

“Faith” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Lent Midweek 4 – March 15, 2023

- I. **Genesis 22:1-18** – previously read
- II. **Faith is our word for the day.**
 - a. God tells Abraham to go out and kill his long awaited son, and our father in the faith is actually willing to go through with it.
 - b. This story is our example for faith.... And yet, when we stop and think about it... is this what we have in mind for faith?
 - c. I guess we can make it better by telling ourselves that Abraham didn't really go through with the whole plan... that in the end, God was merciful and gave him a ram instead of making him go through with it...
 - i. Of course, then we jump ahead to Jesus and the sacrifice the Father made for us, and we give thanks that He did not back out – but He handed over His only Son for us.
 - d. But then again, how in the world did God come up with this plan, and how could He ask Abraham to do this in the first place?
 - e. By the way, this story is the example of faith in the Scriptures.
 - i. Just a couple weeks ago we read Romans 4 as Paul tells us that God promised Abraham that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the sky, and “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness” (Rom 4:3, citing Gn 15:6).
 1. Abraham believed God's promise, and God considered Abraham's faith to be righteousness.
 - ii. This faith leads to “justification,” or the fact that we are called not guilty by our faith alone.
 - iii. Now, in Hebrews and James, these letters both hold up Abraham's true faith... and I often say that when a story is found in the Bible more than twice – in this case four times – we should take note that God is making a major point...
 - iv. Abraham's faith is at the very heart of our understanding of salvation.
 - f. But, if you think about it, this story makes no sense... because God is asking Abraham to sacrifice the long awaited Savior... before He's even born!
 - i. As God promised to bless all the nations through this gift of Isaac, killing him would take away the blessing God planned for us all!
 - ii. It's along the lines of God commanding Mary to kill Jesus.
- III. **What does Abraham do after God tells him to do this terrible thing?**
 - a. Does he sit down with Sarah and let her know?
 - b. Does he talk to Isaac and explain what's about to happen?
 - c. Does he explain to the servants that if his kid runs away they need to chase him down and bring him back?
 - d. Well, Abraham's thoughts and feelings are not in the Bible.

- i. But we know he must have had some pretty strong feelings given that carrying out this plan will destroy his marriage, his family... and the future blessing God planned for all people.
- e. Maybe Abraham is resentful and angry that God is putting him through this.
 - i. Why would God come through on such an audacious promise to bring Isaac into the world by a woman in her nineties – only to take the child away?
- f. Maybe Abraham felt the urge to rebel and offer himself as the sacrifice instead.
 - i. We don't know, but the feelings Abraham had did not take over his actions, because God's promise was bigger than Abraham's feelings.
- g. Perhaps Abraham was overwhelmed with despair... thinking that God was just toying with him – and he would just get this all over with and give up hope...
- h. Abraham may have been filled with anxiety.
 - i. How would Sarah and the others react?
 - ii. Would they come after him and try to exact justice for the death of Isaac?
 - iii. How could he possibly live with himself after following through with such a horrible thing?
 - 1. But God's promise was stronger than the guilt and fear.

IV. **In the end, Abraham's faith carried the day.**

- a. Hebrews 11 says, "[Abraham] considered that God was able even to raise [Isaac] from the dead" (Heb 11:19).
- b. God had promised him so many descendants through Isaac, he couldn't count them, and Abraham believed that promise... even though God Himself seemed to be taking it away.
 - i. The promise was bigger than Abraham's resentment or anger... stronger than hopelessness... and the promise was greater than any fear or anxiety.
- c. You know, God makes that promise to us in different ways.
 - i. The promise in baptism is, "I have called you by name. You are My child. I am well pleased with you."
 - ii. The promise in the Lord's Supper is, "This is My body given for you... this is My blood, shed for the forgiveness of your sins."
 - iii. In a broad sense, Gospel is a promise, "I am your God, and you are My people. Your sins will not break that relationship or interfere with it in the future."

V. **Yet, sometimes we struggle with these promises.**

- a. When little kids get really sick and the parents wonder how God could let this stuff happen.

- b. When a young man who's headed for the seminary to be a pastor collapses and dies on the basketball court.
- c. When a mom and grandmother passes away at a young age even though she desperately wants to be there for her family.
- d. What do we do when we feel that God has done us wrong – or at the very least we feel like He made a bad choice?
 - i. Some people put God on probation – or they say they will trust Him only if He does what we think is right....
 - 1. If the person lives or whatever we deem is right, then we will trust Him – but if the person dies, we will never go to church again.
- e. It's interesting, but the Bible does have lots of examples of people who complained to God, so it's not crazy for us to be upset with God at times.
 - i. However, the problem is when we stop moving forward in faith.
- f. Abraham certainly didn't stop moving forward in faith – he didn't wait to figure everything out before he moved forward with God's will...
 - i. In fact, as Hebrews says that Abraham figured God could raise Isaac from the dead, that means that Abraham didn't know how God's promise would be kept – but that he would just move forward anyway!
 - ii. So the best option for all of us is to live our faith out and see how it goes... trusting that our God knows what is best.
- g. On more than one occasion, I have worked with people going through horrible experiences and wonder if they believe in God or not.
 - i. Through the doubts, as they kept going in faith, they found that their feelings at the time did not change God's promise in the end.
 - ii. Martin Luther's advice in a case like this is to go ahead and experience the doubt (since you can't help it anyway), but don't draw any firm conclusions.
 - 1. He says that the doubts are like birds... You can't stop the birds from landing on your head, but you can stop them from nesting in your hair.
 - 2. So it's not so much about these people trying to figure out in their heads if they believed or not – it was about them continuing in the faith that sometimes doesn't make any sense at all.
- h. In the end, the promises of God are what we have.
 - i. Either they are enough for you or they aren't.
 - ii. But if they are enough, then not even God himself can shake them.¹

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