

Pastor Steven J. Cole
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship
123 S. Beaver St.
Flagstaff, AZ 86001
www.fcfonline.org

THE LORD WHO PROVIDES

Genesis 22

By

Steven J. Cole

November 24, 1996

Copyright, 1996

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from
The New American Standard Bible,
Copyright, The Lockman Foundation

November 24, 1996
Genesis Lesson 46

The Lord Who Provides Genesis 22

We've lost touch over the years, but I used to know a man who met Christ while he was doing five years to life in Tehachapi prison on drug charges. He later found out that at the very moment he went into the prison chapel and cried out to God for salvation, his mother was at home on her knees beseeching the Lord to save her wayward son. He often said, "I was forgiven much, so I love Jesus much." He would tell every stranger he met how Jesus had forgiven all his sins.

At first I was bothered by his referring to that passage of Scripture, because I thought, "I was raised in a Christian home. I never committed terrible crimes, like he did. So does that mean I can't love Jesus as much as he does?" But then I realized that Jesus' point was not that some are forgiven more than others, but that some are so self-righteous that they don't see their need for God's forgiveness, and so they do not love God very much. Others, even those who are outwardly good, see how desperately wicked their hearts are. The more they see their own depravity in the sight of God, the more they love the Savior who rescued them from a horrible pit.

In my estimation, one of the major problems in the evangelical church today is that we have watered down the gospel message by minimizing the desperate need of lost sinners and thereby minimizing the greatness of God's salvation. We've told people that Jesus can help them with their problems and give them an abundant life. They're doing reasonably well in life, but they could use a little help now and then, so they try Jesus to see if He will boost their happiness quotient. Like well-fed people at a feast, they sample a little of the "Jesus" appetizer, to see if they like it, but they don't feel a great need for the Savior. Forgiven little, they love Jesus little.

But that's not the gospel! The gospel is that apart from Christ, people are under the wrath of the holy God, and that unless they

flee to Christ, they will perish in their sins. They are hopelessly, helplessly lost. Unless Christ saves them from their sins, they will suffer God's eternal condemnation. Somewhere in the process of God's dealings with us, He must bring us to the point of recognizing our great need for His salvation. For some it happens before conversion; for others (and I fit here), it happens after. But only when we see how desperate our need is, will we see how great God's provision of the Savior is. Seeing how much we've been forgiven, we will love much.

When God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, He allowed Abraham to go to the very brink, where he would see his desperate need for the substitute which God provided. Out of gratitude, Abraham named that place, "The Lord Will Provide" (22:14). This story illustrates the salvation that God later provided for the world in the death of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Last week we looked at this story from the perspective of what it teaches us about surrendering all to God. Today I want to look at it from the angle of God's provision:

The Lord has provided a great Savior for our great need.

The first thing we must grasp is that ...

1. We have a great need.

If God had merely asked Abraham to go and sacrifice one of his lambs, he wouldn't have felt the desperate need he felt when God asked him to sacrifice his son, his only son, whom he loved (22:2). This was a life and death matter. Of course, Isaac felt his great need, too! He would have died if God had not intervened. God allowed Abraham to get to the point of raising the knife to slay his son, to show him his desperate need for a substitute.

This drama teaches us some important truths about salvation:

- A. Man can only approach God through the shedding of blood.

This was not the first time Abraham and Isaac had learned this. Isaac had been with him on other occasions when he had sacrificed one of their animals. This fact lies behind his question as they proceeded up the mountain, "... where is the lamb for the

burnt offering?" (22:7). Isaac knew that to approach God there had to be the shedding of blood.

God had made this plain from the time of Adam and Eve's sin in the garden. They had tried to cover their nakedness with fig leaves, but God provided animal skins for them. I think God explained to them the significance of that shed blood and of His provision for their sin.

Their sons, Cain and Abel, knew this. When Cain brought a sacrifice of fruit, which represented his attempt to approach God in his own way, God did not accept it and told him to do well. God would only say that if Cain knew the proper way of approach. Later, God would ordain through Moses the sacrificial system by which Israel was to approach Him. The point is, from the earliest times God made it clear that without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. God cannot just brush our sin under the rug, or He would compromise His holiness and justice. He has ordained that the penalty for sin is death, and He must exact that penalty.

B. Man can only approach God through the shed blood of an acceptable substitute.

By accepting the death of animals, God showed people from Adam and Eve on that He would accept the death of a proper substitute as payment for a person's sins. It could not be just any animal; it had to be a male, without spot or blemish, because it pointed ahead to the sinless Son of God who would offer Himself as the Lamb of God for the sins of the world. By requiring the death of Isaac, God was going a step further in His revelation to man. He was showing that man's sins required not only the death of an animal substitute, but that ...

C. Man can only approach God through the shed blood of an acceptable human substitute.

Only man can atone for the sins of man. Furthermore, that man who must die as the substitute must be a son, an only son, a beloved son (22:2). So Isaac and the ram together represent the sacrifice of the Son of God on the cross. The ram represents the aspect of substitution; Isaac represents the humanity and sonship

of the Savior. Abraham pictures the Father, who loved the Son, but who sacrificed Him on our behalf.

Think about how Abraham must have felt as he lifted the knife to kill his beloved son! He must have felt overwhelmed by his desperate need before God. He must have thought, "Oh, God, why couldn't it be a lamb? Why couldn't it be me? Why must it be my son, my only son, whom I love? Is my sin so great that only Isaac will suffice?" And think of how Isaac must have felt! Unless God provided a substitute, he would die!

God has to bring us all to that place of realizing our great need. Our sin is so great that nothing other than the death of God's own Son would suffice. The death of lambs could never atone for sin. They only pointed forward to the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. Through the command to sacrifice Isaac, and through the ram which God substituted at the last minute (which shows that God was not endorsing child sacrifice), the Lord was impressing on His people the greatness of their need for the Savior He would provide. Donald Barnhouse observes, "God was instilling a reflex in the minds of His people so that every time they thought of sin they would think of death, for sin means death. It means the death of the sinner or the death of the Savior." (*Genesis* [Zondervan], 1:203.)

I wish you all could read the autobiography of the great Baptist preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon. His father and grandfather were preachers in Victorian England. Outwardly, Charles was a moral, well-behaved boy. But from age 10 to 15, he went through deep conviction of sin before he came to faith in Christ. God had to show him his great need so that he would appreciate God's great provision in Christ. He spends over 20 pages describing his inward struggles. Here's a brief sample:

For five years, as a child, there was nothing before my eyes but my guilt, and though I do not hesitate to say that those who observed my life would not have seen any extraordinary sin, yet as I looked upon myself, there was not a day in which I did not commit such gross, such outrageous sins against God, that often and often have I wished I had never been born....

Before I thought upon my soul's salvation, I dreamed that my sins were very few. All my sins were dead, as I imagined, and buried in the graveyard of forgetfulness. But that trumpet of conviction, which aroused my soul to think of eternal things, sounded a resurrection--note to all my sins; and, oh, how they rose up in multitudes more countless than the sands of the sea! Now, I saw that my very thoughts were enough to damn me, that my words would sink me lower than the lowest hell, and as for my acts of sin, they now began to be a stench in my nostrils so that I could not bear them.... I reckoned that the most defiled creature, the most loathsome and contemptible, was a better thing than myself, for I had so grossly and grievously sinned against Almighty God... (*C. H. Spurgeon Autobiography* [Banner of Truth], 1:58-59).

A few pages earlier (p. 54) he suggests that the "flimsy piety" of his day arose from the fact that too few people had gone through deep conviction of sin. Then he states,

Too many think lightly of sin, and therefore think lightly of the Saviour. He who has stood before his God, convicted and condemned, with the rope about his neck, is the man to weep for joy when he is pardoned, to hate the evil which has been forgiven him, and to live to the honour of the Redeemer by whose blood he has been cleansed.

While I have never gone through anything as deep as Spurgeon went through, the more I have grown as a Christian, the more I have come to realize how holy God is and how sinful I am. When I first put my faith in Christ, I knew that I was sinful and that God is holy, but I had no idea of "the mighty gulf that God did span at Calvary." That may be one danger of being raised in a Christian home, that we may not realize how much we've been forgiven, and thus not love the Savior as greatly as if we had felt "the rope around our neck." The modern church is going overboard to tell us how to love ourselves and esteem ourselves. But the Bible shows us the depth of our great need as sinners so that we will appreciate God's great provision in the Savior.

2. God has provided a great Savior.

A. Only God can provide a Savior for our great need.

Abraham's desperate situation showed him that only God could meet his need. If God had not intervened at the precise moment He did, Isaac would have been killed. Abraham offered the ram God provided "in the place of his son," so that Isaac was spared (22:13). As the apostle Paul wrote, "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6).

The place where this sacrifice took place is significant. God could have told Abraham to sacrifice his son somewhere closer to Beersheba, where he was living. But He directed him to the land of Moriah, to one of the mountains there. The only other place in the Bible where Moriah appears is 2 Chronicles 3:1, where it is stated that Solomon built the temple on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem. In Abraham's day, this spot was uninhabited. But it later would be the place where sacrificial lambs would be offered at the temple. I can't prove it, but I believe that Mount Moriah is the same as Mount Calvary, where God's Son would die as the sacrifice for our sin some 2,000 years later.

A proverb sprang up concerning this story, "in the mount of the Lord it will be provided" (22:14). The idea is that in our time of extremity, when all human help is gone, God will see our need and provide deliverance for us. The mount of the Lord is, supremely, Mount Calvary, because our greatest need is to be reconciled to God. Like Abraham, we must come to the place God has appointed, to the cross of Jesus Christ. At the cross God provided everything the sinner needs to be reconciled to Him. All we can do is thankfully receive by faith what He provided.

B. The Savior God has provided is His only Son whom He loves.

The ram provided by God represents Christ, who died in our place. But Isaac is also a type of Christ. Whereas Isaac was spared death, Christ actually died in our place. But God allowed Abraham to go right up to the point of killing Isaac to illustrate the fact that He would one day sacrifice His own Son for the sin of the world.

Just as Jesus would one day bear His own cross up that same hill, so Isaac bore the wood for the sacrifice on his shoulders. Just as Jesus willingly gave Himself in obedience to the Father (John 10:17-18; Eph. 5:2), so Isaac willingly submitted to his father. We

don't know how old Isaac was, but he was at least old enough to carry the wood. Probably he was strong enough to resist his elderly father, if he had tried. But his willing submission shows his trust both in God and in his father. In Abraham's mind, Isaac was as good as dead for three days (22:4), before he was raised from that altar, just as Jesus was actually in the tomb three days before He was raised.

Just as Abraham carried the fire and knife, the implements of death, and would have plunged the knife into the heart of his own son, so there is a sense in which God the Father put His own Son to death. Isaiah wrote of Christ that He was "smitten of God," and that "the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, ..." (Isa. 53:4, 10). John 3:16 makes it clear that God so loved the world that He *gave* His only Son. Just as Abraham loved Isaac, and it pained him deeply to think of killing him, so the Father loved the Son, but offered Him up for us all (John 10:17; 15:9; 17:23, 24).

Why? "God so loved" us that He gave His Son to die in our place! Probably no one appreciates what that means like Abraham did after he received Isaac back from the altar. Nothing was more precious to Abraham than Isaac. Nothing could have cost the Father more than to give His sinless Son as the penalty for our sin.

Conclusion

Years ago, a missionary in India named David Morse had developed a close friendship with a pearl diver named Rambhau. Morse had spent many hours trying to tell his friend of God's great and free gift of salvation in Christ, but the Indian man could not accept it. It seemed too easy; he insisted that a man must work for and earn his place in heaven.

As Rambhau grew older, he told the missionary that he needed to make preparations for the life to come. He had decided to spend his final days crawling to Delhi on his knees to make atonement for his sins and earn his spot in heaven. With alarm, the missionary tried to dissuade him and show him that God had provided all that a sinner needs in His Son, Jesus Christ. But the old man could not accept it.

One day just before he left on his pilgrimage, Rambhau invited Morse to his house. He brought out a strongbox, and explained that he kept only one thing in it, something very precious to him. He surprised the missionary by explaining that he had a son. With moist eyes, he told of how his son had been the best pearl diver on the coasts of India. He always dreamed of finding the best pearl ever found in those parts. One day he found it, but he had stayed under too long. He brought up that pearl, but he lost his life doing it. All these years, the father had kept that pearl. But now, since he did not plan to return, he wanted to give it to his best friend, the missionary. He opened the box, and Morse gasped as he stared at the biggest, most perfect pearl he had ever seen, a pearl worth thousands of dollars.

Suddenly, a thought came to the missionary. He said, "Rambhau, this is a marvelous pearl. Let me buy it. I will give you \$10,000 for it." The old man was stunned: "What do you mean?" "I'll give you \$15,000 for it, or if it takes more, I'll work until I pay it off."

Rambhau was indignant. "This pearl is beyond all price to me. My son gave his life to get this pearl. I would not sell it for a million dollars. But I will give it to you, my friend, as a gift."

"No, Rambhau, I cannot accept it as a gift. Maybe I am proud, but I must work for it and pay for it or I cannot take it."

Rambhau was offended beyond words. David Morse, with choked voice, took his hand and said, "Don't you see that what I'm saying to you is just what you have been saying to God? God provided for your salvation by offering His own Son. Your pride in thinking that you could earn it or deserve it shows your great need as a sinner. But the fact that God provided His Son for sinners shows His great love. All you can do is thankfully receive God's great provision for your sin."

By now, tears were streaming down the cheeks of the old Indian man. He understood at last that salvation is not something man can earn, but only something that God can provide. He trusted in Christ as God's provision for his sin.

If you have never seen it before, I hope that today you see that as a sinner, you have a great need for a Savior. Without Christ, you will perish in your sins. I hope you see that God has provided

the Savior in His own Son, Jesus Christ, and that you trust in Him as your substitute sin offering. If you've trusted in Christ, I hope you remember always the great provision that God has made for your great need, and that, remembering, you will love Him, trust Him, fear Him, worship Him, and obey Him with all your heart. As sinners, we have a great need; but God has provided an even greater Savior!

Discussion Questions

1. Must a person feel convicted of sin before he trusts in Christ? Are we too quick to lead a person to salvation before he senses his desperate need?
2. Some say that we should not emphasize God's judgment and man's sin, but rather God's love and the benefits of salvation. Agree/disagree?
3. Some say that to be increasingly aware of how sinful we are is not good in that it leads to poor self-esteem. Why is that bad theology?
4. How can we help people who are spiritually complacent see their great need for Christ?

Copyright 1996, Steven J. Cole, All Rights Reserved.