

LIVES THAT REMIND US ABOUT GOD - Meeting Yourself In The Sacred Text - Part one - Sunday, January 7th, 2024
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**ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND THE TESTING OF GENUINE FAITH
(Genesis chapter 22)**

Many people find this a confusing passage. God's request to Abraham seems so out of character. What is God up to here? The nature of the test is designed to test Abraham's faith. Not his *beliefs*. His *trust*. You can check beliefs with a fill-in-the-blank test. But testing *trust* almost always requires a measure of *confusion* and *relinquishment*.

So here's the conclusion of this lesson right in the introduction. Our lives are only safe to the degree that we don't place our hope and joy in anything other than God. Only what is given over to Him is safe. And this is the explanation to some equally perplexing words from Jesus Himself, as we'll see in a few minutes.

1) **GOD TESTS THOSE WHO PROFESS FAITH IN HIM**

Genesis 22:1-2 - "After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." [2] 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."

The issue is sharply drawn up here. The question is not merely whether Abraham will obey God. The real issue is to what **extent** will he obey God? Abraham has experienced tests of faith before. The Bible speaks of several of his failures. In those situations he didn't rely on God but lied about Sarah (calling her his sister) to save his own skin.

In this situation he is forced to trust God completely. Once he commits himself there is no lie or trick to bring Isaac back from the grave. Perhaps this is part of the reason God sets up these events for Abraham as He does. He will be forced to totally depend on God's power and promise rather than his own cleverness. The point of the passage really isn't the sacrifice of Isaac at all. We know God never intended any harm to Isaac. The real point is Abraham must finally sacrifice **himself**.

2) **ABRAHAM DOES NOT KNOW HE IS BEING TESTED**

If Abraham knew all the details there would be no test. It's very important to view this entire account from **his** perspective. He is totally convinced he will have to knife his own son. At the moment of truth Abraham doesn't look around for some trapped animal. There is no prayer for escape or hesitation. He raises his knife to slay the boy (**22:10**).

At this time God seems like Abraham's worst enemy. This is the way life appears. He has no understanding of ***why*** God is putting him through all this. Yet his firm commitment remains to simply do what he knows God has said. God will accomplish His promises to Abraham even if He has to raise Isaac from the dead (see **22:5** and **Hebrews 11:19** - "He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.").

But this is all in hindsight. The test of trust always requires some measure of ***ignorance*** and ***darkness*** right in the middle of the process.

3) **NO WORSHIP IS COMPLETE UNTIL IT INVOLVES SACRIFICE**

Genesis 2-6 - "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." [3] So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. [4] On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. [5] Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." [6] And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together."

God never intended a drop of Isaac's blood be shed. However, He **did** intend to rip Abraham's choicest possession from the throne of his heart. Once the sacrifice of Isaac is made in Abraham's heart, God is satisfied. Here is the point: if Abraham is willing to offer God Isaac, he will never withhold anything else. He can now be trusted.

True worship isn't just singing songs. It is presenting what is closest to our heart to God. It is always **de-throning** something else before it is **enthroning** our Lord. Jesus underscored this same truth:

Luke 14:25-33 - "Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, [26] "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. [27] Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. [28] For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? [29] Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, [30] saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish. [31] Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? [32] And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. [33] So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."

This is the New Testament **restatement** of the lesson from Abraham and Isaac. Jesus is calling us to offer our trust to Him in such a way that **following through** on initial moments of excitement and dedication.

Behold the offering of Isaac all over again! In our own lives there must be the same actual demonstration of our willingness to **"renounce all"**(33) to truly follow Jesus. Find your Isaac. This needs to be spelled out in terms of **money, time, relationships, affections** and **ambitions**. In each area, what I offer God must clearly demonstrate there isn't anything that I would hold back. This was the test Jesus put to the rich young ruler. And that man failed:

Mark 10:17-21 - "And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" [18] And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. [19] You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.' " [20] And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth." [21] And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

It is a strange thing that Jesus says to this rich man. He tells the man he **“lacks”** something (21), and then tells him to give way what he has to follow Jesus. He **lacks** something and then is told to **part** with everything. What he lacks is the kind of **reliance** on the Lord that would make discipleship possible. He can't **trust** Jesus as Lord in his present condition. And we're **all** required to follow Jesus with complete trust in His ability to secure and satisfy the deepest needs of our beings.

4) THE OFFERING ON MOUNT MORIAH

Genesis 2,14 - “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.’....[14].... So Abraham called the name of that place, “The Lord will provide”; as it is said to this day, ‘On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.’”

As Abraham demonstrated his commitment to obedience at any cost, God Himself provided the sacrifice -13 - “**And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.**”

The place where all of this took place is significant. On this very mountain **Solomon would one day build the Temple of the LORD** (see **2 Chronicles 3:1**). The name given by Abraham would become foundational in the Biblical revelation of the way men and women would make their approach to God down through the ages. It would not be by man's own outward works that God would be bought off. **God** would provide the lamb by Himself. This finds its ultimate expression in the offering up of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who would die for the sins of the whole world.

But, in addition to this truth is another. Man's worship must be commensurate with the Lamb God provides. Worship is forever stamped with the offering of our lives and what is most precious in our own esteem.

This story keeps worship from becoming empty and trite. Worship **gains** everything through the gift of Jesus Christ, God the Son. But worship also **costs** everything if Christ is truly honored as Lord. Remember, God didn't call Abraham to offer his son Isaac on the mountain until **after** Abraham's other son, Ishmael, had left home. God wants no **fall backs** to complete devotion.

So here's the final conclusion and application of this text. You and I can never even **earn** God's favor by any sacrifice or offering we make. **God** provides the lamb in which our ultimate trust must be placed. The cross is stamped all over tonight's text.

But, having said that, our lives must not just ***proclaim***, but ***demonstrate*** our ultimate trust in Jesus over and over again, because our hearts are never safely anchored anywhere else. So God's test of our faith, while painful at times, is His ultimate act of Fatherly love.