

The Compass

Week 2

OT Readings – Genesis 20:1-32:12

NT Readings - Matthew 7:15-11:6

Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

Old Testament

- God fulfills His promise to Abraham and provides him an heir, even though Sarah and he were well beyond childbearing years. Then the crisis moment in Abraham's life – God asks him to sacrifice Isaac, the promised son.
- God continues His redemptive purpose, first through Isaac (very little detail) and then through Jacob (a much longer & more detailed narrative).
- Pay close attention to Jacob's choices and character. While his selfishness is clearly seen in his self-serving dealings with his family, things will begin to change in his life as his story progresses. Watch for turning points. Why does Jacob's life change matter to the Story?

New Testament

- Following Gordon Fee's understanding of the layout of Matthew, each section contains both a narrative of Jesus life and then a teaching portion.¹ This section begins in 8:1 and ends at 11:1. Nine miracles are recorded in 8:1-9:35 and then 9:36-10:42 is the connected teaching portion.
- 9:36-10:1 are key verses this week in Matthew. Jesus has displayed the kingdom in His power over sickness, demons and even nature. Now He names and then sends out followers (disciples) to do the same.
- To follow Jesus is to follow Him into His kingdom mission; it is *not* optional. It is a costly endeavor, as His teachings on the meaning of discipleship in Matt. 10 make clear.

Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

The series of miracles in the Matthew readings express the heart of God, His compassion for the brokenness and pain of humanity. People in the throes of sickness, pain, despair and misery find themselves touched by God's healing and restoring hand. In Jesus, we see God up close, in our "skin," and we come to know Him for who He really is! If we ever have doubts about Who God is and Who He is *to us*, we need only look at the clearest picture of God ever seen, Jesus Himself.²

Application: "What about me? How does this apply?"

Matt. 9:35-10:8. Picture Jesus and His disciples surrounded by crowds of people, pressing in around them, sick, troubled, pained, without hope. His disciples saw not only His power to heal and restore, but the heart of compassion which motivated His life and mission. In the middle of just such a scene Jesus turns to challenge His disciples - pray that God would summon and send *workers* into the brokenness and despair of the people all around.

And then He sends them to answer their own prayer! They, too, go and minister in the same power and with the same heart of compassion with which He reached out His hands to the "confused and helpless" masses of humanity around about. Jesus knew that His mission and ministry would end with His own life unless He could transfer it to His own disciples.

This passage is for us! Be careful how you pray! If you pray as Jesus *commands* (9:37-38) you will find your heart changed, your eyes opened to the "confused and helpless" surrounding you – in your

workplace, in the supermarket, at sporting events. He summons you and I **now** to minister to the hurting and broken around *us*. What will *we* do?³

Difficult Question of the Week

Gen. 22:1-19. “How could, why would, God ask such a thing of Abraham? Of anyone?”

This “test” shows up in the story of Abraham quite abruptly and has raised eyebrows of readers through-out the centuries. Is God a cosmic child abuser? Since the OT condemns child sacrifice, how are we to think about this passage? While we cannot provide a total answer in such a short space, consider the following things:

- No one else, in all of the Bible, is ever asked such a thing – it is a unique moment and event in the Biblical story. The sacrificing of a son is about Abraham and God, not us and God.⁴
- It was a true test, the outcome was not pre-determined; however, I think it is certain that God did not intend for Abraham to actually kill Isaac (Gen. 22:11-12). If that had been His intent, He could have let Abraham go forward and actually sacrifice him.
- The test did, however, challenge Abraham at the core of his being. Would he be willing to give up “your son, your only son, the one whom you love so much?”⁵ In doing so he reveals his true heart to God - nothing stood between God and himself – not even the son of promise. In other words, Abraham loved God supremely and fully, more than anything else, he had no other “gods” in his life, not even “good gods” like Isaac and the promise. It is *Abraham’s* life that went completely and totally on the altar when he raised the knife.
- From the perspective of the NT, Abraham becomes a “prototype” – revealing in this moment the kind of faith true followers of God are to have.⁶ Is there anything in our lives that rivals or competes with God in our devotion or affections?

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¹ See Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart’s book *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* (Zondervan, 2002).

² See John 14:7-9. Hebrews 1:1-3.

³ His power follows His heart! If we will yield ourselves to Him and let Him burden us with those things that burden Him, open our eyes, then He will empower us to touch those in need around us.

⁴ The story or narrative portions of the Bible tell us what *did* happen, not always whether God approves or disapproves or that we should follow suite. Of course, God asks for this in this case; but that is the point – this is truly unique in the Biblical story.

⁵ Notice the language and reflect - to Whom might such language refer in the future if not “God’s Son, His only Son, the Son Whom He loved.” (Matt. 3:17). It is significant that scholars believe that the location where Abraham prepared to sacrifice Isaac was Moriah, which would later be the Temple Mount, where the Jewish Temple would be constructed. More significantly, it is on this site that Jesus would offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world – perhaps on the very spot? I believe that it is possible that as a corollary to this event, God might have revealed to Abraham the significance of Abraham’s willingness to offer up “his son, his only son, the son whom he loved.” At a future time God would offer up “his Son, his only Son, the Son whom he loved” (John 8:56-58). If this is so, then, Abraham by this action entered into a place of intimacy with God that no other person ever had. Abraham, by the experience of “losing” his only son could truly empathize with God, Who would go through just such an experience in the future, when Jesus would die. Who could feel God’s pain in the loss of Jesus? Abraham can!

⁶ Rom. 4.