

## **When Praise Demands a Sacrifice (Parallel: Abraham's Future is Ours Series – Part VIII)**

10/25/2009

The notes that follow each question below come from discussions that occurred after the sermon or further consideration of some of the issues raised. They should not be considered the “correct” answers by any means. It is hoped that they will provide a starting point for developing your own discussion of Pastor Steve’s sermons.

1. In Genesis 12 – 20 we saw nine chapters of Abraham waiting for God to fulfill all His promises. Of course, what was really happening was God was waiting for Abraham’s faith to mature to the point that he was ready to take on the role as father of a great nation. In Chapter 21, the promised son, Isaac, is born. Read Gen. 22:1 – 2 to see what happens next and talk about how it fits in with the trajectory of all that has happened so far.

Abraham knows God’s voice; they seem to be close based on the tone of the conversation. But God’s request would seem to be inappropriate and unrealistic. Why would God promise Abraham a son from whom a great nation would emerge and then ask Abraham to kill the son? There must be more to the story (which later verses reveal).

2. Pastor Steve offered an alternative ending to the saga started in Gen. 12. In it, God decides that He doesn’t really need to force Abraham to kill his son since He already knows that Abraham is loyal to God. Thus, Abraham and Isaac end up with a praise and worship time at the alter on Mount Moriah instead of the emotional scene of a father offering his only son as a burnt offering. While this is a less traumatic path, why would it also be less than satisfactory?

God needed to move His relationship with both Abraham and Isaac from an intellectual level to an experiential level. They had to make the hard choice that God came first in both their lives and make it on the basis of real life and death decisions, not on some theoretical premise.

3. Read Gen. 22:3-5 and describe Abraham’s reaction to this strange request.

Abraham shows no emotion and no hesitation. He does not protest or drag his feet. It is a strange reaction for a man who waited until he was almost 100 years old to have a son with his wife.

4. Read Gen. 22:6-8 and talk about the role of Isaac in this drama.

Isaac seems to start to figure out that something is up at the point that they are heading up the mountain and Abraham still has nothing to offer for this burnt sacrifice. One wonders if Abraham is still hoping that God will come through with a Plan B at the last minute.

5. Pastor Steve then offered an alternative twist to the story in which Isaac indeed dies, but before he can even climb onto the altar. Abraham then leaves the mountain without even noticing the ram in the thicket. Why would this alternative not work in God's bigger plan?

God needed to have Abraham experience the hard choice of whether to save his son's life or to obey God's request. If Isaac died before this came to fruition, Abraham goes back down the mountain without proving himself, but also knowing that God had asked him to do a hard thing. He would be bitter and his relationship with God would always be strained. Nothing would have been gained and much that God had developed over the last 30 years would have been destroyed.

6. Read Gen.22:9-12, one of the great dramatic moments in the Bible, and talk about the actions of both Abraham and Isaac throughout this scene.

It seems clear that both Abraham and Isaac were perfectly willing to do the will of God. Isaac was young (somewhere between a teenager and 30 years old) and Abraham was around 100. Thus, if Isaac had wanted to escape, he was capable of doing so. Further, there was no way Abraham could have bound Isaac's hands without Isaac's consent. Thus, both father and son were cooperating to fulfill God's plan.

The proclamation of the angel in v. 11-12 was exactly the Plan B for which Abraham had been hoping. He was willing to do it God's way, but this fit what he had understood God's promise to be from the start.

7. In Gen. 22:13-14 we see a foreshadow of things to come. See if you can pick it out.

A sacrificial ram takes the place of Isaac as the burnt offering. This is a parallel to Jesus, who took the place of all men, dying on the cross on our behalf, when it should really be us instead.

8. Read Hebrews 11:17-19 and consider how this "clarification" 2000 years later, puts the drama on Mt. Moriah in a little different light.

Abraham had been visited by God many times. He knew that God had promised to make of him a great nation through Isaac (Gen. 21:12). Thus, he had faith that God would do something to keep that promise, even if it involved bringing Isaac back from the dead (which is sort of what He did). This does not diminish the incredible faith displayed by Abraham and Isaac any more than we would diminish the suffering Jesus experienced (reluctantly, but willingly) on the basis that He knew He would be reunited with the father a short time later.

9. Pastor Steve ended by suggesting that God expects not only praise and worship, but also sacrifice. Following Him must cost us something or it isn't real. It may be drams, family, career, income, reputation, places, things, images, or something else that you nold dear.. Is there anything that you won't take to Mt. Moriah?

This is a deep and personal question. Our class had some pretty emotional responses within which some members said they could not kill their children. In fact, people who claim to hear messages from God these days and kill their children are considered obviously mentally imbalanced and locked away for the rest of their lives (if not put to death in what is considered appropriate justice).

10. Read John 12:24-26 and see if that helps put things in perspective.

The bottom line would seem to be that we need to love God more than anything here on earth. If that is the case, then there is nothing that He might ask us to sacrifice that we would not give over to Him. If we don't die to ourselves, then we won't bear the kind of fruit He needs us to produce. That is a hard lesson that only makes sense to someone who has developed a deep, personal relationship with God. That is why it took Abraham decades of repeated direct contact with God and then times of reflection to be ready to confront it. Why should we think we would be any different? The real question then is whether we are striving to develop that relationship, or preferring to keep things on an intellectual basis.

11. Pastor Steve suggested that we will be called to sacrifice at some point. What will it take for you to be ready to answer "Here I am, Lord."?

This is where you will just need to let the group take it wherever they want to go with this. The facts speak for themselves. Jesus obviously did this with His disciples. He confronted every instance in which they put earthly issues as a higher priority than God's plan. Those new in the faith (or long-time Christians who have not made much effort to grow their faith) may well be uncomfortable delving into this one for more than a brief moment. It may be best to close the session by urging them to consider this individually over the next few days in their quiet times with God.