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ONE MORNING IN THE MOUNTAINS OF MORIAH

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I wonder sometimes if his heart was pounding in his chest as he “stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son” (*Genesis 22:10*). The Bible record says that he did it by faith, believing “that God was able to raise [his son] up, even from the dead” (*Hebrews 11:19*). It also says that he rose up early to complete the task, and when his son asked him where the sacrifice was, he said, “My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering” (*Genesis 22:3, 8*). It even says that he called it “worship” (v. 5). Yet my mind struggles with the concept: how could you have that much faith – faith enough to trust and obey God to the point that you would kill your only son in a sacrifice to Him?

The man was Abraham, whom we are told is “our father,” “the father of us all,” and the man whose seed we are if we are in Christ (*James 2:21, Romans 4:16, Galatians 3:29*). This means that Abraham has innumerable children just as God promised: “I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth” (*Genesis 13:16; cf. 15:5; 16:10; 22:17*). Yet Abraham knew little of these future children by faith; he knew less of the future children he would have by Keturah. At the moment he raised that knife he had two sons, but of those two only one legitimate son born to him by the wife of his youth – his princess, his Sarah. That son – Isaac – was the son of the covenant and the son of promise (*Genesis 17:21; Romans 9:9*). And it was that son who was under the knife that morning in the mountains of Moriah.

We know what happens next. Our father Abraham raises that knife above the hope of the world – his “only son,” and the son through whom the seed promise would be delivered (*Genesis 22:2; 12:3; 17:19*). He raises that knife and prepares to bring it down, but at the last minute is stopped by an angelic voice: “Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him” (*22:12*). Instead of being forced to kill his son, Abraham was provided with a ram: “Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns” (*22:13*). We are not told of the relief that flooded the heart of our father Abraham; we are not told of his thanksgivings going up to God. We are simply told, “Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son” (v. 13).

I shudder at the profound faith of my spiritual forerunner. I reflect upon the fact that God has asked no such task of me – neither to give the life of one close to me, nor to give my own of necessity save living a life of self-denial. He has not placed a knife in my hand, but the sword of the Spirit (*Ephesians 6:17*). I fight no carnal battles, and for the most part fear no carnal recourse. Yet I realize that even with the light yoke placed upon my shoulders – for His “yoke is easy, [His] burden is light” (*Matthew 11:30*) – I sometimes falter. I have a long way to go before I can even stand in the shadow of my father Abraham.

Yet as I watch through the eyes of faith that man of faith pulling the ram out of the thicket, this thought permeates the scene – there was no ram in the thicket for another Father that day. For you see, what my father Abraham’s Father did not ultimately ask from him and what He has asked from no one, He was willing to give. Abraham’s Father is my Father and my God, and while my God did not receive Isaac into His arms on that day, He had already opened up His Own arms to let His only begotten Son go. What marvellous faith and sacrifice meet at that splendid scene, where my father Abraham received his son alive again, but where my Father in heaven gave His son to die on the cruel and bitter tree.