

Theme: **God's Will and God's Promise**

Text: Hebrew 11:8-19

Season: Ash Wednesday Lenten service

Date: February 14, 2018

Place: Shepherd of the Rockies LCMS, Bailey, CO

May God's will be done in your life as He keeps His promises to you.

You might be asking, "Who am I? Well I'm the 'The Son of Promise.'" That's what Dad calls me: "The Son of Promise." According to him, if all of God's promises are going to come true, they will have to come true through me. No pressure growing up, right? But I guess when you become a father at the age 100, you're allowed to be a little eccentric.

Laughter. That's what Mom calls me: "Laughter!" Well, I guess everyone calls me that: because my name is, Isaac, means laughter. But for Mom, it was more than just a name. The way she tells the story, Mom named me laughter because of her great joy at "finally having a baby at such an advanced age."

I mean, I get it; around here, not having kids is grounds for divorce. But Dad was always a little different from our neighbors. He loved Mom all those years, even though they couldn't have children. So, when I finally came along, it's no wonder Mom laughed!

But you see, I've also heard my Dad side the story about my naming. And because I'm always the Son of Promise to him, he tells it a little differently. "O, your mom laughed when you were born all right," he says, "but I remember how she laughed the year before, she laughed at an angel of God, can you imagine that? Your Mom laughed and laughed at the promise that she would give me a son from her own body. Never laugh at the promises of God, my son." he said, "Your God can do the impossible!"

Oh, You have to stick out your chin when you say that as you are pointing at everyone, that's the way Dad did it all the time "Your God can do the impossible!" That's Dad for you

So, you can call me Isaac, or Laughter, or even Son of Promise—they're all related ... though I remember a time when they didn't seem related at all. Dad clung to that Son of Promise, but Mom sure didn't laugh when she found out, later, after it was all over what we went through. That what I want to tell you about, how God's will was being done with His promises in my life.

You might not know that my dad is kind of a big deal in these parts. Although we don't come from around here, Dad's pretty well off, and he gets a lot of respect. So, it wasn't all that crazy for the old eccentric to decide we were going on a field trip, especially if it meant a chance to worship his God, a God our neighbors honestly didn't quite understand.

I'm not sure Dad quite understood God all the time either, but even when he doesn't understand completely, Dad trusts God. So, the Almighty God said, "Field trip!" and Dad packed up the donkey. Mom made some falafels to go, (they are fried bread with meat and vegetables inside) and we each had to take a servant along, you know, just in case. Mom insisted.

I remember being really excited about going on an adventure with Dad. I knew the trip was something special, because we had to cut wood for the sacrifice before we left. Dad didn't think we would find enough kindling at that high of an elevation that we were going to. So, we packed firewood and our tinderbox and headed up into the mountains. On the third day, Dad called for a halt. I distinctly remember what he said to the servants: "Wait here with the donkey while my son and I go a bit further, to that peak in the distance. There we will worship, and then WE will come back to you."

Dad took the tinderbox and I offered to carry the wood, so he put it on my shoulders. It was heavier than I expected, and I got a few splinters on my way up the hill. It wasn't until we were almost there that I did the math: "Hey, Dad?" I asked when we stopped for a breather, "I see the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering? You forgot the most important part!"

Dad just stuck out his chin and said, as if he were trying to convince himself more than me, *[sticking out chin, and waving a finger]* "God himself will provide the lamb for the sacrifice, my son." At that time, it almost sounded like a promise, but a promise he was working hard to believe.

I'm not sure how Dad knew exactly where to stop, but it was a beautiful spot. You could hear a spring nearby, and the hill we were on looked down on a young grove of olive trees on one side, and up to a limestone peak on the other. Chunks of limestone littered the hill and it only took a dozen or so of them to put together a suitable altar. We laid out the wood carefully, in a kind of bowl, so it would cradle the offering while it burned. Dad placed the firebox right next to the limestone altar, then turned to face me. He didn't threaten. He didn't beg. He didn't try to explain. But I think he was praying under his breath as he tenderly but firmly tied my hands and feet.

If he had panicked, I think I would have panicked, too. But Dad just methodically prepared my body for the sacrifice. It was all he could manage to get me up on the wood, and I caught a whiff of his sweat as he laid me down on the altar. He anointed me with the oil of sacrifice; it felt warm and sticky as it ran down my forehead. The sharp smell of myrrh in the olive oil was almost stifling. I found it suddenly hard to breathe, like I was drowning, and a deep terror began to rise in me. I didn't want to die. I couldn't imagine my own father ending my life like this. His hopes and dreams

for the future were tied up with me and my future. I knew what the Promise meant to him. Everything I thought I knew suddenly didn't make any sense.

Silently, the ceremonial knife appeared in his hand. I felt paralyzed; all I could do was watch. I wouldn't tell everyone this, but I'll admit it to you: lying there on the wood, oil running down my head, feeling like I was going to drown, I was no longer sure there was a God of promise. I was no longer sure there was a God at all. Finally, Dad spoke: "Isaac, my son of promise!" he cried. Then he stuck out his chin and said, "Your God can do the impossible!" And he raised the knife.

What I saw in his eyes at that moment took away all my doubts. What I saw wasn't fear on his face, or at least, it wasn't only fear. I also saw love. I saw pride. But above all, I saw trust. Dad always put trust in the promise of God at the center of our family life. You know why he moved from his home to this strange place, right? Because God told him to. My father didn't have a plan or a destination in mind. God promised a home land. God said, "Field trip!" And so, Dad went.

That dependence on God's promise is what I saw in his eyes, even as the blade of the knife caught the sunlight and flashed. He told me later that the way he figured it, God could raise the dead if he wanted to. I mean, there I was, the Son of Promise, living proof that the Almighty could bring life out of dead bodies. If I died—and stayed dead—then all of God's promises couldn't come true. But Dad wasn't willing to accept that. I was born a miracle and a promise, he said, and a God who could bring life from death was a God to be trusted, even when it didn't make sense.

Maybe his trust was contagious. Or maybe it's just the way I was raised. But once I saw the trust in his eyes, I didn't even try to escape. I didn't roll off that altar and run for the police. I mean, the cords on my hands were pretty tight—Dad had to cut them off afterward—but the cords on my ankles? I think Dad intentionally left them loose, and if his teenage Son of Promise escaped from a man who was over a hundred years old, who could blame him? But I didn't try to get away. Dad trusted God's promise; I trusted my Dad and God's promise. And the sacrificial knife flashed in the sunlight.

Dad put his hands over my eyes and I couldn't see what was going to happen next. Only at that moment—at the last possible moment— God show up. "Abraham! Abraham!" It was the voice of God, a voice that echoes in my dreams to this day. "Here I am," Dad says, just like he always did. God spook, Abraham listens. That's just the way it is. But this time, I could hear the voice, too: "Don't lay a hand on your son! I have seen, and now I know, that you trust me above all else, since you were willing to give me your son, your Son of Promise."

With a great sobs, Dad threw down the knife and grabs me off of the firewood, like a younger father picking up his baby from a crib. He held me tight, and told me he loves me as tears ran down into that his great beard. That embrace, he later said, was like he had actually gotten me back from the grave. He fully intended to kill me that day, thinking—hoping—trusting that God could raise the dead in order to keep his promises. But for the entire trip, those three long days to getting there, he had learned to accept my death, and now he had me back alive!

So, Dad was a mess. OK, I must admit, I was pretty shaken up, too. But as we stood there in an awkward hug—for it's difficult to someone with both arms tied behind your back to hug? —Dad looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in a thorn bush.

"I told you so!" He laughed. "The Lord will provide!" And that's been the name of the mountain ever since: "The Lord will provide." We have a family saying I know I'll be passing it on to my kids and grandkids: "On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided."

So, Dad cut me loose. We put the sacrificial ram on the altar, on my altar—I remember, the ram fit nicely into the dent my own body made in the kindling—and as I watched the smoke rise to heaven, I couldn't help thinking that I have a God of promise. I have a God that provided a substitute in my place. I have a God that can do the impossible.

Oh sorry, I forgot to stick out your chin when you say that: *[sticking out his chin and waving a finger]* "Your God can do the impossible!"

You should have seen the look we got from the servants when we told them all that went on up on that mountain; I think we laughed all the way home, until Mom heard all about it.

As you come through those moments of confusion, as you walk through the experience of brokenness and trust God's promises, you will come out on the other side and you too will have a story to tell about God's will being done in your life. We all have a story to tell as we face sin, death and confusion in this world and still trust God's promises, for God's will is working in our lives as God keep all His promises to us. God's will is to have all of us live with Him now and for all eternity and that means yes, He can raise each of us from the dead so that we can live with Him forever and that's my story of God's will being done and God's promises being fulfilled in my life. God wants His will to be done in your life as He fulfills His promises in your life also. Amen.