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Genesis 22: Broken Will & Tested Heart

by David Dunlap

Worship always supposes a broken will. Throughout our lives, God seeks to mold and shape us so that our wills might be transformed. His intent is that His will might be our will and His desires might be our desires. In the early chapters of Genesis, we see Abraham in willful disobedience going down and living in Egypt. It was in Egypt that God began to break his will. During all the time that Abraham was in Egypt, he never built an altar, he never prayed, and he never worshiped the Lord. But then God began to move in Abraham's heart. God's will began to be his will and God's ambitions his ambitions. Finally, when he turned his back on Egypt, Abraham returned to the place where he had formerly built an altar and worshiped God. In the shadow of a Terebinth tree, we see Abraham bowing his heart in surrender and sacrificing upon that altar to God (Genesis 13:4). God uses brokenness to bring us to the place where He can use us as He desires. The "Prince of Preachers", Charles Haddon Spurgeon, once wrote:

When I surrendered myself to my Savior, I gave Him my body, my soul, my spirit. I gave Him all I had and all I shall have for time and eternity. I gave Him my powers, my faculties, my eyes, my ears, my limbs, my emotions, my judgment, my whole manhood, and all that could come of it.¹

God's method is to strive to break our hearts with the things that break the heart of God. This was God's intent with King David. After his unlawful relationship with Bathsheba, a child is born who is destined to live only a few days (2 Sam. 12:20). When King David saw his sick child, who was dear to him, it broke his heart to see this little child suffer so greatly. He fasted, pleaded, prayed, and wrestled with God concerning the child's life. However, his heart and will were not yet yielded to God. But once the child was dead, David changed his clothing, ate, drank, and worshiped before the Lord, because the struggle that existed in his heart had ceased. The Spirit of God reminds us: "A broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou will not despise" (Ps. 51:17).

Worship that is in spirit and truth is worship that rises from a broken will. Job experienced deep afflictions through the loss of his possessions, the loss of his sons and daughters, and individual physical sufferings (Job 1:20). Though Job was a godly man, nevertheless his grief cut deep as he mourned deeply for the loss of his children and all that he possessed. But then in his sorrow, grief, and loss, we see Job rising and worshiping God. He builds an altar, offers a sacrifice, bows his knees, and lifts his voice in praise. He can worship God as God should be worshiped, because his will is surrendered to the Lord of all the earth. "Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his

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C. H. Spurgeon
(1834-1893)

head, and fell to the ground and worshiped” (Job 1:20). He can say, “The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord”(v. 21).

Abraham and A Tested Heart

However, in Genesis 22, we read something far above what we see in the lives of King David and the patriarch Job. Yes, these two godly men both yielded their wills to God, but their submission was not as costly as Abraham’s. Yes, they bowed their hearts to God; yes, they built altars; yes, they offered sacrifices—but this was so little compared to what God would ask of Abraham. God demanded of them obedience and yielded hearts, but He required of them no special, costly act. Not so in Genesis 22 in the life of Abraham. Not only must Abraham accept God’s will, but he must offer the greatest and costliest of all sacrifices! He must, so to speak, sacrifice himself; he must plunge a dagger into his own heart, for the sacrifice of his son is nothing short of that. God says to Abraham, “Offer up to Me your son, your only son, whom you love...” (Gen. 22:2). The name “Isaac” reminded Abraham so vividly of how he for 25 years longed for a son and heir. The words “thy son” kindled in Abraham the tenderest of feelings; and now he had to sacrifice that very son! Even more than that, this name recalled to Abraham the promise of God. It was in this son that all the promises were to be fulfilled, for God had positively told him, “In Isaac shall thy seed be called”(Gen. 21:12).

The highest character of testing is that which comes directly from the hand of God. God does not test all men directly. Lot was not tested by God directly, but rather, it was by the sins and wickedness of Sodom that Lot was tested. John Phillips writes:

God never tested Lot. There was never any need, for Lot’s caliber was known. His shallow, empty, worldly, carnal life was so obvious that tests would have been superfluous. But God tested Abraham.²

It is a high, holy, and special act when God tests us directly. When God puts His dear child into the furnace, He purposes to test the reality of His child’s faith. God will do this, for He must have the reality of faith in our lives. It will not do to say, “Lord, Lord,” or, “I go, Sir.” The heart must be probed to its very core, so He might rid us of every trace of hypocrisy and false profession. We read in Proverbs, “My son, give Me thy heart.” He does not say, “Give me your head, or your intellect, or your tongue;” but “Give me thy heart.” God wants all of these things, but most of all He wants our hearts. There may be much truth on our lips and in the intellect, but God looks for it in the heart. “God requires truth in the inward parts” (Ps. 51:6). In order to prove the sincerity of our response, He will lay His hand upon something that is very near to our hearts.

Abraham And A Broken Will

In the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, who was the truest worshiper of the Father, we notice a life lived in continual brokenness. In the labors of Christ, His cup was full of bitterness; yet in His desire to do the will of the Father He set aside the rejection, the suffering, even His own will, and said, “The cup which My Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?” His will was always yielded to the Father’s will. The Lord Jesus Christ is our chief example of the life of a worshiper. This was a lesson that Abraham would learn.

There can be no true spiritual worship without the yielding of our wills to God. Needless to say, this denial of self is entirely contrary to our old nature, which ever seeks to please self. When Abraham said he was going to “worship,” he knew that it meant the offering up of his son, and this would require the

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**John Phillips
(1927-2010)**

denial of all selfish desires—a broken will. When the believer worships today, he must deny the same pull of the flesh. True worshipers are they who might say: “We are the true circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ, and put no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3). Every desire of the flesh must be laid upon the altar of sacrifice if God’s perfect will is to be accomplished. The true worshiper must come to the end of himself; he must see that the desires of the flesh and its allure are completely bankrupt.

As God taught Abraham that every desire of the flesh must be yielded to Him, the lesson is equally applicable to us in worship today. No one should seek to exalt himself in the presence of the Lord (1 Cor. 1:29). In true worship, all secular positions, all spiritual positions, all self-exaltation, all pride, and all titles of honor should be laid at the foot of the cross. We should speak less of our accomplishments and more of His accomplishments. The Lord Jesus Christ must increase and we must decrease. All true Christ-exalting praise and thanksgiving are contrary to the flesh. The flesh seeks to put self in the first place; true worship seeks to seat Christ in the first place. The flesh seeks to exalt itself; the Spirit ever seeks to exalt Christ. Therefore, the Psalmist reminds us, “Everyone in His temple speaks of His glory”(Psalm 29:9). In times of corporate worship, we should speak little of ourselves and more and more of Christ.

And so God, in His infinite mercy, causes us to gain more in the Spirit than we ever forsake concerning the flesh. As Abraham stood at the altar of sacrifice on Mount Moriah with a broken heart and a broken will, far from those servants that accompanied him, his deep sorrow soon turned to great joy. We see Abraham offering a ram on the altar in the place of his son, according as he had said to Isaac, “God will provide Himself a lamb for the burnt-offering” (Gen. 22:8). It is thus that, in secret communion with God, Abraham learns that Jehovah is his all in all. He is Jehovah-Jireh—the God who will provide.

Abraham and A Refined Faith

Abraham’s life was a life of living, active faith. God told Abraham to leave his home in Ur of the Chaldees, NOT KNOWING WHERE he would go. And Abraham by faith obeyed. God told Abraham that Sarah, his wife, would bear a child in her old age, NOT KNOWING HOW God would accomplish it. And Abraham believed. God told Abraham to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice, NOT KNOWING WHY God required it. Abraham by faith obeyed.

Isaac was Abraham’s child of promise. “In Isaac shall thy seed be called.” Isaac was at the center of all God’s promises to Abraham and Sarah. And now Abraham is asked to sacrifice his son. What a tremendous test of his faith! This command of God was beyond human comprehension. How would God fulfill his promise? How could Abraham’s seed be as innumerable as the sand upon the seashore and the stars in heaven above? Still Abraham counted God as ABLE to do what He promised! Well-known Bible commentator Warren Wiersbe writes:

Abraham heard God’s word and immediately obeyed it by faith. He knew that God’s will never contradicts God’s promise, so he held on to the promise, “In Isaac shall thy seed be called”(Gen. 21:12). Abraham believed that even if God allowed him to slay his son, He could raise him from the dead. Faith does not demand explanations; faith rests on promises.³

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Warren Wiersbe

from *Be Obedient: Abraham*
Victor Press, 1991



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Yet God knows, at the same time, that the heart needs to be sustained under trial. He strengthened Abraham's heart by a new promise so that Abraham might triumph. When Abraham built the altar and laid Isaac upon that wood at the time of sacrifice, God gave to Abraham the promise of resurrection, so little known at that time. Abraham "accounted that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead"(Hebrews 11:17-19). Abraham already had seen God give life to Sarah's womb in the birth of Isaac. He felt sure that somehow God would keep His promise! Doubtless, He will also keep his promises to us today.

Conclusion

It was not for Abraham to question the inscrutable ways of God, but simply to obey. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways', declares the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts'"(Isaiah 55:8-9). Abraham must go straight on trusting in the inexhaustible storehouse of the secret ways of God. Oh, for faith like this! Oh, to simply believe what God says, being assured that God will do just what He has promised! Oh, to look at all the circumstances that defy fulfillment without fear, trusting unswervingly in the bare Word of God! If Abraham could believe God like that, surely we can believe God in the same way today! We should begin to practice such faith, stepping from stone to stone, until we are far out from the shore of human strength, leaning alone on the unseen but felt arm of God.

—Suggestive thoughts for this article were drawn from the writings of John Nelson Darby(1880-1882) *Collected Writings - Genesis*; F. B. Meyer (1850-1935), *Abraham-The Obedience of Faith*; and C.H. Mackintosh-(1820-1896) *Notes On The Pentateuch - Genesis*.

Endnotes

1. William MacDonald, *The Disciple's Manual*,(Gospel Folio Press: Port Colbourne, Ont. CA, 2004), p. 110
2. John Phillips, *Exploring Genesis*, (Kregel Publishers: Grand Rapids, 2001), p. 179
3. Warren Wiersbe, *Be Obedient*, (Victor Press: Colorado Springs, CO, 1991), p. 110