

SERMON

Journeying On (Genesis 22:1-19)

Oh for a quiet life! There are those who look forward to that, some don't. I wonder about Abraham. There he is.

- The family moved from their home
- Father died and is buried - but then moved on
- Promised that he would be the father of a great nation blessing all people
- He visits Egypt and is in danger of being killed
- His nephew Lot decides to go his own way
- Promised that he would be the father of a great nation blessing all people
- He has to rescue his nephew Lot
- Met the great king and priest Melchizedek after winning a battle
- Promised that he would be the father of a great nation blessing all people
- Has a son, Ishmael via Sarah's, his wife's maid called Hagar.
- Promised that he would be the father of a great nation blessing all people
- Undergoes circumcision as an adult as a covenant sign between God and him
- Promised that he would be the father of a great nation blessing all people
- He has to rescue his nephew Lot from being destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah
- Son, Isaac, is born to Abraham and Sarah, his wife.
- Hagar and Ishmael have to be sent away
- Abraham, Sarah and Isaac settle down

With all this, with Abraham having proved his faith time and time again, you would have thought that he was deserving of a rest, of a quiet time. He deserved it. Last weekend was the dedication of our grandson, Noah and a happy occasion it was for all. Noah was happy all the way through the service and we saw family and some old friends and some new ones that Beth and Ray have made in Leicester, in their church.

So now as grandparents we deserve a rest, we deserve to lie back and pamper ourselves a bit. Now Abraham was not a grandparent, but the promise that he had been given on more than one occasion about being the father of a great nation and all nations being blessed because of him was beginning to come true, albeit in a slow way, only one child, one male heir to carry on the name.

Isaac and I have in common that we are both the only child of our parents. But this is not the real way to start a nation. For us the Owen name dies out in my branch as Sue and I only had two daughters. You get more chance of a great nation with your name if you are like my uncle Bob and have seven children, five boys, a girl, then a finally boy.

But God does not always work the same way we do. He just gave Abraham and Sarah one son, Isaac and then God says in verse 2 of Genesis 22, the passage we read earlier on page 22

“...”Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.” (Genesis 22:2 NIV)

What! Another test of faith when he, and the family had been through so much already! Why was God doing this to Abraham? Was it that he was being too complacent? He had it all:

The Wife

The Son

The Goods i.e. cows, sheep, goats, etc

The Servants

He ruled a mini empire. We read early in Genesis that when Lot was captured he

“...called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit...”
(Genesis 14:14 NIV)

He had at least three hundred and twenty men with their wives and family. This was a community of over a thousand people, all looking to Abraham for their livelihood. Abraham was a wealthy, contented man, and maybe that was the problem – he was too contented, too complacent, so God asks him for another test of faith.

This time he is to sacrifice his son, this son through whom the great nation is to be born and through whom all nations would be blessed. He is to sacrifice his son on Mount Moriah. Moriah only occurs here and in 2 Chronicles 3:1 where we read

“Then Solomon began to build the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the LORD had appeared to his father David. It was on the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite, the place provided by David.”
(2 Chronicles 3:1 NIV)

So Moriah became the site of the Temple in Jerusalem. For Muslims it is the site of the Dome of the Rock which is why they do not want to give up the Mosque that is in the centre of Jerusalem, on the Temple site. However the Samaritans equated Moriah with Mount Gerizim – their sacred place of worship.

So Abraham is told to take his son to Moriah, and sacrifice him. There is no argument from Abraham, just obedience. Verse 3

“Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled 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.” (Genesis 22:3 NIV)

Maybe Abraham knew that arguing was not an option. Earlier in his life, when Lot was in serious trouble because he had gone into the notorious town of Sodom and Gomorrah and settled there, God told Abraham that he was going to destroy the towns. And we read that Abraham said

...“Are you serious? Are you planning on getting rid of the good people right along with the bad? What if there are fifty decent people left in the city; will you lump the good with the bad and get rid of the lot? Wouldn't you spare the city for the sake of those fifty innocents? I can't believe you'd do that, kill off the good and the bad alike as if there were no difference between them. Doesn't the Judge of all the Earth judge with justice?”

GOD said, "If I find fifty decent people in the city of Sodom, I'll spare the place just for them."

Abraham came back, "Do I, a mere mortal made from a handful of dirt, dare open my mouth again to my Master? What if the fifty fall short by five--would you destroy the city because of those missing five?"

He said, "I won't destroy it if there are forty-five."

Abraham spoke up again, "What if you only find forty?"

"Neither will I destroy it if for forty."

He said, "Master, don't be irritated with me, but what if only thirty are found?"

"No, I won't do it if I find thirty."

He pushed on, "I know I'm trying your patience, Master, but how about for twenty?"

"I won't destroy it for twenty."

He wouldn't quit, "Don't get angry, Master--this is the last time. What if you only come up with ten?"

"For the sake of only ten, I won't destroy the city."

When GOD finished talking with Abraham, he left. And Abraham went home.
(Genesis 18:23-33 MSG)

So now that God say go and sacrifice your son, he goes, no arguing. The story unfolds as most of us know with Isaac being bound and put on the unlit sacrificial pyre and then an angel calling out,

"..."Abraham! Abraham!..." (Genesis 22:11 NIV)

Stopping Abraham as he is poised with the knife to kill his son. We now seem to accept the story too easily now, but there are verses which speak against child sacrifice. Just to take one which God gave about the people they were to remove from the Promised Land, he said

"You must not worship the LORD your God in their way, because in worshipping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the LORD hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods."
(Deuteronomy 12:31 NIV)

But God tells Abraham to sacrifice his son! But this is before the law is laid down, but surely God would not change his mind that much! There are times when we have to accept that God may tell us to do things which are odd and even dodgy and maybe even non-Christian.

In her book 'The Hiding Place' Corrie Ten Boom, the author tells of the times when they told he authorities, the soldiers who were visiting their house that there were no Jews in the house, when there were, in the Hiding Place. The house also had a radio in it which was forbidden by the Nazis authorities.

Some who took Bibles across the Iron Curtain until the Berlin Wall came down prayed that eyes would be blind when the boots of their cars were opened to reveal Bibles within, whilst others took to plain old smuggling. Which is right, which is wrong? Was Abraham right to offer his son for sacrifice? God told him to, and that is enough, but today we would argue strongly against it because it is again the Bible and therefore should not be done and God would not go against his word.

However we must always remember that it is his word and not ours and so beware – God does not always work inside our box, our interpretation of a passage, our interpretation of a doctrine might be wrong, might be incorrect.

However this does not mean that we can throw the baby out with the bathwater and ignore all the interpretations or passages and doctrines that have gone before!

So Abraham had his faith tested. We are told this in Hebrews

“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, even though God had said to him, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.” (Hebrews 11:17-19 NIV)

Abraham was expecting resurrection, but God used another way. He supplied the lamb instead.

I know that in this passage there are a lot of illusions to Jesus:

- They travelled for three days – Jesus died for three days.
- A male sheep was sacrificed – Jesus is the lamb of God, a male lamb
- The male sheep was a substitute for Isaac so they still had something to sacrifice to God – Jesus is substituted for us.
- The ram was provided by God – Jesus is God, the Son, the only one who could go to the cross for the sins of the world

And on the third day Jesus rose from the dead – there was actual resurrection.

However it was not this that struck me so forcefully as I read this passage about Abraham. Even though it seemed as if Abraham could have sat back and rested, he was still being tested by God. Why? Because God wanted Abraham to grow spiritual. If we are not being tested, then we stop growing, stop progressing. I know that in this country some say that we have gone test mad, what with SATS, GCSEs, AS levels, then A levels and all such things, but God wants us to grow, so he will keep on testing us, strengthening our faith.

Maybe you are going through a tough time at the moment. Maybe God is strengthening your faith. It is never an easy time. I’m sure that Abraham was getting more and more nervous as the time drew nearer and nearer for the sacrifice. In a way Abraham was on his own, but we can

- pray with others – something Abraham could not really do
- hold on to the promises that God has given us – just as Abraham must have been doing
- talk to others. We are here to carry one’s another’s burdens, but we need to know what those burdens are.

But then there was another thing that struck me about this passage. It was the last few verses, from verse 20 onward

“Some time later Abraham was told, "Milcah is also a mother; she has borne sons to your brother Nahor: Uz the firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel (the father of Aram), Kesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph and Bethuel." Bethuel became the father of Rebekah. Milcah bore these eight sons to Abraham's brother Nahor. His concubine, whose name was Reumah, also had sons: Tebah, Gaham, Tahash and Maacah.” (Genesis 22:20-24 NIV)

What is this doing here? We have all just been on the ride of faith with Abraham and then we get a genealogy – so what. Let us look a little closer at the genealogy.

To go back one generation we have Terah who had 3 sons, Abraham, Nahor and Haran. Haran had children including Lot and a daughter names Milcah. Milcah married her uncle Nahor and she had 8 sons, one of who is Bethuel, Bethuel goes on to have a daughter called Rebekah and a son called Laban. Abraham married his half sister, Sarah and they have Isaac. Isaac is then married to Rebekah, the granddaughter of his cousin and then Isaac's son, Jacob marries 2 daughters of Laban, who are nieces on his mother's side and great grand daughters of his father's cousin.