

When Something is Drastically Wrong, God Provides

1st Sun. in Lent – 2/21/21 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Genesis 22:1-18 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 8, “**Abraham said, ‘God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son’.**”

I. Trouble in the Text

✘ How can any of us, whether we are parents or children here today, ever imagine how horrendous God’s command to Abraham in our text today must have seemed?

→ During those three gut-wrenching days from the time God said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love...and offer him there as a burnt offering...” (v. 2), to the time that he tied his son on top of the altar and raised the knife, I have to believe that Abraham thought to himself, “Something is terribly wrong here”.

→ Even though you and I know the end of the story, you still can’t help but read this story and say, “Something is drastically wrong for God to command a father to slaughter his beloved son.”

✘ There are many people, in fact, who refer to this particular passage and conclude, “I cannot believe in a god that would tell a dad to kill his own son. I don’t care how this ends up, they say. “I cannot in good conscience worship any god that would ask that.”

→ So let’s take an honest look, just at the surface of the story to begin with. I think we all have to agree, something is drastically wrong, just based upon the stated love we see here in this father-son relationship. God says, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love” (v 2).

→ Yes, Abraham loves Isaac, born to him in his old age. It makes sense that Isaac, as he grew, would be the apple of his father’s eye, the light of his life. You can hear the love in their conversation as they approach the mountain. “My father,” Isaac asks, “here’s the wood and the fire, but where’s the lamb for the sacrifice?” “My son, God will provide” (vv. 7-8). “My father”; “My son”; those are terms of love and affection for each other.

✘ Then to hear God say, “Go sacrifice him”. That had to hit Abraham’s heart hard. “It’s just not right, God,” we instinctively want to say. “Fathers are not supposed to be told to sacrifice their sons.”

→ Not only on a human level does this hit us as wrong, but also on a Scriptural level. I mean God had already promised that Abraham will be the father of many nations; that his offspring will be as numerous as the stars in the sky or the sand on the beach. God told him that out of his own line One will be born who will be a blessing to all nations. So, to kill Isaac is to break that promise to Abraham. Something is drastically wrong.

II. Trouble in Our Lives.

✘ And yet this is true not only in Abraham’s time. Today we see so many things that are so wrong, including those shooters intentionally murdering children inside their schools, parents physically abusing their children out of anger, and a government – our own U.S. government since 1973 – legally allowing the intentional slaughter of helpless unborn infants in abortion. In 2017, 862,320 children were legally “sacrificed” on the various altars of “personal convenience”, “fear”, “women’s rights”, “health care” and other deceptive lies connected to the horrendous act of abortion.

→ Children die needlessly – “something is drastically wrong”.

⊗ And there are other blatant problems before us, aren't there? Cancer indiscriminately attacks and kills children and adults of all ages, mental health issues are rising through the roof, especially now during the pandemic – anxiety and depression; teenage suicide, unemployment, family businesses having to close, the isolation of our elderly in care facilities and at home – hey, even the fact that we are limited by a worldwide virus to the number of people that we can gather for worship right now so that we have to make reservations for a pew, and the finger pointing and casting blame game in government and all of society right now is so intense and toxic, it should be obvious to us all – “something is drastically wrong”.

→ And beyond that human level, God's promises are involved here today as well. I know of a family whose home has a wall with dozens of different crosses. And around those crosses are written a number of promises like, “God is always by your side. You are never alone. God hears our prayers. God surrounds us by His grace. The Lord is good; His love endures forever. God is never more than a prayer away. He restores my soul”. These are wonderful, incredible promises. But when you see what happens to children; to your own loved ones; to those around the world it can make a person begin to wonder about God's promises.

→ Something is drastically wrong here.

III. Grace in the Text.

⊗ And yet, even after he received what appeared to be a very wrong command, Abraham journeyed three days to the mountain. Throughout those three horrendous days Abraham knew what he was going to do at the end.

→ There are a couple of sentences that indicate Abraham had hope. He believed deeply that somehow God would provide. First, he says to the two servants in verse five, “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you”. You see, he doesn't say, “I will come back to you,” but, “I and the boy...will...come again to you”.

→ And then after Isaac's question, “where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”, Abraham replies, “The LORD will provide” (vv. 7, 8). Oh, what a privilege God gives us in His Word, to listen in on this deeply intimate interaction between father and son, where Abraham – even in certain distress and questioning - holds on to God's promises and shares them with his beloved son in hope.

→ Even when things seem so drastically wrong, he still trusts that God will work out the details. This hope and belief takes him all the way to the moment when he has the knife in his hand at Isaac's throat.

⊗ Now, I know some people say that Abraham was just telling the servants and Isaac a little lie so that they would not know what was going to happen. Others say that God secretly gave him a clue and that here he was merely proclaiming a prophetic word.

→ But in the Book of Hebrews, 11:17–19, we have a better answer from Scripture itself. “By faith”, it says, “Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.”

→ Did you hear how that description of Abraham started? “By faith.” By faith, Abraham took Isaac up that mountain. At that moment, Abraham's faith held on to the promise that God would provide. In this case, God did provide by sparing Isaac's life.

→ But the text gives us a glimpse of a much broader and deeper level of God's provision when it says in verse six that the wood for the sacrifice was laid upon Isaac, the son. Remember,

Jesus carries the cross for His sacrifice. Isaac is the son, the only son, whom Abraham loved. Jesus is the Son, the only Son, whom the Father loves. A ram is in a thicket to be sacrificed in the place of Isaac. Jesus, on the cross, takes your place and mine, and is sacrificed for us all. God's promises all come true as, through Isaac, Abraham's descendants are numerous. From Abraham's offspring comes Jesus, through whom God provides forgiveness, life, salvation for all mankind.

IV. Grace in Our Lives.

- ⌘ And so, as you and I know by faith, God provides and keeps His promises for us as well today.
 - ➔ St. Paul offers you and me a special word of hope and comfort, even when things seem to be drastically wrong in our lives today. He says in Romans 8:38-39, "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."
 - ➔ Before that text, in Romans 8:31-32, Paul wrote, "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?"
 - ➔ Even when things were so wrong in this world that the very Son of God had to be sacrificed by His Father to address and deal with that wrong; with sin head on in the torture and death by crucifixion, God never stopped providing for you and me, friends. He paid for the guilt of all sin. He conquered death when He raised Jesus from the tomb so that He can be with us today and forever!
- ⌘ Yes, when everything looks so wrong, God provides by keeping His promises for us; His promises to be with us.
 - ➔ When Jesus' friend Lazarus died Jesus' conversations with Martha and Mary show both the "for us" and the "with us" so beautifully. In His wisdom Jesus waited two days after He heard of Lazarus' illness and death to go and see Lazarus' sisters. Martha meets Him and says to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Can you hear it in her voice? "Something's wrong here, Jesus. You weren't here for us".
 - ➔ But then Jesus makes an incredible promise: "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?' (Jn. 11:21, 25-26). Martha then makes the good confession. She holds on; she believes in what Jesus will do for her.
 - ➔ Then Jesus goes to Mary. She has been crying. She, too, says, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (Jn. 11:32). This time Jesus does something different. Instead of talking, He weeps with her. He cries with her. Think about that, Jesus knew that He was going to raise Lazarus from the tomb. He knew that His own death would defeat death for Lazarus and all people, yet still Jesus cried about His dear friend's death.
 - ➔ What does He teach us here? Well, for one thing, even knowing how the story ends doesn't mean you can't cry at the sad parts. Yes, even when things are so wrong, God still provides; He keeps his promises; Jesus is still with us.

Conclusion

- ⌘ Remember, things have been so wrong in this world, from the time of Adam and Eve, that God sacrificed His one and only Son on the cross. He knows what it's like to lose a child to death. He knows the hurt and the emptiness of hearts that are broken and confused and in pain.

→ And so, like Abraham, you and I are simply called to believe; to trust that God will provide, that He is with us. I know I will still cry at times when things seem so drastically wrong. I expect to see you cry at the wrong things in this world as well.

✘ But there will come a day of no more tears, when Jesus comes back. On that day of resurrection, all that is so wrong will be no more. Children will no longer be killed or abused or think about suicide. Disease and death and sorrow will be no more.

→ Instead, everything will be dramatically right. Until that day, we still will cry. It's then, like Abraham that you and I can turn in God's gift of faith and trust that He will provide because Jesus is with us and He keeps His promises. Amen.