

January 22-Genesis 22

Genesis 22 is a challenging text. For those of us who are parents, trying to walk in Abraham's shoes this story is absolutely gut-wrenching. The story of God commanding Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice presents so many challenges to the human mind. This is not the type of story that is for the faint of heart, but in it we can learn so much about obedience and God's faithfulness. Verse 1 of Genesis 22 seems to come out of absolute nowhere. After all, Genesis 21 records the fulfillment of God's long awaited promise to Abraham and Sarah. These two have waiting decades on a descendant and now, finally all is right with the world. Everything seems to be on track until verses 1 and 2. These verses begin with a very important hint, namely that God was "testing" Abraham. This is important because it provides a glimpse into the reasons for God's command. God has a purpose even though it is vital to remember that Abraham doesn't know it. Just like Job, Abraham does not know that he is being tested. We must note that this hint provides for us a necessary truth, namely that God works in mysterious ways. Just like Abraham, Job, and others throughout the Scriptures are put into the crucible by God without knowing and so often we are also tried in God's Sovereign plan. In God's mercy we know that trials and tribulations have a purpose, namely that "the testing of your faith produces perseverance" and that perseverance finishes its work "so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing" (James 1:3-4). Trials require us to rely on and trust in God which is exactly the purpose of a trial in the first place!

But, how should we handle trials? In Genesis 22 we can see two necessities for handling trials as modeled by Abraham. First, we see Abraham's obedience. The Bible says that God calls Abraham to take his son to Moriah to offer him as a burnt sacrifice. You don't have to be a parent to understand how painful this must have been for Abraham. Abraham was most certainly heartbroken about the prospect of taking his own son's life, but look at what Abraham does. In verse 3 we read that "Abraham rose early in the morning." Isn't this interesting? I mean if God told me that I had to leave to sacrifice Analeigh to Him, honestly I would probably wait as long as possible but Abraham does not do this. No, he leaves EARLY. Abraham's obedience is astounding. His obedience was prompted by his faith. In order to be faithful through a trial we must have a solid faith in God. A little while into the journey, Isaac asks Abraham a very astute question. Isaac realized that there was no animal for the sacrifice. Realizing that a sacrifice could only occur with something to be sacrificed, Isaac inquires as to where this sacrificial animal was located. Abraham responds so wonderfully by telling Isaac, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering." Now, Abraham at this point does not know what God's plans are in this instance but he does know this, that God had told him that his offspring would be blessed and that God had given him Isaac. Sometimes we don't know what God is up to but we can know that He has promised that "all things work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose" Romans 8:28. We can know that He loves us deeply and we can trust that He will keep His promises. These realities should be enough to encourage us to trust God even in seemingly hopeless situations.

Finally we see God's provision. As Abraham is getting ready to plunge the knife into Isaac, God stops him and points out to Abraham a ram for slaughter. Can you imagine the relief as Abraham looks over to see that God has provided a substitute? God in His mercy had provided a way for Isaac to live while still offering up the sacrifice God required. Truthfully, this substitute was only a picture of the substitute to come. In the days ahead, God would provide for all mankind a substitutionary sacrifice. His name was Jesus Christ. In Christ we have a lamb that was slain for the sins of the world, namely people like you and me. He is the one who would take the place of the world on the altar, absorbing God's wrath. However, unlike Abraham, God did require of Himself that He slaughter His only Son for the sins of the world. This time, God did not stop the Romans from taking the life of Christ; He simply looked on in agony with the realization that His plan required the blood of His Son. In this sacrifice we see the love of God the Father, the faith of the Son, and the glory of God's plan to take away the sins of the world.