

THE LIFE OF ABRAHAM
"Abraham's Greatest Test"
Genesis 22
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INTRODUCTION: We have come this morning to one of the greatest chapters in the life of Abraham. This chapter has been called a love chapter, because it tells the story of the love of a father for his only son and his willingness to offer his son to God as a sacrifice. Throughout the history of the church, Abraham's sacrifice of his only son Isaac has been seen as a miniature picture of God's love for us in giving His only begotten Son as a sacrifice for our sins. And Isaac's obedience to his father and trust in him, has been understood to illustrate the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ to the will of God the Father. Philippians 2:8 says, Jesus became "obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

God's call at the last minute and His provision of a ram in verse 13, is an illustration of the resurrection of Isaac from the dead. READ HEBREWS 11:17-19. Isaac rose from the dead "figuratively speaking," but Jesus Christ truly rose again from the dead.

Genesis 22 is also a faith chapter, because it reveals Abraham's total trust in God and his willingness to obey God unconditionally. Over many years of learning to walk with God, Abraham had learned that God loved him and that God could be trusted. He was therefore willing to put God first in his life above anything else--even his most precious possession.

ILLUSTRATION: This week I was talking to one of our missionary families by e-mail--Ray and Ruth Ann Gorrell in France. Ray told me about a friend of his, who is a professional basketball player in France. This man was recently interviewed over French television. In this interview, he was asked if basketball was the driving force of his life. To the interviewer's surprise, he said, "No, the first goal in my life is to honor Jesus Christ. My second goal in life is to be a good husband and father. My third goal is to be a good basketball player. The French news team was dumb-founded. They didn't know what to make of someone whose first goal in life was to bring honor to the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this chapter, God allowed Abraham to go through a great crisis of faith to prove that God was really first above everything else in his life.

Transition: Let's look together this morning at several points in this story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac:

FIRST, Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac was the greatest crisis of his life.

This supreme test of faith and devotion to God came "sometime later."

1. It occurred after Ishmael had been sent away, when all hopes for the future and God's fulfillment of His promises were now centered only in Isaac.

2. It came after many other tests in which Abraham had already seen God demonstrate his faithfulness over and over again.

As we study the life of David we can see that David's faith was also tested in many ways before he faced the supreme test against Goliath.

READ I Samuel 17:33-37.

In the same way Abraham had his heart prepared for this final triumph of faith by previous experiences.

As we think back over the previous ten chapters of Genesis we remember some of those earlier tests-- the call to leave his homeland and his family and begin to walk with God, the call to separate from Lot a man who was not totally yielded to the Lord, the call to go to battle on behalf of others and then to refuse the wealth offered by a godless man, the call to intercede for Sodom, and the call to persevere in faith for many years until Isaac was born.

Someone has said: "It is what we are in the tests of every day which determines our triumph or failure in the supreme crises of life."

This was the supreme crisis of Abraham's life. For 25 years he had believed God's promise and had lived and organized his life expecting Isaac. Then God performed a miracle in Abraham and Sarah's life and gave them this son. When Isaac was born, Abraham had obeyed God and given up his son Ishmael whom he loved--because God had said all the families of the earth would be blessed through Isaac. And now God calls Abraham to give HIM up!!

SECOND, Abraham's sacrifice was (not only the SUPREME CRISIS of his life)--it was made in OBEDIENCE to God's command READ vv.1-2

1. God's command: READ 22:2. This was not an idea that came from the heart of Abraham. This command came from the living, personal, loving God who had given Abraham this son in the first place.

2. God's purpose: READ 22:1. "God tested Abraham."

This is the climax of Abraham's walk with God. The supreme test and supreme victory of his life. The need for this test becomes clear when we realize that Abraham's love would now be concentrated upon his son Isaac. Isaac was the son God had given him in his old age. Isaac was the fulfillment of many years of longing and waiting. All God's promises were to be fulfilled through Isaac. You can imagine how deeply Abraham must have loved his son. You can understand how Abraham could easily come slowly to love his son above everything else--even above God who had given Isaac to him.

So this test came to prove that God had first place in his heart. This test was not intended to uncover evil in Abraham's heart, but to reveal his total trust in God and absolute obedience to Him no matter what the cost.

After this test Isaac would have a preciousness in Abraham's heart far deeper than ever before--because Abraham would know that he was given to God--and then given back by God, in love to Abraham.

APPLICATION: Some Christians are afraid to completely surrender their lives to God. They become preoccupied with imaginary situations of what God might ask them to do, and they are not sure they would be willing to do it. But when you surrender your life completely to God, what he usually asks you to do is along very practical lines. For example--do you love the Lord enough to be willing for your son or daughter to go to the mission field if God calls him? Do you love the Lord enough to open your home so that it can be used for His glory in ministering to others? Do you love the Lord enough to openly confess Him before others? Do you love the Lord enough to go out of your way to help another brother or sister in need? Eg. Ron Yanazaki--I knew I could call upon him, and he would not be put out if I asked him to drive me to Mililani and back to get my keys.

THIRD, Abraham's sacrifice was on MOUNT MORIAH

Verse 2: "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there. . . ."

I want you to notice two things in this verse:

1. First, this is the first time love is mentioned in the Bible. Notice that the first time love is ever mentioned in the Bible, it is not the love of a man for his wife, or the love of a mother for her children, or even a man's love for God. It is the love of a father for his son. And it is used in connection with a sacrificial offering of that only and beloved son. Why? Because this is a picture of God the Father and God the Son. Isaac is a type of Christ. The love of Abraham for Isaac is a miniature picture of the love of God the Father for God the son. And Abraham's offering of Isaac is a picture of the offering God would one day make of His own beloved Son.

The first occurrence of love in the NT is Matt. 3:17: "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased."

The first occurrence of love in the Gospel of John is John 3:16: "God so loved the world that he gave. . ."

So, as the NT opens, God shouts his love for His Son from Heaven. And then he tells us that He loves US so much that he was willing to sacrifice His only and beloved Son in order that we might be saved!!

2. The second thing I want you to notice in this verse is the place that God determined this sacrifice would take place. The place was the "region of Moriah." II Chronicles 3:1 makes it clear that many centuries later it was be in this very place that Solomon's Temple was be built. And then, many centuries after the time of Solomon, the Lord Jesus himself was sacrificed and died in this same place where Abraham offered Isaac. Abraham did not hold back his most precious treasure from God. And Romans 8:32 says God did not spare his Son, but delivered him up for us all. Abraham's offering is a picture of God's redeeming love for us in Christ.

FOUR, the sacrifice was a burnt offering. Genesis 22: 2,3,6,7,8,13

Under the Old Testament law recorded later in Leviticus, there were to be seven sacrifices. Each of these sacrifices was a kind of "visual aid" to help the people of God appreciate the many aspects of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. One of these seven sacrifices was the burnt offering.

The sin offering and the trespass offerings represented the aspect of forgiveness for sins committed. But the burnt offering emphasized total consecration to God. The burnt offering was to be offered voluntarily. And it was to be offered whole.

Nothing was to be kept back.

So when Abraham offered Isaac as an act of worship, he was totally giving Isaac to God. He was freely and trustingly offering back to God, what God had given to him.

At the same time Isaac consecrated his life to God. Isaac could have refused to submit to be bound and laid upon the wood. But Isaac lovingly submitted to his father's obedience to God. The Bible says that Christ did the same. Ephesians 5:2: "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

Jesus fulfilled what was symbolized in the burnt offerings when he offered himself as a "burnt offering" to God in our place.

This can also be applied to our consecration to God.

READ Rom. 12:1-2.

The FIFTH thing I want to point out is that God gave Isaac back and provided a ram Genesis 22:11-14.

When Abraham raised his knife to slay his son, it was clear that Abraham loved God with a perfect love. Nothing, not even his only son, was allowed to stand between himself and God-- God was his dearest treasure and the supreme ruler in his heart and life.

God did not permit him to complete the physical sacrifice.

"Abraham, Abraham!" The instant he heard God's voice he changed direction. Here I am, he replied.

verse 12---Now I know that God is first in your life.

The Lord will provide.

Provide what? Provide a sacrifice.

Two thousand years later someone else carried the wood of sacrifice up the hill of Calvary. He was born to die for our sins.

God stopped Abraham before Isaac could be sacrificed.

But when our Lord climbed Moriah, God's hand was not stopped. God provided the sacrifice in Christ for our greatest need.

SIXTH, the blessing which followed the sacrifice. Genesis 22:15-18

When we are willing to give God everything, and hold nothing back--like Abraham we too will learn by experience that God provides.

Maybe in some small way, God is calling you right now to yield yourself totally to him. If you make the decision to yield yourself to Him, you will experience His blessing.

Andrew Murray had a formula for trial:

1. Say, He brought me here. It is by His will I am in this strait place and in that fact I will rest.
2. He will keep me here in His love and give me grace to behave as His child.
3. Then He will make the trial a blessing, teaching me the lessons He intends for me to learn.
4. In His good time He can bring me out again--how and when He knows. So let me say, I am:
1. here by God's appointment; 2. in His keeping; 3. under His training; 4. for His time.

The Benediction: "And the God of all grace, who called you unto his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, shall himself perfect, establish, strengthen you. To him be the dominion for ever and ever." (I Peter 5:10-11).

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