

THE FAITH THAT OVERCOMES

Genesis 22:1-19

God had made a promise to Abraham that, as far as the patriarch could see, was impossible of fulfilment. Have you ever been in a place where it seemed that there was no way out? Did you ever have the Lord say to you, "Is there anything too hard for God?" How wonderful it was when you learned that God was able! When you got to the place where you could not see any way out, you had merely arrived at God's opportunity. It was only when you learned that God was almighty that you came to realize that nothing was too hard for Him.

Genesis 22 contains the record of the supreme test and of the crowning event in the life of Abraham. After this climactic incident, herein recorded, the story of Abraham's life soon draws to its close.

I. The Time. Genesis 22:1.

For years Abraham waited patiently for the fulfilment of God's promise to him of a son. Finally barrenness was turned into fruitfulness by the life-giving touch of God. Miraculously God gave to the aged Abraham and Sarah a son, Isaac, who was declared to be the seed through whom a perpetual posterity should come. The birth of this long-awaited-for son was welcomed fervently. To Abraham it meant the miracle of a new life in his home, the wonder of a birth at his and his wife's great age, the fulfilment of God's gracious promise to him, and the reassurance that a blessing was to come to the whole earth through him.

After long wanderings and numerous trials, Abraham had arrived at the place and time when it appeared that he could enjoy a season of prosperity and happiness. Just when he thought his greatest trials were over, instead, he was subjected to the supreme test. Quite frequently severe tests follow immediately the times of special or unusual blessing, as many have learned from experience. In the case of our Lord, His temptations followed immediately after His baptism. Faith in God always involves experiences of testing.

II. The Test. Genesis 22:2.

God called Abraham by name when He made known His will to him. The test to which God was subjecting Abraham was for the purpose of revealing the quality and maturity of his faith in Him. God made this shocking request of him: "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering." The deep affection of this father for his son was reflected in the expression, "whom thou lovest." Thus Abraham was reminded of his dearest possession and was asked to give it as a burnt offering to God. This strange and startling request which God made of Abraham reminds us of the fact that centuries later He offered His only begotten Son as a sin offering.

In infinite wisdom, goodness, power and love God took years to prepare Abraham for this supreme test of his faith. He never sends a trial or puts us to a test until He has prepared us sufficiently to come through it victoriously. During those long and trying years God has put Abraham to one test after another, but each trial through which he had passed had made him a bit stronger. Each experience had been an integral part of his preparation for his remarkable triumph in this crucial hour, when he demonstrated to all that he did not have or worship an idol -- animate or inanimate. Of necessity this test had to come. Faith in God always necessitates testing experiences.

III. The Trial. Genesis 22:3-10.

We have not been told what Abraham's first thoughts were when he heard God's

shocking request, but we do know what he did. His response to God's command was swift. His obedience was unquestioning, unhesitating, resolute and decisive. He "rose up early in the morning," meaning when the first faint light appeared in the east prior to the rising of the sun, and went out to do what God had commanded. Early rising for the purpose of doing the will of God was the habit of many of His servants in the Old Testament era; for example, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, David, etc. Abraham's swift response to God's startling request was highly commendable.

One naturally wonders what Abraham said to Sarah that morning. It is very doubtful if he got her consent to go. We do not know, but it is entirely possible that he told Sarah that he was going to take Isaac to the mountain and worship God and come back again. Early that morning Abraham, Isaac and two young men, who were the servants of the patriarch, set out on the journey from Beer-sheba to Jerusalem, which was approximately fifty miles. On the third day they came within sight of Mount Moriah, where Solomon's temple was built later and where "the Dome of the Rock" now stands in Jerusalem. Before they reached this spot of hallowed memories, Abraham instructed his two servants as follows: "Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you." To him the making of this sacrifice was too sacred for any except God to behold. His remark, "I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you," meant that he believed God was able to raise up Isaac from the dead, and that he fully expected him to return with him.

When Abraham placed the wood for the burnt offering on the shoulders of Isaac, he acquiesced fully by carrying it, even though he was a young man. God's Word does not state Isaac's age, but Josephus, the Jewish historian, claimed that he was twenty-five years old. Isaac foreshadowed Christ bearing His cross on the way to Golgotha. Abraham carried the fire which would burn the wood and cause the sacrifice to be consumed. The statement, "they went both of them together," indicated that father and son were in hearty agreement.

As Abraham and Isaac ascended the mountain the son's natural question, "Behold, the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?", was followed by the father's confident reply, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering." God alone could satisfy that which would satisfy Himself.

IV. The Triumph. Genesis 22:11-14.

It is possible that, as they approached the place where the actual offering was to be made, Abraham revealed to Isaac what God had commanded. Regardless of the struggle which was going on in his mind, when they arrived Abraham built an altar, arranged the wood on it, bound Isaac and laid him on the wood. He was about to demonstrate his genuine faith in accounting God able to raise Isaac from the dead, his wonderful love for God Whom he counted more dear to him than his own son, and his implicit obedience in that there was nothing which God demanded of him that he was not willing to do. In not resisting, Isaac proved that he trusted his father completely to do only that which he knew to be right.

When Abraham lifted up his knife to slay Isaac, there was nobody to witness it except God. The scene was too sacred for others to behold. Even so, when the Son of God was being sacrificed at Calvary, no human eye beheld what took place from the sixth until the ninth hour. The Father snuffed out the lights of heaven, pulled down the shades of the sky and separated Himself with His Son alone.

Abraham lifted up his knife to slay his son. Because his obedience had gone far enough to prove that he would give God his very best, God interposed by calling out from heaven, "Abraham, Abraham!", and staying his hand. One mark of the true believer is that he does not withhold anything from his heavenly Father, neither his life nor

what he has. God accepted Abraham's intention for the actual deed, and prevented him from slaying Isaac. Abraham offered God his very best and God set His seal upon the faith of His servant.

Abraham not only found that God prevented him from taking the life of his son, but that his word to Isaac, "The Lord will provide," was fulfilled literally. Abraham beheld a ram caught in a thicket and he offered it as a sacrifice to God in the place of his son. As a testimony to the reality of God's presence and provision, Abraham named the place "Jehovah-jireh," signifying that God always provides, and there is genuine gratitude he worshipped Him.

V. The Testimony. Genesis 22:15-19.

Again God spoke to Abraham and acknowledged what he had done saying, "Because thou hast done this," God clearly taught the patriarch that He regarded the sacrifice as actually offered. The will was taken for the deed.

We can easily picture the glad satisfaction with which Abraham returned to the young men with Isaac his son. He had said they would come back, and they had. He had proved that God was true, and, having fulfilled God's will, he was filled with joy and praise. This simple faith, taking God at His word, is always at the foundation of the believer's peace and restfulness. Abraham's obedience was the expression of his faith. True faith always works itself out in obedience. A child obeys a parent whom he trusts, a man obeys a surgeon, lawyer, banker or superior officer according as he believes in him.

"Trust and obey,
For there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus,
But to trust and obey."