

This is a passage about testing. The first sentence of Genesis 22:

Some time later God tested Abraham

We might be troubled by the question of whether God tests us today. We are more troubled by the testing of Abraham in Genesis 22. It really is a passage that unsettles us. And we can only imagine what was going through his mind.

This is an account included in Scripture that if we don't understand its place and purpose it could deeply distort the Christian message.

I am going to begin this message by stating clearly that there is no place for the harm of children in the church.

St James adheres to Safe Ministry practice in accord with our Anglican Denomination's requirements. We are unreservedly committed to the protection and well-being of children and youth in the church. In fact, to everyone's well-being.

The events described in this passage are different from the application of this passage. There is a difference between de-scription and pre-scription.

The bible de-scribes what takes place. It is history. History with promise.

And because it is the living and active Word of God it pre-scribes what we should do in the light of it.

So, how do we rightly understand the events of Genesis 22? Firstly its message. And then its application.

The message of Genesis 22 could be summed up in this sentence:

God achieves his purposes by the sacrificial obedience of his servant.

Sacrifice and obedience are critical to understanding the Christian faith. If that's the message, let's consider its application in three ways:

1. **Sacrificial Obedience in Abraham (vv 1-14).**
2. **Sacrificial Obedience in Christ (vv 15-18).**
3. **Sacrificial Obedience in Us (Rom 12:1)**

Sacrificial Obedience in Abraham (w 1-14)

Firstly, sacrificial obedience in Abraham.

When we read Genesis 22 there are the questions we have of the account. And then there are the answers the author gives. The two are often quite different.

Was Abraham stunned by this command of God? We imagine so. Isaac was his son. His only son. Whom he loved, according to v 2.

Was what he was asked to do a known practice of the time in which he lived? We don't think so, but we don't really know.

We could speculate about what was going in Abraham's mind. Anger? Confusion? Depression? A mixture of these?

The narrator simply does not tell us. Instead we just see Abraham's ready obedience in v 3. With servants, son, and wood for the burnt offering, he sets off to Moriah, the place God had told him about.

God had called Abraham before. Genesis 12. To leave his family and go to the land he would show him. There was blessing and reward with that call.

Here. No reward. Just obedience through sacrifice. Costly obedience.

Abraham's obedience had been a mixed bag up until this point. We'd seen him wander and waver. Doubting the word of God.

Having Sarah be his sister. Agreeing to sleep with Hagar to produce an heir.

Ishmael is no longer in the picture in Genesis 22. Isaac is the one and only son.

But here, in Genesis 22, in the most demanding of God's call, Abraham's obedience is uncompromising. God's word is promptly obeyed.

But if we have unanswered questions the author does reveal what we should see.

Firstly, Abraham's sacrificial obedience is not simply blind faith. It's not religious zealotry. It's not dispassionate loyalty for a cause.

Uncompromised obedience to the Lord requires first understanding and accepting his eternal promises and purposes.

Faith will always be empty and superficial if it is not anchored in a commitment to the Word of God.

Isaac was the heir through whom God would bring about his promises. How would Abraham reconcile God's command?

Twice in the account the author reveals the hope Abraham held onto in the midst of the costly sacrifice.

V 5. He tells the servants he and Isaac will return after they have worshipped. V 8. He tells Isaac, when he enquires where the lamb for the burnt offering is, that the Lord will provide.

These hints of hope are only hints. The author doesn't want to detract from the sincerity of Abraham's obedience.

It's writer to the Hebrews who opens our eyes to Abraham's understanding. Hebrews 11:19:

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, ¹⁸ even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." ¹⁹ Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.

Abraham trusts in the God who can even raise the dead.

Note God's divine activity in Genesis 22. He calls Abraham to costly obedience.

He provides a substitute – the ram in the thicket - to affirm Abraham's righteousness and rescue Isaac. His purposes will be achieved through the line of Abraham.

We discover this is the pattern of the gospel. We respond to God's call through a substitute so that God's purposes to save us will be achieved.

The message of Genesis 22: **God achieves his purposes by the sacrificial obedience of his servant.**

Sacrificial Obedience in Christ (v 15-18)

The sacrificial obedience of Abraham. Secondly, the sacrificial obedience of Christ. For all the perplexities of this chapter, the point of Genesis 22 is to bring you to Christ.

Abraham didn't know that. What he knows is made clear in v 18:

through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.

Offspring is singular. Literally, though your seed.

The sacrificial obedience of Abraham leads us to the sacrificial obedience of Christ. According to Galatians 3:14, Jesus Christ is the seed of Abraham.

Jesus Christ heard God's call to enter our world and become one of us. Take on our humanity. Understand our frailty. Be tempted in every way that we are but without sin.

This time there was no ram in the thicket. Jesus' sacrificial obedience, his perfect life took him all the way to death on the cross.

We responded to God's call and became the substitute for us, dying in our place, so that God's purposes to forgive and restore us would be achieved.

Like Genesis 22, sacrificial obedience leads to lasting blessing. Romans 8:32:

He [God] who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

The substitute removes the separation. Between God and us. And then blesses us with the assurance that there is nothing that will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ our Lord.

The point of Genesis 22 is to bring you to Christ. This is the pattern of the gospel. **God achieves his purposes by the sacrificial obedience of his servant.**

Sacrificial Obedience in Abraham. Sacrificial Obedience in Christ. Sacrificial obedience in Us.

Sacrificial Obedience in Us

I began by saying that the events described in Genesis 22 are different from the application Genesis 22. There is a difference between de-scription and pre-scription.

Here is the first thing to say about the application of Genesis 22. You will never be tested in the exact same way that Abraham was. Anyone who suggests God is seeking such human sacrifice is just wrong. It could not be God speaking.

God has made it clear in his word in a way that was not likely clear in the time of Abraham that he does not want human sacrifice. Deuteronomy 19:10 forbids the killing of the innocent.

The prophets echoed this in their teaching. Jesus said:

Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

I will repeat what I said at the outset. We must not distort the Word of God. We are unreservedly committed to the protection and well-being of children and youth in the church. And to everyone's well-being.

Here is the second thing I want to say about application of Genesis 22. Isaac asks the question we should all be asking:

Where is the lamb for the offering?

We all like sheep have gone astray. It is only the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, who achieves God's eternal and lasting purposes first promised to Abraham.

Jesus' uncompromised sacrificial obedience ensures we will ultimately, at his return, enjoy uncompromised relationship with him and one another in his Kingdom.

The point of Genesis 22 is to bring you to Christ. Is his sacrificial obedience real for you? Here is the third thing to say about the application of Genesis 22. God does allow us to be tested.

The Apostle Peter has some probing words for us, revealing both the reason and the outcome of our testing:

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

We are not into blind obedience. To stand with Christ requires your sacrificial obedience to his Word because you know his ultimate purpose.

Participating in his sufferings has an end point. When you won't have to any more. When Jesus returns and his glory is revealed. It's the final blessing of God's promises of Genesis 22.

Here's the last thing to say about application of Genesis 22.

Testing exposes the quality of your faith. James says the fruit you should look for is endurance. Because the person who endures receives the crown of life God has promised to those who love him.

We're almost over the message of COVID-19 aren't we? If you've got symptoms, get tested.

Authentic obedience to Christ should reveal the symptoms of our faith.

Mercy. Humility. Patience. Endurance. Sacrifice. Self-control. Kindness. Goodness. Love. Joy. Peace. These are the things against which no cure is needed. Against which there is no concern about spread.

If you are looking for the hassle-free, smooth-sailing, no cost, minimal commitment faith then it's probably not following Christ you're following.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 13:5, get tested:

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?

From Abraham to Christ. To you. The pattern of the gospel. **God achieves his purposes by the sacrificial obedience of his servants.**

I leave you with the words of the prophet Micah:

***With what shall I come before the LORD
and bow down before the exalted God?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
⁷ Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
⁸ He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.***