

Mount Moriah: 'Sacrifice and Provision'

Please read Genesis 22: 1-19 & Roman 8: 28-39 and John 3:16 and then pray; *'Gracious Father, as we open your precious Word, enable us to see afresh the wealth and power of your love revealed and displayed by your only Son, our Saviour Jesus. Amen.*

Last week, we ventured up Mount Carmel with the prophet Elijah – a man who believed and knew that **the God of Abraham**, Isaac, and Jacob heard and answered prayer. (1 Kings 18: 36-37) Today, we climb a different mountain, not with a prophet but with a patriarch, and not just with the great 'founding father of our faith' – the patriarch Abraham, but also with his promised son – Isaac. Father and Son on Mount Moriah together.

Abraham is not just the **founding father** of the Jewish and Christian faith; he is the person who the authors of the New Testament look to more than any other for a **shining example of faith** – one who learned how to **exercise faith**. The apostle Paul (Romans 4), James (James 2) and the author of Hebrews (Hebrews 6: 13-15, 11: 8-12, 17-19) – all point to father Abraham as the one to watch and copy when it comes to Christians exercising faith in God and trust in God's promises.

But as Joyce Baldwin in her commentary on Genesis stresses, Abraham was to receive a very difficult and strange 'test of faith' which would have caused him consternation and alarm – and it still does! Lots of people do not like Genesis 22, but often they fail to appreciate that the "test" which Abraham faced (and Isaac) possessed tremendous prophetic significance.

Here is a sacred story which forever binds together the Old and the New Testaments, and the founding father of our faith with the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It also connects the situation faced by the teenager Isaac with the situation faced by the Son of God after his three-year earthly ministry. Here are the words of Scripture, followed by some words from the commentator Joyce Baldwin:

Read Genesis 22: 1-2

Everyone who lives within earshot of the Filton area of Bristol is aware of the testing of aircraft engines. The whirring roar indicates that these powerful machines are being subjected to unusually severe conditions in order to be sure that, whatever the strains put upon them, they are thoroughly airworthy. People may subject themselves to extreme conditions in order to prove their capabilities, and Scripture reveals that testing is a part of God's education of his children so that they may come to maturity (James 1: 2-4)

Abraham had his patience tested almost beyond endurance, but now that Isaac in late boyhood is companionable, and happy to accompany his father on an expedition, the real test comes. God tested Abraham by demands that went clean contrary both to human reason and to divine promise.

Abraham was being asked to sacrifice the son whom God had given him and his wife Sarah as 'the promised son' through whom the world would be blessed. He being asked by **the God who provides** and keeps His promises to slay this deeply loved son? And as the Israelites under Moses will discover many years later through God's law, God abhors human sacrifice!

Nevertheless, Abraham goes where God tells him to go, just like he did when leaving his homeland at the point God called him to about 35 - 40 years earlier. (Genesis 12:4, 21:5). Abraham, along with his promised and beloved son Isaac and two servants, set out to **the region of Moriah**. This important point concerning the territory and the mountain is crucial. As we have seen before, God can and does call his servants to climb specific mountains. Moses had to climb Sinai. Elijah climbed Carmel. Jesus and 3 disciples ascend Tabor – the Mount of Transfiguration. Here Abraham is called specifically to go

to the region of Moriah, which is a mountainous region, and ascend one of the mountains there – God will show him which one. If we read verses 2, 3, 4, 9, 14 – we see that **the site is important**. Why?

Mount Moriah will become the most sacred place of sacrifice, offering and worship in the future. This will start with King David when he is guided to build a sacred altar in this place within his capital Jerusalem, and God will hear his prayer on behalf of his people. (2 Samuel 24: 24-25) The story of Moriah continues significantly under David's son Solomon, who is guided to build the magnificent Temple on top of Mount Moriah. In 2 Chronicles 3:1 we read;

Then Solomon began to build the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared to his father David. It was on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, the place provided by David.

This is the Temple that will be destroyed and then rebuilt on the same spot after the return of the Jewish exiles from Babylon. The second Temple is the Temple which stood in the heart of Jerusalem when Jesus arrived there on a donkey on Palm Sunday, and which he cleansed the day after. Do you remember how Jesus, after his transfiguration felt compelled to head to **Jerusalem**? It had to be Jerusalem. It was always going to be Jerusalem. That was where he knew he had to go – the place where he would be rejected, mocked, insulted, and crucified. As Luke states in his gospel;

As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. (9:51)

Abraham was called to offer a sacrifice on Moriah – the sacrifice of his son? What was God doing? What was in the mind of the Almighty, the God who knows the end from the beginning? The God who had a plan for the saving of his people and the saving of the nations? The story of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah is one of the most memorable and outstanding stories in the OT for a reason – and not just because it reveals Abraham to be a man of amazing faith. As the Christian writer Derek Tidball explains; *'For centuries, Christians have seen in this a deeper meaning that foreshadows the work of the cross...Glimpses of Calvary can be seen repeatedly in Genesis 22.'*

Certainly, the son Isaac foreshadows Jesus by his obedience and submission to his father Abraham. The connections between Isaac the son, and Jesus the Son are there for us to see. This story (with Isaac as the sacrifice) points to the cross in the same way the famous prophecy in Isaiah 53 points forward to the cross. Listen to the innocent question Isaac asks of his father:

'Father, the fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?'

Many, many years later, Isaiah will prophesy; (Isaiah 53: 6-7)

'We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.'

Isaac's story is a 'type' of things to come. In Isaac's story we can see the story of Jesus and the cross. We have the story of two fathers and two sons.

Isaac's birth was nothing short of miraculous. Sarah gives birth when she is very old. (Genesis 18:11) Her boy was a miracle baby. What about Jesus – who was not born of an older woman like John the Baptist, but born of a young virgin by the name of Mary. He was conceived through the power of the Spirit. (Luke 1: 26-37) The miraculous conception for the Son of God.

Secondly, both sons are referred to 'only sons' and 'beloved sons.' (Genesis 22: 2, 12) What about Jesus? *'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him*

should not perish but have eternal life.' (John 3:16, John 1:14, 18) Isaac is described as the son who Abraham's 'loves.' What did God the Father say about his son, both at his baptism and as he was transfigured? *'This is my beloved Son; with him I am well pleased.'*

After leaving the two servants and the donkey (interesting that a donkey accompanied them on their journey), Isaac carried the wood for his sacrifice up the hill. What about our Lord Jesus? *'So, the soldiers took charge of Jesus. Carrying his own cross, he went out (from the city) to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). Here they crucified him, and with him two others – one on each side and Jesus in the middle.'* (John 19: 16-18)

Isaac willingly lay on the altar. He neither murmured nor resisted nor sort to run away. Jesus willingly gave himself up to death on the cross. He willingly submitted; he willingly laid down his life. *'The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.'* (John 10: 17-18)

The sacrifice of Isaac was to take place "in the region of Moriah." Of course, it did not take place because God provided a substitute, a ram caught in a thicket. Jesus was crucified in the region of Moriah. He was not crucified on Moriah where the Temple stood, he was led out of the city and crucified on Golgotha, a high-point outside the city wall. Why? Remember how Abraham is told to offer a burnt offering. Burnt offerings had to be taken outside the camp according to the law. So, Jesus was taken outside Jerusalem, carrying his own cross, forced up to the top of Skull, and crucified. Outside the city walls! Listen to words from Hebrews 13: 11-12

*'The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, **but the bodies are burned outside the camp.** And so, Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.'*

Remember those blessed words of the wonderful hymn by Cecil Frances Alexander:

*There is a green hill far away,
outside a city wall,
where the dear Lord was crucified,
who died to save us all.*

Why was Abraham willing to go ahead and sacrifice his son, his only son? According to Hebrews, because, by faith, he believed that God could have raised Isaac from death back to life. Listen to Hebrews 11 (the great chapter on faith) verses 17-19. **Read.**

Isaac did not have to be killed because God provided a substitute. Isaac returned with his father alive and well. Jesus willingly gave his life for our sins, as our substitute, instead of us, in our place, so that our sins might be forgiven, our guilt removed, our lives set free by his sacrifice. Jesus was not spared! As Romans 8:32 reveals; *'He who **did not spare his own Son**, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things.'*

The NT Teaches two things at the same time – in parallel; two truths concerning the Father and the Son. The Father did not spare His Son, and the Son willingly gave himself up in obedience to the Father and for us and for our salvation. On Calvary, outside Jerusalem, in the region of Moriah, God provided a Lamb for the sins of the world. On Calvary, Jesus willingly laid down his life, only to take it up again.

Jesus gave his life for us, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. (John 1:29, 36) He also knew that he would be raised on the third day. He would be raised to life so that we too could know

the hope of resurrection and eternal life. And thank God, we do know this eternal blessed hope. It is ours in Jesus, who is the Resurrection and Life, the Living One, who died, but now lives forever.

'On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance...' (Genesis 22:4) Now let me read to Mark 10: 32-34.

Three days later, he will rise. He did rise! He is Lord. On the third day Abraham looked up. On the third day Jesus rose up from the grave.

In Philippians we read this: *'And being found in appearance as a man he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore, God raised him to the highest place and gave him the name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.'* (Philippians 2: 8-11)

The Son honoured His Father, and the Father honoured His beloved Son.

Will you honour the Son of God and give your life to him? Will you take up your cross and follow him? If you have not done this already, will you accept Jesus the Lamb as your personal Lord and Saviour? Can you see how the 'Lord provides' through the cross? "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself." (2 Corinthians 5:19)

God provided for father Abraham. A ram caught in a nearby thicket. He also provides for us. Can you see how the Lord has provided a Saviour for you? On Calvary's Mount – a sinless, perfect, Saviour was provided and died willingly for the sins of the world. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. He did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all. (Romans 8)

I hope you can see there is more to this captivating story in Genesis 22 than meets the eye. We need new eyes "to see" just how God has provided salvation and hope through his only begotten Son. I like the way Joyce Baldwin describes this, and with this quote, I will end.

'The Genesis record of Abraham's testing, then, is rather like the first drawing of a great artist, who has in mind a master work. The pencil sketch is perfect in its own right, yet the finished painting far surpasses the original drawing in which the same hand can be seen to have been at work.'

May we know the joy, freedom and peace of following and trusting God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit – the God who provides for us in every way, the God who is faithful to every promise, the God whose love we can be never separated from through Christ Jesus our Lord; (Romans 8:39) Jesus was the Lamb slain for the sins of the world, the One who is worthy of all our love, praise, honour and glory. (Revelation 5:12) Worship, serve and follow Jesus. Worthy is the Lamb.

Amen.

(Revd Peter J Clarkson 8.3.26)

