



Grace Lutheran Church
Valentine, NE

MAIL MINISTRY

The 1st Sunday in Lent

February 18, 2018

Pre-Service Meditation: Psalm 91

Hymns: 158; 651; 306; 353:1-3, 6-7

Scripture Readings: Hebrews 4:14-16
Matthew 16:21-27

Sermon Topic: Christian Life; Law/Gospel; Trust

In Nomine Jesu!

Sermon Text: Genesis 22:1-14

Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." Then He said, "Take now 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." So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you." So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together. But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." Then he said, "Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." So the two of them went together. Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" So he said, "Here I am." And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. And Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, "In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

In Christ Jesus, who has provided everything we need for our salvation, dear fellow redeemed:

One day a lawyer came to Jesus. Matthew tells us that he wanted to test Him. He asked Jesus, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus responded with reference to the passage in Deuteronomy, which forms our "Word of Truth" today, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Mt. 22:36-37). That thought is a commentary on the 1st Commandment: "You shall have no other gods." Martin Luther captured the essence of God's will for us when he explained that the 1st Commandment means "we should fear, love, and trust in God above all things" (*Luther's Small Catechism*, Sydow Edition, p. 3).

My dear friends, when "God tested Abraham" it was a 1st Commandment test. It was a test not given for the sake of God. He already knew everything about Abraham. Rather, it was a test given to help Abraham grow in his understanding not only of the meaning but in particular of the purpose of this greatest of commandments. God wanted Abraham to experience the truth that **THE LORD WILL PROVIDE!** God wants us all to know and experience this same truth **as we seek to love Him above all things, as we seek to trust in Him above all things, and as we seek to fear Him above all things!**

I.

The text before us is a familiar one. We are told: *“God tested Abraham, and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then He said, ‘Take now 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.”* This is a test difficult for most of us even to imagine. Abraham was a very wealthy man. He had silver and gold, flocks and herds, servants and tents, and any of these he no doubt would have gladly given up to demonstrate his love for and commitment to the LORD God. But God was now asking him for that which he loved most—his son...his only son, Isaac, whom God recognized he loved more than life itself!

There are all kinds of reasons why Abraham may well have objected to God’s request. Isaac was, after all, the child of promise. Abraham had waited so many long years for Isaac to be born. His birth was a miracle for Sarah had long passed the age of child-bearing when she was blessed by God with her only child. It was through Isaac that God’s promise of a Savior was to be fulfilled. Every family on the earth, therefore, depended upon the life of this young man. How could God possibly ask that his life be ended? Did not this request contradict God’s own great respect for the human life He created? We are not told what Abraham may have thought as he no doubt lay sleepless through that night, but we are told: *“Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.”* He was prepared to demonstrate that he loved God above all things! God in turn was preparing to demonstrate to Abraham that He would provide!

My dear friends, what is it that we love the most in our lives? In what do we find our greatest joy or our utmost pleasure? Do we love the people in our lives more than anything else—our husband or wife, our sons or daughters, our best friends or our closest confidants? Do we love the good things in life—a nice home, a luxury vehicle, expensive clothing, good food and fine wines? Do we treasure our freedom or our activities, whether outdoor or indoor, more than anything else? Do we realize that Satan will constantly be tempting us to shift our love away from God to these people, things, and activities, and it is really quite easy to become so involved with and committed to them, that our God simply ends up being replaced in our lives? God becomes an afterthought rather than the object of our greatest love and attention. If you are wondering whether or not this has happened in your life, simply take an inventory of how you spend your time and your resources. As Jesus said: *“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Mt. 6:21). Are we willing to give up any of these things, if necessary, to remain faithful to our Savior God?

God may never call upon us to make the sacrifice He asked Abraham to make—to give up that which we love the most. But should He do so, I would pray that you and I would respond as did Abraham, for as in the case of Abraham God’s goal would be to teach us that He is worthy of our greatest love. **THE LORD WILL PROVIDE as we seek to love Him above all things!**

II.

Yes, **HE WILL PROVIDE as we also seek to trust in Him above all things!** Abraham, Isaac, and their servants traveled three days to the land of Moriah—to the site where Jerusalem and the temple would later be built. Abraham then told his servants: *“Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you.”* Notice Abraham’s use of the pronoun “we” when speaking of their return from the sacrifice. As he and Isaac trudged up the mountain side to the site of sacrifice Isaac inquired: *“Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”* Abraham simply responded: *“My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.”*

I do not believe that Abraham was being either cynical or deceptive in these remarks to his servants and his son. Abraham was no doubt troubled by what he had been commanded to do. He may well have been filled with a sense of dread. The reasoning behind God’s command was difficult for him to understand. Yet, in the midst of what seemed to be a nonsensical situation he could only trust that God would indeed provide. He simply went forward in that trust.

My dear friends, while to be sure none of us has been in Abraham’s exact position, many of us have no doubt been in similar situations, where we find ourselves in the midst of great

uncertainty—not knowing how a particular situation might end. Such situations may involve our health. Some of our members are currently wrestling with health issues involving among other things cancer, pain management, and influenza. Such situations may involve our finances. Some of our members are facing choices of whether or not to change jobs, how best to manage new job/business situations, or considering options regarding either retirement or continued employment. What is the Lord's will in this matter? Whatever the nature of the uncertainty of our circumstances, we must go forward and trust in God above all things! God assures us: *"I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope"* (Jer. 29:11). God wants us to experience the truth of those words and the fact that He will provide!

III.

Yes, **THE LORD WILL PROVIDE**, finally, **as we seek to fear Him above all things!** When Abraham arrived at the site of the sacrifice, he and Isaac built the altar and arranged the wood. We are then told that *"he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood."* We are given no additional details and so can only speculate as to what took place. There would appear to have been no struggle, which would suggest that Abraham must have explained God's command to Isaac and that Isaac willingly complied. Isaac was after all probably about twenty years old and so easily could have escaped had he wanted to do so. We are given some insight into what Abraham may have shared with Isaac, when we are told in the book of Hebrews: *"By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called,' concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense"* (Heb. 11:17-19). Before raising the knife to kill his son, Abraham may well have assured Isaac that God would raise him from the dead if necessary to keep His promise.

When the Angel of the LORD, who is Christ, beheld Abraham about to fulfill His command, He called out to stop him: *"Abraham, Abraham!Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me."* The fear of God is a holy awe that leads one to faithful obedience. Abraham feared God above all things, and the LORD demonstrated His power of provision at that very moment, for Abraham lifted up his eyes and beheld a ram caught in the nearby thicket—the perfect substitute for Isaac. After sacrificing that ram Abraham named the place of sacrifice: *"The-LORD-Will-Provide!"* He had passed the test and had learned the important lesson God intended him to learn!

My dear friends, God has arranged the perfect substitute for each of us—His own Son, Jesus Christ. He was *"the Lamb of God, who takes (took) away the sins of the world"* (Jn. 1:29). Jesus paid the propitiatory price *"for our sins, and not for ours only but also the whole world"* (1 Jn. 2:2). He is worthy of our love, of our trust, and of our fear before and above all things! In a world that treats spiritual matters ever so lightly; in a world that can so easily distract our hearts and minds from that which is most important and needful; in a world that does not fear God even though it is destined to be destroyed, let us turn to and depend upon our Savior God. **THE LORD WILL PROVIDE as we seek to love Him, to trust in Him, and to fear Him above all things!** May we do so with joy and with confidence! Amen.

--Pastor Paul D. Nolting
To God alone be glory!

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