

SLIDE 1

Faith's Solution to Strife

Genesis 13
Lazy Mountain Bible Church
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“Then Abram said to Lot, “Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen.” (Genesis 13:8, ESV)

Introduction

How do you respond when someone wants something that belongs to you? Or when someone claims something that has been given to you.

Do you say, “That is OK, you can have it.”

Or do you say, “That was given to me, it is mine, now get off my land.”

Today, God is going to teach us how a person of faith resolves conflict. It is by faith.

Let's read:

Genesis 13

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“So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the Negeb. Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. And he journeyed on from the Negeb as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai,” (Genesis 13:1–3, ESV)

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“to the place where he had made an altar at the first. And there Abram called upon the name of the LORD. And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, so that the land could not support both of them dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together,” (Genesis 13:4–6, ESV)

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“and there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram’s livestock and the herdsmen of Lot’s livestock. At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites were dwelling in the land. Then Abram said to Lot, “Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen.” (Genesis 13:7–8, ESV)

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“Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left.” And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.)” (Genesis 13:9–10, ESV)

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“So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan Valley, and Lot journeyed east. Thus they separated from each other. Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom.” (Genesis 13:11–12, ESV)

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“Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the LORD. The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, “Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward,” (Genesis 13:13–14, ESV)

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“for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.” (Genesis 13:15–16, ESV)

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“Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.” So Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there he built an altar to the LORD.” (Genesis 13:17–18, ESV)

SLIDE 10 – WHAT IS FAITH’S SOLUTION TO STRIFE?

Part 1

Today we want to look at how a person of Faith responds when there is strife? We want to find the solution—because all of us are fussed up with someone from one time to another? How do we respond to strife as a person of faith?

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- DO WE CURSE?
- PLOT REVENGE?
- DO WE GRUMBLE INSIDE?
- DO WE TOSS AND TURN IN OUR SLEEP GOING OVER A MYRIAD OF POSSIBLE ACTIONS WE CAN TAKE?
- DO WE MAKE “VOWS” – LIKE, “OK, IF THAT IS THE WAY IT IS WITH THIS PERSON, I WILL JUST AVOID THEM.”
- DO WE END THE RELATIONSHIP, OR STEER THE OTHER WAY.
- DO WE USE THE “SILENT TREATMENT?”
- DO WE SEEK SUPPORT FOR OUR POSITION BY TELLING OTHERS?

THERE MUST BE SOME OTHER WAY? THANKFULLY THERE IS, AND ABRAM SHOWS US TODAY.

SLIDE – TITLE SLIDE

We saw last week how Abram became a very wealthy man. Pharaoh, mistakenly thinking that Sarai was Abram’s sister, because Abram had perpetuated that lie, gave Abram an abundant amount of wealth producing items, cattle, sheep, servants, and then we Pharaoh discovered the lie Abram had thrust upon him, he sent him away with his wife and all his new belongings.

So we see in today’s text Abram returns to the very place where he built an altar on the place where God had told him to stop. We presume the famine is now over. So what does Abram do?

“So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the Negeb. Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. And he journeyed on from the Negeb as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place where he had made an altar at the first. And there Abram called upon the name of the Lord.” (Genesis 13:1-3, ESV)

Abram returns to the place where God appeared to him, the place where he had built and altar, and there he worshipped the Lord.

I think there is something here for us. Think back to your last big fight with someone. Did it ever enter your mind to call on the name of the Lord? Did it ever enter your mind to worship God as the first step in working through the strife?

It just doesn’t, does it? And yet, early on in history, that is what the man of faith did. That is part of Faith’s Solution to strife:

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Call upon the name of the Lord

It is hard to imagine a bigger point of conflict than when you are in strife with the head of state. Abram was in strife with Pharaoh over his wife! Talk about pick your battles.

So Pharaoh orders Abram out with all of his possessions, and

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Abram strategically retreats to the side of the Lord.

But it is not a passive thing. It is active.

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“So Abram went ...to the place where he had made an altar at the first. And there Abram called upon the name of the Lord.” (Genesis 13:1-3, ESV)

Abram worshipped God, or called upon the name of the Lord, which is the wording that the book of Genesis uses to refer to man worshipping God.

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“To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD.” (Genesis 4:26, ESV)

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“So Abram went ...to the place where he had made an altar at the first. And there Abram called upon the name of the Lord.” (Genesis 13:1-3, ESV)

Notice that Abram’s worship is active, not passive and that worship at this point is active not passive.

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qara
To call, proclaim

The verb form is Qal Active singular masculine third person.

Now this made me pause for a minute. It got me thinking. What is my worship like? Is it active or passive. Is it something I pursue, or think of in passing?

How about yours? How would you characterize your own worship? Active or passive, a spectator or a participant?

And then I thought, how many people would I identify as an active worshipper of the Lord? How long would your list be?

Why do you think so many of us don't worship actively like Abram did? When you worship, do you call upon the name of the Lord, is it active like Abram did? If not, why not?

And then I asked a question of myself, that I wasn't sure I liked the answer.

How has our worship impacted our children as they have watched us?

And I began to wonder if the reason some of our children have abandoned worshipping beside us in church is because we are not active in our worship like the Abram and Seth and Noah and the other Patriarchs were. And I wondered if our children notice this pattern of worship in Scripture, and say, "Well, Jesus taught, you can't pour new wine into old wineskins", and choose to go to another church or start a another church which is active in its worship like Abram was?

It is an interesting question, considering that the churches today that are not active in their worship are declining, while those that are active in their worship are thriving.

The conclusion one might reach from this is:

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If you are not active in your worship, spiritual decline is around the corner.

My assumption is that I am in a Bible Church because we want to conform our lives to the pattern of the bible, and the pattern of the bible is active worship like Abram's.

Part 2

So let's go move on.

Now comes another problem and here it is:

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The prosperity of God's people may bring strife.

What happens is that Abram, the man of faith, is now a man of great wealth. Lot is now a man of great wealth. And so with more wealth often comes a sense of entitlement—have you ever noticed how the room hushes often when a wealthy person enters? For some reason we equate wealth with privilege and entitlement. It was true in Jesus day, because he warned

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“Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, “When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, ‘Give your place to this person,’ and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”” (Luke 14:7–11, ESV)

So the attendant needs of wealth lead to strife--bigger tractors, bigger barns, more fields—in fact if you look at some of our Alaska battles, most of them have to do with the needs of wealth.

We see this today as it was in Abram's day right here in our own state—we are wealthy and have land, an homes, and autos, and tractors, and businesses—and to have these things you have to have steel, and copper, and lead, and oil. So our wealth has attendant needs. It doesn't do much good to have a tractor or auto without fuel, so we battle about where the fuel is going to come from. It doesn't do much good to have a home, if you don't have lights and heating, which takes fuel and electricity, which requires gas, or fuel oil, or coal.

So just like Abram and Lot, our wealth is not measured in livestock and servants, but in square footage, acreage, and transportation.

Our wealth has needs and so arguments arise, “not in my backyard” that will effect my house values and lifestyle—get your fuel from somewhere else. Not in my backyard, get your electricity from somewhere else.

What do we do when it is our wealth that brings strife between neighbors?

Abram shows us. But may not be spiritually mature enough for the answer—here is what Abram shows us:

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Strife can be settled by the generous actions of those living by faith.

Because, those that walk by faith can be magnanimous. Magnanimous is just a big word for generous, and noble.

The wealth is there—animals need to eat, and a lot of animals need to eat a lot, but there is not enough, so Abrams servants and Lots servants start to fight.

Enter the man of Faith, Abram, with a solution.

He says:

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“Then Abram said to Lot, “Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen. Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left.”” (Genesis 13:8–9, ESV)

Now wait a second. Whose land was it? Who had been given the land by God? Abram or Lot?

Abram had.

So why didn't he say, “Lot, here is the deal, God appeared to me, right at this spot, and told me all that I could see is mine. You are just going to have to move on and find another spot, there are lots of places you can choose, but this is mine.”

Abram teaches us a principal—

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Relationship is more important than ownership rights.

Think back to your present or last conflict—my guess is at some point it can find its source in ownership rights.

Abram teaches us that a person of faith can give up those ownership rights in order to keep the relationship primary.

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In other words—

stuff should never triumph over peacemaking.

Jesus said, “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*”
(Matthew 5:9, ESV)

What war wasn't primarily over stuff.

Civil War—slaves

WW II—Land

Revolutionary War—taxes and ownership

My own family—do you know what it was? A plate. One person grew up thinking, “When mom dies, I will get that plate in the Curio Cabinet.” The other person thought the plate was their right of inheritance.

And do you know to this day we no longer share Thanksgiving, or Christmas or other times together?

What started it all? An argument over who gets grandma's plate.

Do I dare ask for other testimony here? How many of us in this room have had our families ripped apart by strife over stuff.

So what does the person of faith do? Let's see:

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“Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left.”
(Genesis 13:9, ESV)

And so Lot takes the best, or so his eyes tell him.

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“And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan Valley, and Lot journeyed east. Thus they separated from each other.”
(Genesis 13:10–11, ESV)

Now there is a caveat here. Lot's eyes deceived him. He didn't realize, in the fertile land was also the seed of wickedness,

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“Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the LORD.” (Genesis 13:13, ESV)

This will come back to destroy his family, and take the life of his wife. But that is for another day.

The warning is:

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Those who walk by sight can be deceived.

So what is there for Abram? God wants us to make sure we don't miss this:

The generous actions of the faithful, receive the approval of the Lord.

When you put relationship over ownership because of your faith—God sees.

And in Abram's case, God blessed him because of his generous actions.

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The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, “Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward,” (Genesis 13:13–14, ESV)

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“for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.” (Genesis 13:15–16, ESV)

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“Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.” So Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there he built an altar to the LORD.” (Genesis 13:17–18, ESV)

And so, God's promise remains with the faithful. And the faithful, guess what, respond to God in active worship!

Has Abram's situation changed? Yes, he is now not in the most productive and fertile part of the land. But He has the promise of the Lord, and that is enough.

The application for all of us reading this chapter is clear:

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1. Analyze your latest conflicts
2. Determine how you can be generous in the conflict, putting relationship over ownership, because of your faith in God
3. Graciously grant the other person the best of the stuff, and you worship God with all your best.
4. Leave the results to God.

Amen