

Date: 7.12.08
Text: Genesis 13-4
Place: Tweed Heads am/pm, Kingscliff
Title: Faith and Fortune
File: Genesis 13

Blessings. What do you think about when I say the word blessings? Do you think about money, a healthy bank account? Do you think about comfort and security, a nice house to live in, surrounded by a beautiful physical environment? Do you think about health, being blessed with your health restored after a battle with cancer or poor eyesight or sickness? Do you think about relationships, having around you family and friends that truly enrich your life? Blessings. What do you think about when I say the word blessing?

It seems to me that today, when we talk about being blessed by God, we are often talking about physical stuff – money, possessions, good health. For those are the things we seem to value the most nowadays. But I was deeply moved when I watched the movie last Sunday night, “A beautiful mind”. There at the end of the movie, the Noble Prize winner for mathematics, stands in front of an assembled crowd. He has just received his award, his recognition for a life times achievement, his cash and all he wants to talk about is his wife. How she has stood by him through the highs and the incredible lows. For him, the blessings were not material, but relational.

And that is interesting, because last week we heard God make some very important promises to Abraham. In Genesis 12, verses 1 to 3 God says *“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you. I will make your name great and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse; and all people on earth will be blessed through you.”*

Here, God promises blessings to Abraham and blessings to the world. Blessings not just of money, of flocks, of land but as we come to read on, those things will also be involved. But blessings of a relationship. I will be your God. You will be my chosen people. So Abraham will receive those blessings if he trusts God by faith. And others will receive those blessings if they stick close to the faith of Abraham.

So this morning I want to look at the relationships Abraham had with others – with Lot, with God, with Sodom, with Melchizedek. Because it was these relationships that determined the size and the shape of the blessings that flowed to those in the story.

1. Abraham & Lot.

So lets turn firstly to the relationship between Abraham and Lot. They come up after their time in Egypt, wealthy men. Yes Abraham hasn't shown off his best side, he has left Canaan after the first sign of hardship and has betrayed his wife and lied to the King. But despite all of this, he and Lot have acquired sheep and cattle, donkeys, slaves, silver and gold.

They could say that God has blessed them. They are now rich men. But these blessings will soon test them. For they come to Bethel and Abram builds an altar and

again calls on the name of the Lord. But soon God's blessing creates problems, tensions, quarrels.

They have too many possessions to stay together. They have too much livestock to both be around the same grass, the same watering hole. As the Hollywood classics might say, 'this town ain't big enough for the both of us' one says to the other and so they will have to determine what they do next.

Now Abram is the head of the household and so he has to make a decision. Before him is the promised inheritance from God and beside him is his nephew, his closest male family member. Now he could kick out his nephew and get him to fend for himself, he was quite entitled to do that! Or would he choose the best land for himself and leave Lot with the rest?

No he goes down neither of these paths. He chooses to trust in God. He doesn't take for himself what he was entitled to do, he humbly gives Lot the choice – the fertile plain or the hills? And Lot chooses to make a grab for the best land, he will choose the fertile, productive part of the land.

Now when Lot takes the best land he was acting like a child. It's a bit like the Peanuts cartoon where Lucy and Linus are offered the last two pieces of cake and Lucy took the biggest piece. "Hey" said Linus "if I had had first choice I would have taken the smallest piece." "So, what are you grumbling about?" replied Lucy.

Lot took the biggest piece, the best land. But it would ultimately get him into a lot of trouble. For it might have been prime real estate but it had terrible neighbours. For in the midst of those fertile plains were the town of Sodom and Gomorrah and even in those days they were legendary for their wickedness. Sure Lot may well become wealthy but what sort of influences was he opening himself up to? He might get an easier life but would their immorality rub off on him? He might become richer but would he continue to live a life of blessing?

For hadn't God said to Abram, "I will **bless those** who **bless you**, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be **blessed** through you." And here Lot had shown his Uncle disrespect, by taking the good land. He had put profit before his family by deciding to separate from Abram rather than finding a solution where he could stay with his Uncle. And so because of the quarrels of a few herdsmen, Lot chooses to walk away from Abram, the man of blessing. And he settles on the doorstep of Sodom. Which means he is actually walking away from God's blessing.

Yes he will be rich. Yes he will have the outward trappings of success, but this is a choice that robs him of God's blessings. In the words of John Calvin, "*Lot when he fancied he was living in paradise, was nearly plunged into the depths of hell.*" Do you see that? Do you understand that? For Lot the path of blessing was not going to be found going down the track of material prosperity. It was instead staying close to the God of Abram. Learning about the life of faith from Abram. Calling on the name of the Lord with Abram.

Now so many of us make the same mistake as Lot does. We think that God's blessing comes through material riches. We think if we can give the best money can buy to our children, our grandchildren we can share with them God's blessing on ourselves. And by doing that we show them that we value expensive toys, sporting equipment, fashionable clothes over everything else. Whereas God's blessing on our kids will not come through material things, but time spent with them. Showing them your love for them and for God. Caring for them by giving up your time. Placing in them the seeds of faith. These are the real blessings of God and many of them can be passed on to those whom we love.

But I want you to consider where Lot's decision ultimately takes him. In chapter 13:10, Lot looks as the well watered Jordan valley. By the time we get to verse 12, he has pitched his tent near Sodom. And a couple of chapters later, we read that he now dwells in Sodom. Do you see what happens? Compromise turns into acceptance which turns into likemindedness.

But it doesn't just affect him, this decision affects his family, doesn't it? Because after he settles in Sodom and God comes down and warn him to get out, two of his daughters are engaged to the men of Sodom, but they refuse to listen to Lot when the time of judgement comes. And even when they escape, Lot's wife turns back, she can't say goodbye to the things she has left behind and she turns into a pillar of salt. And what do the daughters do after they escape? They get Lot drunk and sleep with him so that his family name can continue through them. Lot has lived near Sodom and now Sodom has over time taken over the morals and actions of all his family.

One preacher put it this way, "People do not decide to be drunkards, drug addicts, prostitutes, murderers, or thieves, but they pitch their tent toward Sodom, and the powers of evil overcome them." And it was Albert Einstein who once said, "I do not fear the explosive power of the atom bomb. What I fear is the explosive power of evil in the human heart." So if we allow evil an inch, it will take a mile.

Mike Yaconelli writes in the Wittenburg Door that he lives in a small, rural community. The area has lots of cattle ranches and every once in a while a cow wanders off and gets lost. If you ask one of the ranchers how a cow gets lost, chances are he will reply, 'Well, the cow starts nibbling on a tuft of green grass, and when it finishes, it looks ahead to the next tuft of green grass and starts nibbling on that one, and then it nibbles on the tuft of grass right next to the hole in the fence. It then sees another tuft of green grass on the other side of the fence, so it nibbles on that one and then goes on to the next tuft. The next thing you know the cow has nibbled itself into being lost.'

That was what Lot has done. That's the danger that we have. Not that we outright reject God, but that we pitch our tents too close to the good life that we place our eyes off God and his spiritual blessings and onto the world and its material blessings.

2. Abram & God

But compare the relationship between Abram and Lot with that of Abram and God. For in verses 14 to 18, God appears again to Abram and tells him look up. Not look around at the material prosperity of your neighbours, not just look out at all the things

that your money can buy. But look up. Lift up your eyes. Look at what God is doing. Remember the promises that he has made to you. Place your attention firmly on your Lord. Walk through the land. Not so that you can keep up with the Jones but so that you can imagine what God is going to do with your life.

And Abram does just that and then he calls upon the name of the Lord. He changes his focus from flocks and tents and slaves and material goods to trust in God, to the promises from God and to the worship of God. For him blessings don't just flow from what you can see, smell, touch and taste. They come through your relationship with God. For He can bless us physically, relationally, emotionally and spiritually.

Dwight L. Moody once demonstrated the principle like this: "Tell me," he said to his audience, "how can I get the air out of the tumbler I have in my hand?" One man said, "Suck it out with a pump." But the evangelist replied, "That would create a vacuum and shatter it." Finally after many suggestions, Moody picked up a pitcher and quietly filled the glass with water. "There," he said, "all the air is now removed." He then explained that victory for the child of God does not come by working hard to eliminate all the things of this world, but rather by allowing God to take full possession of all that is inside of you.

3. Abram & Sodom.

But there is another relationship that is instructive in these chapters and that is the one between Abram and Sodom. For in chapter 14 we see the first war in the Bible. Four kings in the east are overthrown by five kings from the Jordan plain. And when those defeated kings mobilise their armies and come back the next year, they defeat the Kings of Sodom and Gomorrah and their allies, they take the loot and the people and they take Lot and his family as well.

In one decisive action, all of Lot's blessings have been taken away. His land, his goods, his family, his freedom just disappear because these sorts of blessings are incredibly fickle. And so when the news reaches Uncle Abram, he calls all his fighting men and his allies together and chases after the four Eastern kings in order to save Lot and his family. Which he does.

For it's not what you know... it's who you know. And because Lot is particularly well connected, he is able to play his get out of jail free card. Once again he is blessed because of his relationship with Abram. Abram gives him back his freedom, his family, his possessions, his wealth. Or more correctly God gives these things to Lot through Abram.

And as Abram comes back to his home, he meets the King of Sodom in verses 21 and 24. And despite the fact that Abram has defeated his enemy for him, rescued his people, you could hardly say that the King of Sodom is all that appreciative, could you? Listen to what he says, "*Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself*"

He starts by saying to Abram *give me something*. Not thanks or respect or gratitude. Now Abram didn't have to give him anything and we know that because he says to the king of Sodom, let my allies take their share, their share of the spoils of his people and of his possession. They had earned them by winning the war.

But Abram is gracious to Sodom. I will give you everything I have taken, people and possessions. I don't want anything to do with your tainted goods. I don't want people to say that I got rich because of Sodom, but instead I was blessed because of my God.

Apparently Rudyard Kipling, one day speaking to the graduating class at McGill University said, "One day you will meet a man who doesn't care much for wealth or fame. And then you will realize how poor you are." What Abram does to the king of Sodom is to show him how poor he really is and how rich, how blessed Abram really is. For blessings don't necessarily come through wealth, they come through God. Through trusting Him. Through doing the right thing. Through not being involved with tainted goods, tainted practices, corrupt people.

There are plenty of people within the Church whose business decisions, whose financial investments, whose moral actions have been tainted by the people of Sodom. Who decide they will make a grab for material blessings now rather than wait for the real blessings to be given to them by God, but here Abram is showing us a better way.

4. Abram & Melchizedek.

And what is even better is his relationship with the priest Melchizedek. On his way home another person approaches Abram, another king, this one from Salem or Jerusalem. This man blesses Abram and speaks to him about the most high, mighty God, Creator of heaven and earth. This man comes and offers Abram not just bread and water, food, sustenance. But bread and wine, a banquet, a feast, a celebration.

And Abram gives him a tenth of everything. God's blessings are beginning to come the way of Abram. And in thankfulness of the blessings of God, Abram will share with others cash, goods, possessions, worth a princely sum, because they are nothing compared to the blessings of God. If he is given a choice between earthy blessings and heavenly blessings it becomes obvious which ones Abram will choose.

And so at the climax of a tumultuous chapter we begin to see what was truly at stake in this international conflict. The struggle of kings, the far ranging armies and the spoils of the city are the small change of the story, the crux is the faith or failure of one man." That's where the blessings will come from, God's blessings. It will come through our faith, our trust, our godliness. And it will also come to us when we have a relationship with people like Abram. As God had already promised, all people on the earth will be blessed *through* Abram.

So this chapter shows us that Abram was **great**. But because he gives his gift to Melchizedek, it also shows us that Melchizedek was **greater**. But funnily enough Hebrews 7 talks about this same incident and the point the writer there wants to tell us is that **Jesus** tops both of them.

For Melchizedek is a priest of God, standing as a go between besides Abram and God. But Jesus is a perfect high priest always standing between us and God. And in Genesis 14 it's Melchizedek, **King of Jerusalem**, who brings **bread and wine**, and blessings from God. But for us, it's the Lord Jesus; crowned **king of Jerusalem** with a coronation **of thorns** and a **cross**. On the night he was betrayed, he brings out the

bread and wine and says **this is my body and blood. Given for you.** And then lays down his life as the perfect and final sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin?

For when you think about it, Abram's blessings point us to Jesus blessings don't they? Our blessings don't just come through material goods, money in the bank, good health, but they come through a relationship with Jesus don't they? It is when we are close to Him that we receive God's blessings. And when we are far from him that we receive God's curses. And it is through this Jesus that God has decided to bless the whole world.

So friends, be wary of spending all your time chasing more and more money. Don't teach your kids or your grandkids that houses and possessions and cars are the be all and end all. Show them that the real blessings in life, the things that can't be taken away from you in stock market collapses, or through flood, fire or drought, all come through relationships. And the best relationship of all is through God's son Jesus.

For Abram was a man of great faith, who refused to be dragged down by the world around him, compromised by the tainted goods on his right and on his left and through that he blessed his family and the generations to come. And we too can be a source of blessing to our family and to the generations to come if we show them that high on our priority list is staying close to Jesus. If we do that maybe, just maybe, they will be blessed through knowing you. Because you will be helping to connect them to the source of all real blessings, the Lord Jesus Christ.

*****a

Amway .. John Martin.

Pentecostal Preachers – God wants you to be rich. Blessings.

But blessings are wider than riches – a good reputation, a godly inheritance, blessings for others.

*****b

Lot's choosing prime real estate. But **terrible neighbours**.

That family in Sydney last week who paid a deposit on the house where there'd been a triple murder, they **never would have gone there** if they knew the background. I mean, I've heard of Buddhists who were on the verge of buying a house and they pulled out because a **dead budgie** was buried in the garden. Let alone a triple murder. Does Lot just not know the **background of his new neighbourhood?** Or does he just not care?

I mean, for us as we read it, the danger signs are everywhere. But Lot either doesn't know. Or doesn't care.

*****c

That it's not **what you know** that counts. It's **who you know**.

And so you get Wednesday's headline: **Job for Labor mate "sleazy."** About the fact that Labor party heavyweight Bill Ludwig has been appointed to the board of Queensland Racing. Lawrence Springborg says appointing the AWU state secretary to a plum job like the Board of Qld Racing **again proves** the State Government's entrenched and corrupt culture of cronyism is out of control.

I wonder if it's always wrong though?

Whether it's **always** wrong that hanging around with the **right people** can bring you **good results?**

*****d "I will **bless those** those who **bless you**, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be **blessed** through you."

And because of the quarrels of a few herdsmen, Lot's walking away. And settling on the doorstep of Sodom. The city name that's **still today** synonymous with sleaze. Which means he walks away from blessing.

*****e

And the next thing you know, he's in the centre of a battle zone. Chapter 14. When Amraphel and Arioch and Kedorlaomer and Tidal join forces to take on **Bera, King of Sodom** and his mates Birsha and Shinab and Shember and the King of Bela as well. Who have rebelled. They're sick of being pushed around by Kedorlaomer the Elamite; 12 years of subjection; so in the thirteenth year they rebel. And the year after that, in verse 8 and 9, they're **squashed**. It's five kings to four in favour of the rebels.

They draw up their battle lines in the valley of Siddim; but by the end of verse 10 they're outgunned... and **running for their lives**. Falling in the tar-pits as they try to get away. And the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are looted. Their food's taken. Their goods are taken. And most significant of all, Abram's nephew **Lot** and **his** possessions are carried off as well.

*****f

Except, you see, it's **not what you know...** it's **who you know**.

Lot is particularly well connected. Which is the next best thing to having a **get out of jail free card**. Or **diplomatic immunity**.

*****g

It's kind of like a time warp. Because Abram's doing it with Melchizedek. The King of Jerusalem before there was Jerusalem. The **priest of the most high God** before there were priests. The **tithe** before there were tithes. As Melchizedek brings out the **bread and wine** and pronounces God's blessing.

*****h

Abraham was **great**. Melchizedek was **greater**. And **Jesus** tops both of them.

*****I

See, it's great to be well connected. It's great to know people in **high places**. Well, with Jesus it's the **ultimate example of that**. Because he stands before God on **our behalf**. And he does that, says verse 16, on the basis of his **indestructible life**. Which is far better than the priesthood that came before.

*****j

It's not **what you know**. Or even **what you've done**. It's **who you know**. Back in Genesis 14 it's Abraham. And greater than Abraham, Melchizedek. **King of Jerusalem**. Who brings **bread and wine**, and blessings from God.

For us, it's the Lord Jesus; crowned **king of Jerusalem** with a coronation of **thorns** and a **cross**. On the night he was betrayed, I wonder if he's thinking back to Melchizedek when he brings out the **bread and wine** and says **this is my body and blood. Given for you**. And then lays down his life as the perfect and final sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin?

*****k

g. Gen. 14:12 - Lot LOOKED; He PITCHED; He DWELT

*****l

There came a time when they had to separate. (this place ain't big enough for the both of us.)

Abraham did something very unselfish...gave him the best land...land which had been promised to him, rather.

Look at Lot's course: The course of the man
13:10 lifted up his eyes toward Sodom
12 pitched his tent toward Sodom
19:1 sitting in the gate! Living there!

*****m

A lot of trouble

*****n

You know the old story of how to boil a frog. You don't put him in a pot of boiling water. You drop him in the boiling water and he'll jump out before he's injured. So you put him in a pot of cold water, and he's perfectly comfortable. Then you put him on the stove, and little by little the water gets warm. It's very pleasant at first. Then it gets to Jacuzzi level, and he begins to be a little alarmed. Finally, when it's boiling, it's too late. Some "Christians" are like that, aren't they? They try to live as close to the world as possible. First they get into the world and it's oh so pleasant at first. And then it gets a little warmer and it's pleasanter yet. And one day we realize the danger: "This is going to kill me, and I haven't the strength to get out!"

*****o

John Eastwood said, "People do not decide to be drunkards, drug addicts, prostitutes, murderers, or thieves, but they pitch their tent toward Sodom, and the powers of evil overcome them." Albert Einstein said, "I do not fear the explosive power of the atom bomb. What I fear is the explosive power of evil in the human heart."

*****p

Cows nibble their way to being lost. They nibble on one tuft of grass here, and here, and here. Then on the other side of the fence, etc.

*****q

Evangelist Billy Sunday, was dogged by rumors and scandal at some points in his life. As he lay on his death bed, young William Graham sat beside him, comforting and praying with him. At some point, Mr. Sunday looked at Graham and exhorted him, "Billy, never go near the money! Never Go near the money! Don't touch it, don't count it. Never Go near the money!" Today, Billy Graham continues to be an excellent example to all of us of uprightness and integrity.

*****r

Rudyard Kipling: speaking to the graduating class at McGill University said, "One day you will meet a man who doesn't care much for wealth or fame. And then you will realize how poor you are."

*****s

James Moffat made this statement, "a man's treatment of money is the most decisive test of his character, how he made it and how he spends it."

*****t

I don't know, maybe J. Oswald smith was right when he said, "I have learned that money is not the measure of a man, but it is often the means of finding out how small he is."

*****u

When Abraham offered his nephew lot first choice of the lands and Lot took the very best, he was being like a kid. I remember seeing a Peanuts cartoon once where Lucy and Linus were taking the last two pieces of cake and Lucy took the biggest piece. "Hey" said Linus "if I had of had first choice I would have taken the smallest piece." "So, what are you grumbling about" replied Lucy. Lot took the biggest piece and he lost everything he had in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

*****v

William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, became very sick in his latter years, so sick that he was unable to attend the annual Salvation Army conference. Though he was unable to be there in person, William Booth would send a message to the delegates to be read. One year he sent a simple message that read "Others." The philosophy of the Salvation Army was to look out for the interest of others. The same is true of all Christianity. Paul declares in the second chapter of the book of Philippians, "do not merely look out for you own personal interest, but for the interest of others."

*****w

Waiting is something all of us have to do. We wait in line at the bank, we wait at the red light, we wait for our dinner to come in the restaurant, we wait for church to be over with so we can go out, and we wait for our birthday or for Christmas to come so that we can get what it is we want. Sometimes we see waiting as an absolute pain in the neck. We grumble the whole time. We say things, like "I'm sick and tired of you'll wasting my time or I've got other things to do." How many of us have gone into a store or place to eat, got upset because they took so long to serve us, and left and went somewhere else and then spent more time going somewhere else than we would have if we had just stayed where we were?

*****x

*****y

Dwight L. Moody once demonstrated the principle like this: "Tell me," he said to his audience, "how can I get the air out of the tumbler I have in my hand?" One man said, "Suck it out with a pump." But the evangelist replied, "That would create a vacuum and shatter it." Finally after many suggestions, moody picked up a pitcher and quietly filled the glass with water. "There," he said, "all the air is now removed." He then explained that victory for the child of God does not come by working hard to eliminate sinful habits, but rather by allowing the Holy Spirit to take full possession.

*****z