

(Genesis) - Part 20

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of obedience in secret and in something costly as the test of the fear of God, and how sacrifice is necessary to build the house of God.

Duration: 58:29

Scripture: Genesis 22:13, Exodus 3:4, 1 Samuel 3:10, Luke 10:41, Luke 22:11, Luke 22:31, Acts 9:4

Topics: "Genesis"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses six instances in the Bible where God calls individuals by repeating their names. The first instance is in Genesis 22, where God calls Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. The second instance is in Genesis 46, where God calls Jacob to go down to Egypt. The third instance is in Exodus 3, where God calls Moses through the burning bush to deliver the Israelites from Egypt. The fourth instance is in 1 Samuel 3, where God calls the young boy Samuel while he is sleeping. The speaker emphasizes the importance of obedience and sacrificial obedience in following God's call, and highlights how God provides in miraculous ways, often at the last second. The speaker encourages listeners to seek the kingdom of God first and trust in His provision.

Transcript

Let's turn to Genesis and chapter 22. Genesis 22. We were looking at verse 10, where we see that Abraham lifted up the knife to slay Isaac, and we saw that Isaac was a young, healthy, strong man who could have resisted his father and got out of that situation.

But he didn't do it, which shows something of the way in which Abraham had brought up his son. It would be quite something if we could bring up a son in such a way that when he's 25 years old, and we lay him on an altar saying, I'm going to kill you because God told me to do it, and he just lies down there and submits. We've really got to admire Abraham for the way in which he brought up his son in the fear of God, and more than that, in confidence in the fact that whatever my father Abraham says or does is the best for me, even if it means he's going to kill me, I'll accept it.

It's really something fantastic. We see further in verse 11 that as Abraham was about to do that, the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, Abraham, Abraham, and he said, Here I am. Now, there are only, as far as I can see, seven places in scripture where God calls a person with a double call, like here, Abraham, Abraham.

It speaks of a time when God was so delighted with Abraham's obedience in this which was most costly for him. And just in passing, I'd like to mention where the other references are where God calls a person by a double call. Genesis 22, verse 2 is another reference where God spoke to Abraham.

The interesting thing is that all these double calls of God are very significant. Abraham, Abraham is the first one. And Genesis 22, verse 2, we see God speaking to Abraham in visions of the night and said, Abraham, Abraham.

And he said, Here I am. God said to him, I'm God. Go down to Egypt because my purposes are going to be fulfilled there in Egypt.

The third one is in Exodus chapter 3, verse 4, where God speaks to Moses by the burning bush. And the Lord saw that he turned aside to look. God called him and said, Moses, Moses, here I am.

Now I'm calling you to deliver my people out of Egypt. He first spoke to Jacob to tell them to go to Egypt and now he calls Moses to, after 400 years, to deliver them out of Egypt. The next one is in 1 Samuel chapter 3, 1 Samuel chapter 3, in verse 10, where the little boy Samuel was sleeping and the Lord came and stood and called, as at other times, saying, Samuel, Samuel.

Samuel, Samuel. That's the next instance, the fourth one. And the fifth one is in the Gospel of Luke in the New Testament, Luke's Gospels, and chapter 10, Luke chapter 10, and verse 41.

But the Lord answered and said to her, Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things. That is the fifth instance where the Lord again has something very significant to say. One thing is needful, He says in the next verse, and that is to sit at His feet and hear His word.

Luke 10, 41. And the sixth instance is in Luke 22, and verse 31, where before Jesus goes to the cross, He speaks to Peter and says, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.

And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers. Again, a very significant word that the Lord spoke. And the seventh one is in Acts chapter 9, verse 4, where the Lord is speaking to Saul of Tarsus, turning his whole life around, changing the direction of his life.

He said, when Saul fell to the ground on the road to Damascus, the Lord spoke to him, saying, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? In each of these instances, if you take time to look at them, you find that there is something significant that the Lord was speaking when He called a person twice by the name. He usually called a person once. But these are the seven double calls of scripture, and each of them is significant.

And the first of these, as we have just seen, is in Luke 22, verse 11, where God has something special to say. He says, Abraham, Abraham. He says, don't stretch out your hand against the Lord.

I never wanted you to kill him. I only wanted to test you. To see whether you fear God.

He says, now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me. We see there that this is the proof of the fear of God. We saw earlier the fear of God mentioned in Genesis 22 in relation to sexual sins.

Here is the second reference in the scripture to the fear of God, and the first time that God says concerning a human being, now I know that you fear God. What is the proof that we fear God? That when God speaks in secret, God spoke to Abraham in secret at night. He immediately obeys again in secret.

He took Isaac up to the top of the mountain and sacrificed him there without anybody seeing. An immediate obedience in secret to that which we have heard in secret. That is the proof that we fear God.

There is no other proof. However much I may obey in those things where other believers can see me, it does not prove that I fear God. I may not fear God at all.

The only test is when I have learned to obey God in those areas where other believers know nothing of what God has spoken to me in my conscience, in my heart, and where I have obeyed God in secret without a single other believer knowing anything about it. So when we examine our life to see whether we fear God or not, the test is this. In those areas where others cannot see me or know anything about my life, have I obeyed in secret before God.

If there are no such areas in my life, I can sit in the best assembly in the world, but I do not fear Him. God cannot say, now I know that you fear God. God tests us.

He tested Abraham nearly fifty years after he called him out first. And God will test us even fifty years after we are converted to see whether we fear Him. That is not a test that we say, oh, we passed that test long ago.

He says, now I know. Now I know. Doesn't God know everything? Of course He knows everything.

But yet He tests a man so that He can lead him on to something greater, so that we ourselves also know whether we fear God or not. Now I know that you fear God because you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me. And we learn something more there, that the test of the fear of God is in obedience in something which is very costly, not something which is easy to do.

There are many areas where obedience is easy. We've used the illustration of a father telling a child, eat that ice cream. That's not difficult for that child to do.

That obedience is very easy, because the child loves to do it. But when the father says, come and help mummy to cut the vegetables when he would like to play at five o'clock in the evening, that's a little more difficult than obeying the command to eat that cup of ice cream. You know that.

There is an obedience which is easy and delightful, and there is an obedience which is costly and difficult. When Abraham obeyed God, it was not like eating a cup of ice cream. It was so difficult.

And it is in that obedience, which is expensive and costly and costs me everything, that I know whether I fear God or not. In most areas, we all obey so easily. We, there are so many areas we obey, but the test is not in those areas.

Many, many things we do, do not prove that we fear God. It's good to do those things, we are obeying God, but they are not the test of whether we fear God or not. That is in the secret area, and where obedience has really cost us some tremendous sacrifice.

And if there has not been such areas in our life, then that is probably an indication that we are still quite a few miles away from being tested in this simple area of the fear of God. We haven't taken it seriously. We

haven't taken our spiritual education seriously.

So, let's take a lesson from that, the proof of the fear of God. Verse 13, Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son.

And we can say that that is where the gospel was preached to Abraham, that instead of his son, a substitute dies in his place. A substitute dies in the place of his son, a ram. The first clear example in the Old Testament of a substitute, when Abraham said, when Isaac asked him, Where is the lamb? Abraham said in verse 8, God will provide himself a lamb.

It was a word of faith, but he never saw it. He never knew, but he spoke out. But it was a prophetic word that God did provide there a lamb, a ram, and later on provided himself in the person of his son as the lamb.

There's a word in John's Gospel, chapter 8, verse 56, when the Jews were trying to stone Jesus. Jesus said in John 8, verse 56, Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad. When did Abraham see the day of Christ? When did Abraham see the day of Christ? That was when he saw the ram that could be killed in the place of his beloved son.

And we can say that to Abraham, Isaac was more dear than even his own life. He would have gladly given his own life rather than take Isaac's. So we can say that it was a picture of God providing a substitute instead of Abraham's own life being given up.

And there, in some way perhaps, he didn't understand it fully, I'm sure he didn't, but in some mysterious way he saw the day of Christ. We can say he had a revelation of Christ because he himself acted in the spirit of Christ. He would have never had that revelation if he had sat in the tent in his house and not obeyed God.

He got that revelation on that mountain because he offered a costly obedience to God. And there we learn that we can never have revelation unless there is a costly obedience in our lives to God. Now, don't think, my brothers and sisters, that what we hear from another person is revelation.

We can hear the truth from another brother who has got revelation, but we receive it as information. We have to obey God in our personal life and secret and private and sacrifice for that information which we got from that brother to become revelation. And I would say that most believers don't have any revelation in their lives.

All that they know is second-hand truth. Yes, God uses others to communicate the truth to us, but that's not enough. We, each of us, have to get revelation.

And if we are desperate, we'll get it. If we are satisfied without it, we won't get it. Think that there are believers who can drift through a whole Christian life, born-again believers, never get the revelation of God.

Follow Abraham, and we will get revelation. Follow him, and you'll find that God opens up the word to you and reveals things that are hidden from the wise and the clever. If you follow Abraham up to that mountain in secret, not before the face of men, privately, obeying God in secret, obeying God in your thought life, obeying God in private, costly, sacrificial obedience, there is the place of revelation, increasing revelation.

Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day. He saw it. He saw something that was way into the future, two thousand years later.

And that's the mountain that we need to go up also. There he saw Jesus as a substitute in the place of that ram, dying in our place. And Abraham called the name of that place, The Lord Will Provide, or as the Hebrew has it, Yehovah Yireh or Yahweh Yireh, The Lord Will Provide.

This is where that phrase, The Lord Will Provide, comes from. The Lord will provide what? A substitute. It's referring to Calvary.

He saw. The Lord will provide. Or as it is said to this day, in the mount of the Lord, in the margin it says, it will be seen.

In the mount of the Lord, you will have revelation. You will have provision, and you will have revelation. Revelation and provision in the mount of the Lord.

But we've got to get there, in obedience, in costly, sacrificial obedience. And there God provides. The Lord will provide.

That we walk up in faith, the Lord will provide. Even though it looks impossible, right up to the time that Abraham took up the knife, to the last second, there was no evidence that God had provided anything. It looked as if he was going to lose his son.

And very often God's provision is like that. Man's provision is quite different. Man provides well in advance.

Human fathers provide twenty years in advance for the dowries of their daughters. But God provides at the last second. Because that's miraculous.

For a father to provide twenty years in advance, there's nothing miraculous about it. But God provides at the last second. When I lifted up the knife in obedience, God says, stop.

I've got a way for you. Very often we'll find that in life's testing. It looks, it looks, it looks, it looks, it looks as though there's no answer to this problem, no solution.

But if we hold on in faith at the last second, there's a solution. Because in all these six thousand years of human history, God has never disappointed a man who trusted Him till the very end. Do you know that? Do we know that, brothers and sisters? That in eternity in heaven, or at the judgment seat of Christ, no brother, no sister will be able to say to the Lord, Lord, I trusted you till the very end, and you let me down.

Impossible. Impossible. There will not be one human being like that.

Those who have trusted till the very end, like we sing in that song, those who trust Him fully, find Him fully true. The Lord will provide, and in the mount of the Lord, it will be seen. I want to point you out to something in 2 Chronicles 3, which is significant in this connection.

2 Chronicles 3, when Solomon began to build a temple, the temple could not be built in any place in Israel, in Palestine. It had to be built in Jerusalem. God had determined that.

And also in Jerusalem, it could not be built in any part of Jerusalem that, you know, some architect went out and looked for some good site for the temple. No. God had already determined, long before Solomon

and David and King Saul and all were born, long before the Israelites had even occupied Canaan, God had already determined the location of the temple.

You know which it was? Here it is. 2 Chronicles 3, verse 1. Then Solomon began to build a house of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah. Mount Moriah.

That's what we read in Genesis 22, where Abraham offered up his son. God said, that is the place where my house is going to be built, because my house has got to be a house of sacrifice. Do you know where God's house is built today in the New Covenant? It's not built every place where people can get a choir to sing a Christmas cantata and an Easter cantata and stage some Christmas drama or entertain people in some way like that.

Well, that's not where God's house is built. God's house is built where he finds people like Abraham who will give up their Isaacs. That's the place where God says, I'll build my house there.

So you see, when Abraham offered up Isaac on Mount Moriah, it was a very significant thing. It is the place where the Muslims and the Jews are fighting for, the place which they are fighting for today. Because the Muslims have built a mosque today on that very spot.

That's why the Jews cannot build a temple. Even though Jerusalem is in the hands of the Jews, they can't build a temple. Why? Because they know the temple cannot be built in any place.

The temple has to be built in the same place where Solomon built it. And a mosque stands there today. So how can they build a temple? That's the place where Abraham offered up Isaac.

And the Muslims respect Abraham too. They say he offered up Ishmael. And God has saved Ishmael from death.

They've reversed the story. And they say that place is sacred to them. But apart from that, it's significant that the Lord chose that place to build a temple.

And I want you to see another thing there. It is also identified as another place. On Mount Moriah, 2 Chronicles 3.1, where the Lord had appeared to his father David at the place that David had prepared on the threshing floor of Ornan, the Jebusite.

And that story is in 2 Samuel 24, where when God had judged David's sin of numbering the people. That's one thing we see there, that God does not like our counting numbers. When David counted numbers, God judged him.

Why do you want to count numbers? To see how many people you are a king over? Why do you want to keep a membership list in your church? To see how many people there are in the church? It was only 50 people once. Now we are 150. That is the sin of David.

And thousands of Christians have got no light on it. God judged David severely. He said, why do you want to count numbers? You leave that to me.

You just trust in me. That's why the judgment came. That's in passing.

But then God said, all right, you've got to come. And his prophet came to him and said, now you've got to erect an altar in 2 Samuel 24.18 on the threshing floor of Ornan, the Jebusite. This is the same place

where Abraham offered up Isaac on Mount Moriah.

We saw that in 2 Chronicles 3.1. And David went there. And when Araunah, who was an ordinary citizen, saw the king coming, he said, why have you come here? David said, I've come to buy this place, to offer an offering and to buy the oxen and wood. And Araunah said, please take it free.

I don't want you to buy it from me. You are my king. Take the oxen, the wood, the yokes, everything.

And the king said, verse 24, no, I will not take it free. I will pay for it. And that is not easy.

As a king, people like to take things. I am an authority. Why can't I take it free? And besides that, all of us have a flesh which loves to get things free.

You know that? Have you discovered it, when somebody gives you a gift? How you love to get it, it is free. Particularly we find Christians in our country love to get everything free. They love to get tracts free, they love to get books free, they love to get tapes free, they love to get everything free.

That's why they never progress in their life, because they love to get everything free. They never think of payment. They use somebody else's things and never pay for it.

Everything they love to get free. They love to get gifts from other people. And you can't build a house of God there.

The house of God is not built where people are loving to get things free. The house of God is built where people like David say, I will not take it free, because then if I offer it to God, I've offered God that which cost me nothing. That's what he said here.

I'll pay for it, because I'm not going to offer a cheap offering to God. I will give to God that which cost me something. It has to cost me something.

Do you give a service to God? It must cost you a sacrifice. It doesn't cost us anything to come three times a week to a meeting. No.

Does it cost us anything to come three times a week to a meeting? Hardly anything. But where what we give to God has cost us something, cost us sacrifice, cost us pain perhaps, there we know that the house of God can be built. That is the place, we read in 2 Chronicles 3.1, where Abraham offered Isaac, where David offered that sacrifice which cost him something.

God said, that is the place where my house will be built. God's house is built in the place of sacrifice. Very important lesson for all of us to learn, that we can never build the house of God by learning a doctrine.

That's the stupidity that a lot of people have. They think, ah, I've got the doctrine, now I can build the body of Christ somewhere. I found that, brothers and sisters, here in our country, in India.

There are people who've seen that God has done something in our midst, and they said, ah, it must be the doctrine. Doctrine. Okay, we'll take the doctrine, preach the doctrine elsewhere.

And there are people who preach the doctrine and don't get the same results. They use the same songbook and they don't get the same results. Because it's not got to do with the doctrine or the songbook.

It's not a songbook that Abraham used on Mount Moriah. It's not a doctrine. It's an attitude towards God.

And where that attitude of sacrifice and obedience and devotion to God is there, even if they don't use the same songbook, the body of Christ will be built. We can become a cult, thinking that those who use the same songbook are part of the body of Christ. That's a lot of garbage.

I throw that in the garbage bin, that idea. It's those who have the same spirit of devotion, of obedience to God, in secret and private, who are part of the body of Christ. Even I don't care if they don't use the same songbook.

I don't belong to a denomination or a cult. I want a fellowship with those who have the same spirit of devotion to Christ that Abraham had, that David had, that doesn't want anything free. It's a lot of people who use the same songbook, who love to get things free, who don't have the spirit of Abraham and David.

A lot of people who believe the new and living way, theoretically in their head, who don't have the spirit of Abraham and David. There's no body of Christ being built there. And it can be that people can come into our midst, appreciating the preaching, perhaps, or the fellowship or something like that, but they don't have that spirit in their hearts that Abraham and David had.

They will find themselves outside the body of Christ. That's a sad thing, after being many years in a fellowship and ending up outside the body of Christ. This is where God builds his house.

And so we see that that's a very significant thing. The temple is the place of sacrifice, not the place of listening to messages. God didn't choose Moriah because Abraham delivered a wonderful message there one day.

No, the place of sacrifice. Not because he got a fine choir to sing. No.

It's not even the place of miracles. It's the place of sacrifice. Mount Carmel, that's where Elijah brought the fact from the truth.

We need to understand very, very clearly that God is building his house even today. Where? Not in the place of miracles or sermons or songs, but in the place of sacrifice and devotion. And how can I contribute to the building of God's house? By having that same attitude that Abraham and David had.

If I come to the church--not to just the meeting. The church is the body of people. If my attitude to the church is the attitude that Abraham and David had to God, then I contribute something to the building of the body of Christ.

Otherwise, I'm just a passenger, just sitting, just a listener. Now God is gathering together people in the last days to build his body, and it's easy to sit there and miss the Spirit. Brothers and sisters, beware of it.

I emphasize it because I've seen so much of it. People who have the words, but the Spirit is not the same. The words are right.

Songbook is right. Doctrine is right. But the Spirit, there's something missing.

It's not the Spirit of sacrifice and devotion to Christ. The Spirit is seeking their own. Abraham was not seeking his own.

In Genesis 21, we read that God asked him to give up Ishmael. That was easier. Genesis 22, a still more difficult step, to give up Isaac.

Compare these two chapters. Genesis 21, give up Ishmael. Genesis 22, give up Isaac.

What is the New Testament meaning of this? We can say that Ishmael is that which is of the flesh. To give that up is very clear to us. We know that that's bad.

Give up that which is of the flesh. Do you understand that? But to give up Isaac, which is not of the flesh, which is a good thing, when God tells us to give up something good, that is a test of being spiritual. The difference between the carnal believer and the spiritual believer is not that the carnal believer doesn't give up the fleshly things and the spiritual believer gives up the fleshly things.

It's more than that. The carnal believer may give up committing adultery, give up telling lies, even give up losing his temper, but there are certain good things in life which he will not give up for Jesus Christ. Maybe his job, profession, his education, his occupation, his family ties, good things, his love for good food, and therefore he never becomes spiritual.

You know what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6? Here's the reason why Paul became a spiritual man. He not only gave up Ishmael, but he gave up Isaac as well. 1 Corinthians 6, verse 12.

Paul says, All things are lawful for me. What things? Is adultery lawful? No. Telling lies lawful? No.

He's speaking about a man who's given up all those bad things. He's given up Ishmael. Having given up Ishmael, he says, Now I'm only left with Isaac, and that's lawful.

That's a lawful son. But even some of those lawful things I give up, because not all of those lawful things are profitable. So we can say there are three levels.

There are the unlawful things and the lawful things. Two main subdivisions of the things in our life. Unlawful things, lawful things.

Then the lawful things are again subdivided into two. The lawful but not profitable, and the higher level which is the lawful and profitable. So we can say there are three levels.

The unlawful, those are the people who live in sin, not even converted. And then we have the believers who live in the lawful. They say, It's perfectly all right.

And they're always discussing things like, Is it right or wrong to go to the cinema? Is it right or wrong to wear lipstick? Is it right or wrong to have a little gold in the sari? And they are living in this borderline between lawful and unlawful. They're always having questions. Is this right? Is that wrong? Is this right? They're living in the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Is it right? Is it wrong? There are lots of believers living in that level. They are born again, but they are carnal. They never become spiritual.

There is a higher level for those who are spiritual. They are not asking, Is it right or wrong? They are asking, Is it profitable? Is it for the glory of God for me to have some gold on my sari? Is it for the glory of God for me to put some lipstick? Is it for the glory of God for me to wear ornaments? Is it for the glory of God for me to go to the cinema? Their question is not right or wrong. They're not living at that low

substandard level that 99% of Christians live at.

They're living where Paul lives. They're all lawful. Okay, even if everything is lawful, so what? It's not profitable, he says.

So, that is the difference between giving up Ishmael and giving up Isis. Lots of believers are willing to give up Ishmael. Very few are willing to give up Isis.

That which is good. What's wrong with this? For example, in marriage. Many believers say, It's enough if I marry a believer.

The other person must be born again. That's good. But a spiritual person says more than that.

It's not enough the other person must be born again. The other person must have the same devotion to Christ that I have. Otherwise, I'm not interested.

You see, it's lawful to marry a born-again believer, but it may not be profitable if you're a wholehearted Christian that you end up marrying someone who's not wholehearted. And that determines which level you live. Lawful.

Unlawful, of course, is to go and marry an unbeliever. Lawful is to marry a believer, but profitable is to marry someone who is wholeheartedly devoted to Christ just like you. So there's a difference.

In all areas it's like this. Many, many areas. There's the unlawful, there's the lawful, and there's the profitable.

There's a saying in English that the good is the enemy of the best. An English proverb, and it's self-explanatory. It means that I can miss the best by taking that which is good.

I take the good and I miss the best. That's a great tragedy. So we learn a lot from that one incident there in Genesis chapter 22 of Abraham offering up his son and saying, in the mount of the Lord it will be provided.

The spiritual man is the one who says, the Lord is my provider. I don't go running after earthly things. The Lord is my provider.

He drops them into my lap as I seek the kingdom of God first and His righteousness. And my mind is set on seeking God's kingdom and His righteousness. And God will test us on that to see whether I'm real that it's a choice between His kingdom and some good earthly thing.

Not evil earthly thing. The choice is His kingdom and some good legitimate lawful earthly thing. God sees what choice I make.

God or Isaac. If it is God or Ishmael, we're all ready to say God. I want God, not Ishmael.

But when it is God or Isaac, I've seen many men who've learned to hate their father and mother, but haven't learned to hate their wives. It's amazing. It's in the same verse in Luke 14, 26.

But they're very zealous in hating their father and mother, but not so zealous in hating their wives. Where did you get that from? Where did you get this half verse out of Scripture? Christianity is full of these people who've got half verses and a lot of people in the church like that. They haven't understood what that hatred means.

In other words, they were a bit fed up with their parents in any case, so they were glad to hate them. That's not the hatred the Bible speaks of. But they love their darling wives and so they don't hate them at all.

I don't believe such people can ever be spiritual. They're not consistent. Many like that.

They have not understood what it is to give up an Isaac to God, saying the kingdom of God is first, everything else is second. And so, we can ask ourselves whether we have followed Abraham in this, whether we can be a part of building up Christ's body. The Lord is my provider.

He provides. I don't know. For the last second, He'll provide.

My job is only to seek the kingdom of God first and His righteousness in all things. That's all. Then the angel of the Lord, verse 15, called to Abraham a second time.

This is the messenger of the Lord that we've seen before. It's obviously Christ in some manifestation. The same thing we read in verse 11.

The angel of the Lord, the messenger of the Lord. And said, and this is where we know that this is Christ Himself, what did the angel of the Lord say? Notice in verse 16. Not by the Lord, but by myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you've done this thing, not with hell your son, your only son.

Indeed, I will greatly bless you and will greatly multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. And in your descendants, all the nations of the earth shall be blessed because of one reason.

Because you have obeyed my voice, and we can say in secret, when nobody heard what I have spoken to you. For example, we can sit in a meeting and God can speak something to our heart. Nobody has heard it, even the person sitting in the next chair has not heard what God spoke to us in the meeting.

And you need not obey. You can go away from there and not obey what God spoke to you in the meeting, and you can still retain a good testimony in the church as a good brother, a good sister, who is having a good testimony, living a good life. Nobody knows that that thing which God spoke to you in the last meeting, you still haven't obeyed.

Maybe God told you to go and apologize to somebody for having wounded him or her. You haven't obeyed it. You got a testimony in the church as a good brother, but not a testimony before God.

We know in Genesis 21, Abimelech the king came and said to Abraham, we know God is with you. But in Genesis 22, he gets a testimony from God himself, and that's the more important thing. It's no use Abimelech coming and congratulating us if God has got a different opinion.

So brothers and sisters, it's a wonderful thing if God can say, you have obeyed my voice. If he can always say that, you have obeyed my voice by giving up certain good things because you decided to choose the best. And what is the best? In Romans 12, verse 2, it says that good and acceptable and perfect, what? Will of God.

There is only one thing which is perfect. We can say the good is the enemy of the perfect, and the perfect is the will of God. The good is my ideas.

For example, in Christian work, there are a lot of people who have got a lot of bright ideas how to serve God. Lot of bright ideas, but may not be the will of God. God's way is perfect, and that's why we need to seek God's will in all areas.

So Abraham returned to his young men. Why did God bless him? Because of obedience and having obeyed. He comes back, and they rose and went together to Beersheba, and Abraham lived at Beersheba.

We could ask ourselves one more thing before we move on from this, and that is, Have you ever heard God speaking to you, calling you to do something difficult and hard? Or have you only heard words saying, Fear not, my child. I shall be with you. I shall take you through this trial.

I shall comfort you. I delight in you. I rejoice in you, my child.

You go to the average charismatic meeting, it's that type of thing which they call prophecy. I don't believe it's prophecy at all. It's just somebody's got a bright idea in his mind, and he just lets it out.

He says, Oh my child, I know your needs. My son, I know you. And most people have problems in any case, so when someone gets up in a meeting and says, My daughter, I know your problem, at least 80% of the women there think, Oh God, he knows my problem.

My daughter, he says. This psychological humbug which they call the leading of the spirits. We must have nothing to do with this type of garbage and call it prophecy.

Prophecy is that which speaks from God, and very often it's a hard voice saying, Offer up Isaac. Come to Mount Moriah and offer up Isaac. My son and my daughter may not be so interested in that.

And that's what God's calling us. Offer up Isaac. Have you ever heard God speaking a hard word? You know these believers who say, It's a hard message.

It's a hard message we hear. Think of Abraham and God. Oh, that's a hard message.

That can't be God. I better go to some other church where they don't speak such hard messages like offering up Isaac on Mount Moriah. Think what Abraham would have missed.

My brothers and sisters, that's the way of blessing. And those who listen to that and obey God come out triumphant and don't end up like these wishy-washy, slavish, fat Christians who are useless to God and useless to men, and they're floating around the world today. No.

Be a follower of Abraham and David so that the body of Christ can be built through you and your life. And thus he returned. He returned after he had obeyed.

He fulfilled the conditions, and therefore God says, You will be blessed. There are many people who claim the promises of Scripture without fulfilling the conditions. I used to be bothered by that once upon a time.

I wanted to be honest, and I said, Lord, there are times when I pray, and I don't seem to get an answer. Yet you said, Anything you ask in my name, I'll give it to you. And yet I ask for something, and you don't give it to me.

And I don't want to just write that off and say, Oh, well, I can't explain it. I say, Lord, I want to be honest. Why does it work? I remember once the Lord made it very clear to me and said, Just read that verse again in Scripture and see to whom I spoke it.

And I saw that He didn't speak it to a compromiser. He spoke it to disciples who had forsaken everything to follow Him. To them He said, Ask anything in my name, I will give it to you.

And today, a believer who has not even forsaken 50% tries to claim that promise. How will it work? It will not work. Don't be surprised if it doesn't work.

There's a condition to that promise. Then I understood. If I forsake everything, and I have an attachment to nothing in the world, then every promise in the book is mine.

If not, there may be a few promises that God will give me food and clothing and shelter. But the real main ones I've missed. So, there is a condition to a promise.

God blessed Abraham, it says here so clearly, Because you have obeyed my voice, verse 18, therefore I will greatly bless you, verse 17. What is that great blessing? That his children will get promotion in their examination? Or that Abraham won't get any cancer? Is that the blessing He promised him? These are for these third-rate believers who seek God for these things. But those who really want God's best, there's a condition.

I will bless you because you have obeyed my voice. Take it seriously, brothers and sisters. Particularly when that voice goes against what your reason says.

Reason says, how can God ask for a human sacrifice? Faith does. Never mind your reason, if God's told you, do it. There's always this conflict between faith and reason.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and don't lean to your own understanding. Two opposites, your own understanding and God. Faith and reason.

I believe the number one enemy of faith is reason. That's why you find the clever people are the ones who have less faith. The more intellectual we are, the less faith we have.

Unless we crucify that intellect, the people who are simple, they have usually more faith. And I don't think any of us sitting here are simple. So we have a battle.

We're shrewd, we're clever, we're intellectual. Therefore it's difficult to have faith. Because our own understanding comes in the way.

It says, how can God ask such a thing? Abraham never questioned, he just obeyed. And therefore he got blessed. And we'll discover in eternity that the people who got blessed the most were those who obeyed God like Abraham.

And then it gives there a list of the children born to his brother Nehor. Verse 20 to 24. And then we come to chapter 23.

And Sarah lived 127 years. These were the years the life of Sarah and Sarah died. In Kiriath Arba.

In the land of Canaan. And Abraham went to mourn. In to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.

She died when she was 127. We know that she was 10 years younger to Abraham. Abraham was 137.

God called Abraham when he was 75. And now he's 137. 62 years she had stood by Abraham.

Very often not understanding why her husband is doing all this. Why is he suddenly packing up and saying, Let's leave this place and go off. Where are you going? Don't know.

Can you appreciate a wife who followed her husband like that? Where are you going? I don't know. God told us to go. And she also packs up.

Brings home guests uninvited. Come, let's cook something for them. And suddenly takes off the son.

Later realizes he was going to kill him. Happy that they came back. You have to admire this woman who stood by such a husband.

It's not easy to be the wife of a man who has revelations. It is quite difficult. It's easy to be the wife of a drifter.

And a man who's seeking earthly things. It's not easy to be the wife of a man who obeys God. And wholeheartedly seeks to follow in Jesus' footsteps.

But blessed is that woman who can follow a God-fearing, wholehearted husband like that. Without questioning. Without grumbling.

Without complaining. One day when Abraham gets his reward. I'm sure God allows Sarah to come forward to get her share too.

Because many a wife suffers a lot because of her husband's obedience to God. So, we can think of that. When she died at the age of 127.

Faithful. Standing by her husband for over 60 years. In faithfulness.

Not dragging, grabbing like lost wife. Being fed up with this living in tents. We were living comfortably there in Ura, the Chaldees.

And you told us to pack up. And no proper house here. Nothing.

You don't know where we are shifting. And that good land you gave off to your nephew. And all these things that wives complain about.

Why didn't you fight for the family property and get it? And all these things. Think that Sarah was such a good wife. That's a challenge to you sisters.

Be a good wife to your husband. Even if you can't sometimes understand what he's doing. And Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah.

And then Abraham rose before his dead and spoke to the sons of Hez saying, I'm a stranger and a sojourner among you. Think what he called himself. I'm a stranger.

Here was a man who lived for 75 years in comfort. As one of the leading citizens of Ura, the Chaldees. Given up everything to obey the Lord and follow Him.

What did he get? On this earth, nothing. We'll discover soon what he got. On this earth.

He says, give me a burial site. That I may bury my dead. And the sons of Hez answered.

They have respected him and said, hear us my Lord. You're a mighty prince among us. Take the choicest of your grave.

Just like Aaron told King David. Have it free. No need to pay for it.

None of us will refuse you his grave. Abraham rose and bowed down and said, If it's your wish for me to bury my dead out of my sight. Hear me.

Please approach Ephron, the son of Zohar. That he may give me the cave of Maxilla. Which is at the end of his field.

For the full price. I don't want any discount or concession. Let him give it to me in your presence for a burial site.

Otherwise afterwards that fellow will keep boasting that I gave Abraham a place to bury his dead. He must never let an unbeliever think that he has had a part in God's work. By contributing something for God's work.

Sorry sir, we can't receive your money because God wants your heart first. That's what you have to say to unbelievers. No, he would not let anybody give it half price or anything.

Full price. Give it to me in your presence for a burial site. Ephron was sitting among the sons of Eph.

And he said, No my Lord, hear me. I give you the field. And I give you the cave.

In the presence of these sons of my people, I give it to you free. And Abraham bowed before the people and he said, If you will only please listen to me. I will give, verse 13, the price for the field.

Accept it from me. He has a dignity. There is a dignity about a man of God.

That he doesn't go around like a beggar. Hoping that somebody will give him something free. And grabbing as soon as he gets it.

Then Ephron answered Abraham saying to him, My Lord, listen to me. This is Ephron telling Abraham, A piece of land worth 400 shekels of silver. What is that? He said, That's nothing.

Bury your dead. Abraham listened. Oh, he said, It's worth 400 shekels of silver.

Alright, I'll give you 400 shekels of silver. And he weighs out, verse 16, 400 shekels of silver. The commercial standards.

And pays it. A little thing. But we can see something about the dignity of this man of God.

An example worthy for us to follow. Why? Because the Lord was his provider. Wherever you get the 400 shekels from.

The Lord is my provider. I don't have to get a favor from this unbeliever. For my personal need.

And feel obligated to him for the rest of my life. We have to be very careful. When an unbeliever does something for us, a favor.

That we pray that in some way we shall be able to serve him and return that favor. So that we don't live under obligation to unbelievers. If you are a child of God, don't place yourself in obligation to unbelievers.

Keep that in mind. So Ephraim, he did it, it says, in the presence of all the people. So that everything will be done decently.

So that other people will also know. The Bible says we must provide things honest in the sight of all men. Everybody must see that we are upright.

So Ephraim's field was in Machphela, which faced Mamre. And all the trees in the field were deeded over to Abraham for a possession. Verse 18.

In the presence of the sons of Heth and Abraham buried Sarah, his wife. Verse 19. And so the field and the cave that is in it were deeded over to Abraham for a burial site by the sons of Heth.

We ask this question. What did Abraham get in Canaan? For everything that he gave up. What's the answer? A grave.

He never possessed anything in Canaan except a grave. And yet God said, don't worry. One day your descendants will occupy this homeland.

And they have occupied it today. Today, 1986, children of Abraham are living there. But in his day he lived by faith.

All he had was a grave. That's all. But the only thing he had there, a burial place.

We praise the Lord for the example of Abraham that we can follow. They sought another country. A better one.

Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God. When God called them, they obeyed. They went up to the mount of the Lord, believing that the Lord is my provider.

And therefore they were blessed. Let's stand up and give thanks.

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