

Scripture Reading: Genesis 22

“1 Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 2 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." 3 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. 4 Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. 5 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." 6 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. 7 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?" 8 And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." So the two of them went together. 9 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. 10 And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the Angel of Jehovah called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" So he said, "Here I am." 12 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." 13 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. 14 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." 15 Then the Angel of Jehovah called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, 16 and said: "By Myself I have sworn, says Jehovah, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son-- 17 blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. 18 In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."”

"The Sacrifice of Isaac"

On this Lord's Day, in the year of our Lord 2015, the Church around the world celebrates Palm Sunday!

A Sunday where we remember and rejoice in the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem fulfilling the words of the Prophet Zechariah, “9 "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.”

It was a glorious day that all of Israel should have celebrated, but sadly such was not the case as we see clearly in Luke's Gospel Account: Luke 19:37 “Then, as [Jesus] was now drawing near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen, 38 saying: "'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!' Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" 39 And some of the Pharisees called to Him from the crowd, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples." 40 But [Jesus] answered and said to them, "I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out." *[this was THE appointed day!]*

41 Now as {Jesus} drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, 42 saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. 43 For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, 44 and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation."”

- **As I mentioned last week, it is very appropriate that we come to this portion of the Book of Beginnings on this Palm Sunday!**

It is perhaps here in this 22nd Chapter of Genesis more than just about any other Old Testament Scripture, where the religious leaders of that day should have known the importance of this, their appointed day... In fact Jesus had reminded them there in Jerusalem some months earlier that Abraham had longed to see this Day!

- **And it is in our morning text where we find Abraham learning about the coming Day of Jesus and His work on our behalf.**
- **Jesus had come to save His people from their sins and it would be His work in this week in history where that would be accomplished thru His death, burial and resurrection!**

So as we turn to our text, let us clearly see the work of Jesus foreshadowed for us in this account!

We begin with what may come as a surprise to some... "1 Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham,...

Various translations use tested, or tried or proved & even tempted in the KJV. The reason I mention possible confusion is because there is a very familiar verse in James that some might think is contrary to what we see here in Genesis: James 1: "13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone."

Robert Candlish rightly contrasted this testing or tempting of Abraham by God with the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness by Satan: "So far there is a difference between the patriarch and the Savior. The trial of the one is gracious and paternal; the other has to stand a more fiery ordeal. Abraham has to listen to God, & obey; Jesus has to encounter Satan & resist!"

- **And Pastor Candlish goes on to point out: In both cases we see their faith passing the test!**

In fact the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews makes this perfectly clear: Hebrews 11: "17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, 18 of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," 19 concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense."

- **Since this is the divine interpretation of what we see in our morning account, we will lean heavily on it to understand what is happening!**

So God calls out to "Abraham!" And Abraham responds saying, "Here I am." 2 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 this is Abraham's test and it is quite a test! But we must remember that God is not doing this to fail Abraham, but to prove him!**
- **We have seen in prior weeks how the Apostle Paul uses the faith of Abraham as the example of saving faith that we have in our lives & here we are going to see it at full maturity!**

Abraham is being asked to do something that is humanly impossible and something that NO father would do without a clear directive from God!

It would be a three day journey for Abraham to reach the land of Moriah and some argue this just adds to the 'torture' of the event for Abraham...

However we see from the text that God has a specific place in mind for this sacrifice when He says He will tell Abraham which mountain to use!

Jerusalem was in the land of Moriah so they would be near the place where the Temple was built for the sacrifices to be made and of course the location where Jesus would Himself be the sacrifice for sin!

- **We are not told which mount, and while either would be significant**

I believe with many that it was the very place where years later Jesus would be crucified!

Abraham's faith is strong and so we read: 3 "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.

4 Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. 5 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."

I have read all sorts of comments on just what Abraham was thinking or meant when he said WE will come back to you! Obviously the interpretation that we are given in Hebrews should be our guide and thus while Abraham may not have fully understood what was about to happen, he believed that God would protect Isaac who was the son of Promise...

- **Even if it meant raising him from the dead after the sacrifice!**

Then we see an amazing encounter between a father and his son who was no longer just a small child.

And here I hope we can all see the many, many rich pictures of the passion week we are about to celebrate in these events...

6 "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."

- **The father has prepared his own son for the sacrifice, just as God the Father had done from the foundation of the world!**
- **Even the burden of carrying the wood was laid on Isaac, just as Jesus was tasked with carrying His own cross on the way to Calvary!**

7 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?"

8 And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering."

Again, Abraham could not know exactly how all of this was going to work out but he had confidence in His God and here even makes one of the most profound prophecies in all of the Scriptures:

- **God will provide Himself the sacrifice: Jesus, the beloved Son, would come as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world!**

I think it is appropriate to say a word about Isaac and his faith at this point as well... Most think Isaac was at least 15 years old at this point and he could have been even older because his mother did not die until she was 127 years old. He was able to carry the heavy load of wood and converse with his father AND was willing to be the sacrifice!

"So the two of them went together.

9 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."

- **Notice again that God took Abraham to the specific spot where He wanted them to make the sacrifice!**

10 **“And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.**

- **Abraham was ready and willing to obey to the bitter end, and a bitter end it would be for a father!**

It makes real all those places where we think the Bible might be a little too strong...

-- When Jesus told the rich man to go and sell all that he had.

-- When we are told to cut off a hand or pluck out an eye to avoid sinning

-- When are told to hate mother or father for the sake of the Kingdom!

We are quick to make excuses as to why those verses cannot mean what they actually say and yet here we have Abraham willing to lift the knife against his own son, his only son, because of a direct command from God. Abraham demonstrates the kind of faithful attitude that God demands of us at times when it just does not make any sense!

Now just so I am not misunderstood, I believe those commands are there for the same reason we see this command for the sacrifice of Isaac...

- **God wants to confirm our faith and show how He will deliver us at the appropriate time!**

11 **“But the Angel of Jehovah called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" So he said, "Here I am." 12 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."”**

I hope it is obvious that this does not mean that God learned something in all of this that He had no knowledge of before the event...

- **Some actually struggle with that!**

Just as God knew that Sodom and Gomorrah were past ready for judgment before He went to see things there, so He knew here that Abraham’s faith was mature and that he now had a proper fear of God that could be demonstrated to the world. This knowledge of God in His dealings with us is driven home by the Apostle Paul as he talks about our examples from the Old Testament...

I Corinthians 10: “11 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. 13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

And then we come to the climax of our account which should be meditated on at length as we proceed through the Passion Week this year remembering how Jesus presented Himself as the sacrifice for sin...

13 **“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. 14 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."**

- **Abraham offered that Ram as the burnt offering... Instead of his son!**
- **On Good Friday we will read and meditate on the words of Jesus from the cross as He was offered up as the sacrifice instead of US!**

God the Father presented His own beloved Son as the sacrifice and there would be no ram or person or even an angel that could be His substitute.

Jesus came to save His people from their sins and they could only be saved IF Jesus was their propitiation:

- **Only if He was willing and able to take the full wrath of God due to us because of our sin!**

This is why we hear Jesus cry out, “My God, My God why have you forsaken Me.”

Consider again the significance of the name that Abraham gives this place of salvation for Isaac...

14 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."

Abraham understood that the Lord would provide and this is why Jesus entered Jerusalem at His appointed time to be the sacrifice for sin.

- **This was the day that Abraham saw and rejoiced in!**
- **This is the day we celebrate during all of the Passion Week!**

It is the day that God told Abraham would come...

15 “Then the Angel of Jehovah called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, 16 and said: "By Myself I have sworn, says Jehovah, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son-- 17 blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. 18 In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”

Our time with Abraham is quickly coming to a close and I trust we have learned why he is the man of faith that Paul uses so often in his Epistles.

As I said at the beginning, we now see Abraham as a man with mature faith...

- **But we must never forget that such saving faith is a gift from God from the beginning to the end of our walk with Jesus!**

When God tells Abraham ‘because you have done this thing’ many blessings will follow we cannot think that the fate of all mankind rested on the shoulders of Abraham with God looking down from heaven hoping that he made the right choices!

- **No, as the Apostle Paul teaches us in Colossians chapter two: Abraham was walking by faith just as he was saved by faith!**

Colossians 2: “6 As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.”

- **Abraham was walking in the faith that God had given him and His blessings abounded to the whole world!**

James makes this very point when he refers to Abraham in his discussion of faith and works, and yes he did make even men like Martin Luther a little nervous with his bold statements...

James 2: “21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? 22 Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? 23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God.”

Again Pastor Candlish puts it well when he says that “the test of his faith showed him what this faith longed to see!”

Or as we heard from Jesus as he debated those who did not know their own day of visitation...

➤ **"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." [John 8:56]**

How did Abraham see so clearly what we now look back on so easily with not one nor two nor three but four Gospel accounts and various Epistles to give us an even fuller explanation?

Through the Spirit of course and we must remember that we are dependent on Him just as much today or we will be like those who missed their day of visitation....

Listen to how the Apostle Paul draws all of this together with some very familiar words from Romans chapter 8:

26 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. 27 Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. 28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. 31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 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?

Communion Meditation: Romans 8

➤ **When all seems lost: God is victorious!**

"33 Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

34 Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

36 As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."

37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 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.