

Greatest Questions



Ever Asked

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Where is the Lamb?

We're going to travel to one of the most remarkable and emotional scenes in all of human history. God gives Abraham an incredibly bizarre command. "Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, 'Abraham!' 'Here I am,' he replied. Then God said, '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 22:1-2)

Now, folks, that seems bizarre to us, but there is no way that we can begin to adequately appreciate how it impacted Abraham. We're going to study more about this in a moment, but remember Abraham and Sarah had been childless. He waited more than a quarter of a century for this child. It was a promised child. Another thing you may not appreciate is that when God called Abraham to go into this land of Canaan, all of the Canaanite people were child-sacrificing people. I have stood at Megiddo and saw the round altar where the Canaanites who lived at Megiddo sacrificed their little children. There's another altar outside the gates of Jericho, the same thing. Jehovah God was the only God of antiquity who said, "No! Human life is precious to me. Don't you dare shed man's blood." Now, God wants the wonder boy sacrificed!

But despite a lack of understanding, Abraham responded with obedient faith. Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He gathered the servants, took Isaac, and left. When they came to the foot of Mount Moriah, Abraham told the servants to stay while he and Isaac ascended the mountain to worship. The question that we're going to consider came as the two of them started up that mountainside.

"Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, 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?' (Genesis 22:6-7)

Can you imagine? If ever a question cut into a man's heart, this was it. That boy who had worshipped so many times with his father automatically knew what was missing. The boy who so loved and so trusted his dad that the last possibility to cross his mind was that his would be the throat that would be slit and his would be the blood to flow over the woods. That boy with innocent eyes looked into his father's and said, "Where is the lamb?" Obviously, Isaac was asking more than he knew. God was calling his father, Abraham, to sacrifice more than he ever had before.

I think Genesis 22:1 is one of the great understatements in the Bible. Do you see how it began? Sometime later God tested Abraham. Test? Test? This is a final exam. This is the sounding out of the depths of a man's soul. Isaac was the most precious thing in Abraham's life. I've already told you that Abraham and Sarah had been childless through all their marriage and when God called him to make a covenant with him, Abraham was 75 years old and Sarah was 65. God says, "Don't worry, I'm going to make your descendants more numerous than the stars in the sky." The problem was, they didn't even have a child. So, what does God do? I'm sure Sarah, had they been available, would be taking a home pregnancy test every morning. God made them wait 25 more years! When they were old enough to be great, great, great grandparents, Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90, God fulfilled the promise and Isaac was born. The boy grew, his mother doted over him, and his father cherished every movement he made. They loved that promised child more than they loved life itself. Then out of the clear blue comes that vassalling, unbelievable, unthinkable command, to slay the wonder boy. Why? Why did God do that?

Most of us have never really come to grips with the bewilderment and the atrocity of this incomprehensible situation. Surely, God was asking too much of this man, Abraham. This is the key to unlocking the meaning of Genesis 22. It is the key to answering the question, "Where is the lamb?" It is the key to the question being put

to you, where is your lamb? And here's that key: *Before God will use any one of us for a great purpose, he and we must be sure that we love him more than anything else.*

That's the lesson. *Before God will use any one of us for a great purpose, he and we must be sure that we love him more than we love anything else.* See, it wasn't for God's vanity that he put Abraham to the test. It was so Abraham, himself, could know that nothing, nothing was more important to him than Jehovah God. People, while Abraham and Isaac's story is unique in all history, the principle isn't. God still asks for lambs. He asks for our lambs, things precious to us and things that we love dearly, to be put on the altar of sacrifice so that He might do something great through our lives. He might ask you for your lamb to be your home and your immediate family, father and mother, brothers and sisters, as you feel a burning in your heart to be a missionary on a foreign soil.

Your lamb might be your money if God has blessed you with a great deal of affluence. Your calling to put that lamb on the altar might be a major gift to fund some great ministry or some great project for the Lord's work. Your lamb might be your time if you sense God calling you to a ministry that you used to occupy with a hobby.

Where is the lamb? I believe with all my heart God wants to do something great through every one of us, but only if we're willing to put our lamb on the altar. I want to share with you then seven quick principles of sacrifice. Obviously, we're going to cover these briefly.

Principles of Sacrifice

1. He prepares us for times of sacrifice.

It's obvious to me that God was preparing Abraham for this test. Look at verse 1 again, it begins this way, "Sometime later God tested Abraham;" some time later than what? The answer to that is some time later than the experiences that Abraham had experienced. Up to this point, God was preparing Abraham. He had told him to move out of his homeland to Ur. He made him wait 25 years for a son. On the other hand, God had been giving him some blessings. Abraham had become prosperous financially; he was wealthy. When Isaac was finally born, the boy grew up healthy and strong. Abraham even signed a peace treaty with Abimelech. (Genesis 21)

So my point is God had been giving Abraham the right combination of challenges and blessings preparing him for the moment of sacrifice. He does the same thing for us. Look over your life; you know it's true. He fills our lives with challenges and blessings in just the right combination. As he does, he prepares us for those great moments when our faith will be put on the line.

Here's a great axiom worth writing down, it's worth remembering. I've seen it true in Scripture, I've seen it true in my life and you know it's true: "After the blessing comes the testing." Here in the story of Abraham, after the most peaceful moment of his life and after he made peace with Abimelech, God comes to him and calls him for a sacrifice.

I think about how after Moses led the children of Israel through the parted Red Sea. After they are safe on the other side, God let them go without water for three days. He's testing them. When Jesus was baptized God said, "This is my Son in whom I'm well pleased," and the Spirit descended as a dove, he goes to the wilderness to be tested by Satan. After the blessing comes the testing. People, we will only bask in blessing so long until we're tested. That's true of the congregation and it's also true in our individual lives.

2. Our love for God needs to be proven.

We may not like that, but it's true. Our love for God needs to be proven. When the tests come, God is asking, "Where is your lamb?" He expects more than words. We sing a song frequently, "Take my life and let it be, consecrated Lord to thee." Aren't those good words? Heavy words, full of sacrifice, consecration, and commitment, but do you know what God says about those words? He said, "I don't want you to just be

hearers of the word, I want you to be speakers of the word. I want you to be doers of the word." The reason he said that is because God knows words are cheap. You can say a lot through words, but God says back it up with action, quit telling me how much you love me, show me your love, and prove it.

God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love." (vs. 2) "Whoa, Whoa! There's an error in the Bible, there's a contradiction. Abraham had more than one son. We know he had another son by Hagar the handmaiden. That boy's name was Ishmael and Ishmael became the father of all the Arab nations. So, Isaac wasn't his only son. The Greek word "*monogeneé*" translated "only" came to us through the Septuagint. It's really hard to translate into English, it means, "most prized and cherished and wonderful possession." Let me give you another instance of its use. In the King James Version, John 3:16 states "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." The New International Version says, "God so loved the world he gave his one and only Son." The Revised Standard Version states "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son." The same word is in 1 John 4:9, "God sent His only, (*monogeneses*), Son into the world. What's being said here is that God was asking Abraham for the one that really was his one and only, the most prized possession in all his life. In other words, God says, "Abraham, don't tell me you love me. I'm going to really let you show me."

The same principle we see in John 21 when Jesus came to Peter, after the Resurrection, after Peter's denial. Jesus asked "Peter, do you love me?" Peter humbly said, "Lord, you know I love you." Jesus said, "Then feed my sheep. Show me." It's interesting to me that the book of Acts is not called the "words" of the apostles. It's called the "acts" of the apostles. That's what God wants from you and from me. God says, "I have blessed you, I love you, I appreciate your attendance, I appreciate your praise and your songs, but put your sacrifice where your mouth is." Our Lord wants us to prove our love to him.

3. Sacrifice is giving up something precious in order to give to something that is more precious.

That's exactly what it is. Back to our story, how precious do you suppose Isaac was to Abraham? You know, don't you? But how much more precious and protected would your son be, fathers, if you waited and prayed for him every day for 25 years. Tell me, how precious would he be to you?

"Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey." (vs. 3) I think there's more said there than just that Abraham is an early riser. We're not told, but here's my supposition; I believe Abraham got up early the next morning because he didn't sleep a wink the whole night. I think he laid flat on his back gazing into the stars, thinking and praying, thinking and praying.

They get to the foot of Mount Moriah. How would you feel stacking wood on the shoulders of that unsuspecting boy, knowing that in a little while it would be the fuel for the blaze that would engulf his body? Then that question, "Father, where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" (vs. 6)

"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. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son." (Vs. 9-10) What on earth could make a man do such a thing? What on earth? The answer is only something or someone even more precious than that boy. God Almighty.

Do you love God that much? Huh? I'll be honest, I don't know either, because I've never been called to sacrifice that much. But what have you been called to sacrifice? Will you, have you given up something precious to you for something, someone, even more precious? Some of you are doing it for a ministry that's found your passion; you've helped not just one person, but person after person. But sacrifice is giving up something precious to you to give to something that's even more precious.

4. The sacrifice isn't always understood.

There are times when you walk with God and you have questions instead of answers and God just says to you, "It's all right. You don't understand, but hold my hand and obey me." That's what God was saying to Abraham.

There's no way Abraham understood this request. The promise had come to him earlier that it would be through Isaac that his offspring would be blessed. Now God says, "Go kill Isaac." That doesn't make any sense. But sacrifice doesn't always make sense and that's where faith is magnified. Faith is being sure of what you hope for and certain of what you cannot see. It takes faith to make any sacrifice. Anytime you give up something precious to you to give to something more precious takes faith. But it takes greater faith when you can't understand it.

"He said to his servants when they got to the foot of Mount Moriah, 'Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there.'" (v. 5) Do you know why I'm convinced that he made the servants stay? I'm convinced it's because he knows that when he took up that knife and started to kill his son, the servants would have tried to stop him. Abraham by faith was not going to let anything interfere with God's command.

But then he told those servants, "'We will worship and then we will come back to you.'" (v. 5) What? "'We will worship and then WE will come back to you.'" People, that's not an accident, it's not a slip of the tongue. It's not a misprint in your Bible. I think I know what Abraham was thinking about all the night before, before they left that morning. Hebrews 11:19 gives us a little insight. He said as he was thinking about what would happen to Isaac, he reckoned that God would raise him from the dead. Then the Hebrew writer said, figuratively speaking, that's exactly what happened, he got him back from the dead.

I want to tell you about faith and not understanding. We have read so many stories in the Bible about men and women being raised from the dead by prophets, by Jesus or by apostles. We just think it's no big deal. Let me tell you something, Abraham believed that God would raise Isaac back from the dead before God raised anybody up from the dead. Sacrifice is not always understood.

5. Sacrifice must be voluntary.

God told Abraham to make the sacrifice, but he didn't force him to do it. This is a major misunderstanding even among good religious folks. There's no such thing as an involuntary sacrifice. We sometimes mistakenly refer to a loss as a sacrifice. To lose a job, an investment, your health, a mate or a child, is not a sacrifice. Now it may be painful, horrible, tragic or the most awful thing you've ever gone through, but biblically it's not a sacrifice. The reason is: a sacrifice must be given, it's by choice, it is not just something that happens. Jesus' cross was a sacrifice. Why? Because, he chose it. It didn't have to happen. When he calls you to take up the cross, he's calling you to choose the sacrifice.

6. The greater the sacrifice, the greater the sweetness and the greater the blessing.

I love this point. Let's talk about the sweetness, first. God stopped Abraham from the sacrifice; he provided a ram in the thicket. (v. 13) "The Angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, 'I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, 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, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.'" (Genesis 22:15-18)

"Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba." (v. 19) Have you ever thought about how Abraham felt coming down that mountain? How do you think he felt all the way to Beersheba? Have you ever felt so good about something you did, something you said, something that was right that when you were walking along you just couldn't keep the smile off your face. Sometimes you just walked on and said, "Yes!" I can see Abraham doing that and smiling as he recalled the speech from the Angel of the Lord. Now I know how much you fear me. Do you know what he was experiencing? He was experiencing the sweetness of the sacrifice.

Most of us have been so thrilled when we came out of the waters of baptism which may be the sweetest moment in all your memory. Do you know why? Because at that moment you were saying, "God, I sacrifice my life to you. I buried my old sinful self and I turned my new self over to you."

- a. The greater the sacrifice the greater the blessing. Abraham received the blessing of God's timing. Just as the hand is raised, just as the knife is about to come down, "Then God stopped him as the angel of the Lord called out and said, 'Do not lay a hand on the boy, do not do anything to him.'" (v. 10-11) Then he received the blessing of God's approval that we read about in verse 12.
- b. He received the blessing of God's provision. "Abraham looked up and there in the 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." (v. 13) Did the ram just happen to get its horns caught? Or did God provide it?

7. God is the real provider of the lamb.

"So, Abraham called that place *The Lord Will Provide (Jehovah-Jireh)*. And to this day it is said, 'On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.'" (v. 14) When Abraham finished he didn't call the mountain, "The Agony of the Lord," "The Near Miss," or "The Almost Catastrophe." He called it, *Jehovah-Jireh. The Lord Will Provide.*

Any sacrifice God asks us to make, anything in your life, he provides the lamb. He was the one who had given Abraham all his lambs. He was the one who had given Isaac to Abraham. He was the one who initiated and empowered the covenant, not Abraham. Whatever sacrifice God may request of you, remember He has provided the lamb in your life. Whether it's your time, money, heart, home or a relationship, God gives you that lamb. When you're willing to offer it on the altar, he will make provisions for you a hundred times over.

I want to close with one little point here that's really an extension of principle number seven; God has of course provided the ultimate lamb, the Lamb of God. Here is a beautiful illustration of a type of foreshadowing in the Old Testament of the Christ. We've already looked at a couple of them. For example, Isaac was called the "monogeneses," the one and only, the best-loved Son. Jesus, John 3:16. He was the monogeneses of the Father. They waited for years for Isaac to get there, the prophets waited for years and centuries for Jesus to come. Isaac was called upon to be the sacrifice. How about Jesus? When John the Baptizer first saw him in John 1:29, he looked at him and said, "Behold the Lamb."

Even the place, Mount Moriah, where Isaac was taken to be sacrificed, is right in the heart of the city of Jerusalem. It is just a stones-throw away from the place of the skull, where the Lamb of God hung on the cross so that you and I could be freed from our sins.

Peter says, "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a Lamb without blemish and without spot." There are all kinds of parallels, but one big difference. God didn't make Abraham sacrifice his Son Isaac, and God wouldn't halt the sacrifice of his Son Jesus.

If you have not accepted the sacrifice, the Lamb of God, by obeying the gospel, by confessing the name of Jesus, by turning from sins, and laying your life upon the altar by dying to sin and being buried with Christ, NOW is the time. Amazing Grace # 1276, Steve Flatt, August 18, 1996