

MATURE FAITH

As we continue on our journey through the Bible we arrive at one of the most pivotal passages in all of Genesis. It is here that we get a clearer glimpse of God's redemptive plan regarding His rescue of mankind from the curse of sin.

Two weeks ago we saw how sin had cursed mankind due to Adam and Eve's lack of faith in the Garden of Eden. Before God even pronounced on them the harsh consequences that would be the result of their sin, He gave them a promise of one who would come from the woman that would ultimately defeat Satan.

Genesis 3:15 (NIV) And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

Last week that picture was made a little more clearer when God identifies for us the chosen nation by which this promised one would come. In Genesis 12 we are introduced to Abram (aka Abraham) the father of the nation of Israel and God gives him a promise that through him God will bless all the families of the earth.

Genesis 12:3 (NIV) I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

So we have a promise of a RESCUER. We have the nation by which this RESCUER is going to come. Now all we are missing is HOW the RESCUER is going to save us from sin's curse. And that is what we are going to see here in Genesis 22. (Btw, **Jesus' name in Hebrew is Yeshua which means "The Lord Rescues."**) **Let me PRAY for us as we prepare to dive in this morning**

Let me set the context for Genesis 22. When we left Abram last week he and his wife were still without a child. And like any promise we have ever been given in life, the longer time passes the more skeptical you and I become regarding the fulfillment of that promise. And as you can imagine, Abram is no different from you and I. It is important to note that as we reach Genesis 17 Abram is 90 years old. His wife is at the ripe old age of 80 and it has been 15 years since God called Abram away from his father and led him to the promised land. Which means that it has been 15 years since God gave him the promise that he was going to be a great nation. To reinforce the promise God is going to change Abram's name to ABRAHAM (a father of many) as a sign of covenant promise. (A little side note here. **You are who God says you are.** You may not feel like it sometimes but when He places a name upon you, that is who you are! When He calls us SONS and DAUGHTERS of the KING, then you are a SON and DAUGHTER of the KING. When He says you are REDEEMED, you are REDEEMED! **Our identity is based on the promises of God not on our current feelings or circumstances.**) Abram didn't feel much like a father. And he certainly didn't feel like he was ever going to have a child much less give

birth to a nation. **But God's promises are not subject to our feelings and they certainly will not be hindered by our circumstances.** God's promises are TRUE and they can be TRUSTED. When we get to Genesis 21, 10 more years have passed and now it has been 25 years since God called Abraham out from his father's house and Sarah, his wife, finally gives birth to the son they were promised and they call his name Isaac. And that brings us to Genesis 22 where Abraham's faith is going to face its toughest test yet and it is through this test that God is going to give us a glimpse of how He plans on defeating sin!

Genesis 22:1-14 (NIV)

1 Some time later God tested Abraham. (based on Jewish tradition it is believed that Abraham is about 125 years old at this point which would make Isaac approx. 25. Whatever the case may be Isaac is not a little child or infant. He is not taking a baby to be sacrificed. He is taking a grown man) He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. **2** Then God said, "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.

Let me ask you a question! If you know it is a WORD from God regarding what He wants you to do, will you do it? Will you do it without hesitation? Will you do it even if it doesn't make sense? Will you do it without complaining? Will you do it without excuses? **Whether or not you will is determined by the maturity of your faith.** How much do you trust GOD? How trustworthy do you believe God to be? Notice, it isn't about the amount of your faith. It's about WHO your faith is in!

God is asking Abraham to go and sacrifice his ONLY son who he has been patiently waiting for all of his life. Btw, this is the son that is central to the promise God has made him! God is asking Abraham to go and sacrifice the son He is going to use to fulfill the promise given in Genesis 3:15 and Genesis 12:3. It makes absolutely no sense from a human perspective. So what is Abraham's response? What would be your response?

As we examine this passage and Abraham's response to this WORD from God I want us to see **FOUR Lessons MATURE FAITH teaches us that we cannot possibly learn except through actions of FAITH.**

Here is Abraham's response

3 Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. Notice, Abraham's obedience was immediate, it was thorough and without complaint! What a different Abraham than the one we first met in Genesis 12 walking with God out of Haran. **4** On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. **5** He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you." Notice that Abraham is confident that

no matter what happens they are both coming back together. Here's what **Hebrews 11:17-19 (NIV)** has to say about Abraham's faith in that moment **17** 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.

There is a confidence in Abraham's response that no matter what his human reasoning might be telling him or what his feelings of fear and anxiety may be trying to whisper to his heart, He is confident that he and his son will be coming back when this is over. And it is here that we see our first lesson:

Lessons #1 - MATURE FAITH is forged through TRIAL and ERROR

Abraham did not establish this kind of mature faith overnight! In fact, Abraham was by no means perfect in his exercise of faith throughout his life. He struggled just like we all do. That is encouraging to me. Oftentimes we allow Satan to discourage us with the mature faith of others but we need to be encouraged because those who have mature faith got there through failures and mistakes, trial and error. Which means there is also hope for you and me if we will learn from our failures!! Each step of faith Abraham did take, allowed his faith to grow stronger and his faith matured over time as he learned of God's faithfulness. Even when he got it wrong, God was faithful. (vs on faithfulness of God)

Brief recap of Abraham's faith journey (over a time of about 20 years, by the way):

- 1) Called out from Haran to follow God to the promised land and he did so experiencing God's faithful provision. (Genesis 12)
- 2) Only to take matters into his own hands when he was afraid of the famine that hit the land while he was there. He turned south toward Egypt where he ended up lying to Pharaoh fearful of what he might do to him if he knew Sarah was his wife. Despite his lack of faith God protected him and blessed him anyway.
- 3) Out of faith he returned back to the promised land and called on the Lord once again, he didn't give up (Genesis 13)
- 4) (Genesis 16) While waiting for the promise, Abraham took Hagar his wife's maidservant instead of trusting God to provide Sarah with a child of her own
- 5) (Genesis 20) Once again Abraham journeys south this time to a place called Gerar on the border of Palestine and Egypt. Abraham lies to the king in that region rather than trust God just like he did with Pharaoh in Genesis 13.
- 6) (Genesis 21) God Gives him a son just as He promised and his heart is full.

And here God gives him a FAITH test once again!! This time God asks him to sacrifice his beloved son whom he had been waiting for all his life. The son of promise given to him by God!

A true test of His heart of love for God and a true test of his faith. Abraham's confidence here is the result of years of faith steps where God has shown himself trustworthy when he walked by faith and when he didn't.

While on the surface this seems insane. **God is always up to something greater than our current situation would seem to suggest.** In fact, God is giving Abraham a glimpse at how He is going to redeem the world from sin. Abraham is getting a front row seat from God the Father's perspective of what it must have been like for Him when He sacrificed His Son on the cross for our sin. 1) Notice for Abraham that it is his only son whom he loved deeply. **John 3:16 (NIV) 16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.** 2) Abraham is being asked to sacrifice his son Isaac as an offering to God just like Jesus was sacrificed as an offering to God for our sin.

This which Abraham is being asked to do is not only a testing of his faith it is a foretelling of what God is going to do with the RESCUER who is to come in order to demonstrate His love for us. The RESCUER (Jesus) will be sacrificed for our sins! Notice the second lesson we learn:

Lesson #2 - MATURE FAITH is achieved when SELF-RELIANCE is purged from our heart

In times past, it is at this point when faced with difficult circumstances that Abraham would begin to lean on his own understanding and stop trusting God by looking for a human solution. Like he did when he encountered famine, Pharaoh, or an unfulfilled promise. But by taking steps of faith with God he has allowed God to purge his heart of self-reliance. This is what taking steps of faith does. **With each step of faith we take, self-reliance is put to death in our heart.** The more we do it, the less influence self-reliance has. And this time, in his toughest faith test yet, he is trusting GOD to be faithful to his promises. The same promises he has had since the beginning. This time he is trusting God's provisions just like he has seen God do before when he has stepped out in faith and even when he failed to. But there is a third lesson we see here:

Lesson #3 - MATURE FAITH inspires others to walk by FAITH!

6 Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, (Just as God the Father placed our sin on Jesus) and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, 7 Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?"

"Yes, my son?" Abraham replied.

"The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" At this point Isaac is beginning to figure out that he is the offering. But notice he is trusting by FAITH as well. A FAITH taught him by his father.

8 Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together.

9 When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. No resistance from Isaac. No push back. Just like Jesus did at His trial and crucifixion Isaac willingly let himself be bound and placed on the altar. This is what Jesus the son did for us. He willingly gave himself to be sacrificed without resistance. **Isaiah 53:7 (NIV)** 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. Where Abraham was getting a picture of what the Father must have experienced putting Jesus on the cross. Isaac was getting a front row seat as to what the Rescuer (Jesus) must have experienced. And that brings us to our last lesson:

Lesson #4 - MATURE FAITH shows us that God will PROVIDE for us when we lean on HIM

10 Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. **11** But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. **12** "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." **13** Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. **14** So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided."

The RESCUER who is to come will be our substitute. We deserve to die because of sin but because God is our provider He is going to provide for us a sacrifice in our place - Jesus the Christ! When we trust in God by faith He will be our substitute and through this our sin will be forgiven. From this point on in the story of the Bible as we go through the next 49 weeks God's people will be looking for a RESCUER who will save them from their sin.

15 The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time **16** and said, "I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, **17** I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, **18** and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

19 Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba. And Abraham stayed in Beersheba.

What is God calling you to lay down before Him but yet you are still withholding because a lack of maturity? **The blessings of God flow out of obedient FAITH that is first tested and tried.** Abraham's obedience is a true picture of mature faith in action! But that FAITH first must be refined through testing by God. What step of faith do you need to take today?

Jesus didn't die for part of your heart, He died for your whole heart. Jesus's death does not grant you partial acceptance into Heaven, but full acceptance! This morning, Jesus wants your obedience even in the trials! Remember, **Partial obedience is still disobedience!** Will you take that step in obedience to follow God in obedience and believe in the promises?

Worship Team Comes Back Up

Invitation:

Jesus didn't die for part of your heart, He died for your whole heart. Jesus's death does not grant you partial acceptance into Heaven, but full acceptance! Have you given Him your heart?

What promises have you given up on?

How many of us have disqualified ourselves when God hasn't?

Is our view of life small time thinking or will we allow God to make it something greater? (Our goals and dreams for our lives as opposed to God's plan for our life)

This Week's Memory Verse: Romans 4:20-22 & Hebrews 11:17-19

This Week's Reading:

Genesis 18-19

Genesis 20-21

Genesis 22

Genesis 24

Genesis 25:19-34, 26