

Abraham Demonstrates Mature Faith in God

In today's encounter, we are seeing the outcome of growth and development within Abraham's responses as the expressions of his mature faith in God. What started back in Genesis 12 with God's initial call to Abram to come out of false idol worship and into a personal relationship with the living God now comes many years later to a demonstration of fully developed mature faith in God – it has been a learning journey all the way with many mistakes and side-tracks but an outcome that vindicates both God's promises and Abe's responses.

¹*Some time later God tested Abraham. A test involves a temptation to bail! (Gen 22:1-19)*

We are not told the timeframe – Isaac is now a young man, perhaps 18 or early 20's. This whole story contains and reveals the mysteries involved in God's grace and our need for faith in the God who has called us into this faith relationship with him. There is a seeming contradiction with this story in that it begins with God being the tester, which creates a crisis for both Abraham and Isaac, and ends in God being the provider that resolves the crisis, allowing Abraham to pass the test of his faith. Our faith is will always be tested:

²*My brothers and sisters, consider it nothing but joy when you fall into all sorts of trials,* ³*because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. (Jam 1:2-3 NET)*

He said to him, 'Abraham!' 'Here I am,' he replied.

This is the seventh encounter that Abraham has had with God – it's becoming familiar!!! Abraham's response is interesting – there are no more questions or qualifications needed, as there was in earlier encounters, just a simple 'Here I am!'

²*Then God said, 'Take your son, your only son, whom you love – Isaac – and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain that I will show you.'*

Suddenly, the tone of this conversation takes a dark and foreboding turn. We are not given any insight into Abraham's internal reactions. The focus is on the relationship between Abraham and Isaac, the promised son for whom Abraham has had to wait many years to materialise. Of course, he does have another son, Ishmael, whom he has had to send away to keep Sarah happy, and this had been a sorrow for him to do (Gen 21).

But Abraham knows the voice of God now, and while he must have questions, God's word again releases faith in him and he accepts and obeys the instruction. All the promises that God has spoken to him, starting in Ur and then continuing through the various encounters with God he has had, each of which further confirmed God's promise of a son through Sarah as the progenitor of a new nation that will ultimately become the church of Jesus Christ.

³ Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about.

This is simple obedience in the face of an horrendous crisis – remembering that Isaac does not know what God has spoken to Abraham.

⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. ⁵ He said to his servants, 'Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.'

Here again is a remarkable statement of faith that Abraham has come to, even though he has, at yet, no idea how God is going to solve this situation.

⁶ Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife.

There is a beautiful picture of Isaac, carrying the heavier burden of the wood for Dad, and Dad carrying the more dangerous items of fire and the knife, without Isaac knowing the purpose of this trip. But Isaac did not come down in the last shower, and he is beginning to develop some questions of his own.

As the two of them went on together, ⁷ Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, 'Father?' 'Yes, my son?' Abraham replied. 'The fire and wood are here,' Isaac said, 'but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?'

⁸ Abraham answered, 'God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.' And the two of them went on together.

Again, Abraham demonstrates remarkable faith in the God he has come to know as the God he can trust – the one who does what he has said. But still, without any idea of how God is going to resolve this crisis – which is fast becoming a crisis for both Abraham and Isaac.

⁹ When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.

This is the high point of the crisis for both Abraham and Isaac. Imagine what is going on in their minds as Abraham ties Isaac up and then places him on the altar that Isaac has probably helped him build. This is high drama – the knife is in the air and about to come down....

¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, 'Abraham! Abraham!' 'Here I am,' he replied. ¹² 'Do not lay a hand on the boy,' he said. '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.'

This is testing to prove validity in the extreme!!! – God tests and he also provides! All God's gifts are still God's possessions – we can never afford to see his gifts as our own.

¹³ Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, 'On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.'

¹⁵ The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time ¹⁶ and said, 'I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, ¹⁸ and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.'

¹⁹ Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba. And Abraham stayed in Beersheba.

Learnings for Us

- God's gifts must never become more important to us than the Giver.
Was Isaac going to be more important to Abraham than the living God who had called him into relationship with him to secure God's redemptive purposes for humanity?
- This understanding of self-sacrificial living is difficult for us 21st Century Westerners to comprehend but this is the way of living that resides in the depths of God's being.

We see it most clearly in the life of Jesus, the eternal Son of God who willingly took responsibility for yours and my sins by taking on our human form and becoming our sin-sacrifice even though he was sinless in his own life. The trauma of his decision is clearly revealed in his Gethsemane temptation to seek an easier route other than the surrender of his own life to death. – "Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matt 26:39 NIV).

In other words, *Father, if there is some other way...but not as I will...*

The writer of Hebrews picks this up graphically:

⁷ During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. ⁸ Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered ⁹ and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. (Heb 5:7-9)

- This describes the journey of faith for each of us!

³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. (Mk 8:34-35)

God matures His faith within us by walking with us on the journey.
We make the path as we walk with him!!!