

Men's Email Bible Study – Tuesday, February 17, 2021 (8:30am) – Lent I

TEXT: Genesis 22:1-18 – No Laughing Matter ... The Sacrifice (Binding) of Isaac

1. Christians call this story “the sacrifice of Isaac” & Jews call it “the akedah” (“binding” of Isaac). This story has engendered heated debate over the centuries. Is it a story of an abusive God, a misguided Abraham, religious violence at its worst? *Or is it a story of faith and obedience?* Even before the Biblical canon was closed, the akedah became associated with worship at the Jerusalem Temple. In **2 Chronicles 3:1**, the mountain of the Temple is called “Mount Moriah,” **the mountain of the akedah**. (“Moriah” appears in the Bible only in these two passages.) Hence, the sacrifice of the ram in place of Isaac becomes the foundational act for all the Temple sacrifices that follow. For Christianity, the sacrifice of the beloved son has obvious resonance with Jesus’ death. That’s why Gen. 22 is one of the readings for the **Easter Vigil** (also **Good Friday**). The willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his son became for early Christians one of the greatest examples of his faith: “**By faith Abraham**, when put to the test, offered up Isaac ... He considered the fact that God is able even to raise someone from the dead” (**Heb. 11:17, 19**). In the history of Christian interpretation, Gen. 22 has been understood as a story of faith against all odds; a foreshadowing of God’s self-giving in Jesus Christ.

2. The story begins, “**After these things God tested Abraham**” (22:1). And what do “**these things**” include? God’s call to Abraham to go to a land he has never seen; God’s promise to Abraham that he will be the father of a great nation; the long years of Sarah’s barrenness; the birth of Ishmael; and at long last, the impossible birth of the boy they call “Laughter” (Isaac). Then Abraham, at Sarah’s insistence, casts out his first son, Ishmael, with great sorrow. **And now**, God demands a most horrible thing: “Take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I will show you” (22:2). The rabbis imagine the scene: God said, “Take your son.” And Abraham said, “I have two sons.” God answered him, “Your only son.” He said to him, “Each is the only son of his mother.” God said, “The one whom you love.” Abraham replied, “Is there any limit to a father’s love?” God answered, “Isaac.” **Notes**: “Here I Am”; “God will provide Himself a Sacrifice”. “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’” (22:14).

TEXT: Psalm 25:1-10 – Teach Me Your Paths!

1. This Psalm is **one of 25 acrostic psalms found in the Psalter**. Verses 1-22 (each begins with the next consecutive letter of the Hebrew alphabet; 22 letters). **To lift up one’s soul** is to present one’s life as an offering to God. There is only ONE in whom we can reliably trust; i.e. the LORD. Wait (**posture of prayer**) for the LORD & know no shame. What is our request? That we may know God’s ways and walk therein; that God would remember our sins no more, erasing them forever. **We wait for God all day long**; not because the LORD is slow, but because the LORD is our salvation and His steadfast love is our security. God is forever faithful for us. **God’s remembrance** is our immortality and eternal life.

2. Psalm 25 is an Individual Lament. **The psalm singer** lifts up the very essence of her being, her nephesh (usually translated as “soul”), to God (verse 1), asking God not to put her to shame or let her enemies rejoice over her. She then requests that God teach her and all those who wait for God’s goodness the ways of God (verses 2-5). **Verse 6** is the heart of Psalm 25. In it, the psalm singer implores God to remember God’s mercy and steadfast love. Mercy (*raham*) and steadfast love (*hesed*) are two of the words found in **God’s self-revelatory words to Moses in Exodus 34:6-7**. Recall that these words were spoken by God to Moses on Mount Sinai after the Israelites had fashioned the Golden Calf and worshipped before it. When Moses came down from the mountain, he broke the first set of tablets of

the Ten Commandments (Exodus 31:19); in Exodus 34, he ascended the mountain again and God encountered him once again, this time not only giving Moses **the Ten Commandments**, but **also a self-description** that echoes throughout the pages of the Old Testament: "**The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful (*raham*) and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love (*hesed*) & faithfulness.**" (Exodus 34:6). The word **raham** (compassion/mercy) is derived from the Hebrew noun, **reham**, which means "*womb*." God's compassion or mercy is tied closely to the concept of "**womb love**," the love a mother feels for her yet-to-be-born child. God's *hesed*, God's **covenant love** for his people, is a pervasive theme of the biblical text, in spite of humanity's persistent disobedience of God.

TEXT: James 1:12-18 – Testing of Your Faith (1:2-18) – In the Hour of Trial, Jesus pleads for me!

1. The recipients of James' letter are "struggling". What are we to do when our faith is tested? Count it all joy! Why? Because **the testing makes us steadfast**, perfect and complete. So we say, "Bring it on!" Or not! **Double-minded people** (dual allegiance—God and the world) **are unstable**, tossed about like a ship without a rudder. Ask for wisdom and God will give it to you. The trials/testing of verses 2-3, 12 are different from the temptations of verses 13-14. The testing and trials of verses 2-3 refer to external circumstances; temptations of verses 13-14 refer to internal struggles against sin. **Steadfast under trial**.

2. **Satan tempts**: to lead us away from God (i.e. death). **God tests**: to deepen our faith & relationship (crown of life). God is the source of every good and perfect gift! In baptism we become firstfruits.

TEXT: Mark 1:9-15 – The Baptism and Temptation of our Lord. "Testing, One, Two, Three!"

1. Our passage begins with **Jesus traveling from Nazareth of Galilee to be baptized** by John in the River Jordan. Jesus isn't the only one getting baptized and keeping John employed. ALL the country of Judea and Jerusalem are being baptized by John; confessing their sins. John's baptism was one of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. John told the people that a **MIGHTIER ONE** was coming. ONE who would baptize not with WATER, but with the HOLY SPIRIT. The Mightier One has arrived (verse 9). Jesus takes his place (stands) with sinners. He identifies with us.

2. Jesus is baptized and immediately (***euthus* – 42 times** in Mark and only 10 more times in N.T.) as he comes up out of the water, Jesus sees the **heavens being TORN OPEN** (also temple curtain on Good Friday; 15:38). See Isaiah 64:1. The **Spirit descends as a dove** on Jesus. The dove reminds us of the Noah Story (Genesis 8:11). With the heavenly portal open, a voice declares, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well-pleased" (9:7 – Transfiguration). References to Psalm 2, Genesis 22, and Isaiah 42. **The words "you are my Beloved," are singular**. Immediately the Spirit drives Jesus out into the wilderness where he is **tempted by Satan for forty days**. The wild animals are present, but so are the ministering angels. The baptized immediately come under attack. **In baptism Satan puts a target on our backs**. In the hour of trial, Jesus plead for me; lest by base denial, I depart from Thee."

3. **Forty Days**: Rain fell for forty days during the Flood; Moses was on the Mountain for 40 days; The spies were sent to scout the land of Canaan for 40 days; Goliath taunted Israel for 40 days; Elijah took 40 days to reach Mount Horeb/Sinai when he fled from wicked Queen Jezebel; and Jonah preached a message of doom to Nineveh: 40 days and Nineveh destroyed! 40 is a significant number in the Bible.

4. Once the battle with Satan is completed, Jesus returns to Galilee ... after John is arrested. Jesus picks up John's proclamation: "The time is NOW! Kairos! The Kingdom of God is HERE! Repent and believe in the Gospel (victory announced beforehand)." When we read verse 14 and hear that **John has been arrested**, we are **put on notice**. Mark uses the same word to describes John's arrest as he uses to describe Jesus betrayal and arrest, right from the moment Judas is introduced in 3:19 (See Mark 9:31; 10:33; 14:10, 11, 18, 21, 41, 42, 15:1, 10, 15.) **The word (delivered up) is always violent and negative**.