

Introduction

Many of the online games have game restarts. If you get eaten or beaten, no big deal, you simply go back to the starting point and start playing again. One popular game played today is Agario, a game with dots. As your dot eats smaller dots, it grows bigger. The object is to eat up everyone else in the game and be the biggest dot. You can play with partners and help one another.

Partners are able to feed one another from their own mass and then take out other dots that are not as big. If you get accidentally eaten by your partner, no big deal. The game continues and you get to start over and rejoin your partner.

There are times in life that are like the game of Agario. When you get eaten or beaten, you have another chance to start over and get it right. I went to Houston a few weeks ago to take my recertification test. I failed the test. In my case, since I am not one of our regular instructors, our business has gone on without interruption. I get to go back to the starting point, and try again. We did a debrief of what I missed, and I have been studying all the regulations. Hopefully when I go back to Houston next week I will get the necessary score to get recertified.

That is where our text begins today. Abram is back at the same place he was before he went to Egypt. He did not disclose to Pharaoh that Sarai was his wife, and Pharaoh took her to be his wife. The Lord intervened and sent a strong plague on Pharaoh and his house. He understood that this was the hand of God and sent for Abram. He confronted Abram and said, "Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, 'she is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Then, Pharaoh gave Sarai back to Abram and told him to go. He did more than just tell him to go. He had his men escort him away. Abram got run out of Egypt for his lack of full disclosure, or truthfulness. The Greek word for truth is *aletheia* (Strong's G225), which means nothing hidden or concealed. Abram had told the truth that Sarai was his sister; she was his half sister. But he had hidden a significant detail, that Sarai was his wife. It was the protection of God and His grace that Abram was not put to death by Pharaoh. Abram is fortunate to get a do-over.

(Gen 12:18-20) "Then Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? {19} "Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife, take her and go." {20} Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they escorted him away, with his wife and all that belonged to him. {13:1} So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, he and his wife and all that belonged to him, and Lot with him."

Abram was escorted out of Egypt and went back to the Negev with his wife, Sarai, and all that belonged to him, and Lot. If you recall from last week, Negev means the south country. It was to the south and to the east of the Dead Sea. It was a very arid land that only received a little rain during the spring. It could not support much livestock, particularly during the dry months of summer and fall. That is where our passage ended last week and where we are starting this week.

Our passage today has an introduction, where Abram goes back to the starting block. His last efforts did not work out so well. In our introduction, we are given some information that sets the stage for the next scene, the conflict between Lot and Abram. After resolving the conflict, we go back to the starting blocks and the Lord speaks to Abram, re-iterating the promise he had made earlier, and He also gave some clarification about the promise.

1. Back to the Starting Blocks (Gen 13:2-4)
2. Resolving The Conflict (Gen 13:5-13, Matt 5:23-24)
3. Encouragement and Direction (Gen 13:14-18)

1. **Back to the Starting Blocks (Gen 13:2-4)**

(Gen 13:2-4) “Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold. {3} He went on his journeys from the Negev as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, {4} to the place of the altar which he had made there formerly; and there Abram called on the name of the LORD.”

Abram has just been escorted out of Egypt and has returned to the Negev, which is a dry, desolate place that will not support much life, either people or livestock. We have three things that are working against Abram at this point. First, Abram is very rich with livestock and Lot also has livestock. Second, they are in a desolate place that won't support much livestock in normal conditions. Third, they are in a severe drought, which only makes things worse. So, Abram continued on his journeys from the Negev as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai.

You might recall that the name of Bethel at that time was Luz, which means almond (Gen 28:19). I don't think that Abram intended to stay in the Negev when he left Bethel, and he didn't intend to stay there when returning. Abram's intent was to go to Egypt where there was not a severe famine (Gen 12:10). That plan did not work out so well, so Abram comes back to the last place where he had built an altar and called on God. He went back to the starting blocks and did a reboot. He was going to call on the name of God. I am sure that his conversation included some desperate cries to God, “What do I do now? Where am I supposed to go now? You told me that You were going to bless me and show me where I was supposed to go, so tell me. It is quite normal for us to call on God when we get in trouble.

In prison ministry lots of men called on God. They have a term for it, “jailhouse religion.” When men hit bottom, they call on God. They said the garbage can outside the prison entrance was full of Bibles. I liked to work with the men after they got out of prison. I helped them find jobs, cars, places to live, and tried to continue mentoring them. One of the men that got out was named Tommy. He was a carpenter, and when he got out, our church bought him some new tools and helped him get started again. But, his disposition changed when he got out; he no longer wanted to meet with me. He did not want to do Bible studies or to go to church. I told Karen that Tommy would call me again, but it would be a collect call, meaning that it would be from the jail. I was right. About six weeks later I got a collect call from Tommy and he wanted to start meeting with me. It is quite normal to call on God when we get in trouble.

Abram was in trouble and he went back to the altar that he had built and was going to call on the name of God again. But something came up. A problem came up, and I don't know if Abram was able to present some sacrifices and call on the name of God or not before addressing the problem. Let's read on.

2. **Resolving The Conflict (Gen 13:5-13, Matt 5:23-24)**

(Gen 13:5-8) “Now Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. {6} And the land could not sustain them while dwelling together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to remain together. {7} And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. Now the Canaanite and the Perizzite were dwelling then in the land. {8} So Abram said to Lot, "Please let there be no strife between you and me, nor between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers.”

Abram was wealthy with flocks and herds, and Lot also had flocks and herds. The Canaanites and Perizzites are also dwelling in the land; they are the primary inhabitants of the land. Abram and Lot are getting whatever land is left over. Abram's shepherds and Lot's shepherds were quarreling over the pasture land. It says that the land could not sustain them while dwelling together. So, something needed to be done to resolve the strife and conflict. Abram has come back to the altar to call upon the name of the Lord, but he must take a time out and first deal with this problem.

In Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus gives some instructions about situations like this. He said that if you are presenting your offering at the altar and remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering before the altar and go get reconciled with your brother. Afterwards, come and present your offering.

(Matt 5:23-24) “Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, {24} leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.”

Abram had gone back to Bethel, to the altar that he had built, and was going to call upon the name of the Lord again. But, there was a conflict between his herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen. So, we go from the altar where Abram had called upon before in verse 4 to resolving the conflict in verses 5-12. Finally, we get to God speaking to Abram in verses 14-18. There is definitely a break in Abram's meeting with God to deal with the strife.

God wants His people to live in harmony. He does not want unresolved conflict. In fact, God says that getting things resolved with our brother is a higher priority than presenting your sacrifice at the altar. God wants us to come before him with a clean heart. There is a song that was popular called “Come, Just As You Are.” I believe if you are talking about salvation the song is theologically correct. If you are talking about worshiping the Lord, the Scriptures are very clear that we are to worship the Lord in holy attire. We are to worship the Lord after having been reconciled with our brother.

Many years ago I was pastoring a church in Atlanta, and I arrived early for our service so I could be there for worship practice. One of the guitar players came in and I could see on his face that he was troubled. I asked him, “John, what is wrong?” He said that he and his wife had been fighting all morning. My next question was, “Did you get it resolved?” He looked down and shook his head no. I told him that he needed to go home and work things out. I added, if you get things resolved in time for church, great, but if not, you are doing exactly what God says to do in Matthew 5:23-24. I shared the Scripture with him and prayed for him.

Let's continue reading and see how Abram and Lot settled the strife.

(Gen 13:9-13) "Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me; if to the left, then I will go to the right; or if to the right, then I will go to the left." {10} Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the valley of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere—this was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah—like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you go to Zoar. {11} So Lot chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward. Thus they separated from each other. {12} Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the valley, and moved his tents as far as Sodom. {13} Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the LORD."

Abram took a very humble approach. He considered Lot more important than himself. Even though God had promised the land to him, he gave Lot the first choice. Abram was going to be the one that all nations were blessed through. That promise had not been given to Lot. Lot was a tag-along. But, Abram gave Lot the choice of which land to settle on. Abram took the less desirable land in order to settle the strife. Abram laid down his rights in order to settle the strife.

Let's take a minute to look at the choice that Lot made. God gave us the book of Proverbs to help us grow in wisdom and discernment. In Proverbs 2:11-15 God says that, "*Discretion will guard you, understanding will watch over you, {12} to deliver you from the way of evil, from the man who speaks perverse things; {13} from those who leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness; {14} who delight in doing evil and rejoice in the perversity of evil; {15} whose paths are crooked, and who are devious in their ways;*" God wants to deliver us and keep us from the way of the wicked. He wants us to stay clear of the paths of the wicked who walk in darkness. He gave us wisdom, discretion, and understanding to help us stay away from them.

God wants us to make wise choices in life. We are to choose integrity over wealth. It is better not to have wealth that requires us to walk with the wicked. God says in Proverbs 1:13-15, "*We will find all kinds of precious wealth, we will fill our houses with spoil; {14} throw in your lot with us, we shall all have one purse,*" {15} *My son, do not walk in the way with them. Keep your feet from their path,*" It would be better to stay away from the paths of the wicked. Lot chose to dwell in their cities. He did not stay away from the paths of the wicked.

In Proverbs 19:1 God says, "*Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity Than he who is perverse in speech and is a fool.*" In Proverbs 19:22 God says, "*What is desirable in a man is his kindness, and it is better to be a poor man than a liar.*" In both of these Proverbs we are given the value of integrity over wealth.

Abram gave Lot a choice. Let's look at the information given about the choice. The valley of the Jordan was well watered everywhere, but it says that the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the Lord. Gomorrah was near Sodom and it was also exceedingly wicked. Lot chose to dwell among the wicked in order to have greener pastures. He chose wealth over integrity. He chose to walk among the wicked. These were not wise choices. To the world, it looked like he made a great choice, but from wisdom's perspective, it was not the best choice. We should always choose integrity over wealth. Proverbs says "*it is better to be a poor man than a liar.*" Lot did not lie, but he chose to live among the exceedingly wicked people to get better pasture land. Always choose integrity over wealth. Lot should have stayed away from the path and not settled in the cities of the wicked.

3. **Encouragement and Direction** (Gen 13:14-18)

(Gen 13:14-17) “The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, “Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; { 15 } for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever. { 16 } I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered. { 17 } Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you.”

After the strife had been resolved and Lot had separated from him, the Lord spoke to Abram. Strife interferes with our ability to hear from God. Strife wears us out. Strife preoccupies our minds and distracts us. Now that the strife is over, Abram is in a position to call upon God and hear from Him. This is a continuation from verse and four, where Abram returned to the place of the altar where he had called on the name of the Lord. Our text does not say that he was at the altar, but I believe that God is responding to Abram’s prayers. I believe that Abram called upon the name of the Lord and said, “Where do I go from here? What should I do now? You said this land was going to be for my descendants, but what about me? What about right now? Lord, show me Your plans for me.”

(Gen 13:4) “to the place of the altar which he had made there formerly; and there Abram called on the name of the LORD.”

The Lord says several important things to Abram. First, he gives him vision. At Shechem, God said He would give the land to his descendants. Now, God tells him that He will give all this land to him and to his descendants. The emphasis now is “I will give it to you.” It is no longer just for his descendants. God tells Abram that He is going to give it to him and to his descendants. God tells Abram to lift up his eyes and look out in all four directions. God wanted Abram to see the land. This is clearly talking about vision. It is good to have a clear vision before you start moving forward. Before someone starts making plans, it is important to know what the objective or goal is. Our plans are there to help us accomplish the objective. God gives Abram clear vision, this is your land, “for I will give it to you.”

In Zig Ziglar’s Book, *Born To Win*, he writes, “*Famous archer, Howard Hill won all of the 267 archery contests he entered. He could hit a bulls eye at 50 feet, then split first arrow with the second. Would it be possible for you to shoot better than him? YES, if he were blindfolded! How can you hit a target you can't see? Even worse, how can you hit a target you don't even have!? You need to have GOALS in your life!*” You not only have to have goals, but you have to see them. God told Abram to lift up his eyes and look to the north, south, east, and west, and to see the land that God was giving to him.

The second thing that God does is give Abram his next step to take. He told him to “Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you.” God wanted Abram to see the land, and then to walk the land. We are not told in our text why God had him walk the land. In Joshua 18:8, Joshua told the sons of Israel to walk through the land and describe it. God may have wanted Abram to describe the land. In sales, it is important to get customers to touch or feel the product. They are far more likely to buy something that they have touched or held. Car salesmen want you to take a test drive a car. There is a connection between touching and owning. I believe that God wanted Abram to take ownership of the land He was giving him.

One year when I was living at our farm in Georgia, a man who had a particular ministry came to visit me. He wanted to know if he could walk the property, and I told him that would be fine. After walking it, he said that this was his property. He said that God was going to give him all the land that he walked on. He was taking this passage that God had spoken to Abram, and applying it to his life. I told the man that I had paid for the land, and if he paid me money for the land, he could indeed have it. But until then, the land was my land. We can misapply scriptures sometimes, which is what this man had done. God had already promised the land to Abram, and his walking the land was not a condition to receiving it. Walking the land was a specific thing that God wanted him to do.

I believe the primary reason for Abram walking the land was to know his inheritance. God wanted him to know the inheritance He was giving him. He wanted Abram to know the boundaries. He wanted him to know the topography and the geography. He wanted him to know what He was giving. It was not just seeing the land from afar, but to take an indepth look at what God was giving him.

In Acts 20:32, Paul commends us to read God's word. He wrote, *"And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified."* God wants us to read His word so that we will know our inheritance.

Peter writes about that inheritance in 1 Peter 1:3-4. He said that Christ has caused us to be born again to obtain an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, will not fade away, and is reserved in heaven for you. We have a great inheritance, and God wants us to know about it.

(1 Peter 1:3-4) "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, {4} to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,"

The writer of Hebrews wrote about it, saying that Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant so that those of us who have been called may receive the promise of an eternal inheritance.

(Heb 9:15) "For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance."

Paul wrote a lot about our inheritance. In Ephesians 1, he said that we have been predestined to receive an inheritance. He also said that the Holy Spirit has been given to us as a pledge of our inheritance.

(Eph 1:11-14) "also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will... {13} In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, {14} who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

Paul does not stop there. In Ephesians 1:18, he prays that the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened, so that we will know the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. I believe that God wants us to know our inheritance.

(Eph 1:18) "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,"

I believe that this is why God had Abram walk the land. Consider Hebrews 11:8, "*By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.*" God wanted Abram to know his inheritance, just as He wants us to know our inheritance.

The third thing that God does is encourage Abram. He reiterates the vision that He will make Abram a great nation. God was going to give him descendants, and not just a few. His descendants would be like the dust of the earth. Just as the dust cannot be numbered, his descendants would not be numbered. A few weeks ago we looked at Abraham, the father of faith. Paul wrote that those who are of faith are the sons of Abraham.

(Gal 3:7-9) "Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. {8} The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU." {9} So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer."

In Matthew 10, the Lord sent out the apostles and told them to preach the gospel and to heal people. Then, in Matthew 10:14, He said, "*Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet.*" In other words, if people did not receive the gospel message and become sons of Abraham by faith, they were not part of the dust of the earth. The apostles were to shake the dust off their feet signifying that they were not included in the descendants of Abraham.

After the Lord spoke to Abram, he moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron. Notice what the first thing that Abram does. He built an altar to the Lord. Worshiping the Lord was a priority to Abram. It was not an event in the past; it was a lifestyle. He was going to regularly give sacrificial offerings to the Lord. He was going to regularly call upon the name of the Lord. In three different places Abraham is called the friend of God. (Is 41:8, James 2:23, 2 Chron 20:7) Abraham had a relationship with God. He spent time with God. We will see in upcoming messages that God came to Abraham and discussed things with him.

(Gen 13:18) "Then Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and there he built an altar to the LORD."

Conclusion

This morning, what has God been speaking to you about? Has he been speaking to you about laying down your rights and resolving conflict? Has He spoken to you about the priority of resolving conflict? Jesus gave the principle in Matthew 5:23-24, but God gave us an example to follow in our text today. We need to resolve matters with our brothers so that we can have undistracted devotion and worship of the Lord. Let me encourage you to make this a priority.

Has the Lord spoken to you about vision? God gave our church a vision. We are the Connection Church. We help people connect with God and with one another. God wants us to love Him with all our heart and to love our brothers as ourselves. The way that we are connected to God and to one another is through God's perfect love. We also have been given a mission. I believe that we have been given a territory in Albuquerque. I have mapped it out, and like Abram, I am walking the neighborhoods.

Maybe this morning, you have come and you want to become part of the Connection Church. We are just getting started, just like Abraham. We are at the starting blocks, and we have been building an altar, a place to offer our sacrifices. We offer our time, our talents, our finances, our praises and thanksgivings, our very lives as sacrifices to Him. If you want to journey with us, we would welcome you to be a part of this new work.

Let's pray.