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THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC

Genesis 22:1-14 Romans 8:28-39

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION: When have you broken promises or had others break promises made to you? Ever had your heart broken? Ever had cause to doubt God's goodness? Did you have to give up the very thing you dreamt of, prayed for, hoped for? Then you are ready to engage the story of a father asked to sacrifice his son for reasons he did not understand. Genesis 22:1-14.

Abraham is being tested by God. Will he pass or fail? The stakes are high and the tension is real. Especially since this is a test Abraham would rather not take!

- You get a phone call and the caller says, "There's been an accident, we need you to come." What goes through your mind?
- Someone asks, "Can I come see you? We need to talk." or,
- "The test results are back, we need to talk."

For two days Abraham and Isaac walked. What was Abraham thinking, praying?

"O God, please, isn't there some other way? Please don't make me do this!"

"I don't understand why this has to happen, God. It doesn't make sense, Why?"

Nevertheless, Abraham trusted God, he was willing to obey what must be done. Remember Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane? "Father, if possible, let this cup pass from my lips. Nevertheless, thy will be done."

We've been there. We've prayed that prayer. It hurts.

As Abraham and Isaac walked together, Abraham's heart burned with dread. You've dreaded telling someone bad news that you know is going to hurt him, is going to break her heart. Abraham appeared calm on the surface, but emotions churned and swirled deep in his gut. Then Isaac asked his crushing question: "Dad, we have wood and fire for the sacrifice, but where is the lamb?" Isaac's question stabbed deeper than Abraham's knife ever could.

We've been there. We've held the knife.

We've dreaded firing employees or telling the Board of Directors bad news.

We've dreaded the surgery that needs be done.

We've dreaded confronting our loved one.

We've dreaded public scrutiny of our private matters.

We've held it together until our loved one asked the gut wrenching question,

"What's bothering you? What's going on?"

How do we explain what must now happen and why?

Our only consolation is Abraham's response, "Don't worry, God will provide." It is an answer of faith, not of understanding.

We feel alone as we struggle through our trials; but we are NOT alone! No matter how hard the task or lonely the walk, God is with us. God shares our sorrow and our dread.

Abraham built the altar, stone by stone, stone upon stone, each stone bringing the sacrifice closer, and Isaac's innocent questions stabbed Abraham deeper and deeper. Sometimes well-meaning people question us and push us for answers we are not ready to give.

Abraham obeyed God because he trusted God. His faith in God allowed him to say, "I don't understand you, God, but I trust you: so I'll do this terrible thing you ask of me." *"And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son..."*

He would do it, he's really going to do it!

A voice cries, "Stop, Abraham! Don't do it! Now I know that you fear God."

At that, Abraham could drop the knife and pick up his son in his arms. The moment he raised the knife, the sacrifice was complete. The inner will was sacrificed. The outer deed was not necessary. What gives worth to the sacrifice is not the outpouring of blood, but the faithful and obedient spirit. God tested Abraham to prove Abraham was faithful, but also to prove to Abraham that GOD was faithful, that Abraham could trust God to remain true to His word.

If we withstand God's trial and pass the test, our faith is strengthened.

If we fail the test, if we bail out too early, we're back to trusting ourselves more than God and in the long run we suffer for it, we are less for it.

Other servants of God faced God's testing.

Adam and Eve were tested by the serpent's temptation to the forbidden fruit. They flunked the test with one bite.

*The Israelites wandering in the wilderness ran out of water and they began whining to Moses. Moses was stunned by their lack of faith and he asked, "Why do you test the Lord?" God told Moses to command a rock to give forth water, but Moses took matters into his own hands and struck the rock with his staff to add a little drama. The people got water and *were* happy, but Moses failed the obedience test and his GPA dropped a few points (Morford, 100).*

When God allowed Satan to test Job with suffering upon suffering, everyone agreed Job was being tested. He just didn't understand why -- and neither did his wife and friends who thought the test so unfair, so hard, hard that his wife urged Job "just curse God and die, get it over with!" But Job so trusted God that he replied, "Even though he slay me, yet will I hope in God!" (Job 13:15).

Peter three times denied knowing Jesus, a rooster's crowing stabbed Peter in the heart, and Peter wept bitterly. Jesus predicted Peter would fail this test, and he was right.

I am encouraged that some of God's brightest and best servants first failed God's tests. If God could restore them and use them, then maybe God can use us too. I'm also encouraged to know that not everyone fails every test. Many people have passed tests they did not want to take and their witness encourages me.

- We know people who have endured Chemotherapy treatments and now enjoy good days.
- We know people who have survived business failures and overcome family troubles.
- We know people who have recovered from heartbreak and found new love in their life.

- We know people who have overcome devastating losses and tell how God saw them through.
- Friends have lost loved ones in terrible accidents, demanded of God, "Why? Why?" and in their grief even doubted God's presence. Looking back on it later, they saw that the very God they challenged "why?" was the same God who saw them through it all; somehow God was still trustworthy and Jesus Christ was the source of grace and strength. They passed the test they did not want to take. Like Abraham, they found that God provides what we need to follow His will.

Abraham gives us permission to struggle with our faith. Abraham, this celebrated hero of faith honored in the New Testament, reveals that faith is not easy, indeed it's hard d sometimes, but God is faithful to us and God comes to us again and again to renew our struggling faith, to forgive our failures, to guide our way, and to empower us to follow Him.

Abraham gives us permission to struggle with our faith, **and teaches us to get honest with ourselves, to be honest with God, hold nothing back.** God is big enough to take our honesty and to work through it with us, for us, to bring us through anything. God the Holy Spirit comes to us over and over to reaffirm God's covenant promises and to bolster our sagging faith and weary spirits.

That is good news, because sometimes in life our Isaac is NOT spared.

- People for whom we pray are not healed.
- Our loved ones die.
- Marriages still end.
- Boyfriends and girlfriends still break up, walk away heartbroken.
- We lose jobs and don't get promotions
- Sometimes we give up, or give in, when expectations seem to exceed abilities.
- Things like this make God's promises hard to trust.

But there is not just one way for God to handle our Isaacs.

Sometimes he save us FROM the thing we dread,

Sometimes God saves us THROUGH it; by enabling us to handle it, to endure it, to overcome it and to learn from it,

In Abraham's case the will to follow through was enough, the act was not necessary. Sometimes the act to follow through IS necessary and God provides the will to follow through. Sometimes we have to put aside our dreams and things we want in order to have the things we need and to fulfill God's dream for us.

BUT THE STORY DOES NOT END THERE. WE MUST MOVE ON TO ANOTHER MOUNTAIN [TOP. MT.](#) MORIAH IS COMPLETED ON MT. CALVARY.

The sacrifice of Isaac did not require his death. But God completed the sacrifice thousands of years later when another son was sacrificed on the hill top.

Romans 8:32, *"God did not spare His own son, but delivered him up for us all"*

Abraham and God both gave up their sons.

The knife upraised became the nails driven in...

The bundle of wood carried up the mountain became a cross carried up the hill...

Isaac was bound, then released...

Jesus was bound on the cross ..for our release.

Release from the shame of our sins and our failures;

Release from our frustrations and disappointments.

In Jesus the blood WAS SHED, the sacrifice is COMPLETE!

God did not spare his son, but gave him up for us all,

that we might receive the forgiveness which was achieved in Jesus our Lord!

He was crushed for our iniquities; and by his stripes we are healed, (Isaiah 53: 5) God is faithful to His people and true to His word.

God loves us, and wants to help us, so that when the hour of testing comes,

however and whenever and wherever that will come, and it surely will,

we can overcome all things in Christ who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13).

I can trust God even when I do not yet understand His plan. God has worked goodness in my life despite the troubles I have caused and the troubling consequences of others' choices. Despite my disappointments, God is good and God's will has prevailed, and I am all the better for it, and I would be far less, had I instead my will be done, not God's. I have come to trust God with all my heart. You can too!

I also fear God, revere God, stand in awe of God, because if God could ask such sacrifice from those like Abraham who loved and obeyed God, **God can demand obedience** from me, and still insist that we perform impossible tasks to demonstrate our loyalty and faith! God loves us, no doubt, but God does not hesitate to expect us to be willing to sacrifice everything we value!

During World War II, the US troop ship Dorchester was sailing through the North Atlantic when German submarines torpedoed the ship. The Dorchester began to sink and sailors began to abandon ship, piling into lifeboats, capsizing many in the panic and pandemonium. In the midst of that horrible chaos, four chaplains on board, a Methodist, a Roman Catholic, a Dutch Reformed, and a Jewish rabbi, brought a sense of calm and hope. They reassured men with words of scripture and offered prayers for the dying. They encouraged others to live. They opened an extra storage locker with life jackets and passed them out to the men in need.

When all the life jackets were distributed, the four chaplains gave theirs to four frightened young men. "It was the finest thing I have ever seen or hope to see this side of heaven," said survivor John Ladd. To quote one account, "As the Dorchester sank into the dark sea, the four chaplains were last seen braced against the slanted deck, arms linked and heads bowed, having done all they could do, and about to give all they could offer" (Parchin),

When I hear and see God-fearing people who are willing to sacrifice their all for God, I realize that the true God is not the simple, manageable, tame God we worship decently and in order inside a nice building. Abraham's God could demand his child, his life, his all! The God of Abraham is out in the wild and woolly places we encounter and God can demand all that WE are and have and dream, and then want more?

THAT IS the kind of God I want to know. The god of awesome power, the God who loves us so much that he would send his only begotten son to die for us, that we who believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life. The kind of God so big and powerful that nothing in all creation, *neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything other created thing, shall be able to separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord!* (Romans 8:38)

THAT is the kind of God I need and want. That is the God we have! *"If God did not spare His own son, but delivered him up for us all, will God not also give us all that we need?"* (Rom. 8:32).

Believe in God,
trust God,
trust and obey, trust and obey,
and God will see you through every test, trial, and temptation you face! To
God be the glory! Amen!

Sources Cited

Morford, Duane. Word and Witness, Pentecost 5, June 27, 1999, Vol. 99:4 (Year A),

Parchin, Victor M. "The Story of Four Brave Chaplains." The United Methodist Reporter, June 26, 1992 as quoted in Word and Witness, Pentecost 5, June 27, 1999, Vol. 99:4 (Year A), 99.

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