

Genesis 22:1-18
February 18, 2024

I can't lie. I've never liked that one. Genesis 22 has never sat right with me. You can see why. God has called and demanded so much of Abraham already! When God first called Abraham, he told Abraham to leave behind his culture, his family, his homeland to go to Canaan, modern day Israel. God promised Abraham that he and his elderly wife were going to have a miracle baby boy, and through the people that come from him, God would save the world from itself and make all things new. And God kept his promise like he always did and gave Abraham his son, and now God says, *"I'd like him back."*

What kind of God would do that? What kind of God would ask that? Because He is a **Lord who Provides. 1. He provides the test. 2. He provides the substitute.**

1. The Test. What's horrible about this is God isn't doing anything that he doesn't have the right to do- not just because he's God and he can do whatever he wants- it's more than that. Isaac was a special gift from God. Abraham didn't earn him. God doesn't owe him a thing. If God wants Isaac back, he has every right to take him. Also, something that ancients understood very well was this: not only are we as individuals guilty before God, but so are we as family units, and if your family unit is guilty before God, there must be blood, a sacrifice. So God didn't just have the right to ask for Isaac back because he gave him to Abraham in the first place, but because Abraham and Sarah were sinners, their sin demanded blood. And Abraham knew it. He doesn't argue. But his heart is torn in two. That's his only son. That's his pride and joy. Isaac is the ultimate proof in his life that God is merciful and kind- and now God's mercy has run out. God is harsh. God is severe. But he isn't wrong for this. He has every right to do this. So Abraham gets up, chops the wood that would incinerate his son, loads his donkey, and off they go on the three day journey to mount Moriah. Abraham tells his servants that he and Isaac will return- why would he do that? Either because he knew that if his servant knew the truth, he wouldn't be able to do what God asked, or because he believed it- he knew God could do all things, and if he could give him Isaac, he could also give Isaac back- and that God promised through Isaac the world would be saved- and God doesn't break his promises! And up the mountain they go- the two of them. Step by step Abraham's heart fractures more and more until Isaac innocently pierces his soul: "Dad? Where's the lamb?" Could you do it? Could you tell him? He couldn't. "God will provide." What else could he say? As Abraham placed his son on the altar, tied him up, he must have told him what God had told him so many times: "I need you to trust me." He raised his knife, spotted the exposed part of Isaac's neck where his blood would gush, and he said in his heart, "He can do all things." **"Abraham! Don't touch him."** The angel of the LORD has been there the entire time. "I know you love me Abraham. I know you love me more than your own Son. I know." And there a ram was caught in the thicket, the substitute for Abraham's son. Abraham was right.

How could God do this? Why did he test him that way? Was God just saying up in Heaven, "Hm, I wonder if Abraham *really* believes in me." No. That's not what Moses means when God "tested" Abraham. The test of Abraham's faith wasn't for God. It was for Abraham. God is saying to Abraham, "Do you trust me?" "Abraham, you can trust me, even when I allow you to feel pain. You can trust me even when I don't make sense. You can trust me even when it seems like I've abandoned you because I haven't and I never will. You can trust my promises to you, I'll never go back on them." God wasn't just playing with Abraham's heart. He was giving him an opportunity to express his trust by letting him go through severe pain. And afterwards, Abraham left stronger, closer to God, humbler, and able to look how far he's come

in his journey of faith. The point of this test is not that you need to go and do likewise. God strictly forbids human sacrifice. The point of this test is not simply that God is going to ask you to do crazy things, and you just have to close your eyes and obey, and if you do, you'll be rewarded. No, the point of this is that there are times when God allows severe pain to enter your life. There are times when he allows tremendous disappointment, heartbreak, exclusion, and confusion into your life. There are times when he does not make sense. And in those times, God is saying to Abraham and all of us, "I need you to trust me." How? How can we trust him? How could Abraham trust him? How can anyone trust God when he doesn't make sense? Because doesn't just provide tests, he proves the substitute.

2. The Substitute. I don't think we truly comprehend the horror that haunted Abraham as he walked up Mount Moriah to slay his son, as he looked down on his helpless son with the knife in his hand. God promised to save the world from sin through his descendants, and that promise would die along with Isaac. And God had every right. But the ultimate question Abraham struggled with was not- "How could God take away my son?" It was, "How could God not save the world anymore? How could God go back on his promise? What kind of God is he?" The knife in Abraham's hand would kill not just Isaac, but condemn all people to Hell forever, and God had every right. The unsaid tension tearing at Abraham's heart is this: "Is God just, or is he merciful? Does he punish sinners, or does he keep his promise? Is he a God of wrath, or grace?" Does he punish sinners, or does he keep his promise to forgive sinners? How could he possibly do both? I'll show you what I mean. There's a reason you get angry when a corrupt police officer or politician abuses his power and takes a life that he shouldn't take, or makes a decision that is so obviously wrong and corrupt.. There's a reason you get angry when someone you love is abused, used, and stepped on.. There's a reason you are angry when someone shoots up a crowd of people. There's a reason you get angry when people rob, murder, and cheat and nothing happens! You desire justice! Crime and evil demand punishment. God feels the same way you do. The problem is, he sees the evil within us as well, and because he is so good, he must punish us as well with nothing less than the fire of Hell. Not because he's not good enough to have mercy, but because he's too good to not let justice happen. He must destroy us if he truly is good. But he promised, all the way back in Genesis 3, that he would forgive sinners! This is something Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Isaiah, all the Old Testament people knew and they echoed the haunting question that hoped that maybe, just maybe, God would take his justice out on something, or someone else. Could there be a sacrifice? Could there be something or someone that God pours his wrath onto so that I can be forgiven? Where's the sacrifice? Where's the lamb?

Do you remember? Do you remember what John the Baptist said when he first saw Jesus first walking by the Jordan river? "Look! The lamb. The Lamb of God who takes away my sin, your sin, all sin." In those same mountains, where Jerusalem would eventually be built, God provided the sacrifice. The Father did what Abraham didn't have the heart to do. God the Father looked God the Son in the eye and said, "You are the sacrifice." And he placed the wood on Jesus' bloody, weary shoulders and slaughtered his Son, his only Son whom he loved- because that would be the only way a holy God could hold you and me in his arms and never let us go. Abraham was right. On the mountain of the Lord the lamb, the substitute not just for Isaac, but all sinners was provided. Even more, who was the one who called to Abraham from the sky? The Angel of the LORD... But look at what he says, he says that he didn't withhold his son from Him! Throughout the Old Testament, we get these moments where this Angel of the Lord appears- where he speaks for God, and he speaks as God. This is what we call the "Pre-incarnate Christ." Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, appearing before he appeared as a human being on Earth. Do you see

what's going on here? Here Abraham is about to slay his own son for his sins, and Jesus personally intervenes and says, "No Abraham. Not him. Me."

Years later, when the apostle Paul was writing his letter to the Christians in Rome, he has this on his mind. The people he's writing to are suffering: loss of property, loss of home, loss of freedom, loss of life because they are Christians. How can that be? If God has saved and redeemed us and doesn't punish us for our sins, why is he letting this happen to us? Why is he letting us suffer? How can we trust him? Maybe you relate. Do you know what Paul says? He points them back to Abraham. If God would willingly slaughter his own son, his only Son, whom he loves, all so that he could have you and me, if he was willing to hear his own Son scream in pain and ignore him so that he could forgive our sins, what kind of God must he be? He must be good. He must be gracious. He must be compassionate. He must be trustworthy. He must be close- if God was willing to slay his son to have us, then what could possibly separate us from him? . *"38For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* Could you trust a God like that? Could you trust a God like that even when he allows you to have pain, when he doesn't make sense (which, as we see today, sometimes he doesn't). If this Gospel is true, then we can. Because he is a God who tests, yes, but also a God who saves, redeems, comforts, embraces. A God who provides. Amen.