

Settling for Eliezer

Hespeler, 13 March 2022 © Scott McAndless – Lent 2

[Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18](#), Psalm 27, Philippians 3:17-4:1, Luke 13:31-35

First of all, let me make one thing perfectly clear. There was absolutely nothing wrong with Eliezer of Damascus. He was a very nice young man. And Abram had felt very close to him ever since he was born to one of the slave girls in his household. He was reliable, trustworthy and had risen until he became the steward of all of his master's possessions. So long as Eliezer was managing things, Abram rarely had to worry. He knew that, no matter what, the man would do well in life.

So, Abram certainly knew that he could do a whole lot worse than to pass down all of his possessions to such a fine young man. There was only one problem, despite the rumours that unfortunately did still persist in the household, Eliezer was *not* his son. He did not carry his blood and would never be able to carry his name. And Abram had held onto the hope that someday he would be able to have a child of his own body who would be able to carry on his true legacy. He had thought that it was something that God had promised him that he could have and he had clung to that promise beyond all reason. But maybe it was time to re-evaluate that.

Past the Point of Hope

Abram was seventy-five years old now. Sarai, his wife, was closing in on sixty-five. It was now way past the point where you could call Abram hopeful or optimistic. We were now talking in terms of him being downright delusional. So, he had finally made the decision. He was going to call in some of the local elders as his witnesses and make the formal declaration that Eliezer would inherit everything when he was gone. He kept telling himself that this was just wisdom and prudence. He wasn't settling, he was embracing a new and *realistic* possibility. It was the right thing to do. It was a good thing to do. But, no matter how often he told himself that, he just couldn't quite bring himself to believe it.

An Eliezer in your Life

And I can't help but wonder today whether you might have an Eliezer of Damascus in your life. And please understand me that I'm not talking about a person in your life, or at least not necessarily a person. I am more wondering whether there's not a situation in your life which is an Eliezer situation. Is there something that you are settling for? Now, remember that in this story Eliezer is not a bad option. In fact, he seems to be a pretty good option. He is someone who would do a pretty good job as an heir of all of Abram's goods. He's just not the best option. He is not what Abram has always dreamed of, and



he's not the fulfillment of what God has called Abram to be.

So, what is the good thing in your life that you have settled for instead of doing what, somewhere deep down inside, you know is really the best thing? Obviously, this is a very personal question. It is also not something that anyone else can decide for you. But perhaps you know of something in your own life that just doesn't quite measure up to what you know it could be. Have you opted for some job or for some activity not because it's what you know you should be doing but just because it seemed like the safest option to go for? Or maybe you have settled for a certain level of knowledge or a certain proficiency even though you know that you are capable of more.

Why it's Sometimes Necessary

Now, there are all kinds of reasons why we make these sorts of decisions. And they may be very good reasons. There may be a real need to embrace the safe option for a time because you need to give your family some stability, for example. That is perfectly legitimate. But it also doesn't mean that you need to stay with the safe option forever.

Or perhaps think of it in these terms. We have been living through some very difficult times for the last two years almost to this very date. And as a result of that, we have all made some choices. And those have been very good choices. It is good to stay home and not socialize in certain ways when there's a great danger that you will spread a dangerous illness if you do so. It was a good choice for people not to come to church in person. And there are all kinds of other good choices that people have made. I don't really need to go on and make a list here because I know that you have all been making these kinds of choices again and again over the last couple of years.

If you are like most people, you have likely also fallen into certain patterns to manage the stress of these unusual times. Perhaps you have indulged yourself in ways that would not have been normal for you before such times. I certainly know that there are people who have imbibed more or eaten more or been less active than is ideal. There are also other habits that people have embraced that might be addictive – gambling, social media doom scrolling and even, dare I say it, wordle. (Okay, I am totally joking about that last one. And I was actually able to solve yesterday's puzzle in two lines!)

Survival is Good

If any of that reminds you of the things that you have settled into over the last couple of years, then perhaps you should consider that to be an Eliezer response. Because you did something good: you survived. You managed to make your way through a very difficult time. That is not just good; that is fantastic. But what if we are getting to the place where you don't need to settle for Eliezer of Damascus anymore? What if it is time to get back to embracing a little bit more of who you are really meant to be?

Well, if any of what I have said speaks to you and where you feel you are in your life right now, then please do pay heed to what happened to Abram next. Abram had resolved to settle for the good thing that was Eliezer, but then he apparently took a step outside of his tent. Now, Abram was in the middle of a desolate place. There was clearly nobody around. There were no streetlights or big city lights, there were not even any campfires or lamps burning.

The Night Sky

And so, Abram was immediately confronted with a sight that folks like us who live in cities rarely see. For there, blazing over his head was the most breathtaking display of stars imaginable. And if you have ever been out in the wilderness and looked up and seen that sight, you know that it can greatly affect you. It's not just a beautiful sight, it is a sight that can overwhelm you with the sheer size of it. There is this sense that you are looking on something that is truly infinite. It is no accident that since ancient times, people have looked up at nighttime and found themselves confronted with powers and beings far beyond their understanding.

And so, when Abram looked up that night, just after making that fateful decision about the disposition of his assets, he was reminded that he was dealing with a God of infinite possibility. When such a God is involved, anything can happen. He realized that it was not only possible that he might have one child, there could be as many as there were stars overhead.

Abram Believed God

And in that moment, Abram did a very simple thing. It was small, but it changed everything. He believed God. He didn't believe in his own body's ability to produce an heir. He didn't believe in Sarai's ability to carry a child at her age. Maybe that had been the problem up until now. He had been trying to believe in those things. But somehow the sight of that infinite heaven, of the stars far beyond all counting, that made it possible to believe in a God of infinite possibility.

And there is a message in that for you as you ponder that question of whether you should settle for your Eliezer of Damascus or if it is time to aspire for what you were really made to do and be. I am not suggesting, and no one should suggest, that you have been lacking in faith before this point. I am sure that your faith has brought you this far. But perhaps a vision of a God of infinite possibility might persuade you to approach the question of where you go from here from a new perspective.

What if I don't Deserve it?

Ah yes, you might say, but there is a problem. Maybe Abram was an extraordinary man. Maybe he just deserved to have the deepest desire of his heart realized. But what if that doesn't apply to me? After all, I've made too many mistakes in my life. I've let too many opportunities go by, I've been weak or indecisive or foolish in my choices. That's why I don't really deserve to have my deepest desires, hopes and dreams fulfilled. In short, what if I'm just not good enough to have it? I don't feel like I deserve it.

I know that that is how we often feel. I honestly feel that, for many of us, that is the real reason why we don't reach for the things that we are meant to do. It is not because we are lazy or timid. It is because, somewhere deep down inside, we are just terribly afraid that we just don't deserve to succeed. Maybe Abram felt that too and that was the real reason why he had decided to settle for Eliezer. But that is why what happened next is so important.

When Abram had been swept away by the sight of those stars and decided that he was going to trust God to fulfill God's promises instead, this is what happened. **"And [Abram] believed the LORD;"** it says, **"and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness."**

The Theme of Grace

What does that mean? It means that right there and then, God decided that Abram was good, that he was worthy of all sorts of good things to happen to him. And on what basis did God decide that? It was not because Abram had done anything special. It was not because he had worked hard for it or because he had made all the right decisions. God simply took Abram's willingness to believe and trust as enough to declare him righteousness and worthy.

This is, in case I need to say it, a key theme that runs through the whole Bible (not just the New Testament like some people think). It is the simple truth that God loves, accepts and approves of us, not because we have done all the right things, but just because we are willing to trust and believe in God. It is when we forget that truth that we are most likely to stop believing in ourselves, which sometimes means we usually end up settling for Eliezer.

Two Reasons not to Settle for Eliezer

So, there you are. There are two reasons why you can ask for and expect something better for your life than just settling for Eliezer – for the thing that is just good enough. The first reason is that you have a God whose potential is as vast as all the stars in the sky. If you have been limiting your expectations because the God you think you serve is too small, let me suggest that you do like Abram and spend some time contemplating the vastness of the heavens that your God created.

The second reason why you have settled for Eliezer may be because you don't think that you deserve any better. That is a lie. You deserve it all and more. But not because of anything you have done, not because you made all of the right decisions or worked the hardest. You deserve it because of what Christ has done for you. All God is looking for is that you trust him. God will count that as righteousness and will declare you worthy. So don't settle for Eliezer. Dream of what God is truly calling for you to be.