

THE SURRENDERED LIFE

Genesis 22

Sermon for Peace Church

November 8, 2009

PURPOSE – In light of God’s surrender to love, call people to surrender to God whatever they hold as more precious than Him.

MAIN IDEA – A surrendered life of obedience, trust and self-sacrifice fulfills God’s destiny for your life. It is entered in the strength of God’s “surrender” on the Cross.

I. INTRODUCTION

Let’s open our Bibles to Genesis 22, continuing in our series on Abraham.

1. I began last Sunday’s sermon from Genesis 21 by saying that it was a message that I was MOST EXCITED to preach – the long-awaited, miracle son – Isaac, “laughter” was born. In him, as in Christ Jesus – THE Son, the promise & destiny of God’s people moves forward: BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING.

(i) Today’s sermon – from Genesis 22 – is at the other end of the SPECTRUM.

It’s not exactly that I’m LEAST EXCITED to preach it, but I’m certainly much less INCLINED.

We come today to a chapter that rightly CLOSES the mouth in stunned reflection and fearful wonder.

A. - For here’s what chapter 22 is all about, verses 1&2 – ***Read verses 1 & 2***

2. ISAAC – for whom Abraham & Sarah had waited 25 years!

ISAAC – their precious son – their “only” son in the promises of God

ISAAC – whom they had enjoyed now for 12-15!

(i) Is there anything more precious to someone than their own child?

I recently heard Elizabeth Edwards speaking on TV, wife of former presidential candidate, John Edwards. She was asked about pain in her life – she’s had a lot – cancer, adultery by her husband, accusations of him fathering another child ... “But none of that, nothing”, she said, “comes close to the pain of losing her 17 year old son, Wade, killed in a vehicle accident.”

It’s every parent’s deep fear.

But here’s GOD asking Abraham to KILL & BURN his own son as a sacrifice!?!

3. How can God do that?

And, if He can do that to Abraham, what might He ask ME TO DO?

THAT QUESTION stops speech!

(i) Child-sacrifice was not uncommon in Abraham’s day. He had probably seen Canaanite fathers offer their firstborn sons on altars to their “gods”.

Gene Getz comments, “To Abraham, then, the experience was culturally related. If pagan deities demanded such love, was it asking too much for the true God of heaven to require the same?”

There’s a cultural context behind this command.

A. 600 years later, through Moses, God would explicitly prohibit such child-sacrifice. Those laws lead to our modern sensibilities about such a thing.

And, to be sure, this is the ONLY TIME that God ever gave this command to anyone. It comes to the Father of the Covenant of the world’s salvation, our father Abraham. It comes ultimately to reveal the type of love needed to save the world – the sacrifice of Father-God’s own Son.

4. But Abraham doesn’t know that. And we MUSN’T read the story backward.

All Abraham clearly heard was this command from God:

“Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah – to sacrifice him there as a burnt offering!”

WHY? ... Let’s read on:

Read vv. 3-19

5. Verse 12 answers our question.

Why did God ask Abraham to sacrifice his only beloved son? It was to see if Abraham truly FEARED GOD.

When he had laid his son on the altar and taken the knife in his hand to slay his beloved son, THEN Abraham PROVED to God that there was NOTHING, nothing more important in his life than God. He truly FEARED God, he loved God, he REVERED God.

(i) ... verse 12 - THEN the angel of the Lord said, *“Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”*

HE PASSED THE TEST AS A GOD-FEARING PERSON.

6. WOULD YOU?

In one of his books Watchman Nee says that we approach God like little children with open hands, begging for gifts. And because he is a good God, He fills our hands with good things – forgiveness, friends, health, recognition, success, marriage, challenge, children, a good job, a home – all the things we’ll thank Him for later this month on Thanksgiving Day.

With our hands thus full, God then says, “My child, I long to have fellowship with you. I long to lead you in green pastures, new service, deeper prayers. Reach out your hand and take Mine.”

But we can’t do it, Nee writes, because our hands are full. “God, we can’t”, we cry!

“Put those things aside & take My hand,” He replies.

“No! I can’t. It’s too hard to put them down.”

“But I’m the One who gave them to you in the first place,” God says.

“Please, please don’t ask me to put these things aside!”

But God answers quietly, “You must!”

(i) Because Abraham passed the test, let's learn these things from him about a SURRENDERED LIFE:

II. THE SURRENDERED LIFE

1. A SURRENDERED LIFE OBEYS GOD IMMEDIATELY.

Verse 3 – Having heard the command to sacrifice his son, *“EARLY THE NEXT MORNING, Abraham got up and saddled his donkey.”*

(i) This is remarkable! There's no debate. There's no PAUSE. There's no negotiating. There's not even a, “I'm not sure if I heard you correctly ... COME AGAIN, GOD!”

Abraham had learned to discern the living will of God. As soon as he clearly heard it, EARLY the next morning he obeyed ... Up & at it! (Boy, if there'd be any day to be inclined to sleep in ...).

(ii) But, but HOW CAN I hear that voice? ... If I heard that word, maybe I'd get to it immediately:

Bruce Goettsche responds: *“Doesn't God speak with clarity in His Word? He tells us not to marry an unbeliever; He tells us to forgive an offense; He tells us to love our enemies; He tells us not to spend what we don't have; He tells us to build up rather than tear down; He tells us to leave judgment of others to Him; He tells us to pray without ceasing; He tells us to give rather than hoard; He tells us to invest in the age to come instead of this age; He tells us to go make disciples.*

God's direction today is clear. The difference is not in the message or the messenger, it is in the one RECEIVING the message. If we want to be great champions of faith and know the great blessing of God, we have to do what he tells us to do.”

... IMMEDIATELY!

(iii) That takes TRAINING & DISCIPLINE!

- Sometimes we think, “I’ll get around to those things - in time”... But “DELAYED OBEDIENCE is DISOBEDIENCE”.

A. Can you imagine saying to God on the Day of Judgment: “Yea, I was GOING TO fix that relationship ... I was GOING TO take prayer seriously ... I was going to work on my judgmentalism ...” (Delayed obedience is disobedience.)

Worse yet, can you imagine saying to God on that day: “I FORGOT. I forgot your Word says to build others up rather than tear them down.”

FORGETTING OBEDIENCE IS DISOBEDIENCE!

Yet how often, parents & children, isn’t that the line? > “I FORGOT to do my chore, to ask the teacher to check his email, to pick up my room.”

- I don’t think we want to tell God we FORGOT to do his commands on the Day of Judgment. There’s no validity in those words.

(iv) OBEY IMMEDIATELY – if you can’t do it right then, write a note to yourself so you won’t forget. Obey immediately – if God’s said to do it and it’s on your heart, get to it!

TRAIN YOURSELF. A surrendered life is a CULTIVATED ONE.

Abraham heard the command ... and “early the next morning” got up & saddled his donkey!

2. Second, A SURRENDERED HEART TRUSTS GOD FULLY.

(i) Abraham and Isaac set out for Mt. Moriah to make sacrifice – a 3 day journey.
= “a long obedience in the same direction” (to quote a book title by Peterson)

CAN YOU EVEN BEGIN TO IMAGINE ABRAHAM’S THOUGHTS & PRAYERS during those 3 days? ... But he keeps moving ... step by step ... in surrender to God’s will – nothing between my heart & my Savior!

A. At the base of the mount, he parks the donkey, loads the wood on Isaac, carries the flint & knife himself ... and up they go.

Then Isaac asks the obvious question: “Dad, where’s the lamb? We’ve got fire and wood. Stones are up there to build the altar – but where’s the lamb?”

PROPHETICALLY, Abram answers, “God will provide the lamb.” ... and the two go on together. He didn’t / he couldn’t say, “Son, you are that lamb.” He just said: JEHOVAH JIREH. God will provide. We can count on him.

(ii) Hebrews 11 comments with these words: *By FAITH Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, ‘It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.’ Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.” (vv. 17-19)*

A. Abraham could surrender even his beloved son, Isaac, because he figured that even if he slit the throat of his son, God could heal & bring Isaac back to life!

This God, after all, gave him Isaac when he was 100 & Sarah’s womb 90 years old!
“IS ANYTHING TOO HARD FOR THE LORD?”, he had learned firsthand!

(iii) Whatever God is speaking to you about in the life of surrender, you can TRUST HIM to look after things. He is JEHOVAH-JIREH, the God who provides.

Andrew Murray states, *“God is ready to assume full responsibility for the life wholly yielded to Him.”*

A. Like Abraham, a surrendered heart TRUSTS GOD.

- You don’t have to LIKE what He asks you to do.

- You don’t even have to understand WHY He’s asking you to do it – surely

Abraham didn’t – you just need to do it TRUSTING THAT GOD WILL PROVIDE.

(iv) A little girl stood at the second floor window of her house on fire, smoke billowing. She couldn't see a thing. The voice of her father called, "Jump, I'll catch you."

"But, Father, I can't see you", she said.

"That's OK", said the father. "I can see you."

She jumped – not because she could see – she jumped because she trusted the words & voice of the one who told her to jump.

HE IS JEHOVAH-JIREH – the God who Provides.

3. Third, A SURRENDERED LIFE LOVES GOD SELF-SACRIFICIALLY.

(i) This is the deepest lesson. God has not called me in salvation for MY GLORY (although my deepest joy & well-being is in His call). He has called me for HIS GLORY.

In the life of surrender, step by step God teaches us this. He asks us to let go of even good things he has given us in order that we have hearts that love Him above any blessing received!

A. Jesus referred to this when He said, *"Anyone who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of Me."* (Mt. 10:37)

- He's not repudiating mothers or fathers. He's just making sure that there be NOTHING – not even family-love – between your soul & your Savior.

B. So the surrendered life is self-sacrificial.

If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me, Jesus added. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. (Mt. 16:25)

(ii) Life with God is not a game. We treat it so FLIPPANTLY in the Church today. We have to learn how to take God seriously.

A. We know how to take SPORTS seriously – you don't miss a practice unless you're sick – and then you tell the coach. You don't show up late – or you'll get cut. It's serious! But my catechism classes, I'll get there if I can.

We know how to take HOMEWORK seriously. I've got to get it done. But my Bible reading

We know how to take PLAY & VACATION seriously – we plan months ahead of time – But kingdom-advancing seminars? ... I'll see what I'm doing that day.

B. Imagine a discussion with Abraham about how seriously you should take life with God – the God who asked him to give up the life of his beloved son?

- There ARE lots of things to take seriously in this world – None, none, none more so than God.

(iii) For Abraham the sacrifice of his son was an act of worship.

Verse 5 – He says to the 2 servants who go along with him & Isaac, *“Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will WORSHIP and then come back to you.”*

- The whole scene is about Worship. This is what it is - SELF-SACRIFICE.

Worship is not singing a few songs. Worship is not sitting in a pew for an hour.

Worship is coming before God to say, “NOTHING between my soul & my Savior”. Worship is coming to God to ask, “What must I give up to hold Your hand and continue to be led by You?”

WORSHIP IS SACRIFICE.

A. I once heard a speaker describe the true Christian life as a “Triple A – AAA” life:
= “God, anything ... anytime ... anywhere.”

A SURRENDERED LIFE LOVES GOD SELF-SACRIFICIALLY

4. Fourth, A SURRENDERED LIFE FULFILLS GOD'S DESTINY.

(i) It is AFTER Abraham passes this test of FEARING GOD that he hears again those great words which have been the THEME of our series:

Verse 16 – I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sands on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies (= THIS IS YOUR EARTH), and through you all nations on earth will be blessed.

= ABRAHAM, YOU ARE BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING

(ii) That's God's promise & destiny for you, Christian, in The Son, Christ Jesus:

BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING

A. I hope you've taken that to heart. It gives life joy and purpose. It is ETERNAL LIFE with us. It gives us peace & a mission!

BLESSED in "Christ Jesus with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 1) ... in order that we be "God's workmanship (Eph. 2), created in Christ to do good works which God has prepared in advance for us to do."

(iii) But this wonderful, eternal life does not come without a heart that fears God in complete self-surrender. That's what the Word teaches.

AFTER Abraham shows his willingness to give his all to God, then he is renewed in his promise & destiny – "Blessed to be a blessing".

A. Not taking God seriously doesn't cut it. In fact, it's STUPID -

You KINDA want to be blessed by God to KINDA want to be His blessing in this world ... that's not the way God operates.

"Be hot or be cold", Jesus says (Rev. 3:15) – cause if you're LUKEWARM, I'll SPIT you out of my mouth."

It is the SURRENDERED LIFE that fulfills God's destiny.

III. CONCLUSION

SO HOW DO WE DO THIS? Let me close by sharing with you the power and the process of self-surrender.

1. THE POWER is in God Himself and His love – because he has completely surrendered Himself to you.

Everyone should be able to see in this story the self-sacrifice of God in His Son, Christ Jesus. What God ASKS of Abraham, He gives Himself. There's nothing He ever asks of us that He doesn't first give.

(i) This is a story about God's surrendered life.

Mount Moriah is literally the mountains of Jerusalem – where Jesus was killed. Isaac bearing the wood is Jesus bearing the Cross. The ram caught by its horns in the brush is His thorn-crowned head – the substitutionary sacrifice.

The willingness of Isaac – for surely, as a teenager, he could have run away from his elderly father – the trust & willingness of Isaac is Jesus' self-surrender.

Abraham is the Father God who “so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” – that whosoever would BELIEVE in this love should not perish ... but be blessed to be a blessing!

THERE'S NOTHING THAT GOD EVER ASKS OF US THAT HE DOESN'T FIRST GIVE.

A. This is the love of God for you.

In that love, He asks us to give up our life WHOLLY to Him.

We love because He first loved us.

That's the POWER.

GOD PROVIDES. He is JEHOVAH-JIREH

2. In that power, we JOURNEY in self-surrender with God. It's a process.

The missionary, Jim Elliot, who was martyred in Ecuador at age 28 (Movie- "End of the Spear") wrote, *"One does not surrender a life in an instant. Yes, one decides to BEGIN surrender. But that which is life-long can only be surrendered in a lifetime."*

(i) It took Abraham 3 days to get to the mountain. The surrendered life is a journey of growing in God's will.

His Word & voice tell us about specific things we're to give up to continue holding His Hand:

Friends / Worries / Angers

Character Issues – being nice, always wanting to be liked

Habits / Fears / Attitudes / Traditions / Customs / Power

... sometimes things we treasure very deeply – but they stand between God's BEST for our life!

(ii) Climbing Mount Moriah is a PROCESS – but know this: EVERY STEP YOU TAKE BRINGS YOU CLOSER TO WHO HE IS.

It is His mountain of self-sacrifice that He calls you to walk up in worship.

3. TAKE HIS HAND THIS MORNING.

In response to the Word, we'll praise God for His love (seeing Mt. Moriah).

Then we'll pray, beginning with our FISTS CLENCHED – cause, like children, we do so readily hold on to things – even good things God has given us.

Then, opening our hands, finger by finger, let's bring before Him things that He's asking us to surrender.

THE SURRENDERED LIFE:

Obeys God immediately / Trusts God fully / Loves God Self-sacrificially

The Surrendered Life – is the one that fulfills God's promise & destiny

BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING. Amen!