

INI - SDG

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent

March 1, 2009

Hecla

*Text: Genesis 22:1-18 - Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 2 Then He said, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." 3 So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. 4 Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. 5 And Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you." 6 So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together. 7 But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." Then he said, "Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" 8 And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." So the two of them went together. 9 Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. 10 And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" So he said, "Here I am." 12 And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." 13 Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. 14 And Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, "In the Mount of The LORD it shall be provided." 15 Then the Angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, 16 and said: "By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son -- 17 "blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. 18 "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."*

Theme: The-LORD-Will-Provide

- An escape in our trials
- A Lamb in our place

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus,

This text once caused quite a stir. I had chosen this text as a devotion for a member and it just so happened that on the particular day that I went to visit her, that her non-member sister was also visiting. Apparently, after I left the sister told my member how bothered she was by this account. It's not hard to imagine why. The thought of God telling a father to slay his son and

then burn the body as sacrifice to Him offends our civilized consciences. Furthermore that Abraham would comply with this is incomprehensible to us.

As we enter the season of Lent and ponder the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ there are two messages from this text that are particularly fitting for us to consider. We are reminded in this Old Testament lesson how the LORD provided for Abraham and how the LORD has provided for us. We are reminded how the LORD provides a means of escape when trials and temptations come our way. And we also see how LORD provided the Lamb to be sacrificed. May each one of us hear and rightly ponder this portion of God's Word that we may rejoice as we see how the LORD has provided for us!

### AN ESCAPE IN OUR TRIAL

Tests are necessary from time to time. Students may not enjoy them, but they realize they are a fact of school. Tests are one of the only ways a teacher can find out what their student learned. God likewise tests the faith of His children. These tests of faith are given as an opportunity for us to demonstrate our faith in visible ways. In our text we heard how God tested Abraham to see if his love for God was greater than his love for his son Isaac. Yes, Abraham loved his son Isaac. He was the son of the promise, born to Abraham and Sarah in their old age. This was the son Abraham had waited nearly 100 years for. But whom did Abraham love the most - the LORD God or the son which the LORD God had given him?

We are amazed to hear what faith Abraham had! The morning after God told Abraham to do this that Abraham was already chopping the wood to sacrifice his son on. Abraham made the three day journey with his son to the place God told him to go without turning back. Abraham built the altar he intended to sacrifice his son on. Abraham arranged the wood. Abraham bound his son and laid him on it. Abraham took the knife and stretched out his hand to slay the son whom he loved.

In this way Abraham showed the faith he had in God. He believed that even if he had to kill his son and burn him as a sacrifice, that God would provide and make things right. Notice that in verse 5 Abraham does not say, "**I** will come back," but instead "**WE will come back to you.**" Abraham believed that whatever happened, the LORD would provide. The Holy Spirit tells us more of Abraham's faith in Hebrews 11 where we read, "**By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac ... accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead.**" (Heb 11:17, 19) Abraham believed that even if he killed and burnt Isaac, that God was able to raise his son from the dead. "**WE will come back to you,**" he told his servants.

There are accounts of God testing the faith throughout Scripture. You could say that the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was given as a test to Adam and Eve. Not eating from that tree would show that they feared, loved, and trusted in God above all things. Yet we know that Adam and Eve failed this test. Job's faith was tested when God allowed his family, farm, and health to be taken from him. At first Job passed this test as he replied, "**Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD.**" (Job 1:21) But when his health was taken from him, Job cursed the day that he had been born. Peter's faith was tested when he was confronted in the courtyard of the high priest. Approached by a harmless servant girl about his connection to Jesus, Peter denied even knowing who Jesus was.

The Holy Spirit would later lead this same Peter to write, "**In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the**

*genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (1 Pt 1:6-7)* God sends such tests or trials into our lives for the good of our faith. Peter compares our faith to gold. When gold is first mined it needs to be tested by fire to remove all the impurities. Only after gold has been tested by fire can it be called “genuine” or “pure gold.” So too our faith. God tests it with an intense heat to refine it and remove the impurities.

Now none of us have been tested in the same way in which Abraham was. God hasn't asked any of us to slay our children. But we should expect our faith to be tested and even rejoice when it happens. The current financial crisis we are in may be a test of Christian faith. It was easy to trust in God when grain prices were up and the economy was good. But will the Christian still trust and rejoice always in the LORD when all that is taken away?

Test of faith might be physical. When we are young, strong, and energetic it seems like we are invincible and we find it easy to trust in God. But if God allows a skiing accident to happen that injures or paralyzes you, will you still trust in God or get angry that God would allow this to happen to you? Whatever form the test may take, God intends it for our good and for the strengthening of our faith. ***“For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.” (Heb 12:6)***

Now it is true that some of these tests have led to sin. Adam and Eve failed their test and sinned by eating of the forbidden fruit. Peter failed when tested and denied being with or knowing Jesus before men. But this is never God's intention. If we fail and sin, it is only because we relied on our own strength to get us through. Peter thought he was strong enough to stand with Jesus even to death - but learned that he himself did not have the strength to stand up to the pressure of even a servant girl. On the other hand, the strength Abraham had, came from the LORD and not from himself. ***Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. (1 Cor 10:12)***

When trials or temptations come our way, God promises a way of escape for us so that we are not led to sin. In 1 Corinthians 10:13 we read, ***“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”*** Think of what Paul is saying, whatever the test or temptation may be - it is nothing extraordinary. It is the same as is common to all men. Furthermore, God knows our limits. He knows exactly how strong we are. He will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear. He knew Abraham could bear this test. He knew Job and Peter should have been able to bear their temptations.

When these trials and temptations do come, God promises it will not be more than we can bear and He will provide us a way of escape. God says He will provide an emergency exit to keep us from sinning. God kept this promise with Abraham. God would not allow Abraham to slay, but called from heaven and stopped him. The LORD provided an escape. The LORD has promised the same to us. Look for that emergency exit God promises to provide.

## A LAMB IN OUR PLACE

It's hard to imagine how Abraham's heart may have melted when he heard his beloved son Isaac ask, ***“Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”*** Abraham knew. He was walking and talking with the sacrifice. Yet hear Abraham confess his faith in God, ***“My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.”*** Abraham

believed God would provide and his faith was not disappointed. God never intended any harm to come to Isaac, He was only testing Abraham's faith.

As Abraham stretched out his hand with the knife, the Angel of the LORD called from heaven and stopped Abraham. Then the God of all creation then caused a ram to be caught in the thicket. And ***“Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son.”*** As Abraham believed, so the LORD had provided. This ram was a sort of savior for Isaac. The ram was Isaac's substitutionary or vicarious sacrifice because it was offered INSTEAD of Isaac. ***“And Abraham called the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, ‘in the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided.’”***

Because of his obedience God promises Abraham in verse 18, ***“In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”*** All the nations of the earth would be blessed, because that Seed of Abraham was the Savior of all man-kind, Jesus Christ. This event was a picture of what was to come. Just as Abraham was sacrifice his only son whom he loved on Mount Moriah, so too God the Father sacrificed His own beloved Son on Mount Moriah, where Jerusalem had been built. Just as Isaac carried the wood he was to be sacrificed on, so too Jesus carried the wood of His cross on which He was to be sacrifice.

But the greatest picture we have here is what Abraham said to Isaac, ***“God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.”*** Indeed the LORD has provided for Himself the Lamb to be sacrificed! Jesus is the Lamb that the LORD provided. Just as the ram was sacrificed in Isaac's place, so the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, was sacrificed in our place. But whereas the only beloved son of Abraham was spared from being sacrificed, the only beloved Son of God was not spared. We heard in our New Testament lesson from Romans 8 - ***(God) did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all.*** (Rom 8:32) But we have been spared because God gave His Son, His only Son Jesus whom He loved, as a sacrifice for us all. As the ram was sacrificed instead of Isaac, the Lamb of God was sacrificed instead of us.

While it may seem a disturbing to hear what God told Abraham to do, God did it for our benefit. Through it we see how the LORD provides an escape in times of trial and temptation, that we may not sin. While we are amazed that the father Abraham would be willing to sacrifice his own beloved son as an act of worship, let us be all the more amazed that God the Father DID sacrifice His own beloved Son Jesus as an act of salvation. Through it we see the great love of God for us in providing His Son as the Lamb to be sacrificed in our place. Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world! Amen.