

Vision Check

Genesis 13

Introduction.

Historians believe that the ancient Chinese were the first to use eyeglasses as early as the 11th century A.D. The first certain historical record of lenses being used for optical correction comes from the 13th century Europe. By the 15th century glasses were being regularly used in Italy.

500 years later we are still wearing eyeglasses. Of course, our eyewear is more sophisticated and the technology behind them much more advanced. In addition to glasses, we also use contact lenses. And in the last few years, we have developed surgical techniques such as radio-keratotomy that actually reshape the eye.

Our eyewear today not only serves a medical purpose, but makes a fashion statement as well. You can spend hundreds of dollars for frames with a certain designer name, or gold plating. You can choose contact lenses that change the color of your eyes.

But none of these things obscures that reason why we have eyewear to begin with. It is because we have vision problems. Most people do not see perfectly, and most of us reach a point in our lives where we have to do something about it. Although some of us are slower than others. It wasn't until I had to squint just to see someone across the room that I gave in. And even then, I tried to squint my way through my driver's license exams. It was something about that word, "restricted."

But our most important vision problems are not in our eyes, but in our hearts. But unlike physical vision, we can't just put eyeglasses on our heart and correct our spiritual vision. According to the Bible, all of us have a heart vision problem. The prophet Isaiah declares.

We look for light, but all is starkness; for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows. Like the blind we grope along the wall, feeling our way like men without eyes. At midday we stumble as if it were twilight; among the strong, we are like the dead. -Isaiah 59:10

Our Lord Jesus confirms that we suffer from a lack of spiritual vision:

The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! —Mt. 6:22-23

It is true that when we become Christians that God does corrective heart surgery, and removes our spiritual blindness. It is true that we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and He gives us new spiritual vision. But that vision can suffer from a lack of care or attention. There are many believers that have spiritual nearsightedness or farsightedness. There is always the danger that we will look at things with our earthly vision, rather than with spiritual vision.

In Genesis 13, we see a time in Abraham's life that shows the contrasts between earthly vision and spiritual vision. There we see the hidden dangers of earthly vision and the unexpected reward of spiritual vision. (Read Genesis 13:1-4)

¹³ *So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the Negeb. ² Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. ³ 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, ⁴ to the place where he had made an altar at the first. And there Abram called upon the name of the Lord.*

We see Abraham returning from Egypt. He is coming back to where God has called him. We have seen that Abraham by nature was not superior to the general run of humanity, who do not hesitate to lie to gain an advantage or avert a danger. The faith that one day was to plow ocean waves could not now wade across a tiny creek. But now that Abraham is going back to where God has called him and he begins to look at things with a renewed spiritual vision we see that faith begin to blossom. Abraham begins to trust in God and not view things in earthly terms, but in terms of only what is possible with God. He's back to worshipping God and calling on the name of the Lord. It is this sort of intimacy with God that enables spiritual vision. (Read 13:5-13)

⁵ *And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, ⁶ so that the land could not support both of them dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together, ⁷ 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.*

⁸ *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. ⁹ 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." ¹⁰ 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.) ¹¹ So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan Valley, and Lot journeyed east. Thus they separated from each other. ¹² Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom. ¹³ Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord.*

We see here how earthly success can sometimes threaten spiritual vision. The whole problem here didn't arise until they had experienced success. All of Lot's possessions began to cloud the way he looked at things. He saw things only in terms of their earthly importance. Earthly success can create the illusion that everything is under or control, and that we don't have to depend on God.

God would warn Abraham's descendants of this very spiritual danger in Deut. 8:11-14.

¹¹ *"Take care lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, ¹² lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, ¹³ and when your herds and flocks multiply and your*

silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, 14 then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery,

A rich, powerful young man once turned from following Jesus. He couldn't answer the Savior's call for his heart was fixated on his many possessions. Jesus warned his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven." Earthly success has a way of capturing the heart's vision, and not letting it see anything else.

Look at verse 10. We see here the essence of earthly vision. He lifts up his eyes and looks, and he only judges things in earthly terms. He was thinking only of the bottom line: a lush valley with lots of pasture land, lots of room to move, plenty of water, close to the Sodom and Gomorrah metropolitan mall.

But as Lot's eyes filled themselves with the earthly value of the valley, he did not consider the spiritual cost. He was blind to the spiritual threat, because he was so narrowly focused on the earthly success. Vs. 13 tells us the people of the valley were very wicked, great sinners against the Lord. But that didn't figure into any of Lot's calculations in his decision making.

Lot didn't give any consideration to the moral temptation or spiritual impact on his family. Vs. 7 also throws a curious sidelight on the situation when it mentions that the Canaanites and Perizzites were in the land. These people were enemies of Abraham, and would remain enemies of his descendants for many centuries. Whenever we start relying on earthly vision the enemies of God are always ready to take advantage of us.

What have you sacrificed spiritually, for earthly gain? Do you focus on the earthly value without weighing the spiritual cost? When you make decisions for yourself and your family, do your calculations consider the moral and spiritual value of the things?

I've seen Christians move to a dream house that is far from a good Bible teaching church. They swear they will drive the 40 or 50 miles necessary to go to church each week. That lasts for about 6 months. A Christian father takes a new job with a bigger paycheck, but it means he will be almost nonexistent in his children's lives. They will lose the godly influence of a good Christian man. They will learn the lesson that money and career matter more than anything else. By the time his kids are in college, they've all learned the lesson well and have dropped out of church.

A young Christian lady marries a man because he is fun, good looking, and on a successful career path. He doesn't share her faith, but she doesn't think it matters that much. A Christian family spends \$20,000 a year to send their child to the prestigious university that systematically tries to undo everything they taught him for 18 years.

These are all examples of pursuing the earthly value without weighing the spiritual cost. It doesn't have to be just the big decisions. We can do this in a dozen smaller ways every day. We're given too much change by a clerk. Our phone rings and it is someone we really don't want to talk to, so we lie and make up a reason we can't talk for long. Our kid is watching and knows we just made something up. For five bucks or five minutes of time, we pay a big price in honesty and integrity.

Also notice that Lot's decision was essentially selfish. Verse 11 says *"So Lot chose for himself..."* That is a very telling phrase. Lot was thinking only of himself. (Read 14-18)

¹⁴ *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,"* ¹⁵ *for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever.* ¹⁶ *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.* ¹⁷ *Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you."* ¹⁸ *So Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks[b] of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord.*

We see here a new kind of vision. Before with Lot we saw how he lifted his eyes and saw things with an earthly vision. But here God asks Abraham to lift his eyes, and to look, but not on earthly terms, but God wanted Abraham to see things the way God saw them. Spiritual vision is just that, seeing things as they can be with God involved.

Spiritual vision uses a whole different set of values and criteria. Spiritual vision realizes that the bottom line is not the bottom line. There are more important things. Whereas Lot was selfish in his decision, Abraham valued his relationship more than he did his possessions. Spiritual vision holds loosely to the things of this world.

For this reason, spiritual vision is able to make earthly sacrifices for more important things. Abraham was able to give up the better land, because he realized things were in God's hands, not his own.

H. A. Ironside once told of an experience he had in early life where his mother took him to a meeting where two Christian men nearly came to blows in a disagreement. One man pounded the desk and shouted, "I don't care what you do, but I will have my rights!" At that, an old man, hard of hearing, leaned forward and cupped his hand to his ear. "Eh? What's that? What did you say, brother? Your rights is it? Is that what you want? Ah, brother, if you had your rights you'd be in hell! The Lord Jesus didn't come to get his rights- he came to get his wrongs, and he got them." And with that the belligerent fellow flushed and sat down saying, "You're right, you're right, settle it any way you like." You see that one thing that spiritual vision sees is that in losing, we often win.

The short term result of Lots choice was good. He got the choice land. The immediate result for Abraham was uncertain. But we see the reward. God speaks to Abraham. This is the first time since he left for Egypt. There is an intimacy with God that results from spiritual vision.

We see in this passage two distinct ways of looking at life: earthly vision and spiritual vision. How do you look at the world? What kind of vision do you have? What kind of vision do we have as a church?

John Richardson has said that in regards to the future, there are those that make it happen, those that let it happen, and those that wonder what happened? How about you? Peter Sengy said, "That in the absence of a great dream, pettiness prevails." We need to dream big dreams that are only possible with God. We need to see a world where things are possible if God is in them.