

**MOUNTAINTOP EXPERIENCES**  
**2. The Mountain of the Lord**  
Genesis 22:1-18

With this year's Summer Sermon Series, Mountaintop Experiences, our goal is to recount a number of the events, recorded in the Bible, which took place on or near the tops of mountains. We want to learn how these events changed God's people and the course of their history, and see what these incidents teach us about God and our relationship to him.

This morning we join Abraham and his son Isaac on a mountaintop in the region of Moriah. Their experience teaches us that we, too, can put our faith in the Lord who Provides. And what is it he provides? He provides what you need as you travel through this life and what you need to enter heaven.

On The Mountain of the Lord, the Lord Provides:

1. A Deeper Trust, and
2. A Sinless Substitute

Let us listen again to a portion of the text for today. From Genesis 22, verse 14:

*<sup>14</sup> 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."*

Dear Friends in Christ,

Abraham, the Father of Faith. Abraham, one of the best-known figures in the history of the world. Of the 7 billion people living on the face of the earth today, over 3 billion of us call him "Father Abraham." Talk about descendants "as numerous as the stars and as the sand on the seashore." Four thousand years after Abraham lived and died, he is still one of the most popular figures, one of the best known figures in our world today, and this has been the case in every past generation for 4,000 years.

### 1. A Deeper Trust

Abraham's Mountaintop Experience is our lesson today. The familiar incident of Abraham's test of faith illustrates the truth that tests benefit the ones being tested. When God tested Abraham by commanding him to sacrifice his son Isaac, God did so for Abraham's benefit, not his own. God already knew that Abraham loved him more than anything or anyone else. He didn't need to test Abraham to find this out. Instead he tested Abraham to give him the opportunity to consciously put God first in his life and in so doing learn that blessings follow and that God will provide. When God permits you to be tested in your life, it's also for your benefit. God wants you to find out from experience that those who put him first are truly blessed.

The test that God placed before Abraham was an extremely difficult one. By commanding Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, God was not only asking Abraham to kill the son he had waited 25 years to have, God was in essence telling Abraham to cut himself off from the

hope of a savior. God had very specifically said that through Isaac – not some other son – through Isaac the promised Savior would come. How could this be? Didn't Abraham now stand to lose not only a son, but also his promised salvation?

Although God's command to sacrifice Isaac was in conflict with God's promise that through Isaac's family the savior would come, Abraham knew that resolving this conflict was God's business, not his. His business was to obey. And so early the next morning Abraham prepared the wood, sharpened the knife, saddled the donkey, and set out with his son to make the sacrifice. Abraham did all this without debating God's instructions. Abraham knew that God's commands are to be obeyed, not questioned.

Abraham is called "the father of faith" for good reason. Just think about this test God put him to, a test of his faith in which Abraham was asked to set aside all reason and control all emotion and sacrifice his own child. And that's what Abraham did. He did it in faith, mature faith. He got up early the next morning, there was no hesitation. There was no questioning or talking back or complaining, just obedience. He didn't know why God had asked him to do this. He didn't know how God was going to work all this out without breaking his promises. But Abraham displayed implicit trust in God. It was implicit trust in God's promises that moved Abraham to put one foot in front of another for the fifty mile journey to Mt. Moriah where the sacrifice was to take place. You can be sure that during this three-day journey Satan filled Abraham's mind with countless reasons why it was foolish and stupid and wrong to obey God. Yet Abraham went. How could he proceed with God's command? Hebrews 11:17-19 explains how.

*<sup>17</sup> By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, <sup>18</sup> even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." <sup>19</sup> Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death. (Hebrews 11:17-19 NIV).*

According to these inspired words, Abraham believed that if he should sacrifice Isaac, God would have to raise him from the ashes of the burnt offering he was to become. God would have to do this to keep his promise that the Messiah would be Isaac's descendant. This trust was evidenced in the words that Abraham spoke to his servants once they reached the mountain where the sacrifice was to take place. Abraham said,

*"Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and we will come back to you."* (Genesis 22:5 NIV).

And, most beautiful of all, when Isaac asked a question that must have knifed into his old father's heart, *"Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"* the father of faith replied in a way that showed both his love for his son and his trust in God: *"God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son."*

Abraham's faith certainly puts my puny faith to shame, maybe yours too. I hear the words of Jesus, *"Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me;"*

*anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me . . .*" (Matthew 10:37 NIV) and I cringe. In our society we're so trained to put our children first. We are expected to do as much as possible for our kids. We provide food, clothing and shelter for them. We direct and guide their development. We help them get educated. And isn't that what parents are supposed to do?

Abraham's test tests us too. We have all said on occasion, "God is important to me." But here we are confronted with the truth that God doesn't want to just be "important." God wants to be most important, more important than job, more important than school, more important than boyfriend or girlfriend, more important than spouse, more important than even the little bundles of joy we bring home from the hospital. If you are honest with yourself, you will see that you and I and all the rest fall far short of obeying the First Commandment. There are other things (mainly money) and there are other people (sometimes spouse or child) that take first place in our hearts.

How could Abraham do it? Where did he get this Deep Trust in God? How could Abraham keep God #1 in his life? Only in one way, by listening carefully to the Lord and his Word, and clinging in faith to his promises. But in the end there was no need to kill Isaac. In God's eyes the sacrifice had already been made. Verse 12, *" . . . Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."* As dear as Isaac was, in Abraham's heart the LORD was number one.

God may well, in his infinite wisdom, allow tests and trials and tribulations to come to you. In fact, some of you are undergoing tests of faith even as we speak. Will you stand up under pressure? Will you walk with a humble yet strong faith in your God as Abraham did? Or will you toss in the towel, angry at God and complaining, "This is too hard!" It may not be pleasant when God tests you. But when he does, remember his purpose. His purpose is to give you the opportunity to consciously put him first in your life, and in so doing, learn firsthand how he is the Lord who provides. He provided for Abraham and Isaac on Mt. Moriah and he will provide for you.

Use Father Abraham as a guide. Follow in his steps. Know your God, and get to know him better and better through his Word. Jesus doesn't call us to merely have an intellectual relationship with him, but a heartfelt knowledge of his saving work. Walk with God closely, daily, not occasionally. Come to his Holy Mountain, that is, come to his Church to be strengthened by the Word and Sacrament. And as you do, It Will Be Provided – A Deeper Trust that can stand when the day of testing comes.

## 2. A Sinless Substitute

Let me discuss one additional point. God doesn't just invite us to the Mountain of the Lord only to give us a deeper, stronger faith. He also provides us with someone in whom to put our faith. It is what you put your faith in that matters. And God calls us up the Mountain of the Lord to show us in whom we are to put our faith, the Sinless Substitute that God has provided.

Abraham's trust in the Lord was not misplaced. When he and Isaac reached the top of Mt. Moriah, he bound his son and laid him on top of the altar. Then he grabbed the knife ready to plunge it into his son. Not only did the Angel of the Lord stop Abraham from killing his son, he also provided a substitute. When Abraham looked up he saw a ram caught in a thicket. He killed and sacrificed that animal in place of Isaac. Can you imagine the flood of relief that washed over Isaac as he watched the ram's throat being slit and the fire eat away at the ram's flesh? That knife and that fire had been meant for him!

That's also the relief we should feel whenever we think of Jesus' death on the cross, a death which took place 2,000 years later but less than half a mile from where Abraham and Isaac stood on Mt. Moriah. There God did what he would not let Abraham do, sacrifice his Son. God did so as a substitute for all sinners. As the ram took Isaac's place on the altar of Moriah, Jesus took our place on the cross of Calvary and suffered the piercing blow of God's wrath for our sins, even our sins against the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment.

What does Jesus' death mean to you? Well what did the ram's death mean to Isaac? The ram's death meant life for Isaac. Let us never forget that the wrath of God, which Jesus endured on the cross, had been meant for us. What a sense of relief. The death of the Lamb of God means life for us. What joy to know that those who put their faith in the Lord can do so with the absolute assurance of God's mercy and forgiveness.

Abraham was spared the trauma of slaying his own son. But God wasn't. Nor did he wish to be. He chose to offer up his one and only Son as a sin-offering, a Son he loves perfectly, so much more than we are able to love our children. He did that so that we would not die, as our sins deserve, but live, live forever in sinless glory. We can understand Father Abraham's love for Isaac, a parent's love for a child. But we can never comprehend the depth of our heavenly Father's love, who offered his Son as our Sinless Substitute. But God doesn't ask us to understand it. He asks us to believe it. And he promises that those who do believe it have the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Abraham's Mountaintop Experience was quite intense. But his experience teaches us that we, too, can put our faith in the Lord who Provides what we need as we travel through this life and what we need to enter heaven, A Deeper Trust, and A Sinless Substitute. Amen.