

'When the Blessor gives a gift'

'After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." 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 of which I shall tell you.'" (Genesis 22:1-2)

After what things? Chapter 21 deals with the birth of Isaac, the sending away of his slave-girl Hagar along with Abraham's other son Ishmael, and a deal done with Abimelech the Philistine in whose country Abraham resided.

Now some years after those times Isaac, Abraham's remaining son, is at least in his teens because he is able to carry the wood for the sacrifice that Abraham has been told by God he must make on his back. We learn that God requests of Abraham to take his only son to a mountain in Moriah to sacrifice him there.

Now we might ask 'Why is God doing this?' Isaac was an unexpected blessing to Abraham and Sarah, one that they never thought they would see and for which they had waited so long. Why is God asking Abraham to sacrifice his son? How could God do such a thing?

I want you to stop for a moment and think about the relationship between God and Abraham and Abraham and God. For years, God had been working with Abraham, preparing him for what God intended, that Abraham would be the patriarch of God's own people. Abraham, for his part, trusted God with everything and received blessings at God's hand, including that of his son, but now we come to the crunch and the reason why God asked Abraham to do this thing.

Have you ever received blessings at God's hand? You know, perhaps something hasn't been going right, or you've found yourself in a situation and don't know what to do and something happens and you find relief or a way forward; that bill is paid somehow; someone helps you when you really need it. Or it might be unexpected joy of some kind; you find something you had lost; someone brings good news that you find a blessing.

Whatever great blessing it is from God, or however you receive it, and above all if you are thankful, there then remains another question: 'What is it that is most important to you? The blessing or the bless-er?'

This is what God wants to know in his relationship with Abraham. Does Abraham love God for who he is, or on account of the blessings he has received? Has his head been turned by the blessing to the extent that the blessing has more importance than the one who gave it?

So God sets out to test Abraham's love for God. We shouldn't be surprised at that, it happens all the time with all of us. It is just that sometimes we either don't notice; or we don't see it that way, particularly if we are challenged by God. We all have some trial in our lives – how do we react? Do we rely on ourselves, or trust God with it? Do we ask his help with it in prayer or do we think we can do it all on our own?

When we receive a gift at God's hand, do we remember to thank him for the blessing? Or do we wonder at it so much we quickly forget who gave it. Is our focus on the blesser, or has it shifted to the blessing?

Verses 1 and 2 tell us that our love for God will be tested sometimes. In v.1 God wants to know if Abraham still loves him. In v.2 God wants to know how much Abraham loves him. Now, it is one thing for someone to say: 'You know I love you'. Remember Jesus and Peter in John 21? Peter got a bit irritated when Jesus asked him a third time: 'Do you love me!' Anyone can say they love God, but will they prove it by doing something God asks them to do, but they don't want to do?

What about us? Do we love God? How much? You see, we all have an Isaac; something, or someone in Abraham's case, precious to us. If God asked us, would we give it up? Would we keep hold of it no matter what? What is your Isaac? What would you do if God asked you to give it up? God demands that he is our first love. Sometimes he asks us to show this by challenging us with our Isaac. However, he does this not for his benefit, but for ours, so that we learn to keep the blesser, more than the blessing in sharp focus.

If we can do that, the blesser blesses us even more, just as he did with Abraham, relieving him of his heavy heart of faithfulness by making it a heart of joyful faithfulness, joy greater than the number of the stars or the grains of sand on the shore. When we keep the 'Blesser' in view, rather than the blessing, that is when we know we are deep in the love of God. Amen!