

From the beginning God has promised us a savior. From Adam and Eve to Abraham, from Moses to David to the Prophets, the Lord has provided promises and prophecies, visions and allegories to draw a picture of who this savior would be and what he would do. And they believed. I call this faith of the Old Testament saints, Christmas-faith, the faith that one day God would fulfill his promise to redeem humanity from sin, death, and the devil with a savior.

Tonight we're going to talk about the Christmas-faith of Abraham and how such a faith can be ours in our walk with God and with one another.

OPENING PRAYER

GENESIS 22:1-8

God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ²He said, "Take 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." ³So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. ⁴On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. ⁵Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." ⁶And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. ⁷And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" ⁸Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.

Abraham lived in ancient Babylon, today Kuwait, right off the Persian Gulf, in the city of Ur. It was here that God spoke to Abraham and told him to pack his bags and go north with only his dad, his wife, Sarah, and his nephew, Lot. Abraham obeyed, and the family's first stop was the trade center, Haran, which today is in eastern Turkey. The second stop was along the Mediterranean Sea in Canaan, today, Israel.

This was not an easy move for Abraham, for he was already a successful rancher, and he had nothing to gain and everything to lose by relocating, at least in human terms. But God promised him something money couldn't buy. The Lord said, **Genesis 12:2-3**, "I will

make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing...in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

What did Abraham hear when God said he would found a great nation, that his name would be great, and that through him "all the families of the earth shall be blessed"? He heard, offspring, children. He heard, legacy. But Abraham was 75 years old and Sarah was 65, and they had no children.

But Abraham had faith. Perhaps we think of faith as something we have or we don't have. It's like being pregnant. Either you are or you aren't.

However, as we examine Abraham's walk with God, we see that faith is more like a baseball mitt. It's something one grows into, something that fits more comfortably with frequency of use.

Indeed, as we read Abraham's story we discover that he believed strongly enough in God's promises to leave the comfort of his home in Babylon, but not strongly enough to confront the challenges he faced on the road. For example, twice he gave up Sarah, his wife, to emperors as his sister for fear of being killed because he was her husband. Abraham had a hard time believing God was present in his day-to-day life.

So the Lord repeated his promises to Abraham over and over again. After his initial call, God said to him, **Genesis 13:16, "I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted."**

And later on he said to him again, **Genesis 15:5-6, "'Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.' ... 'So shall your offspring be.' 'And he believed the LORD, and He counted it to him as righteousness."**

Abraham's faith was a saving-faith. God made him "righteous"—perfect, pure, and holy—because he believed. But what a brittle thing faith is! Abraham was 85 years old and he still didn't have a son. So he and Sarah decided to help God out. Have you ever done that, helped God out?

Abraham and Sarah had a servant girl. Her name was Hagar. She was maybe 20 years old, max. She was a perfect candidate to bear a son for Abraham. And why not? After all, God promised. So after a great deal of prayer and deliberation (or not), 85 year old Abraham made a baby with his 20 year old servant girl.

Abraham's faith was so shallow, he made a decision about his family's future without consulting God. But the Lord did not give up on him! Fifteen years later, when Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90, God said to Abraham, **Genesis 17:19, "Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him."**

Throughout the Scriptures we see God demonstrating his awesomeness over and over again. And with Abraham, he couldn't have chosen a better object for his work! I mean, if he'd chosen someone a little bit more faithful, a little bit more pious, perhaps there would've been some confusion as regards God's part in what ultimately happened.

St. Paul wrote, **Romans 4:16, "That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all His offspring, not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all."**

"That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace."

God works with what he's got. All along the way, the Lord tested Abraham's faith, and Abraham grew in his walk with him. God gave Abraham his ultimate test after his natural son, Isaac, had been born and was half grown up. God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac just as the pagans sacrificed their first born sons. By this time Abraham was 113 years old, and he had stopped arguing with God. And he was willing to do it, to sacrifice his only beloved child, his only son, his heir, his namesake. As he prepared to do so the only words that came from his lips were, **"God will provide" (Genesis 22:8).**

And he did: God provided.

"That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace."

It is the ultimate statement of faith, to be able to say with confidence, **"God will provide."** He provides everything we need for this body and life, our work, home, clothing, food, good health, faithful neighbors, and everything else. He provides peace and joy, strength and knowledge, love and friendship, and peace. And he provided a son. He provided one for Abraham, and he provided one for you and me, for the whole world, Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, **John 8:56, "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see My day. He saw it and was glad."**

Jesus was saying Abraham saw salvation in the birth of his son, Isaac, and he anticipated an even mightier works by his God who would raise the dead.

“God will provide”: In weakness and heartache, turmoil and distress, depression and failure, the Lord will provide, just as the Prophet wrote: **“For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).**

Abraham’s faith was a Christmas-faith, faith in the One who could bring forth a miracle in Sarah who was 90-years old, for his God—our God—is the God of Creation, the God of the Living, the Author of Life.

Friends in Christ, this Christmas-faith of the Old Testament saints is about hearing God’s voice, and returning to it again and again in the midst of our struggles, knowing in our heart of hearts, **“God will provide.”** Please say it with me. (God will provide.)

Brothers and sisters in the Lord, this week as you confront the challenges that arise in your lives, may your hearts rest on these words, **“God will provide.”**

This week may you be strengthened in your confidence that God accepts you as you are and that he is eager to demonstrate in your life how great, how merciful, how powerful his grace really is.

And this week may you have the opportunity to share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.