

SERMON: GENESIS 22:1-14
IT'S GOOD TO BE AT MORIAH

Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham and said to him, Abraham! And he said, Here I am. Then He said, Take now 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. 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. Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. 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.

So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together. But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, 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? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering. So the two of them went together.

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 a 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. And Abraham called the name of the place, "The-LORD-Will-Provide,"—as it is said to this day, In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided.

It's good to be at Moriah. We'll come back to that later.

True or False? "God sends tests to people to see how strong their faith is?" The correct answer may seem to be "True," especially after hearing the end of the text. God said, "Now I know that you fear God. You have not withheld your only son from Me." It sounds as if by this test God could see that Abraham loved God above his dear only son. But "False" is the correct answer. God doesn't need to give tests; He knows everything. God is all-knowing—omniscient, if you remember it from catechism class. But why **does** God give tests? We'll come back to that.

*God tested Abraham and said to him, . . . Take now 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. God instructed Abraham to offer an olah, a sacrifice that was burned completely--the smoke "went up." An olah meant The End for whatever was being offered. Did God want Abraham to **kill** his son? What about the 5th commandment? Thou shalt not kill! We'll also get back to this point later.*

Such a harsh command from God! Isaac was the son born by a miracle in Abraham's old age. Abraham was 100 when Isaac was born. Sarah was 90. Isaac was their only child. His name meant "Laughter!" What a joy! (Abraham did have another son, Ishmael, at Sarah's suggestion by Hagar, Sarah's servant girl. But Ishmael had no part in Abraham's legacy. God told Abraham to send Ishmael and Hagar away.) Abraham and Sarah had only Isaac. Abraham dearly loved Isaac. Burn him up for God?! But God had promised that through Isaac, Abraham's family line would grow into a great nation, and from it, One would be born, Who would be a blessing for all people of the earth—Jesus! How could God now turn around and tell him to offer up Isaac, his son of great promise? A grueling test!

In simple faith, early the next morning, no questions asked, Abraham made preparations—firewood, coals of fire, donkeys, two servants, and Isaac—and then set out for the region of Moriah. We don't know how old Isaac was at the time—12? 14? 17? Imagine trying to tell Sarah what was going on? Maybe Abraham spared her that knowledge. They left, and they traveled for three days. I suppose Abraham was quiet on this trip. What do you think he was thinking? "God, why would You get us all excited about this dear son, and then yank the rug out from under us? Why didn't you just take him away right away? Why let us get so close to him for all these years." Perhaps these were some of his thoughts.

What kind of tests has God given you? What kind of heartache? What kind of loss? Everybody has a different one. Do you feel bitter toward God? Do you find fault with God? At the beginning, when emotions are

high, all sorts of things run through the mind—even things not right for the child of God to think. Ask the Lord to forgive you. Thank the Lord that He has given you time and comfort to get over those emotions. In Jesus, your sins sinfully twisted emotions and ignorance are forgiven. If you have not, ask Him right now, “Father forgive me for Jesus’ sake, for my hasty anger against what you placed into my life.” In the blood of Christ, He forgives.

But why does God give harsh tests to Christian people if He already knows how strong you are? Well, why does a good teacher give tests? A good teacher can quite accurately predict how a student will do on a test, so why give the test? It forces the student to study and grapple with the material one more time. A test helps the material stick with the student for a longer haul. A teacher could make a test so hard that everyone would fail. That’s how Satan operates. With the “tests” that he brings you—we call them “temptations”—he wants you to fail. God sends tests to make you stronger. Even if you already have a strong faith, He works to make it stronger.

Abraham had had three days to ponder. Did God hate him or love him? Did God want him to murder? Does God ever go back on His word and break promises? Surely Abraham’s thoughts swirled in his head. He was reviewing everything he knew about God’s actions toward him and others. Surely he was reviewing everything God had said regarding the Promised One who would be a blessing for all the world, the Seed promised already to Adam and Eve, the Savior-to-come. After three days of traveling, look where Abraham ended up in his heart and in his faith! He told the two servants, *The lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you.* (!) When Isaac asked him, where is the lamb, Abraham calmly answered, *My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.* Abraham by faith knew that somehow God would work this all out.

And so with you. God is always working to draw you closer to Him, to make your faith in His promised Son and your Savior stronger, to lead you to long for the next world more than this one. Do you arrive at that point by sheer logic? No, but by going back to what God has said and done for you. Go back to His Word, the Holy Bible, and read of His wonderful forgiveness, love, and care. *We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. . . . If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? . . . We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Romans 8:32-39). Whatever tests God sends you, it’s to make you stronger in your faith and trust, in Him. It’s like the wind and the wheat. The harsh wind makes the wheat stand strong. Go to God’s Word for strength.

Jesus said, *He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.* (Matthew 10:37). Abraham was ready to plunge the knife into Isaac, his son. God stopped him. *Abraham, Abraham! 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.* Notice that God says, You “have not withheld” your son from Me. A done deal. In God’s view, Abraham had already “offered up” his son to God—from his heart. God did not want Abraham to kill Isaac.

Now I know that you “fear” God. “Fear” God? There are two meanings for the word fear. One is to be afraid of, to be scared, to be filled with terror. God is not saying, “Abraham, now I know you are scared of Me.” The second meaning of the word fear is to respect, to hold in high regard. God is saying, “Abraham, now I know that you hold Me in highest regard.” He already knew that, but with this test He openly drew out Abraham’s faith so that his great faith led to bold actions.

Which of the two is true of you? 1) Are you afraid of God? 2) Do you have high regard for God? Christians in this life, experience both. The Christian is made up of an old Adam or old sinful nature, and also a new man or man of faith and trust in Jesus. The old Adam is afraid of God and will obey because he has too. Do you sometimes obey out of fear? The new man, however, loves and respects God, holding Him in highest regard for all that God has done through His Son in love for us sinners. The Letter to the Hebrews tells us that Abraham was convinced that if he actually killed his son, God would raise him up again, because God had promised that through Isaac the family line would be carried on and the Savior would be born. Such faith is yours. Jesus was crucified for your sins. God raised Him up. God is with you every step of the way now, then when heaven is reached.

After offering a ram caught in the bushes in place of his son, Abraham called the name of the place The-Lord-Will-Provide. That thought is included in the Hebrew name given to that mountain—Moriah. “It is provided, it is seen to, by the Lord.” Every time God gives you a test, you can be sure He has seen to the answer, He has provided for you. Any time God sends you to Moriah, you will come away stronger. It Is Good to Be at Moriah!

Amen! So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach---