

Sharon Whitley was fortunate in many ways. She was raised in a loving, secure environment. She had a close relationship with her father who took pride in providing for the needs of his *little princess*. So when Sharon graduated from college with her teaching degree, she was ready to spread her wings a bit. She accepted a teaching position at a school in Coachella, California, about 150 miles from her home town where she had been raised. It was not a dream job by any means. The low-income housing complex across from the school was a known hangout for drug users. But teaching jobs were hard to find, and Sharon knew that she would be able to help many of the kids in her class, the majority of whom had come from broken homes. Sharon knew that the stability, love and security that she had received from her parents would enable her to help those in her class who had not been as fortunate.

Sharon got off to a good start. She called home several times a week and always enjoyed talking with her father about her classroom experiences. After every conversation, her dad would end by saying, *Be careful now and always remember that I love you.*

One day, Sharon had to work late at school. She had some papers to grade and the bulletin board needed to be changed. Time got away from her, so it was almost 6 o'clock by the time she left the school building to go to her car. Her tiny import looked very lonely out in the deserted parking lot. As Sharon walked through the dusk towards her car, she suddenly heard voices behind her. Turning, she noticed at least 8 young men who had congregated across the street and were now crossing over towards her. *Hey, are you a teacher?* one asked loudly. *Naw, she's too young. She must be an aide,* another yelled. As Sharon picked up her pace, the boys continued to taunt her. *She's kind of cute,* she heard one say.

Panic began to set in now. Sharon reached into the pocket of her hand bag where she kept her keys. *If I have the keys in my hands, I will be able to unlock the car door quickly,* she thought. But her key ring was not in its normal place. Suddenly the horrible thought came into her mind that she had left her keys on the desk in her classroom. And all the while she was silently panicking, the boys were getting closer and closer. *Hey, let's get the lady,* one of them cried out.

As Sharon broke into a jog towards her car that was very close now, her hand desperately groped around the inside of her purse. Strangely, she felt a key ring. Pulling it out, she noticed a couple of car keys on the ring. Sliding the door key into the car, she quickly unlocked the door, jumped in, and clicked the automatic lock down just before the young men got to her car and began pounding on the hood and windows. Sharon

then started her car up and backed the boys away as she left the parking lot to go to her apartment, vowing that she would never stay that late at school again.

Sharon just had to call her father that night. She was still quite shaken from her harrowing experience and needed to hear the reassurance of his voice. She determined that she wouldn't tell him about her narrow escape because she didn't want him to worry about her. And it was so good to hear his voice and talk with him. Predictably, her father ended the conversation with his usual words, *Be careful now, and always remember that I love you.* But then as an afterthought he added a comment. *Oh, and by the way, I had an extra set of car keys made just in case you ever need them. I just dropped them into your purse.*

There is a basic instinct that God has placed into the heart of a father to provide for his family. Few pleasures are more satisfying to a father than the knowledge that all of the family's needs have been met. And most fathers spend time anticipating potential needs and making provisions for them. Whether it be making a utility payment or buying some clothing or making an insurance payment, there is a satisfaction that a father feels providing for his family. And conversely, there are few pains as intense as the sorrow felt when a father cannot provide for some need of his family.

In order to provide for all of the needs of his family, a father must have a relationship with The Perfect Provider. The Perfect Provider, of course, is God himself. It is necessary for an earthly father to know his heavenly father and be growing in his relationship with God in order to provide for the **spiritual** needs of his family. You see, most often when talking about a father as a provider, we immediately think about material needs. A house to live in, clothing to wear, toys to play with, food to eat. And these are certainly very important to any family. But there are more needs than just the physical ones. There are emotional needs and there are spiritual needs as well. If a father is to be a good provider for his family, he must strive to meet these unseen needs as well as the more obvious physical needs. How can a father even begin to meet the spiritual needs of his family if he doesn't have a growing relationship with God himself?

The passage of Scripture that is before us this morning introduces God as the Perfect Provider. In fact, it is in this passage that a new name is given to God, Jehovah Jireh, the God who provides. It was on this occasion that Abraham grew in his relationship with God to find God as the Perfect Provider. Even though this was a most difficult experience for Abraham, through his experiences in Genesis 22, Abraham grew in his relationship with God and became a better father because of them. Listen as I read the first 14 verses of Genesis 22 that tell this unique story in the lives of Abraham and Isaac. READ Genesis 22:1-14:

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied.

Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."

Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?"

"Yes, my son?" Abraham replied.

"The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together.

When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied.

"Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."

Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place (Jehovah Jireh) The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."

How did Abraham come to know God as his perfect provider in this passage, so much so that he actually called God Jehovah Jireh? I would invite you to see 3 specific ways in which God revealed Himself to Abraham as the Perfect Provider this morning.

1. First, notice with me that God revealed Himself as the Lord who will provide by giving Abraham the ability of strength to perform this most difficult task that was asked of him. This is often overlooked when we study this passage. We know right from the beginning that God never intended for Isaac's life to be in jeopardy because we know the whole story. Our passage begins with the statement "Some time later God tested Abraham". Like any test that God brings into our lives, this situation was designed to strengthen Abraham's faith. But Abraham didn't know that when God first made His request of him. Our passage ends

with Abraham looking up and finding a ram caught by its horns in a thick, thorny bush. But Abraham didn't know that this ram would be there when he began that long ascent up Mount Moriah. What God originally asked of Abraham was something that was humanly impossible to perform. For a father to offer his only son as a human sacrifice, one for whom he had waited 100 years, one who was the fulfillment of all of the promises given to him, this kind of action would be humanly impossible to perform. How could Abraham bring himself to the point where he would be able to make that long, laborious journey to the top of Moriah, where he would be able to tie his one and only son to the top of that altar, and where he would be able to raise that knife over him with the full intention of bringing it down through his flesh? How could a loving, caring father actually bring himself to that point? It is just not humanly possible is it? But the Lord who will provide provided Abraham with the strength for obedience. The Lord provided Abraham with a way to discharge the most difficult of all duties when the command seemed to be impossible to obey. God gave Abraham the strength to walk in God's will that day.

Now we see a beautiful Scriptural truth revealed in Jehovah Jireh. What we all desire naturally is a bushel basket full of God's grace that we can keep stored in the closet so that we will always have an extra supply when needed. So if tomorrow is to be an especially difficult day, we can have the security of knowing that we can open the closet door and dip out an extra portion of grace. But God does not dispense His grace like this. He goes a step beyond this for our benefit. God reveals Himself to us as Jehovah-Jireh - the God who provides. He commits Himself by His name to meet us every single day in every situation giving to us just the measure of grace needed to obey His commands and walk in His will. When unexpected situations loom in our life path, an additional gift of grace is given to us that enables us to do that which is needed to be obedient to His commands. This is the main provision that God makes, it is the highest provision that God makes, it is the greatest provision that can be given - the ability to face every situation every moment of our lives with the strength to go forward through it, no matter how difficult that situation might be.

By the way, the author of Hebrews gives to us a brief commentary explaining what Abraham was thinking as he journeyed up that hill with his son, Isaac. This is very helpful in filling in the rest of the story for us.

HEB 11:11 By faith Abraham, even though he was past age--and Sarah herself was barren--was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. ¹² And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore. . .

HEB 11:17 By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the

promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son,¹⁸ even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned."¹⁹ Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.

You see, Abraham figured that God had raised Isaac from the dead once. His wife's body had been reproductively dead when Isaac had been born. Sarah had already gone through menopause, she was 90 years old. Yet Isaac had been conceived and born. It was if had been raised from the dead. Abraham reasoned that if God had done it once, He could do it again. So Abraham in faith expected God to raise Isaac from the dead because He expected God to honor and fulfill His promises.

But I'm confident that Abraham would tell us that there was no greater day's task that he faced in his life than that day that God called upon him to lead his son, Isaac, up that hill to be sacrificed. Abraham was able to make that climb because Jehovah Jireh walked with him. If the Lord who will provide was able to give Abraham the strength for that day's work, He certainly is able to meet us every day of our lives and provide what is necessary for us to accomplish His will as well.

2. Notice with me now a second way in which God proved Himself to be the perfect provider in this passage. As Abraham was reaching out his knife-clenched hand, the Angel of the Lord called out halting the proceedings. Verse 13 tells us: "Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son."

God proved Himself to be the perfect provider by giving to Abraham a substitute for Isaac so that his son might be spared.

We know that it was on this very hill top that the temple of God was built during the reign of Solomon. There is a Jewish tradition that it was on the very location of this altar where Abraham laid out Isaac that the Ark of the Covenant was placed in the Holy of Holies of that temple. While we can't be dogmatic as to this tradition, we certainly can see the picture which is very clear.

God is the model of the Father who is the perfect provider in that He has provided a substitute sacrifice for the atonement of our sins. Just as this physical picture proved God to be the provider in sparing the life of Isaac, so in the spiritual sense, God has provided a sacrifice to insure the eternal life of each of His children. The perfect and sinless Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ himself, the Angel of the Lord who called to Abraham from heaven, came to this earth and offered His own life upon the cross in payment for our sins. Through believing in Him each one of us can know forgiveness. Our debt of sin can be paid in full through our substitute so that we can have the free gift of eternal life. Jehovah Jireh, the Lord has provided a lamb to pay the penalty of our sins.

It was during one of the many wars between Great Britain and France that France was experiencing a shortage of fighting personnel so men were drafted into the French Army. When someone's name was picked, he had to go off into battle. On one occasion, late in the war, the authorities came to a certain man and told him that he had been chosen, that he had to join the army and go off into the war. Imagine their surprise when he responded by saying, I don't have to go because I was shot and killed 2 years ago in battle. At first they questioned his sanity, but when he insisted that what he was saying was true, they pressed to find out the details. He told them that his name had already come up for the draft. But a close friend had come to him and volunteered in his place. "You have a large family and I am not married," his friend had offered. "I will take your name and go into the army in your place." When the authorities checked the records, they indeed found that this man's name and address were recorded as being killed in action. The case was so unusual that it was referred directly to Napoleon Bonaparte himself. He finally decided that the country no longer had any legal claim on this man for he had already died in the person of another.

So it was in the case of Isaac and so it is in the case of every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord himself proved to be true to his name Jehovah Jireh by supplying a ram as a substitute so that Isaac could be spared, and many centuries later he supplied the Lamb of God who died in our place so that our sins could be forgiven and our lives could be spared as well.

3. Finally, notice with me a 3rd area of provision. God provided a heritage for all who would follow in Abraham's faith. Read verse 14 with me again: So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."

We must never forget that Moses wrote these words that we are reading some 500 years after this event had occurred. Yet even 5 centuries later, the faith of Abraham and Isaac was still making an impact, and we find this revealed through a saying that was in common use during Moses' day - And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."

You see, through Abraham's faith, and the Lord's strengthening hand, there was something else provided - a heritage for thousands of other believers who would follow. And I personally have experienced the power of this heritage. I have stood probably a dozen times or so on top of mount Moriah. And I can tell you it is an awesome and moving experience to stand on that same ground even today, looking out over the Mount of Olives to the East, and reflect how that 4,000 years ago, Abraham offered Isaac before there was any city of Jerusalem built at all and then 3,000 years ago, Solomon dedicated that magnificent temple to the Lord on this very location, and 2,000 years ago, Jesus Christ, the Messiah, stood and taught God's truth on this very location. The magnitude of the history that happened at this location staggers the imagination. Even to

this day it can be said, "On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided."

Yes, Abraham was strengthened for the seemingly impossible task of the day. And Isaac had the special blessing of seeing the miraculous delivering hand of the Lord. But there was even more that was provided through this event. For some 500 years at the time of this writing, and even to this very day as we are studying this passage, a heritage of faith has been left.

Dads, do you want to leave something of supreme value to your children and grand-children who are to follow after you? Do you want to really be a complete provider for your family? There is nothing more precious that you can leave your family than the example of a living relationship with the God who is the perfect provider. Your acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ as your substitutionary sacrifice and your dependence upon God's grace for strength day by day will leave a heritage that cannot be measured. As your children and grandchildren see your faith in God, you will be providing a spiritual heritage for your family. Then you will know the joy of not only being a provider for your family of material things, but also providing for your family in the spiritual realm as well.

Jehovah-Jireh - the Lord who will provide. He will provide the strength needed for every daily situation, no matter how impossible it might seem. He has provided the sacrifice necessary to pay for our sins. And through us, He will provide a heritage and example for children and grandchildren of future generations.