

Genesis 22

Part 1

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[00:00:01] In the story of a man of like passions with ourselves, the story of his faith and his testimony, the story of his happiness and his reward.

But we can never become aware that there looms behind this human story a far greater story, greater than any human or earthly or even cosmic dimension, that looms the story of the Father and his love for the Son and that one great sacrifice of character.

Like many of those who have gone before me, therefore, it is quite natural to divide our consideration this evening into two parts. First of all to speak about the testing of Abraham's faith [00:01:01] and afterwards to speak about the Father and the Son.

There was in a religious education lesson in school a period spent studying the first chapter of James, and the first and the immediate consideration was, Brethren, my brethren, come with all joy when you fall into divers temptations.

And the teacher said to a certain boy, Now, what do you think are divers temptations?

After a few minutes thought he said mermaids.

There is evidently some explanation necessary about the use of the word temptations in Holy Scripture and in a few moments I want to try that we should together examine this temptation that came to Abraham [00:02:08] so that we may get guidance for our own lives in it.

From the beginning, Abraham's faith must have been a pretty robust plot. When he appears on the story, in any detail, in the twelfth chapter of our book, we are told that God said to him, Get thee out of thy land, it is your land that I will show thee, and dwell there. And he obeyed and went.

You consider yourself to be the junior branch of a clan or tribe with your established connections and your established home and your established position and all that goes with it. And suddenly the voice of an unseen God comes to you and says, [00:03:02] Get out from this land and go to the land that you don't know that I will show you. But Abraham obeyed and went.

Then he gradually became aware that the God who promised was able to perform.

He gradually became aware that God could keep him without human support, even in a land like that.

And God would make promises and keep them. But at the beginning, Abraham had nothing but the naked Word of God and on obedience to the naked Word of God he shared the course of his life. And if we learn nothing but this lesson, here is a matter of tremendous importance for every one of us, on to learn that we can take up their Word of God and stake our everything on it and God who promises is able to perform.

[00:04:04] I hope we shall get a very vivid impression of how far God who promises is able to perform. But that was the beginning of Abraham's faith. Abraham's faith before this story had sustained several severe tests. It was in the beginning, as I said, a very severe test for me. And we have it still in this city.

In the summary of Abraham's faith in Hebrews chapter 11, to be told to get out of this land, this was a severe test, the first test for his faith. He found that God had changed his faith by the weary pilgrimage in this strange land and so different from the civilized city which he had left. Yet he sustained that test and he lived in that land. And there's a wonderful lesson for us in the chapter that says that God said to Abraham, lift up thine eyes and look upon the land, north, south, east and west, [00:05:03] to thee I will give this land unto thy seed to possess it. And that, I'm convinced, corresponds to you and me to Ephesians chapter 3. There's the depth and the height and the breadth and the length of all the wonderful message that God has given us in Christ and we have got to look up upon that. His faith was tested in the separation from Lot.

His faith was tested in the fact that Ishmael had to be set aside. But all these tests were small tests compared with the test that he is now put to, his supreme test, which we have read in chapter 22.

I begin to pass out of these things that God tempted Abraham. Now, on the subject of a more careful explanation of temptation, this problem is a New Testament problem as well as an Old Testament problem, [00:06:02] it is perfectly clear by the simple reading of the word God that the word temptation is used in two distinct senses at least. It is used when we are tempted by and to ill.

But it is also used in the sense that God tests or tries our faith or tries us in order to bring out the good, in order to lead us on to better things. As it says in the fourth chapter of Romans, which we didn't read, to glorify himself. Now, needless to say, the test of the second kind, it was a trial or a temptation of the second kind, time, that came to Abraham from God in this story.

Now, I want to examine the real nature of that test a little more closely.

It has been thought that the real nature of this test [00:07:02] was that God had promised Abraham a wonderful gift, and that was the gift of a son. A son of himself and his own wife, Sarah, had been promised the gift of a son. And after that gift had been given, and all the hopes that Abraham had made and learned and cherished from the word of God were centered in that son, Isaac. But God is calling him to renounce, to give up, by sacrificing his son, Isaac, so that it could be seen whether Abraham was resting in the gifts or in the giver. Now, needless to say, there may be some truth in this point of view, but I rather think it suggests to you that it is exactly the central part of the test that Abraham's faith sustained. I shall explain why Abraham knew that he was going to get Isaac back again, perhaps by resurrection, but he knew he was going to get Isaac back again. [00:08:04] We could pass over in detail at least four or five verses in the preceding chapters when it was perfectly clear that the word of God was to be fulfilled, and it wasn't a question of getting another son instead, but these promises, stretching away into the far, remote and distant future, were to be fulfilled in Isaac,

and on these grounds alone, Abraham might have known that God would give him back again his son even though by resurrection. There is a statement, a sentence in the story itself, which makes it perfectly plain. Verse 5, Abraham said to the young man, Abide ye here with us, and I and the lamb will go yonder and worship and come again to you. He knew that when he came back to his servants, Isaac would come with him, [00:09:01] and we are specifically told by the later revelation of the Holy Spirit in the 11th chapter of Hebrews that Abraham knew that he was going to receive Isaac again from the dead as it were in a figure.

So that when Abraham received this command, and with this wonderfully instantaneous obedience, he set out to fulfill the command, he did so with the knowledge that God would restore his son even though it be by resurrection. And therefore, I suggest to you, and I have to make everything to this evening on the fact, that it was really a test of Abraham's faith in resurrection.

Did Abraham really believe that God was able and willing to raise the dead? Did Abraham really believe that God would intervene, thus unheard of manner, and restore his son to vision by resurrection? It was in fact a test of Abraham's faith in resurrection.

[00:10:05] It was a test of his faith in God's power to fulfill all his work in the resurrection life.

Now, for the purposes of not only our conference here, but for the purpose of the last evening of our conference, I am very anxious to take this point and use it to show how, essentially, a faith in fulfillment in the resurrection life is a real Christian faith.

If your faith is in Christ, and you're one of his people, and you have come out of his side, then that faith is in a God who will fulfill his promises in the resurrection world. And this is a fact of the most magnificent practice we've got. If we were to turn this evening to the resurrection chapter, 1 Corinthians chapter 15 in the New Testament, [00:11:06] we would find that in various parts of the Gospels there are two descriptions of a certain manner of life. In the first place, the Apostle Paul says, let us eat and drink and by convocation be merry, for tomorrow we die. Whereas, at the very end of the chapter, he says, let us be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as we know that our labour is not in vain in the Lord. What makes the difference? What stands between the philosophy of life of almost everybody around us, let us eat, drink and be merry, and make the best of this life because it's all we'll get. And the one who says, with our eye upon the future world, let us be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. What makes the difference is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the certain fact of the resurrection of all we know. [00:12:03] But now is Christ risen from the dead?

And it says, although in the other case it says, for tomorrow we die, it says, let us be steadfast, unmovable, because tomorrow we live, because tomorrow we enter into the life of the real life, because tomorrow we are going to be raised to live and to reign with Christ, and to be in the Father's house forever. The practical difference between the philosophy that commands the world, and the philosophy that commands us, the obedience that commands us, and for us, if we are the children of God, by faith and righteousness, the thing that stands between is the resurrection, the triumphant resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, and the certainty of the resurrection of all the people with him in his good time. And so, what you have done, and what I have done, in becoming committed Christians, [00:13:03] is that we have committed ourselves to the promise and power of God to give the real fulfilment of all the wonders he has promised in the life of us to come. In a very, very striking passage, the Apostle, one of the Apostles, the Apostle Peter says to the Lord Jesus Christ,

we have left all and followed thee. We have left all and followed thee. What do we have there for? And the Lord says to him, you will have in this life a hundred more friends and homes, father, mother, sister, brother, family, persecutions, but we've got life to come, in the world to come, life everlasting. And that is what shines before us if we are serving the Lord Jesus Christ. And we have another passage which is very much at the same point, another passage which says, what shall it profit a man?

He gain the whole world and lose his own soul. [00:14:04] He that loveth his life in this world shall lose it, but he that looseth his life in this world shall keep it unto a life eternal. I'm sure our dear brother, John Robertson, who moved us all so much the other day when he was telling us the story of his experiences, he won't mind if I remind you again of certain parts of the story.

Remember at the beginning, the first slide in which he described England's green and pleasant land. May it come to him from Churchill, Mr. Churchill, or from William Blake. So we have built Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land. Well, the voice of God came to him, and he left what was life to him, England's green and pleasant land, and the animal hospitality, which gave him such satisfaction and was really life to him. [00:15:03] And he went across there to a parched and dried up land. God has given him new friends, and new homes, and new brothers and sisters. But above all, in spite of all the adversity and trial and difficulty that come to those who live a life like this, whether it be in this country or abroad, that in the resurrection world, that in the life to come, that the flowering fruit of the promise of God is to be seen, and in the world to come, there will be life everlasting. If you are a committed Christian, you are committed yourself to the God of resurrection, who will fulfill the full extent of his promises, not in this life, but in the world to come. There used to be a very well-known story of a man who called himself a mighty fine, mighty Christian, and he wrote to a local newspaper to find out that he had sown his field, he had ploughed his field on Sundays, and he had sown his field on Sundays, [00:16:04] and he had picked his field on Sundays, and he had treated the grain on Sundays, and he had a record crop. And this was to prove that there was nothing he was doing. Someone wrote an answer in the same local paper and said, Dear sir, I would like to point out that God does not rule out his final accounts in October. God's final accounts, when you and I will see the result of the fact that we have committed ourselves in Christ to the God of resurrection, it's not in this life, it's in the world to come. And that's one of the secrets of the intellectual mystery of the inequality of suffering and pleasure in this life.

Why? Because God, with all wisdom and all love, doesn't settle his accounts in this world. God's accounts are settled in the world to come. And we may rejoice and be strengthened and may be more firm than ever in the fact [00:17:04] that we have committed ourselves to the God of resurrection.

Now I turn to the second part of the subject of the father and the son.

It's very striking to me that the first two references to love in Holy Scripture are in the second verse of chapter 22, Take thou my son, and only son Isaac, whom thou lovest.

And the second reference is in the chapter we had read to us by Dr. Sheffield last Sunday, and the last verse of chapter 24, it says, Isaac loved her, and he was comforted after his mother's death.

[00:18:02] Now these are the first two mentions in Scripture of love.

The first one is the love of a father for a son, and the second one is the love of a bridegroom for a

brother.

And we only begin with our minds illuminated and informed by Holy Scripture, we only begin to reflect upon this before it begins to dawn upon us, that in this love of the father for the son, and in this love of the bridegroom for the bride, we are lifted right out of the realm of the story of Abraham, and there is presented to us the pivotal eternal truth, the love of the father for the son, and the love of the bridegroom for the bride, by which he should be introduced into that form of love where he was. [00:19:04] Now I want to think particularly this evening of the love of the father for the son. Most of us, I think, at the beginning of this story would be able to see marvelous facts wherein the story as we read it is a shadow of a greater.

The story as we read it is a very early presentation of the father and the son.

In verse 2, we take now by the son, let us think of the many phrases which in the one hand present the keenness of the child, and on the other hand represent the tremendous importance of the love that is here presented. Take now by son, thy only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest.

[00:20:02] The father loves the son, but the father who loves his son is going to bring him the sacrifice, and the involvement of both the father and the son is presented in verse 6, where it says they went, both of them, together. It is all how easy it is for us to forget the part the father played in the great, dreadful reality of Calvary.

It is in him we can say to God the Father, for in thee we find the source of that stream of love so deep and broad in the stream that none can fathom, for it is flowed by Calvary's cross. And so the son is brought the sacrifice.

But if we were to slightly alter the words in order to bring out the contrast with the New Testament story more plainly, it is as though the voice of the heavenly King, great Abraham, had said, spare the lamb. [00:21:06] But we are reminded in that part of Romans 8, once again, which we didn't read, if God spared not, there was no withdrawal from the ultimate sacrifice, and the father sent the son to be the saviour of the world. If God spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things? And I have explained already, very plainly indicated, that Abraham received Isaac in the resurrection of man, picturing the wonderful, victorious resurrection of the Lord his God. In chapter 24, when we read of the story of the son going to the Rhine, he told the relatives of the woman he found, my master has given him all things. My master has made him heir of all that he possesses, [00:22:01] and so in resurrection life, and ascended to the right hand of God, the Lord Jesus Christ is the heir of all things, as we read in Hebrews chapter 1. And it is from that position, glorified in power and majesty, and the heir of all things, that God has sent down, we may irrevocably say, all the servants, his servants, that he has sent down the Holy Spirit, that he might seek and find, and bring a bride for his son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Now that bride, composed of all those whose faith he trusts, might become a share of that whole of love, after which Abraham sent to bring the bride to Israel.

Now let us think very particularly of this wonderful fact in the second verse of our chapter, I am only son whom thou lovest.

We therefore have presented, in these few words, the fact of the love that the Father has placed upon the Son, [00:23:05] and this is something which goes back to our love of speed, the Lord Jesus

Christ has informed the foundation of the world. At least one very important term, speed of love, is the person who loves finds satisfaction in the person who is loved.

You can see that young pair, it is so delightful, they cross the road hand in hand, and horns can blow, and shackles can roar, and the sirens can sound, but they are absolutely oblivious to all this. They are only concerned with each other, and the little world from which everyone else is shut up, where they are entirely satisfied with each other, and they don't need to think of anybody else. I don't think this is funny, but it is. It gives a real representation of what is one of the main, real elements in love, and that is satisfaction. [00:24:02] You will see it, of course, also in the love of parents and children. The time comes when it becomes manifest that there has to be, and it is not possible for the parent to retain a very exclusive possession of their child, but for the very end of life, they never cease to take the greatest possible care in speaking about the parent in speaking about the child. There is a great satisfaction there to find in the child, and this element of satisfaction in a person, and not meaning other things, is one of the main elements in love. From what we have presented to us by the Lord Jesus Christ who came forth from heaven, we have that world when the father loved the son, a world of complete satisfaction, in which the father loved the son, and there was not at all a need to complete a perfection of the scene. [00:25:01] The father loved the son, and there was not a little centre, not a great soul of satisfaction centred on that. Well, it was in order that that world of divine love might shine forth upon us, might shine forth upon those of the Lord Jesus Christ who came to seek and to save, that he did come, he came that he might introduce us into the love of the father. If you were to ask me, and I feel certain that a great many here will give the same answer, if you were to ask me what is the main central fact of Christianity, I would say it is the revelation of the father and the knowledge of the father.

And I think we ought to say to ourselves and each other, we have well begun on the first page of true Christian maturity until we are served by that altar where the true incense arises [00:26:04] concerning the father's satisfaction with the son. This is the very centre and the heart of Christianity. Where do we step in practice in the Old Testament? Well, I think you could tell me, if we were to pause and consider it, there is that brief little part of the Gospel of John from chapter 13 to chapter 17.

I don't suggest that you should spoil your main Bible by doing so, but if you've got a small part of the Gospel of John so common, and mark every reference to the father or my father, I haven't been permitted to see what the distinction between the two is yet, but for the moment we take them together. If you were to mark every reference to the father or my father, you would find that the very heart of its subject is found in those three chapters from 13 to 17. Outside, however you look at it, [00:27:04] you have the majesty of Roman peace ruling over all, or you have the brutality of the Roman imperial standing up for all, or you have the treachery of the Jewish priests, or you have the vigour of the Jewish mob, but inside, inside there, twelve men and the blessed son of God speaking to them are the father. And he says to them, the time has come, that I must depart out of this world to the father. He says, if I go away, I will come again and receive unto myself that where I am going may be in my father's house are many mansions.

He says a little later, as my father has loved me, so have I loved you.

And here these twelve men are bound by these bonds of love that come withstood to the blessed son of God there, [00:28:01] and he is bound to the father and loving him. And by these inward bonds that are invisible to the eyes of men, but by the bonds of the church, you have this inwardly knit company of those who are able to rejoice and are being led into the knowledge of the father's love for the son.

In chapter 16 he says, the father himself loves you because he has loved me. And I read you what the Lord Jesus Christ said at the very beginning of that prayer. In order to encourage you never to go far from these chapters. When you come into the moment of grace, never to go far from these chapters, which above all others present to you the knowledge of the father and the love of the father, and the words designed by our Savior and the Spirit of God to lead you into the experience and the knowledge of the love of the father in Christ Jesus our Lord. The Lord Jesus Christ said, Father, I know that they also have asked you to be with me where I am, [00:29:06] that they may hold my glory, which thou hast given me, for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. The world hath not known me, but these have known that I have sent thee, and I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it that the love, the last words of the passage, the last words of the prayer, that the love, for which God has loved thee, may be in them, and I in them.

Is it possible to do the rest of our Bibles without starting out from the sacred pit? It is the absolute marvel of these chapters in which the blessed Son of God speaks to us of the father and his love. Now, it is that there might be an outlet to us and into our poor hearts [00:30:01] that the Lord Jesus Christ has come forth. He said, If any man thirsts, let him come unto me and drink.

And the Lord Jesus Christ has come forth that by his dying on the cross and by his gift of the Holy Ghost there might be a channel by which the perfect serenity and satisfaction and love of that divine home that is foregone to us. If any man thirsts, let him come unto me and drink.

I think perhaps one of the main impressions that many of us will take away from this conference is the thought struck by Mr. Tyson last Thursday evening, and that is that what the world, and I mean by that the contemporary world, what I have called, and you realize I must have said it more than once, but bizarre thoughts that the world takes these days to try to establish such values. You have on the one hand [00:31:02] the world of the establishment with all the hollowness of its society and all the wretchedness of its values, and on the other hand you have those who revolt against this, and they're seen in all kinds of ways only well known to us in the modern world. Turn away from that.

What do they look for?

Above all, it seems to me, they look for freedom. Whatever might be the immediate kind of manifestation, if you talk to them, if you listen to them, speaking relatively to one another, comes out, they're looking for freedom, and they find the biggest bondage of all. But the fact is that if you come to Christ, you've got freedom.

If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. You're made free of the love of God. You're made free of the Father's house. And is it any wonder that you've got peace and joy and hope when you've got the very love of God [00:32:02] which is adored in your hearts by the Holy Ghost and the Queen in you? And out of that perfect serenity and satisfaction of the love that moves in the divine hope in heaven, then these things will travel down to us as the Lord took us to Christ. And is it any wonder that we have found that all that man needs, all that can possibly be needed, all that the world has searched for, the desire of all nations, that all generations, in their successive waves, have a passion that the society in which they live has sought for. We've got that. The God of hope can fill us with all joy and peace in believing. Well, how can it be otherwise when it's the very heart of the divine love that has come down to us through our Lord Jesus Christ?

Now, in closing, [00:33:01] I want to draw your attention particularly to a particular verse in Genesis

chapter 22. And that is where God speaks to Abraham and says, Lay not thy hand on the land, neither do thou anything unto it.

For now I know thou fearest God, in that not withheld thy son, and thy only son from me.

Here was what God saw in the chest that Abraham had not withheld.

And if we turn that negative into a positive, Abraham had committed, not only had he committed his son, but he had committed himself. And Abraham's hope, his heart of life, he had committed it in obedience to God's test.

Abraham had committed himself. And that's the great thing that we want to urge upon each other [00:34:03] as lovingly and as gently and as firmly as we possibly can.

And that is the great and urgent need to commit ourselves to the sign of the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

It won't be hidden from every thoughtful person who has been through this conference that both the lines of story that we have followed, in the mornings, the story of Abraham, his faith and his trials and his victories, on the other hand, the epistle of the Romans, with its justification and its sanctification and its concentration, it won't be hidden from you that both these lines I feel bound to say without design on the part of those who are led to guess these passages, they both end in sacrifice.

They both end in sacrifice. Abraham's heart is a sacrifice. Isaac had his own heart and he received it all again in the resurrection world. [00:35:02] And our passage this morning was presented to us by Mr. Stoller. Our passage this morning ended with this same call for sacrifice. By time I seek you there, O brethren, by the mercy of God, and He present your bodies, living sacrifices, acceptable to God, by Jesus Christ.

It's very striking that there are immediate consequences given in the passage to the fact that we are called to present our bodies as living sacrifices.

If in the first place we have countered this commitment, the consideration of the mercy of God has led us to this commitment to present our bodies as living sacrifices, then that is something which takes place once for all.

But there is something flawed which is a constant habit of mine, [00:36:01] and that is in the negative, be not conformed to this world, and in the positive, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Now it says that the people who have done this committed themselves in presenting their bodies as living sacrifices to God, and those who refuse to have the shape of their lives dictated by the world around them, but they are transformed by the inward renewal of the spirit, by a daily reading of the Word of God in prayer, then they are told that these people will be able to discern the Word of God.

And it is good, it is acceptable, and perfect, and if you walk in this path, if this is the manner in your life, then you will be, and there is no royal road to being able to discern, it is the largest form of the Word of God in this pathway, the pathway of commitment, the pathway of sacrifice, the pathway of transformation, refusing the patterns of the world and accepting, renewing [00:37:01] the spirit of God from within, then you will be able to discern what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.

And then, the whole of our life pattern and behavior is determined by this.

We are told that we are to love one another and our neighbor. We are told, in the later part of this, that we are to render to all their dues the most ponderous, everyday shame that brought within the scope of the lives of those who committed themselves to the will of God and Christ Jesus.

It says, if we love one another, then all the prohibitions of the law, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt not covet, all the commandments of the law, which are tremendously important always throughout our lives, they will be fulfilled in those who on this manner of life [00:38:01] love one another, as the scripture has said. And I want to end, therefore, coming again to this wonderful prayer that unites together so many of the things that we have said, and that is in chapter 14, verse 13, where it says, Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing Jesus.

It's chapter 15, verse 13.

This is the prayer which we can conclude with and realize how much it unites together lots of things that we have said. Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye are bound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost. Amen. [00:39:30] Just be with me.

Just be with me.

First of all, name him brother, name him brother, with love stronger than death, but with awe and wonder and with big breath.

He is God, the Savior.

He is Christ, the Lord, ever to be worshipped and trusted in the world. In your hearts and from them, there let him subdue [00:40:01] all that is not holy, all that is not true.

Crown him as your captain in temptation's hour, that he will enfold you in his might and power.