

GOD TRAINS ABRAHAM

Genesis 20:1 - 22:19

Key verses 22:11,12

“But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, „Abraham! Abraham!“ Here I am,” he replied. „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.“

In today's passage, we learn that God fulfilled His promise to Abraham through the birth of Isaac. Up to this point, Abraham experienced God's sustaining love. God took care of Abraham like a child with great patience, bearing his unbelief and making up for his mistakes. Thus Abraham grew in faith step by step and finally receive the son of promise, Isaac. But that was not the end. God continued to take care of Abraham so that he could manage God's blessing well and grow into a patriarch of faith: 1) God helped Abraham to cast out his human solution, Ishmael, from the family. 2) God helped Abraham to consecrate his son Isaac to God as a holy and pleasing sacrifice. Let us learn in this passage the mature faith of Abraham and the culmination of his faith, his obedience and fear of God. Thus, we may steward well the blessings of promise and spiritual inheritance and grow as faith patriarchs like Abraham for countless spiritual descendants.

1. God fulfills His promise to Abraham (20:1-21:22)

Let's look at 20:1-18. After the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham moved to the south country and dwelt there as a stranger to Gerar. Abraham thought that there was no fear of God in that place and that he would be killed because of his beautiful wife Sarah (11). Therefore, he repeated the same mistake he had made once before at the beginning of his life of faith: he passed off his wife Sarah as his sister. As a result,

Abimelech, the king of Gerar, sent for Sarah. Because of Abraham's fear, which came from unbelief, the promise of God was almost destroyed. But God was very patient. God was supposed to rebuke Abraham. But instead, God appeared to Abimelech in a dream and threatened him to return Sarah to Abraham. Abimelech returned his wife to Abraham, along with sheep and cattle, menservants and maidservants as gifts.

This incident shows how deep and persistent sin is in a person. It is sometimes so difficult to overcome the old sinful habits, but especially the lack of trust in God. We are also quick to abandon the co-workers and sheep who keep making the same mistakes or falling back into the old ways of living. Here we learn to help the spiritually weak people with the patient servanthood of God until they learn faith and grow into a spiritually strong person.

Look at verses 21:1-2: "Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him." Finally, God fulfilled His promise to Abraham and Sarah. After 25 years with some ups and many downs, Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham. It was a memorable event. We can learn three points here.

First, God's faithfulness. In verses 1 and 2, the expressions "as he had said" and "as he had spoken" are repeated three times in two verses. God fulfilled his promise to Abraham despite Abraham's and Sarah's weakness. Twice Abraham almost lost his wife. When he became impatient, he took a concubine and even made a child with her, Ishmael. For 13 years Abraham lived only as a father of Ishmael, giving up the promise of God. But God did not give up on Abraham, but visited Abraham and reminded him of the promise. God helped him to circumcise himself and return to the promise of God. God promised Abraham that the son of Sarah would be the descendant of the promise. Eventually, God fulfilled that very promise.

God's faithfulness and patience is the defining moment of His salvation history. Humans were and are unfaithful. But God fulfilled His redemptive plan through Jesus Christ despite man's unfaithfulness and failure. We have been and often are faithless and unfaithful. But God serves us faithfully through the servants of God, so that we may obtain the promise of God. Therefore, we may also serve the young people with the faithfulness of God.

Because Sh. Jochen and M. Priska serve Olaf with God's faithfulness, Olaf experienced the fulfillment of God's promise that he could complete his studies for the glory of God through mountain-moving faith. God will continue to bless their faithful servanthood so that Olaf may also find a suitable job and apartment and be used as a co-worker and as a faith patriarch for the pioneering work of Rhein-Sieg University and for 1700 universities in Germany and Europe.

Second: Abraham's faith. Let us look at verses 3 and 4. When Sarah gave birth to a son, Abraham named him Isaac, just as God had instructed him. When Isaac was eight days old, he circumcised him as God had commanded him. By naming him and by circumcising him, Abraham clearly showed that he was thinking of God and of God's promise at the moment of his greatest joy. He considered Isaac not as his child, but as a child of

promise and part of God's plan of salvation, and prayed that through Isaac God's promise would be passed on and fulfilled.

When Samuel graduated from high school with a grade A+ at the top of his class during the time of persecution, we were greatly encouraged and comforted by the powerful work of God in his life. But instead of rejoicing only humanly, we may see our children in the light of God's promise and vision. Therefore, we pray for them that they may be used as excellent Bible teachers and global spiritual leaders for medical school and for spiritual revival to the M-world.

Third, Sarah's faith. Let's look at verses 5 and 6. How much Sarah rejoiced when Isaac was born. Verse 6 says, "Sarah said, „God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." Sarah was once a sad woman who laughed only for reasons of unbelief (18:12). But now she became a woman of laughter from true joy. No person in the Bible is so often associated with the word "laughter" as Sarah. How could Sarah become a woman of laughter from true joy? Sarah accepted God's admonition, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" (18:14) When old grandma Sarah repented of her unbelief and relearned faith at the age of 89, she was able to experience God's authority to bring forth descendants. Hebrews 11:11 comments, "By faith Abraham, even though he was past age - and Sarah herself was barren - was enabled to become a father because he considered himself faithful who had made the promise." Bringing forth the fruit of new life is not a matter of age, but of faith. My father and mother are seventy years old, but by faith they live with the joy and vision of bringing forth fruit for the mobilization of the Next Generation and for the M-mission.

Let's look at verse 8. Isaac grew and was weaned. On this occasion, Abraham made a great feast. At that time, Ishmael was about 17 years old. With the birth of Isaac, Ishmael had lost the birthright. Ishmael became envious and began to harass Isaac with harmful intent. Sarah saw this and said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for

that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac." (21:10) Sarah demanded that Abraham divorce Hagar and Ishmael immediately. This did not please Abraham at all. Abraham loved Ishmael because he was his son too.

Let's look at verses 12-14. God commanded Abraham that he should obey Sarah's instruction. God reminded Abraham that He would also make Ishmael a people. Abraham obeyed God by sending Ishmael away with his mother. It was like a painful operation. We can learn here that Isaac and Ishmael cannot live in one house. Ishmael will always try to displace Isaac. In order to obtain the blessing of God's promise, Ishmael must be cast out.

My Isaac is the promise of God to live as a rock of faith (John 1:42) and a Bible teacher like Ezra (Ezra 7:10). However, as a person with an immigrant background, I also lived with the Ishmael of my human ambition, which was the dream of self-actualization by studying medicine as a clinic director. For that, I studied more than other medical students, even with English textbooks, by having a plan to take the American state exam as well. I had my life planned out for the next 30 years. This human dream oppressed and displaced the Isaac of God's calling and promise. My parents said to me, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son." It was infinitely difficult to obey this direction, even impossible with my own strength. But today I thank God that he helped me through the Business Mission to obey his direction and to make a life decision for Isaac, namely for the spiritual inheritance and for the promise and calling of God, with Ezra 7:10. Then I experienced that God also graciously took care of my professional life and makes it a great people and even wants to use it for the Mission.

2. God trains Abraham (22:1-19)

Look at verse 1: "Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, „Abraham!“ „Here I am,“ he replied." Isaac was well grown by now, probably a teenager. Everything

seemed to be going well and without a hitch. It would now be easy for Abraham to become haughty and unwilling toward God, "What does God want from me again?" But his response to God was, "Here I am." Despite God's abundant blessings, Abraham always had a humble and ready attitude toward God. Our next-generation co-workers also have such a very good attitude toward God's instruction and are always willing to cooperate with God. That is why they can take hold of God's blessing.

Look at verse 2: "Then God said, „Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his only son, who meant everything to him. This wish of God seemed too large and cruel. There was also no explanation from God. Abraham could have quarreled with God and fallen away from his faith in God's love. But how did Abraham react? Abraham did not say a single word. He got up early the next morning and prepared everything. He did not doubt God's love and sovereign guidance for a second. This shows his mature faith.

Abraham took two servants and Isaac and set out with his donkey for Mount Moriah. When the mountain was in sight on the third day, he and Isaac continued on the way alone. Isaac was not clueless, nor was he apathetic. He had learned very well. He was very smart and he was thinking along, just like our children and sheep. That is why he asked his father, "Father? ... The fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham was in the most difficult trial of his life. He did not know what to answer Isaac. But in the time of trial, Abraham taught his son Isaac to trust in God. Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." In the last year, we also experienced challenge and persecution. It was a difficult hour. But during that time, the Servant of God taught us and our Next Generation to look to God and to Christ: "Rejoice that you suffer with Christ." Five baptized people made a

faith decision for Christ and experienced Jesus' spiritual authority in their lives.

Finally, they came to the place God had told Abraham. There Abraham built an altar and laid the wood on it. Then he bound Isaac and laid him on the wood. Amazingly, Isaac did not resist, but obeyed his father's will without complaint. He cooperated with his father spiritually because he had accepted the will of God. Isaac was the prototype of Jesus Christ who, according to the will of God, went to the slaughter as the Lamb of God without grumbling or complaining. Then Abraham grasped the knife to slaughter his son.

Let us read verses 11 and 12: "But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, „Abraham! Abraham!“ Here I am," he replied. „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." When Abraham was about to rush in to slaughter Isaac, the angel of the Lord called him from heaven and commanded a halt. God did not want a human sacrifice from Abraham. Abraham's obedience was his much better sacrifice. God's heart was moved by Abraham's fear of God. God issued Abraham a testimony of faith with a grade of 1.0.

Here we learn that fear of God is the most important quality and also the foundation for gaining spiritual victory in the time of trial and receiving the testimony of God. What is fear of God?

First, fear of God is love. Although the word "fear" is in this word, fearing God does not have to do with fear, but with reverence and love. To fear God means to love God more than anything else, more than the blessing of God. Why? Because God loved us and gave everything for us, not sparing even His only Son! That is why the highest commandment is, "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength." (Deut. 6:5)

Second, fear of God is obedience. Even Jesus, though He was God's Son, learned

godliness by obeying God's will, even to the point of death on the cross (Heb. 5:8, 9). How can we do this? There is a great mystery here. First, through faith in the absolute love of God. Second, through resurrection faith. Hebrews 11:19 says, "Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death."

Abraham's fear of God, his radical and humanly unimaginable love and obedience, were the pinnacle of his faith and the secret of his victorious life. Through the fear of God, namely radical love and obedience through resurrection faith, let us please God and receive a testimony of faith with a grade A+ in the time of trial and grow into the patriarchs of faith who write faith history for spiritual revival and for world mission.

My parents came to Germany as guest worker lay missionaries, although they were able to live a rich and respected life in Korea. My father sacrificed his doctorate and career as a pharmacist in Germany for the work of God. Humanly speaking, it was too radical. But God was pleased by it and blessed his spiritual descendants. I may also learn godliness i.e. radical love and obedience to God by also struggling through resurrection faith, forming 12 Bible study teams and also the Early Morning Prayer Fellowship this winter semester, and preparing the Biblical Preaching and Systematic Theology lectures. I may also choose to use God's blessing to serve M-Mission. Through my radical love and obedience to God, 120 disciples of Jesus may be established as spiritual descendants at the medical school in Bonn, Germany, and in many medical schools in Europe and the M-world.

Look at verses 13 and 14: "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. So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, „On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided." Abraham offered a ram to God that God Himself had prepared. Abraham was full

of gratitude, not because he got his son back, but because he realized that "the Lord sees." Abraham confessed that he could not see, but that God sees. He realized that God watches his every step and always guides him for his best. Man's seeing is very limited. But we may be sure that the Lord sees, and follow His best guidance cheerfully and with confidence through trusting obedience.

Let us look at verses 16-18. God called Abraham a second time, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all the nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me." Because of Abraham's obedience, God confirmed His promise that Abraham's descendants would become as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Through Abraham's obedience of faith, God's work of salvation was begun, which was finally completed through the obedience of Jesus Christ. Here we learn that through our obedience of faith, our descendants of faith will be blessed and we may be preciousely used for God's redemptive plan.

Today we have learned the mature faith and climax of Abraham faith. We may write faith history and receive God's testimony through godly faith and obedience. May God bless numerous spiritual descendants through your radical love and obedience and use you preciousely as the father and mother of many nations and for spiritual revival and M-mission.