

Is Your All on the Altar?

Abraham surrenders Isaac

Text: Gen. 22:1-24

Introduction:

1. We come now to what was the greatest test and at the same time, the highwater mark in Abraham's walk of faith.
2. There are two dominant themes intertwined throughout the passage:
 - The principle of total surrender to the will of God; placing all on the altar. Abraham's complete submission to God's will is on display at this time of his life like no other.
 - The picture of Christ and Calvary. Christ can be found in all the Scriptures (Luke 24:27) but there are some O.T. passages of Scripture where the typology is especially rich and Genesis 22 is one of those passages. We know from Hebrews 11:17-19 that Isaac is a type of Christ in this passage so we are on solid grounds to read it in that way.
3. We often speak of a "mountain top" experiences as representing blessings and valleys as representing trials. In reality, some mountain top experiences are actually deep trials but they lift us to a higher understanding of God, His fellowship and His ways.
4. We will consider the theme of Abraham's surrender, the lessons it contains for our Christian walk and the pictures of Christ it provides under three headings.

I. THE PROVING OF ABRAHAM'S SURRENDER (VS. 1-2)

Abraham had experienced a number of tests in his walk of faith to date. Some he had passed, some he had failed but now he comes to what has been called "The grand crisis" in Abraham's life (James Murphy). Observe three truths about this test that came into Abraham's life.

A. The Suddenness of the Test (Vs. 1a)

1. The Bible says it "came to pass after these things". For some years after Isaac's weaning Abraham and his family lived in peace in the area of Beersheba. God had come through on His promise of the promised seed, Ishmael and Hagar had been removed, restoring peace to the home and all was happy. Suddenly, God breaks the silence with a demand that no doubt would have tried Abraham to the very depths of his being.
2. This is often the nature of a trial. We typically do not see it coming. All of a sudden, we find our faith is under test.

B. The Source of the Test (Vs. 1b)

1. Some trials are of our own making due to our own sinfulness. God's grace is needed to accept the chastening and repent of our wayward behaviour. But this was not the case with Abraham. This trial came from the hand of God Himself.
2. The word 'tempt' here does not mean 'tempt' in a sinful sense. James 1:13 that God never tempts someone to do evil. Here the word means "to try, to prove; to put to trial for proof." (Webster

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1828). The same Hebrew word is translated 'prove' in multiple places in the Old Testament (e.g., Ex. 15:25, 16:4, 20:20; Deut. 8:2, 16, 13:3, 33:8; Judg. 2:22, 3:1, 4, 6:39, 17:39, 1 Kings 10:1, 2 Chr. 9:1, Ps 26:2, Ecc. 2:1, 7:23; Dan. 1:12, 14). The below examples illustrate:

- a. Deut. 8:2 "And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, **and to prove** thee, to know what *was* in thine heart, whether thou *wouldest* keep his commandments, or no."
- b. Psalm 26:2 "Examine me, O LORD, and **prove** me; try my reins and my heart."
3. This trial was from the hand of God to refine Abraham and also use him as an example to all who would follow of total obedience and surrender to the will of God. Proverbs 25:4 "Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer."

C. The Submission to the Test (Vs. 1c)

1. Abraham's submission to the Lord is highlighted in the words "Here I am" (Vs. 1, 11). In fact, Abraham's submission to this trial from the Lord is seen throughout the entire passage.
2. God did not provide any explanation. He simply gave the command. So often we won't take a step of obedience until it all makes sense to us. We want to know all of the plan ahead of time. Faith requires stepping out in obedience to God's Word even if we do not understand.
3. Trials from the Lord present us with a choice. We either submit to the Lord's purposes in the trial or we resist and rebel. To whose purposes will you yield in your trial?

D. The Specifics of the Test (Vs. 2)

1. The Person he was to Surrender (Vs. 2a)
 - a. His lone son = "thy son, thine only son Isaac". This theme is repeated 3 times by the Holy Spirit for emphasis (Vs. 2, 12 & 16). The trial touched Abraham at his tenderest point.
 - b. His loved son = "whom thou lovest" (Vs. 2). Abraham was being tested in the area of loving God supremely.
 - c. It is interesting that the first mention of love is "not in connection with the love of a man for his wife, of a mother for her children, of brotherly love, of love for country, or even of man's love for God. Instead, it is used of the love of a father for his son – "Thy son whom thou lovest". Furthermore, it is used in connection with the sacrificial offering of that only, and beloved son. The deep love of a father for his only son (yet a father who is willing to slay him) is thus inferred to be representative of the most complete and meaningful concept of the very word "love" itself." (Morris)
 - d. It is breathtaking when you move into the New Testament and note the first mention of love in the four Gospels.
 - i. In Matthew, Mark and Luke the first mention of love is the Father's declaration "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17, Mk. 1:11, Lk. 3:22). We cannot even begin to plumb the depths of the love of God

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- the Father for God the Son but Christ expresses it in his high priestly prayer in John 17:24, “for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.”
- ii. Then we come to John’s Gospel and the encounter the first reference to God’s love in John 3:16. See the picture? The Father’s love for the Son is repeatedly declared then the grand fact that the Father is willing to give his only Begotten, Beloved Son for the sins of the world.
 - iii. “Three times God shouts His love for His Son from the very heavens. But then, He tells us that He loved us (yes, us!) so much that He was willing to sacrifice His only and beloved Son, in order that we might be saved.” (Morris)
2. The Place of his Surrender (Vs. 2b)
- a. The place where Abraham was to offer Isaac is also of great significant. It was to be on a mountain God would show Abraham in “the land of Moriah”.
 - b. We know from 2 Chronicles 3:1 that “the land of Moriah” is in the area we know as Jerusalem. “Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at **Jerusalem in mount Moriah**, where *the LORD* appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite.”
 - c. Again, this is significant from a typical standpoint. The temple was built on the very site of two very significant events. 1. The offering up of Isaac. 2. David’s offering at the threshing floor of Ornan when God was smiting Israel with pestilence. It was to this very location many years later that Christ, Isaac’s Seed would be dedicated. He would then die on a cross not far from this very place “in the land of Moriah” on the mountain of God’s choosing.
 - d. “Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac was to foreshadow all the sacrifices that would later be offered in this place, which in turn were types and shadows of the one great Sacrifice that would be offered one day nearby, when the Father would offer the Son as the Saviour of the world.” (Morris)

II. THE PATHWAY OF ABRAHAM’S SURRENDER (VS. 3-5)

Abraham and Isaac now embark on the journey together to the land of Moriah. There are some lessons we can learn about the path of surrender from the journey they took. It is:

A. The Path of Consecration to the Will of God (Vs. 3)

Abraham’s obedience is highlighted in his response to God’s command. It is seen in:

1. His Promptness to the Command of God (Vs. 3a)
 - a. Evidently God spoke to Abraham the previous night as we find Abraham rising up early in the morning to immediately set about obeying the Lord.
 - b. This is another powerful example of Abraham’s total submission to the will of God. He did not delay despite the difficulty of the command. We are often slow to obey God in small things that

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don't require much sacrifice, let alone surrendering to God the most precious thing in our lives!

2. His Preparation for the Command of God (Vs. 3b)
Abraham diligently prepares what is necessary to carry out God's command:
 - a. He saddles the ass for him to ride on.
 - b. He involves two servants to help.
 - c. He cuts the wood for the burnt offering.
3. His Preciseness with the Command of God (Vs. 3c-4)
 - a. Abraham went to the exact place God told him. True obedience does not modify God's instructions. Trusting obedience means complete submission to the Lord on every detail. Great blessings follow such sacrificial obedience as we shall see.
 - b. Abraham sees the place afar off on the third day. The reference to the third day is significant from a typical point of view. As our Lord was three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, so for the same length of time Isaac was dead in the heart of Abraham. But the third day would come with a resurrection experience and Isaac would come back off the altar of death. In like manner, Christ's body was dead three days but on the third he rose triumphant.

B. The Path of Confidence in the Will of God (Vs. 5)

1. This verse highlights Abraham's faith as he told the two young men who stayed behind that he and Isaac would return. Abraham's faith in God was truly remarkable.
2. The writer to the Hebrews gives us insight into the faith that was in Abraham's heart that day. Hebrews 11:17-19 "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten *son*, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: **Accounting that God was able to raise *him* up, even from the dead**; from whence also he received him in a figure."
3. Here we encounter the first occurrence of the word 'worship' in the Bible. It is a timely reminder in a day when there is so much that goes on under the banner of "worship". True worship is total obedience and complete surrender to the will of God. True worship takes place when we lay all on the altar for God.
4. From this point, Abraham and Isaac would travel alone, leaving the two servants at the foot of the mountain. "The two men could accompany them to within sight of Mount Moriah, but they could not go all the way, just as the two men accompanied Christ to the place of death, even dying on crosses of their own. But they could not join Him in the awful experience of being forsaken of God and made an offering for sin." (Morris)

III. THE PICTURE OF ABRAHAM'S SURRENDER (VS. 6-14)

The final ascent up the mountain brings us to the heart of Abraham's surrender and the moving and breathtaking typology it represents. There are at least seven pictures of Christ in this inspired album:

A. The Wood Laid upon the Back of Isaac (Vs. 6a)

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1. The wood is mentioned four times in the narrative. Almost 2,000 years later, God the Father would lay a cross of wood upon the back of His Only Begotten Son – “And he **bearing his cross** went forth into a place called *the place* of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha:” (John 19:17)
2. Christ’s carrying of the cross up Calvary’s hill symbolized the laying of our sins upon Him – “the LORD hath **laid on him** the iniquity of us all.” (Is. 53:6)

B. The Instruments of death in the Father’s Hand (Vs. 6b)

1. Abraham carries the fire in one hand and the knife in the other; thus, prefiguring the Eternal Father as the primary Cause of the Eternal Son’s death on Calvary.
2. Isaiah 53:10 “Yet it **pleased the LORD to bruise him**; he hath put *him* to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see *his* seed, he shall prolong *his* days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.”
3. “Abraham carried a knife and a torch, both of them instruments of death. Fire in the Bible often symbolizes the holiness of God (e.g., Deut. 4:24; 9:3; Heb. 12:29). The cross was the physical instrument of death; but at Calvary, Jesus experienced much more than death. He experienced the judgment of God for the sins of the world. Isaac felt neither the knife nor the fire, but Jesus felt both.” (Wiersbe)

C. The Journey of Father and Son Together (Vs. 6c)

This is emphasized three times in the narrative and foreshadows the intimate fellowship and unity of the Father and Son in the work of redemption.

1. “Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship” (Vs. 5). At this point in the journey Abraham dismounts from the ass and travels the rest of the way up the mountain on foot alone with his son Isaac. What was to take place was only for the father and son to witness. In like manner the first 3 hours on the cross was for all to see but the last three hours were covered in darkness as what transpired between the Father and the Son was too sacred and mysterious for human eyes to behold as the Son was made sin for us and forsaken by the Father.
2. “and they went both of them **together**” (Vs. 6)
3. “so they went both of them together” (Vs. 8)
4. The Gospel of John particularly emphasizes the Father and Son walking and working together. In fact, the word ‘love’ is used in the Gospel of John more than it is used in all three other Gospels combined.
5. The type has limitations as Abraham never forsook Isaac but at the cross the Father forsook the Son as he cried “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me”.

D. The Question from Isaac about the Lamb (Vs. 7-8)

1. Evidently Isaac had been with his father to sacrifices before as notes the absence of the lamb (Vs. 7). At this stage of the journey Isaac was still unaware of his father’s purpose.
2. Abraham’s answer comes ringing down the centuries to us – “God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering”.

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- i. "God Himself" = man could not and would not provide himself a Saviour. It would be God's Divine provision.
- ii. "a lamb" = God did provide a lamb to take the place of Isaac but most importantly, God would provide Jesus Christ, the perfect Lamb of God to die for our sins. John 1:29 "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, **Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.**"

E. The Laying of Isaac upon the Altar (Vs. 9-12)

1. The Submission of Isaac upon the Altar (Vs. 9)
 - a. What it would be to have witnessed this seen. F.B. Meyer imagines it in a touching way. "They came to the place which God had told him of, and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order" – "Can you not see the old man slowly gathering the stones; bringing them from the furthest distance possible; placing them with a reverent and judicious precision; and binding the wood with as much deliberation as possible? But at last, everything is complete; and he turns to break the fatal secret to the young lad who had stood wonderingly by. Inspiration draws a veil over that last tender scene – the father's announcement of his mission; the broken sobs; the kisses, wet with tears; the instant submission of the son, who was old enough and strong enough to rebel if he had had the mind. Then the binding of that tender frame; which, indeed, needed no compulsion, because the young heart had learned the secret of obedience and resignation. Finally, the lifting him to lie upon the altar, on the wood. Here was a spectacle which must have arrested the attention of heaven. Here was a proof of how much mortal man will do for the love of God. Here was evidence of child-like faith which must have thrilled the heart of the Eternal God, and moved Him in the very depths of His being. Do you and I love God like this? Is He more than our nearest and dearest? Suppose they stood on this side, and He on that side: would we go with Him, though it cost us the loss of all?"
 - b. By this stage, Isaac was probably a full-grown man or at the very least, a teenager so he could have easily resisted his elderly father if he desired. But we see his gracious and total submission to the father's will. What a picture of Christ who in the Garden of Gethsemane said with tears, "**O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.**" (Matt. 26:39). Christ was not forced upon the cross but lay down upon it willingly.
2. The Saving of Isaac from the Altar (Vs. 10-12)
 - a. Abraham was able to spare his son from that awful death. This is as far as the Lord would allow the test and the type to go. But when it came to God the Father, He did not spare the Lord Jesus the death of the cross. Romans 8:32 "He that **spared not his own Son**, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

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- b. The test was now complete. Abraham's fear of God, obedience and full surrender has been proven. Now that Abraham had fully surrendered Isaac, God could give him back.
- c. God notes that Abraham had not "**withheld** thy son, thine only son from me". This is repeated in verse 16. Is there anything in your life you are withholding from God? Is there something or someone you are withholding from God? Maybe you it is yourself. You have never fully surrendered your whole life as a believer for God to do with it whatsoever He deems best. You will never know the fullness of God's blessing and fellowship until you lay everything on the altar.

F. The Provision of a Ram to take Isaac's Place (Vs. 13)

1. We have a double type in the account. Isaac being laid on the altar pictures Christ. The ram provided to take Isaac's place also pictures Christ and the truth of substitution. The thorn crowned ram dies in Isaac's place so he could live.
2. The truth of substitution is clearly conveyed in the words "in the stead of his son". Romans 5:8 "But God commendeth his love..." 1 John 4:10 "Herein is love, not that we loved God..."

G. The Name Abraham called the Mountain (Vs. 14)

1. Abraham calls the mountain "Jehovah Jireh" meaning "the Lord will see to it, provide". It answers to Abraham's prophecy in verse 8. In fact, the word is made up of 'Jehovah' and 'Jireh' which is the same Hebrew word translated "provide" in verse 8 and "it shall be seen" (Vs. 14).
2. Moses inserts an editorial note at this point of the narrative under the leading of the Spirit that even in his day, it was a saying "In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen". This was a prophetic statement for the future. Abraham had seen God's provision of a lamb for Isaac on Mount Moriah but in the future God's provision of a lamb would be seen again. Almost 2,000 years later God's provision of the perfect Lamb was seen as Christ hung on the cross atop Mount Calvary in the land of Moriah.

IV. THE PROFIT FROM ABRAHAM'S SURRENDER (VS. 15-24)

A. The Swearing of the Promise (Vs. 15-16)

1. God had made these promises to Abraham before but now a touching feature is added. God makes a solemn oath guaranteeing the fulfillment of these promises. He gives assurance to Abraham in the strongest possible way by saying, "By myself have I sworn". Never before had God confirmed the covenant promises in this manner. This expression is only found very rarely in Scripture, and indicates the most solemn oath possible (Is. 45:23; Jer. 23:5, 49:13; Heb. 6:13-14).
2. According to Hebrews 6:13-14, this is the strongest, most solemn oath and confirmation God could possibly make. "For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee."

B. The Specifics of the Promise (Vs. 17-18b; 19-24)

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Abraham's obedience brought great blessings. There would be blessings:

1. To Abraham Personally (Vs. 17a). "God never short changes anyone. **If you must give up something for God, He will pay you back so very much more! The blessings will far outweigh any price paid, even if it is hard.**" (Butler)
2. To Abraham's Seed (Vs. 17b)
 - a. They would be a multiplied people.
 1. As the stars of the sky.
 2. As the sand of the sea shore.
 3. Note: This prophecy clearly looks beyond just the natural seed of Abraham to the innumerable number of people who would become children of Abraham spiritually by faith in Christ.
 - b. They would be a victorious people. Total surrender to the Lord brings power and victory over the enemy!
3. To the World (Vs. 18a). Through Abraham's seed would come the Messianic Seed, bringing salvation for all people of every nation. If you have been saved, you are a fulfillment of this prophecy. You have been blessed because of faithful Abraham.
4. To Isaac (Vs. 20-24). The Biblical Writer introduces us to Rebekah. Including a woman in the genealogy was an uncommon thing but no doubt her name was included as she would become Isaac's wife.

C. The Secret of the Promise (Vs. b)

1. God gives the reason for all these blessings – "because thou has **obeyed my voice**". This is the first occurrence of the word 'obey' in the Bible. What a vivid picture the Holy Spirit gives us of the heart and soul of true obedience in this account.
2. Barnhouse calls Abraham's obedience "obedience unparalleled". With the exception of the obedience of Jesus Christ, it would be hard to find any act of obedience that surpasses the excellence of Abraham's conduct in this experience.
3. Oh how obedience brings rich blessings! How disobedience forfeits so many blessings!

Conclusion: Have you received God's free gift of salvation? Have you surrendered all upon the altar as a Christian? Practically, nothing that we hold dear in our lives, is truly safe, until it has been passed over the alter, through death and then received in resurrection power. Isaac would have been all the more precious to Abraham, and the relationship between Abraham, and Sarah would have been all the more fragrant, because of God's call to Mt. Moriah.

"If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him." (C.T. Studd)