

Prayer

May we press onwards, Lord God, and in Your strength, go forward each day in every exercise of faith, in every expression of love, in every opportunity of service, in every attitude of worship and in every choice of daily living. May we therefore show Your glory not through personal effort but through the way You use all we do in Your name, we pray: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Humility

Pray and ask the Lord to keep His people humble as they go about their extraordinary and powerful mission in this world, whether as individuals or as part of a local church community, or through involvement in mission organisations. Pray that the churches of God may become respected in the community as humble and not proud or arrogant in any way.

Meditation

Fulfil Your calling in me, O God, and keep me safe:

Send me where I should always go,
Because You have promised to meet me there;
Send me where I do not wish to go,
So that I discover new things about myself and others .
Send me where I would like to go,
Where I can be fulfilled in all You have called me to do;
Send me where I might never go,
For without Your prompting, I would not know Your leading.
Send me where I just long to go,
For I can see the need and want to do my best for You;
Send me where I am afraid to go,
So that I face my inadequacies and learn to trust in You.

Fulfil Your calling in me, O God, and make me complete.

Bible Study - Hebrews 11:17-22

¹⁷ By faith, Abraham offered up Isaac when God tested him; he who had received the promises was just about to sacrifice his own son, ¹⁸ about whom it was said, 'It is through Isaac that sons will be named after you.' ¹⁹ Abraham reckoned that God was even able to raise him from the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death. ²⁰ So, by faith, Isaac brought a blessing for the future on Jacob and Esau. ²¹ By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and 'worshipped as he leaned on the top of his staff'. ²² By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, spoke of the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his burial.

Review

Here at the height of the letter to the Hebrews, the example of Abraham's faith is given considerable prominence. Abraham was chosen by God to be the founder of His people and a blessing to the entire world, but what God wanted from him in return was faith. This faith was not to be mere assent to the fact of God's existence, but the personal trust of a true relationship, and this was something which grew with time. It found its greatest expression in the famous incident on Mount Moriah when Abraham took his only son Isaac up the mountain as a sacrifice, believing this to be the will of God. It was the most important event of Abraham's life, and possibly of Isaac's life as well.

It is hard for us to understand how and why someone like Abraham might have believed that it was right to take his only son and attempt to sacrifice him to God, but it is fairly certain that this kind of thing did go on thousands of years before the time of Christ, even though it is totally obscene to us now. One of the best ways we can understand this is through what we are told here in Hebrews. Abraham had travelled a long and painful spiritual journey (Genesis 12-22) to the place where he accepted that God had given him some special promises called 'the Covenant' which he had to pass on to future generations through his son Isaac. However, this depended on Abraham's complete trust and faith in God, so when God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, the message was utterly contradictory to everything Abraham believed was right, but he knew he had to trust and obey the Lord and have faith that everything would work out for the best.

The story of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22 is well known. When Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac on Mount Moriah, God called out to Abraham at the very last moment to spare Isaac's life, and Abraham passed this extreme test of his faith. A sheep was then sacrificed in Isaac's place, and following this, the great Covenant of God was passed on from Abraham to Isaac (Gen 22:17f.). It was the same Covenant between God and His people which saw the foundation of Israel as God's people and the eventual hope of God's Messiah. Many Christians today draw a parallel between the sacrifice of the lamb in the place of Isaac, and the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross in the place of others; but this is not what Hebrews focuses on here.

The message from this passage is that when Abraham set off to sacrifice his son, he must have believed that God could raise Isaac from the dead. This, 'figuratively speaking' (11:19) is what happened, and the salvation of Isaac is regarded by the writer of Hebrews as a clear example of and pointer to Jesus' resurrection. Because Jesus has died and now been raised, resurrection from the dead is now God's promise through Jesus for all people who have faith in Him, and it is God's hope that we will be reunited with Him in glory and in the fullness of time. This is not a pious hope, but one which is rooted in our experience of faith now, just as Abraham's faith was as real as his struggle with doing God's will when attempting to sacrifice his own son and discovering at the last moment that God was testing him (11:17).

This is the reason why the rest of our passage describes the passing on of faith from Abraham to Isaac, from Isaac to Jacob (11:20) and from Jacob to Joseph (11:21f.), each time at the point of death. We need not think now of faith as passed on at the point of the death of our fathers, as in Old Testament times; our faith is activated by Jesus death. Through Him, all people have the opportunity to find faith in God and travel a path which will lead to reconciliation with God the Father, both now and in eternity.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Read through Genesis 22 to check out what you know about the story of Abraham and Isaac. Can you spot anything about the resurrection from the dead?
2. Do you find it easy to think about what happens to you when you die?
3. Some people think that the Old Testament has nothing to teach us. Would you say this is right or wrong?

Discipleship

Many people today find it hard to think about what will happen to them when they die. Scriptures teach us that faith in Jesus is our route to a complete life with God in eternity; and although we cannot fully imagine what this will entail, we can see a glimpse of this through developing our relationship with God through Jesus Christ now. That is what true discipleship is all about; living by faith now but in a way which anticipates our ultimate destiny in God.

Final Prayer

Lord God, Holy Father and great Creator. We cannot give you the fullest praise of which You are worthy; neither can we perceive the full extent of love, work, and faith which might contribute to praise which is truly worthy. Accept therefore our small offerings of worship, and bring us, one day, to where we can join in the heavenly chorus of praise to Your Holy name: AMEN