

POPULAR STORIES

CHAPTER 9

ABRAHAM'S GREATEST TRIAL

Genesis 22: 1-19

I love God's timeliness. This week we found a building on the market that would make a great church building for us. If God is pleased for us to purchase that building, God will have to make the way as only God can. It will require each of us to believe that God is able to do what only God is able to do.

At the same time, I opened my Bible this week to the next familiar passage for our "Popular Stories Series". It is the story of God calling Abraham to offer up Isaac. That is by God's arrangement. When God "works all things together" so that he leads you to a passage like this, at the same time as he is doing something special in providence, God grabs your attention in a special way.

This was: "Abraham's Greatest Trial." Whatever God is pleased to do concerning this building, most likely, it will be a trial for us. And the main point of this passage is God will provide; God will see to it. The only thing for Abraham to do was believe God. If God is pleased for us to have this building—God will provide. Or if God is pleased for us not to have this building—God will see to it. The only thing for you and me to do is—believe God.

Genesis 22: 1: And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, *here I am*. 2: And he said, Take now thy son, thine only *son* Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

GOD SHALL TRY OUR FEAR OF GOD

We read in verse 1, "God did tempt Abraham." It means God tested Abraham; it means God proved Abraham. God will try the believer's fear of God. God will test our reverence, respect, and awe of God. We see it in Christ's word to Abraham in verse 12, "And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God."

God presents a trial to his child which is beyond our understanding. We simply cannot conceive how it makes sense; we do not see the reasoning behind it. For instance, God said to Abraham, "Take now thy son, thine only *son* Isaac,...an offer him up as a burnt offering." This is the son through whom God promised the Messiah. Isaac is the son through whom Messiah would come and bless his elect out of every nation. Abraham could not possibly comprehend how it made sense to offer Isaac as a burnt offering.

When you are child under your earthly father's care, very often your father will tell you to do a thing which makes no sense to you. But if you reverence your father, you do not question his wisdom and authority. He is your father. Therefore, in reverence for him, you obey.

Much more, when you fear God, when you reverence God, when you respect God, a believer does not question God. You may have many questions in your own mind but you know God is Wisdom. God our Father knows the end from the beginning. He works all things after the counsel of his own will. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose." (Is 46: 10; Eph 1: 11; Ro 8:28)

Abraham feared God so he did not question God. Instead, verse 3, "Abraham rose up early in the morning [prepared everything needed] and went unto the place of which God had told him." (Ge 22:3)

GOD WILL TRY OUR LOVE OF GOD

In addition to testing our fear of God, God will try the believer's love for God. God is a jealous God. (Ex 20: 5) He will not share the glory, the praise, the affection due to him, with another. (Is 42: 8) Therefore, the believer's affection cannot be divided between our Lord and another. Christ said, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." (Mt 10:37)

Isaac was Abraham's greatest possession. God gave Isaac to Abraham by promise. He was a miracle child. Isaac was Abraham's only son. He waited twenty-five years for this son. By now Isaac was on up in years. Abraham had watches his son grow up and Abraham dearly loved Isaac. So testing Abraham's love for God, God said to Abraham, "Take now thy son, thine only *son* Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." (Ge 22:1-2)

By Abraham's work—by his obedience to God—by offering up Isaac—Abraham proved that though he loved his only son, he loved God supremely. Christ said, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me." (Gen 22: 12)

Brethren, God gives us sons and daughters, grandsons and granddaughters. He gives us fathers and mothers, sons and brothers. God gives us many other kinds of gifts in this life which we treasure. But we are to hold it all with a loose hand because God will see to it that he alone has our hearts.

GOD WILL TRY OUR FAITH IN GOD

Also, God will try the believer's faith. Isaac was the son through whom God promised the Messiah. Through Christ God promised all nations of the earth would be blessed. If Isaac were your son, would that not make you put a special value upon Isaac? Would it not make you have a special confidence in that child? But Abraham must believe God and his Christ, not Isaac.

What better way to prove Abraham's faith in God's ability than to command Abraham to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering? Though this was the child through whom God promised Abraham's Savior, Abraham obeyed God and offered Isaac because he believed God was able to raise him up, "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten *son*, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God *was* able to raise *him* up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure. (Heb 11:17-19) By this work—by obeying God and offering up his only son Isaac—Abraham proved his faith was not in word only, but that the truly believed God was able to raise him from the dead.

FAITH JUSTIFIED BY OUR WORKS

Men read the apostle James who wrote, "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?" (Ja 2: 14) James is not saying that the believer is justified from our sins before the law of God by our works. The believer's works have nothing whatsoever to do with our justification from sin. It is God alone that justifies his child through the person and work of his Son. James is declaring that by the believer's works of obedience, the believer who professes to believe God is justified as being a true believer, possessing God-given faith. The believer's faith is justified as being genuine faith by his works of obedience.

Often, we hear professing religious folks brag about their works of faith. But the works most men speak of are not the works that James uses as illustrations. James speaks of the believer who has one coat, one piece of bread, with no way of purchasing another. Then God calls him to give what he has to a beggar. The believer who gives so that he has nothing left, proves he really believes God will provide. James gives the example of Rahab. She risked her life before a cruel king by protecting the spies. She proved she believed God would save her by this work. Then James gives Abraham as an illustration. We see from our text that Abraham offered up his only son, Isaac, who he loved dearly. He proved by this work of obedience that he truly believed God would provide.

Brethren, it is not a trial when we stump our toe or our car breaks down or we give out of our abundance so that we have plenty left over. The trial is that test God sends which is beyond our ability to reason or understand yet you submit to God because you reverence God. It is the trials God sends which requires you to take sides with God, letting go of your most dear possession, because you love God more than them. The trials which proves the believers faith to be genuine is the trial which takes away all possible ability and strength from us and requires us to believe God is able to do what only God is able to do. These are the trials by which a believers proves he really believes God.

THE RIGHT TRIAL AT THE RIGHT TIME

When God gives his child a trial, God gives just the right trial at just the right time. We read in verse 1, “And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham...”

Believers have nothing to boast of. Faith is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. (Eph 2: 8) God first gives the faith needed for the particular trial. Then God gives the trial. God even sustains our faith and brings us through the trial. Abraham faced ten trials in his life.

In the very beginning, God first provided Abraham faith to believe God. Then God gave him a trial to prove his faith was God’s gift by calling Abraham to leave his homeland of Ur, to leave his father’s house, along with his former vain religion. “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.” (Heb 11: 8) And through the trial, God provided!

Then God first grew Abraham in faith so that Abraham beheld his eternal home was not in this earth but in the heavens. After that, God called Abraham to sojourn in the land of promise as in a strange country, to pass through like someone sight-seeing. “By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as *in* a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles...For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.” (Heb 11:9-10) And through the trial, God provided!

Next, God first grew Abraham in faith. Then God gave him the trial of facing Abimelech in Egypt. Therefore Abraham believed God. And through the trial, God provided!

Again, God first grew Abraham in faith. Then God gave Abraham the trial when his herdsmen and Lot’s herdsmen began to quarrel. Therefore, believing God would provide, Abraham told Lot to take whatever part of the land Lot wanted. By faith, Abraham took what was left. Through the trial, God provided!

So it went trial after trial. God first provided Abraham faith then God gave Abraham the trial of the destruction of Sodom. Therefore, by faith, Abraham interceded for Lot in Sodom. God first gave Abraham faith then gave him the trial to fight those kings who took Sodom and took Lot captive; God first provided faith to refuse the treasures which the king of Sodom offered to him; God first provided faith to repent from his vain work of producing a son by his own works; God first provided him faith to send away his son Ishmael and Hagar. Through each trial it was by God’s grace that Abraham believed God. And through each trial God provided! God provided! God provided!

Now, God sends this tenth trial—the greatest trial of all—but—“it came to pass after these things.” (Gen 22: 1) Whatever trial we face, believer, we can be sure God will only give it, after God has given and grown us in faith to trust that God will provide.

PROVING THE OBJECT OF FAITH

When God proves the faith of his child, God is proving the faithfulness of the object of our faith, Christ our Lord. God is not proving that we have strength but that Christ is our strength. Our faith has no strength in itself because we have no strength in ourselves.

Have you ever received really bad news? The true trial takes all our strength away. From the moment God's command came, Abraham was utterly without strength. He did not sleep a wink that night. His heart was in his stomach as he saddled his ass. Abraham's arms were utterly weak as he chopped the wood for the burnt offering. His legs trembled with every step he took as he walked those three long days toward the mount of the LORD. Imagine how he had to hide his tears as he saw his son sitting by the fire each night. Abraham was utterly weak in himself! But the apostle Paul said, "When I am weak then am I strong." (2 Cor 12: 10) When God brought Abraham to the end of himself that is when Abraham cast himself entirely on Christ to care for him. When there was nothing else he could do but believe on the LORD, Abraham believed on the LORD.

The trial is not to prove some great ability in us. Faith looks to Christ, depends upon Christ, believes on Christ to do the saving because we have no ability to do so. Christ is even the Strength who sustains us in faith. So when God proves the steadfastness of our faith, the only way we remain steadfast is by the steadfastness of Christ who is the object of our faith.

Through the trial, God proves to his child that God's ability to provide is greater than whatever our need is. Remember, God is in control of both—our need and our provision! The thing that makes the trial is that God sees to it that we have no ability to overcome it. God controls that. The unconquerable trial is God's way of proving that God's provision is more abundant than our need. "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." (Php 4:19)

This is where we have to be brought concerning our sin and salvation. We have to be brought to see we have no way of saving ourselves, of giving life, of making ourselves righteousness, or of making ourselves holy or of even preserving ourselves. Christ is All! He is the Author and Finisher, the Alpha and Omega! Salvation is of the Lord!

GREATER REVELATION OF CHRIST

God gives the trial to give his child a greater revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. By the revelation of Christ God grows his child in fear, love and faith.

Christ said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad." (Jn 8: 56) Through each one of the nine previous trials, Abraham was made to behold Christ's day a little more clearly. So it was in this greatest trial. God's love was manifest to us "because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. (1Jo 4:9) What better way to make Abraham see Christ's day than to call a father to offer up his only son, who he loved!

After our trials, we look back over them. Then we see the hand of God. After the trial, we see how God was revealing Christ to us. At the end of this trial, after Christ revealed himself to Abraham, I am sure the rest of his days, Abraham looked back over this trial and through faith he saw Christ's day more clearly each time he thought on it.

Abraham could remember God saying to him, "Take now thy Son, thine only son, whom thou lovest." (Gen 22: 2) By faith, he could see God the Father giving his Son, his only begotten Son, who the Father loved.

When Abraham remembered making all those preparations while everyone slept by faith, he could behold God the Father making all the preparations to save his people before the foundation of the world when he entered into the everlasting covenant of grace with Christ his Son. That is when God chose his people in Christ and predestinated all things from eternity for his Son to be offered in our room and stead.

As Abraham remembered how "On the third day, Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off." (Gen 22: 4) Perhaps God revealed to him that is the very mountain on which God would offer his Son.

When he remembered how he “took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid *it* upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together”, by faith, Abraham could see that though wicked hands laid the cross on Christ, it was God his Father who determined before for it to be done. (Gen 22: 6) It was God the Father who took the fire of his divine justice and slew his own Son that he might be just and the Justifier of him that believes on the Lord Jesus. (Gen 22: 6)

Abraham could think back on the very words he spoke to Isaac, saying, “My Son, God will provide himself a lamb: so they went both of them together.” (Gen 22: 8) By faith he could see God in his Son, providing himself to be the Lamb. He could see God the Father and his Son “went both of them together” to Mt. Calvary to reconcile his people unto himself.

How often Abraham must have remembered “lifting up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind *him* a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.” (Ge 22:13) By faith, he could see Christ Jesus with the crown of thorns on his head. He could see God the Father offering up his Son in the stead of Abraham’s son, in the stead of Abraham himself, instead of all Abraham’s spiritual seed.

The trials which God sends is to teach us that the doctrine we hear preached is real. They are to teach us that God has indeed provided all righteousness, all holiness, all redemption in Christ Jesus who is the Wisdom and Power of God unto salvation.

FROM FAITH TO FAITH

At the end of the trial, Faith spoke to Abraham’s faith. Christ, who is Faith, spoke to Abraham’s faith. “For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from Faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” (Rom 1: 17)

And what did Faith say to Abraham’s faith? “And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only *son* from me...And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, [feared, loved and believed Christ] and hast not withheld thy son, thine only *son*: [and hast proved thy faith by obeying] That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which *is* upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.” (Ge 22:12, 15-18)

Did Christ not already know that Abraham feared God? This is the tenth trial, Abraham has been a believer for many, many years? Did Christ not know already? Sure he knew, God gave Abraham the faith. But when God spoke to Abraham through Christ, he spoke to Abraham’s heart, so that the Spirit bore witness with Abraham’s spirit that he was indeed a child of God. (Rom 8: 16) That is how our doubts are removed and God proves the faithfulness of our faith is Christ himself. The Spirit bears witness with the spirit which God has put in his child that we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, “if so be that we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together.” (Rom 8: 17)

By this revelation of Christ, God grew him in reverence for God, grew his faith in Christ, grew his love for Christ, grew his hope in Christ! How do we know? “And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh: as it is said *to* this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen.” (Ge 22:14) God named the place Jehovah will provide, Jehovah will see to it. And years later in the mount of the LORD on a Roman cross, God provided, God saw to it, it was surely seen even as Abraham saw Christ’s day and rejoiced! Jehovah Jesus provided all for his people in Christ our All. By Christ’s finished work we have Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification and Redemption!

Believer, are you suffering in some great trial? This is why God gives the trial. He brings us to behold Christ has provided all! He gives us a more clear revelation that he is preserving us by his grace in our Lord Jesus Christ. He grows us trust more and more that our security is Christ, for the sake of Christ who laid down his life for us. That

is why James said, “Count it all joy when ye fall into different trials.” (Ja 1: 2) My brethren, God will provide just look to the mount of the LORD!

Amen!