

## “Demonstrating Faith through Surrender”

**Hebrews 11:17-19; Genesis 22:1-18**

This morning we continue our study called “Greater Things” where we are being challenged to live by faith. We understand that faith is a vital part of the Christian life. Without faith there is no way that a person can be saved. Many focus their life on their good works and good intentions only, but no amount of effort can earn God’s grace. **Ephesians 2:8-9** says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” We are saved by faith alone. But faith isn’t a one-time act that is exercised the moment you trust Christ for salvation. It is how we are called to live our lives from that point forward. **Romans 1:17b** summarizes it well simply saying, “The righteous man shall live by faith.” In other words, the very moment you place your faith in Christ you are saved and rescued from your sin, but that first step of faith is the beginning of a lifelong journey of faith. As we walk with God and live for Him, we begin to realize that faith is required every day of our lives. It was for this reason that as the Apostle Paul looked at the trials and challenges that he faced in the world and, on the other hand, looked to the promises and blessings that God had given he concluded that “We walk by faith, not by sight.” **2 Corinthians 5:7**. I remind us this morning that according to **Hebrews 11:1**, “Faith is...the conviction of things not seen.” Too many believers today walk around discouraged, defeated, and distracted by the many concerns and worries of the world, but God hasn’t called us to live in such a way. We don’t have to live in fear, nervousness, or worry over this or that. We can look to God, trust His promises, and walk by faith. We may not know what is going to happen tomorrow, but if we have trusted Christ as Lord and Savior we can be confident that we know the One who holds tomorrow in His hand. We don’t have to know every detail or figure out every situation. We don’t have to try to control everything. All we need to know is the Word of God and the will of God and trust Him. Perhaps you are thinking, like many, “Pastor, that sounds good, but I am struggling. How can I put that into practice?” If you feel this way, I want you to know that you aren’t alone. In fact, the book of Hebrews was written to a people who were in the same boat. They were people who professed faith in Christ, but they were in new and uncharted territory. They constantly faced the temptation and the pressure to go back to what they knew, what was comfortable, and what was easy. The problem, though, is that God was calling them forward in their relationship with Him and the only way they could go forward and experience God’s victory was in walking by faith. The same is true of us today. God is wanting us to go forward, but in order for that to happen we must walk by faith. We have seen this illustrated in many ways through our time together, but today I want us to focus on another way that we demonstrate our faith in God – Surrender.

Show Texts

A few weeks ago we looked at the powerful illustration of Abraham and how he demonstrated faith by going forward with God. We saw how Abraham grew up in a house that worshiped all kinds of gods, but the true God of Heaven had a greater plan for him. He called Abraham to leave his homeland and go to a land that he couldn’t see at the moment. That is faith – the conviction of things not seen. Abraham trusted God and began this journey of faith. God then promised Abraham, at the age of 75, that he would have a son, and through that son his descendants would

be as many as the stars in the universe. God promised great things through this son. Well, as we pick up the passages today we see that God fulfilled that promise. It took another 25 years when, at the age of 100, Isaac was born to Abraham and Sarah. There were times that Abraham got impatient with God. There were times he tried to do his own thing, but in God's time He fulfilled His promise. By the time we pick up the story in Genesis 22 Isaac is a young man. Most scholars age him anywhere from 16-30 years old. Which means Abraham is at least 115 years old at this point. Abraham may have been an old man, but God wasn't through with him. God still had a plan and purpose for his life. God still had things to show him, work in him, and accomplish through him. By the way, to our elders this morning, you may feel like you have retired and your best years are behind you, but I want you to know that as long as God gives you life and breath you can be a great blessing to the body of Christ. Your best years can be these years as you spend your time and energy for Him. It was here in Abraham's old age that God now gave him the greatest test of his life. In this test God would point to the most precious thing in his life and call him to literally surrender it and lay it on the altar.

### **I. The Call to Surrender (vs. 1-2)**

It is important to remind us that the message starts with God. Again, this call to faith didn't begin with Abraham. It began with God. God had initiated the relationship with Abraham by calling him to leave his home. Now God is furthering this relationship with a significant test. Please understand that this test was unique to Abraham. Nowhere else in Scripture do we see God requiring this of someone. God had a specific purpose for this test. Here was the call. He said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love, and offer him as a burnt offering on the Mount Moriah." Who can fathom the thought? What a high demand of God. God says, "Abraham, I want you to take your most beloved treasure, your only son, and offer him as a sacrifice to Me." In other words, God asked for what was most precious in his life. He didn't ask for Abraham's bulls, lambs, or the first-fruits of his crops. He asked for his son. Abraham knew exactly what God was asking of him, but he didn't know all the details. God didn't spell out his plan to Abraham. God didn't even tell him why He was doing this. God didn't tell him what the outcome would be. God wasn't saying, "Now, Abraham, I'm testing you. If you do this, then I will do this for you." No, God just looked at what was most important in Abraham's life and said, basically, "Sacrifice what you have for Me." I believe what God was doing was giving us a picture of the command that Jesus taught us in the New Testament. In **Matthew 22:37-38** Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment." We should love God over anything and anyone else. Our love for Him should be greater than all. God's command was testing his faith in Him and his love for Him. The test defied logic because it was something that, humanly speaking, Abraham would want to reject. I'm sure as Abraham heard the words of the Lord every word felt like a dagger in his heart. But the question to be answered was, how far Abraham would go in obedience? Would he surrender to the Lord and obey?

Have you ever been there? Have you ever been in a place where God was testing your faith? Has God ever called you to let go of something that was precious and important to you? Have you ever wrestled with God's will because it seemed too heavy or too high a cost? If so, you know how

painful this process is. I have walked through this at times when I had to let go of my own personal dreams or plans or let go of a loved one that was passing or let go of a hope that I selfishly clung to. There are many illustrations, but the primary point of emphasis is that this act of obedience started with God's call to surrender his best as an act of worship to God.

## **II. The Choice of Surrender (vs. 3)**

Can you imagine being in Abraham's shoes in that moment? Who would ever want to offer their child as a sacrifice? What would you do? In Abraham's case, his hopes and dreams were all wrapped up in this child. What was he to do? In this moment, I'm sure that Abraham was wrestling with this. This was a heavy calling and a serious moment. He began to ponder the situation. The truth is that this command made very little logical sense to him. There are several reasons that this didn't make sense: 1) This wasn't the nature of God. This command seems entirely against the law of God, which clearly forbids murder. And this would not only be murder, but the worst of all murders. 2) This doesn't make sense because God gave no reason of why Isaac must be offered as a sacrifice. There was absolutely no explanation for such a profound command. 3) This didn't make sense because of the previous promises of God. God had already promised Abraham that through him He would make a great nation, and that through him all the families of the earth would be blessed. Isaac was the fulfillment of God's promises and Abraham knew that God would fulfill the remainder of the promise through Isaac. What was Abraham to do?

### **A. He Responded with Immediate Obedience**

Even when Abraham didn't understand the "why?", he clearly understood the "what?" God was calling him to do. He didn't have every answer, but he knew what God was saying, so notice how he responded. Verse 3 says, "So Abraham rose early in the morning." I want us to realize that Abraham didn't hesitate. He gave instant, unquestionable obedience to God. The command didn't make much sense. The command seemed to contradict the very nature of God. Yet, Abraham didn't hesitate to obey God. **Warren Wiersbe** said it well, "True faith involves a willingness to obey God no matter what the cost." The command was probably given in the night and early the next morning Abraham set out to do it. He didn't delay or take time to deliberate. So often we delay in obeying the leading of God and it always leads to lost time and often times a hardened, compromising heart. Abraham could have made excuses, which we would be likely to do. He could have argued with God. He could have stalled. But through his actions he proved that he loved God supremely and he trusted God's will over his own and responded with obedience.

### **B. He Resolved to Give God His All**

Not only did he understand the "what?", most importantly he understood the "Who?" that was calling him. Because it was God calling him, Abraham had already settled in his mind that God was worthy of the very best he could bring. Have you ever thought about all that God's call required? We understand what God was requiring of him, but we can easily overlook the amount of work that all of this required. This was a laborious task. God told him what to do, but he didn't tell Abraham every detail about what must be done. Abraham had to use some common sense and some initiative in obeying the Lord's command. He was completely

obedient to God's Word. The very next morning he saddled his donkey, got his servants together along with Isaac, split the wood for the offering, and began the journey to Mount Moriah. This journey was over 50 miles and was mostly rough terrain. It was a three-day journey. And again, he was doing this by faith, waiting for God to show him exactly where the offering was to be given. However, this was no burden to Abraham. He had already determined that God was worthy of his absolute best, even if that meant offering his most precious possession. As he walked forward in faith, finally the time came when he saw the place that God revealed to him. He stopped the small caravan, commanded the servants to stay at the base of the hill, placed the wood on Isaac, grabbed his knife and something to help start the fire, and he and Isaac began to walk further up the mountain. When he got to the top he built an altar, arranged all the wood, bound up his son Isaac, laid him on the altar, grabbed the knife, and raised it in the air. Can you imagine the moment? He is offering his best to God. He has given his time, his energy, his efforts, his resources, and now in this climactic moment he is in the process of offering his son.

I wonder at this point, "Are you doing ok?" Doesn't this seem like absolute radical obedience? Doesn't this seem so strange to us today? I believe that this seems so radical to us because we are so accustomed to compromising with God and giving Him less than our best. We are often fine with giving God the leftovers of our lives, our time, our resources, etc. The thought of setting aside our plans for God's sounds absurd to many of us. Unfortunately, over time we can get so comfortable in our relationship with the Lord that we begin to get complacent and think that we have the right to bargain with God. Friend, I remind us all that God desires and deserves our wholehearted, total obedience. Abraham made a clear choice of surrender and obedience. How is this possible? The next point shows us.

### **III. The Criteria for Surrender (vs. 4-10)**

Please understand that it was no accident that Abraham responded this way to God. Remember, this was God testing him and he passed with flying colors. I wonder for each of us, if we were being tested in such a way, how we would do? How was Abraham able to respond with such immediate obedience? How can we do the same? I believe Abraham responded in the time of testing so well because there were several things about God that had already been settled in his heart and mind. I will list them as exhortations for us this morning.

#### **A. We Must Believe the Promises of God**

How could Abraham obey God with such confidence? **Hebrews 11:17-18** tells us, "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had RECEIVED THE PROMISES was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, 'In Isaac your descendants shall be called.' " In other words, Abraham didn't know every detail, but he knew with clarity and conviction that God had already promised to bless his descendants through Isaac. And, Isaac wasn't yet married and had no children, yet. This means that in this moment Isaac wasn't controlled by his feelings, emotions, wants, or desires. All of these would have led him in the wrong direction. He didn't depend on the advice of others. This was a test for Abraham that nobody else could have possibly understood. Abraham was in a position where he had to

depend completely on the promises of God. Please understand that God's promises empower us to walk by faith and not by sight. Walking by sight would have been terrifying in this situation, but because Abraham believed God's promises he had nothing to fear or fret. He knew that God's will never contradicts His Word. God never breaks His promises. Clinging to God's promises helps us live today in light of what He has promised for tomorrow. I like the way **Joseph Parker** described it. He said, "Great lives are trained by great promises." This was true of Abraham. He did this because he trusted that God would fulfill His Word. He couldn't in the moment fully map out every detail, but he knew God's promise to bless his descendants through Isaac and he trusted that God would do what He said He would do.

### **B. We Must Believe in the Provision of God**

We pick up the story again in Genesis 22:5-8. When the small band of wanderers reached their destination, Abraham instructed the servants to stay behind, but notice specifically what he said about he and Isaac. He said, "You guys stay here, and Isaac and I will go up there and worship." The Hebrew word used there literally means that we will go "bow our knees" to the Father. But that isn't all. He continued, "We will worship and then we will return to you." How could Isaac return if he was offered as a sacrifice? Can you see Abraham's faith? He believed that God would somehow provide a substitute as a sacrifice in Isaac's place. Then the two would return safely. Then we see his faith even more clearly as he and Isaac make their way up the mountain. In verse 7 Isaac nervously asks, "Daddy, we've got the torch to make a fire and we've got all the wood we need to make a fire, but where is the lamb for the offering?" Again, Abraham, not yet seeing what God would do, believed what God would do. In verse 8 he answered, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." Abraham was confident in God's provision. Now, Abraham didn't know how God would provide. He also didn't know when God would provide. He simply believed that somehow, and in some way, God would provide for him. By the way, the fact that Isaac kept walking with his daddy suggests that he, too, believed that God would provide a substitute. Friend, don't ever doubt that God will provide you with everything you need to follow Him. God's will never lacks His supply. **\*\*ILL:** Outreach Pastor, left the business world to go into the ministry. Serious question about finances. Randomly received a \$10,000 check from a distant relative who had inherited some money. The point is that we can trust God to provide us with all that is needed to walk in obedience to Him.

### **C. We Must Believe in the Power of God**

Abraham was convinced of God's provision, but up to this point the provision hadn't come. He has made the altar and stacked the wood and still there is no provision. So, he continues on. He binds Isaac, places him on the altar, grabs the knife, and raises it in the air. Verse 10 says "Abraham stretched out his hand to slay his son." In other words, he is literally a split second away from the dagger coming down upon his son. How could he do this? How could he possibly be going through with this action? This is crazy. **Hebrews 11:19a** tells us how. I love this verse because it tells us just how much faith Abraham had in God. It says, "He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead." Abraham hadn't always had this type of faith. When God had told him years earlier that he was going to have a son in his old age, he

laughed in unbelief. But, Abraham soon discovered that with God all things are possible. God can do what no man can do. So, having experienced that, he learned not to doubt God but to trust God, believing that all things are possible with Him. Abraham was about to sacrifice his son because his faith in God was so great that he believed that even if his son died, that God had the power to raise him from the dead. Through his actions Abraham was saying, “God I don’t know Your full plan here. You’re calling me to sacrifice my own son, which I will do because I know that You have promised that through him You would make a great nation. So, God I am believing that You will raise him from the dead and fulfill Your promise.” This is extraordinary faith, but it is all the more amazing when we consider that prior to this moment there had been no record of a single resurrection. This is faith – conviction of things not yet seen. Friend, do you have this kind of faith? Is God calling you to lay something down in surrender to Him? If it is God’s will, I assure you that you can trust His promises, His provision, His power, and even His presence every step of the way.

#### **IV. The Celebration of Surrender (vs. 11-18)**

It may seem strange to call surrender a celebration. The truth is that every time God has brought me to a point of surrender it has been a very painful process. When you are bringing something as an offering or a sacrifice, there is a death. It may be your own agenda, plans, dreams, etc. It is painful. When God called me away from our previous church family, it was the most painful thing I have ever experienced. I grieved as I laid down various things. But, in laying down what God was calling me away from, He put in my heart and my hands what He was calling me to. I refer to it as a celebration because the end result of surrendering to the Lord is absolute peace and joy regardless of the situation or circumstance. Notice what God did for Abraham. As the knife is raised in the air about to come down upon his son, God rewarded Abraham’s faith and obedience. He did so by reminding Abraham of His promise and by intervening and provided a substitute in Isaac’s place. Remember, Abraham believed God would provide but he didn’t know how. As the knife was in the air the angel of the Lord called out, “Abraham, don’t stretch out your hand against the lad. Don’t do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son from Me.” Suddenly Abraham looked around him and saw a ram that was caught in the thick brush. God provided that ram, there, as a substitute in Isaac’s place. Friend, you can rest assured every time that God always provides for us when we surrender our all to Him. In fact, God’s provision in this moment had such a dramatic impact on Abraham that he called the name of the place “Jehovah Jireh”, which means “The Lord will see to it” or “The Lord will provide.” Can you picture the celebration and the joy that must have occurred? As Abraham laid that ram on the offering and took his son off of it, I imagine he wept tears of joy, embraced his son, and celebrated. God in His power had provided life for Isaac by providing a substitutionary sacrifice. Please don’t hear this truth without understanding the powerful picture that God was giving. In this amazing moment that God was providing a substitute, Abraham understood what this meant. It was the Doctrine of Atonement. God gave Abraham a glimpse of His plan in rescuing all mankind. Abraham saw first-hand what it meant to have a substitute die in one’s place. Years later, John the Baptist would be preaching and ministering to Abraham’s descendants and suddenly a man named Jesus came walking by. Immediately, John the Baptist declared, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” **John 1:29b**. In other words, John identified Jesus

as the only One who could be the perfect substitute for the death that we deserved. The only way that Isaac could be saved and rescued from death was for God Himself to provide an innocent lamb as a substitute in his place. Isaac was bound and as good as dead when God provided a way to be saved. The same is true for all mankind spiritually. Left to ourselves, we are bound by our sins and we are spiritually dead. But, when we were bound and hopeless, Jesus came as a perfect substitute to lay down His life for us in our place. Because He gave His life, we are able to be freed. This is why Jesus summarized Abraham's actions in **John 8:56** saying, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." Abraham saw God's amazing provision of a substitute and rejoiced and celebrated because he understood that this was a picture of how God was going to rescue and redeem His people.