

"THE VICTORY OF FAITH"

Genesis 22:1-19

Genesis 22 is one of the great chapters of the Bible. It may be thought of as the climax of the book of Genesis. It is certainly the climax of the story of Abraham's life. It brings him to the final test of his faith, and when this is over, the story of Abraham draws immediately to its close.

Life is a succession of tests. In many lives there is some supreme test to which all others are secondary and preparatory. It is so with Abraham, and we are now to consider the record of the crowning event of his life.

I. The Time. Genesis 22:1.

The testing came after the fulfilment of the promise in the child of Isaac and his establishment as the heir, and after the expulsion of Ishmael, of whom Abraham had been fond. It was immediately after the experiences recorded in chapter 21. It is frequently the case that severe tests follow special times of blessing. Our Lord's temptation followed immediately upon His baptism.

II. The Test. Genesis 22:2.

What are we to understand by the words, "God did tempt Abraham"? The word "tempt" means "test" or "prove." The word "test" better expresses the divine intention and action. We usually reserve the word "tempt" for a malicious seduction into error or sin. A tempter desires his subject to fail, but the one who tests desires him to succeed. God test us to bring out the good. Satan tempts us to bring out the evil.

God called by name the individual with whom He had business. He is just as much able to make His will known to any of us.

God said, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee to the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering." Thus Abraham was reminded of the dearest possession of his life and was asked to give to God his best. Trials that are put upon us with no reason given at the time are the severest tests of all. They call for absolute unquestioning faith, and when responded to in this spirit, invariably lead the soul higher and nearer to God.

Moriah is generally considered to be the area in Jerusalem where the temple was much later built.

It took the Lord sixty years to prepare Abraham for this test. The Lord never puts us to a test until we are ready for it. He never sends a trial until He has made preparation for us to come through victorious. As Paul said: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). What a tremendous comfort this is to us! If God had asked Abraham to sacrifice his son before this time, he would not have been ready for it. So God waited for over sixty years, while he passed Abraham through the fires of trial after trial, until the patriarch was finally ready to gain the victory and to earn the names, the "father of the faithful" and the "friend of God." During all those long years it had been one test after another, but each one made Abraham a bit stronger. Each experience in the overruling providence of God was preparing him for this final victory. Abraham was ready at last. On his part there was no quibbling, no repining, no arguing and no asking questions. In the entire chapter there was not a single word of discontent. In all the fulness of mature faith Abraham believed God. He was willing to take his son and to place him upon the altar in order that he might please Him Who called him from darkness into light.

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

Abraham's response to God's command was swift. "Abraham rose up early in the morning." Abraham not only obeyed, but he did so without any hesitation. He got up early and went out to do the will of God. His obedience was unquestioning. Previously he had obeyed, and went out when he knew not where. On this occasion he obeyed and went out when he knew not why.

I don't know what Abraham said to Sarah that morning. I don't know whether or not he told Sarah what he was going to do. He may have told her that he was going to take Isaac to the mountain and worship the Lord and come back again, but I don't know. He did tell Isaac that. Immediately and speedily Abraham went to the place where God had told him to go. Two young men accompanied them until the appointed place entered their range of vision.

On the third day Abraham came to the end of his journey. To the young men who accompanied him and Isaac Abraham said, "Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you." It is evident that Abraham fully expected Isaac would come back with him. These two young men witnessed Isaac carrying the wood on his shoulder, but they were not permitted to see what took place between Abraham and Isaac at the altar. No human eye was to behold that. This reminds us of the two thieves who went so far with Christ but who, like all the spectators at Calvary, were not permitted to behold what transpired between the Father and His Son on the cross. The three hours of darkness concealed from every human eye the divine transaction.

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and laid it on the shoulder of Isaac. The young man did not object in the least, but acquiesced fully by carrying the wood on his own shoulder. This brings before us the Peerless One Who gladly performed the Father's pleasure. There was no alienated will in Him that needed to be brought into subjection. You will remember that He said, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God." His statement, "I delight to do thy will," revealed the perfections of His heart. Christ and the Father were of one accord. As he carried the wood Isaac foreshadowed Christ bearing His cross as He went to the place called Calvary, where He Himself was to die. While Isaac carried the wood, Abraham carried the fire which would kindle the wood and cause the sacrifice to be consumed. "They went both of them together." Here we have perfect agreement.

As Abraham and Isaac ascended the mountain the son spoke to the father saying, "Behold, the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham replied, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering." Thus the son's natural question about the lamb was followed by the father's whole-hearted and confident reply that God would provide it. These words of Abraham tell us that God was the One who should provide the lamb and they make known the fact that the lamb was for Him. God alone could supply that which would satisfy Himself. Nothing of man can meet the divine requirements. If sacrifice for sin was ever to be found, God Himself must supply it. The "lamb" was not only provided by God, but was also for God. Before blessing could flow further to men the claims of divine holiness and justice had to be met. It is blessedly true that Christ died for sinners, but He first died for God, that is, "To declare..... his righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Romans 3:26).

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

It is possible that as they came near to the place Abraham revealed to Isaac what God had commanded, and also told him what he himself expected as a result of that command. There was no evidence that Abraham thought he was doing wrong in sacrificing his son. Abraham's faith triumphed over natural affection, reason and self-will. He bowed in absolute submission to the will of God. In doing so he was amply rewarded for he discovered that God was Jehovahjireh -- the Lord will provide. It is only by passing through

trials that we learn what God's grace, faithfulness and sufficiency are.

The testing of Abraham's faith was exhaustive and conclusive. From the human standpoint Abraham might have failed in this test. It was a real test to him. To God it was a demonstration.

When they reached the top of the mountain and arrived at the place where the actual offering was to be made, Abraham and Isaac were all alone. When the awful moment for the transaction came, and Abraham lifted up his knife to slay his son, there was no one to witness it. The scene was too sacred. 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.

At the right moment, but not before, God interposed and stayed Abraham's hand. By this action God bore unmistakable testimony to the error of the heathen as to human sacrifices. From this time forward the Jews never adopted the practice of human sacrifice until they had sunk to the level of the heathen around them. Abraham was prepared to give God his best and God set His seal upon His servant's faith. The mark of the true believer is that he withholds nothing from God, neither his life, nor anything that he has.

Abraham not only found that God prevented him from killing his son, but that his word to his son, "The Lord will provide," was literally fulfilled. The ram was there behind Abraham all the while, but he had not noticed it. This ram was offered up as a burnt offering in the stead of Isaac.

"Abraham called the name of the place Jehovahjireh," thus bearing his testimony to the reality of God's presence and provision. Jehovah is a God who always provides. For lost sinners who had no claim on Him He provided a Saviour. As His children we may expect Him to bless us. He wants us to depend on Him. He knows our needs and will provide for our necessities.

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, and 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. Thus 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."