

The Message We Are Supposed to Get Genesis 22:1-19

Introduction:

There are passages in the Scripture whose meaning is not immediately obvious, whose message is not immediately clear. They disrupt our simple formulas and predictable solutions which we seek force the Bible. We forget that there are strange things. And none is stranger than what is asked of Abraham in Genesis 22—to sacrifice his son Isaac.

- For example, how many of us have thought the message of the Bible was primarily **moral instruction**? The Bible tells us what to do and how to do it. We will be saved as we strive to live according to God's commands.

To be sure, moral instruction is a part of the Bible's goal. Here in Genesis 22, we see that Abraham is tested by the Lord to discern his character. But is morality the core message? After all, at first glance it seems that morality is being thrown out the window when God asks Abraham to sacrifice his own son? Surely there is more going on here than simple obedience.

- Others of us think the primary message of the Bible is about a **heavenly escape**. The Bible informs me about "how to be saved." By that, we mean the Bible instructs us on how we can rid ourselves of this world and all of its problems. Our aim is to pursue life on a higher plane and eventually leave this world behind.

Well, there is truth here too. We recognize that the Bible does have a message of salvation. But is it salvation by leaving this world behind? The life of Abraham might lead us to that conclusion. After all, he was asked by God to leave his family, his country and his old ways behind to go to a new land. However, when God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son, he is asking him to put that entire future promised to him at risk. Maybe an "other-worldly" escape is not the focus of the Bible either.

Okay, so if it not moral instruction or heavenly escape what is the message we are supposed to get? At the very least, Genesis 22 challenges any superficial reading of the Bible because it forces us to deal with God's incredible command to Abraham—sacrifice your son. Literally, the passage reads in verse 2, "Take 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." What kind of God asks his chosen servant to do such a thing? This is about no simple morality or a mindless escape. Okay then, **what are we to conclude from God's radical demand that Abraham sacrifice his son Isaac, the promised child who had finally come?**

1) Morality of the Sacrifice God Demands (1-8)

The first question we are faced with is the morality of the sacrifice God demands. Yet, it is important for us to remember how the Bible relates to both human beings after the fall of Adam and Eve. In the words of one scholar, the Bible views "the lives of all sinful men [as] forfeit before God; God can require the death of any sinner." (Edmund Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery*, p. 53.) There is no moral dilemma for God when it comes to demanding the life of a sinner because before a holy God no sinful person has any right to life.

In other words, God did not ask Abraham to murder his son. As his firstborn, he was to sacrifice him to the Lord in light of Isaac's, even Abraham's, moral failure.

That immediately forces us to deal with this question that the Bible is constantly raising. **Could sin be so serious as to require the payment of its debt with our very lives?**

- The angel of death that took the first born of every Egyptian and only spared the Israelites because of the blood of the sacrifice put on their doorposts (Exodus 12)
- The entire sacrificial system erected by Moses, which clearly identified the animal sacrificed with the sins committed by the Israelite (Leviticus)
- In the New Testament the apostle Paul echoes this truth, "The wages of sin is death..." (Rom. 6:23)

In other words, the moral dilemma according to Genesis 22 is not how can God ask Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, but how can God allow Isaac, Abraham or any other human being to remain alive? In truth, all of creation should be sacrificed over to God on account of its fallen condition.

2) Promise Given Is the One Who Must be Sacrificed (2)

What of the absurdity of the demand? Alright then, if there is no moral dilemma with God asking God to sacrifice Isaac then there is at the very least something absurd about this request. After all, God had promised that Isaac was the heir of the promises Abraham had been given. The promise that Abraham would be blessed, that the nations would be blessed and that he would receive the land all rested upon the shoulders of Isaac. How could God ask him to put all of that at risk? How could God ask him to sacrifice the Promised One that he had given?

It is this question that takes us closer to the main message of the Scriptures. At first glance, God's demand in chapter 22 seems to contradict God's earlier promise, given back in chapters 12, 15 and 17. However, upon closer inspection we discover that the demands made of Abraham are, in fact, not contrary to the promises but necessary to their fulfillment. The Promise was to be the instrument of blessing, but for that blessing to be realized God's holy requirements of righteousness must be satisfied by the Promise.

You see: it is not just that any blood be shed or any sacrifice be made, it is that the blood of the promise be shed and the promise be sacrificed. The message of the Bible is not simply one of sacrificial offerings. If it were, then any religion that considered sacrifices central would be sufficient for salvation. God insistence that Isaac be sacrificed anticipates the only sin-offering that can take away sins. It is the sacrifice of the promised one that can take away sins. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away our sins (Heb. 9).

3) Sacrifice Cannot Void the Promise (5, 7-8, 11-14)

Genesis 22 reveals Abraham's certainty in the promise too. God must provide even in the face of the sacrifice's demand. In other words, God can bring life out of death to fulfill his promises. Yes; a sacrifice must be made. Yes; it must be of the promised seed. But, even death cannot void the promise made earlier.

- **What God Can Provide (5, 7-8):**

Notice that this is exactly what Abraham has come to believe;

"Then Abraham said to his young, 'Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.'" (v. 5) Here Abraham expresses his conviction that both he and Isaac will return to his servants even though he knows he is going to sacrifice his son.

"And Isaac said to his father Abraham, 'My father!' And he said, 'Here am I, my son.' He said, 'Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?'

Abraham said, 'God will provide for himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.'"
(vs. 7-8)

In the face of all evidence to the contrary, but as an expression of absolute trust in his saving God, Abraham believes that Isaac and the promise are secure even though he goes to sacrifice his son. The book of Hebrews confirms this viewpoint, "[Abraham] considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead..." (Heb. 11:19)

- **What God Did Provide (11-14):**

Nevertheless, this was a test for Abraham. God did not ultimately require Isaac's blood. Verses 11-14 reveal that God provided a ram in the thicket. God supernaturally provided another sacrifice for Isaac.

Why? The answer to that question is the main message we are supposed to get. Isaac could not atone any more than any other sinner can atone for sins. Theologically, we say this story typifies or illustrates the main story of salvation that is yet to come in the person of Jesus Christ. The reason why Isaac is not offered is because Isaac could not really save.

However, Jesus can. As our sin-bearer he is both the son of Abraham and the son of God. He is the perfect sin-bearer. In his perfection he knows no sin and as the son of Abraham he fulfills the promise. Amazingly, Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world through the sacrifice he made on the cross of Calvary.

Consider all of the ways Genesis 22 prepares us to see Jesus Christ:

Jesus Christ is God's one and only son whom he would not spare, but give him up for us all for our salvation (John 3:16; Romans 8:31-32)

John 1:29 "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

John 3:16 ¹⁶ "For God so loved the world,¹ that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Mark 10:45 ⁴⁵ "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Romans 8:32 ³² "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"

2 Corinthians 5:21 ²¹ "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Galatians 3:13 ¹³ "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us

Genesis 22 is not just about sacrifice or even the sacrifice of Isaac. In reality, it is about the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. As Jesus reminds us, this passage, along with all of the Old Testament, prepares us to see him and his wonderful work on our behalf. This chapter is about the One God provided. That One is the Promised Savior, Jesus Christ, our Lord!

Implications:

- 1) Of course, there are those who have no tolerance for this idea of atonement as being the central message of the Bible. These individuals want to preserve the ideas of grace,

forgiveness, newness, morality, promise, faith, hope and love. Yet, they destroy the foundation out of which they spring—Jesus atoning life, death and resurrection. Without Jesus death there is no reconciliation to God and renewal in this world.

How common for us to hear that a preacher does not desire to talk about sin because such notions are negative and too difficult for sensitive ears. They prefer to focus on the positive potential that resides within each person. The problem of course, is that when we avoid sin we also avoid Jesus. All we are left with is a **moral message**, which might inform but cannot save. This was the failure of the older, liberal preachers. However, it is increasingly error of so-called conservative preachers. Whereas the older ministers sought to soften the message of the Bible on account of better seats in the secular academy, newer ministers soften the message of the Bible on account of more seats being filled in the pew.

- 2) Others of us confess that we believe in this message of salvation by Jesus work on the cross, but do not adorn that message with a life transformed. We want Jesus to help us escape this world, but not truly live for him in this world. In other words, do our lives reflect the sober and committed devotion found in these words, "...you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:20). Do our lives reflect the charity and forgiveness that we have received at the hand of our Savior? In short, have our lives been radically turned upside down because we have received mercy through the Promised Savior, Jesus Christ? How can I not wake up every morning and say, "Jesus, how shall I live this day for you?" **When we are truly awake to grace, we learn that obedience in this world really matters.** If we are not seeking to obey, perhaps it is because we are not awake to his grace!

Conclusion:

There is nothing safe about the God of Genesis 22. During our last pastor's forum a few weeks ago I made the remark that there is nothing more dangerous than coming to church. Why, because God might show up and you discover that he is more than you bargained for. Genesis 22 is exactly that. God showed up again in Abraham's life and he seems to be more than he bargained for. There is nothing safe about the request to sacrifice one's son. However, without that sacrifice asked for, and ultimately made through Jesus Christ, there would be no salvation for us. There would be no foundation to our hope. There could be no confidence that world is being made new through Jesus Christ.

What is the message we are supposed to get? It is that the drama of the Scriptures is the revelation of the saving work of Jesus Christ.

As Dorothy Sayers said, "The drama is the dogma."

"Christianity is either the most important things in the world or it is not important at all. But there is one thing it is not, and that is moderately important." C. S. Lewis

Or as any coach in the NBA finals will say to his players, "If you can't get yourself ready to play for the finals, then I can't do anything for you."

In other words, there are some truths, when rightly understood convey their own ultimate application. The sacrifice of Jesus for you and for me is that truth. There is no question that that is the message. What remains is have you got it?