

Judica - Genesis 22 and John 8.

I highly recommend reading both of these chapters in their entirety. Summary: God Almighty (El Shaddai) has to do with what God promises. YHWH/I AM/LORD has to do with God fulfilling his promise. I hope this is clear. I wrote another stanza to "What God Ordains is Always Good" in order to wrap up the theme in a prayer. At any rate, here is my sermon: God revealed his name to Moses. He is the LORD, the great I AM, who appeared to him in the burning bush. God's name, which reads as the LORD in all capital letters in most of our English translations of the Old Testament, is from a Hebrew word that means "He is." Perhaps you have heard the name Jehovah or the name YHWH. These are renditions of the Hebrew name of God taken from the words he spoke to Moses in the burning bush. When Moses asked him his name, God said, "I AM WHAT I AM." God was revealing his name to Moses in order to show Moses what he was going to do. He was going to do it all in front of Moses. He was going to fulfill the promises he gave to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by giving them the land he had promised them. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob knew this name of God. They addressed God as the LORD or YHWH. But they were not able to see God carry out what his name meant. They knew God by the name GOD ALMIGHTY, trusting that God was mighty and powerful enough to accomplish what he promised he would do. They didn't know God by seeing him accomplish these promises. Instead, they lived by faith in his almighty promise.

God showed Moses all sorts of amazing signs. Abraham had the sign of the stars and sand and the cutting off of the foreskin. God had told Abraham that his descendants would be slaves for four hundred years. Moses got to see the LORD rescue them out of slavery. Abraham died and was buried hundreds of years before God brought his people out of Egypt and into the promised land. Moses saw the promised land with his own eyes right before he died. Abraham relied on the power of GOD ALMIGHTY to keep his promise. Moses got to see the LORD, the great I AM fulfill his promise. Abraham knew God by what God said he would do. Moses got to see him do it.

When Abraham died, he was buried in peace, in the hope of the resurrection, still waiting for God to fulfill his promise. But he was waiting for still a much greater promise than possessing the land of Canaan. When God took Israel out of slavery in Egypt and then gave them the land of Canaan as their inheritance, this was still only an outward sign of the eternal inheritance he promised to Abraham. Abraham was waiting for the Descendant, the Seed of the woman, the Redeemer through whom all nations of the earth would be blessed. Abraham was waiting to see something much greater than Moses saw on the mountain. He was waiting to see Christ.

Before you can know God as the one who acts, you first must know him as the one who speaks. Before you can see that the LORD is who he says he is, you must first hear the powerful promise of God Almighty. Abraham heard God speak. He believed God's promise. And God counted his faith as righteousness. The promise of God in Christ to save and bless all nations is the almighty power of God to save all who believe. It is the gospel. And Jesus says that those who hear this gospel, those who cling to this gospel through faith – they will never see death.

Abraham died in peace. But he didn't see death. Instead, he was carried to the bosom of God waiting to see what the Almighty had promised him. He rejoiced that he would see this day. And when he saw it he was glad. Abraham rejoiced with Mary when she sang, "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior . . . For the Mighty One has done great things to me, and holy is his name . . . He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, which he swore to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his Seed forever."

Yesterday was March 25th. This is 9 months to the day before December 25th, the birth of our Lord Jesus. On March 25th the church remembers the Annunciation of our Lord, when the angel Gabriel announced his coming birth to the Virgin Mary. After Mary heard the words of the angel, she called herself the maidservant of the Lord. She then said, "Let it be according to your Word." Mary was blessed first by believing God's Word. She trusted in her Savior, the Mighty One, God Almighty who had done great things to her. She spoke as if all things were already fulfilled, as if she had already given birth to the Savior. Because as far as God's Word was concerned, these things were already true. She was already saved from sin and death by God her Savior. God's promise of salvation was as good as done.

Whoever is born of God hears God's words. We walk by faith in his promise before we walk by sight. When Abraham walked up the mountain of Moriah to sacrifice his only son Isaac, whom he loved, he was walking by faith in the promise of God. Isaac was only born because God promised that he would be born. And God told Abraham that Isaac would be his heir. Isaac would carry on the lineage of the Seed who would bring salvation. Now God has told Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. But as Abraham walked up that mountain, he did not see death. He only saw God's promise. He told his servants that he and the boy would return from the mountain. He told Isaac that God would provide the Lamb for the sacrifice. He held onto God's promise. And as Jesus says, "If anyone keeps my Word, he will never see death."

Abraham knew that even if Isaac died God would raise him up. This again is what he said, "The boy and I will go and worship and then come back . . . God will provide the Lamb for the sacrifice." Abraham was not lying to his servants or his son when he said these things. He was confessing the promise in which his faith rested.

Abraham saw the day of the Lord Jesus Christ, because Abraham was still alive when Jesus was born. He was in heaven in the presence of the living God, rejoicing with the angels, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill toward men." Yet many years before he saw this wondrous birth, he saw an unspeakable thing a father would do. He saw his dear son Isaac honoring him and obeying him, lying down on the altar and the wood, waiting for the blade to pierce through him, and all the while still trusting his father whose hand held the knife. As the hymn goes, he did not choose the easy part but gave his dearest treasure. This is what Abraham saw. He saw the horror of giving up his only beloved son. He saw this almost two thousand years before he would see the day of his Savior, Jesus Christ. He saw what God himself saw from before the foundations of the world.

But in seeing this, he did not see death. Instead, he relied on the Word of his Savior. He relied on the Lamb whom God would provide for the sacrifice. And just as the promised land of Canaan was merely an outward sign of the promise of eternal rest in the kingdom of heaven, so the ram whose horns were caught in the thorns was only an outward sign of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, who received a crown of thorns as he died for the sins of all nations.

Jesus did not seek his own glory. Instead, he kept his Father's Word. He trusted his Father even while he was forsaken. Even while the full weight of God's wrath came upon him, he honored God. He trusted that his Father would glorify him just as he said he would do. This is his obedience, which spares not only Isaac but all sinners from eternal death.

Those who don't believe as Abraham believed call God a liar. Those who insist that God show himself to be who he is before they will believe what he says are denying the LORD. They won't believe even when God does show himself to be who he is. Jesus showed himself to be the LORD, the God of Abraham, who revealed himself to Moses in the burning bush. He showed himself to be the great I AM. And he would show it again when he finally took the place of Isaac

and all sinners on the cross. As he said earlier in this eighth chapter of John's Gospel, "When you see the Son of Man lifted up, then you will know that I AM. (John 8:28)"

God did not tell Moses that he was not the LORD when he revealed himself to Abraham. He didn't say that he wasn't the great I AM when he made his promises to Abraham. He didn't say that he wasn't YHWH in the days of Abraham. No, he just hadn't yet let Abraham see what he had promised. Before Abraham was, God was the LORD. He was the great I AM WHAT I AM. Even before he promised Abraham the salvation of all nations, he was who he was. He is who he is. And his words will not fall to the ground. They are as good as accomplished even before he speaks them.

So when the Jews who called Jesus a demon possessed liar refused to believe that Abraham saw what God promised him, Jesus declared, "Before Abraham was, I AM." They picked up stones to throw at him. And by doing this, they were showing exactly how God would show that he is who he is. God would glorify himself by being pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. This is the God whom Abraham saw by faith when he walked the mountain of Moriah with his son Isaac. And this is the God whom they would see walking up the mountain of Calvary with the sins of all people. This is God. He is who he is. He is hidden from those who don't believe him. But those who keep his Word, trusting his promise, will see life. They will see him face to face.

Dear friends, when you hear the words of your Savior you can be certain that he will follow through on his promise to you. His body and blood, which was given and shed for you, remains hidden under bread and wine. But it is the Word of your Savior who died and rose for you, which gives you faith to believe what is there. It is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. It's the same when you must battle against temptations and endure sufferings in this life. His Word says that you are blessed when you suffer these things for his sake. This is the Word of the Almighty God whose promise strengthens your faith. And while you can only see it dimly right now, your own eyes will see how God worked all things out for your good. So taste and see that the LORD is good. Blessed are those who trust in him. Let us pray:

What God ordains is always good.

He is my Friend and Father;

He suffers naught to do me harm,

Though many storms may gather.

Now I may know

Both joy and woe,

Someday I shall see clearly

That He hath loved me dearly.

Lord Jesus Christ, Almighty God,

Thy promise still attends me.

Though sin and sorrow veil my face,

Thou borest it completely.

O great I AM,

Thou Paschal Lamb,

Who gave Thy life to save me,

My eyes shall soon behold Thee! Amen.