

February 21, 2021 at St. Matthew, Port Washington, WI

Trust in the Lord to Provide

“Why?” asked the parents when they heard that their son had leukemia. “Why?” asked the children as they made funeral arrangements for their parents who were killed in a car accident. “Why?” asked the family as they struggled through another lay-off. “Why?” asked the handicapped man who just found out he had cancer. I am sure that you have asked God “Why?” a few times. Why do you face certain hardships? Why does life often feel like we are trying to walk up a slipper slope? Things don’t make sense. We hurt. We ask God, “Why?”

I am sure that Abraham asked, “Why?” when God told him to kill his son, Isaac. Verse 2, **“Take your son, your only son [who was in the line of the Messiah], 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.”** It did not make sense. First of all, murder was wrong. But Isaac, who was probably about 12 years old at this time, was more special than most sons.

Abraham and his wife, Sarah, were not able to have any children. When Abraham was 75 years old and Sarah was 65 years old, God told them that they were going to have a son. How exciting! But month after month, year after year, there was no son. The Bible tells us (Hebrews 11:12) that their bodies were as good as dead when it came to reproduction. But God performed a miracle and when Abraham was 100 years old, he held his new-born son, Isaac, in his arms. What a thrill! What a special son!

But Isaac was special for another important reason. God told Abraham that the Savior of the world would come from his family, through Isaac. If Isaac was dead, though, there would not be a family tree. Isaac was Abraham’s first link to the Savior, whom we know as Jesus. When God told Abraham to kill Isaac, it seemed as if God was telling Abraham to cut off his only chance at heaven. Why, God?

Abraham gave us a good example of giving God first place in our hearts and lives and loving him more than anything or anyone else. Early the next morning, without dragging his feet, Abraham got up, woke up Isaac, summoned two of his servants, saddled his donkey, and set off for Moriah. The donkey carried the wood. The servants carried supplies. And Isaac had no idea what he was walking into.

It took three days to get to Moriah. That gave Abraham plenty of time to think. God promised that the Savior would come through Isaac, and now God told him to kill Isaac. Still, God’s promises are always true. The author of Hebrews tells us (Hebrews 11:19) that Abraham’s conclusion was that God would bring Isaac back to life. It made more sense to Abraham that the dead would come back to life than that God’s Word could be wrong. When they arrived Moriah, Abraham told the servants (:5), **“Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. WE will worship and then WE will come back to you.”** Abraham clearly understood that sacrificing his son was an act of worship, an expression of his faith. He also indicated his conviction that God could raise the dead.

Abraham must have been fighting back tears as he and Isaac walked to the top of Mt. Moriah and Isaac innocently inquired (:7), **“Father? Yes, my son? The fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”** Abraham composed himself, showed loving concern for his son by not bluntly blabbing, “I’m going to kill you.” Abraham also expressed his faith as he replied (:8), **“God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.”** And then they continued walking in silence.

Isaac must have gone numb with surprise and fear after they built the altar and Abraham told Isaac to hold out his hands so he could tie him up and place him on the altar. He was going to be the sacrifice! Had his dad lost his mind? The father who loved him more than life itself was going to take his life? A twelve-year-old boy could easily outrun a 112-year-old man, but Isaac obeyed his father as Abraham was obeying his heavenly Father. Abraham was going to give God his most precious possession, his special son. With weepy eyes, heavy heart and trembling hand, Abraham took his knife and ...

“**Abraham! Abraham!**” a voice echoed across the empty mountaintop that startled and stopped hm. It was God himself. “**Here I am,**” (:11) Abraham replied as he looked around. God explained (:12), “**Do not lay a hand on the boy. Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.**” God finally told him why. God was testing Abraham. God already knew that Abraham had an awesome respect for him, that he feared him. But Abraham was not fully aware of how much that meant. Teachers in school do not give tests to their students to make them suffer and stress, but to get them to review what they have learned and to learn it better. God tested Abraham here to get him to review what he knew about God and his promises and to hold on to those promises even tighter.

The word God used to tell Abraham to sacrifice Isaac is the same word for the Burnt Offering in the Old Testament ceremonial laws. The Burnt Offering was the sacrifice where the animal was completely burned up. It demonstrated total commitment and trust in God. By his actions, Abraham showed that his love for Isaac was not greater than his love for God who gave him his son in the first place. It was God’s promise—and Abraham’s faith in that promise—that allowed Abraham to raise the knife over his son. In effect, Abraham was saying, “God, I’m going to trust you.” Abraham’s action on that mountain was a believer’s way of confessing, “God, even though I don’t understand why I am suffering and struggling, even though this is breaking my heart, still I’m going to leave the final outcome in your hands.” In the end, Abraham was closer to God. Faith trusts in God to provide even if it does not make sense.

Abraham then looked up and saw a ram caught by its thorns in a thicket. He took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. Abraham then called that place (:14), “**The LORD Will Provide.**”

Most of us have heard this story a few times. We know that Abraham never had to kill Isaac. It is important to note that Abraham did NOT know how this was going to turn out. He was asking, “Why?” and that means that Abraham was exactly like us as we go through life asking, “Why?” Things in this world will never make sense to us. Why are children born handicapped? Why do some people die way too young? Why do accidents happen? Why do sickness and sorrows sap our strength? Why does God let pains and problems ruin our happiness when we’re trying to live the right way? Why?

Thankfully, God does not ask us to tie up our children and reach for a knife. But he does ask other things. He asks that we honor him by submitting to and honoring our parents and our authorities in government. He asks us to love him more than wrinkled dollar bills and show it with our offerings. He asks us to recognize that our bodies are his temple and to show it by living a moral life while surrounded by an immoral world. He asks us to acknowledge that we love him more than alcohol, or social media, or our hobby, or our friends and even our family. He asks us to love him more than ourselves and to show it by swallowing our pride, not insisting on our way all the time, and humbly helping others in any way we can. For most of us, the sacrifice God asks of us is the hour by hour, day by day, unspectacular grind of life as you

- go to work and put in an honest days work
- do your homework
- prepare meals and clean up afterwards
- pay your bills and your taxes
- pray for one another and encourage each other

- provide for your family
- support the gospel ministry with your offerings and efforts
- and thousands of other things you do, day in and day out.

It was a struggle for Abraham to sacrifice his son. There's a lot he did not understand. He asked, "Why?" but kept moving forward trusting and obeying God. Isn't the same thing true for you and me today? When we are faced with difficult situations, when our faith is being tested, when we are asked to endure things that don't make a lot of sense to us, when we've cried so much that don't think we can cry anymore but the tears keep coming, when our hearts are hurting, God invites us to do what Abraham did. He invites us to cling to his promises. In his Word, God promises that he will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). He promises that he will use all things to serve for our eternal good (Romans 8:28). He promises that he's preparing a place in heaven for those who believe (John 14:3). It's all these promises and more that allow us to say with Abraham, even in the middle of the most severe tests, "God, all I can do is trust you." And with that, God's purpose for every test we face will be achieved. Our faith will be strengthened.

It is not a coincidence that God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on a mountain in the region of Moriah. About 1000 years later, King David built a city on that mountaintop called Jerusalem. David's son, Solomon, built the temple on that mountaintop (2 Chronicles 3:1) where, for about 1000 years, God's people sacrificed animals as a substitute for their sins. And then, about 1000 years after the temple was built, on a Friday we call "Good," on that same mountaintop, God sacrificed his one and only son as your substitute. On that mountaintop, the LORD provided a substitute for Isaac, and on that same mountaintop, the LORD provided a substitute for you, me, and the whole world.

Abraham reasoned that God would raise Isaac from the dead and he was right. In his heart, Abraham had already killed Isaac and he received him back from the dead. And you also will rise from the dead because Jesus Christ was your substitute. He was killed for you, so you would not have to experience separation from God. Jesus rose from the dead so you, also, can rise from the dead. Your sins are forgiven and heaven is your home.

Don't let the Devil get you thinking that God is punishing you. He already punished Jesus in your place. God does not take pleasure in your pain. He cries along with you. In painful love, he permits troubles and trials to afflict us so that he will strengthen our faith in God's promises to provide. So many things in life don't make sense now, and they won't until we have heaven's hindsight. God preserved this story about Abraham sacrificing Isaac to teach us that God uses hardships to strengthen your faith, your most precious gift. We learn to hang on to God even tighter, to pray more fervently, to listen to his Word more intently, to turn to him more often for guidance and strength, to place all our confidence in him, especially when things don't make sense to us. God always keeps his promises. He promised that he loved you more than his one and only Son and proved it. He promised that your sins are forgiven. He promised that you will be in heaven with him forever. Until then, trust in the Lord to provide. Amen.