

The Garden of the Lord

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[0 : 0 0] All right, so we are starting in a few weeks, February, and the evening is a series on Elijah and Elisha, or Elisha.

I'm not sure how everybody says it here, so I gotta figure that out. Elijah and Elisha, that's coming. And then in two Sunday nights from now, on the day of Derek's induction, Alistair I is coming to preach to us that evening.

And so we've got a couple weeks before we start our new series. And so tonight and next Sunday night, and so we're gonna look at Genesis 13 and 14. So 13 and 14 next week, which are two of the major stories of Lot, Abram's nephew, Abram and Lot.

And next week is Abram and Lot and Melchizedek. And this week Abram and Lot and this fight about cattle and sheep. And so it might seem random, but actually one of the reasons I wanted to do it is because we have this handy little tool on our website that all of you can't see, but the people in the office can.

And that's that, it tells us every chapter, every book of the Bible and chapter that we've preached at St. C's. And so for 16, almost 17 years, we've not looked at Genesis 13 or 14 yet.

[1 : 1 5] So here we are, we can do that, we can cover that now. And the other good reason is because when you look at Genesis 13 and 14, especially tonight, you realize that it's all about understanding what's going on in our hearts when we sin.

And we've just started a series on the anatomy of sin on Wednesdays, city group and midweek evening, engine room, I should say, prayer meeting. And so this fits really well with that.

So you'll get all the answers tonight, the city group that's coming on Wednesday, by the way. Sometimes in the Bible, you read stories where the fire of God comes down on the mountain.

Sometimes you read stories in the Bible where Jesus walks on water and people rise up from the dead. Sometimes you read stories where cattle farmers and sheep farmers get in fights because there's just not enough grass for all the sheep and the cattle to eat off of.

And that's exactly what we have here. And yet it's the word of the Lord. So we've got to think about what it means together. And what we're gonna see tonight is in something that appears a little bit mundane, which is ultimately land allotment, Abram and Lot deciding which way are we gonna go?

[2 : 2 5] Which land are we gonna take? You're being invited here by Moses, the writer, to peer, to look straight at the essence of human sin and what's wrong with us and to see how it can become right again.

That's what's actually going on in Genesis 13. So let's think about that together. First, we're gonna see that we see, we look for the wrong garden. And then after that, we will think about really the heart of sin, the sin of the garden, and then finally hope that we can find in another garden in this chapter.

Okay, so let's think about that together. First, we human beings, we look for the wrong garden. Now, to explain that, let me start with a bit of context.

We're right here in the midst of the Abram story. And Abram was chosen by God a couple of chapters ago to be the man through whom God would bring forth the promised one.

So all the way back in Genesis 3.15, right when Adam and Eve sinned, God says one day, I am going to bring forth a son, a son of Eve.

[3 : 36] And the son of Eve is gonna save the world. He's gonna crush the head of the serpent. And the rest of the book of Genesis, and really the rest of the Old Testament, is about asking who is the seed? Who is the one?

Who is the son? Where's the son of Eve? That's gonna make things right again. And Abram gets chosen. And so you say, well, is it Abram? And God says to Abram, here's two great promises I'm gonna make to you to fulfill Genesis 3.15.

I'm going to give you land. And the land is where I'm going to fulfill this promise of bringing forth a Messiah. And I'm going to give you not only land, but people.

Because in order to have a son of Eve, you've gotta have people. And I'm gonna give you a seed. I'm gonna give you a son. And I'm gonna make you a great nation. I'm gonna make you into as many, or I'm gonna make you as big as the grains of the sand on the seashore.

These are the two big promises. Now, when Abram comes to the land of Canaan the first time from Babylon, immediately he's driven away because of a drought.

[4 : 36] And we learn too that his wife cannot bear children, that they can't have children. And so you say, God, you've said, I'm gonna give you a son that's gonna save the world. And I'm gonna put the son that's gonna save the world in this land.

And as soon as they come there, there's no son and they're driven out of the land. And you say, God, what is going on? How are you gonna fulfill the promise? And that's really what the Abram story's about.

And we read in verse one of chapter 13, Abram went up from Egypt. So the context here is that he's coming from Egypt. Why? Because when he was driven away from the promised land, he went down to Egypt.

And as soon as Abram went down to Egypt, in the previous chapter, he gave his wife away to Pharaoh to protect his own skin. And that's not what messiahs do.

That's not what they look like. They don't give their bride away to protect themselves. And so we immediately learn Abram is not the guy. He's not the savior. We're still waiting.

[5 : 34] And it's going to be one of his children, but who's it going to be? And we learn, he's also not in the land. He's in Egypt. And so God sends, if you back up, you can see this chapter 12 verse 18, just before our chapter starts.

God sends a plague upon Pharaoh to save Abram and the early Hebrew people out of Egypt. Now, the early people are God's people.

They're captured in Egypt. They're slaves in Egypt. And God sends a plague and he rescues them and they come up out of Egypt. Have you heard that before? Does that sound familiar? It happens to Abram before it ever happens to Moses and the Israelites later on.

And that's the context. Now, here we are, chapter 13. Chapter 13, that means that they're back in the land of Canaan, back in the land of promise, but the question is who is the seed of the woman going to be?

Who's the son going to be? And Abram and Sarah, I still can not have children. And so one of the subtle questions of this series of stories about Lot, we have three of them, is Lot going to be the son?

[6 : 41] Because Lot had been adopted by Abram. Lot's dad had died and Abram had effectively adopted Lot. And so the question is, could it be Lot? Could he be the one? And the big thing that Moses shouts to us through this passage is no, no, no.

It's not going to be Lot either. And when you realize why, you're being invited to peer into Lot's heart and see why. It's not Lot.

He's not going to be the one that's going to save the world. And in fact, Lot goes the exact opposite direction. And when he does that, you can see what's going on in the human heart when we sin.

That's what we get invited to see. All right, enough context. Context time is over. Eyes glazed during context time. So let's move past context time and dive into this story about Lot, because we see the nature of sin right here.

What's wrong with us? All right, in verse five and six, Lot we learn is as blessed as Abraham, Abram, he's got as many sheep, as many cattle.

[7 : 45] Lot is a full grown man now. He's no boy anymore. And he's got, he's become as rich as Abram is. And now they've been a unit. They've been one, uncle, nephew, like father, son, Abram in fact, in just a moment says to Lot, it says here, we are kinsmen.

A more literal translation is we are men, we are brothers. So Abram knows we are tight. And yet when lots, shepherds and herdsmen go out and Abram's shepherds and herdsmen go out, they fight over too little space for too much cattle.

And you know, over Christmas time, my family was here for two weeks and we love each other. We love each other a lot. And we had 12 people staying in our flat.

Most of you have been to my flat. And you know, sometimes you love people and you're tight, you're brothers, you know, like Abram and Lot. And then you realize that there are too many phone chargers for too few plugs, you know.

And, or there's too many, too many cattle for the grass. It's the same thing, right? Eventually you can't all live in the same space. And that's exactly what's going on here.

[9 : 00] You have to spread out. And so Abram says, look, you can choose anywhere you want in the land of Canaan, the promised land. And this is where it all goes wrong.

This is the big problem. And what we see here is it's a problem of vision. It's all about the eyes. And we learn here that the problem with Lot is the problem with every single human being from Genesis 3, 4.

And it's that when you lift up your eyes and you look and you see something in this world, something in this life that you want, we have a deep, deep problem. And that's that we want things in this life more than we want God.

And we reach out and we take that thing that we want more than we want God. And we forget. We forget what God said. We forget His word. And here Lot, do you see what he does?

It says in verse 10, that Lot lifted up his eyes and he saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered. Now what did he see?

[10 : 01] First he sees something physical. He lifts up his eyes and imagine if you can picture a map of Israel, there's the Jordan River that pours into the Dead Sea. And that area right there is extremely fertile.

And he lifts up his eyes and he can see probably from the top of a mountain, that whole area, that valley. And he just sees dollar signs, pound sterling signs.

He wants the money. He's got a lot and he's rich like Abrams rich, but he sees that he could be richer, more rich, richer or more rich, I don't know the right way to say it.

But he sees, that's what he sees. And the first thing he sees with his eyes is something deeper than his eyesight. And he sees something with the eyes of his heart and it's that he wants wealth and possessions more than he wants to listen and remember what God has told him.

Now maybe you're already picking up on remembering what God has already told Lot and Abram. Because if you go a little further, what you find and the writer here points it out to us very clearly, he looks and he sees the valley on the east side of the Jordan River and the commentator here, Moses says, it just so happens that this valley is called Sodom and Gomorrah.

[11 : 16] And if you know the rest of the story, you know, that this is a place of deep wickedness. We're told that at the end of the chapter. It's a place of destruction, it's a place of death. And remember that God had said, I'm doing two great things.

I'm going to save the world and I'm gonna do it in the land of Canaan, not outside of it. So stay here, don't leave. And Moses, Abram says, look, my brother Lot, my nephew, you can pick anywhere in the land of Canaan you want.

And if you pick that place, I'll go there. If you pick that place, I'll go there. And Lot says, I'll take east of the Jordan. I'll take the place that will make me the most money, even though he knows, he knows what God has said about it.

He knows that outside the land is a place of judgment. And yet he picks it anyway. You see, he sees with his eyes, but he really sees with the eyes of his heart. And he longs for the exact thing, this creaturely thing, that God told him, don't yearn for that.

That's not it. You see, in other words, he's living by sight, not by faith. He wants what he thinks will make him wealthy. He doesn't want what God says will really bless you, will really make you a great man, a great name.

[12 : 22] This is called idolatry. It's when you look out into the creaturely realm, and you see something with your eyes, and you long for that thing, and you want it more than you want God himself, and what he's told you will really bless you, and you reach out and you take it.

And that's exactly what's happening to Lot. The eyes of the heart. It's called, in the New Testament, lust. And you can lust after anything. And that's exactly what Lot's doing here. I made a list.

Lot is clearly, this is our first Timothy 6-10 moment for him where it says, the beginning of evil is the love of money. And that's what's happening to Lot right here.

But this can happen with anything to any of us. And I know we've talked about this many times from this pulpit, but we can't get past this because this is our deep problem.

This is our fundamental problem. Here's a list. The things that we chase after, you might chase after success and security, money, that great nest egg like Lot did, or you might have idols of pleasure in your life, like food and drink and sex, or idols of approval, being physically attractive, money that you're pouring into the gym because of an addiction to that.

[13 : 39] Being thought, you might have an idol of approval that says, I want to be thought of as perfectly normal, perfectly respectable, not strange, not weird, not different, not like them, you might have an idol of approval for theological acumen that you're a great mind when it comes to the things of the Bible.

You can have religious idols, other gods, vague spirituality, spiritualism, witchcraft, a cult, ideology, searching for God in the wrong places that happens all across our city.

You can have idols, political idols, persuasions, ideologies on the left, ideologies on the right, political party addiction, you can have idols of celebrity, personal celebrity, local celebrity, wanting to be a celebrity, wanting to make a name for yourself on Instagram, celebrity culture, idols of race and country, ethnic pride that turns into racism or unhealthy nationalism, idols of relationship, living life through success and failures of your children, or chasing that relationship at all costs, that person at all costs, you can have idolatries of moralism and legalism needing to be known as righteous, a good person, by your performance, idols of individualism, self-curating your identity, and performing for other, social media addiction, idols of deflection, the need to identify the problem is always out there, always with that family member, that person, never me.

Classic idols, here's the classics. Power idolatry, comfort idolatry, approval idolatry, and the list goes on, anything that you see in this world and you want more than you want God, and that's exactly what's happening to Lot here, there are over 520 instances in the Bible where vision, sight, is used as a metaphor for improper desire, wanting the wrong things, it's everywhere, it's everywhere from Genesis to Revelation, it's about what our heart desires, and in Genesis 12, and we'll move on, Genesis 12, Abram goes into Egypt and he sees that being married to Sarah might cost him his life, and so he gives his wife away to Pharaoh, the image of the serpent himself, just like Adam gave his bride away to the serpent in the garden, so Abram, right after he's called by God, gives his wife away to the serpent, and then in the very next chapter,

Lot gives himself away to money, it's the human problem, we give ourselves away to the creatures as if they are our gods, as if they will really bring to us the Garden of Eden, now here's the last thing about point one and we'll move on.

[16 : 25] Verse 10, you can see it's even a deeper level of desire because what does he call it? He sees Sodom and Gomorrah and it says it looked to him, verse 10, as if it was the Garden of the Lord, and you see what's going on in idolatry?

It's when you look out at something and you say, if I had that thing, it would be Eden to me. If I had that thing, it would be like the Garden of the Lord to me, you can identify your idol, the things you struggle with most in your life by saying, if I get that thing or lose that thing, it would either be the Garden of the Lord to me, Eden itself, or like losing Eden, and if the answer to that question, what is it that is Eden to me is not God himself, then you're dealing with an idol, an idol of the heart.

All right, secondly, the sin of the Garden, the heart of sin, that leads us to then seeing that we haven't actually uncovered the principle underneath the principle.

The issue here is idolatry, lots idolatry, but there's something underneath that, and we can do it very briefly, and it's just to say this, that when you look and see here in verse 10 and 11, this sequence, Lot lifted up his head, and he looked, and he saw, and he took, that that is a recurring set of phrases in the Bible, and it comes first in Genesis chapter three.

Listen to what happens in Genesis chapter three, it says, the woman Eve saw that the tree was good for food, that it was a delight to her eyes, that it was to be desired to make one wise, so she took and she ate.

[18 : 03] And I love what Derek Kidner, the commentator, says about that, he says that, so simple that act, so hard it's undoing, God himself will taste poverty and death before take and eat can become verbs of salvation.

She looked, she looked at her eyes, she saw that it was delight, that this could be to her the garden of the Lord better than the Lord himself, and she ate, it's the exact same thing that happens in Genesis 13, and it happens over and over and over and over again across the Bible in a big series of fall narratives, fall stories, it's what happens to all of us when we sin.

Read James 1, 13 to 17, and you can get the exact sequence as well, this is what happens when we sin, we look, we lust, we think that thing will be the garden of the Lord to us, and we take and we eat, and it's idolatry.

And just, if you think about it for just a moment, when the serpent comes to Eve, when the serpent comes to Eve, he says to her, did God really say you couldn't eat of that?

Now the very first thing he does, he says, can you really trust what God said to you, the promises God made to you? That's the very first way he tempts her, and here, Lot has forgotten what God said.

[19 : 26] God said, the land of Canaan, stay here and I will bless your family. Did God, but did God really say that? Canaan, go to Sodom and Gomorrah and get the same thing, do it my own way?

It's the same thing that the serpent said to Eve, and then right after that, the serpent says, if you eat, you will be like God. And you see, it's the same thing as saying, if I take that, if I chase that thing in my life, then I can build for myself the garden of the Lord.

I can have the garden without God, I can be the Lord of the garden, in fact. You see, the same thing that happens to Adam and Eve, is exactly what happens to Lot, is exactly what happens to every one of us when we sin.

Hermann Bovingt says that the essence of human sin is self-divinization. Another simpler way to say it is it's self-centeredness. I want to be the Lord of the garden, I don't want to be with the God of the garden.

Calvin commenting on Genesis 13, this is what he says, let us then learn by Lot's example that our eyes are not to be trusted, that we must rather be on our guard lest we be ensnared by our look, by our vision, and be encircled with many evils.

[20 : 39] Just as Lot, when he fancied that he was dwelling in paradise, he was actually plunged into the depths of hell. He thought he could build the garden of the Lord, and it plunged him into the depths of hell, into destruction, into Sodom and Gomorrah.

Now that's why lastly, we need to find hope tonight in a different garden, in another garden. At the very end of the passage from verse 14, we have this one of the early moments in the Bible where God comes down, where God comes into our presence, and he comes here into the presence of Abram, and he speaks to Abram here in verse 14.

So it says, the Lord said to Abram after Lot had left, lift up your eyes and look. See, Eve lifted up her eyes and she saw and she took, and Lot lifted up his head, and he looked, and he longed for the wrong thing, and he took, and then God comes down to Abram and says, now you lift up your eyes and look.

And what's the difference? You know, Abram had given his wife away to Pharaoh, but now Abram is hearing the word of the Lord. He's actually listening.

He's saying, God has come to speak to him, and he's saying, now lift up your eyes and look, and look at exactly what I tell you to look at, and stop going your own way. Stop trying to build the garden of the Lord for yourself.

[22 : 01] And so he hears about God's voice. There's just two things as we close to see here about the hope that we need. And it's first that Lot lived by sight, not by faith, not by the word of the Lord.

And Abram here messed it up big time, and he's gonna mess it up again, but he came back and submitted to the word of the Lord. He lived by faith, not by sight. And that's the big difference.

Now Calvin, this is what Calvin says again about it. He says, Lot was plunged into the depths of hell by planning his life according to his own sight. Abram waited on the Lord with the eyes of faith.

Now what Abram did was really hard in listening to the Lord and waiting and not just choosing Sodom and Gomorrah. And even saying, oh, the humility.

Where Abram said, he was the older, he was the head of the clan, and he said, Lot, you pick, and I'll go the other way. What humility? He had changed from chapter 12, clearly.

[23 : 01] He had changed. What he did though was so hard, because one pastor pointed this out to me in reading, there's a little note in the passage at the end of verse seven.

At that time, there were Canaanite and Parasites all over the land. Abram stayed surrounded by Canaanites and Parasites that wanted to kill him.

He stayed, he did what was so hard. And that tells us something very simple, and that's this. Living by faith is a lot harder than living by sight. You live by faith in this life, and you look up, and there's Canaanites everywhere.

There's hard things about it all over the place. Living by faith is so much more difficult than living by sight, and that means that you've got to wake up every single day and point your heart back again to the true vision of delight.

You've got to lift up the eyes of your heart every single day, if you're gonna live by faith and not by sight, and see the one that can actually be for you, the Garden of the Lord, the true Garden Himself. And in John chapter 19, Jesus was being crucified.

[24 : 11] And it says in John chapter 19, John I think really goes out of his way to point this out. In chapter 19 verse 31, that the soldiers came and they broke the legs of the criminals next to him.

But when it came to him, they saw Jesus was dead. He didn't have to have that stabbed him. He was dead. And blood and water poured from his side. And then John writes this, he says, he who bears witness to these things, John himself, testifies this is true.

In other words, he's saying, look, I saw it. Just remember John was there. He was dead. That's what John's saying. Really dead. No life left. This was not sleep.

He was dead. And then it says, so Joseph and Nicodemus prepared his body, took him down off the cross, wrapped him, put spices on him in John 19:41, and it so happened that next to the cross, next to where he was crucified, there was a garden.

And Jesus' dead body was laid into the garden. And when Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the third day and the midst of the garden, he brought life back to the garden of the Lord.

[25 : 30] Remember in the beginning, Adam and Eve, they sinned against God and they were exiled from the garden. A cherub was there with a flaming sword and said, you can't come back in this place.

And when Jesus went into the garden dead and he woke up, he came up from the dead, he dismissed the cherub. He said, it's time for you to go home. Your job is done. Now people really can come find the delight of Eden, the garden of the Lord itself.

You can have it. We spend our lives looking for the garden of the Lord. We long for Eden. We long for that thing that is gonna truly fulfill us and we look in all the wrong places, the eyes of our heart.

We don't have the right vision. Jesus Christ is Eden. He is the garden. He is the delight of your eye. He is the apple of the eye of your heart.

He's everything. He is what you want, even if you don't know it. He is what you want. And so this passage is saying, what do you want in your life to be for you the good life, to be for you the garden of the Lord?

[26 : 28] And the right answer is Jesus, even when we choose otherwise. And that means finally that the other thing we see here about Moses, about Abram, sorry, is that his life was not only marked by faith instead of sight, but also by repentance.

You need faith, not sight, to see truly with eyes of your heart that Jesus is the garden of Eden to you. And then a life of repentance. Last thing, remember in chapter 12, Abram gave away his bride, Deferro.

He gave his wife away to protect his own skin. And when you flip over to chapter 13, the first four verses, Abram is going back, he's come back to the Promised Land and he's going to every single one of the altars that he had previously built in Bethel and Ai in these places and offering a sacrifice and praying.

And one commentator points out, Abram is on a repentance tour. He had given his bride away like Adam in the garden and now he's come back to the Promised Land and he's on a repentance tour.

He's going to every single altar in the land of Canaan and saying to the Lord, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I'm not the man. I'm broken. I need healing. I need forgiveness. I need to be renewed and put back together again.

[27 : 52] He's on a repentance tour. That's what we need. Repentance is acknowledging that you don't have the resources within yourself to stop desiring things in the wrong ways.

Repentance is not just saying, I believe in Jesus. I believe that he is the Garden of Eden. It's saying the lusts of the eyes of my heart put him on the cross.

It's when it gets personal and you say, the things I wrongly desire in this life crucified my Lord. And he did it for me.

And now he's the delight of my life, the true garden to me. Why does the Bible... Why does the Bible constantly say, look at Abram. He's a great example of faith.

Look at Abram. If you read through, you will see Abram messed it up a lot. A lot. Big ways. He's going to do it again in a couple of chapters.

[28 : 56] Give his wife away to protect his own skin. He's going to do it again. But the reason I think the Bible commends him so much is because he was a big sinner that looked to the promised son that he knew was promised through his family line.

And therefore he became a big repentor. And that's what we need. Let's pray. Lord, we ask that you would give us the eyes...

That you would fix the eyes of our hearts. We bring them before you and confess to you tonight. Lord, I ask now that maybe somebody tonight would confess before you for the first time ever or be renewed in that confession because it's been too long.

The eyes of our heart are broken and we want things that are not the garden of the Lord. We want good things in the worst ways.

And so we've made lots of idols. And so we bring those before you. We want them smashed. And so we ask, Lord, that you would do that for us and instead turn us around and give us a vision for the true gardener, the delight of our life, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

[30 : 12] God himself come to show up for us. So we ask for that. We ask this week as we step towards Monday that you would give us the strength to wake up every day and repent, to confess and repent that that would be our daily practice.

So we need that so much, God, or we'll forget. And so we ask that you would just strengthen our hearts now by the Spirit to be people that are big repentors. And we ask that in Jesus' name.

Amen.