

06-28-2020

Ps 13; Gen 22:1-14; Ro 6:12-23; Mt 10:40-42

God Will Provide

Here are a few signs of the times: the ATM is 50 years old. Really. It is a global phenomenon. Another sign of the times is that shopping malls are drying up and blowing away. We are shopping online more and more as the years pass. Access to the internet also began about fifty years ago and continues to grow in use and importance. These are cultural signs of the age we live in.

What about spiritual/religious signs of our times? Self-made religious blends are in. The doctrines of the three Scripture-based religions – Jewish – Christian and Muslim – are being questioned and added to from other religions and ideologies in the marketplace and in the universities and even in seminaries. Are there religious wars in our time? ---- What do you think? What about idolatry? Do idols still influence the world as we see in the Bible? Do you believe the church is looking at sin and calling it “not sin?”

I had a friend whose life, finances, spare time and creativity were all dominated by current fashion. Sometimes this person looked fabulous. And, sometimes my friend looked ridiculous, Fashion is a fickle god. Is this a form of idolatry? I would answer “yes.” It is a cultural and a spiritual sign of idol worship. Anything that dominates our time and energy is potentially an idol in our life. My friend who was a clothes horse is a mild example. Look at your calendar. Look at your checkbook or credit card transactions. What keeps showing up? We may be called to a moment such as Abraham, the father of our faith.

We have been reading from Genesis this past month. Abraham lived in about the 2nd millennium BC. We get cultural information about that ancient era from things made of stone or fired clay – ancient artifacts and inscriptions – but we learn spiritual truth from the Word of God, the Bible. Do not neglect God’s provision

We look in on Abraham as he is hearing again the voice of the Lord God. The text clearly says God was about to test His friend, Abraham. Those were the days when there were many gods. Gods and goddesses represented forces of nature: storm, sky, waters and vegetation (crops). And, the powerful sky gods demanded sacrifices – great or small according to the favor the worshiper was seeking. The ultimate sacrifice was a son – yes, human sacrifice. It was a transaction relationship. A request or demand accompanied by a gift – a sacrifice – was supposed to bring good fortune. Abraham lived among people who believed in many, many gods. He was born into an idolatrous family. Today – there are more voices – more idols – more media of all kinds. Just like Abraham, we are tested – we hear many different messages.

Abraham is learning to discern the voice of the one true God – and to tell the difference between His voice and the voices of all the other gods, the idols. The test was God’s call to make the ultimate sacrifice – as a god like Marduk or Chemosh or the notorious Ba’al – would demand. Abraham goes to great lengths to obey. Isaac is old enough to see that there is no animal for the sacrifice. We learn from verses 5 and 8 that Abraham already has a notion that God plans a happy outcome to this exercise.

Isaac’s death would mean God’s promises could not become real. As he raises the knife to cut his son’s throat, Abraham hears the voice of God’s messenger from heaven. He hears and understands and obeys the command, “Do no harm to Isaac!” Sure enough, God supplies. There is a ram caught in the brambles – just the sacrifice Abraham would choose to offer to the one true God. God provides what is needed.

This relationship – between God and Abraham – is a real, personal, loving relationship, not a trade deal. It is based on life, not death. No bargaining – no bribes. Abraham is caught up in the life of the Sovereign Creator of the universe. It is God who offers the sacrifice – God does not demand the ultimate sacrifice.

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The leader of the biochemical research group says, “Lord, we don’t need you anymore. Science has finally figured out a way to create life out of nothing, in other words, we can do what you did in the Beginning.” “Tell me,” replies God. “Well,” says the scientist, “we can take dirt and form it into the likeness of you and breathe life into it, thus creating man.” “Well, that is interesting, show me.” So the scientist bends down to the earth and starts to mold the soil. “Oh no, no, no,” interrupts God. “Get your own dirt.”

The miracles of life and breath are given by God. Here is the hard part. Human, self-centered nature does not submit easily to this truth. The Apostle Paul says plainly: You and I are either slaves to sin or we are slaves to righteousness. The word “slave” may be troubling to you. We are waking up to the 400 years of the sin of slavery that is woven into our history. Slavery was a fact of life in the 1st c AD. Paul refers to a relationship of helpless bondage – spiritual bondage to an evil thing.

The only freedom in sinful living is freedom from righteousness. Freedom in the life of obedience to God is freedom from sin. Abraham could see that sacrificing his beloved son Isaac was not a moral act – not in the true character of the Creator God. It was a test, very like the tests you and I experience in our journey of faith.

Jesus says: “The one who has found his life will lose it, and the one who has lost his life for My sake will find it.” (Mt 10:39) This discovery is a gift. The provision is Jesus Christ.

Jesus reveals the great truth: ***His complete obedience*** to His Heavenly Father is making a way to God – over the abyss of slavery to sin. He is the bridge – He is the Way God has provided into God’s kingdom.

Abraham’s obedience is an ancient picture of what God has accomplished. God went through with it. Jesus willingly became the sacrifice. If the love in a family is great: between fathers and mothers and their children – how much greater the love of God in Christ! And the love of Christ in His followers? Jesus says, “Start small. How about providing a cup of cold water to someone who is thirsty? This is something you and I receive, whether we offer the cup – or whether we receive the cup.

We are offering Jesus – His love, His story, His Life – Life that is whole and eternal. Jesus says keep at it. Don’t give up. God is the true provider. Amen.