

GENESIS 22:1-8 (BY FAITH ABRAHAM...)

Introduction: Abraham, as we have seen, has been a man of faith and is recognized as such throughout the Bible. Today we'll see Abraham's faith put to the test and from this account the book of James cites Abraham's deeds, what he did, as a point of justification in connection with His faith.

On the surface, this seems to contradict Paul's idea of justification by *faith alone*, but only until we come to the realization that Abraham's deeds are, in fact, deeds of faith. The deeds Abraham accomplishes, and the deeds that we accomplish, cannot be counted for justification apart from the faith behind the deeds.

Understanding that it is faith and faith alone that justifies us, frees us from attempting to accomplish deeds for the sake of deeds. In other words, doing good things only for the sake of the *doing* merely produces a never-ending cycle of frustration, because the "doing" can never please God – only the faith behind it can.

This might sound like double-speak, but what Abraham does in the coming two sermons is an act of faith – not in the act itself, but in the outcome of the action.... Life from death.

Text Verse: Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as *our* father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. Luke 3:8

Jesus speaks of "fruits worthy of repentance" as does the entire Bible. If you have faith in God and accomplish a task because of faith in Him, and someone else doesn't believe in God and accomplishes the exact same task, you will receive your reward and they will receive none. You see, it is faith and faith alone which pleases God and so... May God speak to us through His word today and may His glorious name ever be praised.

I. Go to the Land of Moriah

Everything that has happened to Abraham since his call in chapter 12 has led to the passage we're going to look at today and next week. It is the culmination of everything God has prepared him for, and it is the crowning event in his life.

Four times in his life, Abraham has had to set aside something to gain something greater. The first was when he was called out of the land of idolatry into the land of promise. At that time he was given great and glorious promises about his name and about the multitude of descendants that he would be the father of.

Seven times these promises have been made and built upon and each step has been responded to in faith by this man of faith. The next time he set something aside was when he separated from his nephew Lot, whom he had grown up with and was very close to.

During and after this, the long delays between the promises made to him have molded him into a man of patience and reliance on God's timing. He has conquered armies and refused rewards, trusting instead that what the Lord provides is even greater.

He was told to walk before God and be blameless – meaning not only in his actions, but in the intent behind his actions as well. As an intercessor and a prophet, he's spoken with God as a friend, and petitioned the Lord for the sake of his family and others.

In God's good timing he received the son of promise, Isaac. In validation that he accepts Isaac as the son of promise, he faced his third great trial... setting aside something close to him. This came about when he sent his firstborn son, Ishmael, away.

Isaac then, along with those who would descend from him, is the highest prize of Abraham's life. And so, through this son of highest value he will have his character tested in the highest measure. This is Abraham's fourth

and greatest test and the one which will establish him, for all times, as the Bible's premier example of a man of faith.

Every aspect of his life has been brought into focus to this point as a preparation for this moment. His resolve, his holy walk, his benevolent nature, and his fatherly affections are all ready for this final and immense test.

What God is like is what Abraham has been molded into, and what Abraham faces is what God Himself will demonstrate. The man and his life, particularly this point in his life, will be used to show us the very heart of God and the wonder of His love... for us.

¹ Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."

"After these things" is talking about the events of the preceding chapter. In the first 8 verses is the record of Isaac's birth until his weaning at 3 years old. In the next 13 verses, the account of the expulsion of Ishmael and Hagar from Abraham's camp is noted.

And finally, in verses 22-34, came the detailed story concerning Abraham's treaty with Abimelech, which included Abraham's right to Beersheba. The very last verse of chapter 21 said, "And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines many days."

And so it is "after these things" that God tested Abraham and this is where we begin today. This coming account is one so rich and so theologically significant that no matter how closely we look at it, we will unfortunately only scratch its surface.

After the previous events it says "that God tested Abraham." The term used in this verse is one used before on specific occasions – "*ha-elohim*" or "the God," and it is emphatic. When we see the term "the God" instead of just "God" it's important to ask, "Why?"

And, the reason goes all the way back to the fall of man where Adam and Eve were tempted by the serpent. What happens here with Abraham is by the hand of the one true God, not a satanic subterfuge. The Bible is making sure we note this.

It is not a test, therefore, which would result in *disobedience* if accomplished, but obedience. And likewise, if he failed to do it, he would be disobedient. In order to avoid any confusion in this verse, the NKJV says here that God “tested” Abraham.

Some other versions, like the King James say that God “tempted” Abraham. However, the book of James tells us that “God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.” This is a test, not a temptation.

To avoid confusion and the need to make excuses as to why “tempt” here doesn’t mean the same as “tempt” elsewhere, the term “test” is used. Unless you’re Bill Clinton, there’s no point in trying to explain why a word doesn’t mean what a word means. The Hebrew word means to “prove” or “try” and so “test” is far better in modern language than “tempt.”

The root of this word possibly signifies glistening or light. And so what is occurring is a highlight of Abraham’s character by giving him the opportunity to show to all successive ages the nature and worth of an unshaken faith in the power, glory, and truth of God.

²Then He said, “Take now your son, your only *son* Isaac,...

v’yomer, kakh na eth binkha eth ye-hideka asher ahabta eth yitsak

The order in which these words are placed in the Hebrew gradually increases the anticipation and raises the emotions higher and higher. The detail and minuteness of what is being said is meant to elicit the highest sense of the importance of what’s coming.

It is intended to preclude any doubt in Abraham. Every word is detailed, emphatic, and striking, leading to the name...Isaac. In other words, to show

Abraham what he most wanted to know he was going to use what Abraham most wanted to keep.

He wanted to know God's plan of redemption for mankind – the mystery behind it – and so in order for him to see it, God directs him in the very way in which He would someday show the world the extent of His own Divine love and goodness to fallen man.

God didn't spare his own Son, but instead delivered Him up even though He had done no wrong. He was innocent and loved. And so to allow Abraham the experience of what it was like for God to accomplish this act, He directs him to do the same. For all intents and purposes, Isaac is dead to Abraham from this moment.

God says, "Take your son, your only son..." when in fact Abraham had another son. This then indicates the nature of the sacrifice – it is the son of promise, it is Isaac. And so the pattern of God's sacrifice is laid out – there is a firstborn son and there is a Son of promise. One will live and One will die.

And thus we read in Exodus 4:22 – "Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD: "Israel *is* My son, My firstborn."

And thus we read in John 3:16 – "For God so love the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." EXPLAIN

2(con't) ...**whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah,**...

"Whom you love" is meant to indicate the Abraham's highest love. In other words, Abraham surely loved Sarah and he loved Ishmael too. But the love of Abraham for Isaac is the highest love of his soul. Abraham is asked to take this love to "the land of Moriah."

Moriah means "Chosen by Jehovah." And so, "Go to the land I have chosen. It is a particular place which out of all of my creation is designated for a

particular purpose.” Moriah is mentioned only one other time in the Bible, 2 Chronicles 3:1 –

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.

²(con’t) **...and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”**

The son of promise, the only begotten son of Abraham is to be made a burnt offering. The exact method of such an offering was to first cut the throat, then cut it open, wash the entrails, and then cut up its quarters. After that, the pieces were to be placed in order on the wood and finally it was to be burnt to ashes. Imagine the emotion...

Were we to trace every avenue of this verse through the Bible, this sermon would go until late in the night, but this is the spot where the temple stood and it is the mountain where God’s only Son died. At that moment, the veil was torn as is recorded in Matthew.

As He passed through the veil, He presented His blood as the fulfillment of all of the offerings which only prefigured His work in the Old Testament. When this blood was presented, it restored access to God for fallen man.

Paul records the type of offering Jesus made in Ephesians –

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. ² And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. (5:1, 2)

The term “sweet-smelling aroma” is directly linked to the burnt offering Abraham is asked to make. The death of Isaac upon the altar is given as a foreshadowing of the death of Jesus on the cross.

This son of promise who was miraculously born of a womb that was past the time of child-bearing, prefigures the Lord who was miraculously born of

a virgin womb. The sacrifice of Isaac on Mount Moriah then is a similar picture of the Lord's cross. From birth to his coming sacrifice, Isaac pictures the Lord.

II. The Third Day

³So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son;...

As I said earlier, in point of fact Isaac is to already dead to Abraham. Though the action hasn't come yet, the state of mind has. He was probably numb from the contemplation of what was directed, but in complete obedience to God, the account says he "rose early in the morning."

He probably was told to do this in a night vision and as soon as the morning dawns, he sets out to complete what was directed. Time and again we've seen Abraham's immediate response to every task he's been given. He is a man of promptness and obedience.

A particular point about this verse which we can only speculate on, and yet which we shouldn't miss, is that Abraham's donkey is saddled. When we think this passage through, and although unstated, Isaac will ride a donkey next to his father.

And so once again we have a pattern of the coming Christ revealed in the book of Zechariah chapter 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.

Just as Isaac's birth prefigures Jesus' birth, just as Isaac's weaning prefigured the birth of the church, just as Isaac's sacrifice is to prefigure Jesus' death, so is Isaac's ride to that death here to prefigure Jesus' triumphal ride into Jerusalem.

3 (con't)...and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

Here we have another picture of the coming Messiah. The verse says Abraham split the wood for the burnt offering. Though he has a thousand or more people in his camp, **he** split the wood. It is an act of intimacy and of personal responsibility. In the same way, God is the Creator, in Genesis 1:11 we read this –

Then God said, “Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb *that* yields seed, *and* the fruit tree *that* yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed *is* in itself, on the earth”; and it was so.

God used a portion of His own creation, a tree, in the sacrifice of His Son. The work of Abraham prefigures that great act and the personal responsibility it foreshadows. And so off they head from Beersheba to the spot where history itself began, climaxed, and will continue into eternity – the mountain of Moriah, Jerusalem.

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

It's about 45 miles from Beersheba to Jerusalem and the mournful trip for Abraham took two days. Although we won't come to the end of the story today, the two days of the journey once again prefigure the time from Jesus' crucifixion to His resurrection.

As I said earlier, Isaac's death occurred, to Abraham, the moment he was told to sacrifice him. They arrived at the mountain to accomplish their mission on the third day. The same is true with Jesus, who ascended the hill on Friday and was resurrected on the third day. God has left out no detail, everything foreshadows Jesus.

What is coming in the next sermon then prefigures that great day when life was restored and hope was returned to the hearts filled with grief – both in Abraham and in the apostles and friends of Jesus. Sadness comes for a moment, but the joy is everlasting.

There are many other “third days” mentioned in the Bible, but one in particular needs to be addressed in conjunction with both the binding of Isaac and the resurrection of Christ – because it points to the return of Christ.

In Hosea 6:1-3 we read this –

“Come, and let us return to the LORD; For He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. ² After two days He will revive us; On the third day He will raise us up, That we may live in His sight. ³ Let us know, Let us pursue the knowledge of the LORD. His going forth is established as the morning; He will come to us like the rain, Like the latter *and* former rain to the earth.”

Although this won’t make sense apart from a much deeper review of the Bible, Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8 both say that a day to the Lord is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day. This prophecy of Hosea then tells us that the Jewish nation will, after a period of two thousand years, be revived.

This has happened, exactly as prophesied. It also says that they will return to the Lord at this time and be raised up on the third day. In other words, it will be the fulfillment of Jesus’ own words when He said that He will return to Israel when they call on Him as Lord, at the dawning of the third millennium from their exile.

We are right at that point in history now. As a confirmation of that, verse 3 says He will come to them like the latter and the former rain. The rain cycle in the land of Israel was disrupted for the past 2000 years and only now that Israel is back in the land and has repopulated the forests have the two rains returned.

James 5 speaks about this time in history – “Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. ⁸ You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.”

In other words, Israel the people are back in the land. Israel the land is again receiving its long missing rain cycle. Now that it has returned, the Bible assures us that the Lord's return is imminent.

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."

Abraham confirms that he and Isaac will both return to the servants, even though Isaac is to be offered as a burnt offering. Either Abraham is crazy, he is accommodating his words to soften the truth, he is lying, or he truly believes that they will both return.

He wants to know the mystery of God's plan of redemption and God is going to reveal it to him. He knows this and his faith **in their return** is founded upon it. Even if his son dies, he will live again. And so he tells them that they will both return.

There's no need to speculate on this and the commentaries that say otherwise are wrong. You may place a big X over them. The reason is twofold. First, God made a promise to Abraham in Genesis 17:19 and repeated it in Genesis 21:12 –

"... Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, *and* with his descendants after him."

God has promised that Isaac will live and have descendants, but at this point in Isaac's life he isn't even married, much less a father. And so, Abraham's test of faith is exactly that, a test of faith. No matter what Abraham does to Isaac, he is to have faith in the previous promise, that Isaac will live and have children.

When later in the Bible James says that Abraham was justified by works which accompany his faith, he is speaking of this very act. And the work is a work of faith in and of itself. This isn't meant to be confusing, but what God is asking of Abraham is faith in the previous promises, not in some unknown quantity.

This is borne out in what he says to the servants now, what he says to Isaac later, and in what the book of Hebrews says about this very account. There it tells of what would otherwise be hidden –

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. Hebrews 11:17-19

God is using Abraham as an example of two things – First as a picture of what He will do with His own Son. And second, as a lesson for us. God already promised Abraham that Isaac would have children and through him would come the Messiah.

Now he is being tested to see if he will follow through with something which seems contradictory to that – taking Isaac’s life. “If God has spoken, then what I have been asked to do cannot stop what has already been promised.” This is the lesson for us.

God has recorded this, and many other things in His word. Now what He asks us to do is to stand on the promises recorded there – even when things seem contradictory to those promises. Romans 8:28 is a prime example –

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose.

If this is true, and it must be because it’s recorded in God’s word, then when something happens in our life which is bad or which seems to contradict God’s love for us, we are to trust that God already has it figured out. In other words, and in plain English, he wants us to not be unstable or wavering in our faith.

This is what God is telling us through Abraham. Don’t waiver, don’t be unstable, don’t call into question God’s goodness or integrity. Instead stand

firm on what He **has** said and continue on with what He is now directing in your life.

A good way to look at it is – “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world and nothing can separate us or take My love from you.”

What shall we say then? Paul tells us – “...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.

Romans 8

III. God Will Provide

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.

Once again, as we have seen already many times, this is a foreshadowing of what Jesus will do. Abraham placed the wood on his son and took the fire in his hand along with the knife. The wood represents both Jesus’ cross and our sins.

In John 19 we read this about the wood – “And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called *the Place* of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, ¹⁸ where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the center.”

In both Isaiah 53 and in 1 Peter 2, the Bible records that the Lord placed our sins on Jesus – a heavy burden He carried up that hill. And the wood was the fuel for the fire of God’s wrath upon the sins of man. As I’ve said many times, God’s is angry at sin and his wrath will burn against it.

And this wrath will either be poured out in the crucifixion of His Son and our acceptance of that offering, or it will be in ourselves as we receive the full measure of deserved destruction. Personally, I choose Jesus.

The fire and the knife being carried by Abraham is also represented in Isaiah 53. There we read this about the One who determined and set forth the Sacrifice –

“Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put *Him* to grief. When You 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.”

This plan, the sacrifice of Jesus, was set in motion at the foundation of the world according to the book of Revelation and it was the Father who determined it would be accomplished, just as Abraham determined in his own mind to go through with what was asked, carrying the fire and the knife himself.

What Abraham is prefiguring here is the greatest act in all of history. God the Father pouring out all of His wrath at the sins of man on His own Son. This passage in Genesis is given to show us two demonstrable truths. 1) That God is holy and will judge all sin, and 2) That God loves us and is willing to step out of eternity, unite with humanity, and bear that judgment upon Himself

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?”

Isaac is asking an obvious question here. “Dad, I’ve got the wood and you have the knife and fire, but where is the lamb?” A lamb is an animal of the flock. It’s not something someone would normally find walking around in the open country.

This makes the question all the more direct. “Dad, there are no herds around and you didn’t bring a lamb, so where will the lamb come from?” The answer is coming, and no, it’s not a lie...

⁸ And Abraham said, “My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.” So the two of them went together.

Abraham has already been called a prophet of God by God. His words when recorded in the pages of the Bible do two things. First they tell us *what* he said, and secondly when spoken in a future sense they are prophecies. Abraham isn't lying to his son. Instead he's revealing distinct truths.

One is that God provided Isaac. He is the son of promise and the miraculous birth to a woman beyond the age of bearing. Isaac therefore is the burnt offering. In essence, “Son, it is you.” But Abraham probably told him more because it says, “So the two of them went together.”

He probably reminded Isaac that God had already promised a line through him and that his death wouldn't be final or God would be a liar – an impossibility. But in what is also a prophecy, Abraham spoke of the coming Messiah.

This is absolutely certain because sacrifices were already being conducted, even from the time of Cain and Abel. If those sacrifices were satisfactory to appease God, then they would have stopped being offered, but they didn't.

Therefore, like everything else Abraham already knew, there had to be a fulfillment of them in another way. None of this is speculation. It is reasonable and understandable when taken in the context of the entire Bible. Abraham was merely demonstrating faith in this. God would provide the final Lamb.

Abraham, in his walk up the hill with his son, was learning that Isaac was an expressive type of the coming Messiah. Every other sacrifice that had been offered from the foundation of the world had been those chosen and offered by men. But Isaac was asked for by God and so this looked forward to the true Lamb provided by Him; Jesus.

Next week, we'll see the completion of this amazing passage.
Genesis 22:9-24 (The Lord will Provide)

A Difficult Journey, a Hard Climb, Strong Faith

Now it came to pass after these things
That God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham"
And he said, "Here I am" O King of kings
I am at Your service no matter what the exam

Then He said, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac
Whom you love and go to Moriah, that land
Offer him there as a burnt offering, don't be slack
Go to one of the mountains of which I shall command

So Abraham rose early in the morning
And saddled his donkey for the ride
He took two of his young men, giving no forewarning
And Isaac his son went by his side

And he split the wood for the burnt offering
And arose and went to the place of the proffering

He went to the place which God had told to him
And it's certain the pain in his heart was quite grim

Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes
And saw the place afar off in the distance
And he told his men to stay with the donkey and supplies
"I will go yonder and worship, this is my insistence

And we will come back to you
My son Isaac and I, this is what we will do

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 for the proffering
And the two of them went together for the deed to be done

Then Isaac spoke to Abraham his father
“But dad...” “Here I am my son, what is your bother?”

And he said, Look the fire and the wood
But where is the lamb for the burnt offering?
And Abraham spoke and Isaac understood
My son, God will provide for Himself the Lamb of the proffering

So the two of them went together, Abraham and his son
To do the deed which God asked to be done

What we learn is that God demands our allegiance
In every matter, yes every part of our life
Our attitude is to be faithful without belligerence
Even if it means carrying a sacrificial knife

God looks for faith in his faithless people
And is pleased when He finds it dwelling in us
It is a lesson to be taught beneath the church steeple
And when we possess it, He counts it a plus

And so let us demonstrate faith in Him and in his word
And remember that we are man, and He is the Lord

Yes, He is the only one worthy of our praise
And so shall we offer it all of our days

Great, awesome, and splendid God
Help us in our faith to grow and in Thy light to trod

Hallelujah and Amen...