

The Lord will Provide

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[0 : 0 0] Today we turn to the preaching of God's Word. We're going to be continuing our look in the book of Genesis chapter 22. If you were with us last week, you may remember that James, we've been walking through this series called Seeing Christ in the Old Testament.

And James preached from Genesis 12 last week, which is where God comes to a man named Abram. And He promises to bless him, to make him great, to make him into a great nation, and that all nations through him may be blessed.

And so today we're going to be jumping to Genesis 22, a very famous passage, maybe even you could call it an infamous passage, that kind of bookends this life and ministry of Abraham.

And what we see oftentimes throughout the Bible, when you have two passages that serve as bookends, there's often similarities you see between the two. And so I think we see that as well in our passage today, because in Genesis 12, God gives Abraham a command to go.

To go and to leave his past behind. To leave his land, to leave his family, to leave his father's house, and to move to a new land. And so what we're going to see in our passage today in Genesis 22 is something, a similar command.

[1 : 1 8] To go, but not to leave your past, but to leave your future. To abandon your son, your promised child, and to sacrifice him in a land that I will tell you.

And so while we see these similarities in structure, you may think, well, that seems like a contradiction. It seems like one is a blessing, and one is a curse. But I think what we're going to see as we dig into this text is that this blessing continues in Abraham's life from Genesis 12 to Genesis 22 onward that shows to us that we have a loving and gracious, covenant-keeping God who can be trusted for the redemption of his people.

And so let's turn to our passage. Genesis 22, we'll be reading verses 1 through 19. Sometime later, God tested Abraham and said to him, Abraham, here I am, he replied.

Then God said, take your son, your only son whom you love, Isaac, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.

Early the next morning, Abraham got up and loaded 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.

[2 : 3 7] On the third day, Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. And 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.

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac. And he himself carried the fire and the knife. And 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 them 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.

[3 : 42] Do not lay a hand on the boy, he said. Do not do anything to him, for I know that you fear God because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.

Abraham looked up and there in the 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 the place, the Lord will provide.

And to this day it is said, on the mountain of the Lord it will be provided. The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky as the sand on the seashore.

Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed because you have obeyed me. Then Abraham returned to his servants and they set off together for Beersheba and Abraham stayed in Beersheba.

This is the word of God. Let's pray again together. Oh God, as we consider this difficult passage, I ask that you be our help, that you open our minds as we read the scriptures, as your word is proclaimed, that we may be led by your spirit in truth, that we may be taught your will, that we may be able to see the glorious character of a God who provides for his people.

[5 : 23] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. What we see in this passage from the very beginning, we get some insight from the narrator that Abraham himself isn't given.

We see in verse 1 that it says that God tested Abraham. Abraham. And so I wonder, if anyone here is a big fan of test taking, a lot of students among us, maybe something, a test is something that you actually look forward to perhaps, you enjoy the preparation, you enjoy being able to prove yourself, that you know some knowledge, that you have some skill.

Perhaps you enjoy the fact that you can prepare yourself for whether it's a presentation or an exam of some sort. I myself enjoyed test taking so much that I took my UK driver's test three times.

Maybe there's some of you here that hate test taking. The thought of test taking is something that gives you nightmares to think about tests you've had in the past or tests that you have in the future. My wife and I, some of you know, lived and worked in China for a time a long time ago, and we taught at a university, and we taught in the English department.

And so part of our responsibility as teaching, we had to give a final exam at the end of the term. And the first semester, I was teaching first-year students that the protocol was for me to turn in a PDF of my exam for the department to print and have on the morning of the exam that I could give to my students.

[6 : 47] And so I turned in my PDF long in advance. I go to this big lecture hall, 300 first-year students that were going to be taking this exam. And I look at my paper and realize this is not the test that I had sent to the department.

And so I quickly go to the department. I say, hey, look, this isn't my test. Do you have the right test? And they said, actually, we must have been a mistake. We didn't print your test at all, and there's not time to print it before your exam.

And so rather than delay the exam or postpone it altogether, they said, well, just go back into the room, give the students this exam, and don't tell them that it's not the right one. And they did this because the department, they didn't want to lose face in front of the administration, that if an administrator was walking by the hall, they knew a test was supposed to be going on this room, and there were no students there, someone could be really offended or embarrassed by their own mistake.

And so I have to go back into this room with 300 students, pass out these papers, and you can imagine the look on their faces when they start taking this exam and realize they don't know any of the answers. The horror that they wonder if they study the wrong thing, the hatred directed at me thinking that I've tricked them about what is going to be on the exam.

Well, we see in this story a very similar thing with a test. This passage opens with a test of much greater proportions, of much greater consequences, and you may think may get a response from Abraham in a very similar manner.

[8 : 13] But as I want to do as we walk through this text is to really examine three things. Because in this narrative, we see really this unfolding of three different scenes. And so we begin with this test.

This is what I want us to focus on to begin with. But then we have this response from Abraham and then also provision that's provided. So that's what we're going to be looking at. The test, the response, and the provision.

So let's look again and think more about this test that we see in verse 1. God calls to Abraham and says, Abraham, he says, here I am. In verse 2, God says, take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the region of Bariah.

And sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on the mountain, I will show you. We see from the very beginning that God is testing the faith of Abraham. Will Abraham have faith in God?

We said this mirrors chapter 12, right? In chapter 12, God comes to Abraham and it seems as though it's the voice of blessing. God says to go from this land, I'm going to give you a family, I'm going to give you wealth, I'm going to give you an inheritance.

[9 : 18] But yet in chapter 22, it seems as though it's a voice of cursing. Rather than a promise, it seems as though it's a threat to that promise that he's been giving.

This inexplicable contradiction. We see in between 12 and 22 that Abraham had been promised this son. Abraham being 100 years old, his wife being 90 years old, how were they to have a child?

And yet God blesses them with this one promised son. And now it seems that this son is to be taken from them. And we see just how special this boy is, how he's described by the narrator.

Very deliberately, he's called your son, your only son, the son whom you love, Isaac. And so we're highlighted, the reader's highlighted, it's highlighted just how special this boy was, this promised miraculous son, very flesh and blood of Abraham.

And he's told not only just to kill him, we're told very specifically what kind of sacrifice this is supposed to be, a burnt offering. That means to kill him, to cut him up, and to let the fire completely consume him until there is nothing left.

[10 : 33] A horrible scene to think of a father having to do to his son. But the significance of this is not only that Abraham would be losing his son, but he'd be losing the promise that's attached to his son.

Because God was very explicit to Abraham about how this blessing would flow through him to his family. That it was supposed to flow through Isaac.

Not Eleazar, Abraham's servant, before he had a son, he thought, well maybe this servant of mine will be my heir. Not through Ishmael, who's the son of Sarah's servant, Hagar, who Abraham fathered, but through Isaac.

This is what is promised to Abraham in Genesis 17. I will establish my covenant with him, meaning Isaac, as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.

And so all these descendants, all this blessing that the nations were to experience, it was to come from Isaac. How is that supposed to happen now? Well we turn to scene two then.

[11 : 32] What is Abraham's response to this test? And I want us to think, before we think about how Abraham responded, think about how someone who maybe reads this passage for the first time, who's not a believer, who's not familiar with Christianity, how they may respond to this test from God.

It's usually one of two ways. It's either confusion or it's disgust. How in the world could a loving God demand this of a follower like Abraham?

How in the world would this God ask for something so wicked to be done to man child sacrifice? Even if this was a common pagan custom in the day, if your God is better than these other gods, why in the world would he demand the same thing?

And just to provide a little bit of insight before we move on, if this is your mindset, what we're going to see is that here and other places in the Bible, God often uses common custom in order to get someone's attention, in order to change their mindset and redirect it.

God's attention because if we go back to Genesis 15 where there's this covenant ceremony between Abraham and God, God had instructed Abraham to cut these animals in half, to line them up and for Abraham and God we're going to meet in the middle.

[12 : 49] This isn't something that God just made up on a whim. This would have been a ceremony that Abraham would have been familiar with to symbolize a bond between two people. But God changes up that ceremony, doesn't he?

He doesn't meet Abraham in the middle. He is the one who walks through the animals to Abraham indicating that he is the one who is going to be responsible for keeping this covenant promise.

And so likewise here God is using this pagan ritual not to say I endorse child sacrifice but rather to subvert it. To say I don't want the sacrifice of your children.

I demand a sacrifice but I will be the one who provides that sacrifice for you. And so that's getting a little ahead of ourselves but I think it's mindful to be thinking of that as we think about Abraham's response.

You would think it would be very right for Abraham to ask questions of God immediately. Why God? Why would you demand this of me? This son that you promised me? I have four kids of my own at home.

[13 : 49] This is a question I hear all the time. Why? Please practice the piano. Why? Clean your room. Why? Put on your shoes. Why? And as parents we can get discouraged or just worn down to the point we always answer because I said so.

But we see here that Abraham didn't ask this question of God. He doesn't ask any question. He doesn't try to reason with God. He doesn't try to plead for a reconsideration. He doesn't try to remind God of his promise.

At the very least you may think that well he's going to at least beg for mercy from God. At the very worst he could try to curse God and say there's absolutely no way I'm going to do this to my promised son.

But he does none of those. In verse 3 again look he says early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac and he cut enough wood for the burnt offering he set out for the place God had told him about.

Complete and unwavering obedience. He takes his son his servants and his supplies and he goes on his journey. And for three days he travels on continuing in obedience.

[15 : 03] Can you imagine how heavy hearted he would have been knowing where he is going. The only one in his group knowing what is going to happen. At any point he could have changed his mind and turned around but he doesn't do that.

He continues on in obedience to the hill that God had directed him. And notice what he says in verse 5. Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there and we will worship and then we will come back to you.

He speaks here in the plural when he's talking to his servants. Isaac and I we will go we will worship and we will return. Now you may think this is just a way of covering up so the servants don't think he's get suspicious about what's going to happen because he doesn't have this lamb with him.

But we get a little more insight into what Abraham was thinking if we turn to the book of Hebrews in the New Testament. In chapter 11 of Hebrews it recounts this wonderful chapter that recounts the faith that Old Testament figures have and it speaks specifically of Abraham and this is what it says in chapter 11 verse 17.

By faith Abraham when God tested him offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promise was about to sacrifice his one and only son. Even though God had said to him it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.

[16 : 21] Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from the dead. Abraham had such faith in God's promise that he thought even if I have to sacrifice my son God is powerful enough to raise him from the dead.

And so he places the wood on his son Isaac's back he takes the knife and he takes the fire and they begin ascending this hill. And then we hear this question from Isaac a very reasonable question where is the lamb for the burnt offering?

And so in our NIV translation what I read earlier it says Abraham responded God himself will provide a lamb for the burnt offering. And it's interesting if we look in the original language in the Hebrew here how this word provide is actually what Hebrew word this is.

It's actually the verb to see. And so as you translate this sentence there's really two different ways you can translate it and both it kind of gives it a double meaning which I think is intended here because Abraham says God will provide for himself the lamb or God will see to it the lamb for the sacrifice.

And so as readers of this passage now we see the richness of this exchange because this is really the only time the only recorded dialogue we see between Abraham and Isaac in all of Genesis.

[17 : 49] And what Abraham is saying it's foreshadowing not only what's going to happen in the minutes ahead but also in generations to come. God will provide yes he will a lamb for the altar. But God is also a God who sees and he sees into the future and he sees his own son who he will provide as a substitutionary sacrifice for his people.

And so that question that Isaac asked where is the lamb we look to the New Testament and we see it answered. In the gospel of John John the Baptist is by the Jordan River and he sees Jesus coming to him and what does he say?

He says behold the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Certainly Abraham didn't even understand then the significance of this statement that he's making but he continues on in obedience.

And so this narration now that's just sped through these three days of travel it slows to a crawl when we reach the climax of this passage. Listen to every detail that it gives.

In verse 9 when they reached the place God had told him about Abraham built an altar he arranged the wood on it he bound his son Isaac he laid him on the altar on top of the wood then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.

[19 : 20] And it's here that scene 3 bursts into that we see this provision that's provided. The angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven Abraham Abraham do not lay a hand on the boy 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.

And Abraham looked up and there in the thicket he saw a ram caught in the horns by its horns and he went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. I'm sure all of us have had experience in a literacy class of some form or fashion in school or in university and it may be that you read short stories and you have to analyze them and your teacher or professor wants you to answer questions.

Who's the main character? What is a conflict that the character faces? What do they learn or how do they grow through this conflict? And what can we learn from this main character?

Maybe we may think about this passage in a similar way that is this is kind of just a self-contained fable that we're supposed to kind of draw some conclusions from. And if we kind of have that mindset and we think well okay Abraham's the main character here and the conflict was this test that God had given him and we see that he learns that he needs to have more faith and if he has enough faith then everything will turn out all right.

So we then have to have the faith like Abraham right? Maybe you've even heard this passage preached in a similar fashion before and not that we want to discredit the faith that Abraham shows in this passage but I think if that is our focus if that is our own takeaway then we have cheapened what this passage is showing to us because we need to see it in the context of all the Bible the context of redemptive history.

[21 : 11] See here Abraham really isn't the main character in this passage. It's not the one that the people of Israel would have identified with when they heard this story over and over again.

You see in Hebrew this story was historically called the binding of Isaac. It's Isaac's life and death that's the heart that's at the heart of this plot. And so the people of Israel they would have identified with Isaac because it was with Isaac that their very existence hung in the balance.

Because with no Isaac there is no nation of Israel. With no Isaac there is no covenant promise. And so with Isaac we see this symbolic figure and then it is God who is the main character.

It is God who is the protagonist because he's the one who tests. He's the one who sees. He's the one who provides. And he's the one who fulfills his promise. And so I want us to think then about who this he really is because this is easily overlooked.

At the beginning of our passage in verse 1 it talks about God coming to Abraham. In the Hebrew it's Elohim. Elohim comes to Abraham. But yet in verse 10 as Abraham raises up his knife it says an angel of the Lord called out from heaven.

[22 : 30] Literally in the Hebrew it's this messenger of Yahweh. And so notice how this messenger speaks. He doesn't say I know you fear God because you haven't withheld your son from God.

He says I know you fear God because you haven't withheld your son from me. So how is it that this messenger of God can speak in the first person? Well there's elsewhere in the Old Testament that we see this messenger of God come to God's people.

Actually we only have to go back a few chapters to Genesis 16 where we see this encounter between the messenger of God and this woman Hagar. Hagar became pregnant by Abraham.

She was abused by Abraham's wife Sarah and now she has fled to the desert. And it says that an angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water and says to her I will increase your descendants so much they can't be counted.

He goes on to say Yahweh has heard of your affliction. So how is it that this messenger can speak on behalf of Yahweh but also personally extend a blessing that sounds very much similar to what God had said to Abraham.

[23 : 41] Right after this we see Hagar's response too. She says to the messenger, she calls the messenger, you are God. You are the God who sees me. Again this word, this Greek verb for see or provide is the same root that she uses here, the same one that Abraham says to Isaac.

And so we see the significance of this story because this messenger, how does it work out that he can identify himself with God, can give a blessing similar to God, yet is distinct from God?

From this story and others we can see that this messenger of God is the pre-incarnate son of God. Jesus. This is Jesus who is interacting as a second person of the Trinity working in tandem with the Father, communicating to God's people.

And so this makes the story all the more significance because we see this is the voice of Jesus speaking to Abraham, renewing his promise that God had given to him. And so look at verse 16, he says, I swear by myself declares the Lord that because you have done this and not withheld your son from me, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore.

Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed because you have obeyed me. This is the voice of Jesus talking about what he is going to do in the future.

[25 : 20] He is the offspring. This singular noun used in the Hebrew, he is the one person who will come to see the blessing being proclaimed to the nations.

And so it's no surprise then as we look at how Isaac is described over and over again in this passage, ten times it calls Isaac the son, the only son, the beloved son.

Does that not sound familiar to how Jesus is described in the New Testament? If we think back again to this encounter that Jesus has with John the Baptist at the Jordan River, in the Gospels it recounts how John baptizes Jesus and when Jesus comes out of that water a voice from heaven says, this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased.

Possibly the most famous verse in the Bible, John 3, 16, for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life.

This is the exact same language that is used to describe Isaac, is used to describe the coming Savior, Jesus. And so we see here though that even though Isaac is a type of Christ in the Old Testament, there's clear difference between the two.

[26 : 37] Because we know that Jesus died on the cross here, Isaac does not die on that altar. Instead a lamb is provided for him in the thicket. And it's because of this provision, because of this lamb that's provided that Mount Moriah becomes known as the place where the Lord will provide.

And it's interesting then, as we move through the Old Testament, we see this mountain hold great significance. We can continue on further to 2 Chronicles 3.

And we hear the story of King David who is trying to take the census of his people, maybe for his own pride, to see what a powerful army and kingdom he has.

And as a result, an angel of Lord comes and strikes down many in Jerusalem. And it says that David lifts up his eyes and he sees this angel standing on this very mountain with an outstretched sword over Jerusalem.

And it's there that says that David built an altar and offered a burnt offering sacrifice. And it was here on this very mountain that a generation later Solomon would build the temple.

[27 : 48] The temple that would be the place of sacrifice. The killing of animals for the forgiveness of sins for God's people. And it was on this same mountain that became known as Mount Zion.

It's where we have the Savior Jesus who is convicted and condemned. Who is our sinless substitute.

Who is crucified. And so it is on this mountain where Abraham raised this knife over his son Isaac. It's on this mountain where the angel of God holds a sword over Jerusalem.

It's the same mountain where the knife of the priest would have killed countless animals for the forgiveness of sins. It is at the same place where the knife of God's divine judgment find its mark on his only son, Jesus.

It was right near this mount where the sinless substitute, Jesus, our Savior, carried his own wood for his altar. That rugged cross to a place where he would willingly suffer and die and take the penalty for your sin and for mine.

[28 : 59] A perfect sacrifice as a substitute for needy sinners like you and me. You see, what Abraham was not required to do to his one and only beloved son, God willingly does to his one and only beloved son.

And so this is not a story about some sick and twisted God who demands human sacrifice. This is a story of a loving and gracious God who offers his son as a sacrifice in our place.

You may ask, well, why do we need a sacrifice at all? And it's because of the character of God. We have a God who is both holy and just.

And we have a people who is sinful. In our sinfulness, we are separated from God's holiness. Because of his justice, he cannot overlook our sin. The penalty for sin is death.

A sacrifice is necessary. But a substitute is acceptable. And this is what we see demonstrated to Abraham in this passage.

[30 : 18] This covenant promise that was given to Abraham was not threatened by this test. It was confirmed. And it was continued through his son Isaac and finds its fulfillment in Jesus.

And so this is what Paul talks about in Galatians 3. He says that in Jesus, the blessing of Abraham came to all so that we might receive the promised spirit through faith. The blessing of Abraham is the blessing for you and for me today.

It is a blessing received through faith in Christ. It says in Genesis 15 that Abraham believed the Lord and it was credited to him as righteousness. The same is true for you and me today.

Do you receive this blessing? Do you understand that it is you and I who deserve to be on that altar? But a perfect substitute has taken our place.

If you do believe this, if you are in Christ, then remember what we read earlier from Romans 8. Romans 8.31. It is, if God is for us, who can be against us?

[31 : 28] He who did not spare his own son. That's the same language that's used in Genesis 22. Paul is certainly thinking about this illustration as he writes this letter. He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also along with him graciously give us all things?

We know that if God is willing to give us the ultimate gift of his son, that he will continue to do complete his work of redemption in our lives.

And so even in our darkness and even in our pain and even in our suffering, we can be sure that we have a faithful and trustworthy God who keeps his promises.

Do not doubt his love. He is a God who sees and he is a God who provides. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for the truth.

We thank you for the truth.