

Explore the Bible Series for February 10: Do you obey in faith?

February 1, 2008

Posted: 2/01/08

Explore the Bible Series for February 10

Do you obey in faith?

- Genesis 22:1-18

By Donald Raney

First Baptist Church, Petersburg

Years ago, a man was walking through the desert in Nevada when he came across an old abandoned store with a pump to a water well next to it. Upon approaching the pump, he noticed there was a note attached to the handle.

It read: "I had to close the store, but all who pass by are welcome to use the well. This pump is connected to a continuously supplied source of natural underground spring water. Due to the climate, however, the pump must be primed with each use. Under the white rock to your left is a sealed bottle of water which contains enough to prime the pump but not if you drink any first. Pour about a fourth of the water slowly around top to soak the washers and then pour the rest directly under handle and pump quickly. It may take a minute, but keep pumping. The well never has run dry. When you get water, refill the bottle and put it back for the next person. Signed Desert Pete P.S. Remember, don't drink first. Have faith

and prime the pump. You will have more water than you can hold.”

If you had walked across desert for hours without water and found this, what would you do? The Christian life is a life lived by faith. Sometimes God asks us to let go of things that we think we need to hold tightly in order to more fully trust him. Abraham had such an experience with God that can teach us how to obey through faith.

When God's call does not make sense (Genesis 22:1-2)

Imagine how Abraham must have felt and what he must have thought. He faithfully had left his father's house with all of its security and followed God to a foreign land. He faithfully had waited 25 years for the birth of the promised child. He had already lost one son, Ishmael, who was banished from him home. And now when he was well over 100 years old, God asked him to sacrifice the life of his only son—the child through whom all of God's promises would be fulfilled.

Why would God ask for such a sacrifice? Everything seemed to be following a logical course. Although the timing of sending the child when Abraham was advanced in age seemed out of the ordinary, now that Isaac was a growing boy, the path to the fulfillment of God's promises seemed to be clearing. What God was asking now just did not make sense.

Today, many believers are fully committed to follow God as long as the road is smooth and the course follows a logical path. Occasionally we may even begin assuming that we know what the next step is before God leads. Then suddenly God steps in and asks us to change paths. It does not take faith to walk along a well-lit path. That is why God sometimes calls for us to take a step without illuminating the path. We must step where we cannot see where our foot will land or what we might encounter.

Abraham's swift obedience to God's call to sacrifice Isaac challenges us to obey in faith even when it does not make sense.

When God's call requires work and costs (Genesis 22:3-10)

Not only did God's call to sacrifice Isaac not make sense, it called for considerable effort on the part of Abraham. Since he knew he would be gone at least six days, he had to first arrange for the care of Sarah and his flocks. He had to explain where he was going to Sarah. He had to chop wood and gather provisions for the journey. With each task, Abraham certainly questioned God's directions.

Then for three days as they traveled, he must have wrestled with himself and with God over what he was doing. For three days as he watched Isaac obediently following his father, Abraham must have wanted to turn back many times. Who could have blamed him? God was asking too much. Up until this point, each time God had spoken to Abraham, God's call for Abraham to act had come with a promised reward. This time there was no such promise and we must remember that Abraham did not know this was simply a test. But Abraham proved to have a faith that persisted through the physical and emotional difficulties of the task of following God.

According to Hebrews 11:17-19, Abraham's faith led him to believe God would fulfill his earlier promises, even if it required raising Isaac from the dead. When God calls for his followers to faithful obedience, it often requires physical and emotional effort and cost.

God rewards our faithful obedience (Genesis 22:11-18)

For many years, God had tested Abraham. Each test called for a deeper

level of faith on Abraham's part. While each of the previous tests had involved considerable effort, none had required Abraham to give up something so special to him. God knew Abraham would follow him. Now he wanted to see if Abraham could let go of all earthly attachments and fully trust God to provide.

When Abraham demonstrated his willingness to sacrifice Isaac, God responds, "Now I know that you fear God seeing that you have not withheld your son from me." God knew Abraham's faith had the potential to pass the test, but that potential had to be given the opportunity to be realized through testing.

Abraham's faith passed the test, and God rewarded him. Not only does he return home with Isaac, but God reaffirms his covenant oath to greatly multiply Abraham's descendants. God often does call us to do difficult things which require us to stretch our faith. Yet if we can summon the strength to let go of all else but God, we will find great reward.

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Baptist churches, in Texas, the BGCT, the nation and around the world.