

## The only Son from Heaven - but not the only son

### II - Isaac

God promised Abraham a son. And Abraham believed God. But as time passed by, as he and his wife Sarah were getting older, they could see that, realistically speaking, there was no way she could have a son, not in any real sense, not in the biological sense.

So Sarah came up with a scheme to secure the fulfilment of the promise of God: Abraham would father a son with her maid, and Sarah would call and count this son her own, so that he would, at least in a legal sense, be that.

Sin would get in the way of Sarah counting the son of her maid her own, though. The maid would treat her mistress with contempt, as if she were now the mistress, as if she were the better woman because she had been able to give her master a son. And Sarah would respond in kind and treat her maid harshly instead of caring for her kindly. In this way, they would both set aside the ordinance of God, that element of natural Law He would later lay out for His people in what we now know as the Fourth Commandment, that all households and all governance are to reflect the fatherhood of God the Father in the Trinity, as the Son and the Holy Spirit willingly submit to Him in love, although equal to Him in glory.

Now, it should come as no surprise that sin would get in the way of Sarah's scheme, as it was sin that had made her come up with the scheme to begin with.

Not that there is anything wrong about taking a child to yourself and raising it as your own. It can be a loving and God-pleasing thing to do, and usually is, particularly when a child does not have parents that can or will provide him or her with a healthy and loving home. Most certainly, for parents who do not find themselves in a position to care for their child, to allow others to do so is a good and God-pleasing thing to do, rather than to have their children killed, or leave them to die after they have been born, which cannot but be contrary to God's will, being that He is a God of life, and love.

But this was different. For for Sarah to come up with her scheme, and for Abraham to agree to it, it was nothing less than to fail to trust God to fulfil His promise His own way, in His time. The promise of God was given in direct response to Abraham's specific complaint that he was childless and had no natural son to inherit him. As such, the promise of God was one that clearly called for faith and trust in Him rather than for scheming and legal strategy.

And ever so much more, since, as it would later become clear, and as we learn it from what we heard tonight that God had His holy Apostle Paul write, the promise given to Abraham of Offspring greater than the stars of the heavens, innumerable and unmeasurable, was one that pertained to His *salvation*, that *in you all the generations of the earth shall be blessed*. It pertained to the fulfilment of the judgement God had pronounced upon the ancient serpent Satan that *I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her Offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel*. The promise given to Abraham pointed forward to the fulfilment of this judgement, when a descendant of Abraham would give birth to the Son of God, who would suffer the sting of the ancient serpent Satan, in the fullness of its bitterness, but would nevertheless crush and conquer him completely, and undo all the evil he had done, and win salvation for all sinners and bring blessing to all generations. And this would have to be from God, and from Him alone, and not from human machinations and manipulation.

It is easy enough to understand, though, is it not, how Abraham and Sarah could come to think that they had to do what they did. After all, it seemed to be obvious that time was running out, and had, in fact, run out already. Clearly, to wait for God in faith and trust Him to fulfil His promise was just not going to cut it. So they had to do *something*. Most of us have been there, I think.

So often, when Christians talk about *doing what we have to do*, what it means is that they want to do something that is not quite by the book, that is: something that goes against the Word of God. I have to be ruthless in my business, for I need the money, and perhaps even a bit dishonest. I have to lie a little. I have to get out of this marriage to get the life God wants for me to have.

In untenable situations, something has to give. We have to do *something*; and this is something, whatever it is; so clearly, right or wrong, this is what we have to do. This is the logic of panic: Cats have four legs; my dog has four legs; so clearly, my dog is actually a cat.

It should be obvious to all Christians that to go against the Word of God is disobedience against Him, and ungodliness. It is that by definition, is it not? It is that, even when Christians choose to do it, because they think they have to. What might not be quite so obvious to Christians is that to think that you have to go against the Word and will of God to begin with is something worse than mere disobedience, that it is unbelief, it is failure to have faith in God.

To have faith in God means, among other things, also to believe that what He teaches as good and right is the good and right and responsible thing to do, also for me. And as strange as it may sound, to have faith in God means also to believe that He will make things well for me, even if I have faith and honour and obey His Word and His will. Well, actually, that does not sound all that strange, now, does it? It pretty much presents itself. What is strange about it is how easily Christians forget.

Even with regards to Church and their life of faith, concerned Christians can become confused and come to think that *what we have to do* is to set the Word and will of God aside. To secure money for our church for many years to come we should set Christian love aside, and the command of God that those who are taught the Word share all good things with the one who teaches, as He has had His holy Apostle Paul write it, and not care about providing properly for our Pastor, even if we can still afford to. Or Pastor needs to be less strict about honouring the ordinances of God in his preaching and practices, for then, some of those who are not Christian and will not live as Christians might want to join our church, and then we might have more money, and our church needs more money more than she needs to be a *Christian* church.

Some will even go so far as to say that it is for the salvation of sinners that the Church needs to stop being so strict about honouring the Word and will of God, so that those who will not be Christian will come to our church and learn to be Christian by *not* being taught what it is. Well, nobody will usually say exactly that, not in so many words; but it is usually what it means when someone suggests that the Church should not be so strict and needs to change to survive. It is also what it means when some suggest that for the salvation of sinners, the Church needs to worship in a manner that is exciting or entertaining or otherwise appealing to unbelievers and others who do not care much for God and His salvation; she has to abandon that Word and worship of God and His salvation which reflects who God is, and what His salvation is, that which is the life of His Church and His Christians.

From what we hear tonight, we learn the lesson that to trust in God is always the good and right and responsible thing to do. And to have faith in God means not only to think that there is one, but also to trust Him to make all things well, as He has promised, even if we fail to sin and set His Word and will aside, and the faith itself, and fail to follow instead the unbelief and ungodliness of our hearts and minds.

From what we hear tonight, we also learn the even more important lesson, though, of which the holy Apostle Paul writes, that *Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman, and that the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, whereas the son of the free woman was born through promise, and that we are not children of the slave but rather of the free woman, for you, brothers, like Isaac, as the Apostle writes it, are children of promise, for the Jerusalem above is free, the Church of Christ, that is, and she is our mother, and she is not bearing children for slavery.*

In the *Gospel*, that is: the Word of God of His salvation, sinners are made to be children *born through promise*. His Word of salvation proclaims how the Son of God, who is God Himself from eternity, has won for all sinners full and complete righteousness before His judgement with His holy and innocent life, in which He has presented to God, in our stead and on our behalf, all that we owe to Him, and with His sufferings and death, in which He has borne His own judgement against all sin for all sinners, in our stead and on our behalf. And His Word of salvation presents His salvation as full and complete, with nothing missing, and nothing left for us to do, other than to rejoice in the goodness of God.

The salvation of God is exactly that, *His* salvation. It is from God, and from Him alone, and full and complete, as He Himself is full and complete in all that He is, and in all that He does.

And as such, His Word of salvation is nothing less than His *promise*, by which His salvation is actually *given* to sinners, fully and for real, to all who hear His promise and take it to heart.

And His salvation is the forgiveness of sins. And as such, it is given to actual sinners, and real ones, who actually sin, and fail in so many ways, even with regards to the faith itself; as God fulfilled His promise also to Abraham and Sarah, although they, too, failed in their faith. As He has had His holy Apostle Paul write it: *If we are faithless, He remains faithful - for He cannot deny Himself.*

By His Word of salvation sinners are born anew as His children, *born through promise*. With His living Word of love He gives His own life to us, so that we come alive to Him anew, ever anew, and begin to believe in Him, and belong to Him. By His Word sinners come alive; and by His Word He keeps His Christians alive, and His Church, and will, until He comes to take us to Himself to be with Him forever in the fullness of His goodness and His glory.

Blessed is He that comes, in the name of the Lord. *Amen.*