

Wednesday in Lent 4 2020  
By Faith Abraham, Part Two  
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.”*

Tonight, we are going to take another look at Abraham’s faith, but this time with a focus on the later part of his life. Last Wednesday, we made the point of saying that Abraham never saw the things he was promised. He was promised three things: land, children as numerous as the stars of the skies, and a Savior who was to come from his children’s children. He never received any of these things. But at least Abraham did receive a portion of the promise; may we could consider it a down payment! Not land...he even had to purchase land to bury his wife. Not a Savior, He would be born many generations later. Not children as numerous as the sands of the seashore. But, he does have a start. He has a son, an only son, named Isaac whom he loved.

“Isaac” means “laughter” because both Abraham and Sarah had laughed at God’s promise. It is important that you remember the name Isaac...because God’s promise specifically names him. In Genesis chapter seventeen, we read, “God said...Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.” (Ge 17:19)

Isaac is a joy to his parents because he connects them to the promise. Then God tested Abraham’s faith, “Take your son, you only-begotten 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.” (Ge 22:2)

Abraham does exactly as he is told. But he acts not only according to the commandment of God but also according to the promise, for God had said, “through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” (Ge 21:12)

These two things work in tension in Abraham’s life. He has a clear commandment from God, “take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love...and offer him...as a burnt offering.” But, He also has a clear promise, , “through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” (Gen 21:12)

Many people recognize that Abraham’s obedience to the Lord is commendable! He is celebrated as a true man of God because he does what God commands. But, Dear Friends, do not lose sight of the promise of God in this story. The writer to the Hebrews tells us to imitate is the faith of Abraham in the promise.

Isaac is specifically named as the one who comes from both Abraham and Sarah’s body who will fulfill what God has said. And this is on Abraham’s heart and mind as he enters the land of Moriah with his son. He believes that Isaac will survive this ordeal, because God has promised to fulfill his promise through Isaac by name. And it is this faith in the promise that propels Abraham onward and up the mountain to make a sacrifice to the Lord.

Note Abraham’s faith in the promise of God. Abraham says to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.” “I and the boy!” Abraham is confident they both will return! The second statement of faith is in verse eight. The context is the haunting question of Isaac on their way up the mountain, “My father! Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burn

offering?” And his father answers in faith, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.”

Abraham acts in obedience and faith, but it is his faith that lifts his spirits. The commandment is hard and cruel. Take your son, your only son whom you love, and offer him up as a sacrifice to me. But God has promised and God cannot lie. Abraham goes up the mountain confident that God will keep his word.

The Old Testament looks forward to the cross. The entire story of Abraham’s offering of Isaac points to Jesus – it teaches us the love the Father has for us that He would sacrifice His Son in our place.

The land of Moriah is the place of Golgotha. The land of Moriah is the same as Jerusalem and Calvary where Jesus would suffer and die for our sins. The language is also the same: “...take you son, your only son whom you love.” And Jesus said to Nicodemus, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.” (Jn 3:16)

And then there is this word from John the Baptist. He sees Jesus coming toward him and he says to his disciples, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” (Jn 1:29) Abraham was right -- God himself did provide the lamb. The male lamb that would be the substitute for Abraham’s only son... and that male ram is pointing us to Jesus who would take the place of all sinners to be slain.

And, we have the words of Jesus Himself. In His testy argument with the Jews, Jesus says an amazing thing: “Your Father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” Abraham saw the day of the Messiah on the mountain in the land of Moriah. He saw the ram caught in the thicket. He saw the substitutionary sacrifice that took the

place of his son...his only-begotten son that he loved. He saw Jesus as the angel of the Lord who repeated to him the most important part of the promise, "...in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice." (Gen 22:18)

The story of Abraham is the story of his faith, and that faith is in Jesus, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Once again, Abraham had only two things on his mind...the dreadful commandment of God and the wonderful promise. The dreadful commandment was to offer up his only son. The wonderful promise was that through this son...and not just any son...but through this son Isaac, God would fulfill his promise that even if he should slay Isaac, God would raise him from the dead. This is what the writer to the Hebrews tells us, "he considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back." (He 11:19).

Commandment and promise; Law and Gospel...they always live in tension in the life of a Christian. We cannot live according to the law of God. We cannot comply with the righteous requirements of God....not because we are unwilling but because we are unable. We are sinners by birth. We are sinners in our daily lives. And the knowledge of this moral failure terrorizes our lives. For the commandment of God also includes condemnation for those who do not obey it, "The wages of sin is death." (Rom 6:23)

Yet, we believe the promise. "The gift of God is eternal life!" Jesus is the lamb of God who still takes away our sins. We trust that God still receives us as his beloved children because of the forgiveness of our sins. And it is this gospel that motivates us to live according to the commandments of God.

Listen to this carefully: Abraham is counted righteous not because he obeyed the call of God. Abraham is counted righteous because he believed the promise of God. And it is the promise that sustained him in his difficult task. Abraham is commended for this faith and we are called to imitate his faith.