

## Thought for Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> March 2021

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**Read Genesis 22:1-19** Today is Palm Sunday but rather than looking at Jesus' journey into Jerusalem, we are going to conclude Abraham's journey, a journey that gives the sort of test that none of us would want to receive. I can remember a story, from some years ago, and I don't know whether it was true or just a parable, but a man was working as a signaller of a train track when he was suddenly aware that his young son had got out of the house and was sitting between the tracks, and an express train was coming down the line. He had a choice, he could change the points and divert the train down a side line, where it would likely crash into the buffers and who knows what the result would be, or he allows the train to continue and the likely outcome would be the death of his son. It was a decision he had to make in an instant, his son or a train full of people? The story said he made the decision to save the people, but it cost his son's life. As we have been reading over the past couple of months, Sarah and Abraham had been guided by God and yet, until as we read last Sunday, Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90 years old, did 'they' have a child. It had been a long time coming and when Isaac did finally arrive they would have done everything in their power to protect him. And yet as we begin chapter 22 we read; *'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 I will show you.'* We don't know how old Isaac was when God said this to Abraham, but does it matter? Isaac was relatively young because in verse 5 Abraham refers to him as 'boy', and in verse 7 he says to Isaac; *'my son.'* Abraham is asked to offer his son as a sacrifice. He is not told why he is to offer his son as a sacrifice, just to offer him as a burnt offering. Then Abraham is told; *'go to the region of Moriah. To one of the mountains I will tell you about.'* One thing you have to say about Abraham is that he does as he is told. 12:1; *'The Lord had said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.'* and verse 4 says; *'So Abraham left.'* And here in chapter 22:2 God says, *'Go.'* And verse 3 *'Abraham got up and went.'* That is trust, or belief in God's will. Some of you will know that it was this passage of scripture that convinced me to accept the role of pastor at Copthorne Chapel at the end of 1993. I was convinced Copthorne Chapel was not for me. Chris and I prayed about it and said to the Lord, if you want us to go to Copthorne Chapel, then you will have to show me/us. we laid a fleece and everything appeared to say no, then at the eleventh hour the Lord brought me to a book, Theological Ethics by Helmut Thielicke, volume 1, Foundations and for some reason I opened it at page 663, *'God's Promise for Insoluble Ethical Problems.'* But it was on the following page it commented on the story of Abraham and Isaac. God spoke to me saying, *'Abraham trusted me, why can't you.'* Almost the end of story, I said to God, don't tell me, tell Chris, and Chris turned to me and said, *'We have to say yes, don't we.'* The rest as they say is history. The problem I had, the Lord dealt with, it was never an issue. Because I said yes to the Lord, I have been so blessed and continue to be blessed. For Abraham he was to know the same blessing, he did what the Lord asked of him, that would not have been easy, as we have read the story we see Abraham gets to the point where he leaves his servants. It is day three of their journey, verse 5; *'He said to his servants, 'Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.'* Abraham knew he had everything with him to sacrifice his son, I wondered what was going on in his stomach, it must surely have been churning, what if it really do have to sacrifice Isaac, what am I going to tell Sarah, she would be mortified. Even Isaac says to Abraham; *'The fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?'* scripture

says Abraham says; *'God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.'* I'm sure the written word doesn't convey the emotion that Abraham would have been feeling inside. Even as they came to the spot where Abraham is to build the altar, we cannot ever understand what Abraham was feeling. In the story I shared earlier the man had a very brief time to make a decision of what to do with the coming train and his son. For Abraham, he had time to contemplate his actions. In all of that he continued and built the altar, then he laid his son, his promised son, on top of the wood and took the knife to slay him. Talk about the eleventh hour, I wonder what was going through Abraham's mind, do you really want me to kill my own son Lord? Then; *'the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, 'Abraham! Abraham!'* When the Lord does that to you, you listen, it means you can trust him implicitly. Verse 12; *'Do not lay a hand on the boy, Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.'* You will notice there is no mention of Ishmael, the Lord says; *'Your only son.'* And those words are repeated in verse 16; *'your son, your only son.'* Hebrews 11 talks of Abraham as being a man of faith, as we have read over these 11 chapters, Abraham wasn't perfect, he made mistakes, but even as early as Genesis 15:6 we see that; *'The Lord credited it to him as righteousness.'* Abraham came through his testing. He offered the ram in Isaac's place. Abraham named the place; *'The Lord will provide.'* In chapter 25:7 we see that Abraham finally died aged 175, he ran his race and it was counted to him as faithfulness. The hymn writer John Henry Sammis knew what he was writing when he penned the words; When we walk with the Lord in the light of His word, what a glory He sheds on our way! While we do His good will, He abides with us still, and with all who will trust and obey. On this Palm Sunday let's close with a Palm Sunday hymn, Ride on, ride on in majesty. Amen.

Ride on, ride on in majesty!  
In lowly pomp ride on to die!  
O Christ, Thy triumphs now begin  
O'er captive death and conquered sin.

Ride on, ride on in majesty!  
Hark all the tribes 'hosanna' cry;  
Thine humble beast pursues his road  
With palms and scattered garments strowed.

Ride on, ride on in majesty!  
Thy last and fiercest strife is nigh;  
The Father on His sapphire throne  
Expects His own anointed Son.

Ride on, ride on in majesty!  
In lowly pomp ride on to die!  
Bow Thy meek head to mortal pain,  
Then take, O God, Thy power, and reign!