

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Double Calls - God called twice: Abraham, Abraham!

The call of the angel of the LORD, 'Abraham, Abraham' that we read of in Genesis 22:11 is not only the climax of a wonderful story, but it is also the high point of the life of Abraham. Previously in his life his faith had been tested when he was promised a son. Romans 4:20 and 21 speaks of it, "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able to perform." Now much later in his life he has a greater test. The very son in whom all God's promises were invested was to be sacrificed. "And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, 'Abraham, Abraham': and he said 'Here am I'". This chapter in which occurs the very first mention of love in the Scriptures, is an unfolding in pictures of some very important truths, some of which we will have a look at.

Abraham here is a picture firstly of God Himself. It brings to our minds Scriptures such as, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son", John 3:16, and, "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" Romans 8:32. The faith of Abraham, as we shall see, is used in the New Testament, as a picture of the faith that believes on God who can raise the dead.

Let us consider first the picture of God Himself. We read, "And He said, 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 upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of", Genesis 22:2. In this verse we have the very first mention of love, and it is to be noted that it is the love of a father to his son. We do well to understand that Christianity starts with and is characterised by love. We may think that we have to start with repentance, but Romans 2:4 says, "knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance." It is only when the Holy Spirit works in our lives and gives us to see the love of God that led Him to give His beloved Son to die on the cross, showing us how good God is, that we will ever start to think about how bad we are.

Who can understand what these words meant to Abraham? To realise that it was the will of God that he should offer up his son, the darling of his heart. We could never understand such a thing. But remember, it looked on to the time when God would send into this world His beloved Son in order to die as a sacrifice on the cross. But Abraham did not hesitate or question this, because He believed God who had said to him in 21:12, "For in Isaac shall thy seed be called." How could this be if he was to slay his son? Hebrews 11:17-19 gives us the answer. "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure."

We read also that when on the third day of their journey, Abraham saw the place a long way off, that he said to his servants, "Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you." There was not a doubt in Abraham's heart that he would come back with the lad. His trust was in God. It says in verse 6, "And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together." He fully intended to do what God had told him; he took everything that was needed to kill Isaac, to light a fire and to offer him up as a sacrifice.

That little expression "they went both of them together" is very significant. It reminds us of the words of the Lord Jesus, in John 16:32, "and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me." This gospel on many occasions tells us that the Lord Jesus and His Father were working together to bring about our salvation.

In Genesis 22:7, Isaac asks Abraham the question, "Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" The faith of Abraham again gives the answer: "God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering." Again we read, "so they went both of them together." God had told Abraham to go into the land of Moriah. This name means: 'Jehovah sees' or 'is near' or again 'will provide' so in the communication that God had given to Abraham, there was that upon which faith could lay hold. Abraham knew that God was with him, saw all that Abraham would do and would provide all that was needed. What a very blessed thing it is to have a sense in our hearts everyday that God sees everything that happens in our lives, is with us in every circumstance, and will provide everything that we need.

It is interesting that God had a particular place in His mind. Abraham seeing the place afar off would remind us that God ever had Calvary's cross before Him; it was the place where He would display His love. But that very spot was also the site of Solomon's temple, where His glory would be displayed many years later. God's glory not just then, but in the Kingdom of Christ during the thousand years of His earthly reign, will be based on the death of His beloved Son.

There is another wonderful incident recorded in 1 Chronicles 21 which happened on this same spot. David had sinned in numbering the people and God had sent an angel to destroy Jerusalem. The prophet Gad told David how to save Jerusalem. In verse 18 we read, "Then the angel of the LORD commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up, and set up an altar unto the LORD in the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite." David did this and in verse 27 it says, "And the LORD commanded the angel; and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof." When David saw that God had accepted his offering, he says concerning this place, "This is the house of the LORD God, and this is the altar for the burnt offering for Israel." David then immediately started preparing everything that would be required to build the house of the Lord.

We learn from this, that God's glory in the world to come and His dwelling in the midst of His people can only be on the basis of sacrifice. For David this sacrifice was a bullock. But our story in Genesis would tell us that God had in view the slaying of His only begotten Son. We can never speak too much about the cross. Men may despise it, as they always have. But the Christian realises that his salvation and blessing is because of it. God will never forget the death of His Son. He has displayed His love to the full there and soon will display His glory in this world because of it. All His glory and our entire blessing is due to the death of Jesus.

The words 'God will provide Himself a lamb' are prophetic and have their fulfilment in John 1:29: "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." John the Baptist points out to those around him the greatness of this person who was coming towards him. He is able to take away all the sin of the world from the sight of God forever. Can we imagine a more tremendous task than removing from this world every sin? But the Lord Jesus will do it. We read in 1 Corinthians 15:24 to 26, "Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." When this world's history comes to an end, the world will be handed back to God, and there will not be a single sin in it. God will then bring in a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness will dwell. No man living will ever improve things in this sinful world in a way that pleases God, no matter how clever, great or intelligent that person may be. The only person who can do this is the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Lamb of God's providing.

In verses 9 and 10 Isaac is a remarkable picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. Abraham and Isaac arrive at the place that God had told him about. When we read in the Gospels of the closing hours of the life of the Lord Jesus, it is then that the love of God in all its power over evil is seen. In the life of the Lord Jesus everything beautiful and pleasing to God was seen. The love and grace of God had come into this world in the person of God's beloved Son. But in order to save wretched man who was lost in sin and was guilty before God, He had to die as a sacrifice for us. God can only forgive sins on a righteous basis. There is a little hymn which beautifully sums it up, "God could not pass the sinner by, his sin demands that he must die; but in the cross of Christ we see, how God can save yet righteous be."

"And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood." This is the fourth time that Abraham had built an altar. The altars speak of Abraham's life of communion with God. But altars also represent the righteous claims of God. When Abraham built that altar, he was acknowledging God's claim upon his son, but he was in communion with God about it. God had planned the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ from eternity. God created man that He might have those with whom He could be in communion, but sin coming into the world destroyed that communion which God had with Adam. It could only be restored on the basis of His holy claims being met. That could only be by sacrifice. So we read of Abel bringing an offering to God that was acceptable. He had to kill it before he could offer it to God. But he was accepted in his offering and so communion was restored. The only way we can have a relationship with God and be in communion with Him is by all His righteous and holy claims having been met in the death of His Son.

We do not read of any resistance on the part of Isaac, despite the fact that by now he would be a strong young lad. How perfectly we see that the Lord Jesus was subject to His Father's will. Never had He turned aside in His life from a pathway that pleased God, and now as the moment of sacrifice drew near, He was subject still. But how that love bound Him to the altar was tested. Hear His words in John 12:27, "Now is My soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour." Also in Luke 22:42, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from Me: nevertheless not My will, but Thine, be done." Notice that in both of these scriptures the Lord Jesus addresses His Father. Surely this reminds us of those words we have twice read, "so they went both of them together." The very final act that is recorded of the life of the Lord Jesus in John 19:30, "and He bowed His head, and gave up the Ghost," would tell us of His complete submission to the will of His Father.

So, "Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son." He would have done it; his obedience and faith were equal to the test. But his hand was stayed. It was not so with the Lord Jesus; God did not spare His Son. The poet has written, "Jehovah lifted up His rod, O Christ it fell on Thee." A substitute was found for Isaac but not for Jesus. The hymn says, "If sinners ever were to know, the depth of love divine, all Calvary's weakness and its woe, blessed Saviour, must be Thine."

So in verse 11 the angel of the LORD calls to Abraham with the words, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me." The faith of Abraham had been tested and had been proved equal to the test and as a result the promise of God is secured to him and his seed.

The intelligence of Abraham is also seen here, for we read, "And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son." Here we learn the truth of substitution. God will accept a perfect substitute for another. We fully see this on the cross, when the Lord Jesus took our place and suffered in our stead. For us the judgement of God would have involved eternal banishment from God's presence. For the Lord Jesus it meant His being forsaken of God when, during those three hours of darkness, God "made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

So we read in verse 14, "And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-Jireh: as it is said to this day. In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen." The faith that said "God will provide Himself a lamb" is commemorated by the name that Abraham gave to the place. The place of sacrifice was the place of God's provision. How true this is of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. There God provided the substitute for us, to answer His holy claims that we could never answer. That Substitute was His own Beloved Son. What a story of God's love this is! It is well that there be a recognition in our lives of the gift that God gave in order that we might be forgiven.

The angel calls to Abraham a second time: "Because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed, as the stars of heaven, and as the sand that is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of His enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed My voice."

The fulfilment of this verse is yet in the future. It will take place when the Lord Jesus, who is the true Seed of Abraham, will set up His kingdom and shall reign in this world for a thousand years. The nation of Israel will become the channel by which the blessing of God will flow out to all nations in the world, and every enemy will have been destroyed. However there is a spiritual meaning in this prophecy, which all believers have come into now. The Apostle Paul speaks of it in the epistle to Galatians 3:8, "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed." He goes on to explain this in verse 16, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many: but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." Every believer is a child of God by faith in Jesus Christ, "then are we Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

There is a brief mention at the end of this chapter of Rebekah, who was to become the wife of Isaac. In the story of Isaac and Rebekah in Genesis 24 we have the second mention of love in Scripture. The Lord Jesus Christ as risen from among the dead, is the true Isaac, and to Him God has given the church to be His bride forever. What a wonderful unfolding of the purpose and love of God is Genesis 22.

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