

In chapter 22 of Genesis, our friend Abraham, he is perhaps 120 years old. He comes towards the end of his life. And it would be easy to think that at that age, life would be calmer, that there would be fewer difficulties, that he could ease off a little. It would be easy to think that but it would be wrong. In front of us this morning is perhaps the most difficult ordeal that one can imagine. God tests Abraham. He asks his friend to go through the furnace of an extremely complicated and painful ordeal. This passage is one of the most moving passages in the entire Bible. We are speechless as we read it. It is my prayer that we finish this passage kneeling before the throne of God and say "Here am I"

A test that probes the heart

An unexpected test. There is no word of warning for Abraham. God did not say to him, "Be careful Abraham. Prepare yourself because in 6 months I will put your faith to the test." One fine day, like any other day, God comes to Abraham and tells him about this test. On an ordinary day, Abraham suddenly finds himself in a situation where his faith is tested. Isn't that how tests often arise in life? Joseph with Potiphar's wife. Job, when he loses everything he has! David, on the roof of his palace. Peter in the court of the high priest. We get up in the morning. The sky is blue and 10 minutes later the lightning strikes. The Christian finds himself in a situation where his faith is put to the test, his obedience, his devotion. This is true of small and large trials. In the blink of an eye, you can be in the furnace of a test.

A painful test. Frankly, it's hard to imagine a worse request than the one we see in verse 2. We know this story well. We've read it many times. But try to put yourself in the place of Abraham who hears these words for the first time. What God says to him serves to emphasize the pain of the ordeal. Instead of saying "Take Isaac", he says: "Take your son, your only son, the one you love, Isaac. Offer him as a burnt offering". "Take this young man Isaac, the one you care about like the apple of your eye, the one you saw growing up, who is so precious and offer him as a burnt offering" And what is worse for Abraham is that Abraham must offer him. God does not say, "Your son Isaac is going to die in an accident. That would already be terrible. He's not saying he's going to hit him with an illness. No, He asks Abraham to offer him by killing him with his own hands.

You who are parents, grandparents, you know that you would give your life to protect that of your children or your grandchildren. Your love for them knows no bounds. This love you have for your children allows you to understand why this ordeal is so painful, so violent.

An incomprehensible test.

Not to mention the fact that God asked Abraham to take the life of his son, it must also be said that what God asks of Abraham also seems to go against the character of God and all the promises that God had given to Abraham. Let's not forget the solemn covenant that God made with Abraham. To ensure the fulfillment of the promises, Isaac must live. If Isaac dies, there will be no descendants for Abraham. If Isaac dies, how can God fulfill his promise in chapter 17.19: "Surely your wife Sarah will give you a son; and you'll call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant with him and his descendants after him." Is it possible that God is asking Abraham to do something that keeps God from staying true to his promise? How can God bless the nations through Isaac if Isaac is dead? It does not make sense! Has God forgotten his promises? Has he forgotten that Abraham is his friend? How can God make such a request to his friend?

Dear friends, our God is a God who tests his children. I don't really need to tell you that. He sends tests at any time. He sends tests, sometimes very painful, tests that, frankly, we cannot understand. How can my God, who loves me, how could he make me go through such a painful ordeal? And this test sent by God, serves to probe the heart and faith of Abraham. It serves to reveal the true state of his heart before God. God, does he really have first place in the heart of Abraham, or is it Isaac? Is Abraham's faith really placed in the Promises of God? Is Abraham ready to trust God in all circumstances? A test that probes the heart.

Obedience that reveals the heart.

So given the character of this ordeal, how did Abraham respond to what God asked of him? The text language here is very simple. In verse 3, Moses does not describe Abraham's emotions. He is not talking about a night spent in emotional agony, Abraham tormented by the idea of offering his son as a burnt offering. The text simply describes what Abraham does. There is very little dialogue. The trip lasts three days and it is only the third day that we hear Abraham speak. What then can we say about his response of obedience?

Prompt obedience

Verse 3: "Abraham got up early in the morning." This is what is noted immediately after this terrible request from God. There is no debate, no arguments, no hesitation. Maybe he gets up when everyone is still sleeping. He knows what to do and he does it in silence, without saying a word, Abraham obeys. God asks him the hardest thing you can imagine and he does it without any delay. It's a very emotional scene. Look at him saddling his donkey. Look at his face. Look at his eyes. Are there tears? Look at his hands. Do they tremble? Look at this almost 120 year old old man splitting the wood on which he is going to place his son to kill him. Look at his broken heart. Look at his obedience. Prompt obedience

Painful obedience

Dear friends, let us ask God to help us grasp what is going on in the heart and mind of Abraham during the three days of walking. What's going on in his head? At night, when he tries to sleep, what does he think of? If he had had a smartphone, I imagine that he would have spent hours looking at all the photos saved on his smartphone since the birth of Isaac, the videos of Isaac taking his first steps, laughing and doing laugh everyone.

And the text seems to tell us that Abraham didn't say anything to anyone until the third day. Yes, he probably said they were going to worship God, offer him a sacrifice but the text does not let us believe that he had explained everything to Isaac and his servants. So Abraham carries this terrible burden all by himself. Can you imagine that? Walking for three days with your son knowing that you were going to kill him. Abraham must carry the knife and each time he looks at it, one can imagine his suffering. And then the voice of Isaac in verse 7. This voice that Abraham knew so well, these words that he would have heard thousands of times: "My father." It is painful obedience.

It is obedience that goes to the end.

In a moment of weakness years ago, my friends persuaded me to take a roller coaster ride in an amusement park. I didn't want to do it at all but they put a lot of pressure and finally I gave in. But the queue was long. And during the 30-minute wait, I could hear the screams of those before me. I could see their faces. If I could have gotten into the little car right away, without having to wait, I would have done it. But this waiting time broke my resolve. And when I got to the top of the queue, I gave up. But during these three days of walking, Abraham remains resolute. He does not back down from the task. He has three very long days to turn around and go home. If there are voices in his head that say, "Don't do it. Save your son", he doesn't listen to them. When it comes to building the altar, he

doesn't flinch. He ties up his son and puts him on the altar. He doesn't back down. And he takes the knife to slaughter his son. It does not move back a single centimeter. God speaks. Abraham obeys fully.

It is an obedience of faith and worship.

Prompt, painful obedience that goes all the way. How is such obedience possible? When God asks a man like Abraham to do such a difficult thing, how is it possible to obey? It is an obedience of faith and worship.

Look at verse 5. Look at what Abraham said to his servants: "The young man and I will go up there to worship, then we will come back to you" Abraham said to his servants: Isaac and I will go and Isaac and I will come back.

How could he say that? Is it his intention not to offer Isaac, to say at the last second: Sorry God, but I cannot offer my son? Does he know they are coming back because in reality he knows he has no intention of killing Isaac?

In Hebrews 11 we read: "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, 18 of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back." Abraham receives promises from God concerning Isaac. Abraham believes him. He believes that God is faithful to his word, that it is impossible for God to violate his promise, to violate his covenant. So if God's promises are reliable, and they are, if God is reliable, trustworthy, and he is, even if Abraham has to offer Isaac as a burnt offering, he knows that God will raise him up so that the promises can be fulfilled, so that God will remain faithful to his word. This is Abraham's faith. He is ready to offer his son because he knows that God will be able to resuscitate him.

And then in verse 8, when Isaac asks his father, "Father, where is the lamb" we see Abraham's total trust in God. Without knowing how, without knowing when, without knowing whether the lamb will be Isaac himself, Abraham trusts God 100%. "God is going to provide himself the lamb for the burnt offering." Abraham relies on the providence of God. God will provide. God will provide what is needed. Abraham does not know how God will act but he knows that he will act and he knows that he will provide and that his son will live.

What makes Abraham obey? He knows his God and he knows that his God is faithful. The prophet Daniel says in Daniel 11: " but the people who **knowtheir God** shall stand firm and take action". Abraham knows his God. He loves his God and he acts. He obeys.

And I said it is an obedience of faith and worship. Abraham said to his servants, "We will go up there to worship" but the most important act of worship is the obedience of Abraham and also of Isaac. This act of obedience is an act of worship. Through his obedience, Abraham shows his love and devotion to God. He said to God, I am ready to give you the thing, the most precious person. I'm ready to do anything to show that I love you and trust you. I don't hold back anything. I won't deny you anything. In a sense, it's not Isaac on the altar, it's Abraham, it's Abraham's heart. Abraham says to God, All that I have, all that I am, is yours. And this is the worship that God desires. God desires, not just nice words on Sunday morning, God desires your heart on Monday morning. He desires an adoration which refuses nothing to God, which gives him everything. This is the heart that God wants to see. This is what the angel says in verse 12: "I have now recognized that you fear God and that you have not withheld from me your only son." You haven't denied me the most precious thing in your life. Is this the worship we offer to God? Are we ready to put our heart on the altar or put your treasure, the most precious person on the altar and say to God, "it's yours"? Or do we offer beautiful words to God but when he asks for our obedience, when he asks that we give him everything, we step back from the altar, we go home, saddened? Here is an obedience that reveals the heart of Abraham

A providence that reveals the heart of God

It would be a mistake on our part if the main lesson that came out of this story was simply to see Abraham as a model of faith and obedience. He is, but that's not the purpose of this story. The purpose of this story is not to draw our attention to Abraham, but, as with all of the scriptures, the goal is to draw our attention to God. Yes, we see Abraham, a great man of faith, but more than that, we see God, a great God of love, a great faithful God, a great God worthy of all our faith, of all our worship. What do we see from this great God here? The answer to this question is found in the name Abraham gives to the place. Verse 14: "Abraham gave this place the name of Jehovah Jireh. This is why it is said today: On the mountain of the Lord, he will be provided."

Dear friends, the God we adore, the God who calls us to go through trials, is Jehovah Jireh, it is the God who provides.

Here, in this story, the providence of God, it is a ram. And this ram, given by God, is offered as a burnt offering in place of Isaac. God provides a sacrifice, an innocent animal that is killed, that is offered as a sacrifice, in place of the one who was to die. And we know it very well, it will not be the last time that God provides a sacrifice, an innocent sacrifice to die in place of others. We must see many parallels between this son Isaac who is placed on the altar and another son, the Son of God, who also is placed on an altar.

Look at some of these parallels:

Verse 2 God says "Take your son, your only one, the one you love". And in John 3 we read: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only son". What does the voice of God say during Jesus' baptism? "You are my beloved Son." God gives his only son, the one he loves. In verse 6, "Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering, and put it on his son." Isaac must carry the wood on which he must die. Jesus also must carry the wood on which he would die. In verse 7, Isaac asks his father a question about the sacrifice. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus said: "Abba Father, all things are possible for you, take this cup away from me!"

Isaac accepts his father's will. He does not resist when his father ties him up. He could have resisted. He could have run away. His father could not have held him or caught him. But Isaac submits to his father's will. Jesus the same: "However, not what I want, but what you want." Isaac doesn't protest. He accepts in silence. What about Jesus? "Like a lamb being led to the slaughter, like a mute sheep before those who shear it; He did not open his mouth."

Abraham was ready to offer his son as a sacrifice. God too. "It pleased the Lord to break him with suffering." In this story, God provides a ram for the sacrifice, but centuries later, he provides a lamb. And the lamb is Jesus, his Son.

You could also say that after three days Isaac comes back to life. Even though he was not dead, Abraham considered him dead. But after three days, Isaac is alive. And on the third day, Jesus rose from the dead.

Even in the promises given to Abraham in verses 17 and 18, there are parallels. The promises given to Abraham are also true and fulfilled in Jesus.

Do you see the parallels? God give us this story to prepare us for a greater son of Abraham.

But there is still one huge difference. Here in Genesis 22 we read in a voice from heaven saying, "Don't lay your hand on the young man and do nothing to him". But when Jesus is on the cross, there is no voice from heaven. In Genesis 22, God spares the life of Isaac.

But he does not spare the life of Jesus. In Romans 8.32 we read: "He who did not spare his own Son, but delivered him up for all of us" We thought of the horror that God asked Abraham to do, take the life of his beloved son. Isn't that what God did for us? He did not spare his own son.

Dear friends, here is the truth that enables us to face the trials of our faith. Here is the reality that allows us to believe in the faithfulness of God. When God wants to put our faith, our love to the test, when God asks us to trust him in the most difficult and painful situations, when God asks us to put our hearts on the altar, to refuse nothing, what is it that enables us to do it: "He did not spare his own son, but he delivered him for all of us." The trials will take place. They will be painful. Sometimes you will find it difficult to understand how a loving God could ask you to go through such an ordeal: "He did not spare his own son but delivered him for you". When you think your faith will no longer be able to withstand the test, when you think that the burden is too heavy, listen to the rest of this verse: "He who did not spare his own Son, but delivered him for all of us, how will he not also with him freely give us all things? "

On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided. In the place where God calls you to suffer for him, in the situation where you obey his call, when you put the most precious thing on the altar of obedience, despite the tears, despite the suffering, God promises that there, on his mountain, he will provide. Is he trustworthy? Look at his son on the cross and you will have the answer.