

Our story continues this morning again looking at the life of Abraham. Last week we zoomed out and looked at the last 100 years of his life starting when he was 75 and first heard the voice of God. Today we zoom in as though with a microscope to look at one specific event – the final testing of Abraham found in chapter 22 of Genesis. If I were to do a review quiz on last weeks sermon or even just on random knowledge you have about Abraham from your own reading I'm guessing that the first thing you would give as an answer to name one thing you know about Abraham it would be that he and his wife, Sarah, had a son when they were really old. We don't always preach about Abraham, but when we do that's the story that comes up. God promised Abraham a son, he and Sarah try and help God out with Hagar, but that wasn't the promised son, so finally at ages 90 and 100, after cracking up with laughter, they have this promised son and name him, Isaac. Other fun facts you could give me about Abraham pale in comparison to this one – they had a son in their old age. And, so, in light of a lifetime of dreaming, and a 25 year promise that Abraham would have descendants more numerous than the stars in the sky, that he would produce an heir with Sarah, and that through that heir all nations would be blessed chapter 22 seems like an odd story.

Because I read fast, we're going to read this story in its entirety this morning. We'll read it in 2 Acts. begin in verse 1. **(see separate page) (1-10)**

Act 1: Obedience

It seems like God might be changing His mind or at least the plan. With everything we know about this promised, long awaited son, it seems a little bit like, wait, what? He's now going to kill that son? When we read it as if for the first time – without

jumping ahead to the ending – when we stop right where we’ve stopped – we have a few questions – but, what about; but, I thought you said; but, this isn’t fair; what’s going on? Well, what’s going on is that Abraham is doing what he has been doing for a lifetime – obeying God in the hard times.

In the opening verse of this chapter God calls out to Abraham and he responds, “Here I am.” It indicates a readiness to respond and obey. I’m here, I’m ready, what would you like me to do? Abraham has been asked to do some difficult things, and some things that haven’t always made sense in the moment over the course of his years walking with God. Yet, always we read where Abraham obeys without delay. When asked to leave his home in chapter 12, we read, “So Abram left,” no thinking it through, no several days later after packing, just, “so he left.” When he is asked to make a covenant with God and circumcise himself and every male in his camp we read, “on that very day.” And, here when God gives difficult, painful, heart-wrenching instructions we read, “Early the next morning.” **Abraham had an instant response to God’s voice, and that was to respond immediately in obedience.**

Instantly, immediately, right now are not really the way I like to operate. I wonder how many times God speaks to me, and I respond with – are you sure? Right now? Can it wait? I mean, when you say, Leave your country, your people and your father’s household, do you mean now because I’m gonna need to tie up a few loose ends, I was wondering if I could save up a bit more money, pay off a few more bills, and then look into following you, in complete obedience, obviously. I just didn’t know if you meant now, now. I feel this happens with God because I know it

happens in my other relationships. Growing up my mom and I operated on 2 very different timetables. She operated on a – I asked you to do something so I meant right this second timetable and I operated on a – yes, I heard you and I’ll get to it when I get to it timetable. These were not good years. I finally just moved to another continent! If you’re a mom or have ever been a child with a mom then you know what I’m talking about – and it makes me wonder – do we do that with God or do we respond as Abraham did – Here I am? Oh, it’s a hard thing you’re asking? Well, here I am anyway willing to obey immediately, at once, this very day.

What does happen to our ability to obey when God asks us to hand over the very thing we hold dearest and closest in our lives? Again, we know that Isaac was a long promised child given to them in their old age. They had stopped praying, longing and believing for a child of their own, but God promised and God was faithful. So, now what? The truth is the language used in verse 2 is the same as the language used in God’s initial conversation with Abraham in 12:1. He’s heard this before. It’s the same word version of, go, and it’s the only 2 times God uses that word in speaking to Abraham. Both times Abraham is told to leave what he loves and holds dear. The first time he’s to leave his country, his people, and his family. That’s everything he knows, it’s what’s comfortable. The second time he’s told to first take, but then leave his son on the altar. Why must he always leave behind what he loves most in order to fully obey God? When God first comes to Abraham he says “go” to a land that I’ll show you, and the second time God says “go” to a mountain that I will show you. He’s been in this place before, and the first time trust and obedience to God worked out pretty well. But, I’m older and wiser now, and I’m not sure I can go

through with it all again. That's what might have been going through my head. I know now exactly what it will cost to follow you in obedience, and I don't know if I can pay it this time. I said goodbye to what I loved, to my father, to my friends, to follow you, but this time, this is my son. This is your promise to me in the flesh. How can you ask me to give him to you? To sacrifice the one thing that I love the most? But, then, I suppose, it wouldn't be a sacrifice if it wasn't what he loved the most? What is God asking of you? If God calls to you, Sarah, take what's closest to your heart, your only treasure, maybe it's something I gave you, but it's what you love, and sacrifice it as an offering to me – how will I respond? How will you respond? Sometimes, God asks things of us that are difficult, and things that others won't understand. Notice, that Abraham tells no one what he's doing. In every other instance he tells Sarah – hey, I heard a voice, we're moving – he told her something because she packs her bags and goes with him, he speaks to her of the promise of an heir which is why she schemes with him on how to produce one and gives Hagar to him, she knows that God intends for her to have a child and feels comfortable enough to laugh about it – she's been in on these acts of obedience, but we've no record she knew anything about this episode. Perhaps because she would have stopped it or gone in his place. I'm old – take me instead. She could be very persuasive so she is not allowed to weigh in on the matter. They travel 3 days with 2 servants, and those 2 never know what the point of their trip is. When they get to the mountain, Abraham tells them to stay here. Because this test, this request of complete obedience was about Abraham and not them. They would have been in the way. You're going to do what? You can't kill your own son? This is crazy talk. Either

you turn around now or we'll put a stop to this nonsense ourselves. Abraham didn't need those questions or delays or those judgments from others. As they get to the top of the mountain Isaac asks you know we seem to have everything needed for a sacrificial offering except the lamb, what's the story here, Father? Abraham tells him nothing other than that God himself will provide. This was Abraham's moment – not Sarah's, not the servants, not Isaac's.

Sometimes, we will be asked things by God that others won't understand. It's why people ask me questions about my personal life out of great and genuine concern, and that's okay, they don't have to understand my act of obedience. God may be asking something of you and your spouse that's too frightening to share with anyone else and that's okay. It's okay, sometimes, to keep our mouths shut. We don't have to tell or post on Facebook everything that God is doing inside of us. If God is dealing with you about something it's okay to seek Godly counsel, but sometimes you don't need everyone to weigh in or give their 2 cents or try and talk you out of something they can't understand. We might have to leave some people behind in our lives because they don't understand what God is asking of us, and they won't further the steps of obedience we're taking. Why aren't you doing this or that anymore? You know it's because God is asking me to obey Him in this way instead. What God is asking of you doesn't have to make sense to anybody else. But, are you willing to obey and sacrifice and live out what God is asking you to do? It's sort of like this song – I have decided to follow Jesus no turning back, no turning back. Another verse says, Though none go with me still I will follow. **Your act of obedience doesn't have to be understood by others. It comes down to you and God. Will**

you obey what God is asking you to do? We obey God in the good times and in the hard times. This was a hard thing that Abraham was being asked to do, but he was willing, and he stands over his son ready to act.

Let's finish this passage to find that if Act 1 is about obedience then Act 2 is about provision. **(10-19 see separate sheet) Act 2: Provision**

Abraham's faith in God never wavers throughout this test. For 3 days he has walked in obedience knowing what was ahead of him. The Bible doesn't record any conversation during those travel days, nor do we have any recorded response of Abraham to God once the initial instructions are given. The only response is that he takes Isaac and sets out. But, Hebrews 11 gives us a glimpse into what he might have been thinking. **Hebrews 11:17-19, "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced 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 even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death."**

It's interesting because Abraham has never seen anyone come back to life. He's not heard of the resurrection. But, he supposes, if God can cause a 90 year old woman to have a baby, then maybe God can work a miracle in this situation too. Maybe, just maybe, this isn't the end. Maybe God will bring him back to life. God has provided and met my needs before so I have to believe He can do it again. By faith Abraham tells his servants – we will worship and we will come back. By faith Abraham follows God in obedience up a mountainside. By faith he tells Isaac that God will provide the

lamb. By faith he binds his son and lays him on the altar. I believe in you, God. I believe and I will obey. And, then the voice comes – Abraham, Abraham! And, again, that response that implies a readiness to obey, Here I am! I’m doing it, I’m obeying, I’m ready. By faith I’ll follow through with what you’ve asked. The angel of the Lord says, “Now, I know you fear me.” Now I know that nothing is more important to you than pure obedience to me. Every other time that God has come to Abraham he’s given him a promise and then asked him to do something in return. The promise came first. But, this time Abraham was asked to do something without a promise of a reward. **There was no promise that it would turn out the way that it did – there was only faith that the God before whom Abraham had walked all these years would be faithful to provide.** God then tells him in verse 17 and 18 that He will bless Abraham and make all his descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. **“Through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”** It’s the first time in scripture we read the word obey. God provided for Abraham, God rewarded Abraham, and God blessed Abraham for his obedience.

Do we have faith in God to take care of us? Abraham’s faith hadn’t always been so strong. It’s why we have these weird stories in chapter 12 and 20 where Abraham enters a new land and in fear tells the kings that Sarah is his sister instead of his wife. If you haven’t read those stories this month you can go home this afternoon and read them. Abraham had been afraid and it had cost him. In chapter 15 God comes to him and says, “Don’t be afraid.” You don’t tell someone who isn’t afraid to not be afraid. Abraham had dealt with fear, but in this encounter with God that I’m-

afraid-to-trust-you-completely changes into I fear not trusting you more than I fear what man can do to me. Now, that I know you fear the Lord is what the angel says. Now that I know you fear me instead of man. Now that I know you're willing to give me your fears and worries, and place your faith and trust in me completely – well, now comes that provision, reward, and blessing.

Are we placing faith in ourselves to figure out a solution? Are we trusting ourselves to get it all right or are we placing our faith in God to work on our behalf? Are we living in fear of what might happen if we dare to truly obey what God is asking of us? Where is our level of faith to believe that God will be faithful, to believe that God cares about us, to believe that we've not been forgotten or forsaken, to believe that God hears us when we pray. Don't be afraid – have faith.

Abraham names the place The Lord Will Provide or King James says Jehovah Jireh. This is my one super bowl reference – Time Out – to explain this name. The Jews wouldn't speak the name of God because it was too holy to be uttered. So they began to say **Adonai which meant The LORD** which is why you'll read that in your Bible in all caps. So there's a good possibility that verse 14 in your Bible has LORD in all caps. That was the English for Adonai. However, the real name for God in Hebrew, which is the language of the Old Testament, was **Yahweh** or when written **YHWH**. I never took Hebrew in college because my brain couldn't handle it, but suffice it to say the lack of vowels was too much for me. This word without vowels when put into English became **JHVH or Jehovah**. So it was the English version of the Hebrew word for God. And, **Jireh** is the transliterated Hebrew word for “**see**” or “**to see.**” Time in! Another way of translating this is God will see to it. For in that place on the

top of a mountain God will see to it that the need for a sacrifice was met. God saw to the needs of Abraham and provided the lamb that was missing. God saw to his need for a son, and as Hebrews says, He did receive his son back. God saw to his every need in that place, but the name is in a future tense – God will see to it. God will provide. The name wasn't a memorial to what God had done – God has seen to it or God provided here in this place. But, the name indicates that God will continue to be a provider.

God didn't stop seeing to the needs of his people on that day. No, **Philippians 4:19** says, **“And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”** Do you need God to see to your needs this morning? Because **The God who provided for Abraham is the same God who will provide for you today** as well. Whatever your need is today, we serve a God who will see to it. And, here's how I know. Because our greatest need has already been seen to.

I give credit to this to Pastor James Boice, a pastor in the last century, who pointed out that it was Isaac who first asked the question – where is the lamb for the burnt offering? God himself will provide the lamb was the answer given by Abraham. But, Moses may well have asked about that lamb as he confronted his own sin and that of his people – where is the lamb for the burnt offering? The answer remained – God himself will provide the lamb. King David, great as he was, was still a sinner in need of forgiveness – where is the lamb for the burnt offering, he asks. God himself will provide the lamb. Isaiah the prophet, seeing that the people were headed for punishment, but seeing a day when a suffering servant would die a horrific death on a cross, asks, where is the lamb? For 400 years after the exile they wait in silence

asking, where is the lamb that was promised? And finally a man called John the Baptist is at the Jordan River baptizing people and he looks up to see Jesus, and again comes the question: where is the lamb? John proclaims – **“Look, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”** God himself will provide the lamb! God himself will provide the sacrifice for our sins and see to them once and for all. You see, the gospel of John, indicates that perhaps in some way Abraham when he saw that ram in the thicket on that mountain looked ahead in time and saw another day. **“Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.” John 8:56** He was glad as he looked and saw another Father “who gave his one and only Son,” a Son that he delighted in, and loved. He looked and saw another Son, who was forced to carry his own cross up a hill just as Isaac had carried the wood for his own sacrifice. He saw the Father, “who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all.” He saw that Son, that lamb of God, be raised from death into life and he rejoiced. Matthew Henry wrote, **“He might have seen it without understanding what it meant; but he could not have rejoiced to see it, unless he had been well acquainted with its nature.” – Matthew Henry** He might not have understood all the implications, but he understood the pain of the father and the joy of the Son. He rejoiced and was glad as he looked ahead for God had provided. And, we might not understand it all as we look back to the cross, but it was there that God saw to it. It was there on that old rugged hill that God took my sins far from me. It was there that God provided for my healing. It was there that God saw to it as Jesus cried out – It is finished! He will see to it. Whatever your need, whatever your circumstance, whatever your trial – will you trust Him? Will you

obey Him? Will you place your faith in Him this morning? Because He will provide for you!

Abraham was obedient in all things. He messed up a few times along the way, but God knew he had a heart to obey. God is looking for those who will obey him this morning. For those who stand ready, willing, here I am, voluntarily surrendering my life to whatever you ask of me – God is calling out to you this morning.

And, for those who are in desperate need of provision today – will you trust Him to continue to see to every one of your needs? The provision came not a second too late for Abraham, but it didn't come in the 3 days when he was looking for it either. He didn't lose faith in the waiting, and can I encourage you to do the same. Don't lose faith as you wait for provision. As you wait for Jehovah Jireh to provide for you. He will see to it.

Let's pray.