

God's Illogical Demand

by Jeff Strite

Genesis 22:1-22:14

OPEN: I read the true story of a woman who told of the time she was teaching the toddler-age Sunday school class. Part of the reason she taught there was that her daughter was in that class.

During one lesson on creation she was trying to make the concept as understandable as possible, so she asked like questions like:

"Who made the trees?"

(To audience) Well – who did make the trees?

God did.

Then she'd ask: "Who made the sun?"

(Wait on audience) God did!

"Who made the animals?"

(Wait) God did!

"Who made you?"

(Wait) God did!

Later that week at home she walked into the living room and found her daughter's toys scattered everywhere. That upset her and she got really frustrated and said,

"Who made this mess?"

My daughter looked at me with a proud smile and said,

(Wait for audience to respond) "GOD DID!"

(Carol J. Rivest, "Heart to Heart," Today's Christian Woman)

Now did God make that mess?

Of course not!

But to that little girl that was the right answer.

(Pause) It was the WRONG answer, but she didn't know that because there were things about God she didn't understand.

Now when we come to the story (Abraham and Isaac) this morning there's something here - about God - that is hard to understand. There's something about God here that just doesn't make sense.

In fact, if you didn't know the LAST CHAPTER of this story ("The Last Chapter" is the theme of this month's sermon series), if you didn't know that last chapter it was seem totally irrational.

But first, let's revisit the story.

Years before Isaac's born, God makes a promise to Abraham.

He said Abraham was going to be the father of many nations.

But, of course – in order to do that – Abraham needed to have a son, which he didn't have one yet.

But the day came when God said to Abraham... "I will bless (Sarah) and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her." Genesis 17:15-16

But still there was another small problem.

Abraham was a 100 years old... and Sarah was 90.

Even in that day people didn't have kids when they got that old.

But God had made Abraham a promise, and so they DID have a son even though they were too old to have one.

Isaac was the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham.

Now, fast forward about 25 years or so.

Isaac has grown to a young man and he is the apple of Abraham's eye.

Isaac is a great kid and Abraham loves him deeply.

Then God stops by for a visit.

We're told: "Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, 'Abraham!'

'Here I am,' he replied.

Then God said, 'Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.'"

Genesis 22:1-2

And Abraham DOES IT!

He offers up his son.

He passes the test.

And at the last minute – when he's about to plunge the knife into the heart

of his son - God steps in and says:

"Do not lay a hand on the boy. Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." Genesis 22:12

And later on – in Heb. 11 – God praises Abraham again for his willingness to do as he was asked

"By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.'

Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death." Hebrews 11:17-19

It's all good now.

Abraham is repeatedly praised in Scripture as an example of faith in God.

In fact, because of his faith in God in Romans tells us that

"Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

Romans 4:3

Now that's good stuff.

That'll preach!

In fact, I have preached just that.

But there's one small FLY in the ointment here.

There's just one itty bitty thing that makes this all sound kind of weird.

Anybody know what that itty bitty thing is?

(In both services, the audience looked unsure)

Really? It doesn't strike you as odd that God has asked Abraham to sacrifice his son!!!

(PAUSE) God's not supposed to do stuff like that.

In Deuteronomy 18:10 God declares: "Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire"

And in Leviticus 18:21 God warns His people "Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molech, for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the LORD."

Repeatedly throughout the Old Testament God condemned this kind of

behavior. In fact at one point God said this about the whole nation of Israel: "They sacrificed their sons and daughters in the fire. They practiced divination and sorcery and sold themselves to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, provoking him to anger." 2 Kings 17:17

Over and over and over again God cries out "don't you go sacrificing your children as the pagans do. It'll profane my name. It will provoke me to mad. It will make me angry... and you wouldn't like me when I'm angry."

So what's going on here???

How could the God who so hated child sacrifice... how could He ask Abraham to sacrifice his only son?

Now you might think: "well He was never going to let him do it anyway."

But that's not the point!

The point is – HE ASKED!

He shouldn't have asked...

(pause)

Unless there's something deeper going on here.

And – of course – that's precisely what happening. There's something deeper going on here than whether or not Abraham had faith in God. What you're looking at is the foundation for the LAST CHAPTER of this story.

All throughout the Old Testament God paints pictures for us.

The pictures He paints are images of WHO the Messiah is gonna be and pictures of WHAT the Messiah would do when He came.

You see these pictures painted in the Law where many of the laws portrayed some aspect of Christ's ministry.

Or you can see these pictures in the Tabernacle where every part of that tent said something about what Jesus would be like when He came.

And you can see these images played out in the stories of various heroes in the Bible

And right here in Genesis 22, you're looking at one of the major PORTRAITS of Jesus!!

Think about this:

First – how many sons does Abraham and Sarah have? ONE
Isaac is their one and only begotten son.

Now, does that sound familiar?

“For God so loved the world that He gave His ONLY BEGOTTEN SON...”

Let’s go a little further now.

BOTH boys were supposed to be sacrificed.

Here in Genesis 22 we’re told that “God said, ‘Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. SACRIFICE him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.’”

And in Hebrews 9:28 we’re told “Christ was SACRIFICED once to take away the sins of many people”

Both Isaac and Christ were called to die.

(PAUSE) But wait... there’s more

How many days did Isaac journey to the mountain of his sacrifice?

THREE

In Genesis 22:4 we’re told “On the 3rd day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance.”

And of course, how many days did it take Jesus to go from the Cross and the Grave TO His Resurrection? THREE

(PAUSE)

Now, here’s a good one:

Who carried the wood up the mountain to be used in Isaac’s sacrifice?

ISAAC DID!

“Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife...” Genesis 22:6

And what kind of wood did Jesus carry to His sacrifice?

The Cross.

But, of course Isaac wasn’t sacrificed was he?

When Isaac asks his father “where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son."

God will supply the sacrifice?

Did He?

Of course, He did.

In Genesis 22:13 Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering INSTEAD of his son."

God supplied the SUBSTITUTE for Isaac.

A substitute that died in his place.

One person observed: "Isaac is bound on the altar, sentenced to death but he is released because the ram offered as his substitute. In the same way our Lord Jesus is offered as our substitute. We deserved to die for our sins... but Christ died in our place, on our behalf."

Jesus became our substitute.

He died in OUR place.

This same man went on to observe that "Isaac was saved from death, whereas Jesus saves us through death."

(<http://garymcmurray.blogspot.com/2010/02/sermon-genesis-22-1-19-offering-of.html>)

Then... there's the PLACE Isaac was to be sacrificed.

Do you remember the name of area where this was to take place?

MORIAH.

Genesis 22:2 tells us that "God said, 'Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of MORIAH. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.'"

When God supplied the ram for the sacrifice, Abraham was so moved that "(he) called that place 'The LORD Will Provide.' And to this day it is said, 'On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.'" Genesis 22:14

Now that's interesting.

Do you remember ever hearing about a Mountain in the region of Moriah before?

I hadn't either until I did a study on it, and I found that word is listed in 2

Chronicles 3:1.

“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.”

Where was the Temple built?

Mt. Moriah

Where was Isaac to be sacrificed?

A mountain in the region of Moriah.

Do you think that was an accident???

Me neither!

But it doesn't end even there.

In Hebrews 11:19 God tells us that “Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.”

Isaac was at the edge of death.

The knife was poised to plunge into his heart.

He was moments away from leaving this world.

Abraham was about to kill his only son.

Why?

Well, Abraham reasoned that God had made him a promise. God had promised that Abraham would become the father of many nations – Isaac. And Abraham was convinced that God would not lie to him.

Thus, even IF Isaac died, God would bring him back from the dead.

And – in a sense – that's exactly what happened.

Abraham received his son back from death... and now he lived.

By contrast, Jesus DID die... but He didn't stay dead.

Jesus came back from the dead.

And Jesus did that so we would know that - because HE now lives... so will we.

It was the promise given to us.

And that promise was driven home by the one physical deed that God requires of us to become Christians: baptism.

Romans 6:3-5 says "Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his."

Jesus said: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" John 11:25-26

IN Genesis 22 God painted us that portrait of Jesus so that we would know Jesus' death/burial and resurrection had been planned for centuries. And that Portrait was painted so that we might believe.

So... do you believe?

And if you believe... have you accepted?

1. Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God?
2. Do you believe you are a sinner and you need to change your life?
3. Do you believe that Jesus should now be your Lord and Owner? That He should own your house, your car, your family, your job, your bank account – your very life?
4. And do you believe that you should accept God's offer by allowing yourself to die to sins and be buried in the waters of Christian baptism?
5. And do you believe that from this day you should begin walking with Jesus?

Abraham was willing to let his son die because he believed in God's promise. God calls us to be willing to die (to our sins) because we believe His promise to us as well.

Abraham is the father of all those who believe because Abraham believed God would never lie to him. Do you?

INVITATION