

## God will provide

We are called to be people of faith – to be people that trust God in whatever He asks us to do and wherever He asks us to go. We love to remind ourselves of all the promises God makes to us to spur us on to sow love and good deeds as the writer to the Hebrews said. Here’s a few Bible promises for us.

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;  
in all your ways submit to him,  
and he will make your paths straight.* Proverbs 3:5-6

*“My God will meet your every need out of his riches in the glory that is found in Christ Jesus.”* —  
Philippians 4:19

*This is why we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper, and I won’t be afraid. What can people do to me?”* — Hebrews 13:6

*“I know the plans I have in mind for you, declares the Lord; they are plans for peace, not disaster, to give you a future filled with hope.”* — Jeremiah 29:11

These promises tell us we have a God who can be trusted; who has plans for us, He directs our paths, He’s there with us, He provides what we need. We live by faith and can trust Him even when we can’t see the way forward and don’t have all the answers right now.

Wonderful promises – and that’s just a few. CAN WE REALLY TRUST THESE PROMISES? Do we **really** believe what God says? Does our trust in the promises make a difference in our lives day by day? Do they make a difference in the church?

ABRAHAM – A RECIPIENT OF DIVINE PROMISES

The other week we explored the idea that Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. God made promises to Abraham which he believed, and God made him righteous in His sight. But did Abraham trust God implicitly? In past weeks we saw that sometimes wasn’t the case, but by and large he did and God blessed him.

LOT – “I DID IT MY WAY”

On the other hand we had Lot. As part of Abraham’s family he had benefited from the promises, but he chose to go his way and he chose the opportunity to further himself in Sodom. And he did well - for a time, but at the end of his life all he could show was loss, as he lived and died a broken man.

JEREMIAH 29 Verse

God had plans for Lot but he preferred his own plans. He chose not to trust and follow God. For however much he may have recognised God off and on in life, and experienced the power and wonder of God’s grace, he chose not to follow God’s plans. He was saved from Sodom, but his was a sad story in the end. It’s a pattern still that so many who own Christ follow, where we recognise His grace in our lives, but don’t walk in faith as far as God wants us to go and then we wonder why negative things beset us.

So Abraham was blessed of God and as we come to Genesis 22 we see Abraham, the mature man, in his old age being faced with a new challenge by God. Let’s go through it.

VERSE Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, *'Abraham!' 'Here I am,' he replied. Then God said, 'Take your son, your only son, whom you love – Isaac – and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain that I will show you.'*

I might add, by this time he had effectively disowned Hagar and Ishmael and they were sent away. He was left with just Isaac as his heir and heir of God's promises.

Now God says to Abraham – sacrificially kill him and burn the body as an offering to God. What an utterly absurd command! God never, ever demands his followers to ritually sacrifice anyone. It didn't make sense anyway, because God had given Abraham this amazing son of promise, and God had said on more than one occasion that His promises were going to be fulfilled through Isaac – and Isaac knew that too as well.

And what does Abraham do? He just obeyed without question or argument even though the command clearly made no sense whatsoever. He trusted that God would not go back on his promises as regards Isaac and he trusted Him implicitly. That said, he didn't trust that his family and servants wouldn't see it that way, so he didn't tell them! He didn't even tell Isaac until late on.

What was the basis of Abraham's trust in God? Here's how the writer to the Hebrews describes it:  
VERSE

*17 By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, 18 even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' 19 Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death. Hebrews 11:17-19*

Whatever happened Abraham assumed that the promises would be fulfilled through Isaac somehow, even if it meant Isaac dying and being resurrected.

VERSE

Of course when Isaac asked about where the lamb was for the sacrifice, Abraham gave the famous reply: *'God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.'*

By that point did Abraham believe that somehow God would come good on providing an alternative to Isaac? Or was he just trying to get out of telling Isaac that he was the intended sacrifice? We don't know, but God let him go all the way to binding up Isaac and preparing to strike him dead before stopping proceedings!

Of course, Abraham's words were unwittingly prophetic, and what's amazing is that Abraham only realised there was a ram caught up in a thicket nearby the moment he was stopped from killing Isaac. Neither Abraham nor Isaac had noticed it there before. They just weren't looking for what God was doing – they weren't thinking His way. God did provide what was truly necessary for the sacrifice.

Most commentators I have read and sermons I've heard preached on this see this as a test of Abraham's faith. If it was, then Abraham didn't fail God as he showed he was prepared to trust God implicitly when what he was being asked for what seemed completely absurd and dangerous – and neither God nor Abraham were disappointed. In some ways I'm not surprised that Abraham had an assurance and expectation that God would provide some solution in this situation. He had seen the blessings of Canaan, the victory over the Kings and the miraculous birth

Isaac. He had seen God face to face on more than one occasion. I'd have been surprised if he had questioned God's actions or showed hesitation with his long track record.

However, the truly stellar performer in this story was Isaac. He was the one who was going to be sacrificed. Why didn't he run? He allowed himself to be bound for sacrifice. Such was his trust in God, in Abraham and in God's promises, that his expectation was that God had something planned. He did that with a child's trust not having Abraham's track record with God. Was this that moment that would define his faithfulness to God throughout his life? Probably. What often shapes faith in us are experiences of trusting God and finding Him faithful to us.

What can we learn from this story?

### **God Himself provided the sacrifice**

***We will worship*** : Abraham's words in Genesis 22 is the first use of the word **worship** in reference to God in the Bible. There was no singing or Bible readings intended that day – just Abraham giving his most precious thing to God whatever the cost. True worship in the Bible is the willingness to give that which is most important to us to God. If you came this morning intending to offer God words, ask yourself what God really asks of you in worship today – what about yourself?

As you reflect on that, let's think of the place where Abraham went to worship – the land of Moriah. Here's how it is described many years later.

*Then Solomon began to build the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared to his father David. It was on the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite, the place provided by David. 2 Chronicles 3:1*

Yes, it was where the Israelites built their temple and worshipped. That involved them sacrificing the best of what they had materially as well as singing and dancing. Sacrificing the best of their herds could be very costly.

But then we think of Jerusalem and we see another mountain nearby where God give his one and only Son, His most precious to die for us so that we may have forgiveness, relationship with Him life and hope. Like Isaac, Jesus offered himself willingly, trusting His Father. Unlike Isaac, he died so that we could be redeemed. On that day, there was no alternative provided. Paul says this of Jesus' death on the cross.

*He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Romans 8:32*

The outcome of Abraham and Isaac's faith that day was that God re-affirmed His promise to them. When we trusted Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, we found ourselves to be recipients of so many more promises and blessings, both now and throughout eternity.

### **God comes good on His promises when we trust Him**

On that day, Abraham and Isaac found in a dramatic way that God comes good on His promises. They knew that God was giving them an a command they just couldn't fathom, but in thinking thoughts about God resurrecting Issac, they weren't even looking for the ram that God had provided.

We are called to be a people of faith. We walk by faith not by sight. We are in receipt of God's promises. We often ask God for guidance but are we listening for the answer, and prepared to step out in faith even if we only have part of it? Do we believe that the Lord provides even when what He asks us is a tall order? Are we prepared to make steps of faith when He calls even though we can't see the end in sight.

When God calls, He invariably asks us to take steps of faith. They remind us that He is the one that has provided so far, that He is the One who will provide, equip and empower us in situations He calls us to. In making steps of faith, our faith is strengthened, we are drawn closer to God and and ready for even bigger steps on our journey of faith.

We are starting out on a new adventure as a church; how can we move forward when our resources are smaller than before? Do we hunker down, or do we seek God's will afresh and then trust Him that He will provide what we need.

#### MY GOD WILL MEET YOUR EVERY NEED

I've experienced in my life that when we trust God, He more than provides our needs and in unexpected ways. We have discovered it as a church too. We will be asked to think and pray on these in our items for reflection and discussion this week. Rather than re-tell my story, or remind ourselves of the church's story, let's hear a few minutes from a chap called called Paul Williams who is an evangelist and Pastor, and who as a young man answered the call of God to become an itinerant evangelist. His family though he had gone nuts because he discerned that God was calling him to sell everything and just go. Here's a little bit of his story.

#### Paul Williams VIDEO

Never put a fence around God limit what you think He can do or suggest that what He calls us to is absurd – it never is. Let us open our minds afresh to what He is wanting to do in our lives and in the church, irrespective of how mad it sounds, because God always provides for what He purposes. All we have to do is be an Abraham and not a Lot and act on His call. Let's pray.

#### CONFESSION

Father as we come before you this morning, please forgive us for all those times, including right now when we limit in our own minds what we think You can do, when we forget Your promises to us, when we forget the vastness of Your love for us and for those who don't know You yet, when we forget You are God who provides according to what you need and what you would purpose though us, Your people.

Father, open our minds to the fresh possibilities, plans and purposes for us. Make them clear to us we pray that we may act with the faith of certainty, rather than the lies of doubt. Empower us be Your Spirit to reflect Jesus in our actions and words day by day. Build us into being the people of faith you purpose each of us to be. And may Jesus be glorified though it.

We ask this in His name.

Amen.

## FOR REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

*Start by reading Genesis 22 again.*

1. How important are God's promises to you? These were the small number that Mark mentioned in the service: Proverbs 3:5-6, Philippians 4:19, Hebrews 13:6, Jeremiah 29:11. What do they tell us about God and His relationship to us? Are there any promises in the Bible precious to you personally?
2. Why was it important to Abraham and Isaac that they went through this episode in their lives. What did they learn about God? What did they learn about themselves?
3. What was different about God giving up His Son to death? Look at Romans 8:32 again and reflect on its significance for us.
4. Have you ever been through an experience where you felt God didn't come through for you as you thought He would? Do you know why? How may the stories of Abraham and Lot help us in understanding the will and purposes of God and help us have lives where we can confidently live by faith and not by sight?