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GENESIS 22

Series: Understanding Your Roots

[PRAYER] So now it's this time, Lord, in our gathering together where we eagerly wait for what you're going to say to us. We know that you speak through your word, that your word is living and active, and therefore the things that are said today from you through your word are powerful and important for us. We ask you to speak to each us, encourage us, convict us. Lord, inspire us to further live for you. Thank you for what you're doing in our lives. In Jesus' name amen.

It was 11:30 in the morning on May 29, 1953 when the BBC announced that two people had reached the top of Mount Everest for the very first time. Edmund Hillary and his Sherpa guide made it all the way to the top on this expedition they were on. It took a lot of people to be involved in this process. There were 400 people actually helping to make this happen, most of them down at the base camp before they sent these two up who finally made it to the very top. And the BBC announced that the British flag was flying over the whole world because it was the highest point in our earth that anyone had ever reached. A lot of excitement about that for everyone because of the trip up this huge mountain. The story is a fascinating one to read about it. You can google it and read a lot more about all of the intricacies of this trip that they took up the mountain.

But today I want to talk to you about another mountain that I find to be much more difficult to climb. It's the one in our story in Genesis 22 where Abraham goes up with Isaac to the top of Mount Moriah to sacrifice his son. Wow. We're going to look at that trip up the mountain and we're also going to look up another trip up the mountain, the mountain of Golgotha where Jesus Christ goes up the mountain and another father and that mountain experience. We're also going to look at the mountains that you and I face regularly and find some inspiration in that. Because I expect that some of you right now in the midst of this moment are looking at a mountain that's very difficult and you're trying to imagine how in the world you would climb this mountain. And for others of us the mountain may be a little ways away. But we know that those mountains come in our lives and we need to know how to proceed up the mountain. I'm excited to share this story with you. I've just had a lot of fun in this passage this week. God shared some very valuable things that now I want to pass on to you.

So if you'll open your Bible with me to Genesis 22. If you look there in Genesis 22 we're going to come to this story and I want to share with you some of the details as you look at the word of God with me together. Notice in verse 1-2 it says this: *After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."*

When I look at scripture and the stories of the Bible, I try to put myself into the story. Stories that have to do with New Testament disciples or Old Testament believers. Imagining myself being in that situation. Because when I imagine myself there then I'm able to see what's going on in that story and take some applications for my own heart and then find some that I can pass on to you. But this is a tough one for me. I look at this story and I say I couldn't do that. I could not do what God called Abraham to do. Sacrifice your son. There is no way I could do that. So I'm imagining in my own heart, how could Abraham do that?

I realize the answer to the question is in the first three words of the passage. Notice what it says there. It says – *After these things*. After what things? After all the things that have taken place to this point, now God is taking Abraham to the next place in his commitment to Him. You see, God takes us in a path in our lives and moves us further and further in that path. You remember that Abraham left his home in Ur. God said, "I want you to leave here. I'm going to take you to a land." Abraham didn't know that that land was a thousand miles away. But he goes up to Haran and then God calls him out of Haran to Palestine. In each one of these times, Abraham's faith is being strengthened. He's learning how to trust God in new ways.

When he got down to Palestine remember there was this famine and so he had to go down to Egypt or he chose to go down to Egypt and he lied about his wife being his sister. You know the whole story. We've talked about that. Even in that experience, God is teaching Abraham some valuable things about his faith and what he needs to do to trust the Lord.

You remember the story about Lot and how Lot was taken away as part of the possessions by the kings that came and captured Sodom and Gomorrah and all those places. Abraham, all of his fighting men in his home, plus he gets some people around the other areas around there and they go and they conquer these kings to bring Lot back. And yes, they're successful. God just does another work of faith in his life. It was then that the King of Sodom comes to Abraham and says, "Hey, let me pay you for this." Because he himself was rescued here. Abraham says, "No. I don't want anyone to say that they made Abraham rich." Again, another opportunity for Abraham to walk along with what God is doing in his life and grow more in his spiritual walk.

Last week we talked about how God had Abraham move Ishmael and Hagar out of his family. That must have been really hard. We see in the passage that was tough for Abraham. It says it was difficult for him to do that. But God knew if you don't remove some things in our lives then we can't experience the beauty of the promise. So Abraham does that. So all of these things are taking place. And after these things is what God does in the life of Abraham. He takes him to the next step in his life. We face challenges along the way. Every one of us face challenges along the way and those things that we face prepare us for the next steps in life. That's very important to understand. That the things we go through now when we dedicate ourselves to the Lord or we fail like Abraham did, God does that work in our lives to prepare us for the mountains that are yet to come that we often don't realize are going to be there. But God is preparing something in our hearts.

I think parents sometimes make a mistake by trying to make their children comfortable, trying to give them things and not demand a lot from them, but help them to be happy, believing that their

self-esteem will be encouraged or something like that. The danger of pleasure is that if you pursue pleasure you become addicted. It is not a goal. It is only a byproduct. So sometimes parents don't allow their children to experience the hard times that are necessary to prepare them for what's yet to come.

It reminds me of the story of David. He conquered Goliath, yes. But what happened before that in his life? Well if we look at the story, David comes to the battlefield and he sees what's going on there and he says, "I'll go out and kill that Philistine." Saul, trying to talk him out of it says, "You're just a young guy. You can't do this." And David says, "Wait a minute. Let me tell you a story. There was a time when I was taking care of the sheep and a lion came and took one of the sheep. I went and grabbed that and got that sheep and killed the lion and took the sheep right out of his mouth. There was a time when I was taking care of the sheep and a bear came and took one of the sheep and I went and killed the bear. The same God who rescued me from the mouth of the lion and the mouth of the bear will protect me as I go and beat this Philistine."

You see in order for us to conquer the giants in our lives we need the lion and bear experiences. I don't know what God is doing in your life right now, but there's probably a lion or a bear going on in your life right now that God is using to prepare you for the giants that are yet to come.

After these things.

After these things it says *God tested*. Let's stop and look at that word *tested* for a moment. Because they were *tested* and *tempted* are translated the same way. In other words that one Hebrew word can either mean tempted or tested. In fact the King James Version uses that word and it doesn't say tested there, it says *tempted Abraham*. Why? Because when you're placed with a challenge then you're either tempted to do the wrong thing or you're tested to become stronger. In the New Testament we have a similar word used in 1 Corinthians 10:13 where God says – *There is no temptation*. It's the word *peirasmos*. *There is no temptation (or test) taking you, but such is common to man. But God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tempted above that which you're able, but will with the temptation also provide a way of escape so that you'll be able to bear up under it.*

Now don't be confused about that passage. Because if you think that passage means you'll be able to handle every experience that comes your way or you will feel confident to handle the challenges in your life, you are mistaken. That's not what it says. Because there are plenty of times in our lives when God gives us things that are so overwhelming we cannot handle this. And we need the grace of God. That's why that verse says God brings about with the temptation the grace necessary to deal with it. That's what we experience when we fight lions and bears. We start watching God work. We see Him do this activity in our lives and we go, "Yes, God is faithful. God can do amazing things." So when we face the giants or the mountains in our lives, we have a greater confidence of what God is doing. That's what's taking place in this passage.

It says – *After these things, God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."* Let's just pause there for a moment. I want you to notice the availability of Abraham. Three times in this passage he's going to say, "Here I am." He's obviously available. He doesn't say, "Well wait till I get to the next level to the video game." He is available. I just really believe that we need to be available. Now two times he's going to be available to the Lord;

one time he's going to be available to his son. "*Here I am,*" he says. The availability is an important thing for us. We get so wrapped up in ourselves. But not Abraham. He's ready to hear from God. *God says, "Abraham,"* and he says, "Okay God, I'm ready. What do you got to say to me today?" "*Abraham.*" *And he said, "Here I am."*

He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love." Let's pause there for a moment. Because it is his only son. But you think in this story he had another son. Right? He had a son Ishmael. But see, that son was a compromise that he and Sarah participated in that wasn't a part of the promise. So God had Abraham remove Sarah from the family.

Joan pointed this out in the small group this week. This is the small group that I lead where we talk about the sermon from last Sunday and the one coming up. They help me actually prepare the sermon. Joan said, "Now I understand the Ishmael story a little bit more. Because it looks like what God is doing is removing Ishmael and Hagar from the picture so that when now Abraham comes to this challenge there is no plan B." Can you imagine that if Abraham was going to be called on to sacrifice his son, he could say to himself, "Well I guess if I lose Isaac, I've always got Ishmael." No. There is no plan B. And there is no plan B in your life either. Total dedication to the Lord. That's what salvation is. When we come to the Lord, we say, "Lord, I want you to be first place in my life. I want you to be the only thing that I'm trusting in. We come before the Lord with this dedication.

So God says to Abraham, "*I want you to take your son, your only son, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I shall tell you about.*"

Moriah. The Moriah hills and mountains are near Jerusalem. In fact the Old City of Jerusalem that's there today, about a hundred yards outside of the city is the highest little point there. You would not know it. There are not peak mountains. They're just like hills when you get up there. But it's on a high point.

In fact let me give you a little geography lesson so you understand this a little bit more. If you were coming to Jerusalem from down in Joppa by the Mediterranean Sea at sea level, you would go up 2500 feet (over 50 miles), over 2500 feet to be at the Jerusalem level. If you were coming from the Dead Sea on the other side, which is the lowest place on earth, you would be going from 1300 below sea level all the way up to 2500 feet. It's a high point. You can look around there. That's why in the Bible continually you'll see the statement that they went *up* to Jerusalem. Whether they're going north, south, east, or west they're always going up because it's up to Jerusalem. It's up high in the air. It's cooler up there. It's a different climate. And up there there are these hills, the Moriah hills.

What's very interesting is if you go outside of the Old City, about a hundred yards, you come to this high point and there's a bus station there now. Carrie and I visited there ourselves. If you come back around the other side and look at the hill, the mountain that is right there (not really a mountain, but this big kind of cliff area) it looks like a skull there and that's why they called it Golgotha. It's the same hill that Abraham and Isaac are going up that Jesus Himself goes up and He's crucified on this hill called Golgotha or Calvary. It's an amazing parallel between the story

of Abraham and Isaac and this other father and son who are going up the mountain. There's a sacrifice. Isaac is the sacrifice. Jesus is the sacrifice as we come to this hill. As we're going up the mountain, Abraham has Isaac carry the wood on his back (you'll see as we read this story) and Jesus of course carries the cross up to Golgotha Himself. We see Jesus is bound by His hands before they beat Him and Isaac is bound when they put him on the altar. We see a lot of similarities between them, but we see one stark difference. The difference is when Isaac is on the altar God is going to say stop and rescue Isaac. But with His own Son He says we're going to sacrifice Him.

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross for you and me is such an amazing experience. When you feel the pain of Abraham and Isaac in this situation, you can feel a little bit of the pain that God must have experienced and Jesus must have experienced when He says, *"Father, if there's any other way, take this cup from me."* Or when He's on the cross and He says, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* The pain that's involved in that whole experience just causes us to love the Lord so much. We're so grateful for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ so that we can have a personal relationship with Him. There is no plan B. It is Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation.

"Abraham, take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."

So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. The details here slow down the story so you can imagine being there.

On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey." It reminds me of a base camp where all of those people on Mount Everest waited while the two went up the rest of the mountain.

He says to them, *"Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you."* I've got to pause there. I don't want you to miss this. He says to them, "I and the boy are going up the mountain and we are coming back." Oh well that's really interesting since God told him to go up there and sacrifice his son, but he knows he's coming back. He doesn't really know how he's coming back, but we are coming back together.

And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. You had to carry your fire with you. Either you're going to take a torch, you're going to have a bucket of coals, or something you're going to take up the mountain with you. *So they went both of them together.*

And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." The availability of a father to his son. It's great. He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together. Do you see that he's saying God will provide for Himself the lamb.

Let's go back to the other mountain that's being climbed by Jesus to get to Golgotha. We call this process of salvation redemption. We call it redemption because there's a purchasing that takes place. Whenever you have redemption you have three things involved. You have the coupon or the money, whatever is being paid. You also have the person who is paying it and you have the person receiving it.

I like to ask young people this question. I say, "So let's look at that. What is the payment being paid?" Of course we know it's Jesus Christ dying on the cross for us. We got that. Okay. Who is the one paying it? Well that's not hard. We know it's God the Father who's paying the price. But who is He paying it to? Well that's a little puzzling. Sometimes young people say, "Well I think he's paying it to Satan." I say, "Nope. He's not paying it to Satan. I'll tell you who He's paying it to. He's paying it to Himself." Because God is holy. He's so holy that He can't have sin around Him. We are humans and we have sin in our lives. God loves us so much and He wants to have a relationship with us, but He can't have that relationship because of the sin barrier. So He creates this plan and offers Jesus Christ as the redemption to buy back our relationship to pay for our sins. So when God looks at us He does not look at our sin anymore. He looks at the sacrifice of Jesus Christ who took away that sin so He can look at the love He has for us. He can treat us as a father treats a child. That He can have that close relationship with us. Yes, He provides the sacrifice for Himself. And Abraham says that. He says – *"God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son."* So they went both of them together. So here they are walking up the mountain.

Now the scene is going to change. Let's go to the next page and see how the scene changes as they are now up at the top. They are now at the place where God had told them to be. It says – *When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.*

It's in this moment that I'm going, "What is he thinking is going to happen here?" But we have some insight as to what's going to happen. Let me show you that. In Hebrews 11 recounting this story, God tells us what He was thinking. *By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son (emphasized again, his one and only son), even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.* Wow. Abraham actually believed he would kill his son, trusting that God would bring him back again as part of the promise. Because Isaac was his son, his only son. It reminds me how in John 3:16 it says – *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in him will not perish but will have everlasting life.*

Well let's go on in the story. It says – *But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind*

him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.

There was a ram there. Now this ram didn't just magically appear. I'm sure that what was happening was as Abraham and Isaac were coming up one side of the mountain that God had this ram on the other side getting caught with his horns in the rambles there and stuck there. The solution to this problem was already present in the story, Abraham just couldn't see it yet. I'm convinced that in the mountains that you and I climb in our lives that seem overwhelming, that seem so difficult and challenging, the solutions are there and God reveals them to us. His grace is present in the midst of the challenge. It's right there waiting for us. When we trust God with all of our heart, we give Him everything in our lives, He says, "Okay, here's what you need to do. Here it is right here." So Abraham turns around and takes this ram who becomes this sacrifice.

Wow. What a picture of God's grace that He wants to give in your life and my life. He wants to provide us with the solution for the mountains that we climb. I don't know what mountain you're climbing right now, but I do know that God has the answers in the midst of the testing, in the midst of the trials, in the midst of the suffering that we experience. I think that's why James in James 1 says – *Have joy, my brothers, whenever you face various trials. This is the same word peirasmos, testing or temptation or trials. When you face these trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. And God will bring it to completion in your life.*

One of the benefits of these trials is that God purifies us and He prepares us and He does work in our own lives to do something very important. It's the mountains in our lives that we learn how to trust God, we learn how to give up things that we really need to give up. And God does this deeper work in our life.

So Abraham called the name of that place, "The Lord will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided." You should take those words, you should write it in your journal, put them on your wall. Because when you face the mountain, when you face the mountain, you need to know that God will provide. On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided. Notice it doesn't say God *did* provide. Because that's what happened. God provided! This is great! It's not past tense; it's future tense. God *will* provide. You've got to know that as you go forward right now in your life you might be working with bears and lion, but there's giants yet ahead and you've got to know that on the mount of the Lord, God will provide. When you get there He has the solutions, He has the answers. They are waiting for you. They are God's grace in your life.

Let's continue as we go to the next page of the story. It says – *And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son (how many times has he said that – your son, your only son), I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies."* I'm going to read that again. *And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies.* Let me come back to that in a minute. *"And in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."* So Abraham returned to

his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba. And Abraham lived at Beersheba.

The gate. *And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies.* What that means is that the gates are the protective place of the city. He says your offspring is going to have access to anything. In other words, there's no gates that are going to prevent your offspring from going through there. There's no stronghold that's too big that God can't handle. There's nothing in the world that's going to be so difficult that your offspring are not going to be able to face.

It reminds me of another passage in the New Testament when Jesus spoke and He said to Peter – *Peter, upon this rock I will build my church* (speaking of Peter's faith). *Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* Do you know what Jesus is saying? He's saying that I have chosen the church to be the vehicle through which I'm going to share a message to the whole world. And there's nothing that's going to destroy the church. Nothing. We are on the winning side. Being part of God's church is so strategic, it's so powerful that it will go on forever. I'm just so excited about that and I'm honored to be a part of a church.

Now let me describe here when He's saying the church He's talking about the church as a whole. During the COVID time there have been a number of churches that have closed now because they don't have buildings or for other reasons they've just had to close down. They're gone. So they won't be coming back, those churches. But that doesn't mean all of God's church is gone. God's church is powerful and it continues to grow.

Our church I'm particularly excited about. In fact I'm convinced that God is going to kind of slingshot us out of COVID here into something very powerful. You just see it. I can hardly wait on Sunday morning to see you folks online interacting. Because I see all the comments being made here, so eager to get together with each other and talk and sharing prayer requests and praises and just greeting each other. It's just so fun. And then we see people coming to the Barn. When I got here this morning it was 18 degrees. I mean it was freezing cold when I came. I always wonder, will anybody come today? Yet all you people come. It just makes a statement about your love for the Lord, your commitment to God, your desire to worship. All of those things.

God is doing something in our lives as a church that's strategic and I am committed, I am all in. Part of that is because of what I see in this church that I'm excited about. But it's also because of what I see Jesus saying. That *not even the gates of hell will prevail against you.* I don't care what happens in politics, what happens in disease, what happens in all kinds of challenges that are out there. We are going forward. We are not retreating because we are now in some kind of problem in our world. We are advancing in the kingdom. I am part of the church, the big church that God has called us to. I am excited about that and I am honored to be serving with you in this particular church. I look forward to what God is going to do in our lives. Yes, we're tested. Yes, we're tried. We face mountains. But isn't it nice to go up the mountains together? Isn't nice to be able to interact online and share our concerns and challenges and experience God's grace in all of that? It is beautiful and I love all of what God does.

When Toyota decides to give one of their cars, let's say the Highlander, to *Car and Driver* magazine, they give it to them to test it out. Go ahead. Test it out. So they test drive it. They're not testing it to see if it's going to fail. Because all of the technicians and the drivers and the engineers from Toyota have driven it all over all kinds of things. They've tested it and worked on it and honed it down, so it is ready to go out there and face the test, so to speak, of *Car and Driver* magazine. So *Car and Driver* magazine drives it on their racetrack and drives it on their rough track. They drive it forwards and backwards and around tight corners and through cones and all the things you see in the commercials for the Toyota Highlander. They do all of those things. It's not to see if it's going to fail. It's to prove how strong it is and powerful it is of a car.

You see I just want you to know that when you go up the mountain or you face the giants or you see the walls come tumbling down because you obey God and march around them, when those things happen other people are watching. Because it's the test that we experience that prove or demonstrate the strength of our faith. And that faith is strengthened so much that other people look and they say, "I need some of that in my life." My walls are just so big I don't know what to do. My mounds are just so difficult. I can't imagine what it would be like to face the mountains of today's challenges without the Lord. There is no plan B. There is only a plan A. And that is total dedication to God. Totally trusting in Him. When we do that, we are on the side of God, we are on the side of His church that's marching forward in this world today. We are being tested, yes, so other people can see what's going on.

Hey, I say bring on those mountains. Maybe I don't want to say that too much because I don't want too big of a mountain, but that's the attitude we need to have. James says – *Take joy when you face trials of many kinds*. They are the opportunities for God's grace and His power and His mercy to go through. Notice God is the one who provides. The words there in Hebrew are Jehovah-jireh. God provides. He's the one who provides His grace in the midst of the challenges. I need that. You need that. As you go out this week, I hope you'll use God's grace in your life to be able to first dedicate yourself totally to Him because there's no plan B, but allow your grace to be His provision as you face the mountain. As you do, others will be watching. So be ready to share with them what God is doing in your life.

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we want to ask you now to give us your grace. Lord, I know there are some people struggling right now with some mountains that are pretty big. I know you don't give me the grace for somebody else and their problems. But I look at them and I feel sorry for those people and I'm challenged by that. But Lord, I know that your grace is for them. Your grace is sufficient for them. I just pray that you would strengthen and encourage each of us with your grace, your individualized grace that we need in our lives. Lord, we dedicate ourselves to you because we know there's no plan B. That plan A is total sacrifice, total commitment to you. Lord, we're inspired by this story. Use it in our lives to encourage us as we give our lives to you. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.