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Presentation Transcript
Bible Stories for Adults, Part 10 – The Sacrifice of Isaac
July 21, 2019

Our title today is *The Sacrifice of Isaac*. It's the tenth presentation in an ongoing series called *Bible Stories for Adults*.

Most people have heard, if they've not read, about God's instructions to Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac. People have thought all sorts of terrible things of God – you know, "He was asking Abraham to break His own law, 'Thou shalt not kill.'" How are we to understand this? If He didn't really mean to do it, which we see in the end, He didn't, wasn't it kind of a mean trick to play on him? How can we think about this? Well, if we can understand it, and get past it, there is something very important for Christians to learn from this story. That's why it's in here.

Let's read it first. It's a short story – Genesis 22, beginning in verse 1.

Genesis 22:1 – *After these things, God tested Abraham....*

The *JFB Commentary* says, "It was not God's intention to cause or tempt him to sin, but to cause his faith to increase." So that's one thing we can think about right there. It's a test – a trial. In the Bible, it talks about God is like the refiner's fire – you know, you heat up the metal with all the impurities in it, and the impurities rise to the top, and you can take them away then. So He tries us. He gives us tests – trials – to help build our faith.

V-1-2 – *...and He said to Abraham, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." So here's Abraham, at less than a moment's notice, ready to respond to God's instruction. We should ask ourselves, "Am I like that?" He said, '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 which I shall tell you.'*

Now, you'll remember that Abraham and Sarah had a terrible time having children. She was in her old age before she had Isaac. So Isaac, we can surmise, was the apple of their eye. So, how

hard would this be? Just think about your own children. You know, the thought of it is horrific. Why would God ask anyone to do such a terrible thing? Well, He asks all those who seek Him to sacrifice their own lives and live them for Him, but He has never asked anyone to kill themselves or their children, except this *one* time. So this is the first and last time that He asks anyone to do this. We can think then, there must be some supreme importance here – that it was a one-time thing – and that would be, in some way, to God, not necessarily to us. Also, think about the implications of God’s message. He was telling Abraham He wanted him to disobey God’s law – to commit a sin – something that doesn’t make any sense. And He’s also telling Abraham to kill the heir, who was to inherit all the promises God had made to Abraham. So we can also surmise that Abraham was well aware of these points, and probably understood them at a much deeper level than we do, since he was the one that talked to God personally about these things. So he must have suffered a sleepless, sad, confused night before leaving. But look what he does in verse 3.

V-3-9 – *So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son, Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. And on the third day, Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. So he does as he’s told without dispute of any kind or any resistance. It took three, maybe four, days to get there. It was on the third day that he saw it from afar off. So he had a lot of time to think about this, and yet, he went forward. Then Abraham – when they got there – said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey. I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.” And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac, his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went, both of them, together. And Isaac said to his father, Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, 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.” So they went both of them together. When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac, his son, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.*

Now, if your father wanted to tie you up and put you on top of a stack of firewood, what would *you* do? And remember, now, Abraham was very old compared to Isaac. I’m not sure we know how old Isaac was, but it’s quite possible he could have been a young adult. I just don’t know, at any rate. But we do know something about Isaac. Isaac was a *very* laid-back person. We have another sermon in our library, called *Finding a Wife for Isaac*, that points up his laid-back nature. So that may be partly how we can understand how he ended up on the pile of firewood bound hand and foot. He was cooperating, it seems.

V-10 – *Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son,* it tells us in verse 10.

Now, he was not going to burn him alive, like the pagans did. No, he was going to nick a large

artery near the surface – probably in the neck. How can we know this? Well, this is how all the sacrifices were killed. We also know that thousands of years later, at Masada, where a band of Jews – the Maccabees – held off the Romans until they could defend themselves no more. They all died that way, rather than give themselves up to be killed by the Romans. That’s very much documented in history. Now, exsanguination is *not* a painful way to die. So Isaac would have simply lost consciousness – it would be like going to sleep. Still, he would have died. And Abraham and Sarah would have suffered the loss of their beloved son. And at this point, too, they would have no heir.

V-11-14 – *But the angel of the LORD – verse 11 – called to him from heaven, and said, “Abraham! Abraham!” And he said – what he always says – “Here I am.”* It’s the same thing he said to God at the very beginning – “Here I am. Whatever You want.” And while he was willing to do as God commanded, we can be sure that when he unexpectedly heard God’s voice, knife in hand, his heart must have nearly leapt out of his chest. And God said, *“Do no lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing that you have not withheld your son – your only son – from Me.”* So this is what it’s all about. It’s a test. “Now I know that you fear God!” Okay! “So, are you willing to trust Me all the way?” That was the question God was trying to answer. *And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him – coincidentally – was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, “The LORD will provide.” As it is said to this day, “On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.”* So that was a name that was completely fitting and poignant to Abraham.

Paul makes an interesting comment about this event. Let’s read it. This is in what we call the Faith Chapter today – Hebrews 11. Paul lists off an amazing number of people, who, under terrific pressure and great trials, trusted God with their lives. And one of those was Abraham.

Hebrews 11:17-19 – *By faith, Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.*

So, in Abraham’s mind, Isaac was as good as dead, because of God’s command, yet he knew that Isaac had to be part of the plan. But here God has told him to kill Isaac. So, “Well, it makes no sense. Maybe He’ll raise him from the dead.” So Paul makes an interesting comment about this event. Let’s read it. This is in what we call the Faith Chapter. So, going back to Genesis:

Genesis 22:15-16 – *And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, “By myself I have sworn....* Now this is *after* He told him not to kill his son and *after* Abraham had sacrificed the ram. *And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, “By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this*

and have not withheld your son, your only son....

So, a bit of a side note here, breaking in, who's this talking here – “By Myself I have sworn....” So the angel didn't do that swearing, did He? So the word *angel* here means *messenger* – one sent – right? So he's talking to God here. Here's a side note: Why is all right for God to swear, but we're not supposed to? Well, because God has the power to fulfill all His oaths and we don't. If we go around swearing we'll do this or that, it's hubris. We're weak. We're frail. We're ignorant. Quite often, things don't work out the way we think and we can't keep our promises. So we ought not to act as though we're strong. And also, when God swears, it's important. He's swearing by His life, which is eternal, and that makes it sure. So when He says things to us like that – when He makes an oath to us – we can bank on it, so to speak. And when we go to that bank, then that's faith. God reiterates His promise as we continue reading in Genesis 22:17.

V-17-19 – *I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gates of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice. Why is everybody going to be blessed? Because this one man “obeyed My voice.” So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba. And Abraham lived at Beersheba.*

Now let's think for a minute. It was never God's intention that Abraham kill Isaac. And Isaac did not die. Was it cruel of God to do this? Well, before taking a deeper look, let me say that one thing we can learn from this story is that God is not concerned about our emotional comfort as much as He is concerned our commitment. Right? I mean, we have an example of that right here. So let's go on with a deeper look then.

Let's think about where God told Abraham to go make this sacrifice – “the land of Moriah, to one of the mountains of which I shall tell you,” He said. So the Bible is clear that Moriah is the site where the temple would be built many years later – the place where sacrifices are made – and also much later, nearby where Jesus would be sacrificed as well. Why there? Let's read something Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10, starting in verse 1:

1 Corinthians 10:1 – *For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.... Oh, so he likens going through the Red Sea – when ancient Israel did that – to being baptized. Now, who were you baptized into? Well, you were baptized into Jesus Christ, weren't you? They were baptized into Moses. So it says, they all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.*

So Moses is a type of Christ. And all the things that happened in the Old Testament are about Christ. That's what it's for – to teach us about Christ and about how God works with people. All

the holy days are about Christ. All the sacrifices are about Christ. All the things that happened to them are about their relationship to Christ – and *our* relationship to Christ as well. And Abraham, being willing to sacrifice his own son is about Christ. Isaac was the type of Christ – the willing sacrifice and Abraham was the type of the Father.

Okay, so what does that mean for us today? You know, very interesting, but what does that have to do with me? Well, one thing that it means is, that God did *not* ask Abraham to do anything *He* wasn't willing to do. He sacrificed His Son! Right? That's why Abraham is a type of the Father. And the second thing we can think about is, that God asks the same level of commitment from all of us.

You know, there's a movie I like to watch from time to time. It's called *We Were Soldiers*. It's about the Seventh Cavalry – the first air cavalry we ever had – where we fought in Viet Nam. Our men would be helicoptered into battle places and they would fight there. The commander, when he was getting ready to leave with his men, gave a speech. And he said that his boot would be the first boot to hit the battlefield, and it would be the last one to leave, and he would leave nobody behind – living or dead.

So a good battle commander sets the example for his troops. He's first in and last out. And God is like that, too. He asks us to give up our whole life for Him, just like He surrendered His whole life for His plan that He is working, and spends His time on that. And His Son, Jesus Christ, was willing to give up His life for that plan, too. And that plan is, that all of us can be in their family.

You know, today at church, we want to be encouraged. We want to hear smooth things. We want to hear comforting things. People today can't tolerate thinking about the level of commitment it takes to enter into the Kingdom of God. It is an *all or nothing* deal! Now yes, we don't all start out that way. We have to learn to be committed. But, in the end, that's what it's going to take. So the whole point of the story is, that, if we have faith in God – if we *really* believe – then that faith will cause us to obey God.

I was looking at a Webpage recently, put out by a group – or person, I don't know whether it was one or many – who said that to be a real Christian, you have to believe in salvation by faith alone. Do you believe that? Well, quite often, when we point the finger at others, we have three pointing back at us. Think about those who look down on those who, along with faith, also believe obeying God's law is necessary as we read James 2 – James 2:21.

James 2:21-24 – *Was not Abraham, our father, justified by works when he offered up his son, Isaac, on the altar? Yes, it was something he did. You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works. What that means is, the outcome of faith is works. And the scripture was fulfilled that said, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness – and he was called a friend of God. And then in verse 24, it says: You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.*

Faith *produces* works. A living faith in God causes us obey God and do what God tells us to do in His word. So we're not saved by our works. We're saved by the life of the resurrected Christ. But faith in that *motivates* us to obey God. So when you say "faith alone," a lot of people think you don't have to do anything, and the is *not* biblical. Do you have the fruits of faith in your life? That is, do you follow God all the way? Are you all in? Well, that's what it takes to be a Christian really. That's where we have to go. We have to go toward a total commitment to God.

Many time, in the New Testament, we're directed to Abraham and his willingness to obey God under all circumstances. And that should lead us to believe that kind of obedience is still necessary today. Why else would they talk about it in the New Testament? You want to be encouraged? Be encouraged to do that. Follow God completely.

Don't forget to comment on the Website. Be looking for our new blog posts that will be coming out every other week – on the weeks opposite the postings, which come out biweekly now.

Until next time, this Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.