Gravity – Part Three

# The Pull of Possessions

# (Genesis 13:1-18)

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church. We’ve been in a message series entitled Gravity: Finding Balance in God, and over the past two weeks we’ve looked at obstacles to the presence of God. In week one, we learned that the place is not enough, because it’s the presence of God that we need. In week number two, we discovered that prayer can easily become a duty and so we don’t want to make prayer the purpose of prayer, because prayer is merely the vehicle to come to the Father. And then, today in part three, I want to talk about the pull of possessions.

Today we’re going to look at some advice from God’s Word and I believe that God is going to use this to impact a lot of lives in a powerful way. In fact, I wonder how many of you would say that at one point in your life you were actually closer to God than you are today? In other words, there was a time when you were passionate about spending time reading the Bible, you would faithfully study God’s word, and God was speaking to you and you were being transformed. Or, you would always get the church early, wanting to serve, to sit in the front, and you couldn’t wait to worship. And so, your leaning in, you’re expecting to hear from God, but then somehow you cooled in your passion for the presence of God.

If there was a time in your life when you were closer to the presence of God than you are today, may I suggest that God isn't the one who moved. This is what I want to talk about today, it’s the pull of possessions, and we’re going to look at Genesis chapter 13 if you have your Bible or your phone, but if you don’t, we’re just going to put it on the screen anyway.

And so, you may remember in Genesis chapter 12, how the Lord called Abraham to leave his country and his people and go to the land he would show him. Now, it was that calling that included the promise that God would make him into a great nation, that he would bless him, that he would make his name great, and that all peoples on earth would be blessed through him.

And so, Abraham left Haran as the Lord had told him, taking with him his wife Sarai and his nephew Lot. Following God’s directions, they went south to the land of Canaan, but the Bible says that there was a famine in the land and so Abraham continued on from there to Egypt. However, it wasn’t long before he discovered that he would’ve been better off in a dry and thirsty land in the will of God, better off dealing with the conditions in Canaan, then dealing with the people of Egypt outside of the will of God. But God was gracious and he brought Abraham through that difficult situation and we read in Genesis chapter 13 that,

“Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, with his wife and everything he had, and Lot went with him. Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold” (Genesis 13:1-2).

Now, unfortunately these great possessions Abraham received in Egypt became burdensome and life became unmanageable. Both he and Lot discovered they couldn’t steward such great wealth together. In other words, it wasn’t just coin, but they had to manage servants, flocks, herds, and tents, and so the Bible says in verse six,

“The land couldn’t support them…. Their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. And quarreling arose between Abram's herdsmen and the herdsmen of Lot…. So, Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and mine, for we are brothers. Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left" (Genesis 13:6-9).

And so, both Abraham and Lot came out of Egypt with great possessions, but the problem was that Lot’s heart was centered on wealth, selfish ambition, and worldly achievement. This problem is identified in James chapter 4 where the Bible says,

“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? (James 4:1).

But Abraham only wanted to please God and so he determined to be a peacemaker and not a troublemaker. And so, he wisely encouraged Lot to go and verse 10 says,

“Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, toward Zoar. So, Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company: Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom” (Genesis 13:10-12).

Lot looked at all that was before him, but he only saw a deceptive view of it, because you could say that he was possessed by his possessions. He was deceived by his insatiable lust for self-gratification and he pitched his tents near Sodom a sinful city.

Verse 14 tells us, “The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you" (Genesis 13:14-17).

And so, Abraham had great possessions, he had a lot of stuff, but none of the stuff Abraham had, had Abraham. Therefore, God knew that he could trust him with more and this is important, because any time you’re possessed by your possessions, you no longer have them, but they have you. Your name may be on that title or the lease, but whatever it is, it owns you.

Now, I want you to notice in verse 18 what Abraham’s response was to the goodness of God. The Bible says,

“Abram moved his tents and went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he built an altar to the Lord” (Genesis 13:18).

You see, Abraham worshiped the Lord his God because he knew that every good and perfect gift comes down from heaven. And even though he had great possessions, his possessions didn’t have him, and so he honored God with a tenth of all that he had received and God gave him even more. The problem Lot encountered was that if God is not the center of your life, if you’re not daily seeking his presence, but instead your pitching your tents near Sodom, it’s hard to resist the gravitational pull of possessions.

## 1. Serving Something

And so, number one, you’re going to be tempted to serve your possessions, instead of serving God. You see, our spiritual enemy, Satan, is going to bring possessions, he’s going to put credit and money in front of you to try to distract you and keep you from God. You see, he knows that nothing offends the heart of God more than when we put something else before him. And that’s why our grip on our possessions is one of the best outward measurements of our inward spiritual condition.

In fact, the Bible is full of teachings on financial stewardship, dealing with money and possessions, because where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. And that’s why Jesus spoke so strongly in Matthew’s gospel saying,

"No one can serve two masters. Either he’ll hate one and love the other, or he’ll be devoted to one and despise the other. (And so, Jesus says,) You cannot serve both God and money” (Matthew 6:24).

And it’s interesting that of all the things that Jesus could’ve said, you know, you can’t serve God and power, or popularity, or selfish ambition, but he said, “You can’t serve both God and money”. In other words, Jesus tells us that the presence of God is choked in our lives by possessions. Look at what he said in Matthew chapter 13, verse 22 says,

“The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful" (Matthew 13:22).

In other words, money, wealth or possessions will choke out the words of eternal life; they’ll choke out your faith, making you unfruitful. And so, you need to foster the presence of God so that you can properly handle wealth. You need to entertain the presence of God so that you can be a good steward of your possessions. Because, you can have great possessions like Abraham, but anytime you like Lot give power to money, wealth, or possessions it’s difficult to resist the pull; they’ll overcome you, overwhelming you, possessing you, and dominating your life, choking out the presence of God.

But I want you to notice that it’s not the things themselves that choke, it’s the deceitfulness of wealth that chokes the presence of God. You see, the quarreling between Abraham and Lot arose because of their great wealth, the problem wasn’t because of the land or even their herdsman, it was a problem with Lot’s heart. You see, when we begin to elevate our possessions in our hearts, giving them power, and allowing them control, they begin to direct our lives and they deceive us, quenching the presence of God. And yet, it’s the Spirit of God that’s supposed to lead us, and it’s the presence of God that we need.

## 2. Losing Something

And number two, we need to lose some things, we need to lay some things down on the altar, because every person in the history of the world who’s been close to the presence of God will tell you that they’ve had to lay something down on the altar. Today, you’ve got to loosen your grasp, you’ve got to let go and put those things down before God, because whatever it is, it will choke the presence of God in your life. In fact, Jesus said it this way,

“Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it” (Mark 8:35).

And so, it’s not until you begin to lay them down that you begin to realize how much your possessions own you. But the moment you determine to give it up, to lose it, to lay it down, suddenly you actually have that car, that job, or that house, where before that whatever had you.

Can we stop choking the presence of God in our lives and instead allow ourselves the freedom to be led by the Spirit of God? You see, we don’t want to be controlled by our possessions like Lot was, but we want to follow Abraham’s lead as he was willing to lay down and sacrifice his most treasured possession. We find this illustrated in Genesis chapter 22, when God speaking of the son he’d promised Abraham, the son Abraham had waited for 25 years to know and love; it was of this son that God said to Abraham,

"Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering…" (Genesis 22:2).

Now, I want to state first off that culturally this was not unusual, to sacrifice your children to the gods was not shocking, but what stands out is that this was the son of the promise, that Abraham would be the father of many nations. However, I want you to notice that Abraham didn’t resist, he didn’t argue, but in obedience and in faith he took his one and only son, the son of promise, the gift of God, his prize possession, his greatest treasure; and he took Isaac and early the next morning, Abraham got up, saddled his donkey, and verse nine says,

“When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood” (Genesis 22:9).

Abraham was willing to lose his greatest possession, to give up his son on the altar, with the expectation that God was going to do something miraculous. He didn’t know what, but he obeyed and verse 10 tells us,

“He reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"…."Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you’ve not withheld from me your son, your only son” (Genesis 22:10-12).

Today, I want to encourage you not to be afraid that God’s going to ask you to lay something on the altar. Don’t be afraid that you might lose something, because God will provide. The Bible tells us in verse 13,

“Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide…" (Genesis 22:13-14).

Abraham willingly gave up his son, he tithed of his possessions, but it was only temporary because he got so much more in return. Prophetically, he considered everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord. On the other hand, we find Lot camping near Sodom, he’s lingering at the gate, he’s compromising his righteousness, and yet he would lose everything and he would lose it permanently.

In Genesis chapter 19, two angels came to Lot and said get your family out of here because we’re going to destroy this place. And yet, in spite of their urgency, Lot hesitated causing the angels to grab him and the hands of his wife and daughters to lead them to safety. Verse 17 says,

“As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, "Flee for your lives! Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away” (Genesis 19:17).

Now, Lot had lost his possessions before and Abraham had retrieved them for him, but now he was about to lose them a second time and this time it was going to be permanent.

Today, if you’re possessed by your possessions, you already don’t have them, and so it’s just a matter of time before they’re gone. And so, let’s not be so attached to our possessions that we can’t let go, but instead let’s be attached to the presence of God. You see, in verse 24, the Bible says,

“The Lord rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah …he overthrew those cities... But Lot's wife looked back and she became a pillar of salt” (Genesis 19:24-26).

You see, Lot and his wife held on to their possessions, they were possessed by their possessions and ended up losing everything. And yet, Abraham had great possessions and gave a tenth of all that he had, even offering his one and only son, and today there are 2.3 billion sons of Abraham on the earth. And so, I want to encourage you to never be afraid to be generous in the presence of God, because he’s not greedy and he’s always good.

## 3. Pursuing Someone

And that’s why number three, we want to determine to pursue the things of God. If you find yourself in bondage to your possessions, anything that’s keeping you from being connected to the presence of God, anything that’s distracting you from loving and pursuing God, anything that’s keeping you from prayer, keeping you from feeding on the Word that would transform you, and keeping you from pursuing the presence of God you’ll want to lay it down, whatever it is and offer it as a sacrifice. You see, we don’t want to fall into the trap or the temptation of halfhearted commitment to Jesus, because the Bible says it this way,

“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15).

And when he says “the world” he’s referring to a system that’s in competition with God. Honestly, it could refer to anything but God, but Jesus said it best when he said,

“You cannot serve both God and money” (Matthew 6:24).

And so, you don’t want to be in love with this world, selling out on what’s important to get more and more of this world only to find yourself in bondage to your possessions.

Today, I don’t know what it might be for you, but if there was a time when you were closer to the presence of God, you need to recognize that he didn’t move. If you’re recognizing that you’ve drifted from God and you’re feeling a little bit of conviction that’s a good thing, because that means you haven’t hardened your heart. And so, if you’re feeling some conviction that means that the Word is falling on good soil and the Holy Spirit is speaking to you. Jesus said it this way in Matthew chapter 13, he said,

“The one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown." (Matthew 13:23).

Some of you may be recognizing that at one time you were really passionate about pursuing God, but honestly right now you’re more attracted to your stuff. You know, there’s this pull toward maintaining your possessions. And so, what do you do when you recognize that you’ve drifted away from God because you’re controlled by your possessions?

Well, I think the words of Jesus in Revelation chapter 2 are particularly applicable if there was a time when you were more passionate about the presence of God. In verse five, Jesus said,

“Remember the height from which you have fallen…” (Revelation 2:5).

And maybe that’s where some of you are right now, you hadn’t even really noticed, but there’s been this gravitational pull drawing you from the presence of God. And so, Jesus very pointedly says to consider where you were and where you are today and then he says,

“Repent and do the things you did at first” (Revelation 2:5).

In other words, you turn around, you return to God, and you do what you did at first. Now, I don’t know what you did at first, I don’t know what that means for you, but you remember the height from which you have fallen and you turn and do what you did at first.

In other words, you feel it from the very depth of your soul and you’re going to crave something more, something better, because you want to experience the presence of God again. No longer do you want to be possessed by your possessions. You don’t want to give yourself to the things of this world; and above all you don’t want to neglect the God who sent his son for you. You want to put him first, you want to be filled with his spirit, because you remember your first love. And so, you want to be led step-by-step living your life to glorify the one who gave his life for you. And when you draw near to him, he always draws near to you, and so we want to do the things that we did at first.

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