

Text: Heb. 11:17-19

Title: "By faith Abraham offered Isaac"

Time: 3/27/2016 am; Easter Sunday

Place: NBBC

Intro – It is true that some of the most powerful men in the world today are no longer in the world today. In my life, a pastor's influence is still very powerful, for which I am grateful, although he has gone home to be with the Lord. A radio commentator was trying to make the point this last week that it used to be that George Washington was the most powerful man in American politics, and he went on to lament that he believed that Saul Alinsky, the author of *Rules for Radicals*, now holds that power in that arena.

As we begin these verses regarding Abraham, our author gives us a clue, which is sometimes missed, that he believes that the faith of Abraham, though he is no longer with us, is one of the most powerful influences on us still as believers today. The first occurrence in v. 17 of the verb *offered* is actually in the perfect tense in the original language. We might translate it this way, "By faith, Abraham *has offered* Isaac" [see the *Disciples Literal New Testament* and *Young's Literal Translation*]. Westcott mentions the significance of this: "the . . . verb expresses the permanent result of the offering completed by Abraham" (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 365). The perfect tense speaks of a past act that has a continuing effect or result of some kind. That continuing result still affects us today.

So what shall be the result and effect of Abraham's offering Isaac on us today? What does God intend in this regard? These many years later, we need to be influenced by what Abraham did by faith that day. Understanding how that should be is our goal this morning, and with that goal be-

fore us I want us to notice three things about Abraham's faithful offering of Isaac.

I. By faith, Abraham offered Isaac while being tested (v. 17).

Ill: There are certainly few tests as severe as the loss of a child. I was privileged to meet a man named John last week at our Palm Sunday singspiration in Fitzwilliam, NH, and to hear his testimony about the way the hymn, "It Is Well with My Soul," ministered grace to his heart when he lost his first-born child. That hymn was written by a man who had just lost his children at sea, H. G. Spafford. The music for that hymn was written by P. P. Bliss, the song leader for D. L. Moody, and at the same service Pastor Vincent shared the history with us that Bliss and his wife tragically lost their young lives in a train crash leaving their two young children behind.

God's people throughout their history have been called upon by the Lord to face severe tests by faith. Remember the text of this song:

"When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll,

"Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say, 'It is well; it is well with my soul.'"

"Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come, let this blessed assurance control,

"That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate, and hath shed His own blood for my soul."

Appl: The author of those words understood in the trial of his sorrow that there is comfort for the soul in remembering the suffering of Christ for us. Abraham's test is full of those

reminders of Christ's suffering for us. The text tells us that Abraham's testing was especially severe for two reasons:

1. The offering would sacrifice Abraham's only-begotten son (v. 17b). The term translated *only begotten son* is *monogenes*. It is our author's reflection on the phrase in Genesis 22:1, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest." In God's eyes, Abraham had only one son. Ishmael had been born to Abraham, but in the previous chapter, God had instructed Abraham to obey Sarah's wishes and send Hagar and Ishmael away.

The term *monogenes* is the term for an only child. And it is a term that repeatedly refers to Jesus Christ in our New Testaments: John 3:16, "For God so love the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life"; 1 John 4:9, "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." Just like Abraham was asked to sacrifice his only child, our salvation from sin required the same from God the Father. He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all (Rom. 8:32).

As Spafford wrote, "And when I think, that God His Son not sparing, sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in; that on the cross, my burden gladly bearing, he bled and died to take away my sin." In your trial and testing this morning, can you see that God gave His own Son for you? There is comfort in remembering the sufferings of our Savior.

2. Faithful obedience did not seem to lead to fulfilled promise (v. 17, "he that had received the promises"). The specific promise, of course, is in the next verse, a quotation of Gen.

21:12, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." That promise was difficult to reconcile with the command, "Offer Isaac."

God's promises are often difficult to reconcile with God's commands. We know God wants us to be faithful obeying His will in a certain matter, but it also seems to be true that if we are faithful obeying that command, His promised provision for us will have no chance of fulfillment. For example, Jesus has promised, "I will build My church," and He has commanded, "Preach the Word. Be instant in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." In our world, the more faithful you are doing this command, "Preach the Word," the less success you often seem to have seeing Christ build His church. At times, faithful obedience does not seem to lead to fulfilled promise.

I was encouraged by the commentary of F. F. Bruce on this passage: "How could the promise of God and the command of God be reconciled? . . . the biblical narrative has little to say on this score. Indeed, the impression which we get from the biblical narrative is that Abraham treated it as God's problem; it was for God, and not for Abraham, to reconcile His promise and His command. So, when the command was given, Abraham promptly set about obeying it; his own duty was clear, and God could safely be trusted to discharge *His* responsibility in the matter" [emphasis original; The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 311].

What did Spafford counsel? "Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come, let this blessed assurance control, that Christ hath regarded my helpless estate and hath shed His own blood for my soul." I do not know why Spafford lost his children, or the Bliss children their parents. I cannot tell how the command to endure that testing reconciled with God's promise to care for them in His love. I do

not know why you and I are going through testing, which often seems especially severe because faithful obedience does not seem to lead to fulfilled promise. But I do know a blessed assurance that I must allow to control me under those conditions—Christ hath regarded my helpless estate and hath shed His own blood for my soul."

And this too reminds us of the suffering of Christ for us. He was the promised Messiah who would rule and reign, and yet the command from the Father was to require death on the cross. The command was difficult to reconcile with the promise, and Christ's disciples struggled mightily with it. God understood how to reconcile them, and He does so in the case of our suffering as well.

Transition: By faith, Abraham offered Isaac while being tested. He let the blessed assurance of God's promise control during a difficult time. We need that faith.

II. By faith, Abraham offered Isaac trusting God's Word (vv. 18-19a).

III: If you have any interest in the race for the Republican nomination for president, you find yourself doing some math after every primary – at least I do. I calculate how many delegates are left and what percentage of them my favorite candidate needs to get the required majority. Right now, we are at about 86%, so it is not looking good. There is one candidate still in the race, who if he were willing to do a little math, would see that he has no chance to get the nomination. He could be saved a lot of time and effort if he did a little math.

Appl: Our passage tells us that Abraham did some math in the midst of this test ("Accounting", v. 19). What calculation did he do? Well, he took measurement of what God

had said in His Word and did a calculation based on what he found there.

God's Word said that in Isaac the promise of descendants would be fulfilled; and now God's Word said that Isaac had to be offered. Saying-one plus saying-two equaled saying-three – God was able to raise the dead. Our author knew that Abraham did this math because of what he read in Genesis 22:5, where Abraham tells his servants, "Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you."

How do you and I develop the faith of Abraham? We do the math with what God says. We study His Word; we trust His Word as true; we add up what we find there; and we apply that to our lives. Abraham's faith does not come naturally. It comes only by time spent in God's Word. Rom. 10:17, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Have you found your faith growing strong like Abraham's because you have spent time in God's Word?

### III. By faith, Abraham offered Isaac illustrating the true meaning of Easter (v. 19b).

Appl: We celebrate Easter together this morning because we believe that Christ is risen. Our text tells us that Abraham believed in God's power to raise the dead, and that his faithfulness in offering Isaac has illustrated that true meaning of Easter for many who have followed him ever since. It has done so for us this morning. All that we read about Abraham in Genes 22 is a figure or illustration of both Christ's vicarious atonement for our sins and of the resurrection of Christ from the dead. We see Him taking our place on the cross in the provision of a ram instead of Isaac for the offering. In a very literal sense, the words of Abra-

ham were true: "God shall provide Himself a lamb" (Gen. 22:8). And we see the resurrection illustrated by Abraham's faith in his receiving Isaac back as it were from the dead.

Unlike Abraham, our faithfulness will not be recorded in Scripture to influence generations of believers all over the world. Nevertheless, God has ordained for us to live lives that illustrate the gospel, which includes the true meaning of Easter. He has not asked us to offer our sons, but He has asked us to submit to believers' baptism. That demonstration of our faith is an illustration of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ and our identification with it.

In addition, our lives illustrate the true meaning of Easter when we decide once and for all that we shall no longer serve sin, but rather walk in newness of life. That too is a tremendous illustration of Easter truth. Paul put it this way: "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His suffering, being made conformable unto His death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead" (Phil. 3:10-11).

Conclusion: Do you and I have Abraham's faith? Will we be faithful though our testing is severe? Will we trust God's Word like Abraham did, doing the math in our study of it, and finding that it produces the faith we need in our hearts? Will we submit to baptism and live new changed lives that illustrate the true meaning of Easter – that God is able to raise from the dead. He did so for His Son, and He shall do so for us some day. By faith, Abraham offered Isaac. What shall we do by faith?

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon in to print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

— David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*