

# GENESIS: THE BEGINNING IS NOT THE END

## Faith and Failure

TEXT: Genesis 21-28; Romans 12:1; Hebrews 11:17-20

INTRODUCTION: While moving through the Book of Genesis, we have recounted some of the stories of Abraham, who though he had both pauses and detours in his walk with the Lord, at his core, he was a man of both faith and faithfulness.

This morning we are going to learn what the Bible speaks to us out of the life of the son of Abraham whose name was Isaac. Sadly, the story of Isaac is one of both faith and failure. Books of myth and legend are filled with heroes often without flaws and who always win in the end. **The Bible is filled with the truth** that comes from God and as such tells us the truth **about men and women who encountered God.**

- **Some responded in faith,**
  - **but others turned away in unbelief.**
- **Some of those who believed lived lives of faithfulness to the glory of God,**
  - **but there were others whose walk with the Lord was often marred by disobedience and faithlessness.**

As I said, Isaac was one of these. You might ask, “Then why should we look at him?” Why take time to read or study or consider the life of one who is less than a noble example?

- Because it is in God’s Word, which means we need to read, study, and consider it.
- Because, sadly, we ourselves can often identify with those who stumble and fail more readily than those who do not.

So let us look at the life of Isaac to see what God wants us to learn and do.

**Isaac’s life began as a miracle.** He was a baby promised by God 70 years before he was born. When he was delivered, his mother was a hundred years old and his father 110! **He is a testimony to the faithfulness of God to keep His promises, no matter how unlikely it seems** by the estimation of the world.

And may I pause here to ask you a personal question? **Are there any of the promises that God has made to you in His Word that you have given up on?** You waited, and waited, and hoped and hoped, but the promise is not yet kept. Abraham and Sarah waited 75 years! But God kept His Word! God promised that a descendent of Abraham would be a blessing to every family on the face of the earth. But that promise, fulfilled in the saving death of the Lord Jesus, a descendent of Abraham in the flesh – that promise took 1,955 years to be brought to fruition, but its blessing is still being received, and its benefit will still be enjoyed throughout eternity.

Therefore, when we think of Isaac, let us remember that first and foremost his life was a testimony of the power and faithfulness of our God, no matter what Isaac himself did or did not do. And do you not think that Abraham and Sarah must have often recounted to Isaac the story of his miraculous birth. How many times as a child did he delight to hear that he had been a gift from God? How many times as a teenager was he embarrassed by his parents in front of his friends as they told the story of God's wondrous works that resulted in the birth of their son?

Isaac was born to parents of faith, and in spite of a few slip ups, to parents described in Scripture as faithful. He no doubt was raised in an atmosphere of faith and love of the Lord God.

But there came a day when

## I. THE CHILD BORN IN FAITH BECAME A MAN OF FAITH HIMSELF.

Genesis 22:1-2, 8-10 1 Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, ... "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 the two of them went together. 9 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. 10 And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.

You see, our common conception of Abraham placing Isaac on an altar to sacrifice to the Lord while Isaac was still a child or even a young teen is in error.

The Jewish historian Josephus says Isaac was 25 years old when he journeyed with his father to Mt. Moriah. I believe the best biblical chronology shows Isaac to be 33 years old at this point in his life. In Genesis 22, Isaac is called a "lad," but the word in Hebrew means "a young man."

The point is that Isaac was an able-bodied young man. Abraham was nearly 150 years old. Abraham could not, did not, force Isaac upon the altar. Isaac climbed up there of his own free will and allowed his father to bind him hand and foot.

We marvel at the faith of Abraham that he would obey God to offer his son, his only son Isaac, his son whom he loved, as a sacrifice to the Lord. Now let us take a moment to be inspired by the faith of Isaac to allow his aged father to so offer him, to climb up on that altar and see his father poised above him with knife in hand.

Paul tells us in the Book of Hebrews that Abraham believed that after he killed Isaac that God would raise his son from the dead. Perhaps Abraham told Isaac and Isaac believed that also, or perhaps Isaac was just willing to die if that is what the Lord required.

I am not saying this is the moment in which Isaac came to faith and thus was saved. But this certainly tells us that by this time, Isaac had himself become a believer. He trusted God and he believed the promise of God, given first to Adam and Eve in the garden and then to his own father Abraham.

But as amazing as Abraham's faith on Mt. Moriah is, Abraham's faith could not put or keep Isaac on the altar. Isaac trusted the Lord.

THE CHILD BORN IN FAITH BECAME A MAN OF FAITH HIMSELF.

**Have you?**

- Has there been a time in your life where you recognized that you were a sinner who was lost and bound for hell?
- Has there been a time when you deliberately, consciously believed Jesus died on the cross for your sins and rose from the dead.
- And because you believed, you trusted Jesus as your Savior and Lord, making Him the Master of your life?

Dear friend, listen, please!

**The faith of our parents will not save us.  
The faith of our spouse or family will not save us.  
Going to church will not save us.  
Just believing that God exists will not save us.  
We must trust in Jesus who died upon the cross for our sins.**

**John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:**

But friend listen, Isaac not only became a believer, a man of faith,

## **II. THE MAN WHO NEEDED A SUBSTITUTE AS A SACRIFICE BECAME A LIVING SACRIFICE FOR GOD.**

Isaac had such faith in God that he was willing to die on the altar. And that is when God showed Isaac and his father the reward of faith.

God provided Himself a sacrifice, a ram caught in the thicket, a lamb to take the place of Isaac on the altar.

The text does not indicate whether Isaac fully understood the implications of what God had done on the mountain that day. Certainly he knew God had rescued him from certain death by providing a substitute, and he was no doubt profoundly grateful to the God He trusted for his merciful provision.

But Abraham knew that there was more to what had happened between God, Isaac, himself, and the young ram than just keeping his family alive.

Genesis 22:14 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."

And he was right! Because on another peak of that same mountain, later called by the Romans "Calvary," God sent His Son, His only Son Jesus, Whom He loved to be the substitutionary sacrifice to pay the penalty for the sin of the world, purchasing salvation to give freely to all who would trust in Him.

The Scripture commands us that after we are saved

Romans 12:1–2 1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is your reasonable service.* 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Apparently, Isaac obeyed this principle, at least for a while, in his life. One thing the Scripture tells us that gives testimony of this is that when Abraham sent his servant back to Haran to get a wife for Isaac from their own family and not from the pagan Canaanites that lived around them, Isaac offered no protest. Abraham said this was what the Lord wanted, and Isaac surrendered his will to let the Lord choose his wife.

That was no small surrender. Because pagans have nothing to live for except the things of the flesh, they magnify the flesh in every way. Girls were raised to become sensuous young women, seeking to attract men with an overt lack of modesty and seduction – much like the year 2017.

Canaanite young women were readily available to Isaac. His willingness to allow the Lord to lead the servant to select a bride for him from his father's extended family meant that he had indeed presented his body as a living sacrifice to the Lord to be holy unto Him.

### **Have you?**

- Young men, are you praying for God to lead you to someone who loves the Lord and can be the godly helper God wants you to have, or are you just keeping your eyes peeled for the hottest looking chick in town?
- Young ladies, are you praying for a husband that will be the spiritual leader of your family, a faithful partner for a lifelong relationship, and an example of godliness to your children; or are you just hoping to capture some handsome dude who will make lots of money and be tons of fun?
- Married couples, have each of you so surrendered your lives to the Lord that your marriage belongs to Him. You are no longer comparing your spouse to other men or other women and wondering why yours cannot be like them?

### **All of us who are men and women of faith need to**

- **present our bodies a living sacrifice,**

- **holy,**
- **acceptable to God,**
- **which is our reasonable service,** or our spiritual worship
- **and not be conformed to this world,**
- **but be transformed by the renewing of our minds,**

Oh, that Isaac had remained surrendered to the Lord. But he didn't.

### III. THIS MAN OF FAITH FAILED IN FAITHFULNESS.

After God brought the woman right for Isaac to be his wife (her name was Rebecca), God gave them twins.

- **Esau was born first.** His name means "hairy," but he was nicknamed Edom which means "red." He was a worldly, outdoors man, and favored by Isaac.
- **Jacob was born second,** his hand extending as if to catch the heel of Esau and be born before him. His name means "the one coming after" or "supplanter." He was a home-boy, had more spiritual interest than his brother, and was favored by his mother.
- Before the boys were even born, **God announced that the second born** would be the son whose line **would carry the promised seed of Abraham** and that
- **The nation coming from Jacob would rule the nation coming from Esau.**

Isaac would not accept the revealed will of God. He determined He would give Esau his blessing and circumvent what God declared. His rebellion against God's decree set the tone for the attitude of each one in the family.

1. **Isaac intended to defy God and bless Esau.** Gen. 27:21
  2. **Rebekah wanted God's will to be done, but did not have confidence that God could pull it off.** Therefore she schemed with Jacob to deceive Isaac, trying to "help God out" in ungodly ways.
  3. **Jacob knew he was the son of the covenant, but he too did not trust God to accomplish His promise.** For him, the end justified the means, and he sought to fulfill the will of God by disobedience to God.
  4. **Esau knew Jacob was the covenant son by the choice of God.** But that did not mean God had no purpose for Esau, just a different purpose. **But Esau wanted things his way.** Even after the blessing was pronounced, Esau cried and begged like a child for what Isaac did not have the power to give.
- **The failure of each to accept God's will and trust Him brought tragic consequences to the whole family.**

1. **Isaac had once voluntarily laid upon the altar; now he opposes the express will of God.** He is frustrated and defeated. His family gets shattered by his lack of spiritual leadership.
2. **Rebekah gained what God would have given, but her methods cost her both of her sons.** Esau's heart was turned far from her, and she never saw her beloved Jacob again.
3. **Jacob had what he wanted, but he gained a lot more than he bargained for by his deceit.** He was forced to leave his home and endure the hate of his brother. Furthermore, he became the victim of deceitful men the rest of his life. His uncle Laban will trick him, costing him years of labor; and his own sons will deceive him into thinking that his youngest has been savagely killed.
4. **Esau lived a life full of hate.** He planned the murder of his brother and intentionally injected pain into the lives of his aging parents. **His descendants became a people who were constantly an enemy to God.**

#### How about you?

- **Are you daily surrendered to the will of God, or do you oppose things you know He desires?**
- **Do you trust the Lord to work through righteousness, or do you manipulate to produce the results you think are right and best?**
- **Is your mind being transformed to be more and more like the mind of Christ, or are you conformed to the thinking of the world?**

CONCLUSION: Bow with me in prayer. While you focus your mind's attention and your heart's affection upon the Lord, would you answer these questions to Him, right now?

1. Have you, yourself, become a man or woman of faith through trusting Jesus as your Savior and Lord?
  - If not, trust Him now.
2. Have you in recent times presented your body a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service? Are you being conformed to this world, or have you surrendered your life to be transformed by the renewing of your mind?
  - If not, surrender now.
3. Are you surrendered and actively engaged in doing God's will and fulfilling His purpose in your life right now?
  - If not, you can commit to doing so in prayer at this moment.