

A Total Commitment

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Genesis 22:1-18

After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.'² He 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 that I shall show you.'³ So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt-offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him.⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away.⁵ Then Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you.'⁶ Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together.⁷ Isaac said to his father Abraham, 'Father!' And he said, 'Here I am, my son.' He said, 'The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?'⁸ Abraham said, 'God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son.' So the two of them walked on together.⁹ When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son.¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.'¹² He said, 'Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.'¹³ And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt-offering instead of his son.¹⁴ So Abraham called that place 'The LORD will provide'; as it is said to this day, 'On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.'¹⁵ The angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven,¹⁶ and said, 'By myself I have sworn, says the LORD: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies,¹⁸ and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.'

1. My Trip to Russia

For the past nine days, I had a great opportunity to go to Russia with a Christian group from the Greater Boston Area. The total number of people in the group was 12. I want to thank everyone for your prayers during my time there. We visited St. Petersburg and Moscow. Part of the trip was to learn more about Russia and to meet several missionaries serving in the country.

Although we were in Russia only for a short period of time, I felt like our time in Russia was a much longer journey. The highlight of the trip for me was when we visited the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. The Hermitage Museum has so many well-known paintings and sculptures. In the museum, I saw many paintings from Rembrandt. This morning I would like to show one of them, “**Sacrifice of Isaac**” and talk about it.

2. Sacrifice of Isaac

The biblical reference of the painting is found in Genesis 22:1-18 that is today’s scripture. When I saw one of the Rembrandt’s masterpieces, “Sacrifice of Isaac,” I was so moved to tears. Of course, I had seen the painting before, but I experienced a very different emotion when I saw the original painting in person.

In the past, when I reflected on Genesis 22, I often thought that both God and Abraham were crazy. I couldn’t understand why God would ask Abraham to do such a horrible thing. I know that Genesis 22:1 says, “**God tested Abraham.**” But if God is omniscient, he would have known that Abraham would obey His every command. I also had a hard time understanding Abraham’s response. If I were in Abraham’s place, I would have argued with the Lord regarding such an unthinkable request. But Abraham was different. He doesn’t ask any question to the Lord when God commands him to offer his son Isaac as a burnt offering.

Genesis 22:3 says, “**Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac.**” If Abraham rose early in the morning, that means he did not hesitate to sacrifice his son at all. We are not sure if Abraham even talked to his wife Sarah regarding the Lord’s request. And yet, he had no objection and followed the Lord’s command.

When I saw the painting from Rembrandt two weeks ago, the painting seemed to ask me whether I would be willing to sacrifice my children like Abraham. As I reflected, I realized I didn’t have the same commitment to following after God as Abraham did. I began to ask how Abraham was able to obey such a difficult command from the Lord. Later, when I heard missionaries’ testimonies, I was able to understand how Abraham could do it.

3. Korean Missionaries in Russia

During our time in Russia, we were able to meet seven missionary couples in St. Petersburg and in Moscow. All of them have lived in Russia for over twenty years. They came to Russia after the collapse of the Soviet government in 1991. They have planted local churches, started seminaries, and have trained and supported local Russian pastors serving the people.

I talked with one missionary couple from New Jersey. When they came to Russia, their three children were ten, nine, and eight years old. They did not know the Russian language and culture at all. They were treated like spies from the U.S. and bullied by Russian children every day at school. They thought they would return to the U.S. in three years. So, they had decided to endure all kinds of challenges. But their parents are still in Russia. These children were like Isaac, potential victims of their parents' obedience.

The missionary parents felt so sorry to their children. But they could not give up the calling of the Lord to share the good news of Jesus Christ with Russian people. At times, living in Russia was very difficult for them without enough money, health insurance, and many close friends. But they said that if God sent his family to Russia, they would need to stay in Russia until the Lord decided to move them somewhere else.

4. A Total Commitment

During my time in Russia, I saw a total commitment from the missionaries. They were willing to sacrifice anything for the Lord. When we visited one missionary's home, I saw a banner on the wall. It read, "**As long as God wants and God's people obey His will, it will be done for sure.**" Another banner read, "**Nothing is impossible if we do something with the sense of God's call.**"

I saw the total commitment in the missionaries that Abraham had. These men and women believed that their lives were one hundred percent dedicated for the Lord. How can they live such a committed life? Let us reflect on Abraham's case. He remembered always that God allowed him to have his son Isaac and that his son was the best gift from the Lord. And Abraham also knew that he had a promise from the Lord. God promised Abraham. "***I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son***" (Genesis 18:10) and "***It is through Isaac that offspring shall be named after you***" (Genesis 21:12).

God assured Abraham that he would have offspring through his son Isaac. Abraham believed that if God would keep this promise, God would not let his son Isaac die. Hebrews 11:19 says, "***He (Abraham) considered the fact that God is able even to raise someone from the dead—and figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.***" The writer of Hebrews interprets that Abraham believed in the resurrection of his son Isaac.

My trip to Russia reminded me that God can do anything to fulfill his purpose. One of the banners at the missionary's house read "**We can live with our vision, but the fulfillment of the vision will happen through our prayers.**" I saw a true trust in the Lord and total commitment from the painting of Rembrandt and from Korean missionaries in Russia.

5. The Meaning of the Painting

Let me talk about the painting. In Genesis 22:11, the angel of the Lord calls Abraham, "**Abraham, Abraham!**"...**'Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.'**" If we look at the painting carefully, the angel of the Lord grabbed Abraham's right hand making him drop his knife. Abraham's left hand covered Isaac's eyes revealing his painful emotion. I've heard that Rembrandt painted his wife as the angel. His wife had already passed when he painted it. He must have believed that God was protecting him through his wife as an angel.

Many people say that the sacrifice of Isaac is a foreshadowing of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Abraham in the story symbolizes the Lord who makes a total commitment to His people. The angel says to Abraham, "**By your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice**" (Genesis 22:18). Through the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus, all of us have received the blessing of eternal life.

6. Conclusion

One of the secrets for a happy life is a total commitment between husbands and wives. Revelation 19:7 says, "**Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.**" Jesus is "**The Lamb of God,**" (John 1:29) who will return to this world, and we will be his bride. In the sacrifice of Isaac, we see God's total commitment to us. Believing in Jesus isn't just for our own salvation or for our own benefit, but for sharing God's blessing with others.

7. Application

I am sure that God had a reason for me to go to Russia in this time and season of life. When we had dinner with the missionary couples in St. Petersburg, I promised that I would live my life with a total commitment. I would like to pray and support missionaries as much as I can. As God showed his total commitment through the sacrifice of Jesus, God wants us to make a total commitment to the Lord and renew our commitment every day. Then God will bless us with true happiness every day. Amen.