

Jesus the Sacrifice - Genesis 22

Roller coasters! Who loves them? Anybody? They are fun, aren't they? But what would you think if you got on a roller coaster like this? You wait in line and finally it's your turn. You get buckled in. The bar goes across your lap. The guy working it gives the sign and off you go. Chugga, chugga, chugga, up the steep first hill. Maybe you are holding the bar tight. Maybe you are holding on to the person next to you. Maybe you are a daredevil and you have your hands up. But then, finally, you get to the top...and it just eases around slowly in a straight line, never going up or down. It's just a nice way to get a view of the park. It never goes too fast. And then at the end it just eases you back down real slow and steady. And then you get off the ride.

What do you think about that? It's more like a monorail than a roller coaster. And if you want a roller coaster then that wasn't very fun. Right? That's not what we expect from a roller coaster at all. And yet, that's what we tend to expect out of life but life just seems to be one roller coaster after another, doesn't it? We go from the highest high to the lowest low time after time. And we wonder why we can't just stay at the top at least for a little while. But something always comes along to shoot us back down the hill and into the valley.

Why is that? Is God not able to keep us up on the height? Does He not care? Are we being punished? Maybe He's just not aware. Or... God is sovereign, all-knowing, all-caring, all-seeing, all-powerful and He allows us to go through the low times so He can reward us when we get through the low part obediently. Maybe that low part is a test to see if we will really trust Him and only Him.

When we are on the heights, we say that God is blessing us. When we have lots of stuff and things are going well and there is money in the bank and everybody in the family is healthy, we say that God has blessed us and we are grateful and we should be. But what about when all of that is gone? You might remember in **Luke 18** that Jesus challenged the rich, young ruler to sell all his possessions and give all the money to the poor. Everything that God has given him, Jesus tells him to give it away. Why would Jesus tell him that?

Let me ask you a question. And don't even think about answering out loud. If God takes everything away from you; if He yanks it out of your closed fist and replaces it with nothing but air, would you still praise Him? Would you still come to Christ Fellowship and sing "You Are My All In All" with a loud voice and a sincere heart and give a testimony about how good God is...if He took everything away from you?

All of that is a pretty good description of where Abraham is in our passage this morning. If you turn to **Genesis 22**, you will see one of the most intense and powerful passages of scripture in the whole Bible. It's mind-boggling. It's unthinkable. If you have ever read scripture and thought, "*God must have lost His ever-loving mind*" this is it. I've studied it and studied it and I still have some real questions that I don't have answers to. But in this passage we see the heart of God the Father and here is another place where we are able to see God the Son, Jesus, show up in the Old Testament. Let's read **Genesis 22:1-19**. I tried to see if there were any verses we could leave out to save a little time but this passage is so amazing, I want to read the whole thing.

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. ²Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you."³Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. ⁴On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. ⁵He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."⁶Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself

carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, ⁷ Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?" "Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"⁸ Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together. ⁹ When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. ¹² "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." ¹³ Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided." ¹⁵ The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time ¹⁶ and said, "I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, ¹⁸ and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me." ¹⁹ Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba. And Abraham stayed in Beersheba.

That very first phrase is "*Some time later...*" and that makes us look back to what has happened in Abraham's recent past. His life has been a roller coaster, that's for sure. But in his recent past, things have started to settle down. Things are going pretty well. He's a pretty old man by now and we see that God has fulfilled His promise to old Abe and given him a son in his and Sarah's old age. He had some problems with some of the neighbors for a while but that has settled down. He had some problems with Sarah's handmaiden but she and her son were gone and not a real issue anymore for him. Abe was up on the height...and then God spoke to him. Can you imagine getting that word from God?

Before we get any further, I think we need to answer some questions about this story. And there are lots of questions but only a few do we really *need to know* the answer to. I would *like to know* how old Isaac was when this happened but we aren't told. Experts say anywhere between 10 and 33. However old he was, he could have refused and we will talk some more about that later.

I would *like to know* how Abraham felt about all of this but nothing is written of his emotions. I would also *like to know* what Isaac thought. That would be interesting. But the real question is, what did they tell Sarah when they got home? "*Hey guys! How was the camping trip?*" What do you tell her? I can imagine Isaac saying, "*Well, it was okay until dad tried to plunge the dagger into my heart.*" Right? That conversation didn't get recorded and while it would be interesting to know the answers to those questions, we don't *need to know* them.

One question that *we do need to know* the answer to is, **why** would God ask Abe to do this in the first place? What kind of God do we serve that would ask a man to do such a thing to his son, especially after promising old man Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation? And then at the last minute say, "*Aw, psyche! Just checking to see if you would do it.*" That sounds cruel, doesn't it?

The answer to that question is in the **first verse**. God did it to "test" Abraham. But to understand that, we need to know the difference in a test and a temptation. The difference is in the expected outcome. You may be tested by God. If so, He wants you to make the right choice because He wants to bless you. Satan will tempt you hoping you make the wrong choice so you have to endure the consequences. And sometimes God may test and Satan may tempt in the same circumstance.

When General Motors tests a Ford vehicle, what outcome do they hope to see? They hope to see failure. When GM tests a GM product, what do they hope to see? Success. It may be the same test. They just hope for different outcomes. Sometimes it is obvious in our lives. Is God testing you by presenting you with an opportunity for a weekend of booze and prostitutes? That's an easy one to see. No. Of course not. But maybe you find yourself with an opportunity to have a new job. And in this opportunity, God is testing you to see if you will hear His still, small voice that is saying, *"That's not the best for you."*, but Satan is screaming, *"Take it and get rich, big boy!"*

Here in **Genesis 22**, God is testing Abraham. But He is testing Isaac as well and that is the fascinating thing that often gets overlooked in this passage. Like I said, Isaac can be anywhere between 10 and 33 and was probably closer to 33, I think. But however old he was, he could have refused. He could have said no to Abe and just run off back home. What was Abe gonna do? He was over one hundred years old at this point. So, obviously Isaac had faith in God and faith in his father at the same time.

So, what about you? Let's get right to the application of this passage. Do you have faith? How do you know? I have been told that soldiers can go through basic training and every kind of preparation, school, physical and mental training and every pep talk and motivational speech the military can provide for them but they will still never be prepared for combat...until they see combat. Nothing can prepare you or prove that you are ready for combat until you are there and not everybody is able to handle it.

Ben works on airplanes and he told me that when they get a certain type of airplane ready for production, they take one of them and test it on some kind of big machine that shakes it and puts pressure on it and simulates all the stresses of air travel. That helps them to know if any bolts are going to come loose or if under pressure something is going to happen that they didn't plan on. But nothing proves that airplane is safe and effective until a test pilot flies it and puts it through some live tests. And those tests are difficult but they prove the plane's stability.

So, if I ask you if you have faith, what would you say? Of course, you would say you have faith, right? God gives all of us a measure of faith. But God tests us to prove that faith. And your faith is for your benefit, the benefit of others and for God's glory. God wants all that to happen so you can expect God to give you plenty of opportunities to prove that faith.

Before this happened, if you had asked Abe if he had faith, I'm sure he would say he did. He could have pointed to the fact that it was already said of him in **Genesis 15:6** that he believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. But after this, he didn't have to say anything. Nobody would ask that question because it was obvious by how he and Isaac both reacted to being tested.

James 2 in the New Testament says, *"21Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. 23And **the scripture was fulfilled** that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,' and he was called God's friend. 24You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone."*

Scripture was proven to be true. Abraham and Isaac were both proven to have faith and God was proven to provide through this one test. That is a situation with "God" written all over it. Yes, it was difficult. But in one test, God proved His word was true, proved His servants were faithful and proved He would provide. AND He proved another scripture true that people have a hard time understanding. In **Romans 8:28** that says that God causes all things to work together for the Christian's good. This difficult test proved to be for the good of Abe, Isaac and every believer from then until now.

Abraham passed the test with flying colors and all people everywhere can see it and appreciate his faith and God's provision. Now...here comes the difficult part of this message today. Here is what I have been struggling with all week preparing for this morning. For Abraham and Sarah and Isaac God blessed and gave more than ever before when they passed the test. I think about poor old Job who lost everything he had including his health, his wealth and even his ten children. And that was unbelievably difficult but, in the end, God restored everything he lost and even gave him more than he had before.

But what I have struggled with this week is the question, what if He doesn't? What if God doesn't restore everything we lose? What if God allows us to lose everything; our health, our wealth, our freedom, our stuff, our money, our pride, our church... and then allows us to die quietly and forgotten by the world?

I can't say it won't happen. Our God is merciful and generous and loving and most of the time when He takes something away, He replaces it with something better. For those of you that have been tested by God, you can attest to God's provision after the test. Most of the time you are able to see that what was horrible, He turned for your good. You can see that what Satan wanted to use for your undoing, God used for your good. You can see, like Joseph saw later in Genesis, that what your enemies intended for your harm, God intended for your good and for the benefit of those around you. (Genesis 50:20)

But what about when you can't see it? Sometimes it takes years to be able to see how God used it in your life. But you can look back and see God's provision and protection. But what happens when you go most or all of your life and you can never see or understand why God would take away something or someone you love or give you something you didn't want.

God may take something away that is bad. Or even take away something that is good so He can give you His best. But sometimes He just takes things away. But even when He just takes away and never explains it, we can still say that God provides everything we need. I'm reminded of the beautiful passage in **Habakkuk chapter 3** that says, *"Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, ¹⁸yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior."*

Can you say that? Can you say, *"Though my job fires me, and the bank account runs dry, though my 401k is used up and gone and my car breaks down, though my health fails and my loved one dies, though I have no friends and no family to support me, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior."*?

How do you get there? How does one have the kind of faith Habakkuk had to be able to truly say that and mean it? Well, let's go back to the roller coaster illustration. Do you know what makes a roller coaster so much fun? It is the feeling of being in danger and being completely out of control of the situation and yet having complete faith in the people who built the ride.

You know that you know that nothing bad is going to happen to you that is not planned by the designers of the ride. And so, in your faith, you can have peace and joy. It will be bumpy. You will be jerked around and thrown back and forth. There will be ups and downs but it's all planned. Why would you be worried? I think you see where I am going with this.

Isaac had heard his father talk about God's provision and God's promise and how he, Isaac, was the fulfillment of that promise. He knew that God provided. He would say that he had faith in God and faith in his father but it wasn't until Isaac was tested that he really knew it. Abraham and Isaac were both like new recruits fresh out of boot camp before this. They knew what they were supposed to do but they had not been tested.

Look back to **verse 12**. *“Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”* *“Now I know”*, God says. And that doesn’t mean that God didn’t know before. God wasn’t on the sidelines biting His nails hoping that Abe and Isaac would do the right thing but He wasn’t sure. No. He knew it. He just wanted Abe and Isaac to prove it; prove it to themselves and to God and to everybody watching.

And what is it that God knows? God knows that they feared God. They obeyed because they feared God. That word “fear” in Hebrew is “yare” (yaw-ray) and it means to stand in awe of and to show the respect due. It means to revere and worship.

I have a niece who is deathly afraid of clowns. She can’t stand them, doesn’t want to look at them or even see a picture of them. Clowns are not a laughing matter to her. She hates them. I don’t know why. But that’s not the picture here of yare fear.

The fear of the Lord is knowing that God gives and God takes away. He is sovereign, all-powerful, and all-knowing. He can bless you with long life or stop your beating heart with a thought. When you know God you will fear God. You aren’t scared of Him but you understand His power and you don’t want any part of His wrath. When you know God, you are obedient to God and when you are obedient to God, God provides everything you need.

Abraham knew God as the God Who Provides. That’s what he called the place where they were in **verse 14**. We would translate that verse from the Hebrew as, *“So Abraham called that place (Jehovah-Jireh). And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.”* Jehovah-Jireh means the God that provides or even the God that **makes it happen**. I like that. It could even be *“the God who sees to it.”* Isn’t that a comforting thought? God, the Creator of the universe, will see to it that you are provided for.

God will test you. It will be difficult. You may lose friends, family, job, stuff, health, money, or everything you have but all we have to do is be obedient. All we have to do is make God look good in our lives. Fear Him. Revere Him. Worship Him even when it is hard and you watch God provide. You watch God reward you with eternal rewards in Heaven.

Just remember, you can’t go through God’s test or Satan’s temptations by yourself. But even there, God provides. God has provided His Word. He has provided His Spirit to live inside you. He has provided His bride, the church, to comfort you and support you and hold you accountable. He has provided everything you need. All you have to do is be obedient.

Do you know God today? Do you really know Him or just know of Him? Do you believe **in** Him or really just believe Him? There is a big difference. You can know Him and believe Him and He wants you to and He wants to bless you. But you have to give Him everything that is you. Give Him your faith, your dreams, your future, your health, your finances and your very life and He will provide.

He provided His Son for you. Just like Abraham was willing to do, God did. Oh, the parallels between God the Father and His Son Jesus with Father Abraham and his son Isaac are staggering and maybe we will see some of that tonight but all you need to know right now is that God provided His Son as the perfect sacrifice to pay the price the Father said was due for your sins. It is a price you can only pay with death in Hell forever but Jesus paid the price for you and all you have to do is believe. Do that right now as the music plays.