

Whenever we hear something from the Bible, we always want to make sure to pay attention to the main point. Because if we don't pay attention to the main point of whatever we hear, we're going to miss the point. And if we miss the point, we're not going to learn what it is that God wants us to hear. Because all of these things, Christians, as Paul tells us, have been written for our learning, written for our understanding. And if we miss the main point, we will distort the whole passage. And if we distort the whole passage, we're going to learn the wrong thing. And if we learn the wrong thing, we will not be built up in our faith.

So the question we have to ask ourselves, then, is: what is the main point of our Old Testament reading from Genesis chapter 22? At first glance, you might think that the main point is about Abraham. Because, after all, it speaks so much about him, talking about what he does, what he's going through, even the great things which he accomplishes. But if we think that Abraham is the main point of this passage, we will be mistaken. Because if we thought that, we might think that what Abraham is doing is setting up some kind of impossible example for us, that he's all the way up here with all the things that he has done at a level that we can only hope to get to. And because we don't get to that level, because we often struggle and fail, we wouldn't be built up in our faith. We wouldn't want to pursue after God more and more. And it would lead us into despair. No, the point of this passage is not Abraham and what he does.

But Abraham tells us the main point of this passage. Because you'll notice that after everything is said and done, Abraham does not name the place where he is after himself. He doesn't call it "Abraham-Believes" or "Abraham-Trusts" or "Abraham-Sees" or something like that. No, he calls it "The Lord will provide," Jehovah-Jireh in the old King James. And because "The Lord will provide" is the name of this place, it shows us that God is the one we need to focus on here. The things that God is doing here is the main point. And when we focus on that main point, we will see and learn something about who God is, something which Abraham himself knew. And then once we have that main point, yes, we can learn from Abraham's example, but not from the things that he's doing, but rather for the reasons that he does them.

Because God in this passage in Genesis chapter 22 asks Abraham to do a very difficult thing. He gives him a very severe trial. He wants him to sacrifice his own son. As we hear in verse two: "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." God doesn't give him a reason. God doesn't explain himself. He doesn't say, "Go sacrifice your son, and here's all the reasons why you should do it." God simply tells him to go with no further explanation. And that might be confusing and it might be very difficult, because what makes this trial so difficult for Abraham is not just that this is his son. I think we often focus on the emotional aspect of this. As parents, especially, we would say, "How could God ask Abraham to do such a thing? I know I couldn't sacrifice one of my own children. Why would God ask Abraham to do that in his service?" And because we get so caught up in the emotional aspect of it, we might think that's the whole trial. But it's actually much more than that, because Isaac is not just his beloved son. Isaac is, as Paul calls him, "the son of the promise." Isaac is the one through whom God has said time and time again that he is going to carry out his promise to Abraham. In fact, we hear in chapter 21, in verse 12 especially, that God says, "through Isaac shall your offspring be named." It is through Isaac that God is going to do all of his wonderful things. So if there is no Isaac, then there is no promise. And if there is no promise, then there is no Jesus. And if there is no Jesus,

then there is no salvation. God's redemption would be completely gone. It seems like God is going back on his promises, setting up this impossible situation that he wouldn't be able to do anything about. How can God keep his Word when it seems impossible for him to do so? How can Abraham's offspring be named through Isaac if Isaac is dead?

And Christians, we struggle with this too. Not just in this way, but in other ways, where we find situations in our lives or in the world around us where we wonder, how can God keep his Word in this situation? It seems impossible for him to do so. Let me use some examples so you can see what I mean. We all know someone who either isn't a believer in Christ or hasn't been to church for a very, very long time. And we might wonder, how can God convert this person? How could he bring them back to the church if they fallen away? Because it seems like they are so opposed to the Gospel, like they're always fighting against it. It seems like they're just becoming harder and harder, so that how could they ever be saved? How could they ever believe? How could God keep his Word in this situation? Or to use another example: God has promised to his Church that they would have victory, that the Church would be victorious over all of her enemies, that Christ would reign victorious over all things. The Church will win in the end! But then we look at the world today and we see how great evil is becoming, how it seems to grow more and more with each passing day, and how evil seems to be using even our American institutions--the government, the media, even the schools--as a way of promoting its agenda. How are we supposed to fight against that? Evil seems so great. It seems so organized. It seems so big. How will we ever have victory over this situation? How can God keep his promise in the midst of this? Or let me use the one that's probably the most obvious example here. God promises to us, as we confess in the creeds every Sunday, the resurrection of the body, that we will rise again with him on the last day. But then we see the reality of death, how it seems so final, how it seems like such an end. How can God keep his promise in the face of death? How can God do this when we haven't seen any evidence that he's going to do this? How can God keep his Word in this seemingly impossible situation? That's what we struggle with, Christians, and that's what we're wondering today: the faithfulness of God in the face of these impossible situations.

But Abraham, for his part, goes. He doesn't waver. He doesn't ask questions. He doesn't talk back to God and say, "God, why? Why do you want me to do this? How are you going to do this? I have no idea how you're going to do this. Why should I?" No, he doesn't say any of that. He simply goes, taking with him his servants and his donkey, his son and the wood. And he goes to Mount Moriah just like God tells him to go. And he lays the wood in order, and he binds his son Isaac. And with a knife in his hand, he is prepared to sacrifice his son. But why? Why would he do this? What does he know that leads him to do this even if he can't see the reason why? Christians, it's because he knows beyond all doubt that God is faithful, that God will keep his promises, that no matter what happens, no matter how impossible the situation seems to be, God will do what he says he will do. And he knows that because God has said "through Isaac shall your offspring be named," he knows that even if Isaac is dead that "through Isaac shall his offspring be named." God said it. He meant it. And he will not go back on his Word. In fact, that's what we hear over in the book of Hebrews chapter 11, specifically verse 19: "Abraham considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back." He knew that even if Isaac died, God would raise him up again, and then his offspring would come through his son. Because God does not lie. God does not go back on his promises. If he said it, no matter how impossible it seems to us, he will do it.

And God even gave Abraham a sure sign of his promise, strengthening his faith, by giving to him a substitute, a ram to sacrifice in place of his son Isaac. It was God's way of saying, "I will do what I said I will do, and I will keep all of these promises to you. And this is the sign that I will do it." God can do all things, and God will keep his Word, even when it seems impossible.

So we can trust him too, Christians. We can look to him even in the midst of seemingly impossible situations. God, after all, can convert anyone. He can bring anybody to faith. Just think of Paul, for example. The great apostle Paul once murdered Christians, a literal persecutor of the church zealous for the traditions of his fathers. And yet Paul was converted. God made him into one of the greatest pillars of the church, the greatest evangelist that the Christian church has ever known. And if God can convert Paul, there is no one beyond his hope. And when we look at all of the evil around us, Christians, we don't have to be afraid of that either. Because God has brought his church through situations just as bad as this one. They came to an end, but the church went on. And Jesus is victorious over all things. He will not fail to keep his promises. And when it comes to the resurrection of the dead, God has told us that whoever believes in his Son Jesus Christ, who is the resurrection and the life, will certainly also rise with him. Because God does not break his promises. God will do what he says he will do.

And he has proven that to us, Christians, by giving us a substitute, by giving us one who stands in our place. Because near Mount Moriah where Abraham nearly sacrificed his son, on Good Friday God sacrificed his own Son Jesus Christ, so that we might be forgiven. Because of Jesus, we have the promise of God that he will always keep his Word. And not even the death of Christ could break that Word. Not even Christ's death would stop God from keeping his promises. Jesus rose on Easter morning to show us beyond all doubt that God will always be faithful, that God will always be true, that there is nothing, not even death, that can stop God from keeping his Word.

So trust him, Christians. Come to him. God is faithful. God is trustworthy. God is true. If he said he's going to do it, he will do it. And even if it seems impossible, he will still do it, because God will always keep his Word.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank you for the many promises that you have made to us through your Son, and as you once taught Abraham to trust you in all things, teach us this day through your Holy Spirit to trust you as well, knowing that you will do all things and that nothing is too hard for you; through Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.