Sacrificing the Son
Genesis 22:1-19

Central Exegetical Proposition: God tested Abraham’s faith by commanding him to sacrifice his promised son Isaac.

I. God presented the test to Abraham through a command (vv. 1-2).
   A. God tested Abraham after “these things.”
      1. “After these things” was a reference to everything that has happened with the promised seed from Genesis 15 up to now.
      2. This test was a test of the quality of Abraham’s faith.
         a. This meant that God was not testing to see if Abraham had faith in him after he had completed the promise in the supernatural birth of Isaac.
         b. God was testing to see how strong Abraham’s faith in Him and His nature was.
            i. Abraham did not believe God to be unjust or like the Canaanite gods who demanded child sacrifices.
            ii. Abraham had trusted God to this point, but had tried to fulfill the promise by human means, such as Hagar and Ishmael.
            iii. This test from God demanded complete obedience in the face of commands that seemed to not make sense.
      3. Abraham replied as a servant prepared to do whatever God asked before he heard about the details when he said “Here I am.”
   B. God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son.
      1. God specified which son Abraham was to sacrifice.
         a. God demanded that Abraham take his son.
         b. With each word, the description becomes more specific.
            i. When God said “Take your son,” Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac.
            ii. When God said “your only son,” possibly Ishmael is out of the picture because he was sent away into the desert, or possibly Abraham thought he had an only son from two different women.
            iii. When God said “Isaac,” Abraham’s heart must have sunk in his chest, for Isaac was the promised son for which he had waited so long and through whom the future of the covenant would be fulfilled. This test could have challenged Abraham’s understanding of how God would fulfill the covenant without Issaac.
      2. God pointed out the place of the sacrifice.
         a. The mountain of Moriah was a known place to ancient Israel, sighted in 2 Chronicles 3:1 as the place upon which the Temple would be built.
i. Moriah in Hebrew means “The appearing of the Lord” or “The Lord sees/provides.”

ii. Moriah is connected by Josephus, the book of Jubilees, and the Samaritans to Abraham’s sacrifice (the ram in the thicket) and God’s appearance to David there as a mountain of God’s appearances.

b. The command to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, a burnt offering, would surely have alarmed Abraham as a parent and as a believer in a God who did not demand child sacrifices.

II. Abraham obeyed the command of the Lord (vv. 3-8).

A. Abraham gathered the resources and people to make the sacrifice.

1. Abraham arose early in the morning for the journey to Moriah.
   a. The resources for the journey required a donkey and two young men, servants of Abraham’s house.
   b. Abraham cut the wood for the burnt offering.

2. Abraham’s faith in action suggested faith in his mind and heart.
   a. He slept after God commanded him to sacrifice his son because he arose early in the morning.
   b. He cut the wood for the burnt offering sacrifice, probably thinking about the coming time with his son.
   c. As he traveled to the place, he must have been deep in thought about this experience, for it took three days journey to get there.

B. Abraham consoled the young men traveling with them.

1. When Abraham saw the mountain, he spoke with the young men.
   a. The three verbs here are masculine plural, showing that Abraham and Isaac would return after they offered the sacrifice.
   b. This could mean that Abraham was consoling the two young men, who would have realized that they did not bring an animal for the sacrifice.
   c. It might have been understood by Abraham that God would do something extraordinary, such as raise Isaac from the dead (see Hebrews 11:19), or other possibilities to amend the importance of Isaac as the seed of the promise.

2. Abraham conversed with Isaac as they prepared the sacrifice.
   a. Abraham took the tools for sacrifice.
      i. First he gathered the wood and the flint for fire and the knife, all tools for a burnt offering, except the lamb or animal.
      ii. The narrative mentions twice the togetherness of Abraham and Isaac, father and son, here in verse 6 and in verse 8 after the dialogue. This may form an inclusio which emphasizes the main point of the dialogue in verse 7.
   b. Isaac asked about the animal for the burnt offering.
      i. In Isaac’s question is the understanding that they lacked the most important ingredient for the burnt offering, that is, the animal.
ii. When Isaac calls on his father, Abraham answered with the same answer he answered God’s calling him by name in verse 1, “Here I am.”

iii. Isaac does not mention the knife in his question. But he does ask about the lamb for the offering.

iv. Abraham answered in faith to his son, “God will provide,” which may be the key to this entire narrative, to the test and Abraham’s faith.

v. If there is a pause between “burnt offering” and “my son” in the grammar of this dialogue, there may be a hint of irony that Abraham’s son, Isaac, is the burnt offering that God provides, but this may only be for dramatic effect.

vi. Finally, verse 8 finishes the inclusio focusing grammatically on “God will provide.”

III. Abraham proved his faith to God (vv. 9-12).

A. Abraham carried out the building of the altar.
   1. Then after all was prepared and the wood had been laid, Abraham bound his only son to the altar.
   2. Next Abraham raised the knife to carry out the sacrifice. The word slaughter here seems harsh, as if it does not fit. Possibly the narrator was suggesting that Abraham would not consider God like the other gods who demanded child sacrifices.
   3. All of Abraham’s actions, from the moment God gave him the command, had been carefully and adequately carried out. Abraham would go through with the sacrifice of the promised son.

B. God stopped Abraham from carrying out the sacrifice.
   1. In verse 11, God through an angel or messenger called to Abraham as in verse 1.
      a. In verse 1, he called Abraham once, but here in this part, he calls Abraham’s name twice, showing the drama and escalation of the narrative, believing Abraham would go through with the sacrifice.
      b. The angel called Abraham off on the command to sacrifice his son. At the last minute before sacrifice, God commanded Abraham to not harm the boy in any way.
   2. The angel of the Lord expressed God’s approval of Abraham in this test.
      a. The angel of the Lord explains the reason for stopping the sacrifice.
         i. The word “for” here is a causal connection, showing the reason for stopping the sacrifice.
         ii. The word “now” shows that God was unsure of the level of Abraham’s faith before, showing the reason for the test of faith-quality.
         iii. Fearing God was based on obeying His commands and revering Him always.
iv. Because Abraham’s will and mind and heart were prepared to give up his son as an offering to the Lord, God knew that he would have followed the command physically,

v. God calls Isaac for the second time in this narrative Abraham’s “only son.”
b. Abraham had obeyed God’s command in his heart and mind, but was not forced to carry it out physically.
   i. Previous narratives may provide a context for this test because Abraham had repeatedly attempted to fulfill God’s promise naturally, or through human means alone.
   ii. He attempted to have a son, Ishmael, with Hagar instead of Sarah to accomplish the many descendants.
   iii. This narrative came right after he had released Hagar and Ishmael into the desert.
   iv. Perhaps God wanted to be assured that now that the promised son had arrived, Abraham would no longer attempt to fulfill any of God’s promise on his own.

IV. God provided for Abraham and Isaac and reiterated His covenant (vv. 13-19).
A. Abraham gave the place a name.
   1. God provided an animal for the burnt offering instead of Isaac.
      a. There was a ram caught in the thicket unharmed because its horns were caught. The animal appears to not have any blemish and was provided by God for this purpose.
      b. It provided for Abraham to carry out the sacrifice of a burnt offering to God and also keep his son Isaac.
   2. Abraham named the place after his experience with God that day.
      a. Because God had provided the animal, Abraham called this mountain in Moriah, “The Lord will provide.”
      b. Ancients tended to name the places where they experienced God or God revealed His nature to them, many times on mountains as here.
      c. The name “The Lord will provide” can also be taken in Hebrew “The Lord sees,” which would make a link to what Hagar said about God in the desert about “The God who sees me.”
      d. Also, this phrase explains how provide and see are related in the Hebrew language.
         i. God sees and responds.
         ii. If this is the same mount the temple of Solomon was built on, the idea in the statement explaining the name of the place in verse 14 according to the offerings of Israel later.
         iii. If it is taken as “On the mountain of the Lord, He shall be seen, it speaks of God’s revelation. Either way, God is seen by Abraham to not be a god like the Canannite gods and a God who sees and provides.

B. The angel of the Lord repeated the covenant between God and Abraham.
   1. God declared the covenant caused by Abraham’s continued obedience.
a. Once again the covenant blessing to Abraham is given as the reason for his obedience.

b. God did not have to have Abraham go through with the sacrifice of his son to see Abraham’s obedience. He considered the deed as good as done.

c. God swore by Himself, part of the structure of a covenant. Covenants included an oath in most circumstances.

2. The covenant summarized the language and parts of the other covenants in Genesis 13 and 15.

a. The intensive verb constructions here (lit. “blessing I will bless” and “multiplying I will multiply” show the emphatic nature of God’s covenant.

b. The two images reflect previous covenant imagery and statements that imply the same type of multiplication: innumerable.
   i. The imagery of the stars came from the Genesis 15:5 statement of the covenant.
   ii. The imagery of the sand came from the Genesis 13:16 statement of the covenant.

c. God states that Abraham’s offspring will possess the gates of their enemies.

d. God finally states that they will be a blessing to the nations, found also in Genesis 12:3 and 18:18. From the beginning God meant Abraham’s blessing and covenant promise to bless everyone else.
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Central Theological Proposition: God can use tests to determine the quality of human trust in Him and obedience to Him.

I. God tests the faithful as to the quality of their obedience (vv. 1-3).
II. The passing of such tests will challenge the obedience and trust of the believer (vv. 4-14).
III. When human action meets the expectations and approval of God’s testing, trust and obedience in God is affirmed and strengthened (vv. 15-19).
Sacrificing the Son
Genesis 22:1-19

Central Homiletical Proposition: Endure the testing of your obedience level for God’s blessing.

Introduction

In one of my classes I once received a test that was the hardest test I thought I would ever take. When I got the 15-page test in my hand, I was told I had 50 minutes to finish it. There were over 125 questions on the test. Usually I will read through the questions, discover the easy answers or the answers that just pop into my head from my memory and fill those out first so that I can concentrate on the harder questions. First I read the instructions at the top of the page: Read very carefully all of the questions before responding appropriately. Pretty generic instructions, but this was the hardest test I had taken up to that point. As I looked through the test, I realized there was stuff on that test that I had no way of remembering at all. I was drawing more blanks than ever! I was so stunned, I decided to read through every question and prepare for the worst.


As I begin this story, I wonder what it would have been like from a different point of view. For instance, how would one of the servant boys tell the story? Maybe their point of view had to be supplemented by Isaac or Abraham, because they stayed behind with the donkey. Maybe their story would have gone something like this. Become one of the servants and tell your story supplemented by Isaac.

I. God will test your level of obedience (vv. 1-5).
   A. God tested Abraham for a specific purpose.
      1. Although Abraham was unaware of the test until later, God wanted to test the quality of Abraham’s obedience. How far would Abraham listen and obey?
         a. They went to a mountain in Moriah, which means “The Lord’s appearing.”
         b. This mountain could be mentioned in 2 Chronicles 3:1 as the place where Solomon’s temple was built.
      2. God presented His command in a way that would make Abraham wonder if He was like the other gods who demanded child sacrifices.
         a. Abraham had already seen that God would save an entire city if there were only ten people (Genesis 18:22-33)!
         b. He had an idea of God’s character, and this probably did not fit those ideas of God.
c. But this time Abraham’s trust in the Lord is maintained as he does everything God told him to do.

B. The test was harder than anyone could imagine.
   1. God demanded the life of Abraham’s only son Isaac. With every phrase, Abraham’s fatherly heart must have sunk even more.
   2. Isaac was the promised son. It was through Isaac that the covenant would happen. Abraham had already waited 100 years for Isaac to be born.
      a. We see from earlier on in the story that Abraham tries to fulfill the promise of a son and descendants with Hagar instead of waiting for God.
      b. Perhaps this whole test was to see if Abraham would stop trying to fulfill God’s promises to him in his time and way instead of God’s.

C. Application: Maybe you’ve tried to fulfill God’s promises to you before His time. Maybe you have pushed your own way on God’s plans instead of waiting for Him to do it. Maybe you have become weary in waiting for God. But what if God is waiting for you to let Him fulfill His promises in and for you? What if you’re interfering with God’s plans for you? Learning to wait upon the Lord may be part of the test you’re going through right now.

II. God will be faithful to provide (vv. 6-14).
   A. No matter how difficult the test was, Abraham displayed his obedience to God.
      1. He showed his obedience by preparing the wood and the fire for the burnt offering.
      2. Even when Isaac asked him about the sacrifice, Abraham still held to God’s instructions.
      3. And then he placed Isaac, his beloved son, upon the altar. There was only one more step in the process, and that’s when God stopped him.
   B. Abraham named the place “The Lord will provide.”
      1. Because Abraham obeyed everything God told him to do, God faithfully provided the sacrifice so Isaac’s life would be spared.
      2. Hebrews 11:19 suggests that Abraham would have sacrificed Isaac, believing that God could raise the dead.
      3. Because God saw his obedience and provided the ram, Abraham named the mountain “The Lord will provide” or “The Lord sees.”
   C. Application: The middle of the test, the time where you feel God isn’t even paying any attention to you anymore, that is the hard place. When your prayers hit the ceiling, when you don’t feel God’s presence through you, when you feel completely and utterly alone on the journey. How do we get through that time? We are being stretched and our faith is being strengthened. We are learning to fight through feelings to long-lasting obedience. We are learning to endure. God never leaves us in these times. On the contrary, He is cheering us on and impressed with our growth as we face the test. Faithfulness is defined in the fire of purification, in the deafening silence, in the darkest void. Hold fast to what you know of God: that He will never leave you and that He has your best in mind.

III. God will bless your obedience (vv. 15-19).
   A. Because Abraham obeyed God completely, God reaffirmed His covenant.
1. God faithfully kept His covenant with Abraham only because Abraham had learned to be obedient and wait upon God’s timing.
2. The covenant was reiterated by the angel of the Lord, combining the imagery of previous covenant statements in Genesis 13, 15, and 16.
   a. His descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky.
   b. His descendants would be as numerous as the sand on the seashore.
3. The main point would be that Abraham’s offspring would be innumerable and would bless the nations.

B. God blessed Abraham with the son he was willing to sacrifice, and a promise of a great nation of descendants.
   1. Abraham was blessed so that he and his descendants could be a blessing to the whole world!
   2. God did not put the promise or the covenant into jeopardy, but He did discover Abraham’s level of obedience because of this test.

C. Application: When we try to do things on our own and get in the way of God’s blessing, God might test us to see that we’re finally getting the big picture, that God wants to bless us if we’d just let Him do it! Are you keeping God from blessing you? We think that we know what’s best, but God is infinite and good! If we stand the test, we will be blessed by God for our obedience. But obedience is no walk in the park. It might be a walk up a mountain to kill your most valued treasure. Only when you’re ready to offer up that sacrifice will God know that you are finally obedient.

Conclusion: Jesus, the Promised Son.

I told you about a test at the beginning. When I had read through all 125 questions, the last question grabbed my attention. It read, “Now that you have read the questions and have no clue what the answer is, turn in this test without writing anything. If this test is handed in within the first 15 minutes, you will receive an A. Congratulations! You have now learned that you can’t know everything.” I can’t tell you how good that felt.

But since I read through the entire test, I was done in about 10 minutes. And I got an A. Abraham passed this test with flying colors. Although he attempted to fulfill the promise God made through the covenant with Hagar, he had learned to be obedient to God always no matter what the circumstances. This kind of faithfulness reminds me of Someone else. You see, God was testing Abraham’s faithfulness, but God was completely faithful from before He cut a covenant with Abraham through fulfilling the covenant in the supernatural birth of Isaac, and also in this story, through the protection of Isaac as Abraham proved his obedience. God is more faithful than any of us could ever be.

We see this faithfulness clearly in a garden roughly 2,000 years later as a man bent over a tree cried out, and through His tears drops of blood poured from his face. “Father,” He asked in
the midst of his test, “If it be possible to have this cup pass from Me.” But Jesus was also faithful to fulfill God’s covenant with us. “Not My will, but Yours be done.”

The Father, like Abraham, also must sacrifice His one and only chosen, promised Son. He had to do this for you and for me, so that we could be in relationship with Him for eternity. The stakes were infinitely higher than in Genesis 22. Paul speaks of this in Romans 8:32 when he alluded to this story of Abraham, but with God the Father, “He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all.” Although Abraham received back his promised son, the Father had to turn His back at the crucifixion of Jesus, when the skies grew dark and Jesus became sin for us.

Call:

- If you are here today and have never realized just how much God loves you even when you can’t love yourself, and you want to make a commitment to this God who spared nothing to set you free, then I want you to commit your life to Him today. The way that you can do this is to ask God to forgive you and proclaim Jesus as your Savior and Leader here and now as we prepare for communion. It doesn’t have to be elaborate. God knows your heart. And I want you to greet me on the way out and mention it so that we can help you get to know God even better. But today I want you to take communion with us as you join the family of God in remembering this great sacrifice for us.

- For everyone here, I would like for us to ponder the depth of God’s love for us in giving up His only beloved Son on our behalf. He gave up family for you. He was not only willing to go that far as Abraham was, but He did! Let’s respond to God’s sacrifice this morning with thanksgiving and praise!