

Looking Up, Out and Around

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 January 2018

Preacher: Alistair Chalmers

[0 : 00] Thank you very much to the band and good evening, everybody. How about we just have a word of prayer before we look at Genesis 13? Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we know that the words that we have just sung are true for each and every one of us.

Lord, we're sorry for the things that we put before you. We're sorry for the things that we worship. And Lord, we ask that this evening we would be brought back to you.

That we would be brought back into line with you and that we would worship you for who you are. Lord, help us see that it is all about you, Jesus. And it's in your name that we pray. Amen.

It would be really helpful if you keep Genesis chapter 13 open in front of you. We'll be looking in a few details as we travel through this passage. Now, I wonder how many of you have noticed on Sundays my or our lovely little car sitting outside.

It's pretty hard to miss because it's bright yellow. And I took this picture this morning. So, sorry, excuse the dirt that's on the car. But recently my wife and Sabine and I bought this car.

[1 : 18] And I will admit that we were a little bit cautious when we went to see it, first of all, because of its obvious bold color. But we bought it from a well-known car dealer through in Glasgow.

And so we saw it online and we traveled through to check it out. And then we gave it a test drive. Because that's what you do when you buy a car, apparently. That's what adults do. So we did. We went through. And the car looked great.

As much as I know about cars, you walk up, you kick the wheels. It looks fine. But the engine sounded great. The interior was fine. It wasn't marked by the previous owner.

It was just round and round amazing. And the bonus for me, the real point which sold it to me, was the fact that you could heat up the front two seats. So when I drive, I can be nice and warm.

So I was sold on the car. It was amazing. But then there was one problem. And the problem was, when we got in it to test drive it, the minute we set out, Sabina was driving, you could feel the car pulling to the left as we drove.

[2 : 17] And I was like, oh, no. And then all of a sudden, your excitement just plummets. And you think, oh, no, something's really wrong. So every time you touch the brakes, the car would pull away from the center of the road. And we got back to the garage.

We spoke to the dealer. And he was like, oh, yeah, that's not a problem. We can fix that. That's an easy fix. We'll just track the wheels for you. Great. So they agreed to realign the wheels. The problem was that our car wasn't driving straight because the wheels weren't aligned.

Now, last week, when we left Abraham at the end of chapter 12, he was off balance. He wasn't aligned. He went on a little bit of a detour and he wasn't relying on God.

He wasn't living according to the promises that God had given him. If you have your Bibles open in Genesis chapter 12, verses 1 to 3, you can see God speaking to Abraham.

And God promises him some amazing things. Now, God was working out his masterful plan, good plan for this world. And he promised Abraham a land, a vast number of descendants, and he promised Abraham that he would be a blessing to the world.

[3 : 26] Amazing things. But then at the end of chapter 12, we found Abraham in Egypt. He'd gone on a little bit of a detour. He wasn't relying on God.

He had selfishly asked his wife to lie for him so that he wouldn't be in any danger. Abraham was lacking faith and he needed to be brought back to God.

And that's what we see in Genesis chapter 13. We see Abraham returning to God, calling on the name of the Lord once more. We see him being realigned with his God.

In Genesis chapters 3 to 11, we see the people of this world trying to make a name for themselves. In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve, they eat the fruit which God told them not to eat of so that they could

be like God.

In Genesis chapter 11, the Tower of Babel, the people wanted to build a tower to make a name for themselves. But in Genesis chapter 12, we see the huge, powerful God of this universe choosing to reveal himself to Abraham.

[4 : 35] Here we see the goodness of God because God promises amazing, wonderful things to a corrupt and fallen, finite human being.

Now here's a map of where we've been with Abraham in chapter 12. So at chapter 12, 1 to 3, Abraham was called by God. That's up there at number 2 in Haran.

And then he travels to the promised land, number 3, where God takes him to the land that he's promised him. And then we get the spiritual detour going into Egypt, number 4.

And now in chapter 13, he's coming back to Canaan. So that's where we've been with Abraham in chapter 12. Abraham went to the land that God showed him. But at the end of chapter 12, we see him thrown out of Egypt, needing to be brought back to God.

And that's what we're going to see this evening, Abraham's return to God. So we can look at Genesis chapter 13. And yes, we can see what Abraham did. We can look at all the things that happened.

[5 : 38] But the most important thing in this passage is to see God. To see what God has done, to see the amazing things that God has promised. And that despite Abraham's failings as a human being, God's faithfulness endures.

So let's look through this passage and see what we can pick up. So as Abraham returns from Egypt, he seems to have some form of spiritual renewal. He's being brought back to God.

And instead of focusing on the situation around him, he looks up. Verses 1 to 4. Look up. See, Abraham went to Egypt in the first place because of a severe famine.

And you see that if you glance over the page of Genesis chapter 12, verse 10. But now in Genesis 13, Abraham's described as being very rich.

Abraham has many possessions. Now, do you see the goodness of God in this? Because even though Abraham was on a detour, even though he was relying on himself and living in his own strength and living on his own devices, God did not turn his back on Abraham.

[6 : 48] But instead, God blessed him. God didn't just leave him, but he blessed him richly.

Abraham and his family leave Egypt and they find their way back to Canaan.

And verse 4 tells us that he goes back to the place where God spoke to him, first of all. He goes back to where he had built an altar, where he had worshipped God.

In chapter 12, the creator of the universe spoke to Abraham and promised him many things. God promised Abraham a land, descendants that would be so great that they would become a nation.

And God promises Abraham that his family would be a blessing to the world. Now, God doesn't give these promises to Abraham because he is somebody special. He hasn't done anything to deserve these, but God gives these promises to Abraham because God is sovereign.

God is in control. God is working out his good plan of salvation for the world, which is referenced in Genesis chapter 3, verse 15. God is working and God is loving and generous.

[8 : 09] But Abraham still decided to trust in his own lies to keep him safe. He didn't trust in the power of the infinite and promise keeping God.

And so now God is drawing him back. He goes to the place where God spoke to him. And what does he do? Verse 4 says that he calls on the name of the Lord.

What do you think his cry to God was at that time? Wouldn't it be a plea of forgiveness? Wouldn't it be a cry for God to show his amazing mercy and grace?

Wouldn't it be a cry for forgiveness for Abraham's doubts and failings? Perhaps as he called out to God, he begged for strength. Strength to endure.

Strength to live by faith and not by sight. Because in Genesis 12, Abraham saw a problem and he thought, yeah, I'm the solution. I know what to do.

[9 : 08] I know how to fix it. But now we see that Abraham needs to look up. He had a problem, but he can't be the solution to his problem. God must be his help.

God must be his deliverer and his provider. That is exactly what God has promised to do. And all of this time, despite Abraham's failings, God has been working and drawing him back.

God has been protecting him and blessing him. And he's saying, Abraham, come home. So Abraham looks up and he calls on the name of the Lord.

Abraham worships God. Abraham worships God because that is the right response when we meet God. Abraham can see God's hand in his life.

He knows that it's God who's drawing him back. He knows that his fallen heart won't naturally take him towards God. And he knows that God has remained faithful, even though he hasn't.

[10:08] God is worthy of Abraham's praise and God is worthy of our praise. Do we need to look up this evening? Do we need to realign ourselves with God?

Life is full of ups and downs, full of encouragements and discouragements. But let me say that there is one person who is a constant. There is one person who, despite our failings, despite our doubting, will never leave us nor forsake us.

And that is our loving Heavenly Father, God himself. Maybe Abraham called out to God, Lord, I don't deserve these promises.

I don't deserve your forgiveness. I don't deserve your mercy. But please, would you grant them to me? And all of that is true. Nobody deserves God's forgiveness.

Nobody deserves to be called and used by God. But God forgives and uses people all the time because he is an amazing, wonderful God who has created us with a purpose.

[11:18] Maybe you're here this evening and you've been on a little bit of a detour. Maybe you've been on an Egypt experience. Would you call out to God this evening?

Would you call out and ask for forgiveness? Would you be drawn back to God? Or maybe you haven't wondered. Maybe you haven't gone to Egypt as it were.

But don't we all need to be realigned with God on a daily basis? We've just sung these words earlier on in the service. I'm coming back to the heart of worship.

It's all about you, Jesus. I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing that I've made it when it's all about you, Jesus. Aren't these words true for each of us?

Our lives become about our stuff, our jobs, our houses, our families, our car. But we've got to come back and confess that it is all about Jesus.

[12:14] He's the only reason that we can stand here. And this should be our prayer. I'm coming back. Help me come back. So let's look up to God.

Let's come back to him and let's worship God because that is what we were created to do. Let's look up. The second thing that we see in this passage when Abraham is being called back to God in verses 5 to 13 is that we should look out.

Abraham should look out. Now this lookout is not necessarily that Abraham should look out on the land, although that does come in verse 10. But I think that this lookout is a warning.

So if you can imagine an exclamation mark after that, look out. It's a warning. Look out. Abraham has just worshipped God. And he's just realigned himself with God.

And often when someone has just met with God, they're excited. They're encouraged in their faith. They feel that they can take on the whole world because they know the God that is with them. And it's at times like this when reality hits, that we are in a fallen world.

[13:24] It's at times like this where sin is knocking at the door of our hearts and minds, trying to pull our attention away from God. And it's at this point in Abraham's life that quarreling begins.

Abraham and Lot were both wealthy, materially blessed with flocks and herds. Look at verse 6. It says their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together.

The shepherds begin to argue. So how does Abraham react? How does this man react who has just worshipped God, who has been realigned with God? Well, he turns to Lot and in verse 8, he says, let's not have any quarreling between you and me or between your herders and mine, for we are close relatives.

It is not the whole land before you. Let's part company. If you go to the left, I will go to the right. If you go to the right, I will go to the left. There are two things I'd like us to notice about Abraham's response here.

First of all, Abraham is a peacemaker. He initiates peace. And then second, he submits to the will of his nephew. Instead of pulling rank on his nephew, Lot, instead of insisting that he, as the head of the family, should have the right to pick out his land, he turns to Lot and says, you know, you choose which land you want.

[14:50] You take first pick. Abraham's spiritual renewal, his being brought back to God, has brought him in line with God's will. Abraham is no longer deciding to trust in himself or to rely on his own means to sort himself out.

But instead, he says, take what you want, Lot. I have God on my side. Could it be that Abraham now trusts in the promises that God has given him?

Perhaps Abraham now knows that his God is faithful. Maybe Abraham has realized that despite his failings, he is still the recipient of God's promises and God's blessings.

And so in trust and reliance on God, Abraham says to Lot, you take whichever area you want. God has me sorted. Now this is such a stark, stark contrast with the Abraham we meet in Genesis 12, isn't it?

Look back with me at Genesis 12, verse 13. Abraham says to his wife, Sarai, say that you are my sister so that I will be treated well for your sake and then my life will be spared because of you.

[16:05] He cares more about himself than he does his wife. But now in chapter 13, verse 9, he says, if you go to the left, I'll go to the right. If you go to the right, I will go to the left.

He's changed. And what a transformation it is. What a change God has brought about in this man's life. Now this is not a result of Abraham reading a make yourself a better person book.

He's not read a self-help book. But this is the result of a man who met God. See, when people meet the God of this universe, they will not walk away unchanged.

We thought about this this morning as we looked at Zacchaeus, a complete transformation in a man's life because of God's grace. And the same has happened here in Abraham. God has changed Abraham's heart and now he is relying on God's promises.

Here we see a man transformed by God. But Abraham is not the hero of this story. God is the hero of this story.

[17:14] Abraham is not the one who's changed himself, but it is God who has brought him back. God is the hero of this whole story. And over this whole series, as we continue, we will hopefully see that.

And so Lot looks out at the land and he sees that the Valley of Jordan is amazing. It's green. It's well irrigated. It's perfect for all his sheep.

I wonder if you remember back to the old Windows PCs when they first arrived and you took them out of their box. The first default picture that many of them had was this.

And this is the land that Lot looks out and sees. Perfect. It's like a green ocean. It's like a sheep's dream. They could eat to their content. There was not a problem.

And Lot looks at this and he says, yes, that's the land I want. I'd be daft if I didn't take it. But maybe you've noticed an interesting detail in verse 10.

[18:13] The author likens this land to the garden of the Lord or the land of Egypt. Now these are descriptions which point to the beauty and quality of the land that Lot sees.

But there was one problem. Verse 12 tells us that Lot was moving towards Sodom. Now we'll hear more about Sodom in a few weeks when we get to Genesis chapters 18 and 19.

But look what the author says in verse 13. Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord. So on the surface, this land might have looked perfect.

It looked great. It looked good. It looked like a no-brainer. Lot thought he'd be silly if he didn't take it. But at the core, this land was rotten.

J.C. Ryle is a famous bishop and author from the 1800s. And in his book, Holiness, he says this about Lot's decision. Lot chose by sight and not by faith.

[19:19] He asked no counsel of God to preserve him from mistakes. He looked to the things of time, not to the things of eternity. He thought of his worldly profit and not of his soul.

He considered only what would help him in this life. And he forgot the solemn business of the life to come. This was a bad beginning. So the land that Lot saw was really good on the outside.

But at the core, it was rotten. The people who lived there did not walk in line with God. In fact, they completely rejected God and they sinned greatly. Lot made this decision based on what he could see.

But Abraham makes the decision based on God's faithfulness. He rests in God. Now, because of our time in history, we can see that Lot made the wrong decision.

The Bible records that for us. But can't we also see God's protection of Abraham? Because God in his sovereign plan is not letting Abraham move to a place which is rotten at the core.

[20:27] A place which might draw him away from God. God is changing Abraham's heart and Abraham is now focused on God and not on what he can see before him.

What are our tendencies to make plans? Do we, like Lot, focus on the things that we see? Focus on the world around us? Or do we rest on the promises and faithfulness of God?

And the promises that he has given us in his word? I think it's so easy for us to focus on the here and now. To live life for today and to let the future me worry about the problems of tomorrow.

But the Bible encourages us to have an eternal perspective on everything. An eternal perspective on life. Look at life from God's point of view. All of the things that we see in this world, all the things that we have, will be gone in the blink of an eye.

And none of our possessions or stuff will matter to us as we stand before God. We were created for eternity. Let's have an eternal perspective.

[21 : 41] There's no point for a person to gain the whole world, but to forfeit their very soul.

Instead, let us live lives as God wants us to and tells us to in his word.

In Matthew chapter 5 verse 9, Jesus says this, Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God. What would our lives be like?

What would our witnessing for Jesus be like? If we sought peace where peace was lacking. If we did what Abraham did and sought peace in all of our relationships.

Imagine if the global church was a community which showed the true unity of Jesus and encouraged peace in every case. If we took the example of Abraham, and if we take the words of Jesus in Matthew 5 seriously, then I think it would make such a difference to how we interact with friends and families and co-workers and the world in general around us.

Our desire should be to live lives which are living testimonies to the greatness of our God. There is no better way to live, there's no better way to do that than living, than by living according to what God has told us in his word.

[23 : 01] And I think the same warning that Abraham, that I see there in verses 5 to 13, that we should look out, I think the same warning applies to us. When we've just spent time with God in his word, when we've just gathered with our church family to praise God and to learn from his word, isn't that the time where sin is creeping at the door of our hearts and minds?

Isn't that the time where we walk out the doors and we're distracted? The world wants to pull us away from God, but we need to keep our eyes fixed on God.

We need to keep our hearts in line with him and in line with his will. And to do that, we need to be in constant prayer. Our lives need to be about worshipping God, the God who is sovereign, the God who is protecting us, the God who is guarding us.

So let's be careful. Let's look out. Let's be peacemakers. Let's be people who base our lives on eternity, people who base our lives on God's word rather than on what we see.

So Abraham's return to God. He's looked up and he's had to look out. And now in verses 14 to 18, God says, Abraham, look around. Look around.

[24 : 22] So after Lot and Abraham separate, God tells Abraham to look around, to survey the land that's before him. He doesn't say this just so that Abraham has a nice view for a while, but he says this because this is the land that God had promised him.

This is the land that God had promised Abraham and his descendants forever. Now can you imagine Abraham's relief as he hears the voice of God again? Abraham's past failures do not affect the way God is interacting with him now because God is faithful to the promises that he has given to his servants.

Abraham needs to have faith and trust in God because the land that he stands on currently belongs to the Canaanites and to the Perizzites. And he needs to have faith because this man is in his 70s. He has no children. His wife is barren, but he's supposed to be the father of a huge nation. Every onlooker on this situation would stand there and say, Abraham, go home.

Go live out your life in peace, in quiet. That would be the logical thing to do. But if you look at this from an eternal perspective, if you look at this from the perspective of God, if you remember that these promises are not coming from a normal person, but they are coming from the God of this world, the God who made this world, the God who spoke the world into being, the God who doesn't dish out empty promises.

[25 : 58] But this is the God who remains faithful despite our failings. This is the God who remains faithful to his word, the God who never changes. Take all of that into account and the character of God.

It makes sense, doesn't it, for Abraham to have faith? Now, I once stood on a plot of land in Romania with a friend of mine who just bought a plot of land. And as he stood there in this field, he looked at me with a huge smile on his face.

He was like, this is my house. I was like, wow, he's lost it. But it made sense once I heard his plans. It made sense once he showed me the blueprints and I could see what was going to come in just a few months.

And then once I saw that, I could imagine it. And I got excited with him and for him. Now, Abraham is looking at a land which God would give him. But God has told him what's going to happen. God has told him how this is going to work out. Abraham doesn't need to see any plans. He doesn't need to know the blueprint of God's grand design. Do you know why? Because he has the grand designer standing with him.

[27 : 12] Abraham is now walking in line with God. God has transformed his heart and he is trusting in the faithful and promise-keeping God that he worships. So Abraham pitches his tent.

And he worships God. He builds an altar. Abraham looked around and he worshiped God. Now, in the world that we live in, the world focuses on the physical and material things.

So often we can be discouraged. We can think maybe that God's absent. That God has left us or abandoned us. That God has walked away from the promises that he has given us. But let me say that none of that is true.

The life of Abraham shows us that God is faithful. That God will never go back on his promises and that his promises will be fulfilled. In this chapter, we've seen Abraham worship God twice.

The first time he built an altar and worshiped God. And the second time he returned to the altar, sorry. And the second time he built another altar to the Lord. So what is the result of a transformed heart?

[28 : 22] What is the result of a man who's been realigned with God? Well, it is a life of worship. A life that is dedicated to enjoying God. Abraham has reasons to worship God.

This old man was promised the land on which he stands. But we too have a reason to worship God. Because we sit here this evening as a result of these promises given to Abraham.

How exactly? Well, the promised land that Abraham is given is not just any land. This land is the land where the nation of Israel will live.

Where the people of God will dwell. This is the land where God will dwell with his people.

Abraham's descendants are to be living representatives of God and God's goodness.

Every nation in the world should have been able to look at Israel and see God's strength, God's might and God's power. Israel was supposed to be a light to the world from this land that he had given them.

[29 : 26] And if you fast forward in time, this is the land and these are the people through whom Jesus Christ would come. Throughout the whole story of the Bible, there is one big theme which stretches through that.

And that is the story of how God will restore this world to himself. The Bible tells us the amazing story of God's plan to redeem this world. And it started with this little old man in Canaan.

And it was made possible through a man who died on a cross years later through Jesus Christ. The son of God who came into this world, who lived in this promised land. And who taught the people of God about their need to return to God.

And so how did Abraham's land and offspring become a blessing to the world? Well, all of this was a blessing because this is the place where the savior of the world would be born.

But Jesus didn't only come to save the land of Canaan. He didn't only come to save the people of Israel. No, God came to restore the whole of fallen and broken humanity to God.

[30 : 38] All those who call on his name. That is what these promises are pointing forward to. And that is the redemption story of the Bible. Now if we think about that, doesn't it make sense that right at the beginning of these promises, Abraham worships God?

But even more pressing, as we look back on all these events, doesn't it make sense for us to worship God too? See, we can look at Genesis chapter 13 and see what Abraham did.

That is important. But the most important thing to focus on in this chapter is God. To see what God has done, the amazing things that God has promised.

And to see that despite Abraham's failings, God is faithful. And the great news is that God's faithfulness has not ended. God's faithfulness is not bound by our failings.

Our sketchy pasts don't stop God from working in us. Will we look around this evening? Will we see the marvelous work that God has done through the whole history of this world?

[31 : 49] And will we worship him? Will we realign ourselves with God? Will we live in step with the God of this universe?

The God who created us? The God who loves us? And the God who has designed us with a purpose? The God who has sent his son so that we can return to him? Will we realign ourselves with him this evening?

Let's pray together. Amen. Heavenly Father, we come before you this evening.

And we confess that we are a people who wander. We are a people whose hearts and minds constantly pull us away from you. And yet, Lord, we thank you so much that you are always faithful. Lord, we thank you for your goodness. We thank you for the offer of salvation which was made possible through your son, Jesus Christ. Lord, help us look to you.

[32 : 56] Help us live by faith and help us live lives of worship and devotion to you. The only one who is worthy of our praise. And we ask this in the mighty and precious name of your son, Jesus Christ.

Amen.