

## Gen. 22:1-14 The Good Father

What does it mean to be a good father? We can find the answer to this question throughout the Bible. But today, I would like to answer this question from one of the most intriguing passages in all the Bible, the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham. There are MANY truths in this passage. But, I want to focus on 4, answering the question, “What does a good father look like?”

1. A Good Father loves his children in a special way. Look at vv. 1-2: “**After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ He said, ‘Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.**” I would like to focus a moment on the words “*whom you love*.” Abraham LOVED his son! A good father loves his son. Now, it interesting that this verse also says “*your only son*.” But we know that Abraham had another son, Ishmael. “*If this so, why would the text say, Isaac is his only son?*” We must consider the context if we want to understand these words properly.

In the storyline, years earlier God appeared to Abraham (Abram) and gave a promise. He said: “***I will bless you greatly.***” In fact, he told him to look up and number the stars; “***so shall your offspring be.***” Abraham said, “***How can this be? I have no children. A member of my household will inherit my possessions.***” You see, at that time, Abraham had no children. And He and his wife, Sarah (Sarai) were not getting any younger. In fact, Sarah was too old to have children. So, Sarah came up with a plan. She gave her servant to Abraham in order to have a child. Abraham, though he knew God’s promise, listened to his wife. (He was 86 years old at the time.) And sure enough, a son was born. His name was Ishmael (Gen. 15-16).

Now fast forward 13 years. Abraham is 100 years old. And again, God appeared to him and said. “***I will bless you with lots of children*** (more than the stars you can count).” Then God says, “***Sarah (Sarai) your wife will have a child*** (She is 90 years old).” What do you think Abraham did? He laughed! As he was thinking about how old he was, he said, “***Oh God, please just let the blessing come through Ishmael!***” To which God said, “***No, I will establish my covenant with Isaac.***” Shortly thereafter, Sarah gave birth to Isaac (which means “he laughs”). You see, Isaac was the Son of the promise, not Ishmael. This was God’s plan. Isaac had a SPECIAL place, a UNIQUE position that only HE could fulfill. In this way, Isaac was the “ONLY SON” of the promise, the ONLY one who could take this position. In the same way, when we read John 3:16: “**For God so loved the world that He gave his ONLY Son . . .**” Jesus is the ONLY (beloved) Son in this sense.

I think this is the context of Abraham and Isaac. Of course Abraham loved Ishmael. But Isaac was the special Son of the promise. It was a special kind of love reserved for ONE. In the same way, God loves the Son, in a particular way reserved for the Son. In John 5:20 Jesus says, “**For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing.**” I can say with confidence that I love the children in this church (and others). But, I have a special love for my own. This is what a good father does. And we can all understand this truth. Fathers, you may love others, but your love for your children finds a special place. And, your children know this fact. (Also know that God loves the world in a particular way, but He loves his children in a special way!)

2. A Good Father is obedient to God. Well, this is where things start to get more difficult. As a good father, Abraham knew that obeying God was the best choice in all circumstances, no matter what the cost. Look at v. 1. We read: **“God tested Abraham and said to him, ‘Abraham!’”** Abraham did not ignore the voice of God or turn the other way, as God gave commanded him to sacrifice this special son whom he loved. Instead he says, **“Here am I.”** Also notice there is no hesitation to obey the voice of God. In v. 3 Abraham rose early the next day and followed the command of God. And this obedience doesn’t stop with the trip. As he came closer and saw the mountain where the sacrifice will take place, he did not linger. He continued. He tells the young men to stay behind and he and Isaac continue together.

Abraham continues to obey. He prepares the wood, lays Isaac on top of the wood, ties him down, and even takes the knife in his hand. This must be the ultimate test of obedience. I don’t claim to understand the differences culturally between their times and ours. And we must be careful not to read too much of our understanding into this text. But, the point is clear. As a good father, Abraham was obedient to God’s command, no matter the cost.

Let me try and put this into perspective with the difficulties with such a sacrifice. Think about it with me for a moment. To Abraham, this command must have seemed contrary to the law of God, which forbids murder. And, if someone murders, there is a strict penalty. Gen. 9:5 says, **“Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.”** In Abraham’s mind, *“was God contradicting himself? Could he accept a sacrifice that is also a murder? Must the father of all the faithful be the monster of all fathers?”* And think about Isaac’s death. If he were to die as a martyr or his life been the ransom of someone else, his death may have meant something; or even if he were to die as a criminal, or a rebel against God or his parents, or as an idolater, or a stubborn son, his death might have passed as a sacrifice for justice. BUT, this is NOT the case with Isaac. He is an obedient, hopeful, son!

Abraham must have been thinking, *“Lord, what profit is there in his blood?”* And, how would this death be consistent with the promise? Was it not said that in *“Isaac shall you seed be called?”* What will happen to this seed if he dies like this? And, could he ever look Sarah in the face again with the blood of Isaac sprinkled on his clothing? And, what would it do to her faith, and the faith of the rest of his family? And, what would the Egyptians say, and the Canaanites and the Perizzites, etc. who lived in the land? What about Abraham’s name that God had promised to make great? This murder (in their eyes) would be an eternal reproach to Abraham and all his future altars? These and many more questions abound! Yet, he obeyed the command of God.

The world may think, *“This is the most ridiculous story in all the Bible.”* In fact, most can’t believe God would command a father to do such a thing. (We’ll understand why in a moment and come back to this point.) But for now, let me ask, *“Fathers (mothers), how good of a father are you if you know God has commanded you to do something, or to act in a certain way, and you neglect that command in front of your children?”* And, we aren’t asked to sacrifice our children. In fact 1 John 5:3 says, **“For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.”** (Abraham’s was burdensome!) This might be the most convicting question you ever ask yourself as a father (or mother)! If Abraham had disobeyed God and failed this test, what do you think Isaac would have thought of his Father’s God? Do you think he would have grown to be the man he was?

Fathers (and mothers) are you willing to obey the commands of Christ no matter what the world says? For all of us, nothing shows the greatness of our God than when his children obey in the most difficult circumstances! Though not nearly as difficult as God's command to Abraham, God's commands will nonetheless be difficult in the midst of this world that competes for the allegiance of our hearts. When Martin Luther was brought on trial for his writings and his beliefs against the established church, and commanded to recant his beliefs he said, "*Here I stand. Unless I am convinced by Scripture . . . Here I stand!*" When John Hus was burned at the stake, do you think those watching had any doubt of the greatness of his God?

Fathers, be obedient to God. This is the BEST thing you can do as a good father. Let me also say, where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more. Repent today! Trust Christ as the one who covers ALL your sins! And by his grace do better tomorrow!

(On a side note, children, notice the obedience of Isaac And Isaac doesn't know all the details. And, he isn't a baby anymore. Physically, he is a young man. And he's smart enough to know there is no sacrifice with them; there is no lamb. I am sure he is concerned! Can you imagine your father getting to sacrifice you? I cannot! Still Isaac followed the command of his father. Many times, children, you won't understand WHY your parents tell you to do something. But, that's ok. In time you will know. For now, obey your parents in the Lord. For this is right.)

Before moving on, let me ask, "*How did Abraham obey this command?*" "*How could he endure to think that Isaac was himself the lamb to be sacrificed?*" There must have been something deeper within him that caused him to go through with this sacrifice. We might say, "*From WHERE does our obedience come?*" I will briefly mention 2 motives for Abraham's obedience: 1) Love for God, and 2) Fear of God. Certainly, he loved God! And I think ALL obedient acts must stem from our love for the ONE who gives us the commands. Also, Abraham's obedience was a result of his FEAR for God. In v. 12, after God provides a ram for the sacrifice, the angel of the Lord says, "**I see that you fear God.**" We don't have time this morning to develop these. But, these two motives always flow from true faith in God. And they are the deepest motives. Let's move on.

3. A Good Father trusts God's promises. When we look at Abraham, we see a man who trusts the promises of God. Many years earlier God spoke to Abraham and told him to pack his bags and leave his home country, culture, family, etc. and move to a new land (Canaan). And he said, "***I will bless you. I will give you a family greater than the stars. I will give you a land. I will make you a great nation. AND, I will make your name GREAT!***" This is known as the Abrahamic Covenant, which is basically a promise by God. And so throughout his life, these promises were part of the motivating factor in all that he did. So, when we come to this great test of faith, Abraham believed the words of God and trusted his promises to come. And we see a hint of this in vv. 7-8. "***And Isaac said to his father Abraham, 'My father!' And he said, 'Here I am, my son.' He said, 'Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?'***" <sup>8</sup> ***Abraham said, 'God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.'*** So they went both of them together." In the midst of the greatest trial of his life, Abraham's first responses is about God and his provision. He says, "***God will provide.***"

Now, I am not sure at this moment if Abraham believed God would provide another in the place of Isaac. I am sure he hoped this would happen. But, even if it didn't, he would obey. Why? He

trusted God's promises. Abraham looked forward to a land, a people, and great blessings. But, this was only the beginning. According to the Book of Hebrews, Abraham was looking for a beyond a physical land and earthly blessings; he was looking **"forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God"** (Heb. 11:10). He was looking forward to the heavenly city that was to come (Heb. 13:14). In Heb. 11:17-19 we read: **"By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, 'Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.' He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back."** By faith Abraham believed in the promise of God that culminated in ultimate salvation. And because of this, Abraham was a good father.

The same is true for the good father, and for all Christians. God's promises provide the foundation for us to be good fathers (and mothers). Our hope is found in these promises! When you are down and it seems like the world is against you, God says, ***"I will be with you."*** When your sins are great and you look at your heart and see what only you (and God) see, God says, ***"your sins are forgiven."*** When life's trials overwhelm you, God says, ***"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you"*** (Is. 43:2). When you think about being a father (mother) God promises: ***"Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it"*** (Prov. 22:6). As an anchor holds a ship from moving, so the promises of God anchor our hope. Trusting in God's promises found in the word are a GREAT means of grace on our journey. I think of a marathon with all the water stations along the way. Those runners could not make it without being replenished as they go. In the same way, God's promises are the water stations of life. But, unlike water, we can't get enough! God is good. Today, be a good father. Trust God's promises for you and your family! (How are you doing? Does your family have no doubt that you trust the promises of God in Christ?)

4. A Good father looks unto Christ. Finally, a good father looks to Christ. I don't think I have done justice to this text (or any text for that matter) if we do not see Christ. In 2 Cor. 1:20 Paul says, **"For all the promises of God find their Yes in him . . ."**

You see, this story is not put here primarily to teach US about how to be a good father. It is here to teach us about our heavenly father and his great act of love in carrying out his promise(s) to his people. And this provision comes at the expense of another Son. Look at v. 14. Here we see one of God's names. It is Jehovah Jireh. We see a form of this word two times. The angel of the Lord said, ***"Abraham, Abraham! Do not lay your hand on the boy . . . Stop . . ."*** (my translation) . . . And Abraham ***"lifted up his eyes and looked and BEHOLD, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns."*** God provided a substitute sacrifice for Abraham (and his son) to offer in Isaac's place. GOD WILL PROVIDE A SACRIFICE ! Let's rephrase this for us today. God the Father will provide his ONLY SON as the sacrifice. And by faith, though he did not know all the details, Abraham looked unto Christ, the ONE who would fulfill all God's promises. This is the Gospel of Christ! This is the Gospel we preach. Really, the key to being a good father (mother) is to look unto Christ, to find Him more beautiful than all things; to love Him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.

With a fixed heart, and an eye lifted up to heaven, he takes the knife, and stretches out his hand to give a fatal cut to Isaac's throat. Matthew Henry says, *“Be astonished, O heavens! at this; and wonder, O earth! Here is an act of faith and obedience, which deserves to be a spectacle to God, angels, and men. Abraham's darling, Sarah's laughter, the church's hope, the heir of promise, lies ready to bleed and die by his own father's hand, who never once shrinks back from doing of it.”* Why? 1) He loved his son. 2) He knew the best thing for his son was obedience to his heavenly father. 3) He trusted God's promises. 4) He looked unto Christ! May it be so today with us!