

Remnant Life Church
February 11, 2024
**Obedying the Voice of God:
Abraham and Isaac**
Genesis 22:1-14

Hearing God's voice is the first step in desiring to live in the center of His will for your life

- The second step is to obey
- And the third is to act

But what if what you believe God is telling you to do doesn't make sense?

- What if what you are to do goes against something else you know is of God?
- What if every person in your life is saying one thing, and you are firm in your belief that God has said something else?
- What do you do?

Fortunately, it has been my experience that God knows what we can and what we cannot handle

- But examining these questions helps us to better understand how God speaks to us in the daily activities of life
- And, more importantly, how to become sharper at recognizing His voice

We have a perfect example to draw from

- A man who is on the Mt. Rushmore of faith
- Challenged to the very core of his soul

READ - Genesis 22:1-14 (Ryan Buffington)

This well-known account is one of the great stories of faith and obedience found in the entire Bible

Context:

- Abraham and Sarah have been childless their entire lives in a culture where children were seen as the most obvious symbol of God's favor and blessing
 - His story begins in the 12th chapter when he is known as Abram
 - He is a descendent of the line of Shem – Noah's second son
 - With the water canopy removed from the earth following the flood, the lifespans of man began to rapidly decrease
 - The first 10 patriarchs of the Old Testament, from Adam to Noah, all lived to be over 775 years old
 - The shortest was Lamech who died at 777, and the longest was Methuselah, who died a 969
 - It was at his death that the great flood came (**Gen 6:3**)
 - The exception of these 10 was Enoch who the Bible says God took home to be with Him without his seeing death
 - He "only" lived to be 365 years old
 - But at the time of Abraham's birth, his (7) great-grandfather Shem was still alive

- While he did not live as long as his father Noah (950), Shem still lived to be 600 years old
 - His three sons all lived into their 400s
 - But then it was 200-plus years
 - And Abraham died at 175
- Our story begins when Abraham is 99 years old
 - Prior to this, in the 15th chapter, God makes a covenant with Abraham
 - His descendants will be God's people
 - Abraham reminds God that he has no children, but God promised Him that it would be a child of his own, not a child from a servant of his household
 - Abraham has this promise but still accepts Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian slave to bring a child, an heir into their lives
 - The perfect picture of a counterfeit blessing
 - His son Ishmael was not to inherit the covenant blessing of God
 - In chapter 18, we read of the three visitors (messengers from God) who promised Abraham that he and Sarah would be parents one year later
 - Then in chapter 21, we read of the birth of Isaac as God fulfills His promise with the first of the line of the fathers of Israel as well as the line of David and eventually, Jesus
- Abraham is 100 years old when his promised son is born
- AND THEN...God asks him to do something that not one person would say is possible

But before we consider that, where is Abraham at this point in his life?

- Isaac has been born, the heir of his body
- The resolution of the Ishmael dilemma has taken place as Sarah sent Ishmael and Hagar away
- Abraham and his entire clan have settled in and around Beersheba
 - He traded and struck agreements with his neighbors
 - He planted trees and dug a well there
 - In other words, he had made it his home
- And his relationship with God was one that indicated stability, security, and permanence
- It is the very real and satisfying outpouring of his covenant with God

We then read in the first verse of **Genesis 22** that, ...*God said to him, Abraham!*

- God has spoken several times to Abraham in the course of his life so he recognizes His voice
- And Abraham hears the voice of God because he answers Him, *Here I am.*

Now Abraham is about to come to a harsh realization that I'm afraid most Christians do not realize today

- Christians today tend to think of God as a benevolent father figure whose main concern is to make man feel good about himself
- They regard God as something like the recreation director on a cruise ship whose single goal, function, and purpose is to give everyone a good time with no expense spared
 - You can tell this attitude is true by the prayers that are most often prayerd

- Most involve some sort of plea for a solution to a hardship
- A provisional increase with little or no regard or consideration of others' needs
- And a worry-free, pain-free, problem-free life
- But James put this type of thinking into a very different perspective when he writes
 - **James 1:2-3** - *Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.*
 - Does this verse have anything to do with our comfort, our excesses, or struggles being avoided?
 - No! It says that our faith is to be tested and the outcome of that is perseverance
 - To persevere through what?
 - More testing!
 - In the same way that our bodies are strengthened through exercise, so too our faith is strengthened when we go through times of testing
 - Testing that God permits!
 - James goes on further to explain that...*faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead* (**James 2:17**)
 - Faith is not increased in a vacuum
 - It operates and grows in the tensions of life and is most often fully seen by how it responds to the ongoing trials
 - For faith to become visible, it must perform
 - James once again echoes these words...*show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works* (**James 2:18**)
- This is what Abraham is faced with as God has told him to sacrifice the only means by which the promise of God will be fulfilled
 - Dare we ask, “What is God doing here?”
 - Dare we say that regarding our own lives?
- If the progress of Abraham’s faith were drawn on a piece of graph paper, it would likely have looked like the Himalayas mountains
 - There were staggering, soaring pinnacles of trust
 - But they would have been interspersed with deep valleys of doubt
 - But this was the Mount Everest valley of challenges...or, more accurately, Mount Moriah

Remember, Abraham is an old man when this event takes place

- He was 100 when Isaac was born, and Isaac was at least in his teens, if not his early 20s
 - We get a glimpse of the love he surely felt for Isaac, even in the words of Jacob, Abraham’s grandson talking about Joseph
 - **Gen 37:3** - *Now Israel (Jacob) loved Joseph more than any of his other sons because he had been born to him in his old age, and he made an ornate robe for him.*
 - Children later in life were considered an added blessing

- But what God is asking is compounded by the fact that wrapped up in Isaac are the promises of God to Abraham regarding not only his own succession but, more importantly, the salvation of his race.

How, then, do we categorize what God is doing in this difficult-to-understand command made of Abraham? Let's consider two this morning...

1. The Command is a Test

- a. In Abraham's day, animal and even human sacrifices were common
 - i. God specifically forbade the sacrifice of humans, especially children, but the pagan nations surrounding the region regularly used this practice to appease their gods
 - ii. God's command might not have been as shocking to Abraham as we might want to think
 - iii. The act itself would have been familiar to him
- b. God is also requiring much of Abraham to physically complete this task
 - i. Mt. Moriah was about 55 miles from Beersheba, where Abraham had made his home
 - ii. It would require approximately 3 days of travel each way with, I imagine, each step more agonizing than the last, knowing what lay ahead
 - iii. It is a difficult, hilly journey in the direction of the northern region of Jerusalem
 1. It was Moriah, some 900 years later, where Solomon would build the great temple
 2. And it is today where the Dome of the Rock stands with its gold-plated finish that makes it very easy to see
 3. If you ever travel to that location, I have read that you can look in the mosque and see an exposed rough patch of rock that is said to be the very spot where Abraham set up his altar
- c. But this test does raise some questions that remain unanswered
 - i. Why did Abraham not tell Sarah what God was commanding him to do?
 - ii. There is no back-and-forth exchange between father and son
 - iii. What made Abraham so accepting of what God wanted to do without a single word?
 - iv. I say this because contrast this scenario to what we read in **Genesis 18**
 1. God is going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah
 2. But Abraham argues and bargains with God to spare them yet does not say a word regarding his son
 - v. Abraham lived a faith that required little to be sustained
 1. God sent Abraham in a general direction
 - a. **Gen 22:2a** - *Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah.*
 - b. On the strength of that alone, Abraham made his preparations and set out
 - c. **Gen 22:3** - *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.

- d. No delay, no asking for clarification or a sign that it was really the voice of God
- e. God said go, Abraham went
2. Abraham then makes a bold statement of faith
 - a. **Gen 22:5** - *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.*
 - b. Only Abraham understood the depth of faith this statement proclaimed
 - i. God had told him to kill his son
 - ii. Abraham said, **we** will come back to you.
 - c. The author of Hebrews gives us an insight into what Abraham was saying
 - i. **Heb 11:17-19** - *By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.*
 - ii. Even if he had to go through with this unspeakable, horrific act, Abraham's faith went beyond the restrictions of human understanding
 - d. Even his answer to Isaac about where the sacrifice was tells of Abraham's faith in the midst of such emotional and spiritual turmoil
 - i. **Gen 22:7-8** - *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?" Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together.*
 - ii. Even Isaac appears to sense something great is taking place as he does not ask Abraham a single question or push for further clarity
- d. Abraham was every bit the man of God through this time, but he was also every bit a father
 - i. His faith was relentlessly locked into the premise that God was faithful and that as He had promised to do certain things – He would
- e. The test of Abraham was a command of faith, but it was also...

2. A Command of Triumph

- a. They arrive at the top of Mount Moriah
 - i. Abraham builds the altar still not sure what is going to happen but he is sure God will be faithful to His promise
 - ii. Then, I'm certain, to Isaac's great astonishment, his father grabs him, ties him up, and lays him on the altar
 1. Again, Abraham is well over 110 years old, and Isaac is a young man
 2. Isaac must have presented himself submissively to his father to allow this to happen
 3. Both, at this point, are living by a faith that had no reasonable measure of understanding available
 - iii. Picture Abraham standing over his son
 1. The knife is in the air
 2. His hand likely over his son's eyes to ensure his final sight would not be the horrific act his father was about to commit
 3. Abraham must be crying, perhaps even wailing
 4. And Isaac is no doubt shaking
 5. Abraham's faith, just as ours would be, is stretched to an unspeakable limit
- b. But then the voice of God is heard
 - i. The 9th and final time God spoke to Abraham was a triumph of divine timing
 1. **Gen 22:12** - *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.*
 - ii. God did not act too soon, nor did He act too late
 - iii. The timing of what He did was intended to take Abraham to that precise moment when the truth of his heart, his faith, his obedience was revealed
 1. And this was not for God's information
 2. It was for Abraham to see for himself as well as Isaac from his uncomfortable position on the altar
- c. And this was not only a divine act of timing but a divine timing of provision
 - i. **Gen 22:13** - *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.*
 - ii. God's promises always come with His provision
 1. But it will be in His time
 2. And it will take place in the way that serves His purposes for our lives and to accomplish His will

There is so much within this account that is important for us today

- But I close this morning with a reminder that it always comes back to Jesus
 - Those who say that the Old Testament is nothing more than history and prelude till the coming Jesus do not understand the fullness of the Scripture
 - It is all about Jesus!
 - Consider what we have just seen here

- The father Abraham loves his son, His creation
 - But his son must die
 - But in His son's place, God provides a sacrifice to fulfill what was required
 - Abraham is a type of God the Father
 - Isaac is you and me, God's creation
 - And the ram caught in the thicket is a type of Lamb, a spotless lamb, sent to die for us in our place
- This love story is the picture of our redemption
 - We must die because of our sin
 - But God sent a spotless Lamb to be sacrificed in our place

God had great purpose in this seemingly contradictory request

1. To strengthen Abraham's faith
2. To give Isaac a firsthand, albeit overwhelming, experience of who the God of his father was
3. To enable all people to see how justified God was in choosing Abraham as the recipient of His eternal covenant promise
4. To offer us a clear picture of a father's pain in sacrificing his son – even as God would one day do in offering up Jesus to save each of us
5. To confirm that His promises can never be thwarted no matter the circumstance

Abraham showed his faith from the very beginning by obeying the instructions of God

And he spoke his faith in God throughout the entirety of the process

- What place is your faith this morning when God is calling you to obey Him in a way that makes no sense to you?
- Do you trust Him and will your actions reflect that trust?
- Do you speak in faith when in the midst of the test?
 - Or are your words negative
 - Your demeanor downcast
 - And your life consumed with the trial rather than faith that there will be triumph

Is this easy?

- Not at all
- But God is with you always
- Loved ones, friends, and church family are in your life to help you
- But you must take those first steps
 - Listen to God's voice
 - Obey His word
 - Act in faith