

Genesis 22:1-18 - “The LORD Will Provide”

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We are now in the season of Lent, which serves not only as a time to meditate on what Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was willing to suffer in order to save us from eternal suffering and death and give us eternal life, but it's also a time to reflect upon what it means to live in this world as baptized children of God. In the midst of all the earthly blessings that God gives us in this world, which are here today and gone tomorrow, we've also been given the blessing of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ and His presence to share with others. To help us keep God's temporary and eternal blessings in their proper perspective, God often tests our faith in order to strengthen us and bless others through us.

In our OT reading from Genesis, we're told that God “*tested*” Abraham's faith by telling him to sacrifice his only son. If you remember, Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac, their long prayed for son was born. But now that Abraham and Sarah were blessed with a child, it would have been very tempting for them to worship that child—to redirect their main focus away from God and His purpose for their lives. That would not be good for Abraham, Sarah, Isaac or anyone else.

This is also a danger when it comes our temporary blessings in this world—to focus more on our material blessings than on God. Whenever we allow people or things, like our children, our spouse, our jobs, or our material possessions to take our hearts away from God and His will for us, then those blessings from God become stumbling blocks in our lives and in the lives of others.

Thanks be to Jesus Christ that He was willing to give up the comforts of heaven, to resist the devil's temptations for a more comfortable life in this world (as we heard in our Gospel reading), and to even give up His very life in order to free us from our sins, including the sin of worshiping creation rather than our Creator, and failing to trust that “*the LORD will provide.*” Not only has the Lord provided for us in the past, but He promises to provide us with all that we need now and in the future, especially when it comes to our eternal life in Him. And as I mentioned last week, since our eternal salvation in Jesus Christ is the most important thing God gives us, and the most important thing that we are all called to share with others, whenever the things of this world become obstacles to our salvation and the salvation of others, it's time to reevaluate our lives in Christ.

Jesus Christ's death and resurrection is our greatest assurance that “*the LORD will provide.*” While the Son of God's willingness to take upon Himself our flesh, so that He could die in payment for our sins, emphasizes His great love for us, His resurrection from the dead assures us of His almighty power as God to overcome our sins, death, and the devil, which rob us of the good thing God wants to give us. His death and resurrection also assures us that everything He says is true; that His death on the cross was an acceptable sacrifice for our sins; and that He will transform the lowly bodies of all those who believe in Him so that we will be like His glorious body (Philippians 3:21). This is the most important gift, which we never want to give up. So, let's get back to how God tested Abraham's faith in order to strengthen and keep him in the true faith to life everlasting.

Since we know from our text that Abraham passed God's test of his faith with flying colors by being willing to obey the Lord's command to sacrifice his only and long awaited son, we may wonder what God did earlier in Abraham's life to strengthen his faith. Apparently Abraham had learned from experience, especially

his experience with Hagar, that *“the LORD will provide.”*

Remember when Abraham and Sarah, instead of trusting in God’s promise to provide them with a child, became impatient and decided to depart from God’s Word about marriage and follow one of the ways of the world at that time to produce a child. Sarah encouraged Abraham to try producing a child through her handmaiden, Hagar, which resulted in conflict between all those involved, a conflict which continues even today between the descendants of Abraham and Hagar’s son, Ishmael, and the descendants of Abraham and Sarah’s son, Isaac.

Once Abraham and Sarah eventually conceived and gave birth to Isaac, I can imagine Abraham kicking himself as he thought of all the pain he caused himself and others by not being more patient and trusting the *“the LORD will provide.”* I can also imagine, after Isaac’s miraculous birth when Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90, Abraham saying to himself, “God, help me to never again doubt in your Word and promises—in Your ability to do all things.”

Whether Abraham prayed that prayer or not, God does test and strengthen Abraham’s faith even further by telling him to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. Can you imagine, after waiting so long for a son, to now be told to sacrifice that son! This would not be a sacrifice to try and earn God’s blessings, like the pagan sacrifices of Abraham’s day. Instead it would be a sacrifice in obedience to God who had already miraculously blessed Abraham and Sarah with the birth of Isaac. Abraham was now strong enough in his faith to take God at His word instead of doubting in God’s word. The end result was that Abraham not only received back his son, but he also received the added peace and joy which comes from knowing and trusting that *“the LORD will provide.”*

For Abraham, God provided a ram caught in a thicket as a substitute for his son. *“So Abraham called the name of the place, ‘the LORD will provide’; as it is said to this day, ‘On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.’”* This takes our thoughts to another mount, Mt. Calvary, where the ultimate substitute for all of us, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, was sacrificed on a cross to free us from our sins and death. It’s this good news that brings us to this place where God has called us away from the temporary blessings of this world to give us something infinitely better, Himself and His promise (sealed in the waters of our baptism and in the body and blood of Jesus Christ in the Lord’s Supper) that *“the LORD will provide.”*

As a descendant of Abraham, the father of many nations (Romans 4:16-17), God reaches out to you this morning to continue to free you from your past sins (such as the sin of worshipping the things of this world). Through His Word and Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper He fulfills His promise to you that, *“the LORD will provide.”* He provides for you His Son’s perfect obedience; His Son’s death for your sins; and His Son’s eternal life.

All glory be to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

[Children’s Sermon] We heard in our OT reading that God provided Abraham with a *“ram caught in a thicket by its horns”* to sacrifice instead of his son. The thicket or thorny bush around that ram’s head reminds us of the crown of thorns around Jesus’ head when He was sacrificed on a cross for our sins instead of us.

Because of what Jesus did for us through His death and resurrection, God gives us *“the crown of life”* as we heard in our Epistle reading (James 1:12-18). So, Jesus wore a crown of thorns like the one on that cross (a crown of death), so that He can give us *“the crown of life”* like this one, assuring us that we are God’s children now and forever through our baptism and faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior.