

**BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: Ignite Your Faith: Genesis 12-25 wk. 4**

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**Message Title: By Faith We Live pt. 1**

**Release Date: Thursday, 8/22/19**

We've been following the story of Abraham, which brings us to Genesis chapter 22, which really is the culmination of the journey. It is the apex, the greatest chapter in the story of the life of Abraham. But Genesis chapter 22 is also one of the most intense, one of the most emotional, one of the most disturbing stories ever written. So, turn with me to Genesis chapter 22, beginning in verse one.

*"Now, it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." And He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you." So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day, Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance. And Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship and return to you." And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. And Isaac spoke to Abraham, his father, and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" And Abraham said, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together. Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" and he said, "Here I am." And he said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him, a ram, caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him for a burnt offering in the place of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place The Lord Will Provide, as it is said to this day, 'In the mount of the Lord it will be provided.'"*

We don't know how much time elapsed from the end of chapter 21 to the events in chapter 22. Most guess somewhere in the neighborhood of 15 to 30 years, which means Isaac would have been either 15 to 30 years of age, somewhere in that timeframe. As far as we know, this was the first time that God had spoken to Abraham since the events in the previous chapter. Ishmael and Hagar were now gone. Isaac was the Son of Promise and these must have been absolutely glorious days in the home of Abraham and Sarah. The long-awaited Promise Seed had come. It would be through Isaac that the descendants would come. It's everything that they had waited for, for so long, by faith. God was pouring out His blessing upon them. It was everything that they had ever wanted.

Then one day God spoke, and He asked for the most unimaginable thing. As a matter of fact, it's interesting to notice in the text, that the writer tells us right from the beginning, this is a test, as if we could not even emotionally process the story, if we did not know up front it's a test. The book of Job is

written in similar fashion. We're told right up front what's happening or emotionally we probably couldn't even process what happens in that book. So we're told, but Abraham isn't told. God comes along and says to Abraham, Abraham, I want you to take your son, your only son, the son whom you love, and I want you to offer him as a burnt sacrifice in an act of obedience to Me.

If you notice the way the text is written, there is great emphasis on "son, only son, whom you love". As a matter of fact, when you read through the story, what you notice is a continual reference to my son, my father, Isaac his son, Abraham his father. The writer wants us to enter into the emotion of the text and really come to grips with what's going on here. We can't even imagine what was going through Abraham's mind. He knew that Isaac was the Promise Seed, he knew that God had promised that the seed would come through him. He knew that the descendants would come through Isaac. None of this could have made even the slightest degree of sense to him, but Abraham had been on this journey of faith and one thing he had learned is that God can be trusted, no matter what. God can be trusted. God tells the truth.

The way the story is written, there's a lot of detail. He saddled his donkey. He got together two servants. It even says that Abraham, in his old age, a very wealthy man with lots of servants, he himself went out and chopped the wood for the fire. That's a way of slowing the whole story down. Probably for Abraham, it was a way of processing, but for us it slows the story down, so we really come to grips with what's being asked here.

It was a three-day journey and over those three days, Abraham had lots of time to think. Somewhere along the way, Abraham came to the conclusion that he believed he would have to literally slay his son, but that God would raise him from the dead and give him back to him. We know that because the writer of Hebrews tells us that. Now Abraham didn't have the facts quite right, but he did understand that God had made a promise and that promise would be fulfilled, because God tells the truth. Somehow Isaac has to come out of this thing alive. Notice even when he says to his servants, we will go to the mountain and we will return. There wasn't a doubt in Abraham's mind that Isaac would come down the mountain with him, because God had made a promise and he would keep that promise.

So they arrive at the destination and they're walking to this place, just Isaac and Abraham and Isaac figures it out. He says, father, you've got everything you need for this sacrifice. But where's the lamb? It's a pretty good question. Abraham must've just about choked on the answer- God will provide the lamb.

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Abraham and Isaac finally get to the spot that God designated. He builds an altar. He places on top of it the wood and then he begins to bind the hands and feet of his beloved son. Abraham would have been an old man. Isaac would have been in his youthful prime. There's no question Isaac could have overpowered his father. Somewhere along the way, Abraham had passed his faith onto his son, Isaac, and Isaac in willful obedience simply allowed his father to bind him and to lay him on that wood.

By this time, Abraham's heart must've been pounding through his chest as he pulled out that knife and he reached out to slay his beloved son, when God stops him. God stops him and says, Abraham, I know now that you fear Me, you reverence Me. You have not withheld your beloved son from Me. And there Abraham looks up and in the thicket he sees a ram and the ram becomes the substitutionary sacrifice on that altar. The place was called, the Lord Will Provide, Jehovah Jireh. It's really quite a remarkable story.

We pick it up again in verse 15, *"Then the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, "By myself, I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this thing and have*

*not withheld your son, your only son, indeed, I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham lived at Beersheba."*

God reaffirmed his covenant with Abraham. This wasn't a new covenant; it was just a reaffirming of a covenant that's been reaffirmed a number of times in this story. Go all the way back to Genesis chapter 12 and God had made a covenant with Abraham, but part of that covenant meant you will be My people and I will be your God. And part of the commitment of that was to get Abraham to a point where he really understood what that meant. What God wanted was to pull out a people who would trust Him by faith, and He would pour out his blessing upon them. And so God had entered into this lengthy commitment with Abraham to get him where He wanted him to be, as a man of faith, remarkable faith.

It's important not to just pull this story out of its context and just look at it all by itself. It is the culmination of a lengthy journey of faith. This wasn't the first time that Abraham had been tested. He'd been tested several times. Sometimes he passed the test and sometimes he'd fail. Sometimes he had great faith and sometimes he had doubt. Sometimes it's only in those times of failure, that we come to grips with what we really believe to be true of God. Those are some growth moments. They were necessary moments to get Abraham to Genesis chapter 22 when he offered Isaac in an act of obedience.

When you think about what God asked of Abraham and we crawl inside the skin of Abraham, it's hard to imagine. It's hard to imagine his emotions, what he would have been processing. As a matter of fact, we find it somewhat disturbing. More than that, we maybe even find it somewhat appalling. Even if Abraham did not have to slay his son, just the emotional trauma of what he was asked to do, and how far that went, seems appalling to us. Hold that emotion right there, and then remember that about 2000 years later on that same spot, there would be another Father who loved His Son more than Abraham could have possibly loved Isaac, and He would lay His only Son on an altar. Only in that case, the execution would not be stopped. Rather, it would be completed, and there that Son would die, and his blood would be shed. The substitutionary lamb would be placed on that altar called "a cross" and there, God the Father would see his Son, His beloved Son, executed.

You know why he did that? He did that because you offended Him. He did that because you offended Him, and you offended Him and you offended Him. He did that because I offended Him. That was His response. I offended Him, so he gave up his Son to die, to die on a cross as the substitutionary lamb for my sin.

As we go through the book of Genesis, I've tried to highlight those words that appear in the book of Genesis for the first time in all of the Bible and you have a lot of those of course, because it's the first book, but they are significant. In Genesis chapter 22, for the first time in the Bible, you have the word test. For the first time in the Bible, you have the word love. For the first time in the Bible, you have the word obedience. Genesis 22- test, love, obedience. That's the theology of this text. God testing our faith by asking if we're willing to take that which we love most, and in an act of obedience, sacrifice it to God.

I mentioned this is the first place in the Bible where the word love appears. Do you know where the first place is that the word love appears in the New Testament? Matthew: God, the Father saying, "This is my Son whom I love." Mark: "This is my son whom I love." Luke: "This is my son whom I love." John: "For God so loved the world that He gave His Son." Does this sound like a God you can't trust, a God that would sacrifice his own beloved Son, because you offended him, so that you might know forgiveness of sin? Does that sound like a God you can't trust? Well then let me ask you a question. What would be

your Isaac? What would be your Isaac? What is it that you love more than anything else? Are you willing to put that on the altar and say, God, if you want it, you can have it?

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Arnie: Okay, Bryan, this test really stretched Abraham to his limits. Should we expect extreme challenges in our lives as well?

Bryan: Yeah, so this was extreme, and I do think about the fact that 2000 years later we're still motivated and inspired by this amazing story. So, yeah, it was extreme, but God's done amazing things through it. But I also think, you know, whether we expect some of these things or not, they're still coming. That's just the reality of life on this earth. But it's good to remind yourselves, this was a long road of God teaching Abraham and Sarah, so many ways through so many experiences to get them to this point. This didn't like just happen. It's been a long process of getting Abraham to this amazing moment. So, it is extreme, and it was a long education to get there.

Cara: So just thinking back to last month's series and James - faith demonstrates itself in action. That's pretty much what's happening in this account of Abraham and Isaac...

Bryan: Yeah, absolutely. As a matter of fact, Abraham's kind of the poster boy for that in the New Testament in multiple books: he was justified, Abraham believed, and it was credited to him as righteousness, 15:6 in Genesis. But circumcision was an outflow of that. That's a New Testament illustration. This story with Isaac is an outflow of that. That's a New Testament story. You know, with Abraham it was live or die stuff. I mean I think sometimes we forget just what was at stake in so many of these stories. For us today, you know, we'd have to say for the most part, life is a lot easier. It's a lot more comfortable, a lot less risk. So you wrestle with the question, what am I actually trusting God for today? It's easy to use that language. But really with life such as it is, what is that and how is God stretching my faith?

Cara: I always wondered how Abraham was able to do that, but just you saying that he believed God, when He said the things that He said to him, and that's what helped him march up the, [Yeah.] you know, and so....

Bryan: And to believe according to the text, he'd have to kill him. But God would resurrect him. I mean, just think about that. He really did think that, and he was willing to do it. So the level of trust that God had built into Abraham by that point was just staggering, really.

Arnie: So, we've seen Isaac as a symbol of grace, but Bryan, it seems like he's also symbolizing Jesus in this account. Is that right?

Bryan: Yeah, absolutely. Isaac is what we call a type of Christ or a shadow. It's a reminder that one day there would be a Father who loved His Son more than Abraham loved Isaac, and He would actually sacrifice His son in that same place, in order to pay for the sins of people that were His enemy. So people read Genesis 22 and they're appalled, but then they think about The Cross and they're not appalled. It's like, well, that was close in Genesis 22, but God actually did that. And that's what's appalling. And He did it for people that were declared to be His enemy and that, you know, that's the real story. That's the fulfillment of the shadow.

Cara: Just something that popped in my head, the difference between Lot and how disobedient his house was. And then look at Abraham, where his kid's just like, Yup, you know what? I'm going; there's nothing here to sacrifice; I must be that guy. And he went.

Bryan: That's a great comparison, because Isaac was an adult. He wasn't a little child, somewhere 15 and up. And Abraham was an old man. So it's not like Abraham was going to wrestle him down [Yeah.] on the altar. So the level of trust and obedience Isaac had in his father is a big part of the story too. [Amazing.] [Lot of respect there.] Yes.

Cara: So, you asked us to place our Isaac on the altar, which I mean, outstanding Bible teaching. It made me hyperventilate, because it really pointed out to me, how much work that I need to do, how many branches that need to be pruned off of me. That means replacing our fears with faith, to be able to give up the people, the things that we hold the closest. And that just doesn't happen overnight.

Bryan: No, it doesn't happen overnight. And that's part of God's grace and mercy, is He's not going to come out of nowhere and ask that. So, it's a process, and He builds us, and He grows us, and He gets us to trust Him. And He's got reasons for what He does. But I think it's also good to process when we think about doing that, it creates a fear, because we think that God's going to turn around and strike our children dead, or kill somebody we love, or whatever. And that really goes to our view of God. Why do I think that? Why do I think if I surrender to God, He's going to abuse me? It's more an issue of God, I just trust you. I can't protect my family, but God can. I think what's helpful is it roots us back to our view of God, and the need to correct some things that lead us to think, if I surrender to God, He's going to abuse me. And He's not. That's not who He is. And so it's a process of trying to correct that misperception about God.

Cara: And that's just getting to know Him better.

Bryan: It is. I mean, those misperceptions come from life experiences, from all kinds of things that happen to us. I mentioned in the message, part of that comes from my own experience with my own dad, and so that creates a view of God, that has to get examined and corrected and rethought. So lots of things come along that create that view of God. And we keep getting into the Word and better understanding who God is, so that we trust Him. I mean, another way to wrestle with the family is, do you think you're better equipped to protect them, or God?

Cara: That's actually, Bryan, what helped me, because I'm saying I can do a better job than God. He loves my kids more than me. Let Him have what's rightfully His, what's His before it was mine. Just, quit!

Bryan: Yes, it's really, really hard.

Cara: But then, you haven't met my husband yet. He is a mess. I mean, he can't cook anything. He can't...

Bryan: Like what's he going to do without you?

Cara: Yes!

Bryan: Well, you know, Patti's gone all this week, so I'm like, the frozen pizza thing.

Cara: Oh, Dan would be a mess. Arnie knows, Dan would be a mess.[Yeah.]

Bryan: I'm glad I'll get something to eat on the way home, yeah.