

Clergy Notes, Genesis Session 5

Focus text: Gen. 22

What a tough read! Genesis 22 has always garnered enormous attention from Christian interpreters, but in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries it gained even greater attention. In the mid 1800's, Soren Kierkegaard famously used it as the concluding reflection in the final section of his famous *Fear and Trembling*. According to Kierkegaard, we have an absolute duty to obedience to God, in light of Abraham's test of faith in sacrificing Isaac. In some ways, we can see responses to Gen 22 as a turning point in the way early modern thinkers began to doubt and question God's providential authority. Either way, we are certainly in a cultural place now where God comes across as monstrous in texts like this. So, what do we do?

1. Well, one option is to put hard divide between the OT and the NT; God was that way then, but now with Jesus, he is a God of love. The problem with this view is that Christians have pretty much always understood it to be wrong. An early Christian sect, the Monatanists, were deemed heretical even in the very early stages of the church's development. Thus the God of Abraham is the same God of Jesus. He must be, otherwise our salvation is in vain... what Romans 8-11 is about (we get grafted into the promises to Israel). Scripture is not something we are allowed to edit.
2. The other way folks try to reconcile with Gen. 22 is to envision it as a one off event, where God tests the great Father of the *Abrahamic* faiths. That is, Abraham was special, but God wouldn't do that now. Maybe... but it's typically not a good idea to say God will never do something again unless he himself says it (like he did after the flood in Gen. 8).
3. The more commendable option is to simply be humbled by this story. God can do things that are absolutely mysterious and beyond our understanding of his purposes. Think of his punishment of Israel in their captivity under Babylon. God does things that are hard to comprehend. But would you want to worship a God who was easy to understand? Maybe.. maybe not. Either way, it is important to see that God's plan of salvation is very serious and the stakes are very high. Scripture should challenge us and humble us, and this is one of those sections.
4. Finally, the most emotionally compelling way to look at this is to view it in light of Christ's own sacrifice—completed and painfully detailed—on the cross. The video and questions will go into this, but do keep in mind that God ultimately sacrifices himself so that any sacrifice or trial on our part is promised to lead only unto life.