

GENESIS 22: 1-14

Last week, in the story of Abraham and Ishmael, we saw how great God's love is for us even when we make mistakes and complicate our lives.

From today's reading in Genesis 22, we can learn much about our relationship with God and what God expects of us. Also, we can see a parallel between this story and Jesus' sacrifice in the New Testament.

"God said, take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I will tell you."

The verses that follow tell the story simply. There is no unnecessary information and there is no mention of the feelings of either father or son.

What picture do you have in your mind as the story unfolds? I can remember the representation in our eldest son's picture bible of forty years ago. It was quite disturbing and unpleasant. Now, I see an elderly man with loving eyes for his son and a loving heart for God the father.

There are some points to note about Abraham's actions and what we can learn from them.

Abraham didn't question God and wait for further instructions but obeyed readily. He rose early the next morning and went prepared with the wood and everything he needed for the sacrifice. Are we always ready to follow God's promptings without question? It is interesting that he didn't discuss with anyone or even consult with Sarah. I wonder at his strength of obedience to God as they had to travel for three whole days to the appointed place where the father was to sacrifice the son. Are we willing to work in God's time?

The relationship between Abraham and Isaac was obviously one of love and trust. Can you imagine what must have been going through Isaac's mind as his father placed him on the logs and raised the knife?

At that very crucial time, Abraham is stopped by the words of the angel and an alternate sacrifice is supplied.

And yet at all times, Abraham was full of obedience and trust in God.

In verse 5 Abraham tells his servants: "Stay here with the ass; I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come back again to you". So it appears that he expects that both of them will return from the mountain.

When Isaac asks about the lamb to be sacrificed, Abraham answers in verse 8: "God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son".

Even though he didn't understand why God was telling him to do this unspeakable act, Abraham still had faith which led to his obedience. In fact, Hebrew 11:17-19 tells us that Abraham believed God would raise Isaac from the dead.

“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, of whom it was said ‘Through Isaac shall your descendants be named.’ He considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead; hence figuratively speaking, he did receive him back”.

Although Abraham was already a true man of faith, God asked him to prove it through action. “You see that faith was active along with his works, and the scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness’; and he was called the friend of God.” James 2:21-23.

Through his test of faith blessings came to Abraham. Isaac was unharmed and Abraham had God’s approval:

“...for now I know that you fear God...” v12.

ARE WE READY TO ACT ON OUR FAITH? WE CAN LIVE BY FAITH IF WE BELIEVE, IF WE OBEY AND IF WE ACT. GOD WILL PROVIDE. GOD TESTS OUR FAITH, NOT TO WEAKEN BUT TO STRENGTHEN.

Isaac was the son God had promised Abraham and he loved him dearly. God wanted to be sure that Abraham was willing to put him first, even ahead of Isaac. It was possible that Abraham was trusting in Isaac to fulfil the promise and not trusting in God alone. Abraham passed the test.

There are times when God will test us to find out if other things are more important to us than he is. We need to ask him to help us, to trust him with all he has given us, to listen to Him and be honest with Him. There may be ‘Isaacs’ in our walk with God that he wants us to sacrifice in order to make him number one. We may be guilty of putting other things ahead of Him, such as family, friends, possessions, time, hobbies, health, money.

I had the privilege of reading about a Canadian Christian Missionary, Isobel Kuhn, who served with the China Inland Mission in the first half of the twentieth century. Along with her husband, she worked with the people of China and Northern Thailand. She wrote:

“Keep your treasures on the open palm of your hand. If you hold something tight clenched in your fist, God may have to hurt you in order to open your fingers and take it from you. But if it is offered on the open palm of your hand, you will hardly know when it’s gone.”

Indeed, God may not want to take away what is in our hand. He must just want to see if we are willing to let him have it.

GOD WANTS TO BE TOP PRIORITY IN OUR LIVES.

Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac can also be used to illustrate the gift of Christ in the New Testament.

Abraham was willing to sacrifice his only, much loved son for the sake of God. Similarly, God was willing to sacrifice his only beloved son, Jesus, for the sake of all people. John 3:16.

“God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son.”

Both Isaac and Jesus were most obedient sons and Isaac was the promised son of Abraham while Jesus was the promised Messiah. In Matthew 26:39, Jesus said

“My father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt”.

It is interesting to note that Isaac carried the wood for the sacrifice and Jesus carried a wooden cross.

For three days on the walk to Mount Moriah, Isaac was as good as dead in the eyes of Abraham. However, he passed the test and God provided a ram to be sacrificed. On the third day both men returned down the mountain.

Jesus, the Lamb of God, died but on the third day he rose again. In the death and resurrection of Christ, God provided what we need, eternal life to all believers.

IN BOTH CASES, THE WILLINGNESS TO SACRIFICE DEMONSTRATES THE DEPTH OF LOVE THAT IS INTENDED TO EXIST BETWEEN GOD AND HIS PEOPLE.

This story of Abraham and Isaac serves to reinforce to us that through faith, obedience and action God will be our friend as he was for Abraham.

God wants to be top priority in our lives.

Jesus was given as a true sacrifice for us.

FATHER, OPEN OUR HEARTS TO HEAR YOUR WORD. SHOW US IF WE ARE HOLDING ANYTHING BACK FROM YOU OR PUTTING ANYTHING OR

ANYONE AHEAD OF YOU. HELP US TO HAVE SUCH FAITH IN YOU THAT WE WILL BE WILLING TO MAKE WHATEVER SACRIFICE YOU ASK OF US, KNOWING YOU LOVE US AND WANT WHAT IS BEST FOR US.