

Genesis 22:1-18

We have the distinct advantage, when reading the narrative before us, of knowing how it turns out. Abraham, however, did not know what we know. He lived this story from start to finish. He was not able to scan ahead in Genesis 22 and see, to his relief, that the ending would be a happy one. Abraham did believe, as the book of Hebrews tells us, that God would raise his son, Isaac, from the dead. And so he also believed that he would in fact have to carry out the slaughter of his son, and then burn his body there on the mountain as an offering to God.

So put yourself in his sandals. You're walking toward the land of Moriah in utter silence and sadness. You reach the mountain, bind your son and lay him on top of the wood, with tears streaming down your face. You raise the knife to slay your son, not thinking to yourself, "Okay God, this is the moment when You intervene and tell me to put down the knife." Oh no. You raise the knife, and you cannot look at the sad eyes of your son Isaac lying there, which gaze up at you filled with shock, and disbelief, and hurt. You can only live out the story as it unfolds. You can hope for the best, but you cannot make that happen. That you must leave to God. Your hands are tied, as much as Isaac is tied down.

Those are difficult sandals in which to walk. But are you not walking in sandals like these even now? "*God tested Abraham,*" is how Genesis 22 begins. He is also testing you and me. We do not have the answer key; that stays with God. All we have is the test. And this test is no simple one. There are questions that we want help with. We want to raise our hand and ask the teacher for a clue. We want to whisper to the one next to us, "Hey, how did you answer number 22?"

Abraham did not do that. Question 22 was a direct command from God. "*Take your son...to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering.*" How Abraham would have wanted to raise his hand and ask, "I don't understand this test question. How am I supposed to answer it? Can't I just skip this question and go on to the next one?" But Abraham doesn't say a word. He is given his test from God, and he must carry it out to the letter.

What test has God given you? There are no easy tests. Although some seem to us to be much harder than others, especially those, as with Abraham, that deal with our loved ones.

I used to hate it when the teacher would surprise us with a test. And she always seemed to know when to pop these tests on us; it's when we were not prepared. This is what God did to Abraham. He gave him a pop quiz. But He disguised this test as real life. Abraham did not think to himself, "Oh, I see...God is testing my faith here. So I just need to follow His command to the letter and everything will turn out well." Far from it. Abraham's test did not come across to him as a test. And neither do ours.

God tests us out of love, not so we fail, but rather so we pass the test. He wants no one to fail. That would not be a test, but a temptation. And these come from the devil, not from God. So how did Abraham do with his test? He passed. Good for him. Yes, but also good for us. For we see how he passed, and we want to take it to heart. Here is how Abraham passed his test: keeping these words before him - "*The Lord will provide.*"

"*Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?*" his son asked him. "*The Lord will provide,*" Abraham told him. He didn't know how. He didn't know when. These words seemed laughable. God will provide? Yeah, right! There was no way out of this. This test question was impossible. It could not be answered;

not by man. The question seemed to be flawed. “Kill my son! Really? Who put this question on the test?” But Abraham clung to the hope that God would provide somehow, someday. And that’s faith.

Every question on your test throughout your life can be answered with these words: The Lord will provide. These words flow out of the First Commandment. We can fear, love, and trust in God above all things, at all times and in all places, no matter where we are in life, no matter where the curves, and bumps, and jagged rocks in life have taken us, because the Lord will provide...period...exclamation point! That’s faith. To believe that God always will provide.

The opposite of this is unbelief. To doubt that God will provide. To say to myself, “God will not help me, not with this test question. I’ll have to do this one my way.” That’s disobedience. Had Abraham done that, he would have stopped short in carrying out the command of God to slay his son. And that would have evidenced, not his faith, but his lack of it.

We schwaffle back and forth between the two: faith and the lack of it. Some questions on the test we answer well. Others we fall way short with our answer. Every Sunday morning is a test question. Will we obey God and worship Him, as Abraham did, or will we fall short? If we believe that God will provide, we will be like Abraham and do as God commands and promises us. And when it’s time to give our offering to the Lord, sometimes we act like Abraham and give our very best. Other times we doubt that God will provide, and so we keep the best for ourself.

We’re schwafflers, you and I. Sometimes we pass a test question by acting in bold faith. Other times we completely mess up with our answer by worrying that God will fail us; that He will not provide as He has promised. And so we have to disobey Him and do things our way.

God provided on Mt. Moriah, and not just for Abraham. Yes, He put the ram there so Abraham would see it and offer it in place of Isaac. But God always puts the ram there for you and me. He always gives a way through every trial in life. He always provides the answer to every test question.

But think of this...Mt. Moriah, where God provided the ram for Abraham, is the mountain upon which Jerusalem was built centuries later. And just outside of Jerusalem is Golgotha. Here God provided, once and for all, the Substitute for sinners. The very spot where the ram was offered up in place of Isaac is where Jesus was offered up on the cross for you.

Your sins, and mine, have taken us into some very difficult places in life. Our disobedience to God, our lack of faith, has led us into places where there is no way out. We’re like Isaac who was bound to the wood of the altar. Our sins have bound us, and we cannot escape.

Friend, God will provide. He provided His Son to take your place. He died that you might live. He was burned in the fires of hell for you. And here right now He releases you from what has bound you for Jesus’ sake. Here are His words of pardon. They are for all of you. “You are forgiven of your disobedience. Everyone of you is completely forgiven.” And here is the evidence. The Ram...His body and blood, which was offered up for you on the cross, is given to you with bread and wine. He is laid here on this altar for you. Here is your Substitute. You come forward as Isaac and behold the Ram, and receive Him as the One who releases you from your sins and from all that has bound you.

You are tested throughout your life. But here is Christ who is the answer key; who solves every question on your test. He is your Lord, the One God provides for you. Amen.