

Sermon Text for November 8, 2015

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Mark 10:32-34, Genesis 22:1-14

“When it all dawns on us”

This Scripture has been called the best known, if not the theologically most demanding, passage in all of Genesis. Only now in this Scripture do we see how serious faith is to the people who have it, Abraham in this case, and to God who gives it. Faith is a gift from God and salvation for us. No Scripture like this one today explains faith to us more clearly and, frankly, more shockingly. Genesis 22 has been given a variety of different titles: the testing of Abraham, the sacrifice of Isaac, God tests Abraham, one author even called it Sarah’s ultimate exclusion.

We find ourselves thrust into a story where God tests on the one hand and provides on the other for our protagonist, by now our favorite character, Abraham. As we read this story it should dawn on all of us that God’s testing in our lives corresponds and fits neatly into how God provides for us in our lives. These two things go hand in hand. And yet we often overlook the second, the providence, in spite of I Corinthians 10:13 which tells us what? Let this dawn on you: He will not tempt you beyond what you can bear. We know that part, but what about the second, But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. Let’s look at Genesis 22 and allow God’s truth to dawn upon you.

What words are missing from this sound? We all know it, right? This is a test, this is only a test. When you hear those words you know what comes next. Then what seems like an eternity a blaring horn, comes through the speaker. When that is over then the words, this was a test and so on. You are so relieved when it is over, and yet even from the beginning you knew, because you were told, that it was a test.

Our Scripture today provides us with the same framework of telling us from the beginning that what is about to happen is a test. This is a test. The first words that we read are “After these things God tested Abraham.” This is a test, this is only a test. So right from the start we almost breathe a sigh of relief because we know that the outcome is going to be positive because after all, it is only a test and when we think of a test we think of practice right? No one really fails a test in the Bible, right? Except maybe Peter when he is walking on water, when Jesus calls him Satan...anyway. But did you notice that as you were reading the horror and the anxiety build up there is the thought: He

really isn't going to do it is he? It keeps building up and up. As Abraham and Isaac are walking that long three day journey we are waiting impatiently for God to appear and say, this was only a test, but it seems like it is never going to happen.

Right from the beginning we have a question that has bothered people from the beginning of time. Does God test us? James asked a similar question and then answered it for us. He states never say that you are tempted by God, for God is the giver of all good and perfect gifts and nothing evil can come from God so never say that you are tempted by God. And yet here very plainly this verse tells us that God tested Abraham.

Calvin tells us that we find in this passage the command of God and the promise of God in direct conflict. What is the command of God in this passage? We read it in vs. 2, and notice how God leaves no doubt as to whom he is talking about. Abraham Go, take your son, your only son, Isaac, the one you love, and sacrifice him on Mt. Moriah. God makes very clear who Abraham is supposed to take. Not Ishmael, not Lot not anyone else but Isaac and he himself is responsible for the sacrifice, he himself is responsible to draw the blade to end his life. This command is in direct conflict with God's promise that we have heard over and over again. The command that made Sarah laugh before and after she had Isaac. The promise that through Isaac would come a great nation.

Do you find in your life times when what we consider the promises that we receive from God: such as I will not leave or forsake you, ask and you shall receive, I will not leave you destitute and alone, these promises sometimes come under pressure and doubt as events happen to threaten the promises that we think we received from God? When we receive God's promises it does not mean that we will have a free ride, it does not mean that we will be protected from moments where those promises seem to be called into question. God may provide us with a promise and yet call you to do something that would seem to contradict the promise that is made. You want to call up, I just wish you would make up your mind.

This test that Abraham undergoes is one of them. Take your beloved child, the one that I told you before would be a great nation and kill him. It was a three days journey and can you imagine what was going on in his head those three days. Can you imagine the torture that he was undergoing?

Have you ever wondered where in the world Sarah was when this was going on? You remember Sarah who was so protective of her child that she banished Hagar to the

desert because her slave child was playing with her chosen child? Where was she while Abraham was carrying through God's call? You'd expect her to be pleading with God for the life of the boy. Can you just picture the scene when Abraham and Isaac get home from their adventure?

Abraham is lingering outside tying up the camels trying to figure out exactly what he is going to tell Sarah when Isaac impulsively dashes into the house and says Mom, you won't believe what dad and I did today. There is silence in the tent and then: Abraham. Yes dear. You did what with my boy? You know as you get older you start to reveal to your parents things that happened or that you did with your siblings that leave them wondering how you ever survived. Every time my brothers and I get together my mom learns something new and has something new to thank God that all of her boys are still alive. In Moscow Bethany and I would go to the park with Rosie and I would let her climb a tree some 30 feet up in the air, to the top branches. When she gets down we have a routine. I say: You know the deal. And she says: I know, don't tell mommy.

Abraham was truly tested in this Scripture. I have found that the testing in our life serves the purpose, as it did here with Abraham, to discover if we really mean what we say when we say that our faith is grounded in the Gospel. The Mark passage serves a similar purpose. Couched in the context of lessons on how difficult it will be to enter the kingdom of God unless you are child, especially if you are a rich man, 3 times in vs. 32 we hear that the disciples are amazed and the followers are afraid. Why? Because here is when it dawns on them that if we really follow Jesus it is either all or nothing. I don't think I have the faith or even desire that type of radical faith. I just want a taste, enough to get me saved. I don't want to change my life, I just want to be good and normal. Not the radical believer that these verses almost demand from me. We turn away when we think that God is only one who tests when we forget that he is also a provider.

Now God begins in this passage as a tester but then he evolves into the provider. Isaac asks his father on the journey: dad, you have the wood, the knife, the rope, everything you need except for the lamb. Isn't that the most important thing? Now what, where are we going to get the lamb to bring before God? Abraham answers by stating: God will provide or in Hebrew Jehovah Jireh. God will provide. The word provide can also mean "see" in Hebrew so Abraham states God will provide, Jehovah Jireh, or God will see to it.

This passage gives us one of the central points in our Christian Faith: God's providence. Neatly tucked into that word providence is the word provide. When we talk about a providential happening or experience we are affirming that God provides. When his son asks him the question, what are we going to do? Abraham doesn't know how, he doesn't know when, he doesn't know where but he does know that God will provide.

That ram did not appear by accident, it did not appear by nature, or by luck, but by the provide-*n*ce, the providence of God. We find ourselves today a bit confused about God's providence. We pray give us this day our daily bread and we see it in Exodus as God provided the manna and we know that God can and does do it. But we are so busy gathering the wood and the fire and everything else for our lives that God's absolute, radical providence easily slips from us.

It hasn't quite dawned on us that our lives are filled with times of testing in order for us to see God provide and be able to trust and have confidence in his provision. When it all dawns on us, look out. When we are able to become like Abraham to say to our children, God will provide, to say to those around us who see the times that we go through, God will provide even in the face of the most difficult, horrific circumstances, then you can experience the type of walk with God that Abraham had.

We are all like Abraham, so involved in our outside world, our careers, interests, even principles that we do not or cannot see that it is our child, or spouse, or parent that is bound, by us, on the altar. We are so adept at sacrificing that which is truly important to us on the altar we have erected that we may ask whether we are capable of hearing the cry of the angel before it is too late.

When it all dawns on us we realize that life is not like a carousel where you will get another chance to catch the ring because it is coming around again. Instead, life is filled with windows of opportunity, filled with moments when it all dawns on us, when we hear this is a test, when we are given an opportunity to follow through on the faith that has been gifted to us. When this happens allow your eyes to be opened, allow the providential God to give you his life through his Son Jesus Christ. Seize the moment, bask in the dawning of understanding as Abraham did when the ram appeared to him caught in the thicket, and know that with every test comes an opportunity to experience once again the fullness of God's providence. Amen.