will work together for good. If we're not that kind of person, we're not going to gain the eternal benefit.

We're not going to gain the perspective that Moses sketched out for us there in Psalm 90. We have to be able to lift our perspective and see the long-term view and be teachable even in the midst of failure. So in verse 20 of chapter 12, after this all unravels down in Egypt, God doesn't speak directly to Abram, but what God does is He makes that solution, that course of action untenable.

It's not workable. God fills in Pharaoh through the plagues to the fact that Abram has lied and Abram can't continue down that path. He's got to do something different.

God forces him out of Egypt. Pharaoh commands his men concerning Abram. They send him away.

They march him to the border of the land and expel him. And for Abram, who is a man of faith, this has been a big failure on his part, but God marches him out of that failure. He gets down there and experiences the humiliation and the embarrassment of being told what a moral life is by a pagan, and then he's expelled.

How far does the army of Pharaoh take Abram? It takes him to the border of Egypt and drops him off. How many different directions can Abram go at this point? Well, he's going to head north. He's got provision.

God gives him enough provision to get all the way back up to Bethel, and that's where he goes. But think about the map of Palestine. You know where Egypt is down there.

You know that you've got the curve of the Mediterranean Sea here. You've got Egypt down here. Bethel is up here.

You've got the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea there over on the right-hand border of the land of promise. Well, to get up there to Bethel and Ai, you've got to march past this nice fertile plain over here where you've got Sodom and Gomorrah, these prosperous cities and these fertile. We're going to see in the next chapter that this is well-watered and very attractive and so forth.

Abram could have diverted off and gone that direction. He could have gone over toward the land of Moab. He could have veered off in any different direction.

But Abram is teachable. Abram learns his lesson, so to speak, here with this big fiasco in Egypt. What conclusion does Abram draw when he is confronted with his failure? He says, I've got to get back to where I started.

I've got to get back to the presence of God. And he marches straight north, and he goes back up to Bethel. When you look at chapter 13, Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had and lot with him to the Negev.

He was rich in livestock, silver and gold. And he went on his journey from the south as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning between Bethel and Ai, to the place of the altar, which he had made there at first. You notice that phrase, at first, at the beginning in verse 3 and verse 4. Abram responds to the rebuke of God.

Even though it's indirect, he learns something here. He says, this is where I made my mistake. I departed from the place of God.

He doesn't go off and try some new human solution, does he? He's teachable. Think about David after the Bathsheba murder of Uriah incident. When Nathan confronts David and tells him the story of the poor man who had the little lamb and the rich man who had great flocks and herds, but he goes and steals the poor man's lamb and slaughters it to feed to a stranger.

David, when Nathan says, you are the man, David recognizes and David changes his mind. He wakes up and he gets back on the road. This is what distinguishes believers who are going to succeed, believers who are going to be blessed, believers who are going to accomplish God's purpose from those of us who don't.

What do we do when we're confronted with the fact that we're going down the wrong path? The reason Abram is great, the reason he's going to become Abraham and be heir to the covenant promises of God, the reason David is going to be great, and the reason he is going to be an heir of the covenant promises of God is this feature of their life. It isn't that they never fail. It isn't that they never sinned.

They sinned and failed greatly. It's what do they do when they're confronted with it, when they realize I'm going down the wrong road. I've been living in fear.

I've been operating with my own resources, my own solutions, my short-term view. All I've been concerned about is what's going to happen in my three score and ten. I haven't been thinking about the long term, having my work established after the end of life.

These men, these examples in Scripture, see the joy that's set before them, and even after their failures, turn back and get back on the narrow road. This is what we see Abram doing in chapter 13. He went back to the place of the altar which he had made there at first, and there he calls on the name of the Lord.

This is something that, even though it's a big failure, God works it together for good. Now, who has been an observer and accompanying Abram all this time? Lot. He's been with Uncle Abe here the whole time.

He's not been mentioned, but he has seen this. He should have been able, as we do, to look at this story, to look at this circumstance and see the lesson in it. If you pursue short-term solutions to your problems in your own energy, if you're operating out of fear instead of out of faith, things turn out badly.

God is watching. If you purport to have a relationship with God, you need to live your life in that light. Lot has seen that, but we're about to find out that he hasn't learned the same lesson that Abram has learned.

So, this reaction, the response to what God does, this is what we're focusing on. Abram has gone back to the place of worship. What is in Lot's mind? He's another individual that's been accompanying him in the same place, but what is his reaction going to be? Lot also, who went with Abram in verse 5 of chapter 13, had flocks and herds and tents.

Now, the land was not able to support them. This is parallel to the famine that Abram experienced and Lot in the last chapter. The land couldn't sustain him at that point either.

What is the solution? What should you do? Do you trust in God or do you start looking around trying to find a place that's more prosperous? They could not dwell together for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together. There was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. The Canaanites and the Perizzites then dwelt in the land.

So, in addition to each other's flocks and herds, there are also other inhabitants of the land as well that need pasturage and water and so forth. And so, it's like they used to say in the Westerns, this town ain't big enough for the both of us. Well, this area of the land doesn't appear to be able to sustain Lot and Abram together.

So, in verse 8, Abram makes a speech to Lot. Let there be no strife between you and me and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen for we are brethren. This is not worth getting into opposition with one another over.

Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right. If you go to the right, then I will go to the left.

Now, this sounds like, well, he's just being diplomatic here. You know, you just go one way and I'll go the other and I'll give you first choice. But if you stop and think about this, this is a great application on Abram's part of the promise of God.

How much of this land has been promised to Abram? All of it. God has said, all of this that you see and God has sketched out the borders for him. He says, wherever you put your foot, this is what I'm going to give to you.

Abram knows that this has all been promised to him. He says, now it doesn't matter which part of this land I go to because God has promised it to me and he's going to sustain me here. I can go any direction in the land and God is going to provide.

I don't have to figure out where is it the most prosperous. I can go anywhere in this land. This is a great leap forward.

Abram has learned something from his Egypt experience. Now he doesn't think that the answer to his problems is going to be in where he goes. He's not worried about the ability of the land to sustain him.

But what does he recognize? He recognizes that he's going to have to separate from Lot. And why is that? Because Lot doesn't have the same perspective. Lot's men are fighting with his men over land.

They're fighting over sustenance. They're concerned and they're operating based on what they see. They're trying to find a short term solution by arguing and haggling and saying we want this well.

We want this section of pastures. We want this valley to graze our sheep and our flocks in. He's all wrapped up in the immediate and in the moment.

Lot doesn't have any perspective on the promise of God or on the future in the land or anything else. He's fighting over small things. Abram says, I don't want to do this.

I don't want to join you in the squabble. I don't want to sit down and draw up a treaty with you and say you have this pasture and I have this pasture. Pick what you want.

If you're worried about the land, if that's where your focus is, if that's what you're depending on, just go. Take what you want. Wherever you go, I'll go somewhere else.

If you think about this, this is a huge advance forward in Abram's thinking. He has learned something from what happened in chapter 12. Lot has not.

Lot was there for all of that stuff. They went down to Egypt where there was all kinds of

prosperity, but they were away from God. They were out of God's will, operating out of the need to meet the immediate problem, the immediate crisis.

So now there are two different mindsets here. Lot and Abram have been together all this time. Now they can't dwell together, and it's because their minds are different.

Does this ever happen to us? When we start to try to live life from a divine perspective, live a life that's illuminated by the word of God, thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path, we start to find that there's tension with others who are not interested in walking by that light. It's going to cause conflict. It's going to create the need to let them walk down the path they want to walk down, and we have to walk down the path we want to walk down.

This is what happens with Abram and Lot. So Abram says, Let there be no strife. Separate from you.

Take the left and I'll go to the right. If you want what's on the right, then I'll go to the left. So this is response to a problem in faith, contrasted with what we saw in the last chapter, responding to a problem in fear.

So in verse 10, Lot says, Hey, this is great. I've got the answer to my problems. Uncle Abe here has said I can pick whatever I want.

Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere. This is before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. You have that in parentheses there in verse 10.

Like the garden of the Lord. It's laid out there before him like the garden of Eden. He thinks this is paradise.

This is perfection. This is the perfect answer to my problems. I can go down here to this plain of Jordan, like the land of Egypt.

Why does it mention Egypt in verse 10? Well, this is where they went the last time they had trouble getting enough pasturage and enough food and so forth. He says, boy, this is prosperity. This is the answer.

So Lot chose for himself in verse 11, all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other. Do you see the little red flag waving there in verse 11? If you remember our previous studies in Genesis, there's one word in verse 11 that ought to have a little neon bulb flashing off and on behind it here.

Which way does he go? He goes east. What do we know about the direction east? We can go all the way back to Genesis chapter 2 and chapter 3. You know, they've written books and plays and made movies out of this east of Eden. When Adam and Eve get

expelled from the garden, they go eastward.

What happens after the Cain and Abel encounter and Abel is murdered? Cain goes eastward. When the glory of God departs the temple in Ezekiel, it leaves heading east. Bad things happen when you move east.

East is a bad direction. It's a signal. It's a very freighted direction in the Scripture, just the way the north is and the south and some of the others.

So we know already, as I mentioned before, the girls are always asking when they're watching movies and all of a sudden you get this stuff in a minor key and little thumping strings and a deep bass roar going on in the background music. And they say, Dad, is that warning music? Is this warning music? Well, when Lot journeys east, that's warning music. And in Israelites' mind, they know what the direction east means.

So Lot journeyed east and they separated from each other. Well, what does this portend? What are we about to see happen here as the warning music begins to play? We're going to pause and take our break, and when we come back we're going to find out what this separation between Lot and Abram is all about. Let's pause here and take our break.