

Looking for the Ram in the Thicket

By Paul R. Blake

Introduction:

- A. Tell story - Genesis 22:1-14
- B. This story has been very sad and seemed destined to tragedy; but the sky suddenly clears up, the sun breaks out, and a bright and pleasant scene opens. The same hand that wounded and cast down now heals and lifts up.
 - 1. God's time to help his people is often when they are brought to the greatest extremity. The more imminent the danger is, and the nearer to be put in execution, the more wonderful and welcome the deliverance.
 - 2. But Abraham was being tested, and the nature of God does not require the commission of a sin as the answer to his tests; a human sacrifice was forbidden
 - 3. But what if Abraham was required to sacrifice his vast wealth of herds, or his health to raise his son, or his life?
 - 4. Abraham was ready to give whatever God asked; when the angel of the Lord stopped him, he was raising the knife to end Isaac; he was not looking around for a ram in the thicket. He did not seek a way out.
- C. Far too many professed disciples find themselves in a position where they must choose between what God requires of them and what they want to keep for themselves, what they believe they cannot go on without
 - 1. And instead of going to Mount Moriah and raising the knife to surrender what God has asked, they stand there looking around for a ram in the thicket, a way to escape the commands of the Lord, an excuse for not doing the will of God or a substitute sacrifice instead of what God asked
 - 2. This is not the faith of Abraham
 - 3. There have been devout disciples praying at the bedsides of faithful fellow soldiers, and God answered their prayers by saying, "You must let them go." There was no ram in the thicket for them.
 - 4. There have been hardworking Christians praying to keep good jobs so they may keep their families in comfort, and God's reply was, "I would rather you emptied bedpans." There was no ram in the thicket for them.
 - 5. There have been conscientious servants of Christ praying fervently for souls of erring family and friends, only to hear the Lord say, "You must go on alone from here." There was no ram in the thicket for them.
- D. What kind of faith must you have in order to go on and make the sacrifice when there is no ram in the thicket for you?
 - 1. Heb. 10:35-39

I. THE ADVERSARY'S CYCLE OF FAITH

- A. Bondage - Begins where we all begin, slaves to sin
 - 1. Rom. 3:9; Gal. 3:22
- B. Faith - One becomes informed and changes his life view
 - 1. Rom. 10:17; Heb. 4:2

- C. Courage - Conviction moves him to change his life and undertake challenges he would not have done before he developed faith
 - 1. Heb. 11:32-37
- D. Liberty - By the courage of conviction, they overcome the obstacles that bind them in slavery to sin
 - 1. Rom. 6:17-23
- E. Abundance - Now that one is free, he enabled to enjoy the blessings that come with freedom
 - 1. Eph. 1:3; Israel in Canaan; The wealth of Solomon
- F. Self-orientation - The problem with abundance is that it often tempts one into materialism, self-interest, and even greed
 - 1. Ez. 33:30-32
 - 2. This is the point where many disciples are. They are aware that God calls them to surrender matters precious to them, and because they are unwilling to give up what they enjoy, they look around for a ram in the thicket.
- G. Complacency - As soon as they have what they believe to be enough to keep them in abundance, they forget their need for God
 - 1. Prov. 30:8-9; Deut. 6:10-12
- H. Apathy - It isn't far from forgetting one's need for God to forgetting God
 - 1. Rev. 3:15-17
- I. Dependency - When one's faith becomes a shadow of what it was in the past, it lacks the strength to maintain liberty and hold onto blessings; he becomes dependent on others to sustain him. In the absence of a swift restoration, it is inevitable that he will fall.
 - 1. Heb. 5:12
- J. Bondage - In this weakened condition, they no longer have the strength to fight off temptation; they become re-enslaved to sin.
 - 1. 2Peter 2:20-22

Conclusion:

- A. Do you find a conflict between what God said and what you want?
 - 1. Are you looking for a compromise that allows you to escape the challenge to your faith by the word and will of God?
 - 2. Stop! If you find it, it will lead you to the next step in the decline of your own faith.