

The Lord Will Provide

Genesis 22:1-19

This morning we reach the climax of the faith life of Abraham. This is the supreme test, and the supreme victory. In our passage today, Abraham reaches the summit, the very highest height of his lifelong walk with God. But the occasion also gives rise to some of the most troubling questions we could possibly have. For some, this passage is almost unthinkable, even cruel. Some would say wicked! How could God demand a human sacrifice? And how could Abraham possibly obey such a command?

I want to answer those questions very briefly, but directly, at the outset, before we study in detail. The answer makes sense on a day in which we are thinking about the resurrection, anticipating the funeral service this afternoon for Sharon Tucker. I'll give you a hint about my message this afternoon, and it won't surprise you. I'm going to focus on the resurrection. I'm going to focus on life. And that focus is the key to understanding this chapter.

You cannot understand or appreciate this chapter if you are thinking about death—the death of Isaac, or if you are focused only upon Abraham's willingness to obey God's command to offer Isaac as a burnt offering. The proper focus in this text is the faith of Abraham, faith to believe in the resurrection. Abraham had no sense, no sense at all, that Isaac would remain dead. Rather, in his willingness to offer his son as a burnt offering, we read of Abraham's faith,

Heb. 11:19 "concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense."

So Abraham wasn't bringing an end to his son's life. Rather, he was demonstrating his faith in God's power to raise him from the dead. Abraham's obedience to God was founded upon his faith in God's promise of resurrection. And, we're told, it was a test.

v.1-2

To be sure, God doesn't tempt us to sin. Temptation comes from our own sinful heart.

James 1:13 "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed."

However, using Genesis 22 as the primary example, we know that God will test us, for a good purpose.

I. GOD WILL TEST US TO STRENGTHEN OUR FAITH.

He tests us to challenge us to greater love and obedience. He challenges us to greater devotion and greater faithfulness. This is such a good thing. For example,

Exod. 16:4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not.

And, Deut. 8:2 "And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. 3 "So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD."

What a good thing this is. But how was the command for Abraham to sacrifice his son a good thing? Because it was test at the very heart of Abraham's faith, testing the very core of his faith. To express that more broadly and even apply this example to us, I would say that,

A. Our faith will be tested by the call to offer a sacrifice of that which is most precious to us.

The point is that if that which is most precious is offered to God, then obviously the whole heart and the whole life will be offered to God as well. Surely that was the obvious example of Abraham.

v.2

Isaac was Abraham's only legitimate son, born to him and his wife Sarah. He was the beloved son. Deeply beloved. Thus this command went right to that which was most precious to Abraham. Such a test was to stretch his faith farther than it had ever been stretched, and to make it stronger than it had ever been before. God fully understood that, and fully acknowledged the depth of Abraham's faith in obeying this command.

v.11-12

Abraham withheld nothing from God.

This is astounding, because each one of us would probably have to admit that we do withhold things from God. Something in your life is probably being protected from God's call to sacrifice. There may well be something in your life that you have not surrendered to God, some aspect of your life in which you have not surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Some way in which you will still say, "I will do what I want to do, despite what God says I should do."

For some people, almost all of their life is withheld from God. Some people wish to reserve just a part of their life for God, a little part, represented by the willingness to come to church on Sunday morning. But that's it. Jesus' demands upon our lives are much greater however. In fact, he demands the sacrifice of our whole life! Could he possibly have made himself any clearer?

Luke 9:23 Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. 24 "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it."

We are called to give up our whole lives, everything, every part of our lives, as a sacrifice to God. In the familiar words of the Apostle Paul,

Rom. 12:1 "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."

Your faith shall be tested by the call to offer a sacrifice of that which is most precious to you. But Isaac? Abraham's son? For some people, that just goes too far. Some object that such a command by God was even immoral. Some explain it away, noting as one commentator does that "of course, God did not really intend that Abraham should slay Isaac. As a matter of fact, God's words were simply to 'offer' Isaac for an offering; nothing was said about slaying him." Some would say that God was simply demanding a "spiritual" sacrifice of his son, that done in the heart, a total dedication of his son to God's service.

Surely, in the context of today, in the New Covenant, with all the sacrifices ended with the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus' own life, God no longer would require from us a bloody sacrifice. But in the provisions of the Old Covenant, the command was for a

burnt offering. The command was for Isaac to be the burnt offering, replacing the animal whose blood was shed upon the altar. The command was for Abraham to put to death his own son upon the OT sacrificial altar. How could God command such a thing?

Well, this might well be the most important sentence in this whole sermon, God commanded only that which he himself was willing to do. It wasn't immoral for God to test Abraham's faith by his willingness to offer his only beloved son as a burnt offering, for God himself would later offer his only beloved son as a burnt offering, the final sacrifice of the Old Covenant, the sacrifice that paid the penalty for the sins of God's people in all ages.

God himself would do exactly what he commands Abraham to do. God sacrifice the son whom he love, the only begotten son. He offered that which was most precious to him. God doesn't merely tell us of his love. He demonstrates it.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

The challenge for us is to offer a sacrifice of that which is most precious to us. Ultimately, that is the sacrifice of your whole life, everything. Very much related to that,

B. Our faith will be tested by the call to radical obedience.

This was radical. That is, nothing reserved. Nothing held back. No qualifications, no restrictions. Just bare obedience. Remember that Adam and Eve were given such a test, a test of obedience for the sake of obedience. And they failed. Yet Abraham passed.

What God commanded, Abraham did.

v.3-6a

v.9-10

I don't need to explain to you what those verses mean. They are perfectly clear and understandable. At the deepest level of the human soul, they are an example of obedience.

Now, in just a few moments I'm going to explain the great blessings which God promised and which Abraham, and Isaac, received. But the test here was one of pure obedience. There were to be no mixed motives. Obedience for obedience's sake. And the blessing which came to him came because he obeyed just that fully.

v.18

Our faith will be tested by the call to radical obedience. "If God says it, I will do it." "If God forbids it, I won't do it." That's radical. But that is God's calling upon your life. Not half-heartedly surrender. Not even 99%. God demands 100%. Everything. Nothing held back.

Then we see what blessings there are for those who have that commitment. God is so good and so gracious.

II. GOD WILL RICHLY BLESS US WHEN OUR FAITH HAS BEEN TESTED.

To repeat, we need to be careful that the blessing doesn't become the motivation. I can teach my dog to do obey me on that level. But don't misunderstand me, either. This radical obedience is not an oppressive thing. This is not a call to a miserable life, void of any fun or enjoyment. God's laws are not burdensome. Just the opposite. The life of obedience is the most blessed life we could ever experience, and that word blessing is actually the same as our English word "happy." To be blessed is to be happy.

When our faith is tested, and strengthened, God will richly bless us. When we obey, wholeheartedly, with nothing held back, God will richly bless us. Looking Abraham and to God's blessings upon him, notice that,

A. God swears an oath to assure us of his blessings.
v.15-17

God swears an oath! He swears by his own name. He makes a solemn promise to do that we he has said. We have an inspired commentary on those verses in,

Hebr. 6:13 For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, 14 saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you." 15 And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. 16 For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. 17 Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, 18 that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. 19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, 20 where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

Notice the context for God's oath, the purpose of it. To give us encouragement. Since "it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast."

God swears an oath to assure us of his blessings. And then,

B. God blesses us in accordance with his own covenant promises.

In other words, God does exactly what he has promised to do.

Abraham has already received the promises of uncountable descendants and immeasurable land. Now, God grants him that blessing.

v.17-19

Abraham understood God's covenant promises. He understood God's power, and his faithfulness. And as I said at the outset, he believed in the resurrection. Abraham believed that God had the power to raise Isaac from the dead, and figuratively, symbolically, he did.

Having said all that, let me move on to the most profound aspect of this whole event. Let me proclaim the deepest theological significance of this text. Remember, all of OT history is the history of salvation acted out in the life of God's people. And so the doctrine of salvation, the theology of salvation, is presented to us in this chapter. And it is presented just as plainly and as obviously as you could find anywhere in the OT.

Let me say that more clearly. Genesis 22 is a chapter about Jesus Christ, for what we find in this chapter is that,

III. GOD WILL GRACIOUSLY PROVIDE AN ATONING SACRIFICE.

Ultimately, this chapter isn't about Abraham. It's not about his incredible faith nor about his radical obedience. It's not about Isaac, nor about God's blessings which come through Isaac. It's about Jesus Christ. Look at,

v.8

So he did.

v.13

But it wasn't just a sacrifice so that Isaac would be spared. The point is not simply that God tested Abraham, and since Abraham passed, some animal would be killed on the altar instead of Isaac. No, OT history has a focus. And everything in the OT focuses on Jesus Christ.

When Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for the burnt offering," he was looking forward to THE lamb for THE burnt offering, THE lamb. He was looking forward to Jesus Christ.

In that regard, we read in,
John 1:29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

Abraham was looking forward to the Lamb of God, the lamb who is worshiped by the angels around the throne of God, recorded in,

Rev. 5:12. "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!" 13 And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: "Blessing and honor and glory and power Be to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!" 14 Then the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever."

Abraham was looking forward to the lamb about whom Isaiah prophesies,

Isa. 53:7 "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not

His mouth. 8 He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken."

Isaiah goes on to say that,

Is.53:10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. 11 He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors."

A. By faith, Abraham looked forward to the sacrifice of the lamb of God.

v.8

Then,

v.13-14

The Lord will provide. Jehovah Jireh in the Hebrew, if you have ever heard that expression or are familiar with it. The Lord will provide. The Lord will provide what? The burnt offering. The atoning sacrifice. That sacrifice is Christ.

B. In Christ, we see clearly the sacrifice of the lamb of God.

Jesus sacrifice is a burnt offering, an offering with a fragrant aroma, sweet-smelling, a sacrifice with which God was pleased, in which he took delight. So we read of Jesus in,

Eph. 5:1 Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us,

an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.”

That’s the burnt offering, and the most characteristic thing about the burnt offering was not that it was burned. But that the WHOLE animal was burned. The whole animal was given to God. Nothing was held back. The burnt offering of the OT was a sacrifice of that which was most precious to the one giving the offering.

Again, to say it plainly, this passage is not so much about Isaac, as it is about Jesus. Isaac symbolizes Jesus. The seed of Abraham, through whom the blessings of these promises would be fulfilled, was not Isaac, but Jesus Christ. Jesus is the lamb of God whose sacrifice was a fragrant aroma to God, whose blood shed upon the cross cleanses us of our sin.

In OT history, there is one occasion above all others when God would provide the lamb for the burnt offering, and that is the passover. We read in,

Exod. 12:21 Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Pick out and take lambs for yourselves according to your families, and kill the Passover lamb. 22 “And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning. 23 “For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you. 24 “And you shall observe this thing as an ordinance for you and your sons forever.”

Jesus celebrated that same passover with his disciples, as Luke records it,

Luke 22:7 Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed. 8 And He sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat.” 9 So they said to Him, “Where do You want us to prepare?” 10 And He said to them, “Behold, when you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house which he enters. 11 “Then you shall say to the master of the house, ‘The Teacher says to you, “Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?’” 12 “Then he will show you a large, furnished upper room; there make ready.” 13 So they went and found it just as He had said to them, and they prepared the Passover.”

Luke 22:14 When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. 15 Then He said to them, “With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; 16 “for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” 17 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, “Take this and divide it among yourselves; 18 “for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” 19 And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” 20 Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.”

And so, Genesis 22 is directly tied to the sacrament that is before us this morning. When Abraham named that place, “The Lord will Provide,” he spoke about the very same thing as what we proclaim by receiving this sacrament. The Lord will provide. The Lord has provided. The Lord has provided the lamb for the burnt offering.

His body was given for you. His blood was poured out for you.

Do this, Jesus says, in remembrance of that. And as you look at this table, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!”