

CHAPTER VIII
The Sacrifice of Isaac
Gen. 22

Agnes M. Lawson
Hints to Bible Study
The Colorado College of Divine Science
Denver, 1920.

We grow into true knowledge of God by obedience to the highest that we know. The highest that we know may be a false concept, but sincerity and aspiration are always seen of Him who looks not upon the outward act, but the inward intention. There existed for centuries among Semitic races the custom of sacrificing children to their gods. This may seem to the one who does not look beneath the surface hideous and loathsome. It is the thing that we do not understand that we condemn; charity always comes with comprehension.

The central impulse in the heart of man is to find his God and be united to him. Man is "incurably religious" the philosopher tells us. He is always seeking God and endeavoring to propitiate Him and enlist His favor. Man is dependent and has always felt this dependence, so he makes sacrifices in order to gain favor. The dearest possession of man is his children, and when he came to see that his best must be given to his god he was groping for the ideal.

This idea of child sacrifice was Abraham's inheritance from his age. We have to grow out of the beliefs we are born into. When the child of promise came, he was Jehovah's gift to him. Could he keep from Jehovah that which was his? "God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac." Do we believe this? Abraham who called himself the friend of God, meditating on what he could do to please Him, had the inward conviction that he must give his best, and the dearest thing in life to him was Isaac. Great men never hesitate, the act follows the conviction, and Abraham obeyed immediately.

Here are three of the highest qualifications of the soul of man: Obedience to his highest concept, instant action upon it, and neither condemnation of the God who demanded it nor self-pity for himself who must give. Self-sacrifice is the supreme test of faith, and Abraham was not found wanting. Willingness to give our highest and best opens the way for God to give His highest and best to us. It is impossible to take anything out of life that we have not first put into it. An old concept was lost to Abraham, but a new one was born--God demanded the sacrifice of his son in another way than the one which Abraham knew. We never possess anything until we lose it, that is, we never get into right relationship to it. Human love must always be passed through the sacrificial fires before it is acceptable to God.

Sacrifice means to make sacred, and the one we have given to God has been made sacred to us. This is adjustment, an adjustment that we must make with everyone, our loved ones and unloved ones alike, for the human consciousness is chaos and the spiritual is order. Perfect adjustment would be eternal life, we have been told by one of the best thinkers that this planet has produced. We are always making adjustments, we must continue to do it until we get into right relationship with the universe and everything in it.

God does demand of us that we sacrifice our sons and daughters, our husbands, wives, lovers and friends, aye and our own lives also. It is not a mere humorist that exclaimed, "God save me from my friends, I can protect myself from my enemies." We instinctively protect ourselves from our enemies, we are always on guard against them. Yet they can never injure us in the sense that our unconsecrated lovers can injure us. The unwise parents who indulge their children, the foolish lover who flatters our mediocre efforts and thereby fails to stimulate us to better accomplishment are far more injurious than enemies would be. Our enemies often stimulate us to endeavor, for a definite determination to succeed often follows another's criticism or condemnation. It takes God to protect us from our friends, and He does it; He commands us to sacrifice them, and sacrifice them we must.

We give freedom when we have given up, we gain freedom as we are given up. Every life must come out and be its individual self, and the restrictions laid upon us by our mistaken lovers must be broken, as Samson broke the ropes bound around him by Delilah. Our genius is innate and solitary and must be worked out from itself and not deflected by another's desire for us. The mother who would help her children must give them up. A mother of five children, four of whom died in infancy, sadly told me: "I have killed four of my children, and if my daughter had not fought me every inch of the way, she would not be alive." The truth had enabled this woman to see that the fear constantly held over her children had actually crushed their lives out. This woman is from the world's standpoint a model mother.

It is impossible to heal the sick and erring but by giving them up. We have not created them nor are we responsible for them. Turn them over to the One who did and Who is always responsible for them. Hold this responsibility up to God constantly and you will find that He always measures up to it. Time after time when in my blind human way a feeling of responsibility for my patients would creep over me, I have been enabled to give them up by repeating the words of that great seer, Robert Browning, "Would I fain in my impotent yearning do all for this man; and doubt He alone will help him, who yet alone can?" Peace comes with sacrifice, and we can give no healing treatment that does not come from the deep conviction that the life of everyone, no matter what the seeming, is always hid with Christ in God.

God has nothing better to offer us than the love of a friend who has given us up. We have been given to God and, held in this, we have the required stimulus. We need this love as the tiny crocus needs the spring sunshine. We expand in it, we reach out in

endeavor to measure up to it. "God never made a great man but He confided the secret to another." This stimulus is an actual necessity. No soul ever arrived at the goal without it.

The love which has passed through the sacrificial fire alone is true. There is only one love and that is Love. Love always sees our possibilities and believes in us until we believe in ourselves. In the mirror of another's love we find our real life. Let us pray with Hamilton Wright Mabie, "Send someone, Lord, to love the best that is in me and to accept nothing less from me." For those, who accept from us anything less than God, will take from us, they are not an aid but a detriment.

I give the following experience as it was related in a class recently: "The youngest members of our family were two daughters, of which I was the elder. My mother was very sympathetic and had spoiled the family baby by indulging her in her belief in invalidism. The girl had no thought of anyone but herself and had enslaved our mother. She had alienated the affections of the whole family by her selfishness and uselessness, and when my mother died I was the only one who had compassion for her. For years I carried a deep-seated pain in my heart for her. I felt that she was not as intelligent as myself, nor as competent, and she was a trust left me by my mother that I could neither evade nor shirk.

"One of the greatest trials of my life were her letters; everything was hopeless from her standpoint. Her only diversion was trying new physicians; her letters were pleas for money to pay her bills. One day a peculiar vision came to me. I was in a large body of water bending over my sister as I held her head under the water waiting for her to drown. As I had been studying Divine Science for some time I knew that I was actually doing that. There could be no mistaking its meaning. I was holding her fast in my positive thought, and I must free her. I jumped up and, standing in the middle of the room, I positively threw her at God. I passionately exclaimed: 'God, I did not create her nor am I responsible for her. I absolutely refuse to carry her any longer.' From that moment my pocketbook was closed for her. She had the necessities, the luxury of physicians she must forego. She is a self-supporting woman today, she who never did a thing in her life to amount to anything until after she was thirty-five years old."

GOD DID COMMAND ABRAHAM TO SACRIFICE ISAAC. And He commands every one of us to do the same, and we shall know no peace until we place in God's care all those whom we love, and as we do it we gain them.