

## Jehovah Jireh. Bethesda Bible Teaching. Breaking of Bread meeting on 2 June 2013.

As most of you know, on the first Lord's Day of each month we are looking at one of the better-known divine titles. This month's title is 'Jehovah jireh'. Unlike some of the titles, this occurs only once in the Bible, and, indeed, there simply as the name given to a place ... to a place in a mountain range in the land of Moriah.

Nevertheless, largely on account of the context in which the title is found, it must rank as one of the most familiar of all divine titles. And – no prizes – our reading for this evening comes from Genesis 22 ... commencing at verse 1 ...

After these things, God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I". And He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you".

And Abraham rose early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son. And he clave the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. And Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the ass; I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you".

And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took the fire and the knife in his hand, and they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here am I, my son". And he said, "Behold, the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" And Abraham said, "God will provide for Himself the lamb<sup>1</sup> for a burnt offering, my son". So they went both of them together.

And 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. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.

And the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I". And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, and 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.

And Abraham called the name of that place, "Jehovah jireh" ('The Lord will provide');<sup>2</sup> as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided".<sup>3</sup>

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, that surely I will bless you, and surely I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your seed shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice".

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

Sticking with the traditional understanding of the title 'Jehovah jireh' as 'The Lord will provide', I suspect that most, if not all, of us have had experiences which serve as a personal commentary on those words. By way of illustration, let me refer to the experiences of two servants of the Lord, one from the nineteenth century and one from the twentieth.

First, as is well known, James Hudson Taylor (who died 108 years ago tomorrow<sup>4</sup>) established his China Inland Mission on the same principle by which he lived himself; namely, that it would never solicit funds but would simply trust God to supply its needs. While this policy may not be appropriate for every ministry, it provided Hudson Taylor with thousands of examples of God's faithfulness. In one of his letters, when recounting how the Lord met a specific – and sizeable – need in a most remarkable way, he commented – and I quote – 'over our mantelpiece hung two scrolls in the Chinese character — Ebenezer, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us"; and Jehovah-Jireh, "The Lord will provide"'.<sup>5</sup> And 'provide' He most certainly did.

Second, I refer to Mr. T. Ernest Wilson, a prominent and much-used pioneer missionary in Angola. Some time ago I read (in a reliable source) that when Mr. Wilson, as a young man of 21, stood on the Belfast docks preparing to

leave for Africa in the early 1920s, a kind brother pressed two gold coins into his hand, saying, 'If you are ever down to your last penny, there is something to fall back on'.

As a testament to God's faithful provision, Mr. Wilson – who, as Hudson Taylor, made it a practice to never mention his material needs to anyone but the Lord – still had those two gold coins over seventy years later.<sup>6</sup>

One of John Newton's lesser known hymns begins ...

Though troubles assail,  
And dangers affright,  
Though friends should all fail,  
And foes all unite;  
Yet one thing secures us,  
Whatever betide,  
The scripture assures us  
The Lord will provide.<sup>7</sup>

Along with Mr. Newton, both James Hudson Taylor and T. Ernest Wilson proved that, indeed, the Lord does provide. And so too have countless others.<sup>8</sup>

But this morning I want to consider this gem of a text in its proper setting – where God has placed it ... following as it does in the wake of the record of the supreme test of Abraham's faith and obedience.

I speak of this incident as being Abraham's 'supreme test' because it was not only the last recorded trial<sup>9</sup> of his long life, but it was without doubt by far the most severe.

Through several earlier testings, Abraham's faith had enabled him (i) to give up his comfortable villa in sophisticated Ur of the Chaldees, (ii) to allow his nephew Lot to choose which part of the land he wanted – thereby foregoing his own rights, (iii) to refuse to accept any goods from the King of Sodom by way of payment for services rendered, and, more recently, (iv) to part with his elder biological son Ishmael.<sup>10</sup> In more senses than one, Abraham had certainly come a long way since the God of glory had appeared to him back in Mesopotamia.<sup>11</sup>

But now he faced by far his greatest trial. For God now put His finger on Abraham's most treasured possession – that which he 'loved' most in all the world ... his son Isaac.

To no small extent the drama and tension of our passage is spoilt for us, partly (i) because we are alerted in the very first verse to the fact that it was a 'test' – that there never was any real danger to Isaac – that it was just a 'test', and partly (ii) because we are all very familiar with the happy outcome and sequel. But for most of the chapter Abraham knew nothing of these things.

And when God spoke to Abraham, He spoke with agonising precision. Abraham was left in no doubt exactly what God wanted. He was well and truly fenced in with no room for manoeuvre.

He was told, first, **who** to take. Neither bullock nor lamb – nor even one of his 318 trained servants – would do. God spelt it out for Abraham. It was to be his 'son' – now effectively his 'only' son – the son who he loved – and, just so that there could be no mistake, as the climax of identification, God added the name ... it was to be 'Isaac' – the meaning of whose name Abraham's wife Sarah well understood; 'God', she had said at the time of Isaac's birth and circumcision, 'has made me *laugh*: all that hear will *laugh* with me'.<sup>12</sup> But I suspect that Abraham found God's command here to be no laughing matter. For he (Abraham) had found it hard enough parting with Ishmael ... 'Oh that Ishmael might live before you!' he had pleaded with God<sup>13</sup> ... it had been 'very grievous in Abraham's sight', we are told, for him to send Ishmael away.<sup>14</sup> How much more painful therefore it would be for him to surrender up his Isaac,<sup>15</sup> the more so as all his hopes and plans now centred in him.<sup>16</sup>

Second, Abraham was told **where** he was to go ... to some specific mountain in the land of Moriah – there to build an altar. To some extent it must have come as no small surprise to Abraham that God should pin down the site of his altar so precisely. After all, previously, he (Abraham) had been left to choose the location of each of his altars – whether at Shechem,<sup>17</sup> at Ai/Bethel,<sup>18</sup> or at Hebron.<sup>19</sup> On each previous occasion, we are simply told that 'he built there an altar to the Lord'. But now God requires him to travel upwards of 30 miles through rough and inhospitable terrain to build this altar.<sup>20</sup>

Thirdly, Abraham was told exactly **what** he was to do ... to 'offer' Isaac there 'for a burnt offering'. Not only, that is, to slay him, but to reduce him to ashes! What? ... the loved son, who earlier had been spared the mockery of Ishmael, is to suffer both the knife and the altar fire of his own father? Yes, all of that.<sup>21</sup>

And, fourthly, Abraham is told **when** he is to do it ... 'now'! Not at some unspecified time in the indefinite future. Not when it suited him. But 'now' ... so that there would be no time either for God Himself to change His mind (as God had in chapter 6<sup>22</sup>) or for him (Abraham) to attempt to talk God out of what He had in mind (as Abraham had in chapter 18). 'Now'!

Who ... where ... what ... and when ... all neatly tied down. But not a word in answer to the most obvious question of all ... to the question which we are so quick to ask ... **why!** No word of explanation; not so much as a hint of the reason for God's so surprising demand. Oh yes, we know why, because the angel of the Lord reveals it all later. This was to be the final and ultimate test before God committed Himself to Abraham and his seed in such a way that there would then be no going back ... namely by confirming and sealing His earlier promises by swearing on oath – a point picked up for us by the writer to the Hebrews in the New Testament.<sup>23</sup> But of this, of course, Abraham knew nothing.

According to Hebrews 11, Abraham had earlier proved his willingness to trust God when he didn't know where – where, that is, he went when, called of God, he left his idolatrous home in Ur.<sup>24</sup> According to Genesis 15, he had proved his willingness to trust God when he didn't know how – how, that is, God would bless him with a seed (a posterity) as numerous as the stars of the sky<sup>25</sup> when his wife Sarah had been barren all her life<sup>26</sup> and there was no natural prospect of them ever having a child. But here in chapter 22 Abraham faces his final test; is he willing to trust God when he doesn't know why?<sup>27</sup>

And the answer to that question is a resounding 'yes'.<sup>28</sup>

For there is not the slightest hint in the text that he wavered in his faith – not even for one moment. And throughout we witness his unhesitating, his unquestioning and unwavering obedience to the God he had known and loved for some 50 years.<sup>29</sup> When, by faith, he had left Ur at the call of God, he had proved that he loved Him (the Lord) more than he did his fatherland.<sup>30</sup> When now, again by faith, he was willing to offer up Isaac, he proved that he loved the Lord more even than he did his own son.

At this point, the test was over. And Abraham had passed his final exam with flying colours. For all the time God had really wanted, not Isaac's death, but Abraham's devotion. It wasn't Isaac that God wanted on the altar; it was Abraham. What the Lord wanted was not the sacrifice of a human life, but the surrender of a human will. And He had it.

And so, at the very last moment, a voice *sounded down* from heaven to prevent a knife being *plunged down* on earth.<sup>31</sup> And I guess that, given it had been a direct command from God which had instructed Abraham to offer his son in sacrifice, nothing short of a direct command from heaven to spare his son would have succeeded in stopping him from doing just that.

Which brings us to our set divine title for this evening. 'And Abraham called the name of that place, "Jehovah jireh" ('The Lord will provide')', we read. For when Abraham looked back on the incident the one thought which rose in his mind was of how his words to Isaac had been proven true; 'God will provide for Himself ...'. And so he christened the spot, not with a name<sup>32</sup> which would remind others of his own trial, faith and obedience,<sup>33</sup> but with a name which would remind them of God's provision.

But the name which Abraham gave to the spot was understood by future generations to point, not only backwards (to Abraham's confidence that God would provide an animal substitute for Isaac, but forwards ... 'as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided"'.<sup>34</sup> Evidently, by the time of Moses, the statement had become something of a proverb. And to still later generations, the term "mount (or 'mountain') of the Lord" usually referred to *the temple mount* in Jerusalem – as is made clear, for example, by the words of Isaiah in chapter 2 of his book, 'Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob'.<sup>35</sup>

For we learn from the books of Chronicles not only that David consecrated the area of Ornan's threshing-floor on Mount Moriah as the site of the future temple ('the house of the Lord God'),<sup>36</sup> but that – and I quote – 'Solomon began to build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared to David his father ... in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite'.<sup>37</sup>

And so it was that a thousand years after Abraham, in the days of David, in this very vicinity, the angel of the Lord's sword was held back, never to fall, over the city of Jerusalem ... in the vicinity, that is, where a knife had been suspended over Abraham's son – likewise never to fall!<sup>38</sup>

But it is even more significant for us, given that the Jerusalem Temple was later erected just there, that both the patriarch's knife and the angel's sword were held high in the near neighbourhood of that spot, where, one thousand years' later again, a cross was raised, at which time no voice from heaven called for a knife to be put away or a

sword to be sheathed, but where, indeed, according the prophecy of Zechariah, the very sword of Jehovah was bidden to awake – to leap, as it were, from its scabbard – and to smite God's shepherd – our Lord Jesus.<sup>39</sup>

For a moment our attention in turned from 'the place of which', as we read, 'God had told' Abraham – and to which Abraham's much-loved son *bore* 'the wood' upon which it seemed he was to die ... our attention in turned to another 'place' – to that of which the apostle John wrote, 'He (Jesus) went out, *bearing* His ... cross, to the place called ... Golgotha'.<sup>40</sup> There we hear no cry, 'Do not ... do anything to Him', for no substitute was found to be offered up 'instead of' this Beloved Son! Indeed, He was there as *our* substitute, offered up 'instead' of us!

I have no doubt that, to Abraham at the time, the chief significance of the name 'Jehovah jireh' lay in his earlier comforting response to Isaac that 'God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering'.<sup>41</sup> But we know that the patriarch then spoke better than he knew. For, in the event, God did not then 'provide ... a lamb' – He provided a ram, a very different animal, and one which was, incidentally, most fitting for the occasion, given (i) Abraham's proven wholehearted consecration to the Lord, and (ii) the fact that in the sacrificial system of the Old Testament rams were frequently associated with consecration.<sup>42</sup>

God could, of course, have provided a lamb if He had so willed, but He chose not to. And so, strictly speaking, , Abraham's words to Isaac were not then fulfilled in their completeness. That fulfilment must wait for another day. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that every future animal sacrifice offered in that place – whether in the Temple built by Solomon or the Temple built by the Jews following their return from exile in Babylon – every future animal sacrifice offered on this site, proclaimed afresh, 'God will provide for Himself the Lamb'. For the words of Abraham, along with the entire sacrificial system of the Old Testament, proclaimed loudly, 'Watch this space!'

And Abraham's word to Isaac was fulfilled properly some 2,000 years after they were spoken. He (Abraham) foretold that 'God will provide for Himself the Lamb', and it was left for John the Baptist, seeing Jesus coming to him, to respond, 'Behold, the Lamb ... of God'.<sup>43</sup>

And I leave the last word this evening with the apostle Paul. It is a fact that the Greek Old Testament renders the word of the angel of the Lord to Abraham as, 'Lay not your hand upon the child, neither do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, and you have not spared your son, the beloved, on my account'. I have no doubt that it was with his eye firmly on those words that Paul dictated those very well-known words, 'He who did not spare His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely (graciously) give us all things?'<sup>44</sup>

For, yes, the God who did what Abraham wouldn't do – namely, spare his (Abraham's) son – did not spare His own Son.<sup>45</sup> And in so doing He provided us with a Saviour – and with Him absolutely everything necessary for our salvation and ultimate blessing. Truly, 'Jehovah jireh' – 'the Lord will provide'.<sup>46</sup>

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Or, 'God will see to a lamb for Himself'. We sometimes say, "I will see to it", when we mean, "I will attend to it", "I will take care of it", or "I will provide for it". That is the meaning here.

<sup>2</sup> Or 'The Lord will see' ... 'will see to it', that is.

<sup>3</sup> Or, 'it shall be seen'.

<sup>4</sup> On 3 June 1905.

<sup>5</sup> Robert J. Morgan, 'On this day: 365 amazing and inspiring stories about saints, martyrs & heroes'; under 'November 18'.

<sup>6</sup> See ... <http://www.ternestwilson.com/page2.html>

<sup>7</sup> Hymn 7 in 'Olney Hymns'. See ... <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/newton/olneyhymns.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> 'MY PARENTS WERE RATHER POOR — not with the poverty one finds in the worst of the world's slums, but poor by North American standards. My Dad was a pastor. Before I was born, still at the end of the Great Depression, Dad took around a little wagon of food that had been collected one Christmas for the poor, and then came home to the flat my parents rented, where the only food for Christmas dinner was a can of beans. My parents gave thanks to God for that — and then even as they were doing so, they were invited out for a meal. I can remember many instances, as I was growing up, when our family prayed that God would meet our needs — huge medical bills when we could afford no insurance, for example — and he always did. When I left home to go to university, my parents scrimped and saved; that year they sent me ten dollars. For them it was a lot of money; for myself, I was financially on my own, and worked and studied. Many times I went two or three days without food, drinking lots of water to keep my stomach from rumbling, asking the Lord to meet my needs, fearful I would have to put studies aside. God always met them, sometimes in the simple ways, sometimes in astonishing displays'. (D A Carson) <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/loveofgod/2013/06/07/deut-11-psalms-95-96-isaiah-39-revelation-9/>

<sup>9</sup> 'God tried Abraham', Gen. 22. 1 J.N.D. trans.

<sup>10</sup> See Gal. 4. 22-23.

<sup>11</sup> Acts 7. 1-2.

<sup>12</sup> Gen. 21. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Gen. 17. 8.

<sup>14</sup> Gen. 21. 11.

<sup>15</sup> Relinquishing Ishmael was made easier by the knowledge that Isaac was still there and would be the true heir. God now tested Abraham to see if he would relinquish Isaac as willingly as he did Ishmael.

<sup>16</sup> Gen. 17. 19, 21; 21. 12.

<sup>17</sup> Gen. 12. 7.

<sup>18</sup> Gen. 12. 8.

<sup>19</sup> Gen. 13. 18.

<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, twice (cf. Genesis 12) God instructed Abraham to take certain actions which would result in close family ties being broken. The significant part about the construction of God's word here is that it parallels the call in Genesis 12:1–3. There the Lord had said, "Get you out [lek-lekā] ... to the land that I will show you." Here he said, "And get you [welek-lekā] to the land of Moriah ... upon one of the mountains which I will tell you." The repetition of these motifs forms an inclusio in the structure of the Abrahamic narratives.

Both comparisons and contrasts can be drawn between this experience and Abraham's initial encounter with the Lord, as told in Gen 12:1ff. Both experiences began with a divine emphatic imperative, "go."<sup>19</sup> Both situations involved going to an "undesignated place": ". . . to the land that I will show you" (Gen. 12:1); ". . . upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you" (Gen. 22:2). In both cases a "sacrifice of family" was required: in the former experience, it was to leave family behind; in the latter, it was an actual sacrifice of his son. This final confrontation by Yahweh was, in a sense, not a completely new experience for the patriarch, although obviously the most trying. While the general direction of Abraham's response in both cases was toward obedience, in the first situation there was only partial obedience, while in the last situation there was total obedience. The major contrast, of course, between the two is the fact that the first imperative was accompanied by a promise of blessing; there was no such promise which came with the imperative of Gen 22:2. In fact, this latter imperative seemed to place all the foregoing promises in jeopardy. the paradox is seen in the fact that Abraham became quite distressed over Sarah's instructions to cast Hagar and Ishmael out, yet when God instructed him to slay Isaac, the favoured son, there was no evidence of any reluctance whatsoever on the father's part. Bitter as the trial had been to "cast out" Ishmael, his son, it was only a preparation for a far more severe test of Abraham's faith and obedience.

<sup>21</sup> To propitiate a deity by child sacrifice height of devotion in pagan world. God want know if willing go as far as they.

<sup>22</sup> Gen. 6. 6-7.

<sup>23</sup> Heb. 6. 13-18.

<sup>24</sup> Heb. 11. 8. Cf. 'Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods', Josh. 24. 2.

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He was 75 years of age when he left Haran, Gen. 12. 4. He was 86 years of age when Ishmael was born, Gen. 16. 16 (cf v. 3). He was 99 years of age when God told him of the birth of Isaac, Gen. 17. 1, 16-21. He was 100 years of age when Isaac was born, Gen. 17. 17; 21. 5. He was 175 years of age when he died, Gen. 25. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Gen. 15. 6; Heb. 11. 12.

<sup>26</sup> Gen. 11. 30.

<sup>27</sup> Know not adverse ask questions if something want know or not happy. "Exceeding great reward ... what give me", 15.1-2; "I, Lord, brought out Ur and given land inheritance ... whereby know inherit", 15.8; "cry great/sin grievous (clear implication destroy) ... will also destroy righteous with wicked", 18.23.

<sup>28</sup> He knew God as the God who quickens the dead. He had proved that in his own person, Rom. 4. 17. He would therefore count on Him to manifest Himself as the God of resurrection in the raising up of Isaac from the dead, Heb. 11. 19. In one sense Isaac would be brought twice from the dead, once from Sarah's dead womb and once again from the ashes on the altar on Moriah. "Believed in God who gave life to dead ... considered (not) own body good as dead and (nor) deadness of Sarah's womb", Rom 4. 17, 19.

<sup>29</sup> Abraham was 75 years of age when he left Haran, Gen. 12. 4. He was 100 years of age when Isaac was born, Gen. 17. 17; 21. 5. Josephus claims that 'Isaac was twenty-five years old' in Genesis 22, Antiquities of the Jews, Book 1, Chapter 13, Paragraph 2. This would make Abraham about 125 years of age at the time.

<sup>30</sup> But it took years for Abram to be separated from his father; and when it did occur, it was the result of death rather than of active obedience.

<sup>31</sup> In chapter 16, the angel of Lord earlier appeared at a moment of crisis for Ishmael, to his mother, who declares God to be 'the God who sees'. Now at moment of crisis for Isaac, the angel of Lord appears to his father, who declares God to be the Lord who provides.

<sup>32</sup> Abraham discovered a new name for God.

<sup>33</sup> God spoke about that, not Abraham.

<sup>34</sup> The name points back to the saying of Abraham in verse 8, but the explanation of the name links to temple worship.

<sup>35</sup> Isa. 2. 3.

<sup>36</sup> 1 Chron. 21. 28; 22. 1. 1 and 2 Samuel begin with a debased shrine at Shiloh (1 Samuel 1–3) the sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know the Lord. The custom of the priests with the people was that when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant would come, while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand, and he would thrust it into the pan or kettle or cauldron or pot. All that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. This is what they did at Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there ... Now Eli was very old, and he kept hearing all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting. 1Sa 2:12-14, 22; and closes with the choice of a new shrine at Jerusalem (1 Chron. 21; 22. 1). God – not David – chose place for altar ... God's choice, not David's (as was form judgement).

<sup>37</sup> 2 Chron. 3. 1. The descent of fire onto the altar and consume sacrifice took place in the Old Testament only three other times (see Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting, and when they came out they blessed the people, and the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people.

And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar, Lev. 9:23-24; As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. 2 Chr. 7:1. the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.

<sup>38</sup> See 'Now it happened that Abraham came and offered his son Isaac for a burnt-offering at that very place; and ... a ram ... which Abraham sacrificed in the stead of his son', Josephus, Ant. 7. 13. 4.

<sup>39</sup> Zech. 13. 7 "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me," declares the Lord of hosts. "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered. Mark 14. 26-27. when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. And Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' We often sing the words of Mrs Cousin ...

Jehovah bade His sword awake—  
O Christ, it woke 'gainst Thee!  
Thy blood the flaming blade must slake;  
*Thy heart its sheath must be—*  
All for my sake, my peace to make:  
*Now sleeps that sword for me.*

From 'O Christ, what burdens bowed Thy head!' (The Believers' Hymn Book. Number 176.)

<sup>40</sup> John 19. 17.

<sup>41</sup> Gen. 22. 8.

<sup>42</sup> As in the cases of the Nazirite and of Aaron and his sons. Though at times rams were offered with bullocks and lambs in the same offering (Num. 28: 11, 19, 27; Num. 29: 2, 8, 13, 17, etc.), there were occasions when a ram was appointed to be offered alone. The trespass-offering was a ram. (Lev. 5: 18, Lev. 6: 6.) The burnt-offering on the day of atonement for Aaron and for his house and for all Israel was to be for each a ram. (Lev. 16) At the completion of the Nazirite's vow of separation to God, the peace-offering was to be a ram. (Num. 6: 14.) And at the consecration of Aaron and his sons, it was the blood of the ram, called the ram of consecration, which was put on the tip of their right ear, on the thumb of their right hand, and on the great toe of their right foot. (Lev. 8: 22, 23.)

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Consecration, therefore, we learn from Lev. 8 was connected in thought with a ram, and hence its special fitness as the sacrifice that day on the mount of the Lord. A ram suggests the thought of consecration, which a lamb does not.

<sup>43</sup> John 1. 29. Same Hebrew word jireh as in 1 Sam. 16. 1.

<sup>44</sup> Rom. 8. 32.

<sup>45</sup> The first use of the word 'love' in the Old Testament is found with reference to Abraham's love for Isaac. The first use of the word 'love' in the New Testament is found with reference to God the Father's love for His son, Matt. 3. 17. Abraham's love for his son is but a pale reflection of the Father's love for His Son. God did not spare Him so that He might spare us! Are we wrong in thinking that, when God reminded Abraham of what Isaac was to him, there was present to His own mind that purpose conceived in His heart before the foundation of the world? (C E Stuart ... <http://www.stempublishing.com/magazines/cf/1879/The-Surrender-of-an-Only-Son.html>). Hagar in the wilderness turned away that she might not see her son die. Yet God beheld His Son prostrate in the garden, and yet yielded Him up for us all.

The Bible speaks on several occasions of the outstanding love of a father for his son. Indeed, the very first occurrence of the word 'love' in the Bible is connected with one notable example, that of Abraham's love for Isaac. And, even if we may question the wisdom of how he demonstrated his love, we might think of Jacob's love for Joseph. And, again, although we would certainly quarrel with the way in which King David indulged and doted on Absalom, scripture leaves us in no doubt about either the reality or the depth of his love for his wayward son.

But I need hardly say that no earthly father has ever felt affection for his son remotely resembling the love which God the Father felt and feels for His Son. And although, in one sense, God has many sons – both by creation (I refer to the angels ) and by adoption (I refer to believers ) – He has never had another like 'the Son of his love', Col. 1. 13 (literal translation), who stands altogether apart as His unique and eternal Son.

Nor has the Father left us in any doubt about the extent of His affection for His Son. Indeed, at our Lord's baptism, God threw the heavens wide open – 'rent them apart' is the expression used in one of the gospels – that He might declare, 'Thou art my beloved Son', or, more literally, 'Thou art my Son, the Beloved'. And more or less identical words were echoed some three years later on the so-called 'Mount of Transfiguration', when, we are told, 'a voice out of the cloud ... said, This is my beloved Son'.

If God's declaration at our Lord's baptism distinguished Him (the Lord Jesus) from some of the worst of men, come to be baptised by John in token of their repentance, God's declaration on the Mount distinguished Him from two of the best of men, Moses and Elijah. And, if God's declaration at our Lord's baptism followed the 30 years our Lord had lived in private at Nazareth, God's declaration on the Mount followed the subsequent three years of His public ministry.

And I note that both of these assertions by the Father are recorded for us by each of the synoptic gospels. But, if, in this way, for their part, the writers of the first three gospels focus on the Father's expression of His limitless love for His Son, for his part, John, in his gospel, stresses rather our Lord's own constant and conscious enjoyment of that love.

In the opening section of his gospel, the apostle John speaks of our Lord Jesus as God's only-begotten 'in the bosom of the Father', John 1. 18 ; 'in', that is, the place of warmest affection and most intimate communion. He occupied love's eternal abode, ever dwelling in the embrace of the Father's love.

And it is clear that our Lord's enjoyment of that love continued undiminished when He was in the world. We are exhorted in Jude 21 to 'keep' ourselves 'in the love of God', keeping ourselves from anything which would cloud our awareness of God's love, walking continually in the warmth of its glow. Alas, speaking for myself, all too often I stray into the shadows! But, make no mistake, throughout the whole His life and ministry here, our Lord never once 'strayed into the shadows'. He was forever basking in the sunshine of His Father's love for Him.

Indeed, we hear the Saviour refer to His Father's love for Him no less than six times in John's gospel. The first of these is in verse 20 of chapter 5; 'The Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth'. These words of our Lord are similar in many ways to that which is said back at the end of chapter 3; 'The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand', v. 35, which words were either those of John the Baptist, or, rather more likely I suspect, those of John the apostle.

But, if John assures us in chapter 3 that, because the Father loves the Son, He places all in His hands – in other words, that the Father has withheld from Him no possessions – our Lord Himself assures us in chapter 5 that, for the very same reason, namely His love for His Son, the Father has shown Him all He does – in other words, that the Father has withheld from Him no knowledge. The Father kept no secrets from the Son of His love, and because, in His daily communion with His Father, our Lord Jesus saw all that God was doing and all that God would have Him do, His activity was always a perfect reflection of His Father's.

The second reference which our Lord made to His Father's love for Him comes from the well-known passage in chapter 10; 'Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me (no power in Jerusalem or in Rome; no power on earth or in hell could ever do that!), but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father', John 10. 17-18. And our Lord rejoiced to know that His unqualified submission to His Father's will and command – His undeviating obedience all the way to death – served to draw out His Father's love for Him.

And what can we possibly say in response to His third reference to His Father's love for Him, recorded in chapter 15 verse 9, 'As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you'? For here the Beloved Son, who alone knew the

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immensity and the intensity of His Father's love for Him, assures us that nothing short of this is the measure of His own love for us?

Such a breath-taking claim can be matched only by words our Lord later uttered in prayer, when speaking to His Father of His own purpose 'that the world may know that thou ... hast loved them, as thou hast loved me', John 17. 23. What an amazing thought! – that the Father's limitless love for His Son overflows in all its fullness to every one of His people.

And in the very next verse the Saviour embraces, as it were, two eternities with His words, 'Father ... I will that they ... be with me ... that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world', John 17. 24. And here, as our Lord's words stretch back before creation itself, our finite minds are baffled. As one commentator says, 'This love is very old. The eternal Son could not remember its beginning'!

And the final reference comes in the closing words of our Lord's prayer, as the last grains of sand were trickling through the timer before His rendezvous with my sins and God's wrath; 'I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them', John 17. 26.

Yes indeed. The Lord Jesus ever lived in the constant and conscious enjoyment of the Father's love for Him. And to think that He whom the Father loved so very much is one and the same as He of whom Paul once said that God 'spared not his own Son, but delivered Him up for us all', Rom. 8. 32.

'What was it, O our God,  
Led Thee to give Thy Son,  
To yield Thy well-beloved  
For us by sin undone?  
'Twas love unbounded led Thee thus  
To give Thy Well-beloved for us.'

A. Taylor (Mrs. Gilbert), (1782-1866)