

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas  
February 5, 2017

The God of Providence (1)

Genesis 22:9-14

22:9 When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

22:10 Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.

22:11 But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I."

22:12 He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."

22:13 And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.

22:14 So Abraham called the name of that place, "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

Here describes that God tested Abraham, Abraham then accepted His testing through faith, and finally He blessed Abraham more than already given. Abraham is called "the father of the believers," and many speak about his own faith along with today's verses, but this morning, I would like to think about God Himself with you, whom Abraham believed in...and what his God does and what his God thinks over His believers.

## 1. God Tests Us

What character does God have? First of all we could say God tests you. Today's verses begin with this phrase, saying, "After these things God tested Abraham and said..." (verse 1) God tests man, especially believers; and He does it in order to deepen the loving relationship with people.

"After these things" means, "After Isaac was given," the son of Abraham who was dearly wished. God chose Abraham and promised him that his heirs will inherit the promised land and become the foundation of the worldwide blessings. Abraham believed it and finally met Isaac so that his story could be "all very fine." However, God still tested Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice for God. In human eyes, it is too harmful and nonsense. Moreover, killing a kid for a ritualistic purpose was forbidden in God's law and only common between people don't know true God. More importantly, God may erase the promise with Abraham if He really allowed killing Isaac. Did He want to cancel the promise with Abraham, or did He have other reasons for doing these things? Why did He become so oppressive and irrational?

We have the Bible from God, and it helps us know His will; but it doesn't speak everything. In the land we are not able to understand all of His deeper wills. Why God tests man, or what does the test mean over man's lives- that's not the thing explainable by the third person. Even though you are in charge of the test, you might not find the reason. The only thing believers are assured enough to say is that God tests us because of His love.

My sister has taught me some lessons, and she said to me,

“Because I’m your family.” No one complains of others; even though someone did wrong, people just observe it unless they and their friends could be harmed. Contrary to it, God may advise and support people over close people. Likewise, because He comes in our lives through testing because He sees us as special lives; God loves us and treat us as His family.

Holy and righteous God judges us. Do you know the most awful judgment of God? It is that God gives people up to sins and evils. Romans 1:28 says, “And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.” If we keep shutting our heart to the Word of God and neglecting God’s invitation, God may withdraw His hands from our life. God may never give warnings or chastisements even we do wrong things. It is the most severe God’s judgment if we don’t have any pains while we are doing whatever we wish.

The Bible says, in Hebrew 12:6, “For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” Jesus also said, in Revelation 3:19, “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.” God loves us so that He tests us. I know a sister who was tested continuously and she told a missionary about her trials; then he said to her, “You are the beloved of God.” She could not understand it at the time, but later she testified that it was true, and God loved her so much. Trials are the evidence of God’s loves for us.

## **2. God Requires Our Dedication**

The second point we learn from Abraham’s trial is that God demands our dedication.

Abraham's trial so far was to receive a promised child from God. Abraham was hundred years old and Sarah was ninety years old without any children. Medically speaking, they were already beyond the reproductive age and it appears that God's promise was never fulfilled. God gave a trial to Abraham, which was to push him to the extent that there was no hope, but it was to teach him that God's promise should be fulfilled by the power of God, not by human works.

Abraham believed in God's power and finally he saw his son's birth as Romans 4:18-21 says, "In hope he believed against hope, .... He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised." Abraham was put through the trial to receive the promised one and he passed. But there was another trial waiting for him: that is to dedicate what he had received from God.

God is a God of giving blessings. There are so many blessings that are obvious to our eyes but unimaginable in poor countries, such as health, medicine, food, clothes, house, work, education, family, friends and entertainment. That is why we tend to think that God is a giving God so that we can ask for blessings from God but God will not ask anything from us.

Indeed, God is a "giving" God, but at the same time, He is an "asking" God. And it is so understandable because He is "love". A true love relationship is to love and to be loved. God who loves us also asks us to love. God who truly takes care of us also asks us to

have truth in our heart, that is faith. And His love and truth demand us to have worship service that shows love and truth to God. Therefore, Lord Jesus says “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment” in Matthew 22:37-38, and “But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him” in John 4:23.

For Abraham, Isaac was more important than himself. Because God’s promise to Abraham fulfilled by Isaac, Abraham put all of his hope in Isaac. When Abraham heard “Offer Isaac”, he must have thought that he could die for Isaac. But even if he had given his life, it was not the same as he offered the most important thing for God. The reason why God said “Offer Isaac” instead of “Offer your life” was because Isaac was more important to Abraham than his own life. For Abraham, offering Isaac was to offer himself.

The Bible teaches us that salvation is a free gift from God and that we should just receive it by our faith, not by our works. This is the truth of the Bible and Gospel that we have to spread to the world. But at the same time, it teaches us that those who are saved should dedicate themselves to God. Romans 12:1 says, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” Every time we come to the worship service, we would like to remind ourselves that God wants us to dedicate ourselves to Him.

### **3. God Provides Our Needs**

Third, “God with Providence”. Abraham believed God as “God of Providence”.

When Isaac was on the path of the mountain of Moriah, he asked Abraham, saying, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Abraham answered “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son” Did he answer in desperation? No, he didn’t. As this says at the last part of the passage, God prepared the lamb for sacrifice for Abraham. When Abraham found the lamb, the lamb was hooked to the bush, and he offered it to God instead of Isaac. God prepared the lamb of sacrifice by himself.

Therefore, Abraham called the place “The LORD will provide”. It means “The Lord sees.” God sees our futures, and has prepared our needs already. This is called “providence”. This English word “providence” consists of two Latin words “Pro” meaning preceding and “video” meaning seeing. God prepares what we need because He sees us in advance. God, in the past and in the present, has always prepared the best for the future of the believers and followers. God is “the God of Providence”.

In fact, God prepared the greatest thing, which is the salvation of Jesus Christ. Isaac was called “the beloved and only son”. Isaac is the prototype of Jesus Christ who is only Son of God. After approximately a thousand years later, the temple of God was built on the mountain of Moriah. After a thousand years when the temple was built, Jesus Christ was put on the cross on the hill of Golgotha. As Isaac had firewood on his back and went up the mountain, Jesus had the cross on his back and went up to the hill. God said , “Do not kill

Isaac” to Abraham, however, God himself killed his son on the cross. It was for our salvation. God said to Abraham, “You have not withheld your son, your only son.” (verse 12) This can be said to God . In Romans 8:32, “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”

God is the God of Providence. When we answer the trial given by God by faith, we will understand that He has prepared all needs for our life and lead our life, and support our life. We understand that God is “God of Providence”

**(Prayer)**

Dear Father, you are the God of Providence. Romans 8:28 says, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” Let this word be true to our life. In the name of Lord Jesus, Amen.