

# Trusting God

## ***“God Will Provide”***

Genesis 22:1-14

Pastor Bruce C. Armstrong  
March 28, 2010

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Celia Brewer Marshall begins her commentary on this 22<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Genesis with the following:

*Imagine an audience of children, dressed in their Sunday best and crowded around little tables in the classroom. Its church school and they are eager, as young children are, to please their teacher, who is you. And your assignment this morning is to tell them the Genesis 22 story. You aren't even sure what to call it: "The testing of Abraham? The sacrifice of Isaac? The strange demands of God?" Your task is daunting. Perhaps you can get this over with quickly, without too many questions, and fill up the rest of the Sunday school hour with snack time, maybe some indoor games. Perhaps the children will not be so attentive today. It has happened before. So you launch right in with an eye on the clock. You clear your throat, and begin . . .*

*Abraham took his son Isaac where he was told, as God commanded. When they got to the mountaintop, Abraham built an altar, which was used back then as a place for worshipping God with animal sacrifices (we don't do this today). At the last minute an angel stopped him. He sacrificed a ram, which is a boy sheep, on the altar. God was happy and they all got to go back home. The children sit quiet, puzzled. One little boy raises his hand and asks, "How old was Isaac?" You aren't sure – the text doesn't say – but you know that for these children the boy Isaac is exactly their age. Another hand comes up: "Why did God want the father to kill anyone, especially his own son?" You glance at the laminated poster of the Ten Commandments on the wall and clear your throat again. "Well, Abraham didn't kill Isaac did he? God didn't want that."*

*And then the new girl, the shy one who observes everything but says little murmurs: "I wonder what Isaac was thinking." It's so quiet the class overhears her. They wonder now, too, because what if that wasn't Isaac*

*long ago, but them today? Next year, you vow, if there is a next year, you will skip this lesson in Sunday school.*

(Marshall, Interpretation Bible Studies: Genesis, pp. 57-58)

Well, it is a disturbing and challenging passage of scripture before us this morning, in this concluding sermon of our series on *Trusting God* – learning lessons from the experience of Abraham and Sarah. But, there is in this passage a very profound promise that we need to hear this morning, on this day that is know both as Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday.

So, let's look at the setting of this challenging text. As we know, Abraham emerges on the scene of biblical history in the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of Genesis, when God calls him, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." (12:1).

Abraham, along with his wife Sarah and his nephew Lot, responds in obedience to God's call and begins an amazing journey of faith. In the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of the New Testament book of Hebrews, we read this about Abraham, "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out not knowing where he was to go." (Hebrews 11:8).

God made a covenant – a promise – with Abraham, "... I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing ... and by you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Genesis 12:2). On the basis of this promise, Abraham began a journey with God.

Now, in order for this promise to be fulfilled, Abraham and Sarah must have a child. You can't be the father of a great nation until you have one child. Abraham and Sarah did have a son – Isaac – and all their hopes rested in him. This is the vital background of our text this morning. We can't fully understand or appreciate this experience of "trusting God" until we understand that all of God's promises to Abraham are tied up with his son, Isaac.

Now, fast forward to Genesis 22, God calls to Abraham and tells him to do something absolutely unspeakable, "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." (22:2). The threefold

description of Isaac – your son, your only son, whom you love – rules out any possibility of misunderstanding. What is God asking of Abraham? What must Abraham have been thinking about this unspeakable command?

It's helpful for us to know that in the cultural setting in which Abraham and Sarah lived, and into which this command was given, there were religious groups that engaged in the hideous practice of child sacrifice. As Abraham and Isaac journeyed from their home to Mount Moriah – a distance of about 45 miles, a three day trip – Abraham may have been saying to himself, "This God who called me is just like all the other gods . . . I thought this God was different, but he's no different, he's asking me to do what the other gods require." For three agonizing days Abraham struggled with God's command, "How could it be?"

How could God make a promise – *"all families of the earth shall be blessed through me . . ."* – and then crush it so completely? But the real question is "Whose responsibility is it to fulfill this promise? Could it be that Abraham assumed responsibility that wasn't his? Abraham's only responsibility was to trust and obey. Perhaps Abraham's issue was trying to keep control of the promise, as if it was his. And perhaps we are more like Abraham than we would like to acknowledge.

There will come times when we need to give up control of our families, our professions, our future, ourselves, and be reminded that everything we have is a trust from God. So, this text requires us to ask, "Who or what is our 'Isaac'?" Who or what competes with God for priority in our lives? What do you and I have, or what have we accomplished, that keeps us or hinders us from fully trusting God's plan and purposes?

It is often in a crisis, and it may take a crisis, for us to realize that God does not have our ultimate loyalty. False gods are not only in temples, they can be in our homes or garages, deposited in our stock portfolios, invested in the plans we have for our future.

Faith is trusting God's faithfulness – that God will accomplish his purpose and plan in us and through us. So, here's that straightforward and profound promise that we may claim from this text: **God will provide, in God's time, what God plans, to accomplish God's purpose as we trust in God's faithfulness and obey.** The thundering truth in this account in Genesis 22 is that God came through for Abraham at just the right time – not a moment too soon and not a moment too late!

Just as Abraham is about to plunge the knife into Isaac, God called to him, "Abraham, Abraham . . . do not lay your hand on the boy . . . for now I know that you fear God . . ." (22:12). Abraham names this place "Jehovah-Jirah", the Lord will provide, and the text tells us, "And to this day it is said, 'On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.'" (22:14).

This provision on the mountain for Abraham and Isaac is a preview of a much greater provision that will arrive in God's time, a provision that we will remember again this Holy Week, 2010. It is a provision on a "greater mountain", located not far from Moriah – a mountain called Calvary, where God would provide his own beloved Son as a sacrifice for the sin of all people, in all ages.

On Calvary, what God did not require of Abraham – the sacrifice of Isaac – he "required" of himself, and God offered his Son, that we might experience the fullness of God's amazing love and grace. We are here on Palm Sunday – also known as Passion Sunday. And next week we will gather on the joyous day of Easter/Resurrection Day. But make no mistake – to fully experience the joy of Easter we must understand Good Friday, and the provision that God has made for us. Thanks be to God for his faithfulness! Amen.