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THE SUPREME CRISIS, Part One

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We've been talking about the life of Abraham as the pattern of the Christian walk. I don't like to over-spiritualize Scripture because I believe it is to be taken literally except where it indicates otherwise; yet Paul has shown us over and over that the actual events of Abraham's life have spiritual significance for us. If that be true, then today we have perhaps the grandest lesson of all!

Do you remember hearing about "The Law of First Mention"? That is, when we find the first mention of something important in the Bible, that first mention sets the context for the other mentions of it that follow in Scripture. Well, right here in verses one and two of Genesis 22, we find two very significant first mentions. The first is in verse one, and the second is in verse two. Can you spot them?

Let's turn to Genesis 22 and learn about Abraham's supreme crisis.

¹And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am.

²And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

Did anyone see a first mention in verse one? The word is translated "tempt" in our King James Version, but in modern English we would translate it "test" or "prove." Verse one tells us that God is going to test Abraham. Why would He do that? Doesn't God know what is in Abraham's heart? Of course He does! God tests us so that we (and others around us) can see what is in our own hearts. That is the purpose of testing; testing allows us to gauge what we otherwise could not. God tests us to bring to light the strength and nature of our faith, our patience, and our true loyalties, among other things. We're going to emphasize this first mention of testing next week.

What about verse two—does anyone see a first mention in verse two? The word is "love." We've never seen this word in Scripture up to this point. It's apparent that love existed, obviously; yet it is not specifically named in the Bible until Genesis 22:2. God has been saving it for something special!

Yet, at first glance, verse two seems cruel! Every word cuts right into Abraham's heart: "*Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering....*" How can this be a picture of love? How is it possible that this first mention of love can set the context for subsequent discussions of love in Scripture? Is this an error?

The first mention of love is not about God's love for us, nor of our love for God. It is not about a man's love for a woman, or a woman's love for a man. It is not brotherly or sisterly love. It is about a father's love for his son, and the request to offer that only son, that beloved son, as a sacrifice.

This is not just any sacrifice, either, but a burnt offering! In a burnt offering, the body of the animal is literally cut apart and then burnt. It is brutal, and it is bloody. It is as unpleasant a death as we can

conceive, and it is certainly not anything we'd wish to see happen to our children (or anyone else, for that matter.)

The first mention of love, then, calls attention to the love of a father for his son—and the question of sacrificing that son. What we have here is a picture of the love of God the Father for His Son, His only begotten Son, and the question of sacrificing that Son. It was ordained by God that the very first mention of love would draw attention to this relationship.

Jesus said in John 17:24, “Father . . . thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.” How can God reveal to us that deep love between the eternal Father and Son in eternity? The truth is that we cannot *comprehend* it at all (because the finite cannot comprehend the infinite), but by using this picture of Abraham and his beloved son Isaac, we can *apprehend* (or grasp) it. We can see what we need to see.

The awesome truth of this picture of God's love is carried through into the design of the New Testament. Henry Morris captures this beautifully in his book, *The Genesis Record*:

There are, of course, four “portraits” of Christ in the New Testament. Three of these—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—are known as the “Synoptic Gospels.” The Gospel of John stands essentially alone, picturing Christ especially as the Son of God, and emphasizing especially the love of God....

Now it is thrilling to see that the first occurrence of “love” in the New Testament is in the clearest possible expression of God the Father for His Son. It is found in Matthew 3:17: “And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

But that is not all! The first occurrence of “love” in Mark's gospel is in Mark 1:11: “And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Similarly, the first occurrence of “love” in Luke is likewise at the baptism of Jesus....

Thus, three times over, as it were, as we enter the New Testament to learn the love of God in its fulness, we are introduced to it by the great voice from heaven acclaiming Jesus as His beloved Son. If Abraham loved his son, how much greater is God's love for *His* Son!

But now, as we look into the Gospel of God's love and God's Son, the record of the “beloved disciple” John, we are silenced in awe when we come to the first verse in John containing “love.” What is the verse? Why, what else could it be?

For God so love the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

Three times God shouts His love for His Son from the very heavens. But then, He tells us that He loved us (yes, *us!*) so much that we was willing to sacrifice His only and beloved Son, in order that we might be saved.¹

I'm going to stop for a minute so that we can pause and thank God for His marvelous love.

¹ Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2006), 376.

[Moment of silence]

Friends, what more can we say? Yet there are two things more in this chapter today that bear pointing out.

The first is the place: the land of Moriah. It is clear to biblical scholars that the land of Moriah is the immediate vicinity of Jerusalem. Verse 14 indicates that the appointed place of sacrifice was a mountain. Therefore, we have a mountain-top sacrifice very close to Jerusalem; this is no coincidence. The very place Abraham was to offer Isaac was to be the scene of another sacrifice in the years to come, the sacrifice of Jesus, God's beloved Son, on a mountain outside of Jerusalem.

The other thing to point out today is Abraham's prophetic uttering in verse 8. Isaac had pointed out that they had everything they needed for an offering, except the actual offering. Abraham replied, "*God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering.*" Later in the passage we see that God did provide a ram to be offered that day; but the lamb that God Himself would provide came in the form of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

Friends, the beauty and truth of the gospel is staggering, is it not? God loves us and was willing to sacrifice His precious Son for us. In the words of Paul, "*Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief*" (I Timothy 1:15). Jesus came, not for perfect people, or good people, but for sinners; and we are all sinners. He came to take the penalty for our sins.

Have you accepted God's great and precious gift today? Have you trusted in Jesus alone for the forgiveness of sins? He came and He suffered in your place; will you accept His love today? And if you are saved, have you told Him recently how grateful you are for the great love wherewith He has loved you?