

Jehovah Jireh

by Alexander Maclaren

God's provision is not just for our outward needs, but also for our strength to discharge duties and a sacrifice for our sins, and it comes at the last moment, after we have found out how much we need it.

Scripture: Genesis 22:7

Topics: "Faith and Obedience", "God's Provision"

Description

Alexander Maclaren's sermon 'Jehovah Jireh' reflects on the profound moment when Abraham, burdened with the command to sacrifice Isaac, reassures his son that God will provide a lamb. Maclaren emphasizes that God's provision goes beyond mere physical needs, offering strength and guidance to fulfill His commands, even in seemingly impossible situations. He highlights that true provision is found in obedience and faith, as God often reveals His help at the last moment, just when we need it most. The sermon encourages believers to remember God's past deliverances and to expect His continued provision in their lives. Ultimately, Maclaren reminds us that God's greatest provision is the sacrifice of His Son for our sins.

Transcript

AS THESE Two, Abraham and Isaac, were traveling up the hill, the son bearing the wood and the father with the sad burden of the fire and the knife, the boy said: "Where is the lamb?" and Abraham, thrusting down his emotion and steadying his voice, said: 'My son, God will provide Himself a lamb.' When the wonderful issue of the trial was plain before him and he looked back upon it, the one thought that rose to his mind was of how, beyond his meaning, his words had been true. So he named that place by a name that spoke nothing of his trial but everything of God's provision--"The Lord will see," or "The Lord will provide."

What the Words Mean

The words have become proverbial and threadbare as a commonplace of Christian feeling. But it may be worth our while to ask for a moment what it was exactly that Abraham expected the Lord to provide. We generally use the expression in reference to outward things and see in it the assurance that we shall not be left without the supply of the necessities for which, because God has made us to feel them, He has bound Himself to make provision. And most blessedly true is that application of them, and many a Christian heart in days of famine has been satisfied with the promise when the bread that was given has been scant.

But there is a meaning deeper than that in the words. It is true, thank God! that we may cast all our anxiety about all outward things upon Him in the assurance that He who feeds the ravens will feed us, and that if lilies can blossom into beauty without care, we shall be held by our Father of more value than these. But there is a deeper meaning in the provision spoken of here. What was it that God provided for Abraham? What is it that God provides for us? A way to discharge the arduous duties which, when they are commanded, seem all but impossible for us and which, the nearer we come to them, look the more dreadful and seem the more impossible. And yet, when the heart has yielded itself in obedience and we are ready to do the thing that is enjoined, there opens up before us a possibility provided by God, and strength comes to us equal to our day, and some unexpected gift is put into our hand which enables us to do the thing of which Nature said: 'My heart will break before I can do it'; and in regard to which even Grace doubted whether it was possible for us to carry it through. If our hearts are set in obedience to the command, the farther we go on the path of obedience, the easier the command will appear, and to try to do it is to ensure that God will help us to do it.

This is the main provision that God makes, and it is the highest provision that He can make for there is nothing in this life that we need so much as to do the will of our Father in heaven. All outward wants are poor compared with that. The one thing worth living for, the one thing which in being secured we are blessed and being missed we are miserable, is compliance in heart with the commandment of our Father, and the compliance wrought out in life. So, of all gifts that He bestows upon us and of all the abundant provision out of His rich storehouses is not this the best, that we are made ready for any required service? When we get to the place we shall find some lamb "caught in the thicket by its horns"; and heaven itself will supply what is needful for our burnt offering.

And then there is another thought here which, though we cannot certainly say it was in the speaker's mind, is distinctly in the historian's intention, "The Lord will provide." Provide what? The lamb for the burnt offering which He has commanded. It seems probable that that bare mountaintop which Abraham saw from afar and named Jehovah Jireh, was the mountain-top on which afterward the Temple was built. And perhaps the wood was piled for the altar on that very piece of primitive rock which still stands visible, though Temple and altar have long since gone, and which for many a day was the place of the altar on which the sacrifices of Israel were offered. It is no mere forcing of Christian meanings on to old stories but the discerning of that prophetic and spiritual element which God has impressed upon these histories of the past, especially in all their climaxes and crises, when we see in the fact that God provided the ram which became the appointed sacrifice, through which Isaac's life was preserved, a dim adumbration of the great truth that the only Sacrifice which God accepts for the world's sin is the Sacrifice which He Himself has provided.

This is the deepest meaning of all the sacrificial worship, as of Israel so of heathen nations--God Himself will provide a Lamb. The world had built altars, and Israel, by divine appointment, had its altar too. All these express the want which none of them can satisfy. They show that man needed a Sacrifice and that Sacrifice God has provided. He asked from Abraham less than He gives to us. Abraham's devotion was sealed and certified because he did not withhold his son, his only son, from God. And God's love is sealed because He has not withheld His only-begotten Son from us.

So this name that came from Abraham's grateful and wondering lips contains a truth which holds true in all regions of our wants. On the lowest level, the outward supply of outward needs; on a higher, the means of discharging hard duties and a path through sharp trials; and, on the highest of all, the spotless sacrifice which alone avails for the world's sins--these are the things which God provides.

The Conditions in the Case

So, note again on what conditions He provides them.

The incident and the name became the occasion of a proverb, as the historian tells us, which survived down to the period of his writing, and probably long after, when men were accustomed to say, "In the mount of the Lord it shall be provided." The provision of all sorts that we need has certain conditions as to the when and the where of the persons to whom it shall be granted. "In the mount of the Lord it shall be provided." If we wish to have our outward needs supplied, our outward weaknesses strengthened, power and energy sufficient for duty, wisdom for perplexity, a share in the Sacrifice which takes away the sins of the world, we receive them all on the condition that we are found in the place where all God's provision is treasured. If a man chooses to sit outside the baker's shop, he may starve on its threshold. If a man will not go into the bank, his pockets will be empty though there may be bursting coffers there to which he has a right. And if we will not ascend to the hill of the Lord, and stand in His holy place by simple faith, and by true communion of heart and life, God's amplest provision is nought to us; and we are empty in the midst of affluence. Get near to God if you would partake of what He has prepared. Live in fellowship with Him by simple love and often meditate on Him if you would drink in of His fullness. And be sure of this, that howsoever within His house the stores are heaped and the treasury full, you will have neither part nor lot in the matter unless you are children of the house. "In the mount of the Lord it shall be provided." And round it there is a waste wilderness of famine and of death.

When the Provision Comes

Further, note when the provision is realized.

When the man is standing with the knife in his hand and the next minute it will be red with the son's blood then the call comes: "Abraham!" and then he sees the ram caught in the thicket. There had been a long weary journey from their home away down in the dry, sunny south, a long tramp over the rough hills, a toilsome climb with a breaking heart in the father's bosom, and a dim foreboding gradually stealing on the child's spirit. But there was no sign of respite or of deliverance. Slowly he piles together the wood, and yet no sign. Slowly he binds his boy and lays him on it, and still no sign. Slowly, reluctantly, and yet resolvedly, he unsheathes the knife, and yet no sign. He lifts his hand, and then it comes.

That is God's way always. Up to the very edge we are driven before His hand is put out to help us. Such is the law, not only because the next moment is always necessarily dark nor because God will deal with us in any arbitrary fashion and play with our fears, but because it is best for us that we should be forced to desperation and out of desperation should "pluck the flower, safety." It is best for us that we should be brought to say, "My foot slippeth!" and then, just as our toes are sliding upon the glacier, the help comes and "Thy mercy held me up." "The Lord is our helper, and that right early." When He delays, it is not to trifle with us but to do us good by the sense of need as well as by the experience of deliverance. At the last moment, never before it, never until we have found out how much we need it, and never too late, comes the Helper.

So "it is provided" for the people that quietly and persistently tread the path of duty and go wherever His hand leads them without asking anything about where it does lead. The condition of the provision is our obedience of heart and will. To Abraham doing what he was commanded, though his heart was breaking as he did it, the help was granted-as it always will be.

What to Do with the Provision

And so, lastly, note what we are to do with the provision when we get it.

Abraham christened the anonymous mountaintop, not by a name that reminded him or others of his trial, but by a name that proclaimed God's deliverance. He did not say anything about his agony or about his obedience. God spoke about that, not Abraham. He did not want these to be remembered, but what he desired to hand on to later generations was what God had done for him. Oh! dear friends, is that the way in which we look back upon life? Many a bare, bald mountaintop in your career and mine we have names for. Are they names that commemorate our sufferings or God's blessings? When we look back on the past, what do we see? Times of trial or times of deliverance? Which side of the wave do we choose to look at, the one that is smitten by the sunshine or the one that is all black and purple in the shadow? The sea looked at from the one side will be all a sunny path, and from the other, dark as chaos. Let us name the heights that lie behind us, visible to memory, by names that commemorate, not the troubles that we had on them, but the deliverances that on them we received from God.

This name enshrines the duty of commemoration-yes! and the duty of expectation. "The Lord will provide." How do you know that, Abraham? And his answer is, "Because the Lord did provide." That is a shaky kind of argument if we use it about one another. Our resources may give out, our patience may weary. If it is a storehouse that we have to go to, all the corn that is treasured in it will be eaten up some day; but if it is to some boundless plain that grows it that we go, then we can be sure that there will be a harvest next year as there has been a harvest last.

And so we have to think of God not as a storehouse but as the soil from which there comes forth, year by year and generation after generation, the same crop of rich blessings for the needs and the hungers of every soul. If we have to draw from reservoirs we cannot say, "I have gone with my pitcher to the well six times, and I shall get it filled at the seventh." It is more probable that we shall have to say, "I have gone so often that I durst not go any more"; but if we have to go not to a well but to a fountain, then the oftener we go, the surer we become that its crystal cool waters will always be ready for us. "Thou hast been with me in six troubles; and in seven thou wilt not forsake me," is a bad conclusion to draw about one another; but it is the right conclusion to draw about God.

And so, as we look back upon our past lives and see many a peak gleaming in the magic light of memory, let us name them all by names that will throw a radiance of hope on the unknown and unclimbed difficulties before us and say, as the patriarch did when he went down from the mount of his trial and deliverance, "The Lord will provide."

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