

# When God Demands Too Much

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## I) Genesis 22:1-19; Hebrews 11:17-19

### II) Introduction

#### A) *Bedtime story*

- 1) This story of Abraham's obedience is like one of Grimm's Fairy Tales. It is repulsive if you think about it. It goes against every fiber of human dignity and parental instinct that we have to even think about this scene.
- 2) I do not recommend that you read Genesis 22 as a bedtime story to your kids or grandkids. It will give them nightmares for months.  
*(a) "And then the kindly old father raised the knife above his little boy and prepared to plunge it into the child's heart."*
- 3) The narrative raises so many questions and creates so many paradoxes that we can hardly read it. But we dare not look away or ignore it because imbedded in this story we hear the heartbeat of God to provide for his children.

#### B) *Smooth stone*

- 1) The story in Genesis 22 has been passed from generation to generation for 4,000 years. So, by the time the writer of Genesis penned it around 3,500 BC the story was already as smooth as a river stone.
- 2) The rough edges of emotion which we would expect from the characters in this extraordinary situation have been worn away by time and yet, the story still evokes a deep emotional response from the listener.

#### C) *Responses*

- 1) In order for us to uncover what this story has to tell us I want to frame it with the three responses that Abraham verbalized in the story. Ironically, all three of the responses are the same, "Here I am." This should greatly simplify things for those of you taking notes.

### III) Hear I am (1)

#### A) *Testing*

- 1) In verse 1 of Genesis 22, we are reminded that Abraham intimately knew God's voice.  
*(a) It was the same voice that told him to leave Chaldea a region which is now within the borders of Iraq. God told him to go to a new land.*  
*(b) It was the same voice that told him that the new land where he was walking would one day be his and that his descendants would be more numerous than the sand on the sea and stars in the sky. We know that land today as Israel.*  
*(c) It was the same voice that promised that he and his elderly wife, Sarah would have a son.*
- 2) So when God called Abraham's name, Abraham probably responded enthusiastically, "Here I am" he said. - O boy! Another good thing from this good God,

- (a) *But God wanted Abraham's full attention this time because he was about to give him the ultimate test.*
- 3) We all know what it means to be tested.
- (a) *School teachers and professors test our knowledge of the material that we should have learned in class.*
- (b) *Athletic competition tests our physical skill and endurance.*
- (c) *Music, painting, writing, and all of the arts test our creativity and talent.*
- (d) *Mirrors test our vanity and traffic tests our patience.*
- 4) But what kind of test does God use to test our love and devotion to him?
- (a) *After all this is the same God who later demanded, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."*
- 5) So, it should not be surprising that when God gives a test for love and devotion that the test would be over-the-top hard.

### **B) The test**

- 1) The first time Abraham said, "Here I am" he was not expecting God to go right for his heart.
- (a) *"Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you."*
- 2) As repulsive a request as this is to us in 2010, it was not unusual in ancient times for people to sacrifice a child. It was true in Abraham's hometown of Ur back in Chaldea and it was true among the pagan religions of Canaan. The question was, would Abraham comply.
- (a) *The narrative has polished off any of the inner wrestling or arguments that Abraham may have had with God. We don't know what he was thinking but the next thing we find is that he has packed up the necessary equipment and gathered the people he needed to make the three day trip to the place God told him to go.*
- 3) What is interesting is that he saddled the donkey before he cut and bundled the firewood. Perhaps the storyteller wanted us to recognize that the stress of the decisions to obey God made his mind scattered and do things out of natural order.
- 4) The immediacy of Abraham's response of "Here I am" was followed up with obedient action. He packed, and took two servant boys along with Isaac and began a torturous three day journey.
- (a) *It was not a torturous journey because of the terrain or bad weather or anything like that. It was torture because he had three days to wrestle with his decision to obey God and preventively grieve the death of his only son.*

### **C) Your tests**

- 1) When God tests your love and devotion to him, he does not merely put up obstacles to overcome. **God tests us with choices between what we love most in life and our love and devotion to him.**

- (a) *A test for someone who struggles with the love of money, God will make you choose between your love of money and devotion to God. This is exactly what Jesus identified in the story of the Rich Young Ruler.*
  - (b) *A test for someone who is in love with fame or knowledge or adventure or whatever will be tested in those areas.*
  - (c) *God fully admits that he is a jealous God. He will not let anything or anyone have first place in our lives other than him.*
- 2) At the core, Abraham's great test was whether or not he would be obedient to God no matter what.

#### **IV) Here I Am (2)**

##### **A) Arrival**

- 1) The region of Moriah is only mentioned twice in the Bible – here in Genesis where God leads Abraham and then again in 2 Chronicles where it says that it was on Mt. Moriah that Solomon built the Temple to the Lord.
- (a) *Although there is some controversy over whether or not these two Moriahs are the same place most scholars assume that they are.*
  - (b) *This is also the same place where Jacob dreamed the ascent and descent of the angels from heaven.*
  - (c) *This is the same place where Jesus was charged and convicted to death.*
- 2) When they arrived, Abraham unpacked everything he needed for the final leg of the journey. He instructed the servant boys to wait for them as he and Isaac went to worship.
- (a) *It is an interesting parallel to Jesus' instructions to the disciples to wait and pray.*
- 3) Abraham put the firewood on Isaacs back to make the final trek up the hill.
- (a) *As we remember, Jesus carried his own cross on his back up to Golgotha.*

##### **B) Second "Here I am"**

- 1) The second time Abraham said, "Here I am" he was responding to a question from his son, Isaac who called out, "Father."
- 2) Abraham said, "Here I am." Then Isaac said.
- (a) *"The fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"*
  - (b) *<sup>8</sup> Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together.*
- 3) Isaac asked the most important question in human history but for him it would not be answered for 2,000 years.
- (a) *He asked, "Where is the lamb?"*
- 4) Not until John the Baptist identifies Jesus at his baptism was Isaac's question answered. John proclaimed,
- (a) *"Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."*

**c) Abraham's response**

- 1) Isaac was a bright boy. He knew that there was no animal with them to sacrifice. He could also read his father's face and the ominous sense of gloom that hung over him. But this is the remarkable thing about Isaac, he continued the journey up Mt. Moriah with his dad knowing that he would not be coming down.
- 2) Once they reached the summit he probably helped Abraham pile stones for the altar. He stood silently as Abraham bound his hands and feet and then lay still on the alter as his father unsheathed the knife. Can you imagine it?
  - (a) *In Isaiah 53, Isaiah prophesied of the coming Messiah, "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."*
- 3) When God puts us to the test, he does not simply put obstacles in our way. He puts **himself** in the way. I ask myself, how in the world could I ever raise a knife to kill my only son who I love in order to prove that I fear God?
  - (a) *It makes me want to cry out, "God, isn't there another way, there's got to be another way."*
- 4) **The test of God will make you choose between what you love the most and God himself.** He will not take second place in your life.

**v) Here I am (3)**

**A) Raising the knife**

- 1) It is one thing to go through all the motions of obedience and another thing to actually raise the knife as Abraham did. He did not raise the knife as a kind of a last warning to God, I believe that he was in a full downward motion to plunge the knife into Isaac's heart and then would quickly slit his throat.
  - (a) *The text says that an Angel called from heaven, "Abraham, Abraham."*
  - (b) *Now this is a place where the drama of the text is so understated. I imagine Abraham hearing the voice and in that split second somehow, somehow stopping his downward plunge.*
  - (c) *I can hear him exhale with a panicked grunt and Isaac scream in the anticipation of terrible pain.*
  - (d) *This could not have been a moment of silent restraint and calm.*
- 2) And Abraham answered a third time to the voice, "**Here I am.**" This time his voice was loud with adrenalin. He probably shook uncontrollably in fear of what almost happened as the knife fell to the ground because he was too weak to hold it.

- (a) *Everything that happened from here would have been a blur. He saw a ram caught in the thicket that he didn't see before. He couldn't get the ropes off of Isaac's wrists and feet fast enough. My guess is that together, Abraham and Isaac wanted to get the ram on the alter as quickly as possible in case God changed his mind, but of course he would not.*
- (b) *Once again the knife was raised in the air and the downswing ended the life of the ram and their sins were atoned.*
- (c) *The servant boys at the bottom of the mountain could see the smoke from the altar in the distance. It would soon be time to go home.*

## VI) Conclusion

### A) **Testing**

- 1) **When God tests your love and devotion to him, he will call for you to choose between putting God first in your life and your deepest and most vulnerable love.**
  - (a) *Yes, it is extreme. Yes, it's over-the-top. You may even be tempted to complain that God is demanding too much but he will not back down until he has first place in your heart.*
- 2) This my friends, is why Jesus died on the cross, to redeem our failure to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul and strength. Everything else that we love more than God, no matter how good it might be, must take second place to God himself.
- 3) Following the amazing events of that day on Mt. Moriah, Abraham named the place, "The Lord will provide." Notice that he didn't name it, "The Lord provided" in the past tense but rather "The Lord will provide" in the future tense.
  - (a) *In that name, he saw the significance of that place for being the place of provision for every future generation.*
  - (b) *It is in that place that God will provide the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.*
  - (c) *It is the promise that "The Lord will provide" his answer to all of our testing.*
- 4) This place may be holy ground for you right now. It may be the place you need to rename as, "The Lord will provide."

### B) **Here I am**

- 1) If you hear God speaking to your heart, respond by saying, "Here I am." Say it with me.
  - (a) *Hear I am.*
- 2) Say it again. Here I am.
- 3) Say it again. Here I am.
- 4) Bow your heads with me.

## VII) PRAYER

- 1) Whether or not you are facing the kind of testing where you are tempted to say, "God is too demanding" the fact is, that if God is speaking to your heart, you need to answer, you need to choose. Let my words be your prayer.

**B) Prayer**

- 1) Holy God of Abraham and Isaac, I say to you now, Here I am. I know that you want to have first place in my life above everything else that I love and cherish. Do what you need to do identify the areas of my life that I am hanging on to.
- 2) Let this place be named, "the Lord will provide" because it is here where you met me and called me to obedience. It is here where I have chosen to put you first in my life above everything and everyone else in my life.
- 3) Lord, I get the point, this is not a game. My choices have lasting impact on my life. And I choose you. I choose to trust you and obey you no matter if I ever see resurrection of that other thing that I love. It is far better to choose you.
- 4) I tremble at that thought of the downswing of the knife but am determined to follow through with what you have told me do. And so I put myself in your hands. I give you my real life struggles, suffering, grief and separation as a living sacrifice.
- 5) I offer you my heart and pray for your Spirit. In Jesus name, Amen.

**VIII) Benediction**

- 1) If God has been speaking to you this morning and you need more time to do business with God, you are welcome to stay after the benediction to pray. If you would like someone to pray with you, the Prayer Companions are here to pray with you.
- 2) Receive the benediction,
  - (a) *When the God of life and resurrection calls your name answer him. Trust and obey for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus. Go now, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.*