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THE MEASURE OF A MAN

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Last week we talked about how Abram went down to Egypt and failed badly there. He got into trouble just as we do: one step at a time. He didn't start out by saying, "I want to endanger my life and my family. I want to ruin my reputation." No one does that! No one wakes up one morning and says, "You know, I think I just want to destroy my life. I want to end up drunk in a gutter somewhere, and lose my family, my job, my home, and everything else." A destroyed life starts with a bad step that goes uncorrected.

One of the really wonderful things about the Bible is that it shows us its heroes for what they really are. It doesn't gloss things over. It doesn't excuse the bad things or glorify the good things. It's one of the Bible's many attributes that assures us that the Bible is authentic history, not some kind of collection of myths.

Abram went down to Egypt, messed up, and took his lumps for it. Last week we drew the application that our reputation is important, and that is very true; but there is more to be learned! We can learn two very important things today: First, how a man of faith responds after a failure, and second, how we can truly observe the measure of our faith.

Let's start with Genesis 13:1-4:

And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south.

And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold.

And he went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Hai;

Unto the place of the altar, which he had make there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the LORD.

Remember, Abram is a picture of the man of faith—a living symbol of what we become in Christ. He left the old country by faith, picturing salvation. He journeyed to Egypt, a sign of the kinds of failures we encounter when we do not fully trust God. Now he is back where he is supposed to be, "where he had been at the beginning." What does he do? He worships. He gets right with God. He ends the backsliding and begins worshiping. He calls upon the name of the LORD in prayer. Furthermore, he is known by the name of the LORD—he is God's child. He knows it and the world around him begins to see it.

That is what the Bible does for us. Let me share with you a verse from the New Testament:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God [it is "God-breathed"], and is profitable for doctrine [what is right], for reproof [what is wrong], for correction [how to get it right], for instruction in righteousness [how to keep it right]:

That the man of God may be perfect [mature or complete], thoroughly furnished unto all good works (II Timothy 3:16-17).

Abram knew what was right, but got it wrong for a while. Now he's ready to get it right again and keep it right. That doesn't mean he'll never make another mistake, but it does mean he's making progress toward that maturity, that "perfection," that Scripture speaks of. He's correcting his missteps and taking the right steps again, in the light of his relationship with God. That's what it takes, folks! It's encouraging to me to know that when I mess up, God is right where I left Him. There are backslidden Christians who may stay backslidden for a long time, yet God is ever faithful. He will be right where they left Him. In the meanwhile, they can expect to continue to walk in darkness, stumbling and hurting themselves and others. Backslidden Christians need to go back to where they had been at the beginning.

We note also that God had indeed been faithful to Abram, even when Abram was not faithful to Him. God has blessed Abram, as He promised. Abram is a very prosperous person. Remember, material wealth is not a litmus test of God's blessing. It is one way that God may choose to bless a person, but it is neither the only way nor the best way; and we *cannot* make the mistake of thinking that great wealth is a direct result of God's blessing, because it may very well not be! There are many, many people getting wealthy right now by destroying the minds of our young people through the selling of drugs, alcohol, and pornography. Do you really think that money is a mark of God's blessing? No way!

And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea (Mark 9:42).

Let the wicked beware of God's judgment, and let the Christian be mindful of seeking God's true blessings.

I want to ask one question before we move on: "How can we Christians expect God's blessings if we are not willing to walk in His ways?" I say this because I've had some people—not members here, but other people—suggest that since we're a church, we can "cut some corners." Whether it's being in total legal compliance or copying software illegally or whatever, you know, some people will say, "Well, a church has got to do what a church has got to do." Folks, that's just wrong. If we're going to be called by Christ's name, we need to live and conduct all our business with integrity. What good is saving a little money crookedly if we are missing God's intended blessings? *"The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it"* (Prov. 10:22).

Lesson number two today is that the true measure of a man is what is in his heart. We can't see people's hearts. We think we can, but all too often we "see" what we *want* to see there. On the one hand, if someone has hurt us, or we just don't like them for some reason, we put motives in their hearts that may not be there. We say things like, "You're just saying that because..." and whatever follows the *because* is our judgment of their motive. That's the kind of judgmentalism that God does not allow. Besides, very often when we make that judgment, we are really projecting our own personal drives into that person. We're projecting who we are into him. In other words, when we judge others in that manner, we are often exposing who *we* are on the inside, not who *they* are. That is why someone has said, "Remember when you're pointing your finger that you've got three pointing back!"

On the other hand, if we like someone, we tend to see only their best qualities. This can also be a

danger because we may be missing some very important clues. “Love is blind,” right? But we say, “Oh, he’ll change after we’re married.” Or, “Well, he’s really a good kid at heart. He doesn’t mean to hurt anyone.” In the meanwhile, we excuse the bad behavior we see. It’s easy for a good girl to marry a bad boy (or vice versa) and it’s easy for parents to raise a menace to society by making excuses for what is in their hearts.

There is only One who is qualified to judge a heart, and that is the Lord Himself.

“But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: *for the Lord seeth not as man seeth*: for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

Only God can judge hearts. We can’t put motives into other people’s hearts. How then can we tell whom we should marry or how we should address our children’s behavior or anything else? God tells us that, too, in Luke 6:43-45:

For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes.

A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.

The key is to watch the lifestyle and see what patterns emerge. In other words, if someone did you wrong once forty years ago, is that a pattern? If someone hurt your feelings fifteen years ago, is that a habit? You tell me. If you’re holding a grudge against someone for something they did once, it’s time to let it go. On the other hand, if there is a regular pattern of deceit, fraud, abuse, or whatever, then you know you need to address the issue in Christ’s love.

With Abram, we begin to see what is in his heart. He really does love God. He’s not perfect. He messes up sometimes; but he has a pattern of godly living. Even though he put his wife in jeopardy (and he’ll do so again), he generally has a habit of valuing relationships both with others and with God.

On the other hand, as we look at this passage today, we begin to see what is in Lot’s heart. He is a godly man with a weakness to the world’s offerings. When he’s given the choice, he chooses the temporary pleasures of the world, and we’ll see the awful result of this in time.

Let’s read Genesis 13:5-13:

And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents.

And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together.

And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land.

And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren.

Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left. And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar.

Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other.

Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.

But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly.

I'm not going to belabor the story this morning. It pretty much explains itself. Because Abram and his nephew Lot had so much livestock, there were constant disputes over territory, watering holes, and so on. Abram valued his relationship with Lot and wanted to keep that relationship strong. He knew they needed to separate, but he gave Lot first choice. As Lot considered the offer, he thought about what would be easiest. "The plains of Jordan are well watered, rich grazing lands, which means easy living for me. I'll take that!" He gave no consideration at all to Abram's age. He took the best and easiest for himself.

This is the beginning of a pattern that emerges which will lead to Lot's great tragedy. Notice that Lot pitched his tent toward Sodom. Every morning, when he left his tent, what did his eyes behold? Sodom. He and his family are drawn to it. There's more to this story later.

The point for us is that we need to realize we are setting our own patterns. What are your habits? How are you known among your family or your co-workers? Do you have habits of godliness, or of selfishness? Are you judging people by one or two isolated incidents that occurred, or are you considering the whole record? How will others remember you when you're gone?

The Measure of Man

Not "How did he die?" But "How did he live?"

Not "What did he gain?" But "What did he give?"

Not "What was his station?" But "Had he a heart?"

And "How did he play his God-given part?"

Not "What was his shrine? Nor "What was his creed?"

But "Had he befriended those really in need?"

Not "What did the piece in the newspaper say?"

But "How many were sorry when he passed away?"

Was he ever ready with a word or good cheer,

To bring back a smile, to banish a tear?

These are the units to measure the worth

Of a man as a man, regardless of birth.

Author Unknown