

Genesis 22, The Beginning of Hope in the Promises of God: A Life of Abraham, Preached by Michael Gunn @ Harambee Church on Easter Sunday, March 23rd, 2008

“The essence of sin is we human beings substituting ourselves for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for us. We...put ourselves where only God deserves to be; God...puts himself where we deserve to be.”

John Stott

Intro

Happy Lord's Resurrection Day! Welcome to Harambee, and thank you for spending such an important day in the church calendar with us! I pray that every day would become uniquely resurrection day in our lives, as we feed off the incredible reality of Christ's life, death and resurrection, and how that continues to transform lives through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We have been going through the life of Abraham, and in the past few weeks, we have seen Abraham's faith growing as he is changing from a man who once desired the gift more than the giver (**Genesis 15:1-3**) and who once trusted his wife more than His God (**Genesis 16:2**).

Easter is all about faith changing in the power of the resurrection. We see Peter's faith and Thomas' faith transform within the story, and many others transformed by the historical resurrection of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ.

In today's epic, we will see not only an incredible transformation of Abraham's heart, but an incredible picture of God's grace in our own lives. In this story, Abraham displays a great faith, but the hero of this story remains God, who gave him that great faith (See **Ephesians 2:8**). We have watched God develop Abraham's faith, much like He develops yours and mine. It's a process. By this time in Abraham's life, he has been walking with God for 35-40 years old (Depending on Isaac's age). Faith is so often mischaracterized as the change agent in believers. The more faith you have the more change you will see. It's purely quantitative in much of the teaching I hear. However Jesus said that all it takes is the faith of a mustard seed (Very small seed) to move mountains, because the size of your faith is not the issue, but the one whom which you place it. **Philippians 1:6** promises us that, *“...He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”* What a promise! This is a process, and it takes time. Fruit is not grown over night, but its lasting impact will nourish you forever!

In spite of Abraham's faith in God, there were still some things that God wanted to work out in his life. It is easy to be walking with God for many years, and have another lover creep in and begin to rob you of your joy in Christ. God wants to have an incredible, personal relationship with His people, and He is a jealous God who does not want to share us with anyone else (**Exodus 20:5**). God created us for worshipping Him, and we will never find peace and joy until we do. So *“God's demand for supreme praise is his demand for our supreme happiness,”*¹ because, *God's summons for our praise is the summons for our highest joy.*² No matter how long we are walking with God, there is room for improving our soul before Him, and God is the changing agent that keeps using circumstances to manifest our idols and insecurities. Ultimately however there would be no change, no faith, and no grace without the cross of Jesus. In today's narrative we see God doing more than “testing” Abraham, He is giving him a glimpse of His grace, through Abraham's promised seed.

From the Head...

God Uses Tests to Refine Our Character (**Genesis 22:1**)

Right away we see God “Testing” Abraham. The word for “Test” (Nasa) means to prove or test, and has nothing to do with “Tempting” which is often found in some of our English translation (See **James 1:13**). The idea is similar to someone who has worked at practicing something for so long, and now has to go out and “Prove” themselves in a test, much like a boxer would do after months of training. Whereas this might be needed for the trainer to evaluate his talent, it is very much needed for the psyche and confidence of the boxer. Likewise God “tests” His children to show their character and build confidence in Him that they might walk closely with Him (see **Exodus 16:4; Psalm 26:1-3**). He places us in circumstances that will demonstrate our faith before Him. The idea in verse twelve is anthropomorphic, and should read; *“Now I have experienced intimately the worship of your heart.”* God's testing has a refining, redemptive quality to it (See **1 Peter 1:7**).

God's Testing Zeroes In On the Issues of the Heart (**Genesis 22:2, 12, 16**)

God had promised that the covenant promise would come through Isaac (**Genesis 18**), and it is clear in our passage that the testing would also come through Isaac, Abraham's “Only Son,” the son whom he loved (**Genesis 22:2, 12, 16**). The first commandment is clear that God has no intention of sharing the stage with anyone else. Abraham has shown a tendency to desire the gift more than the giver (**Genesis 15:1-3; 16**), now he has the promised physical “Seed” and the text highlights his “Love” for the boy. God is gracious to keep on purging us of the strongholds in our heart. It was imperative that God purged Abraham's heart desires of any competition that would rob Abraham of his joy in his

¹ John Piper

² IBID

relationship with God. The word for “Know” in verse 12 is the word “Yada,” which in this context has the connotation to know intimately, and experientially. God knew where Abraham was, but it is here that they both experience the deep relationship that had grown throughout the years walking with God. Simply, God wants your heart!

God Provides in the Midst of Testing (Genesis 22:8, 14)

Many of us want a god that provides, but does not bother us. We serve a God who both provides while He tests us, so that we can be made complete in Him. The call to Abraham is a call to walk in the presence of a God who both moves toward us and away (See **Jeremiah 23:23**). God may call us as we are, so that he can make us what he wants us to be. For this reason God dwells on high, and with the lowly at the same time (**Isaiah 57:15**). He is with us, yet He is capable of being in control, since he is also removed from us.

I think Abraham understood this a bit, since **Hebrews 11:17-19** (See **Genesis 22:8, 14**) indicates that he believed that God was capable of both death (Crucifixion) and redemption (Resurrection). What began in testing (**vv. 1-2**), ended in God providing (**vv. 13-15**) and reiterating His covenant promise to Abraham (**vv. 17-18**).

God Provides Abraham with a Glimpse of Easter Weekend (Genesis 22:1-18 cf. Galatians 3:8, 14)

The promise to Abraham has always been that through his “Seed” the nations would be blessed. The problem however is that this promise resulted in a national pride that relied on the physical promise, and not the God who made the promise. National Israel began to believe that they were the chosen ones, who were circumcised, and trusted their circumcision and lineage for their covenant relationship with God, and not the God of the covenant relationship. This is the issue in much of Romans and Galatians, where we are told that it is not children of the “Flesh” (Physical lineage) that are related to God, but the children of the “Promise” (**Romans 9:8**), and the “Seed” that would result in blessings is Christ, and not the physical descendants of Abraham (**Galatians 3:16**).

So what is really going on here? Well you have the promised son; an only Son, one whom was loved, and who was born miraculously, and who carried the wood of his sacrifice up to Mt. Moriah (Which is mysteriously the place of the temple of Solomon, and the subsequent crucifixion area of the Romans), and is laid on the altar to be slain, but is rescued by a ram mysteriously provided by God, as a substitute for his death. Hmm? Sound familiar?

...to the Heart

Why did God do it? Did He need to find out the answer? NO, He simply wanted to gain an intimacy with Abraham that was previously not existent. What's amazing is the change of heart evident in the newfound intimacy obvious in the name change used for God. Many scholars believe that the author's use of the generic term Elohim for God prior to verse 13 is the work of another author (The Elohist),³ while after verse thirteen another author (The Yahwehist) is writing. I find the idea ridiculous, and view the whole thing in terms of relationship. The different name use is much the same way we do it. We can refer to the supreme being as “God” which is quite generic, much like the Genesis author using the term Elohim. When we want to get personal with God we use speak about Jesus or Yahweh. When we want to show an intimacy we use terms like Father. When we want to express His authority and sovereignty we use the term Lord. All of these terms are appropriate terms, but only when we use terms like Yahweh or father do they show our relationship to God. This is what is happening in our text. Verse eight (“*God (Elohim) will provide*”) shows that Abraham sees God as just that; God. He believes, but his intimacy with Yahweh isn't present. In verse fourteen we see a change, which I think is significant, to the “*LORD (Yahweh) will provide.*” God has purged him of a potential idol, made His provision obvious in both physical (The situation with Isaac), and spiritual (The type of blessing that He is giving). God wants your heart, and He has sent his Son to die on the cross in order for our hearts to be changed and redirected back to Him in order to gain an intimacy that would change our lives.

This is what the gospel does, and this is what Easter is about, Christ dying and rising again from the dead in order to pay the penalty for our sins on our behalf, and then give us the hope of life beyond this world. The Lord does provide; He is the author and perfecter of our salvation, and He is the source of our life, both here, and for eternity!

Books for further study: *Genesis*, Walter Brueggemann, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Genesis*, Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis*, Bruce Waltke, *The Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis*, Gordon J. Wenham, *The NIV Application Commentary: Genesis*, John H. Walton, *Creation and Blessing*, Allen P. Ross

Next Weeks Verses: Genesis 20

To dialogue with the sermon go to www.sermonrant.wordpress.com and express your thoughts

³ There is a popular liberal theory in biblical studies that holds that Genesis was not written by Moses but by a series of authors known as Jahwehist, Elohist, Priestly and Deuteronomic or JEPD.