

Abraham at Mount Moriah

by Zac Poonen

God tests us in secret to see if we fear Him or not, and to test our faithfulness in the area of our thought-life.

Scripture: Genesis 22:16

Topics: "Sacrificial Obedience", "Faithfulness"

Description

Zac Poonen preaches on the story of Abraham being tested by God to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, highlighting how God speaks to us secretly in our hearts to test whether we truly fear Him. Those who are faithful in their thought-life, like Joseph, receive God's approval. Sacrificial obedience and being pure in heart, having God alone as our desire, delights God. Just as Abraham's blessing extended to all families of the earth, God desires His blessings to flow through us as well.

Transcript

When God spoke to Abraham that night to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, Abraham was 125 years old and had already obtained a name among the people as a man of God. Genesis 21:22 tells us that "at that time (King) Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, saying, 'God is with you in all that you do.'" But God cares nothing for the high opinions that other men have about us. God wanted to test Abraham Himself. And so He spoke to Abraham quietly that night; and no-one else heard what God had spoken to him. Genesis 22:1 tells us: "After these things (that is, after King Abimelech had given Abraham a certificate as a man of God), God tested Abraham, and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.'" It was a costly thing that God asked him for that night. Abraham could have gone about the next day, doing nothing about it, and no-one would have known that Abraham had disobeyed God. That was how God was going to test whether Abraham feared Him or not. And that is how God tests us too. He speaks to us secretly in our heart - so quietly that not even those living with us know what God has said to us. One reason why God has given each of us a totally private area - our thought-life - is to test us to see whether we fear Him or not.

If our thoughts sounded out loud like our words do, then we would all keep our thoughts pure, for we would not want anyone to think less of us. But when our thoughts are so secret that only God can see them, it is easy to find out whether we fear Him or not. If we harbour impure and unloving thoughts that we would not want our fellow-believers to know about, it would clearly prove that we fear men but not God. That is unfortunately the condition of the vast majority of believers. God has tested them and they have failed the test. How few there are like Joseph, who when tempted sexually in secret, said "How can I do

such a wicked thing as this? It would be a sin against God" (Gen. 39:9-Living). Such young men are the ones who get God's certificate of approval. Very, very few believers are totally faithful in the area of sexual purity in their thought-life. But it is through these few that God can demonstrate to Satan that He still has some sons on earth who would rather pluck out their right eye than commit a sin with that eye and who would rather die than lust in their thoughts. The way to life is narrow and there are few who find it. But the wonderful thing is that there are a few!

Abraham passed the test. He did not seek just for a good testimony before men. He wanted to obey God even in the secret area. And so he took Isaac the very next morning and journeyed towards Mount Moriah and there he offered the darling of his heart to God, saying thereby, "Lord, I love You more than anyone and anything on earth." It was then that God gave Abraham His certificate of approval and promised to bless him without measure: "By Myself I have sworn,' says the Lord, 'because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, indeed I will greatly bless you....and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. And in your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed because you have obeyed My voice.'" (Gen.22:16-18). Nothing delights God as much as sacrificial obedience. To be 'pure in heart' is more than to have just a clean thought-life (Mt.5:8). It is to have nothing in one's heart but God alone. Many who live clean and upright lives nevertheless have an idolatrous attachment to their job or to the ministry that God has given them. They have not learnt to offer their God-given Isaacs on the altar back to God.

Do you want God plus some gift, or God plus some ministry, or God plus the good opinions of men, or perhaps God plus health? God plus some Isaac? Or is God alone sufficient for you? No-one can be approved of God who does not pass the test here. Only when we come to the place where we can sincerely say to the Lord, "Lord, whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is no-one and nothing on earth that I desire beside Thee" (Psa. 73:25), do we qualify as far as God is concerned. This is the Mount Moriah that each of us has to climb, where we offer everything that is dear to us on the altar to God and are left with God alone. If our joy increases through an increment in our salary or through a promotion in our job, or through a gift that we receive, or if it decreases when we don't get the expected promotion or gift, that would clearly indicate that our joy is found in God plus something earthly. Then we certainly need to purify our joy until we learn to 'rejoice in the Lord' alone. If our joy is found in God alone, it will not increase with the addition of anything earthly nor will it decrease when something of this earth is lost. Philippians 4:4 commands us to "rejoice in the Lord always". The reason why most believers cannot rejoice ALWAYS is because their joy is not found in the Lord alone. It is in the Lord plus something else. When our heart is pure - having place for the Lord alone - our joy will be pure too.

Step by step God had led Abraham on, to this place of total dedication - and now God was going to bless all the families of the earth through him. The rivers of blessing began to flow from Abraham's life when he came down from Mount Moriah. God's purpose is that Abraham's blessing should be ours too. Galatians 3:14 says, "That in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." God desires that the rivers of living water (the blessing of the Spirit) should now flow through each of us.

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