

Living and dying believing God provides
April 19, 2015
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Throughout life we face times and moments when it becomes apparent that we are not able to handle the situation in front of us; that we can't provide for ourselves. So, even though it offends our pride, someone must come through for us. When the doctor says, "You have cancer;" when your spouse says, "There's someone else;" when your boss says, "We're letting you go" -- these are all moments where it becomes very clear that we need a provider. And when we are on our deathbed, when we are hours or minutes away from passing from this life to the next, we realize one last time that we need God to through for us.

Does God provide? Will he come through? We all know the Sunday school answer. Of course, God provides. We can't bring ourselves to deny that. But we don't live our lives in the Sunday school classroom, do we? And if you live long enough and you go through tough times you begin to wonder, "Will God provide?" How come I'm still sick? Why has it taken so long? How come my prayers don't get answered? I want to encourage you this morning, my brothers and sisters, with the word of God so that you are convinced that God does provide. But I want us to think honestly and critically about God's promise of provision so that we don't live with the wrong expectations. Because God does provides, but oftentimes not in the way we were thinking. But I'm hoping that you and I will be led to believe that God's way and his provision is always better than what we might want him to do for us. To learn this I want us to turn to Genesis 22 (READ vs. 1-19).

We begin learning about God's master plan for the world in Genesis 12. God has a plan to bless the world, to bless every family on the face of the earth. And he picks a man named Abram to be the one person to carry and then pass on the covenant promises of God. But there's a problem. Abram doesn't have a family to pass them on to. He has a wife and a nephew; he has some servants and possessions, but as things stand in chapter 12, his line will die with him. He has no children. So, God makes a promise. You and your wife Sarah will have a son together and through that promised son I will make you a great nation.

So, Abraham (God gave him a new name) and Sarah waited; and they tried. But they couldn't have a son. They tried some more; they couldn't get pregnant. Years past and still nothing. You know, what are you tempted to do when things aren't going your way? You're tempted to take matters into your own hands, aren't you? How can I provide for myself? How can I make this happen on my own? The same thing happened to Abraham and Sarah. And they learned the hard way: when you try to provide for yourself what only God can give, you just make matters worse. And they did; they made matters worse.

At the end of Chapter 16 it says this (vs. 16), "Abram was 86 years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram" (one of Abraham and Sarah's attempts to find God's blessing their own way). Then, vs. 1 of chapter 17 says, "When Abram was 99 years old the Lord appeared

to Abram and said....” 13 years go by. No son. Another year goes by, no son; most of us would give up, wouldn't we? But finally, as it's recorded chapter 21 Abraham and Sarah finally conceive and give birth to a son. Abraham was 100 years old; Sarah was 90.

Can you believe that? Isn't that the craziest story you have ever heard? An old man becoming a father (his body was as good as dead); a barren woman 90 years conceiving. It was crazy to Abraham and Sarah. When God promised Isaac to Abraham and Sarah one last time we read this in Gen. 17:17, “Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, ‘Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?’” Sarah couldn't believe it either. 18:12 says, “So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, ‘After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?’”

What have you been tempted to laugh at? What impossibilities have you stared in the face and thought, “No way!” What obstacles in your life, what obstacles in this church have looked unattainable? That's what happens when you focus on the problems. When you focus on the obstacles, when all you do is look at why something can't happen, how there's just no way, you are bound to mock the idea that God might provide. You you lose all hope that something good might come.

But what do you think happens when you begin looking at the one who can provide? What changes take place in you when your primary focus is on the one who bring something from nothing, who can open a barren womb? You begin to believe, that's what. You begin to have hope. There's a HUGE difference between focusing on the problem and focusing on the one who can fix the problem. Your heart changes, doesn't it, when you stop looking at the challenge and you start looking at the God who can do the impossible? You begin to have hope. You begin to believe. The obstacles do not look so large any more. And that's what happened to Abraham and Sarah. Eventually, doubt was replaced with hope; laughter and mockery was replaced by conviction and obedience. God will provide and he did, just like he said. Sarah gave birth to a son named Isaac, whose name means “laughter.” They were given a living reminder never to laugh off the provision of God.

Now, fast forward another 13 years or so. God woke Abraham up from his sleep and says, “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love and sacrifice him to me as a burnt offering.” Can you imagine waking up to that? You would doubt it, wouldn't you? I sure would. “I was dreaming,” I'd think. I'd try to explain it away. But Abraham knew it was God.

Now, Abraham didn't know this was a test. We know that because God tells us that in vs. 1. God tested Abraham. Isaac's life was not in jeopardy; God is testing his friend. Will Abraham's faith in God lead him to obey even the most radical command he's ever heard?

That's faith. Faith is believing God's word so deeply, so significantly, so passionately, that I will obey. Faith is trust demonstrated through obedience. This is so important for us to understand. Faith is not a feeling; faith is not believing the right things in my head and then

ignoring that when times get tough. Faith is having confidence in God to such a degree that I actually do what he says I should do. This is probably one of the biggest mistakes contemporary men and women make about faith. There are churches in America filled with people who say they have faith in God but do not do what God says to do. They don't even try... even in the good times let alone during a trial. Do any of you? Do some of you come Sunday after Sunday, hear what God's word says about humility, the church, serving, giving, confessing, forgiving, but refuse to do it? You don't have faith. No, faith is a conviction, a belief in who God is and what he says where I actually obey his words; I actually follow his way.

So, what does Abraham do? Look at vs. 3 (READ vs. 3-6). Two things strike me about this passage. 1) Abraham just moved with action. No dragging his feet; no second guessing God. No arguments. He just went; he obeyed. Every step he made was an act of obedience to God and that obedience came from faith... he believed God (we'll see in a minute what he believed). 2) We never hear anything about Abraham's feelings. It doesn't say he was stunned. It doesn't say he was angry. It doesn't say he cried. I'm not sure what he was feeling on the inside; the scriptures don't say.

I'm a big believer the Bible tells us what we need to know; not always what we want to know. I take that to mean it doesn't matter how Abraham was feeling; it only mattered if he was ready to obey. That speaks volumes to me.

What did Abraham believe? We get a clue in vs. 7-8 (READ). When this young boy asked his father, "Dad, where's the offering? Where's the lamb that we will sacrifice?" Abraham's response is simple: The Lord will provide. He'll make a way. God will come through.

What did Abraham mean by that? Did he actually mean and believe that God would provide another lamb? Because that's what happens, right? He takes Isaac up, he's about to slaughter his son and God calls and says, "Stop! Don't harm the boy!" As he stops he looks over, and behold, a ram is caught in the thicket of the brush by his horns. Rather than sacrificing Isaac, he can sacrifice this other lamb.

Here's what's so remarkable about Abraham's faith that God would provide: he was really going to do it. God said it himself in vs. 12: "... now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." He was going to be obedient and that obedience came from the place of faith. I can only guess Abraham was whispering to himself, maybe as his heart was pounding like a bass drum, "God will provide; God will come through; many nations will come from Isaac... somehow, someday, it's going to happen. God will provide."

But this is what I want you to see: Abraham didn't know how God would provide; in fact, he actually thought God was going to provide a different way. In Hebrews 11, in the

chapter highlighting the faith of God's people, this incident was recorded about Abraham. Listen to how the scripture writer describes Abraham's faith (READ vs. 17-19). This inspired scripture about Abraham's faith does not say that Abraham believed God would provide some ram caught in the thicket. In fact, there's is no indication whatsoever that this was even an expectation or a prayer of Abraham's. This provision wasn't even on Abraham's radar screen. Here's what Abraham was thinking: after I kill Isaac and offer him as a burnt offering, God will raise him up; God will bring him back to life. It's the only way I can see how I will be the father of a great nation through Isaac... just like God promised. Now, that's not what God did; but that's what Abraham was thinking.

Look how God surprised Abraham. Look how God provided in his way and in his time. Abraham believed that God would provide (vs. 8, God will provide for himself a lamb... later in vs. 14 Abraham names that place, "The Lord will provide.") And he did provide; he did come through; he did make a way. But it was a provision that Abraham did not anticipate.

Let's talk about you and me. I wonder for myself, for you: how much do we fail to see God coming through, God providing for us because we either 1) won't wait or 2) we get in our mind what God should do; how God should provide.

What if you faced -- cancer, heart disease, divorce and betrayal, the death of a family member, the loss of a job, whatever -- what if you faced those situations believing God would provide some way at some time rather than mapping it out just like you want it mapped out? What if you simply trusted God to do what God does, provide, and allowed yourself to be delightfully surprised by how God comes through?

But that's not what we typically do, is it? What we typically do is we map out for God what his provision should look like. We oftentimes will place our hope not in God as provider, but in God doing what I want (and even demand) him to do. And when he doesn't provide my way in my time we doubt God, we curse God, we double down.

We are going to need the provision of God and this passage teaches me several things. 1) It teaches me that God is indeed a provider. He will come through. When you and I walk obediently in faith God delivers. 2) But God doesn't always provide like we think; he doesn't always provide what we want or what we think is the best. So, let's get real for a minute. We will get sick. Will God provide healing? I'm not sure; we'll certainly pray for it. But his provision of grace might meet a greater need than your physical healing. We might really struggle in some relationships. What does it mean for God to provide? Well, for most of us, God providing looks like this: I'm vindicated as the right one; and other people say they are sorry and I eventually forgive when the grovel long enough. Friends, maybe God's provision is you learning how to bear with others; maybe it you learning how to forgive like Christ forgives. Maybe it's you learning true patience as the years of hostility keep stretching on; maybe God provides by showing you that you were the one who was wrong and not your friend.

Here's the question: will we trust God to provide in his way and in his time? It's really hard, I know, especially when we think we know what's best. But this passage is begging us to wait; trust God. Believe he will come through by being obedient to his word.

Let me give you an example of this. A couple of years ago when the membership voted to move forward to the design phase to provide enough space for future ministry, we didn't just need a picture of a building, we needed land. The decision had been made by the leaders and members that as much as we love this location, it's not big enough for us. So, the process began. Your leaders began looking for land. As I kept preaching and teaching, they looked, and they looked. And the reports back were discouraging. There were not many good options at all. And nobody wanted to sell their ground near Medford. It didn't take long for me to get discouraged. I thought, "Boy, where are we even going to find that ground? And wherever we find it, it's going to be expensive."

To the surprise of many, some of our own members, Bill and Sandy Hall, said, "We've got land. And we are even happy to donate it." The Lord provided through their generous donation. What a gift! Bill and Sandy set the example for all of us. Friends, rather than buying ground for maybe over \$100K, it was given to us. God provides.

That's been the plan for two years now. You've seen the pictures. It's a little outside of the city; we're losing some visibility and easy access. It would also have some expenses since city utilities do not go that far north. Those are manageable issues. We've been grateful and been rejoicing in God's provision.

Fast forward a couple of years to a week or two ago. Our brother and sister in the Lord, Lee and Clarice Schield, have been sensing a stirring from God. They were asking, "What about our land? It's a better location. It's in the city limits. You can't beat the visibility. The baptist church should go there." So, over the past few days, Lee and Clarice have shared with me and Mark Hoffman, our *Reaching Beyond* leader, that they indeed want to donate to us a portion of the open field just west of Walmart (PIC). If it's really the case that we add more ministry space to keep reaching out to more people, when we raise the money and when it's time to build, a portion of this field will be given to us. The Deacon board talked this through at our last meeting on Monday and given it's prime location, given that it's in the city limits and will save us thousands upon thousands of dollars, we believe we should humbly and gratefully accept this donation.

Friends, think of it. God provides. In his way and in his time. This piece of property is on the top of the wish list of every businessman and developer in the area. How can it be that First Baptist Church would be the recipients of this piece of ground? Because God provides. He provides through his people in ways that we can't manipulate or manufacture.

What else might God do? How else might God provide? I don't know, friends. My hope and prayer is that the message of God's word this morning might convince you and I that God will provide in our living and in our dying. More than likely, he will provide in ways that we were not anticipating. Will you wait for him? Will you trust in him? I'm confident that he will come through. May we have eyes to see it and faith to wait on the Lord.

Small Group Questions

Sermon: Living and dying believing God provides

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- What tempts you to believe God doesn't provide? Why is it important for us to remind each other again in the scriptures that God does provide?
- Read Gen. 22:1-14 together to remind yourselves of the text.
- What stands out to you from vs. 1-8?
- Was Abraham really going to slay his son? Does vs. 12 give us any hint?
- Why was Abraham going to offer his son as a burnt offering? What does that tell us about what it means to follow or have faith in God?
- Pastor Brian argued that while Abraham believed God would provide, he didn't know how he would provide? Do you agree with that? Why or why not?
- What's significant about vs. 14 and Abraham's naming ceremony?
- What's hard about trusting God...
 - "in his way?"
 - "in his time?"
- How does "control" figure into the equation? Do you have to give up control to trust in God's provision? Why or why not?
- How does "holding onto control" keep us from experiencing God's blessing? Why do we want to maintain control?
- How does our church motto fit this discussion... "Treasuring God; loving people?"
- How does this sermon apply to our *Reaching Beyond* campaign?