

**Genesis 22: 1-14; “Abraham’s Faith Displayed”, Sermon # 64 in the series –
“Beginnings”, Delivered on March 26th, 2006, by Pastor Paul Rendall,
in the Morning Worship Service.**

It may seem too great a thing to us, that God would expect Abraham to offer up the very son whom He had given to him, by His miraculous power, as a burnt offering. What kind of God is this, we might think, as we read this passage, that He would ask for such a thing? Well, I hope to show you, by our looking at Abraham’s responses to this test, that our God is worthy of our fullest and deepest trust, and our complete obedience to His commands as well. He is worthy of our giving Him whatever He asks of us to give Him. Even if this would mean the loss of a loved one who is very dear to us. It would be the right thing for us to do, if God would ask for it.

We can ask, and we should ask – Does Abraham’s offering up his son pertain to our faith, as well as his? Well I believe that it does. Because the Bible clearly teaches us here, that God will test our faith, as Christians, at some points in our lives. And He will do this because He always has something to give to us which is of much greater value to give us. It is something of greater value than we could ever imagine. It is something of greater value than any sacrifice that we could make for Him. It is something of eternal value. That something is His gift of Christ Himself.

So the question that we want to think about at this time, is this: In what ways did Abraham show that his faith was not shaken, when he was tested by God? I will attempt to show you that Abraham’s faith was displayed strongly in the 3 responses that he gave to God in obedience to God’s command, which are mentioned here.

1st of all – Abraham’s faith was displayed in his immediate response to the command that God gave him. (verses 1-3)

It says in verse 1 – “Now it came to pass...” We should understand by this that our God is a God who thinks about us in regard to our faith. His thoughts towards us, as it says in Psalm 40, verse 5, cannot be recounted in order. And if we were to declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered. The Lord is mindful of us in a way that should show us that He is very concerned with our faith. “Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust”, it says in the verse 4 of that same Psalm. So, we see here, that God is the One who brings things to pass; plans which He formed long ago with perfect faithfulness. And after all that Abraham had been through, God thought that this was the time to bring a test.

You and I think that if we have been through certain trials and tests, that that is enough. There is no need for another test we think. But often with God, the trials and testings that He has brought before to us, they only set the stage for other greater ones which are yet to come. This particular test was to be the test of all tests for Abraham. And it was because God intended to bring great blessings to him that this great test was brought to him. Let us remember that God would have His commands obeyed because He is the One who loves us so very much.

Notice how deliberately that God states the commandment to Abraham in verse 2. “Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” The suddenness of this may seem cruel to us. But I do not think it came to Abraham to think that way. I suppose he could have said – Could this really be the voice of God to me? But let us remember, that Abraham knew God’s voice. And there was no doubt in his mind that he had really heard God speak to him, here.

The text does not say that Abraham fell down on his face and cried out and prayed that this command would not be so. He had really heard this same voice of God before. He heard it clearly when God said to him that he was to, “get out of his country, from his family and from his father’s house, to a land that I will show you.” “I will make of you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great.” He knew that it was God who had given him his son; this lad who was his only son, whom he loved.

This child was God's gift, as all children are. But O how he had prayed, and waited, and agonized over the promise being fulfilled to him and Sarah. And now God would have him do this? But I want you to notice also that grace had brought Abraham to the place where he would exercise his faith in an immediate and implicit way of obedience. Verse 3 says – "So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him."

We do not find any hesitation in Abraham at this point. There was no procrastination. There was no hemming or hawing. His obedience was as clear and as definite as God's command was. His obedience began early in the morning. By the way, all obedience to God should be an early obedience. Psalm 63: 1 says – "O God, You are my God; early will I seek You." And verse 3 says – "Because your lovingkindness is better than life." Abraham knew this, and this is why he obeyed God immediately. To hesitate would mean that his great love and feelings for Isaac would enter in to this situation. He did not want that to happen. He did not want to fail in obeying God's command.

When he rose early, it was with a view to obey. Some people might have pulled the covers up over their head, and kept the shades closed, and wept. But Abraham was up early at his obedience. He split the wood thinking – This is the wood that I will offer my son upon. But my dear Lord, this is my obedience to you, and I will give it immediately. Strong faith does not feel the need to question God's commands. Strong faith will set out to obey even when the command is contrary to reason. This does not mean that strong faith does not have strong feelings. Or, that it will not think a matter through. But Abraham's feelings for his son were brought under self-control by his faith. And his faith was submissive to the wisdom of God.

He thought to himself – God knows better than I do what needs to be done with Isaac and what will be the right thing to do, now, at this point. This must have been the holy reasoning that Abraham used that morning. You and I need to be aware that, sometimes, the commandments of the Lord, and the implications of keeping those commandments, can bring us to a place of doubting His wisdom and questioning His reasons. Perhaps we cannot see His reasons. Abraham justified God's reasoning in this matter even though he did not understand it.

If you have strong faith you will look beyond your ability to completely understand. You will look beyond your own understanding to find that there is a reason to trust that God really does know best. He is wiser than I am, you will think. My responsibility is to obey. So faith led Abraham to arise and go the place of which God had told him. Faith in God, and in His promises, is not only essential to your being justified in the sight of God, but it is essential to also to your sanctification. It is essential to your fulfilling God's purpose for you as a Christian. His testing comes so that your faith will grow stronger, as the days and years go by.

If you are a true Christian you will want to abide in Christ. And you will want to abide in Him, the Apostle John says – so that when He appears, you will have confidence. And if you do abide in Him, you will not be ashamed before Him at His coming. (1st John 2: 28) It is clear from this passage concerning Abraham's testing, that it is the intention of God to test the faith of His people at various points in their walk with Him. God's testing of Abraham was a test designed to prove that his faith concerning the fulfillment of the promise would not be shaken, even though it appeared that his obedience to God's command would destroy that fulfillment in the death of Isaac.

We have already seen that Abraham's faith did not waver when God came to him when he was 99 years old, and said to him that Sarah would have a son that next year. He fell on his face and he laughed for joy. He did say in his heart at that time – "Will a child be born to a man who is 100 years old?" And yet in Romans chapter 4, verses 19 and 20, Paul says about him – "And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb." "He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He

had promised He was also able to perform.” There was a test of his faith at that time, in relation to whether Isaac would be born to Sarah at all. And he had passed this test.

And now, here, we find another test which comes to Abraham years later, when Isaac is a lad old enough to know something about what is going on. This was a test of faith which was harder than the first one, and indeed it may have been the hardest test of Abraham’s whole life. It was a test which centered on his love for Isaac, and whether that love was greater than his fear of God. It was a test of whether he would obey the express command of God to offer his son up on Mt. Moria as a burnt offering, or see it as something that he could not do because of his human love for his son. Abraham chose to believe and to obey. However unreasonable this command would have seemed to him, in light of the promises that God had given to him, he would obey it.

2nd – Abraham’s faith was displayed in that he saw his obedience as an act of worship. (verses 4-8)

This Mt. Moria was a three day journey away. Abraham lifted up his eyes and he saw the place afar off, it says. Abraham was not blindly obeying God in this situation. And he did not consider this as an unreasonable obedience in spite of the fact that he could not see God’s reasons for this command. If someone else besides God had commanded him to offer up his son as a burnt offering, he would not have done it. He was not like many insane persons who think that they are hearing voices, or even the voice of God, and then they kill someone. The voice of God’s revealing himself to Abraham was very clear to him.

It was evident to Abraham that what God had commanded him to do, he must do. The wording of it in verse 4 shows us how Abraham looked at the act that he was about to do. “He lifted up his eyes and saw the place afar off.” He did not come to this place with his head down and his eyes closed, as if he was resigned to do something which was detestable to him. His act of obedience was going to be an act of worship to His God. He so he lifted up his eyes. In all of his obedience he would look above his circumstances to God Himself. He would look by faith, seeing Him who was unseen.

Notice how calmly, how lovingly, and how deliberately that Abraham went about this act of worship. In verse 5 it says – “And Abraham said to his young men, ‘Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you.’” Surely this is strong faith. He was not being overly dramatic. He would lovingly keep everyone who was with him from being worried or afraid. He was just going to go over yonder, and worship. He was not being naive or deceptive. He was rendering a thoughtful, careful obedience as an act of worship. But as he was going, he also wanted everyone around him to see his love for Isaac. He calls him fondly, “the lad”.

This obedience, however, would be difficult for Abraham in every way, personally. God had commanded him that Isaac was to be offered up as a burnt offering. This kind of an offering is described in detail for us in Leviticus chapter 1. Verses 2-9 say there – “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When any one of you brings an offering to the Lord, you shall bring your offering of the livestock of the herd and of the flock.’” “If his offering is a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish; he shall offer it of his own free will at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the Lord.” “Then he shall put his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him.”

“He shall kill the bull before the Lord; and the priests, Aaron’s sons, shall bring the blood and sprinkle the blood all around on the altar that is by the door of the tabernacle of meeting.” “And he shall skin the burnt offering and cut it in pieces.” “The sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar, and lay the wood in order on the fire.” “Then the priest, Aaron’s son shall lay the parts, the head and the fat in order on the wood that is on the fire upon the altar; but he shall wash its entrails and its legs with water.” “And the priest shall burn all on the altar as a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the Lord.”

So, we see here, that Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and he laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together, it says in

verse 6. I think that it must have been hard for Abraham to think about doing this with his son that he so greatly loved. But I think that the text is plain. He went about to do this as an act of worship, out of his faith in God, and out of his love to God, and even out of his love for his own son. In verse 7 Isaac questions his father and says to him – “My father!” “And he said, ‘Here I am, my son.’” “Then he said, ‘Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?’” Isaac did not yet understand the implications of what was taking place. Instead of bringing alarm to Isaac’s mind, Abraham says to him – “My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.” “So the two of them went on together.”

In saying this to Isaac, I believe that Abraham wanted to tell Isaac that God was the One who had commanded him to do what he was going to do. And that He, God, would provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering. This would give assurance to young Isaac’s mind that when the time came when he would bind Isaac to the wood on the altar, that he would not resist him when he was doing it, but would sweetly submit to it, and rest in his father’s judgment of the matter. Truly Isaac’s faith was real and true. Because do not find him resisting his father at any point during this act of worship. And we find here that Abraham’s love for his only-begotten son was shown forth in the best way that he could, given the circumstances.

3rd – Abraham’s faith was displayed by the fact that he believed that God would provide for Himself the sacrifice. (verses 9-13)

“Then they came to the place of which God had told him.” “And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood.” “And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.” “But the Angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham!’” “So he said, ‘Here I am.’” “And He said, Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.” “Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was ram caught in a thicket by its horns.” “So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son.”

We see here that Abraham’s obedience was very deliberate and very definite. God saw that he would have gone through with offering up his son. And so, God in His great mercy, intervened to stop Abraham from slaying his son. The issue in regard to this test, the Angel of the Lord said, was whether Abraham feared God or not. If he did not fear God, he would not have been so willing to offer Isaac up. What is the fear of God? It is regard for all of God’s commands, to do them. In this case, having the fear of God meant that he regarded what God had commanded him to do, more than his own natural feelings or fears. And even more than his love for Isaac, whom the Lord had given to him as his son.

When God saw this, he provided a substitutionary sacrifice. He ordered Abraham to offer up this ram which was caught in the thicket near by. What was God saying when He commanded this? What was He showing Abraham? He was saying that even though Abraham had been faithful to Him in this situation, and had passed the test, that he still needed an atonement to be made for himself and for his sins. It was not his offering up of his son Isaac who could be the perfect sacrifice for sins. It was only Christ who could take upon Himself all of our sins, even those that we are unaware of, in relation to our obedience.

God was showing Abraham that only He could provide the Lamb. The labors of Abraham’s hands could not fulfill the law’s demands. The Angel of the Lord here was the Pre-Incarnate Christ. And He knew, even at that time, that He would become Incarnate to fulfill the law’s demands, and lay down His life as a sacrifice for sins. The Lord will provide, Jehovah Jireh. In the Mount of the Lord it shall be provided. At Calvary, the Lamb of God would be offered up to God for Abraham’s sins and ours.

How thankful we ought to be for the substitutionary atonement of Christ. When we receive His finished work of righteousness and sacrifice, we most certainly will find One who willingly took our place in judgment, so that we might not have to try to pay for all of our sins. We could never do it.

But when we come to Christ, we too then will be able to display our faith even as Abraham did. We will find grace to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God. And it will be our reasonable service of worship. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. May it be so for us.