

The Separation of Abram and Lot

Rev. C.G. Vreugdenhil – Genesis 13: 10-18

Sing: Psalter 73:1,4,5,6

Read: Galatians 3: 1-18

Sing: Psalter 161:1,3,7,8,9

Sing: Psalter 152:1-3

Sing: Psalter 439:3,4

Congregation, this morning we wish to consider the portion of God's word that we read in Genesis 13, verses 10 through 18. The theme for this sermon is, *"The Separation of Abram and Lot."*

This history reveals two totally different lives; namely in:

1. The choice of Lot
2. The path of Abram

1. The choice of Lot

Congregation, take notice of the great difference as we compare verse 10 with verse 14. Verse 10 says, *"And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan"* and all the beauty of it. While in verse 14 we read, *"And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:"*

Do you notice the critical difference? Lot lifts up his eyes *himself*, in a greedy and selfish desire. Abram also lifts up his eyes but he does it at the command of the Lord. Lot lays a claim for himself whereas Abram freely receives everything from the Lord. Lot only sees what appeals to his eyes but Abram sees beyond all that with the eyes of faith. Do you see these two different inclinations here before you? On the altar Abram builds it is written, *"and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it."* Whereas above the gate of Sodom is written, *"For whosoever will save his life shall lose it."*

Do you see them standing there on the hill in the vicinity of Bethel? The two men stand there, with their hands to the forehead as they shield their eyes from the glaring sun, gazing intently into the distance. Together they have journeyed to the Promised Land. Now they stand there and they look out over the land that is in front of them. To the left is the fruitful valley of Jordan. To the right are the dry barren mountains.

And then suddenly there is that generous offer of Abram, *“Lot, is not the whole land before thee?”* Lot, you may choose first. If you go to the left, I will go to the right. And if you say, *“I will go to the right”* then I will go to the left.” What an offer! It makes one speechless, don’t you think so? What will Lot do? Will he decline Abram’s offer, even out of politeness or else indeed out of genuine respect? Does Lot know his place? No, he eagerly grabs at Abram’s generous offer. After all, he did offer it, didn’t he? And this is about business, isn’t it?

Lot gazes into the distance and beholds a wide panorama. He sees the fertile Jordan valley. The eyes of Lot are constantly drawn to that one direction. He no longer even so much as glances to the right, towards that barren mountain landscape. He only looks at the fruitful plains. That plain entralls him. That succulent greenery of course attracts him. That land smiles invitingly at him and captivates him.

Just read verse 10, *“And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere -- and I will just skip a piece here -- even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar.”* That is certainly an exceptional piece of land! Lot looks at it with longing eyes. But...with eyes that do not take God into account. Lot goes with what his eyes see. The plains of Sodom: such a promising area, such a fruitful land! It resembles even the Nile Delta in Egypt! Perhaps you have an idea what the Nile Delta looked like and how fruitful it was as a result of the yearly flooding of the Nile. That is just how the plains of Jordan are: many streams nourishing the land and making it very fruitful. Lot sees something like Paradise before him.

Yes, something like Paradise, but...and I skipped a piece of the text, a subtle, but also gloomy piece and that is: *“before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.”* Yes, this plain was like that, *before* the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. So in these words we hear already a distant rumble of God’s

impending judgement on these wicked cities. But Lot did not hear it. Take careful notice of that!

And so Lot chose the entire plain of Jordan as his possession. He probably saw his chance to be independent and free. His freedom had always been curtailed and this was his chance! Some boys and girls think that too, don't they? Freedom! Imagine to be free from your parents! No longer under the watchful eyes of your parents! Free! Well, actually that is the ideal for many people. Likewise, Lot goes for freedom.

And yet, Lot is not really free at all when he makes his choice. Do you know why? Because he chooses in bondage to his lust. His eyes are fixated on the fruitful plains and captivated by the luxurious comfort that those distant cities afford. Those plains have arrested him and the devil, as it were, throws sand in his eyes. Lot only sees the material gain. He does not perceive at all the spiritual and moral dangers that he will meet up with. Freedom? Forget it! Lot is a slave.

Do you know who is truly free? It is Abram! Because he says, "Lot, you may choose first; it makes no difference to me. You go to the left? I will go to the right. You go to the right? I will go to the left." Abram is truly free because God and His promises are his portion, and that is the source of his life. Abram could say, "I have my God, He is sufficient." Abram is bound to God and that is true liberty.

Lot, however, is a slave of his own lust and coveting. His choice is worldly in the deepest sense of the word. The Bible warns, "*But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition*" (1 Timothy 6:9). That is what the Bible says of the craving for riches and the history of Lot is a sad example of it. Calvin remarks, "Lot thought that he was about to enter into paradise but in reality he entered into the forecourts of hell." All this because the power of lust was driving Lot. Through his choice he leaves behind the Promised Land, abandons the promise of God, removes himself from the brotherly relationship with Abram and from the blessings of the God of Abram.

Lot chooses wrong. We read in verse 11 "*Then Lot chose him...*" or, "*chose for himself.*" He chose for material advantage and this way he ultimately exchanged the promises of God for it all. True, he did journey with Abram in the hope of a blessing but, when they had arrived in the land of promise, it

actually seemed to be a big disappointment because they remained strangers in the land and continued to live in tents. He had thought the blessing of the Lord meant, for example, success, but it turned out not to be like that at all. And now he saw his chance. He even had a perfect excuse. After all, the land could not accommodate them living together with their flocks. Without any problem he could now say farewell to Abram, even though that meant a separation from Abram's altar, a separation from Abram's promises and from Abram's God.

Lot is completely blinded. He doesn't see the spiritual and moral dangers that he is going to face. Lot, how can you ever be happy in Sodom? Don't you know that the men of Sodom are wicked men and that they commit great iniquity against the Lord? Lot, you will vex your righteous soul there! Can't you see it?

Yes, but you know, there's also Lot's wife and his two daughters. They also wouldn't mind a change. City life is much more appealing than a nomadic tent life. And it will soon become apparent how Lot's wife's heart is totally with Sodom and his daughters become infected with the sins of Sodom. What a dreadful failure this is going to become for Lot! *"Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death"* (James 1:15). This all to do with the choice Lot made.

Congregation, what do you think of the choice of Lot? "Well, yes" you might say, "after all that I have heard, of course I can no longer really say much good about it." You're right. But now also make the application for your own life. If you only choose for wealth, money, honour, career opportunities - and fill the list yourself - then that will have consequences for your spiritual life, should you actually have that in the first place! Also, your family will bear the consequences! Because it is not an indifferent matter where we bring our family and what an example we ourselves give. And what shall it really profit a man if he would gain the whole world but lose his own soul?

After all, verse 13 says, *"But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly."* It is a dangerous place to move to. If you move somewhere you always need to ask: Is there a church? Is there an altar? Or is it only a place of ungodliness, a God-less place? Young people, you must also carefully consider that. If you complete your education and begin to apply for jobs or are getting married and are looking for a house, what will be the place

where you are going to live? Be on your guard when you are to make these decisions. Remember that we are fully responsible for our choices. Maybe you think, “Don’t worry, I will be careful.” But what about your children? Will they be careful too?

Where did Lot bring his family? Lot stands as a beacon at sea. The land that Lot chooses lays outside of Canaan. Away from where God reveals His covenant. May I ask you, does that still have value for you? Boys and girls, young people, does God’s covenant and His revelation have value for you? Consider your baptism. Have you possibly joined the enemy while you bear the mark and ensign of the Lord Jesus Christ? When God laid upon you the sign of His covenant He separated you from the world and included you in His church. God said, “I give to you that you do not grow up in the world which is going to perish. Instead, you may belong to My church, safely inside the boundaries of My covenant. There I have given My Word, there I am, and there I will reveal Myself to you for your eternal salvation.”

Do you still come faithfully to church to hear the Word of God? Some young people would rather move out and leave their parents. More liberty, less control! But what will you gain with that? Will it not bring you to places where the people are very evil and great sinners before the Lord? Do not choose the evil places: the bars, the cinemas - and you can complete the list of such places yourself - places where God is grieved. Know what you are doing, young people, when you do not come faithfully to church, when you do not bother to come to catechism, when you no longer read your Bible, when you pray less and less, and when everything in your life more and more starts to look like Sodom. Be warned that Sodom was destroyed and that this world shall perish. Are you ready to meet God?

What happened that Lot ended up in this sad condition? To be sure, the change happened gradually. That is always how sin works. It is a slippery slope. It began with looking, as we read in verse 10, “*And Lot lifted up his eyes.*” Just looking at it - yes, that is how it began, the same as with Eve. Eve only *looked* at the forbidden fruit. David only *looked* at Bathsheba. But looking became desiring and desiring became choosing.

Congregation, what do you look at? Do you watch DVD’s a lot? Or YouTube or NetFlix? I’m just asking. Do you simply watch everything or are you very selective in what you place before you and your children? “Yes, but we

shouldn't be ignorant, right? We need to know what's going on in the world, don't we?" Yes, that is what Lot thought too. True, his soul cringed when he saw all the bad stuff; his family, however, just took it all in and enjoyed the sin of Sodom.

That is how it goes, congregation. Lot is a beacon at sea for us. Be warned, because such a life goes from bad to worse. Again and again it will take the *next* step. Lot began with looking, verse 10. Then he went on to choose for himself, verse 11. After that he left Abram. No, by grace, he himself did not break with the God of Abram, but his posterity did. The Moabites and the Ammonites became enemies of Israel. They lived totally estranged from God and His covenant. When Lot left Abram he took his whole posterity with him. What a wonder of divine grace it is when you read later of Ruth, one of those Moabites, a descendant of Lot, that she was taken by the Lord and brought back to the land and descendants of Abram.

Looking, choosing, choosing wrongly, leaving Abram... And do you know what the next step is? This: Lot pitched his tent toward Sodom, verse 12. Continually he moves his tents. But the peculiar thing is that it was always pitched in one direction, toward Sodom. It is just as if that city entices him. When Abram disappeared out of Lot's life, it was as if a switch was turned in Lot's life. He totally lost his spiritual balance. That mysterious attraction of Sodom became increasingly stronger.

And then comes the next step. First his tents were still pitched outside the gates of Sodom, but in chapter 14 verse 12 we read that he lived inside the city. Over time, he became a rich man who could afford to purchase for himself a luxurious house within the gates of Sodom. A city with a bad name, a city of transgression where the inhabitants had seared their consciences shut with a red hot iron.

Lot, how can you live like that? Congregation, if 2 Peter 2: 8 had not confirmed that Lot was a child of God you would not believe it. It is clear that the sins of materialism and world conformity are also issues in the lives of God's people. You think you're free from them? We had better not ignore and reject these warnings. Who can put his hand into his own bosom and take it out clean? How dangerous to live in Sodom! Why? Because the sword of God's judgment already hangs above it. Oh, how wrong Lot was in his choice! He only

thought in a carnal manner. Worldly thinking will only cause grief. Lot only looked at the outward appearance.

Lot goes further still. He not only goes to live in Sodom but in chapter 19:1 it appears that Lot even advances to sit as an elder in the gate of Sodom. He is a member of the city council of the most ungodly city of that time. The number of righteous people living in Sodom was too small to have a representative in the city council and yet Lot sits there! Do you see the ongoing backsliding in his life?

Do you know what the result of all this was? Instead of the Garden of Eden that Lot now sees before him, Sodom will prove to be the forecourts of hell. He will lose his wife, his sons-in-law, his possessions, his riches, everything! As a destitute man he will see all of his riches being consumed by the flames of judgment that will engulf Sodom. Soon he will spend his last days in a desolate cave in the vicinity of Zoar where he even falls into the sin of incest. And his descendants, the Moabites and Ammonites, become enemies of Israel.

What a serious warning sounds from the choice of Lot! Personally he was saved by a wonder of God's grace, but only as through fire! His soul was saved, but his life was far from being to the glory of God.

That was the choice of Lot, with everything that resulted from it. Let us now proceed to our second thought:

2. The Path of Abram

Congregation, we see Abram sitting there on the mountain after Lot has gone. Notice the profound pain in that short sentence, "*after that Lot was separated from him.*" Pain, in the first place, because of Lot himself. What will become of him? Lot separates himself much further away from Abram than what was really necessary. He alienates himself from Abram. They had lived together for so long and had shared joys and sorrows but now they are separated. Such pain!

It is not the first thing that has been cut away from Abram's life. Like axe blows it had come, "*Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house*" (Genesis 12:1). But still he always had the company of Lot. Until now. Now Abram also loses Lot. Abram is left all the more alone. Abram now really has to place his trust solely upon the Lord. Do not think that

that was easy because Sarah did not yet have a son. And the thought that he could possibly adopt his nephew Lot as his own son has now also evaporated. How is Abram going to proceed now? Let us ask him.

“Abram, how are you? How are things going for you?”

“Well,” says Abram, “here I am, privileged to live in the land of Promise. True, the mountains here are quite dry and barren but it is Canaan. God is present here. This is the land that the Lord has promised me. And even if I have to sojourn on the mountains and live in tents, God’s promise has more value to me than all the riches of this world. The Lord has said to me *“I will bless thee.”* That is sufficient. I have my God and He is all that I need.”

“But Abram, do you not notice that the pastures on which you have to feed your flocks are quite poor?” “Yes, I know,” Abram answers, “I can see that, but still it is far better to be near to God on an arid mountain than to live without Him in a fertile plain. Yes, my life is becoming all the more solitary, but it is a solitude in which I may experience communion with God. And that secret communion with the Lord I do not want to miss and would not want to exchange for anything. In the pain of the separation with Lot I have retained the Lord. And truly, believe me, I do not think that I have been short-changed. God provides for me, also now in the sorrow of this separation.”

Now that Lot has left him Abram lifts up his eyes, upwards, on high. And we see and hear, as it were, the sigh of his heart ascending up to God, “Lord, where art Thou? Without Thee I cannot go on. Lord, confirm Thy word to my soul, say unto my soul *“I am thy salvation.”* Lord, I desire to be blessed by Thee only.” As it states in Psalter 74: 2

*“Thy face, Jehovah, will I seek
Above all else beside”*

What a wonder! The Lord answers prayer in such circumstances! We can read that in the verses 14 and 15, *“And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.”*

Can you see that the Lord is mindful of Abram? The Lord knows all things, congregation, and He is especially mindful of us when we suffer sorrow and

pain. In the afflictions of life, He knows where to find us and He always comes at the right time.

God pours a soothing balm into the wounded soul of Abram. Particularly at *that* moment, after Lot had left Abram, the Lord says to him, “*Lift up now thine eyes.*” Intentionally, just at this time, the Lord confirms to Abram his calling and election and graciously repeats His promises to him. In His message to Abram God grants him, as it were, His approval of the manner in which he has treated Lot. The fact that the Lord again reveals Himself to Abram is a proof that He supports him, that He will maintain his cause, and grants him to experience His favour and presence. And that is exactly what Abram stood in need of. Lot has left him, but God will accompany him into the future.

Actually, the Lord does not say many new things to Abram. He repeats to him a promise that He already had made before. Yet this is not just a pointless repetition. Do not say, “Abram knew these things already long ago!” Oh, God’s children at times strongly desire that the Lord confirms His own given word time and again. Don’t you crave the weekly preaching of the word, child of God? Don’t you long for the continual proclamation of the promises of God? That never gets boring. Or is it different with you? Luther said that we need to hear them proclaimed over and over again. Do you recognize that, also in your own life, that prayer, “O God, may I once again see and believe that Thou knowest of me”?

Is that how you came to church this morning? Did you pray before you came? Did you pray for the minister or for the elder who has to read? Do that always, but you also need to pray for yourself. Did you say, “Lord, may I meet Thee once again in Thy house? May I again see that Thou knowest of me? Wilt Thou repeat and confirm to me what Thou hast promised?” What God has spoken to our soul needs to be repeated and confirmed again. Do you know why? Because we cannot hold on to it; that is why God always repeats and confirms what He has once said.

“Abram, lift up your eyes, I am still there, I am still your God! My child, I will provide for you! I will fulfil everything that I have promised. This land, all this land that you can see from this mountain top at Bethel, I will give to you and to your seed.”

Congregation, notice how this repeating and confirming message of the Lord contains actually more than what the Lord said to Abram at previous

occasions. There is something that makes the promise clearer, something that expands on it. The revelation of God becomes deeper and richer.

The Lord first spoke about “*a land*,” (chapter 12:1). Then it became “*this land*,” and now the Lord says, “*all this land*.” Do you see that each time the promise becomes clearer, that each time it becomes fuller? Abram receives progressing instruction from the Lord. And there is even more, because God first said, “*go unto a land that I will shew thee*.” Then He says, “*Unto thy seed will I give this land*.” And in this chapter the Lord says, “*For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever*.” Abram and all of his seed, the people of Israel, shall possess the land as a perpetual inheritance. Abram may travel through the length and the breadth of the land as the heir of it all. Do you see how that the riches of God’s promises to Abram steadily increased at each revelation of the LORD to Abram?

And so it is still. God’s children need to have their insight deepened and their knowledge must increase. We know but so little! How precious when the Lord reveals Himself again so that we may find more in Him and increase in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. Not only in the steps of His humiliation, as the Child in Bethlehem’s manger and as the Man of Sorrows on the cross, but also to know Him in His exaltation as the interceding High Priest at the right hand of God the Father, Who is fully satisfied with the sacrifice of His Son. It is vital that we keep learning more and more and keep digging deeper into His Word as that is the means through which God reveals Himself, also in our own lives. The deeper we dig into His Word the more riches we will receive.

All of this land is for Abram and his seed, and that forever. He receives it through *the* Seed of Abram, the great Son of Abram. You will understand that Abram must have been extremely happy and encouraged with this revelation of God. Just when it was so difficult for him he was given to experience: the Lord provides for me.

Let Lot have wealth and prosperity, but Abram may here receive a better portion. He receives God, His promises, His favour, His faithfulness and His Son. Therefore, Abram did not lose with Lot’s departure, instead he gained. Although he had no son, yet the Lord’s promise is, “*Unto thy seed will I give this land*.” Then there is nothing more but to say, “Lord, that’s all I need; Thy Word. For Thou art not a man that thou should lie.”

Congregation, this very same God is here present in this worship service. The God who says, *“I will.”* Those who trust in that Word and in the Lord Jesus Christ and upon the promise of the Gospel shall never be put to shame. In this Word the Lord God promises the forgiveness of sin. Is that what you long for? The forgiveness of all your sins, is *that* the issue for you? After all, that is the greatest benefit a person can ever receive. The Lord promises it in His Word, in the promises of the Gospel, that everyone who believes in the crucified Christ will receive the forgiveness of all their sins. They shall not perish but have everlasting life.

The Lord promises the renewing of your life and eternal salvation. In His Word He invites, just as He did to Abram, *“Come unto Me, hear and thy soul shall live”* and *“him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.”* Congregation we may lay our hand on those words. Those words we may keep in our heart and say, *“Lord, Thou art the fulfiller of Thy Word; do then as Thou hast said.”*

Now, at a time when Abram has become lonelier than ever and Sarah evidently appears to remain barren, now, at this delicate moment, God repeats and confirms His promise to childless Abram. Consider what the Lord says in verse 16, *“And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.”*

One must experience a hot summer in Israel after it has not rained for half a year to really understand the expression, ‘the dust of the earth.’ Who can count a handful of particles of dust? No one! Let alone in a whole land of dust. And now God says, *“and so shall thy seed be!”* Unbelievable! Yes, but not to be doubted, because it is the Lord Who says it. It is also not an exaggeration. Yes, one would be able to count the people of Israel, but here it not only refers to the natural seed of Abram, it also concerns all those who are of the faith of Abram as they too are the children of Abram and heirs of the promised inheritance.

Finally, we read in verses 17 and 18 that the Lord says to Abram, *“Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee. Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord.”*

There goes the great wanderer! With every step it resounds in his soul, *“Unto thy seed will I give this land.”* And so a Psalm wells up in his heart and

we hear the wandering pilgrim and stranger singing *“What time I am afraid I put my trust in Thee; In God I rest, and praise, His word so rich and free”*

Come, let us sing it too: Psalter 152 verses 1,2 and 3:

*What time I am afraid
I put my trust in Thee
In God I rest, and praise
His word, so rich and free.*

*In God I put my trust,
I neither doubt nor fear,
For man can never harm
With God my helper near.*

*In God, the Lord, I rest,
His word of grace I praise,
His promise stands secure,
Nor fear nor foe dismays.*

“In God I put my trust, I neither doubt nor fear, for man can never harm with God my helper near.” In this way Abram is enabled to go on after Lot had separated himself from him and after the Lord had so richly encouraged him by confirming and enriching His promises to him. Abram’s entire journey through the Promised Land was, as it were, one great exercise of faith. An exercise in trusting and hoping solely upon the word of God.

Have circumstances changed for Abram? Are the barren hills suddenly just as fruitful as the plains of Jordan which Lot chose? No, but the Lord is with him. He has said, “Abram I will provide for you.” There is such a big difference between receiving something *from* the Lord or using something *without* the Lord. Abram looks with eyes that have been enlightened by faith. Those who so look, first look to the Lord and then at what is around them.

Abram may see something of the riches of the love of Christ that exceeds knowledge. Yes, in the distance, beyond the hills of the Promised Land, Abram sees a city emerging. No, not Sodom, but another city, a city which has

foundations and whose Builder and Maker is God the Lord. We know that from the Epistle to the Hebrews. Abram sees the new Jerusalem, the Holy City, where no discord will ever be heard. There Lot will never be led astray by selfish thirst for more. There Abram himself will not behave foolishly as he did previously in Egypt. There all tears shall be wiped away. Everlasting joy and happiness shall be on their heads. That City is in sight! There Abram will be able to lay his shepherd's staff down forever at the feet of the Lamb. And the Lamb shall feed him. Congregation, would you not be longing for that City?

Abram looks up and with enlightened eyes of faith he beholds the heavenly Canaan. Being in such a frame, Abram considers everything that the Lord does is good. Now Abram has peace with everything, with the portion that he receives, "I have my God. He is sufficient!"

A few moments ago I addressed the youth. But do not think that such trials apply only to young people and that it is only they who are surrounded with temptations. It applies just as much to those in their forties and fifties and even to the elderly. There is no one who will be able to say that they are free from these temptations. We all have to make choices and so often we make the wrong ones.

But do you know when the choice becomes so easy? When we may see the Land of Immanuel and the great Son of Abram. Then we say, "Yes Lord, it is good; if Thou art there then all is well," and we have peace in all circumstances.

In this way Abram may go on with life, also with his daily work. After this encouragement Abram may again receive the strength to continue with his daily calling. In verse 18 we again read: "*Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord.*"

Hebron is the new place of Abram's abode. He stays in the Promised Land. Lot goes to Sodom, Abram to Hebron, the place where he has stayed the longest. That is also the place where he was buried. There he worked, traded, grazed his flocks and herds, and also established contacts. His manner of life there commanded respect from those who lived around him, because he established some good relationships with the heads of the local people. Think of Mamre, Eshcol, and Aner of whom we read in the next chapter. All things

begin to work together for good. Abram is encouraged and so he can continue with his daily work.

He lives by the oak trees in Mamre. In Mamre stood a large sacred tree, a holy tree for the superstitious Canaanites. In Shechem there was also one of these immense trees that supposedly declared to the people what the will of the gods was. Such a tree was in Hebron too. Abram builds his altar right next to it! For Abram there is no other option but to serve his God!

Actually, that is what we would have expected from him. He cannot live without an altar. Do you know why? Because he cannot live without the Lord. The altar in Mamre is a public confession of his faith in the Lord like it was in Shechem. He is not ashamed of serving the Lord. What about you? Are you ashamed of the Lord at your place of work?

At every place he dwells, Abram builds an altar. There he calls upon the name of the Lord. He maintains the worship service of the Lord. In the service of reconciliation at the altar Abram calls upon the name of the Lord in submission and thankfulness. Time and again Abram would go to these altars. There he humbled himself before his God confessing his sin and guilt. There he sought and received forgiveness. There he received peace with God. There he experienced the blessed communion with the Lord. There he expressed his devotion to the Lord and experienced his dependence on Him. There he also beseeched the Lord to fulfill His promises, because, congregation, that is not something to be taken for granted. Yes, from the Lord's side it is sure. He is faithful. However, He wants to be asked for it. When we have sinned all our rights away and have become totally unworthy of anything, we will plead with Him, "O Lord, in spite of all my unfaithfulness, be Thou the faithful One."

There, at the altar, Abram has given thanks, has believed, and has praised his God. Yes, the entire life of Abram at the altar can be summarized in just two words: prayer and worship. Also for his posterity that yet had to be born. His entire future he has laid in the hands of his God. Abram continually sought to be at the altar. Do you know of such a life at the altar? In this manner Abram went from altar to altar: Shechem, Bethel, Hebron.

You do not read that Lot raised an altar to the Almighty God in Sodom. That was the saddest thing in his life. To live apart from God is death. But Abram could say, "I make Thee my refuge, my Lord and my God."

Congregation, do you know something of such a life before the altar? A close life with the Lord can only be exercised at the cross of Christ and before the throne of grace. It is only there that forgiveness of sins is received. That is where faith is strengthened, reconciliation is experienced, and peace is tasted. When you are upon your knees before the altar, praying and worshipping this adorable God, you learn to know the Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous. There the promises of God are found to be true and are applied to the heart.

Even if you would be all by yourself, just as Abram was, even if you would no longer be able to participate in the culture and mind-set of the world within which you live, even if you would become estranged from your own family and friends, yes, even if you would have to fight against your own flesh and blood, at the altar you will nevertheless receive the strength and encouragement to go on. At the altar you may yet sing, *“For God as our own God forever will abide, And till life's journey close in death will be our faithful Guide.”* At the altar we may lean upon the promises of God's covenant, also for our children. We may rest upon what God has said, *“Jehovah's truth will stand forever, His covenant-bonds He will not sever.”*

Be very active with that, congregation. We have not deserved anything. We have sinned everything away. But there is an altar, the cross of Christ. He, as the interceding High Priest, has taken the offer that He himself has wrought into the Holiest Place with His pierced hands. Plead upon that cross, plead upon Psalm 72, *“His name shall endure for ever: His name shall be continued as long as the sun.”* Bow then before the Lord and say, “Lord, may it also be for my children? All of them.”

Finally, I have to pass on one more special invitation that proceeds from that altar of Abram, from that cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Do not become as Lot. Do not become a friend of the world, but associate yourself with Abram! “Yes,” you may say, “but Abram is buried in Hebron. Can Abram still be of any help to us?” Not Abram himself, but his Seed can! His Son, that one particular Son, his great Descendant to Whom all the land eventually is promised to possess it eternally: Christ the great Son of Abram.

If we may call upon the name of the Lord in such a manner, before the altar that speaks to us of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice, then, as Paul says in Galatians 3, the inheritance of Abram also becomes ours. In Christ and for the

sake of Christ there is a Promised Land for all eternity. The seed of Abram of whom we read in verse 15 receives its deepest fulfilment in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Galatians 3 which we read together, you can see what Paul means when he speaks of the promises that were given to Abram. We read in verse 16, *“Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.”* Look, there you have it. Here we read it, Abram and his children. Yes, all those who are of the faith of Abram are his children and heirs of the promises. We read in verse 9, *“So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.”*

So Abram’s altar points us directly to the cross of the great Saviour. He had no ground on which to stand. He became a curse. He only had a cross. That was His altar, the altar of the cross upon which He has offered Himself unto death. Oh! Jesus, the Man of Sorrows! He was consumed by the curse of God’s wrath, because, *“cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.”* His sacrifice was a voluntarily sacrifice, He did it all out love. In love He submitted Himself unto death, even the death of the cross.

Congregation, if God spared not His Own Son, but gave Him over to the death of the cross, shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? What things? Eternal life, heavenly Canaan, reconciliation. Yes, Paul says in the last verse of this chapter, *“And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”*

Do you see, congregation, that it always comes back to the same big theme, *“if ye be Christ’s...”* The communion with the Lord Jesus Christ through faith is what counts. Abram could not do without it. Can you? If you can do without it, disaster will befall you! Because outside of this communion with the Lord Jesus Christ, by faith, there is no life but only eternal destruction of your soul. Outside of Christ there is indeed also an inheritance waiting for us. We read about that in Galatians 3 as well: cursed under the law! The impending wrath will then fall upon us. It will be terrible to fall into the hands of the living, unreconciled God! And consider, that is for all eternity!

Oh, how much better it is to fall into the pierced hands of the great Son of Abram, Jesus Christ and Him crucified, who also in this service stretches out His hands to rebellious sons and daughters. If you may love this crucified Surety,

you are safe for all eternity. Then you will love Jesus so dearly that you will say, *“Whom have I, Lord, but Thee on high?”* No one! Because, *“Thou,”* O Lord Jesus, *“art my rock that naught can shake. In life and death, Thou are my stay, my strength, my portion, Lord, for aye.”*

Amen.

Concluding Psalter 439:3,4

Verse 3

*Whom have I, Lord, but Thee on high?
None else on earth can satisfy
But Thou, O God, my soul's deep yearning;
For Thee my troubled heart is burning.
Though flesh should faint and heart should break,
Thou art my rock that naught can shake;
In life, in death, Thou art my stay,
My strength, my portion, Lord, for aye.*

Verse 4

*All they who wander far from Thee,
Will perish in their misery;
Thou hast destroyed the carnal-hearted,
Who from Thy covenant-ways departed.
But unto Thee, my God on high,
'Tis good for me that I draw nigh;
I'll trust Thee, Lord, through all my days,
And publish all Thy works and ways.*