

“God Wants Everything”
Genesis 22:1-19
October 30th, 2016

The movie *Master and Commander* starring Russell Crowe portrays life aboard a British naval ship in the year 1805. One dramatic scene shows the ship’s captain gripped in an agonizing dilemma. When the *HMS Surprise* rounds Cape Horn during a storm, Captain Jack Aubrey orders the ship’s sails to be trimmed. As one of the sailors scales the mast to help bring down the main sail, the top of the mast shatters and falls into the story waters. Connected to the ship by a series of ropes, the mast, sails, and sailor drag on the ship like a heavy anchor.

The men work feverishly to pull the sailor to safety but the sinking mast and tangle of sails begin to tip the ship dangerously to one side. Captain Aubrey weighs the difficult choice: cut the ropes to save the ship and let the poor sailor drown, or try to save the sailor and risk the lives of all on board. *Which would you choose?*

Have life’s circumstances ever placed you in an impossible situation where all your options seemed to lead to difficult consequences? Perhaps God has called you to leave something you considered very important – a possession, a position you worked hard to earn, a friendship or relationship, a dream or a goal you had labored hard to realize. You don’t want to disobey your Lord and Savior, but you find the leaving so very difficult.

Abraham was faced with just such a dilemma in **Genesis Chapter 22**. Having waited so long for the son that God promised he and Sarah, Chapter 21, which we studied 4 weeks ago today before our brief sermon series on the eldership, we saw the birth of Isaac to the 90-year old Sarah, and the 100 year old Abraham. It was a time of rejoicing and laughter.

Chapter 22 takes place some 15 or so years later. Let’s listen to God’s Word:

Genesis 22:1-19:

“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 the LORD 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 the LORD called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, ¹⁶ and said: “By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, 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.” ¹⁹ So Abraham returned to his young men, and they rose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beersheba.”

Abraham shines in this passage, and we’ll look at that briefly. But, the primary emphasis of this passage is dedicated to what is God like:

MP 1 – When God Tests His People (v. 1-10);

MP 2 – When God Provides for His People (v. 11-14);

MP 3 – When God Blesses His People (includes Abraham’s Response and ours) (v. 15-19)

Right off the bat in verse 1, we see **God testing Abraham**. The command of God (the test) to Abraham was for him to take Isaac to a mountain in the land of Moriah (which we learn in this passage is a 3-day journey away), and Abraham was to sacrifice Isaac there. Wow. *What an incredibly difficult burden for someone to carry, right?* The test before Abraham was whether he would cling to the child that God had given him, the child on which the future was based, or would he continue to obey God?

Each of us may be thinking, *why would God ask a father to lay his child on an altar and sacrifice him as a burnt offering?* On the surface, it seems like a horrific suggestion. But, we remember that God is the one issuing the command here. We must bring to this passage everything we know to be true about God. We know that God loves His people, and that He has our best interests in mind, even when the circumstances don’t look like it.

What is the point behind such a test? Didn’t God know how Abraham would respond before it happened? Of course He did; God knows all things. When God tests His people, He is determining the quality of our faithfulness. He is showing us the strength – or weakness – of our faith. He stretches us to go deeper with Him in the deep things of life. When God tests us, Scripture teaches us that He could be purifying our faith as **I Peter 1:6-9** teaches. Or, God could be perfecting our character through a test, as **James 1:1-4** teaches. And, God, through a test or trial, may be protecting us from sin as **2 Corinthians 12:7-10** teaches.

The story continues in verse 3. The next morning, we see Abraham, Isaac, and two other men loading up a donkey with, among other things, split wood for the sacrifice of Isaac. Another wow. *This is really happening, isn’t it?*

As they approach the land three days later, Abraham instructs the two men traveling with him and Isaac to stay at that point with the donkey, and Abraham and Isaac would continue on to the mountain for the sacrifice, with Isaac carrying the wood. As they walked on, Isaac asks Abraham where the sacrifice was that they'd offer, given they had wood, fire, and a knife. (Poor Isaac, he doesn't even know that he is the one to be sacrificed!) How sad; how humbling!

Abraham replies that God would provide the sacrifice, and they continued on. They finally arrive at the place for the sacrificial offering, an altar is prepared with wood, and Abraham lays Isaac on the altar. He has the knife in hand, and is ready to plunge it into his son.

Before we go further, let's consider two more things from these first 10 verses.

1 - Moriah (which means "God has chosen") is mentioned in **2 Chronicles 3:1**; it is where God halted the plague of Jerusalem, and where Solomon built the Temple. In the New Testament, we learn the place is located in the vicinity of Mount Calvary where Jesus was sacrificed.

2 - Sacrificing in Abraham's day was necessary for atonement of sin. Bulls, lambs, goats, and pigeons were offered in sacrifice, and it was understood their blood shed covered the sins of the people offering them. The sacrifice was actually an act of worship. God had called Abraham to worship Him on a mountain in the land of Moriah, and for his worship to be acceptable to God, it would require sacrifice – the sacrifice of his own son, Isaac.

Back to the text. To this point, we've considered that **God gives His people tests**. With verse 11, we also see that **God provides for His people**.

Just before Abraham can sacrifice his own beloved son on the altar, a voice calls out to Abraham (verse 11), "Abraham, Abraham!" Then in verse 12, "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."

Whew! Just in the nick of time! The voice was, verse 11 tells us, the voice of the Angel of the Lord, a name for Jesus Christ before He took upon Himself a human nature with the dawning of the New Testament.

Abraham looks behind himself and he sees a ram caught in a thicket. God not only stayed Abraham's hand, but He also provided the sacrifice in place of Isaac! According to **Hebrews 11:17-19**, which Ethan read earlier in this service, Abraham offered Isaac believing that God would keep His promise. He had a history with God. Abraham had grown spiritually to the point where he knew that God's will never contradicts His promise, so Abraham held on to the promise of **Genesis 21:12**, "for in Isaac your seed shall be called (named)."

This means that Abraham believed that even if God allowed him to slay his son on the altar, God could raise Isaac from the dead. After all, Abraham had seen God bring life out of the deadness of Sarah's womb. Abraham believed God would provide, when he did not know where, when he did not know when, when he did not know how, and he did not know why!

When God provides, it's on a God-sized scale.

A little boy went to the store with his mother. The shop owner, a kindly older man, passed him a large jar of suckers and told him to help himself to a handful. Uncharacteristically, the boy held back, and just stared at the jar. So the shop owner pulled out a handful for him.

When the boy and his mother left the store, she asked him why he had suddenly become so shy and had not reached his hand into the jar when invited. The boy's answer? "Because his hand is so much bigger than mine!"

God's hand is much bigger than ours. There will be times when we cannot make head nor tail of what God is doing. We can trust Him to come through.

Beginning with verse 15 and running through verse 19, this passage ends with the Angel of the Lord (Jesus) reiterating the promises God first made to Abram in **Genesis 12:1-3**, and has repeated in many chapters since. We note here:

- 1 – God swears on Himself, because there is no higher authority on which to do so;
- 2 – He promises again to bless Abraham, and multiply his family as the stars of the heaven, and the sand on the seashore;
- 3 – Abraham's descendants would possess the gate of their enemies; (a promise is here mentioned for the first time – it means the enemies of God and His people would not overtake them; and, finally,
- 4 – All the nations of the earth would be blessed by his seed

God mentions these things because of Abraham's obedience. God blesses obedience to His Word. We cannot expect His blessing when we transgress His Word, when our will is not in submission to His word and we insist (and persist) on having our own way, which often times is in direct opposition to God's Word and His will for us.

Rather, we are to be submissive to Him, and to the spiritual leaders God has placed over us.

It is instructive to note something else about Abraham in this passage. When God's Word came to him, Abraham obeyed. God speaks to him to take his son Isaac and sacrifice him on a mountain in the land of Moriah. And the very next day, early in the morning, Abraham is about the Lord's business.

Let us apply this to ourselves now. Consider your life presently, and your recent past. *When you have been confronted with God's Word, either through a sermon, a Sunday School class or bible study, and your sin is pegged, how do you respond typically, or how have you responded in the past?* If you were to act like your spiritual father Abraham, you'd do what God tells you to do. Without delay, without making excuses for your actions or words, and without biting the hands that seek to love and shepherd you.

If, instead, you desire to cling to your sin, you will seek to continue in and justify it even by pointing to the behavior of others. Or you may seek to tear others down as a way to get your way. You may even slander or speak evil of those who in love seek to bring you back to the good graces of the Lord. You may even go as far as to leave a trail of destruction behind you as you walk away from the community that loves you and desires God's best for you.

If this could describe you and your behavior, may God the Holy Spirit bring upon you the conviction, strength and spiritual maturity necessary to own your sin, forsake and turn away from it, to seek forgiveness from those against whom you've rebelled, and to embrace the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It may be that you are not a son of Abraham at all. You are not mentioned in the text today. You were last included in Genesis chapter 21, when Ishmael was last seen, and banished from Abraham's family. God is growing your family, even as he promised to do so last chapter. But, you would not be a part of the family of promise, the family of Abraham and Sarah which continues through their son Isaac. To you, it may be that God is calling you to switch families, and embrace the promise of everlasting life by faith in Jesus Christ.

As we come to a close in this message, it is quite possible, if not likely, that God would have you sacrifice something to Him, even as He called on Abraham to offer Isaac.

* God calls all of His children to remember the Sabbath and to keep it holy (**Exodus 20:8**). As such, He wants your Sundays to be spent, at least a portion, with His people in corporate worship. *Will you make that commitment if you're attendance is sporadic, and will you continue to do so if this is already your priority?*

* God may call you to sacrifice your comfort, your time, and your schedule. It is sometimes very inconvenient to minister to a brother or sister in Christ, but God calls you to give priority to those who are of the household of faith. (**Galatians 6:9-10**)

* He may call you to change your plans, turn down a promotion or even take another job. **Proverbs 16:9** – "A man's heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps."

* God may call you to sacrifice your need for revenge or getting even with someone you perceive to have hurt you. **Romans 12:19** – "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance *is* Mine, I will repay," says the Lord."

* God may call you to give up your desire to be right, and to win every argument. **Ephesians 5:21** and **I Peter 5:5** command us to submit to one another; further, we are to submit to the elders placed over us. (**I Peter 5:5/Hebrews 13:17**)

* God called Abraham to sacrifice His only, beloved son. He may call you to do something similar. **Matthew 10:34-39** – "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; ³⁶ and 'a man's enemies *will be* those of his *own* household.' ³⁷ He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. ³⁸ And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. ³⁹ He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it."

The faithful worshiper of God will hold nothing back but will obediently give to God whatever He asks, trusting that "the Lord will provide."