

GENESIS 22:1-14

GO TO 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.

Have you ever been in a car wreck in which you could have died? Did you have mixed feelings about going back to see the crumpled, mashed not-much-of-a-car-left? Do you still prefer not to look at photos of it? In that case, maybe it would seem best this morning, not to talk about Abraham and Isaac's trip to Moriah. It's something to make one shudder. But we do go back, so we can leave there with personal relief and comfort of heart in Christ.

Isaac was Abraham's only son, born by God's promise and miracle. Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90 when Isaac (meaning "Laughter") was born. What a joy! God told Abraham that his first son, Ishmael, born by human contrivance through Hagar the slave girl, was to be sent away and not to be included in the family.

Today we study Abraham and Isaac's trip to Moriah. We don't know how old Isaac was when God told Abraham to "sacrifice up," to "offer up," his son. Isaac could not have been too young. He carried the wood for the sacrifice—likely on his back—which must have been more than a small amount. Was he 14, 16, 18, 20? The word that's translated "lad" for Isaac is the same word that's translated "young men" for Abraham's "servants." It has a wide range. Perhaps here in cowboy country we could just call them all Abraham's "boys"! Furthermore, the name for this sacrifice was "olah," to "go up" like smoke. Later the Lord would make it clear to the Israelites (Abraham's descendants) that the "Go Up" sacrifice, the olah, must be completely burned.

What a close relationship between father and son. Isaac was Abraham's "one son," "one and only son." The root of the Hebrew word for "one" means to be joined together. Abraham was closely joined to his son. When he and Isaac were walking the last part of the journey alone, Abraham answered Isaac's question saying God would provide a lamb, and Isaac questioned no more. The two went on together, "as one." The young Isaac trusted his father and trusted his heavenly Father, whom Abraham had surely taught him to know. What a blessing when fathers and sons are close. What a heartache when they are not. Part of the problem is a father's stubbornness and conscious or subconscious demand to be in charge. The other part is the budding independence of youth coupled with rebelliousness. The same is true for mothers and daughters. Our prayer is, "Lord, for Jesus' sake, forgive us for sins against our own family members, and help us to go forward with love and compassion in both directions!"

Imagine what a blow God's request was to Abraham. Imagine, that it's a nice sunny day and then God says, "Offer up in sacrifice your dear and only son." It must have seemed like the bottom fell out. For twenty-five years Abraham and Sarah had waited for this son to be born. Now some fifteen years later, God pulls the plug, "Cut! Done! Exit Isaac." We do not read that Abraham cried out "Unfair!" or called God something like "double crosser." We do know he went forward. Were you bitter when you lost a child? When you lost husband

or wife after just a few years of marriage? When you lost mother or father at still a young age? It's a hard blow. Why was Abraham not bitter or dragging his feet in objections? In fact, early the next morning, he prepared to go. How could he?

He had been learning. At 75 when he was childless, God told him to leave his home country, and go to a new land where he would become a great nation and in His Seed / Child all the families of the earth would be blessed. It was a promise of the Savior of all the world. Abraham learned to take the God of mercy and salvation at His Word. When he was unsure, God told him to count the stars—so many would his offspring be! When Abraham lied about Sarah and said she was his sister both before Pharaoh in Egypt and before King Abimelech in Canaan, the Lord kept them both safe, and his sin was forgiven. Then when Abraham and Sara sinned (yes, Sarag too--it was her idea) having a child by Hagar, it displeased God. Yet the Lord forgave them. Abraham had come to know the merciful love, forgiveness, wisdom, and power of God to direct all things in the best way.

We don't know what may have stirred in Abraham's heart, but he in childlike faith he went forward. Imagine how Abraham must have felt when his beloved and trusting son asked him, "Where is the lamb?" In trust he simply said, "God will provide, my son." Likewise the Lord looks for you to have childlike faith to wrestle through the obstacles of life. Some hard things come from the devil seeking to break and destroy your faith. Some hard things are from God, seeking to strengthen your faith--like the prairie wind bending the trees and other plants prompting them to root deeper into the ground. Trust Him who forgives your sins in love each day--and all sins are against Him—every one of them. His promised Son and Seed of Abraham has reconciled your account with God.

We know from the New Testament Letter to the Hebrews, that at some point, by the working of God the Holy Spirit, Abraham came to the conviction that even if he ended the life of his son, God would not go back on His Word—Isaac was the one from whom the line of the Savior would be carried on. Therefore God would raise Isaac from death even if Abraham took his life. What an astounding conclusion of faith! *By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead (Hebrews 11:17-29).* Trust your Lord.

Maybe you are facing an obstacle, a test, right now. Hasten to the Bible and/or recall Bible verses you have learned, which assure you first of all of forgiveness from God because of Jesus; then of blessed guidance in life and strength for that which comes; and finally of the new life from the grave at the end and then heaven. However, Satan will want you to "curse God and die (Job 2:9). A seminary professor I had, told how a pastor friend of his was dying, and the devil was tempting him to walk away from God. A few weeks later he told the Prof. "When the devil comes at me now, I beat him over the head with Bible passages, until he shuts-up"! Find forgiveness, comfort, and strength of heart in the Scriptures!

When Abraham was at the point of slaying his Son, he was stopped by the Angel of the Lord—that is, God Himself—we conclude it was God the Son. *Do not lay a hand on the boy!* Now what? Had God only been bluffing or playing a cruel game with Abraham? No. The procedure stopped because Abraham had already offered up Isaac in his heart. God spoke of this sacrifice as already done: *You have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.* Abraham had not put his dear son ahead of God. God used this test to strengthen Abraham's faith to the max. --- God sends you tests, not to defeat your faith, but to lead it to grow into new faith-territory, to stretch out your trust in Him even further, and ultimately for the moment when death is at your door.

God proceeded to provide a ram caught in the thicket. Abraham used the ram as his olah, his "offering-up sacrifice" and burned it on the altar to God. Abraham called that place "Jehovah-jireh," which means "The Lord Will See / See to It / Provide." Indeed the Lord did see to it and provide. He provided strength of faith for both Abraham and Isaac--we don't read that Isaac tried to fight off his father or get away. Isaac trusted the Lord, surely having learned from his father, that whatever the Lord of forgiveness and salvation directs is always best. Then the Lord further provided the ram.

The text says the name of the place was "Moriah." "Moriah" is related to "Jehovah-jireh." "Moriah" means "Seen-to by the Lord." This Mount Moriah would also become the place in Jerusalem where David's son Solomon would build the great Temple (II Chronicles 3:1). There sacrifices for sin would be offered on the great altar, sacrifices picturing the sacrifice of the Lamb of God who would come to take away the sins of the world. Jesus died and rose at Jerusalem. Your spiritual trip to Moriah today brings you closer to Jesus' sacrifice for your sins. In Christ GOD PROVIDES—eternal rescue and safety for you. Whenever you are at any "Moriah of Hard Testing in Life," go to the true "Moriah Where God Provides the Savior Sacrificed for You." At Moriah God comforts you with forgiveness, and makes you stronger!

Amen! So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach---