Genesis 22:1-18 *His Name Is: God Provides*

***Jehovah Jireh***

**Psalm 9:10** says:

Those who know your name trust in you.

This verse is addressed to God. The idea is that the more we know about God’s character, reputation, and nature, the more we will place our hope and faith in Him. And one of the best ways to know more about God is to know the names that He chooses to reveal Himself by.

And so, as we approach Christmas this year, we are doing a series of sermons called *His Name Is*. We are looking at the different names given to God in the Bible. You might think of Christmas as God’s ultimate way of introducing Himself to us. Studying these names is a way to give even more meaning to that introduction.

And today’s name is a favorite for many of God’s people: ***Jehovah Jireh****.* **The God Who Provides.**

Jehovah, of course, is one of God’s essential names. Written in Hebrew, it’s just the four consonants Y-H-W-H. Sometimes pronounced, Yahweh, Israelites preferred not to say this name aloud, so they substituted the word for Lord: “Adonai.” The vowels from Adonai combined with the consonants from Yahweh is where the word Jehovah comes from.

Jireh is a Hebrew word for “seeing.” So literally, Jehovah Jireh means “The Lord sees” or “The Lord will see to it.”

Our English word “provide” comes from a Latin word; “providere” which means “to foresee” or “to attend to.” Thus, the traditional interpretation of this name of God is: “The LORD will provide” or “The God who provides.” As Charles Spurgeon says:

Possibly this expression hits the nail on the head. Our heavenly Father sees our need, and with divine foresight of love prepares the supply. He sees to a need to supply it, and in the seeing He is seen, in the providing He manifests Himself. <http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols28-30/chs1803.pdf>

We see this name given to God in the story of Abraham and Isaac.

***Liar or Devil?***

The scripture passage is Genesis 22. If you have a Bible with you, I invite you to look that up: Genesis, chapter 22. We’ll also have the verses up on the screen behind me.

Genesis 22, **verses 1 and 2**:

Some time later God tested Abraham, He said to him, “Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied. Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.”

Whoa! Wait a minute. Time out. I said this sermon is about the God who Provides. And now we’re talking about child sacrifice? That doesn’t seem right. God doesn’t seem to be providing anything here. Instead, the story begins with God taking away!

A couple of things. For one thing, notice that verse 1 says God “tested” Abraham. That’s very important. This is a test. As it turns out, Isaac was never in any real danger. We’ll see that in a bit.

For another thing, while child sacrifice was actually very common among the pagan tribes that surround God’s people in the Bible, there is never any indication that God desires child sacrifice or wants His people to practice it. In fact, God renounces the practice in the strongest possible terms (i.e. Leviticus 20:2-5).

But, given the practices of the other tribes, this would not have seemed that odd of a request to Abraham.

Now, dig a little further. Most of Abraham’s story in the Bible is about him waiting to become a father. God had promised to make a great nation out of him and to bless the whole world through his family (Gen. 12:3), but he didn’t have any children. He was already 75 years old when God first called him, and for 25 years he waited. He even tried to keep God’s promises for Him by adopting a servant and by having a son with a different woman—but God kept telling him a son would come.

And then, finally, when Abraham was 100 and his wife Sarah was 90, the impossible happened—Sarah become pregnant and gave birth to a son. At the age of 100 Abraham became the proud father of a bouncing baby boy named Isaac.

Isaac is born in Genesis 21. Now, in chapter 22, “some time later” God comes to Abraham and tells him to sacrifice the boy.

Can you imagine what a painful moment this must have been for Abraham? The narrative is very skillfully constructed at this point so that we will not miss the weight of what is being asked. God says: “Take your son…your only son…Isaac, whom you love.” Three times He refers to the boy, and each time He gets a little more specific about what the boy means to Abraham. This is Abraham’s son. Abraham’s only legitimate son. The son whom Abraham loves. God is asking Abraham to take the most important thing in Abraham’s world and lay him on the altar.

The great Reformer Martin Luther says that Abraham must have felt there were only two options: either God had been lying to him all this time, or this was from the devil.

Or—perhaps—Abraham had a third option. Abraham could believe that God would provide.

***The Test***

Verses **3-5**:

Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”

Very quickly, there are three things I want you to notice from these verses:

First, notice again the skillful way the narrative is constructed. We aren’t simply told that “Abraham journeyed three days to the place God had told him about.” Rather, we get this series of details about him getting up, saddling his donkey, taking two servants, cutting wood, and setting out. Why drag the story out? It seems that Moses—the Biblical author--wants us to think about just how much thought and effort went into obeying the Lord. Abraham has time to think about this, and he is making a conscious decision to do what God asks.

Second, notice the rather unnecessary role of the servants. Says one commentator:

The servants are brought along to be left behind. This is their function, a very strange one in any narrative, characters who are introduced solely in order to take no part in it. It compounds our sense of Abraham’s isolation. (Landy, quoted in Waltke, p. 307)

In other words, Abraham is very much alone when he heads up the mountain.

And, third, notice the word Abraham uses to describe what is about to happen: “worship.” According to one sermon I read on this text, this is the first time the word “worship” occurs in the Bible. It’s an interesting insight into what Abraham is thinking. Commanded to sacrifice his son, Abraham is viewing this as an act of worship. He is going up that mountain to acknowledge the greatness of God.

Verses **6-8**:

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?” “Yes, my son?” Abraham replied. “The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.

This is perhaps the most heart-rending portion of this whole passage. Isaac is old enough to carry the firewood, but not yet old enough to figure out what is happening. So, in his only line of dialogue in the whole story, he naively asks where the lamb is to be found.

I can imagine Abraham’s throat catching and his eyes watering as he hears this question. Isaac calls him “Father”. He calls Isaac “Son”. There’s no denying—or forgetting—the close relationship here.

Abraham doesn’t really answer the question, he dodges it. It’s in the Lord’s hands. God will provide.

Verses **9-10**:

When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son…

Again, notice the skill of the storyteller here, the building of the tension. The attention to detail becomes almost minute: Abraham “built…arranged… bound…laid…reached out…took…to slay.” It’s like Moses is using a slow-motion camera (Waltke, p. 308). With each verb you get closer to the edge of your seat, hoping…praying…that God will step in…that He’ll yell “STOP!!”

He does, in verses **11-12:**

But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied [It’s the same thing he said in verse 1, but I bet he said it with a whole lot more feeling this time]. “Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”

At the last possible moment, God steps in. The boy doesn’t have to die. The test is over. Abraham has passed.

***Commitment***

Now, let’s pause for a moment to talk about what God is saying to us here. What is the lesson we learn from Abraham’s experience? What does this have to do with us?

For one thing, I think this story of Abraham illustrates what it means to truly worship God. God wants our total commitment. He doesn’t want us to hold anything back. I’ll phrase it like this: ***Our commitment to God must exceed our commitment to all else*.** That’s the lesson from this story about Abraham and Isaac: our commitment to God must exceed our commitment to all else.

Now, commanding a child sacrifice seems like an extreme way for God to make this point, but keep in mind that Isaac was never really in danger here. This was a test. What is in danger here is Abraham’s relationship with God, not Isaac’s life. Either Abraham was going to fail the test, and Isaac would live; or—as it happened—Abraham would pass the test and God would stop his hand. God does not desire child sacrifice, but He does desire complete commitment.

Our commitment to God must exceed our commitment to all else.

So, how do you measure commitment? How do you know if God really holds first place in your life? The way I see it, God was testing three different measures of Abraham’s commitment. He was testing Abraham’s devotion, Abraham’s obedience, and Abraham’s faith.

1) For one thing, **God was testing Abraham’s devotion**.

Look at **verse 12**: "Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." “Fear” here is another word for “devotion”.

God wanted to know if there was anything Abraham would withhold from Him. He wanted to know if He really held first place in Abraham's heart, or whether something else--even something as special as the son He had given Abraham in his old age--had become primary in Abraham's affections.

There are a lot of things in this world for us to be devoted to: money, pleasure, family, career, more. But God wants to take precedence over them all. He demands first place. He says: “Thou shalt not have any gods before me.” And that means that God must come before everything—even good things, even good things that come from His hand.

I mean, think about it: where did Isaac come from? He was the child of promise; he was the miraculous result of God’s blessing on Abraham. If there was anything on earth that God would have wanted Abraham to be devoted to, anything that God would have wanted Abraham to love and protect, it would have been this boy. And yet, God will not take a back seat. Even Abraham’s commitment to his son must take second place to his commitment to God.

God doesn’t want us to love others less, He just asks us to love Him more.

God was testing Abraham’s devotion, and Abraham passed.

2) For another thing, **God was testing Abraham’s obedience**.

God came to Abraham and told him to sacrifice his son--the son whom he loved--as a burnt offering. The question, then, was whether or not Abraham would obey. Whether he would submit his will to that of the Almighty, Omnipotent God, or if he would rebel. Whether he would be obedient--even if the price of that obedience was costly--or if he would disobey a direct order from the Lord.

God wants our obedience. He wants us to listen to His voice and His voice alone. Even when the outcome isn’t clear, God calls us to obey Him.

Abraham chose to be obedient. When the Lord said go, he went. When the Lord told him to build an altar, he did. When the Lord instructed him to sacrifice his son, he bound him and laid him on the altar completely prepared to strike the fatal blow to his heart. Abraham obeyed, and he was rewarded for it. Verses **15 through 18**:

The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because [and catch this] because you have obeyed me.

God tested Abraham's obedience, and Abraham passed.

3) But more than that, I think **God was also testing Abraham's faith.** Remember, this whole journey of Abraham’s has been a journey of faith, and now that faith is being put to the ultimate test. How much does Abraham trust God?

Twenty-five years of waiting, 100 years old before having a legitimate son, multiple attempts to try to force the promise to come true—and now, here comes God with this crazy request to have Isaac killed. It's as though He is saying to Abraham, "O.K. Abraham, how much do you trust me? Do you still believe I can make a great nation out of you, even if the child of promise is taken out of the picture? How great is your faith?"

And really, the whole matter of commitment could be boiled down to a matter of faith. Do you want to know if you are committed to God? Ask yourself: “Do I trust Him?”

If you trust Him then you’ll be able to make Him first in your life, because you know He won’t let you down. If you trust Him then you’ll be able to obey Him, because you know God holds the future.

God was testing Abraham's faith, and I think Abraham passed. Look at **verse 5**. When he told the servants to wait with the donkey, he told them, "We will worship and then we will come back to you."

Did you hear that? "We", not "I", will come back to you. I don't think he misspoke. Abraham knew he was going up that mountain to kill Isaac, but he also believed that--somehow or another--both he and Isaac were coming back down.

Maybe he expected God to stay his hand. Or maybe he believed God would raise Isaac back to life. That’s what Hebrews 11, verse 19 says about it. It says “by faith…Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead.” One way or another, Abraham believed that God would remain true to his promise. He had faith in God.

God was testing Abraham's faith, and Abraham passed.

How do you measure commitment? **Devotion, obedience and faith.**

And so, here’s the question for all of us to ask: “Does my commitment to God exceed my commitment to all else?” These are great diagnostic questions for us as we check our relationship with God. We need to ask ourselves:

*Who am I devoted to?* What takes first place in my life? Does God take first place, or does something else? Something like career or family or money or good times? Am I willing to sacrifice for God, or would I sacrifice my time with God in order to do something else?

Or again, we need to ask: *Who do I listen to?* What voices influence the decisions I make? Am I obeying the voice of God, or is it the voices of my friends, or the culture, or my family or something else that has more say in how I live my life?

And what about faith? Ask yourself, take a good hard look: *Who do I trust?* When push comes to shove, where do I put my faith? This is the key to living life with God: Do I really believe God has my best interests at heart, or do I think He is holding out on me?

This is a story about commitment. Commitment is measured by devotion, obedience and faith. Who are you committed to?

***The Ram in the Thicket***

So the message from this scripture story is that **our commitment to God must exceed our commitment to all else.** But there’s a second half to that lesson, and it is this: **He is a God who is worthy of that commitment.**

This is important, I don’t want us to miss this. If God were just some cosmic bully who ordered everybody around and expected us to obey Him because He is bigger than all of us, then being committed to Him would be hard. We might do what He says because we are scared of Him, but that doesn’t mean we’d like it.

But this story not only calls on us to be committed to God, it also tells us that He is worth it. He isn’t just the kind of God who demands our commitment, He also deserves it.

The story doesn’t end with verse 12. After the angel of the Lord stays Abraham’s hand, the story continues. Verses **13-14**:

Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.”

Remember what Abraham said to Isaac on the way up the mountainside? “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” Now, after Abraham displays his commitment, God does just that. A ram is providentially caught in a thicket, and Abraham offers it “instead of his son.” God provides.

And here’s where we get the name for God. Abraham names the mountain: Jehovah Jireh. Abraham names God: The LORD Will Provide.

Now, we need to be careful with this name of God. It’s not a blanket promise that God will provide whatever you need just when you need it: like if you’ve been negligent to pay your electric bill God will mysteriously send a check your way right before the power gets shut off. Jehovah Jireh does not mean that God is a Genie-in-a-bottle who grants us all our wishes.

But what it does say about God is that He sees what we really need and has made provision for it. He is aware of our situation. He provides.

Here’s where we see the link to Christmas as well. The ram caught in a thicket, the one sacrificed “instead of his son”, is a prophetic pointer to the gift God provided when Jesus was born to the Virgin Mary. For when that child of promise arrived, He was God’s very own son come to earth in the flesh.

And what God would not allow Father Abraham to do, He will eventually do Himself. He will take His Son, His only Son, the Son whom He loves, and He will offer Him as a sacrifice. His Son, Jesus Christ, will become the lamb who is sacrificed “instead of” the rest of us.

The Lord provides—on a mountain, in fact, not so far from this hill in Moriah—the atoning sacrifice for our sins when Jesus goes to the cross to shed his blood for us.

He is the God who provides. He is the God who has acted to meet our needs.

So, carry this back to what we’ve been saying about commitment. God calls us to surrender to Him. To give Him everything. He wants all of us, ninety-five percent is not enough. And He has already committed Himself to us.

If our lesson from this story is that **our commitment to God must exceed our commitment to all else, then we need to know that He is the kind of God who is worthy of that commitment**

The God who asks us to surrender to Him is the God who has already surrendered His own Son so that we can be redeemed. The God who asks us to give is the God who has already provided all that we have. The God who wants 100 percent from us has already given 100 percent to us.

And so, we learn: Our commitment to God must exceed our commitment to all else…and He is the kind of God who is worthy of that commitment.