

Genesis 22:1-18

If you think God is loving, gracious, and compassionate, read again the story of Abraham and Isaac. He appears to be downright mean commanding Abraham to offer his son as a burnt offering. Nowhere in the Bible does God seem so cruel as He does here. Even when He destroys Sodom and Gomorrah--that we can understand, those wicked people rejected Him. But Abraham loved God. He was a faithful, obedient worshiper of the true God. How could God put him through such a torturous test? Abraham had waited ninety-nine years for the son of promise. And now God says, *"Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and offer him (to Me)."* What agony God put that poor man through.

We think this way because we are human. We feel for poor, old Abraham because we see things from a human point of view. It's how we look at our own life. When life is good we paint a smile on the face of God. It's easy to praise His name, be thankful, and put a fat check in the offering plate when we get a big tax refund from the IRS. But when money is tight, when we're sick or depressed, when we deal with death, we turn God's smile into a frown and wonder why He's allowing us to endure such hardships.

Poor, old Abraham, however, did not once complain. How tempting it would have been to object when God gave him this harsh command. How easy it would have been to hesitate, to offer up one excuse after another. *"Not my son, God! Take my livestock, my property--all of it if You want...take even my own life, but not my son!"* Yet, nothing like this came from the mouth of Abraham. Not one word of objection did he speak. The Bible says, *"So Abraham rose early in the morning...(with his son, Isaac), and went to the place of which God had told him."*

God was testing Abraham's love. Did he love his son more than he loved God, or did Abraham fear, love, and trust in God above all things...even above his only son, Isaac? What if God were to test our love for Him? He chose Isaac for Abraham's test because Isaac was a treasure within Abraham's heart. What is in your heart? What do we treasure? Is it family? Is it money and the things money can do for us? Is it our time? Is it our talents and abilities?

When it comes to money, do we have the attitude, *"I will only give you this much, God, and no more. I need my money."* When it comes to time, do we have the attitude, *"I'll give you this many Sundays, God, but no more, because my time is precious to me."* With our abilities do we use them for ourselves without giving much thought as to how we could use them in service to the Lord and His church? And with family...is this the one thing in our life which is sacred? *"I'll worship you, God, except when I have family over. I treasure my family time."*

You and I may not like it too well--having to search our own heart and see what it is that we treasure there, because it exposes what we really are. We're not the good Christians we pretend to be. We don't love God above all things. There are things we love as much as, or more than God. We do not give Him these things when He asks us to, and when He takes them away from us, we get angry at Him.

Abraham did not get angry. The Book of Hebrews tells us that Abraham kept looking to God's promise, believing that He could raise his son back from the dead. The harder the test got for Abraham, the more he focused on the promises of God. If we all did that here, we would not have to seek money from the community to pay our bills. If we all did that here, we would have to print more

bulletins on Sunday mornings. If we all focused on God's promises, as Abraham did, we would be having Holy Communion today.

God calls Abraham the father of all the faithful. Abraham is your father not because you need to grow into his shoes, but because your faith, weak or strong, is in the same God. God does not ask you to become Abraham. Rather, God becomes Abraham for you. God was not being mean by telling Abraham to offer his only son on Mt. Moriah. He did this to show both Abraham and us His incredible mercy, because this is exactly what God Himself would do on Mt. Calvary.

Do you see the parallel? Abraham saddles a donkey for the journey...Jesus rides a donkey toward Jerusalem and the cross. Abraham takes two men, his servants, with them...Jesus is placed between two men on Golgotha. Abraham laid the wood for the burnt offering on Isaac...the cross was laid upon Jesus for Him to carry. It was a three-day journey to Mt. Moriah...Jesus was in the tomb until the third day. Abraham bound his son to the wood upon the altar...God's Son was bound to the altar of the cross.

And yet no angel called from heaven to put a stop to Jesus' sacrifice. No ram was offered up as a substitute in place of Jesus. Instead, Jesus was offered up as the Lamb of God as the substitute for you. "*Where is the lamb?*" Isaac asked his father as they journeyed together. The answer is seen as Jesus bows His head and dies. He is the Lamb. He is the one who is sacrificed for Isaac, for you, and for every sinner.

Search the heart of your God and you will see that it is you He treasures. He loves you above all things. He puts Himself to the test. Will God give up His only Son, whom He loves, Jesus, and offer Him up on Mt. Calvary for you? The answer is, "*Yes!*" my friends. God did not object. He did not hesitate. He offered no excuses. He did not look at our lives and say, "*You are too sinful! I will not shed My Son's blood for you.*" He did not look at how we love other things in life more than Him. He did not look at how selfishly we give Him our money, our time, our voices, our love. God sent His Son to die for you not because of anything in you, but because He loved you; because He is merciful and full of pity.

And God forgives you, friend. He's not waiting for you to love Him more. God forgives you right now, and He will help you respond in love this week in your life. God is not waiting for you to do better with giving Him your time, your money, your service. He forgives you right now because His Lamb died for you, and He will help you do better in your life with how you show your thanks back to Him.

The tears and sadness within Abraham turned into joy at the top of Mt. Moriah. God gave his son back to him. And the tears and agony within Jesus on the top of Mt. Calvary are the source of your joy because there God gave His Son for you. And so in your life you can know that each and every day God smiles upon you. In sickness and in health, in poverty and in prosperity, in life and in the midst of death God is for you. He gave up all that He had--His own Son into death--because you are everything to Him. Now go out and show your family and friends, your coworkers and classmates that you, as Abraham did, believe this. Amen.