

"And Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan;
and... Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan."

Genesis xiii,11,12

Genesis xiii

Luke xvii,20-end

Psalm 125

New Book of Worship, Psalm 48, pp.57,58

The story of the return of Abram and Lot from Egypt would as mere history have little meaning for us today. It would be only a statement of the fact that two shepherds, to keep their herdsmen from strife, agreed to separate, one to keep to the highlands, the other to the plains. As mere history there is nothing in the story of the Jewish people any more than in the history of any other nation.

The Word is Divine not because of the mere historicals, but because the Lord has worded and arranged those historicals so as to express spiritual truths. By means of this history He has drawn pictures of otherwise invisible and inexpressible spiritual things. And more than this, He has taken the natural events and ideas and so arranged them as to tell the story of His own Incarnation and Glorification, and to tell it in the order of its progress from infancy until His work was completed. So the story tells about spiritual changes that took place in the human nature which the Lord assumed in the world, and at the same time it teaches us about changes that must occur in every regenerating person.

There is an evident and practical lesson just beneath the surface of our text. We can not get knowledge of spiritual things until we have knowledge of natural things in some degree. There are two reasons for this. First the faculties are developed on the natural plane before they can be developed on the spiritual plane. Natural things are used to develop the faculties. Second, into the knowledge of natural things spiritual knowledges can be insinuated.

One who cannot feel, see, hear, taste, or smell could not learn anything. Our learning commences with the exercise and development of the senses. So the sense life must be developed first, and this involves, of course, the danger of one's becoming confirmed in it and believing that there is no superior life, and so never rising above the sense level. Lot stands for this sense life and its possessions.

But the sense life is given us for a higher purpose than for its mere gratification and pleasures. It is a means by which life on a higher plane can be introduced. One cannot understand how the Lord gives the soul love and wisdom - its heat and light - if he does not know how the sun gives the earth heat and light. All nature, being created by the Lord, is a parable of spiritual things, for, as Paul said, "the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead." If we recognize this, natural science can serve us as a mirror in which spiritual things can be seen.

And so this great natural universe with its seas and rivers, its mountains and valleys, its earth and sky and clouds, and its great life-giving and light-giving sun is as a lens through which the spiritual world shines and is revealed. Natural affections are images of spiritual affections. We cannot understand what the Lord's love for us is if we ourselves have felt no love for anyone. The love that parents

have for their children is given by the Heavenly Father that we may see and feel and know with what tender mercy He loves us. Thus natural things are necessary for the attainment of spiritual things. Their close relationship is illustrated by Lot's relationship to Abram; and the higher things attained by means of the lower are represented by Abram.

Our lesson for today turns on one point. Why did Abram and Lot go down into Egypt? It was because it was the country in which there was science, the basic knowledge not only of natural but of heavenly things, for it was in Egypt that the Ancient Word was still in existence. The famine in Canaan represents a famine in knowledge. Going down into Egypt represents acquiring knowledge. To represent this Abram and Lot went from Canaan into Egypt. So did Joseph and Israel later. Moses was born there, and the Lord Himself was taken there by Joseph and Mary to represent the fact that the acquisition of knowledge is first necessary.

The cattle, silver, and gold that Abram brought out of Egypt represent spiritual acquisitions. The cattle are natural affections, silver is truth, and gold is goodness or love. But Lot's acquisitions are not so stated. It is said that he had flocks and herds, but it is not said that he had gold and silver, because his affections were not spiritual but merely for the things of the low sense plane.

Everyone has to be in Canaan first. This is provided by the Lord through the "remains" planted in infancy and childhood. But there must also be a desire for knowledge. This feeling of our need of instruction in spiritual things is represented by Abram's going down into Egypt. For us it is the feeling of the need of going to the Word for instruction, to obtain the knowledge of what life is for and of how to live rightly. And when we have gone there and learned about spiritual things, we then return to Canaan, that is, we try to enter into the life which the Word teaches. What we acquire of affection, truth, and good constitutes our riches - in Scripture terms the cattle, silver, and gold. The order in which these three things are named is not the order of their actual value either naturally or spiritually, but it is the order in which they must be acquired. The cattle are first because they stand for the natural affections, which must come before we will seek spiritual knowledge. Silver is mentioned next because we must then acquire truths. And gold is mentioned last because it is by learning truth and doing it that we acquire good.

When Abram went back to Canaan, he and Lot came into conflict. Abram, as noted, represents the love of heavenly things, or the ruling love of the spiritual mind. Lot is the desire of the natural or external man or, more simply, sense satisfactions and pleasures. The conflict between Abram and Lot pictures that struggle within us when, after instruction, our spiritual nature comes into conflict with our natural worldly desires. At Abram's suggestion Abram and Lot separated. So must we separate our spiritual from our natural desires.

Lot chose the low land because it was pleasant and fair. He did not want to climb the rugged hills, dig wells, and shift his flocks and herds continually for pasture and water. He wanted things to be easy and abundant. His choice represents

how the natural man in us, our natural desires, follow after ease and pleasure. It represents how distasteful to the natural are the hard struggles, the thirst, and the famine that the spiritual man must undergo.

Lot and Abram are both in us. The desires of the natural mind tend to the low land. Their choice is the plains of Jordan, the dead level of the lower things of the world, the things that look beautiful and abundant. Lot's choice is the choice of riches, honor, power, fame, indulgence, voluptuousness, all that the mere sense life craves. This is all pictured by Lot's choosing the low land and pitching his tent near to Sodom, that city immersed in sensual pleasures. "The men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly."

If when we face the choice between the spiritual and the natural, we choose the things of mere sense gratification, we do so because they are pleasing to us. And there are no elevated states of life there. We pitch our tent near Sodom every time we allow the external to rule over the internal, every time we stifle our sense of right for the sake of some pleasure or worldly gain. Do we choose our friends because they are rich in this world's goods rather than in spiritual graces? Do we choose our company from those who are learned regardless of whether they are looking to the Lord for light or only to themselves? If we do, then we pitch our tent toward Sodom. Do we love wealth for its outward show rather than for the uses it can be made to perform in our Father's kingdom? Then we pitch our tent toward Sodom. Pitching the tent toward Sodom is to separate natural from spiritual uses and live in the natural alone.

Abram chose the hills, the mountains; and Abram and Lot were separated. So must it be in our journey toward heaven. When we have gone to the Word and learned about the heavenly life and are prepared to enter into it, we must make this separation. This is not to say that we are not to enjoy the pleasures of the natural - eating, drinking, music, games, and the like. All these things are beneficial when subordinated to uses. All our senses and all good things are Divinely given to be enjoyed. But we should not let the senses rule, not let worldly delights gain the dominion and suffocate our love to the Lord and His Word.

How like Abram and Lot we are today as we look over all the land before us! Look down upon the plane of sensuous living - fair to look upon, but where does it lead? The Word tells us: to Sodom and its destruction. Then look to the high hills of the Christian life and remember that, though at times rough is the way and steep the ascent, the Lord has assured us that He will go with us and give us peace. He will make the yoke easy and the burden light.

And in the light of the truths of the Word we should be able to see the mountain tops brilliant under the Divine sun. Shall not the things that the Lord has prepared for them that love Him be more to us than all else? Let us attach ourselves to spiritual uses and in the strength of the Lord who is ever present with us make Abram's choice, that we may extend the Lord's kingdom on earth, making the hills of His presence our eternal abode.

Amen