

# Does God command murder?

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[ 0 : 00 ] Father, I thank you for Jesus. I thank you that he loves us. Thank you that he loved us enough to die on the cross for us. Thank you, Father, that your son Jesus, by his death upon the cross and his mighty resurrection, that he has dealt with our gravest and deepest need.

We thank you, Father, that his death upon the cross is a power for salvation that comes from you that we can receive by faith. Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would fall upon us this morning, fall upon us with gentle but deep power, and draw us to Jesus.

Father, you know the deep fears that we have about you. And so, Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would fall upon us, that your Holy Spirit would quieten our hearts, that we might know that you are exalted and that you are good.

And this we ask in the name of Jesus, your son and our savior. Amen. Please be seated. Amen. So, did you know that in the city of Ottawa, there are more people in the city of Ottawa in the 2011 census that identify themselves as having no religion than those who self-identify themselves as Protestants?

That's true. In fact, more than one in five people in the city of Ottawa in 2011, in the census, identified themselves as being no religion. Doesn't mean they're bad people, doesn't mean that religious people are good people.

[ 1 : 32 ] I'm not talking about anything like that. No value statements being made whatsoever. That's just what the census tells us about the city. That, in fact, today, if you leave your friends and go and talk to people, you're more likely to meet somebody who would identify themselves as no religion than you are to meet somebody who would identify themselves as a Protestant.

And the text that we're going to look at in a couple of minutes, we're going to look at right now, Genesis 22. If you have Bibles, you might want to sort of get them and open it up to Genesis 22. In some ways, this is a classic horror text for many, many people in our culture. Many people who identify themselves as Protestants or Catholics, in fact, find this a profoundly difficult text.

And for many people who identify themselves as no religion, some of whom I suppose are atheists or agnostics, and many of whom, probably the majority, would call themselves spiritual but not religious, the text that we're about to read would be, in a sense, everything that terrifies them about God and terrifies them about religion and terrifies them about religious people.

It is a story where God tells Abraham to take his son, his only son, the son he loves, and embark on a journey, and the end of the journey, he is to sacrifice his son. Andrew, if you could put up the first piece of art.

[ 2 : 53 ] And for this first part of the sermon, while we look at this text and think about it, this is a famous painting by Rembrandt to capture a key moment in this story.

Later on, we'll have a different piece of art that will come up by a contemporary Jewish painter, well, contemporary in terms of 20th century, one of the greatest painters of the 20th century, who also reflects upon this.

But right now, you can sort of, as we're looking at the text, if you want to lift your eyes for a second, and this work of art helps you to enter into the story. But for many people in our culture, this idea that God would command murder, it brings up images of ISIS.

It brings up this image that God is an amoral God at best, and maybe even an evil being, that he's willful, that he just goes ahead and makes whatever command pops into his head, that he does things to hurt people, that he can't really be trusted, and that only nutcases, to be honest, would be attracted to such an unpredictable, violent, irrational, and willful being.

And, you know, a lot of people just aren't interested in religion, but if you press the case, if you press the Christian case, and especially if they were to hear a story like this, all of their deeper

thoughts, all of maybe many of our deeper thoughts of worry about what it's like to get close to God come to the fore.

[ 4 : 21 ] So we're going to read this text. In the Jewish faith, Genesis 22 is a profoundly important text of Scripture in terms of understanding Abraham, and it's a profoundly important text in the New Testament as well.

So Genesis 22, this very first book in the Bible, and what we're going to do is I'm going to sort of read through the text with you, making a few comments and observations, because I don't expect many of you, all of you, to necessarily just have the story at the tip of your mind, so to speak. And then after we've sort of read the text slowly, drawing attention to different things, I'll make a couple of points and observations about the text. So Genesis 22, and it begins like this. After these things, God tested Abraham and said to him, Abraham. And Abraham said, here am I. And just sort of pause here for a second.

One of the things that you're going to notice about this text is that Abraham says a couple of things in the story, but he only speaks to God twice, here in verse 1 and later on in the story.

[ 5 : 26 ] And in both cases, the only thing he says to God is, here am I. That's all he says. It's something for us to puzzle over. Eventually, as we get through the whole story, we'll maybe get a bit of a sense why for Jewish people, and especially for Christians as well, this story ends up being a story about faith and about a particular posture for God.

But at the very, very first verse, which sort of sets the stage for the entire story, that God's going to be testing Abraham, and he speaks to Abraham directly, and Abraham's response is, here am I. Here am I. In a sense, if you go back and read the beginning of Genesis, because remember, Genesis is a book, right? It's a book. It develops themes. And after the fall of the human race, human beings were created good.

They decide to be gods themselves, and so they break off their relationship with God. And the first thing that happens to them is that they realize that they're naked. They're ashamed of their nakedness. And when God comes and calls for them, they hide.

And here we have Abraham, who's been now in the book of Genesis for 12 chapters, and his response when God calls him is, here am I. So sort of, it's an interesting sort of counterpoint to God testing him, is Abraham's just saying, here am I.

[ 6 : 54 ] Verse 2. We're not going to go that slow all the way through. Actually, I'm going to say one more thing about this text, just before we get going, is that if you read the book of Genesis from the beginning, and it's in chapter 11 that Abraham is introduced, and there's a bit of cultural background that's not automatically in the text, but Abraham was a pagan who worshipped the moon god.

That's who Abraham is. He was from Ur of Chaldea, what was later on known as Babylon, and what would now be known as Iran.

And he was there with his family, and he was a worshipper of the moon god. So he would have believed that there were many, many gods, and out of the many, many gods that exist, he was a devotee to the moon god.

And so part of the story of Abraham is the fact that God chooses, I mean, in a sense, if God can call and choose a pagan who worships the moon, he can call anybody.

He can call you, he can call me. That in the story of Genesis, it's not all about God looking for people who have their lives completely and utterly together, who know the Westminster Confession or the Catholic Catechism off by heart, that can read the, have know the Calvin's Institutes or Aquinas' Summa Theologica off by heart, and have their lives completely and utterly together.

[ 8 : 21 ] And when we've accomplished these things, God looks down and says, oh, there's the person I sort of have my eye on. No, no, no, no. This first person that God calls to himself worships the moon in the context of worshiping many gods, and that's who God chooses and calls to himself.

Verse two, God says to Abraham, take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.

And we'll pause. We'll do more pauses at the beginning of the story to give it a bit of a context for you. For a lot of Jewish people, this is a very stark text, and it would be stark for us if we realized that burnt offering is Holocaust.

Holocaust. It's a sacrifice that is offered to God where the animal is killed, and then there's absolutely no benefit to the worshippers because after the animal is killed as a sacrifice, it's burnt

until there's nothing left.

So a great part of human sacrifice and a great part of human religion is doing something, an act of sacrifice, or a liturgical act or a religious act or a spiritual act in the hope that we can buy off God, we can appease him, or we can get him on our side.

[ 9 : 55 ] And at the same time that the sacrifice is done, hoping to get some type of goodies from God in terms of his relationship to him, at the same time, we want to have some goodies right now. And in some ways, then many sacrifices are both this combination of trying to manipulate God and at the same time get some goodies for ourselves.

But a burnt sacrifice, there's no goodies that come to us at all. It's a holocaust. It's a complete and utter death and then destruction. And that's what God calls Abraham to do.

And from the rest of the Old Testament, Moriah is where Jerusalem now is. And there's obvious parallels between where the temple is to go and where Jesus is to eventually be crucified.

But this is what God calls Abraham to do. Now, one of the things that we also have to understand about this, which is a bit puzzling for us, is remember I said to you that Abraham was a pagan who worshipped the moon god.

The moon god didn't practice human sacrifice. But archaeologists tell us that human sacrifice is 5,000 years old. And I'm not going to get into a discussion or debate about when Genesis was written or anything like that.

[ 11 : 11 ] The traditional understanding is that Moses was the primary author of the book and that Moses either lived in the 1200s BC or the 1400s BC, depending on how it fits with archaeological evidence.

But this story purports to be told around the year 2000 BC, which means that human sacrifice is already 1,000 years old in that part of the world.

Not all gods demanded that a human being be killed to appease him or her, but many did. And Abraham would be familiar with this.

And so I guess the question for Abraham and the question for God is, how is God revealing himself to Abraham and who ultimately does Abraham think that God is?

In fact, in the pagan world, it was only with Socrates approximately 400 years before the birth of Jesus that he articulated a question that we now take for granted.

[ 12 : 11 ] But for other than the Jewish scriptures, which predate this notion, but in the pagan world, Socrates asked the question, is God good because he wills it? You know, is goodness in a sense over God or does God just declare goodness?

Because the pagans didn't understand that goodness was at all necessarily connected to God. The gods did all sorts of willful, horrible things. And their understandings of good and evil would be separate from their understandings of God.

And so for the question for Abraham, on one hand, this is going to be obviously a huge blow. Isaac is his only son. Abraham's over 100 years old. God has promised Isaac, Abraham, that he was going to have descendants.

And God has promised Abraham that Abraham would have many descendants and that the whole world would be blessed and that his descendants in particular were called to be a blessing to the world.

And Abraham had tried to sort of deal with things in his own power by having, through a slave woman, the birth of Ishmael. And in chapter 21, chapter 21 of Genesis, is all about Ishmael leaving.

[ 13 : 21 ] And so now Isaac, who's over 100 years, Abraham was over 100 years old. His only son is Isaac. And in fact, in the story, I'm not going to bring it out every time.

I believe that just about every verse or every second verse in the story, it mentions son to drive this home. And for Christians, this idea of your only son, the beloved son, when the Greek version of the Old Testament was published, it's the same language which is used of Jesus in the Gospels when he's baptized and the transfiguration.

It's the exact same term which is used of Jesus. So Abraham gets this command from God. There are many gods in the ancient world who would command the sacrifice of innocent human life.

And Abraham has these promises of God. He's been called by God. And he's trying to figure out or is he trying to figure out or is the reader trying to figure out is God a bloodthirsty God like many of the gods that have existed for 1,000 years prior to Abraham or is this God different?

One of the things about this story is that we don't learn anything at all about Abraham's inner life. Abraham, we get a few statements but it's all in this context of a very, very horrific command from God.

[14:49] Read verse 2 again. He said, Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.

Verse 3. So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey and took two of his young men with him and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

Now just sort of pause here for a second. Moriah is 45 miles away from where Abraham is. That's about 72 kilometers, give or take.

And that's going to be a long walk. In fact, it's going to take two and a half days for Abraham to walk there with Isaac and the two servants and the donkey.

And so this actually is one of the interesting things about the story. It shows two aspects about Abraham's response to God. On one hand, his faith in God leads him to act promptly.

[15:55] And secondly, it leads him to act with persistence. One of the things that we're going to see in this story is because at the end of the story, it's going to be understood that Abraham was a man of profound faith in who God is.

And Abraham's faith in God is going to require a time of profound loneliness. Two and a half days walking with his son, his only son, to the place where he is to kill his only son.

Two and a half days to think about this. One of the things we have to always remember that these books are books. They have literary features. And one of the literary features of the book of Genesis is that the stories usually contain blanks.

And by that, I mean, it's just the way the book of Genesis is often written. It doesn't do anything to try to describe what's going through Isaac's mind. It doesn't answer the question about Sarah and what she thinks.

It doesn't say anything at all about what Abraham might have said to Sarah. that in the book of Genesis, the way that the writer writes the book is he blanks out certain types of things that we're interested in to focus on the one character that the story is about.

[17:06] And this story is about Abraham. And so all the other types of questions that we might have and speculation that we might have are blanked out as it just focuses on Abraham's lonely walk of faith.

Those of us who are followers of Jesus, this is a profound reminder to us that there are some times in our walk with Jesus when we are called to a lonely walk of faith with Jesus.

Where it seems as if the way is dark and we have no external support, maybe no support from our culture, no support from our church, no support from our family, no support from our friends, and we are called to a lonely walk of faith.

And that's what we see here in Abraham. Verse 4. And by the way, just with verse 3, you see, that's why, as we'll see in a moment, the only reason that the two servants are there apart from the fact that they probably were with him is that the servants serve as a way for us to understand something about the inner life of Abraham, which we'll see in a couple of verses.

Verse 4. So, okay, we have this story now. God has said to Abraham, take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, take him to Mount Moriah, a mountain near Moriah, where you're going to kill him.

[18:27] Abraham wakes up the next morning and immediately starts to do it. He takes two servants and a donkey and his son Isaac, and they begin this two-and-a-half-day journey to Moriah. Verse 4. On the third day, Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar.

Then Abraham said to his young men, the young servants, stay here with the donkey. I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.

That's a real puzzling riddle in the text. What does Abraham think? The book of Hebrews comments as a sort of a Christian reflection on this wonders, in fact, says that Abraham actually believed that God was going to be able to resurrect Isaac.

That on one hand, that Abraham was going to go through with the slaughtering because he had no idea at this point in time that he wasn't called to do it, but that he had this belief that since there was no other offspring and since he was over a hundred years old and that Isaac was his only offspring

and God had promised to him that he would have many offspring and give birth to many, many people that would be a blessing to the whole world and that would bless the whole world.

And so Abraham has this amazing statement. He doesn't tell the young man I'm going up the mountain to kill my son. He says, he knows that that's what he's called to do, but he knows what God has promised and he says to the young man, Isaac and I will return.

[ 19 : 59 ] You wait here. Verse six, and Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac, his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife and in the original language it's a knife, it's a butcher's knife, a knife for killing.

So they went, both of them together. Abraham, after two and a half days of walking, now walks up the hill having put the wood that will burn his son upon his son's back and he carries in his hands the knife and the fire, the knife to kill and the fire to burn.

The lonely walk of faith. Verse seven, and Isaac, as he's going up the hill, says to his father Abraham, my father. Can you just imagine how that would break a father's heart?

My father. And Abraham said, here am I, my son. And Isaac says, behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?

We'll return to this in a few minutes after we finish the story. This is a poignant question and one that Christians and others have reflected upon for millennia.

[ 21 : 17 ] In verse eight, Abraham said, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son. So they both went on their way. They went, both of them together.

When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and then he laid the wood in order and then he bound Isaac, his son, and then he laid his son upon the wood and the altar on top of the wood.

Verse 10, then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. Now we have that in the picture here, which is happening in verse 10 and 11.

But the angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven and said, Abraham, Abraham. And here's the second time that God speaks to Abraham and the second time that Abraham responds.

The angel of the Lord in the book of Genesis is a bit of a mysterious creature, but basically in the ancient world to have the messenger of the emperor, the messenger of the king was as if you had the king himself present.

[ 22 : 27 ] And there's been Christians who have speculated that this is the pre-incarnate Jesus who is speaking. The New Testament doesn't speak anything of that. It's pious imagination, but it's very, very clear that this is a messenger who speaks, and when he speaks because he's come from God, to hear him speak is to hear God speak.

And so God calls and Abraham again says, here am I. And the angel of the Lord, God says, do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him.

For now I know that you fear God, seeing that you have not withheld your son, your only son from me. And pause here. As many of you have heard me talk about before, the fear of God here doesn't mean that we're terrified about God, but that we have a profound sense that God is God and that I am not.

We have a growing sense of the difference between God and us, that we don't confuse my will, my success, my happiness, my emotions with God, that there's a clear sense of me is me and God is God, that this is a good thing, but it's also, in a sense, a profoundly unsettling thing to actually know that we are so completely and utterly distinct from God and God is distinctly himself.

And on one hand, it's in the Psalms, talk about how as we experience the fear of God, on one hand, we long for him, but on the other hand, we also have a sense of reverence for him and in a sense of something almost like fear to understand how profoundly different God is and to start to have this sense of complete and utter stripping of our consciousness and our emotions of any sense that I am God.

[ 24 : 07 ] And that's the word which is used here. Abraham has had stripped from him any sense that he is God and has this sense of God is different and that that is good.

And that Abraham has trusted who God is and his promises. Verse 13, And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked and behold and behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by his horns.

And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. And in the Hebrew, the language for caught in a thicket, it's actually the same word.

You know that gospel text that we just read a few minutes ago and we all struggled over? Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

I have the King James Version stuck in my head. And that word, sabachthani, is translating, it's from Psalm 22 and it's translating the word forsaken and that's the exact same word which is here. [ 25 : 17 ] There is a ram forsaken in the thicket. And Abraham took up, verse 13 and a half again, and Abraham went and took up the ram, the forsaken ram, and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.

So Abraham called the name of that place the Lord will provide. As it is said on this day, on the mount of the Lord it shall be provided. And as we'll see later on when we're going to comment more about the verse, in modern, the last hundred years or now, we now, when we refer to one of the Hebrew words for God, the Jewish people, because they thought the name of God was so holy, they stopped pronouncing it.

And so now, there's only four consonants and we don't actually know what the vowels are. It literally, the vowels literally got forgotten. And for many years, people translating these four words used the word Jehovah now that the normal word is Yahweh.

But it's become an important sort of idea in Christian spirituality and even Jewish spirituality to refer to Jehovah Jireh. And that's what's here.

That's what is here. God called the name of that place Jehovah Jireh. As it is said, on the mount of the Lord it shall be provided. Jehovah Jireh.

[ 26 : 38 ] Very important idea to George Mueller, to Hudson Taylor, to many, many Christian mystics and workers and ordinary Christians throughout the centuries and the decades.

Jehovah Jireh, my provider. Verse 15, And the angel of the Lord called Abraham a second time from heaven and said, By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore.

And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed because you have obeyed my voice. So Abraham returned to his young men and they arose and went together to Beersheba and Abraham lived at Beersheba.

It's a very, very powerful story. You know, I'm not going to say their names. This congregation has a lot of, you know, we live in a very transient part of the city and so there's a lot of transients but about eight, seven, eight years ago there was a very, very keen couple who were part of the congregation, very, very active, real leaders.

They were a young couple. They came here, they were sort of in love and then they got engaged and they got married. I performed their marriage and about three months after I performed the marriage I got an anguish call from the bride.

[ 28 : 10 ] because the man in prayer had come to the conclusion that God had called them to be divorced. God had called them to be divorced and she called me up and asked me to speak with them.

And this began a year, two year back and forward thing that involved many, many people in the congregation because they were very well connected, very well thought of, very well liked and I had many conversations with this young man who believed and I kept trying to look to see, you know, is there mental illness, is there an affair going on, is there some other type of thing going on and it was just unshaken that he came to the conclusion in prayer that God had called him to divorce his wife. And I kept telling him, no, God cannot call you to divorce your wife just, just, just, just like that. God can't call you to do that. Was I going against Genesis 22? Abraham seems to go against, God seems to, to order the breaking of the sixth commandment although the commandments aren't given until the next book later on, many hundreds of years after Abraham.

I think this story tells us different, several important things about God and about Abraham and so now it's time to sort of go back and reflect upon them. So if you look at the verse one again, here's the first thing to notice about this with a now second reading of the text.

[ 29 : 53 ] Notice how verse one goes. How's my time going? Okay. After these things, God tested Abraham and said to him, Abraham, and Abraham said, here am I.

Here's the first thing. In my blog this week, I talk about how one of the problems I have with Bible readings is I'm a quick reader and I'm having to learn to be a slow reader. Actually, at a literary level, there's two very, very interesting things about this first verse at a literary level if you just read

it carefully.

The first thing is that these opening words are the narrator speaking to the audience and Abraham doesn't know them. And the narrator speaks to the audience and says, these things, after these things, God tested Abraham.

And so we now know that God is going to test Abraham. and here's where the text starts to talk about all of our fears. In the book of Genesis in the Old Testament and the New Testament as well, the word here is tested, not tempt.

And Andrew, if you could now take the picture down and put the first point up, here's the very first thing to understand. In a sense, a careful reading of the text would have us know that right from the beginning that Isaac's not going to die because evil tests to corrupt and bind me.

[ 31 : 12 ] The living God tests me to grow health and freedom. Evil tests to corrupt and bind me. The living God tests me to grow health and freedom.

The serpent, in Genesis 3, 19 chapters before this, the serpent tests, and it's really a temptation, and evil tests Adam and Eve and the purpose of it is to corrupt and to bind.

And all the way through the Bible, God never tempts. He does things to reveal to us and help us to experience his confidence in us and his call on our lives.

And every time we are, in a sense, tested by God, we go through maybe a dark night of the soul or a lonely walk of faith. In every case, the purpose of it is is for us to draw closer to God.

That's what is in God's heart. And that as we draw closer to God, as we see that these things that may be a year in advance, a year earlier, or two years earlier, or ten years earlier, or twenty years earlier, would be unimaginable things, that as we go through these things, even though the darkness is real and the suffering is real and the loneliness is real, but as we go through these things and emerge on the other side, we realize that God has done this because he loves us.

[ 32 : 43 ] He loves me. And we emerge wholer, healthier, and freer. And a careful reading of the text when we see that the language here is of testing, we can say, oh, Isaac's not going to die.

This is not a story about the danger. This is a very profoundly unsettling thought to us because we don't hear the text the way the Bible means is to hear the text. This isn't a text, a story about danger to Isaac.

Is it a story that's going to reveal Abraham's heart and his potential danger in terms of whether he knows who God really is? It's not a story about Isaac and the danger to Isaac.

It's a story about Abraham. And God does this in the hope that at the end of it, that Abraham is more whole, more healthy, and more free.

which is what happens in the story. An even deeper promise, an even deeper blessing from God upon Abraham.

[ 33 : 55 ] And in the Old Testament, this language of blessing is a language of, it's always, our intern Daniel says that it's all about God wanting us to thrive.

That's a very, very good way to understand it. It's all about a greater potency, in a sense, a greater potency, meaning power for life. It's all about prosperity. It's all about, in a sense, a greater thriving, a greater success in spiritual, and just potency.

It's all about God bringing into our lives greater potency, greater life, greater health, greater wholeness, greater freedom. Potency is about freedom. And so the narrator says to the reader, this is going to be a story about God doing something with Abraham, that at the end of it, he'll be more whole and more free.

See, one of the things about this story is in a sense, the reading of this story is our version of God saying to Abraham, go and kill your son. Because the fact of the matter is this story reveals something about my heart and your heart.

You see, the Bible constantly goes after our heart, the heart being, what the Bible understands is the center of who we are and in the context of the living God. And the fact of the matter is that even those of us who follow Jesus at the center of who we are, there are parts of us who are terrified about getting too close to God because if we get too close to God, he will make us a nutcase.

[ 35 : 22 ] He will ask us of things that will make us unpopular in the eyes of the world, ridiculous in the eyes of the world, ridiculous in the eyes of our loved ones, that will hurt us, that will belittle us, that will damage us.

And in fact, we have that thing with inside of us and so in a very small and mild way compared to what Abraham had to go through with Isaac, this text is like that.

When we hear this passage of scripture, will we trust that God is good? Will we trust that even when God makes commands that seem to us unreasonable in the eyes of our culture, in the eyes of our culture, it's only reasonable to live together before you marry?

That's not what the Bible teaches. That seems unreasonable to us. In the eyes of the Bible, it's because God, everything is owned by God and God puts things under our care and so part of the way that we develop freedom from money and don't have money as an idol in our lives and because we can live a more authentically human life and because at the heart of what it means to be authentically human is to give, that he asked us to give away 10% of our money, 10% of our financial resources and that's completely and utterly insane in a culture that has pages and pages and pages in the newspaper written on a weekly basis about how to make more money, not how to give money away, but how to make more money and whether it's in terms of, you can go on and on and on that we have this fear that getting close to God will hurt us and God wants to reveal to us that he is good.

In fact, that's the whole point of the story. If you could put the second point up, Andrew, here it is right here. The living God is only good and he gives all of himself to all of me and all of we.

[ 37 : 17 ] the living God is only good and he gives all of himself to all of me and all of we. I know it's not very good grammar but it's sort of catchy and it's because it's not just a private thing.

This text has a communal aspect to it and he gives all of himself and it's interesting it's something I didn't know this until I did the research at the Hebrew this is communicated in a very interesting way.

You see, for the first, there's two different names for God used in this text. So we're going to read the first ten verses very quickly and the first word for God is Elohim which basically means the distant creator, the all-powerful distant creator and the second word that's going to be used for God in this text is Yahweh and Yahweh is the intimate word.

It's the intimate God. It is both the creator, great creator God but it is the God who gives himself to human beings because he desires to be in a covenant with human beings.

He desires to be their God and have human beings like you and me who might have worshipped the moon and might have accepted that human sacrifice is just the way that the world works and yet he wants to call us to himself and be in a relationship with us where he gives all of himself to us in the hope that as we grow in the covenant that we will give all of ourselves to him and that's what's symbolized in the word Yahweh.

[ 38 : 42 ] And now listen to this story where I will say Elohim, distant creator God and Yahweh, the intimate God who desires to be in a relationship with us and this is how the story goes.

Verse 1, after these things Elohim tested Abraham and said to him, Abraham, and Abraham said, here am I. And Elohim says, take your son, your only son Isaac whom you love and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you. So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey and took two of his young men with him and his son Isaac and he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which Elohim had told him.

On the third day, Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, stay here with the donkey. I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.

Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac, his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together and Isaac said to his father, to Abraham, Father Abraham, my father, and he said, here I am, my son.

[ 39 : 52 ] And Isaac says, behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for burnt offering? And Abraham said, Elohim will provide for himself the lamb for burnt offering, my son.

So they both of them went their way together. When they came to the place of which Elohim had told them, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac, his son, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood.

And then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of Yahweh called to him from heaven. The angel of Yahweh calls to him.

No longer just the God that Abraham, he believes that God is good, but he is the distant creator God. And now it is Yahweh who desires to be in a covenant with Abraham and with Isaac and to bless the generations in the world.

It is Yahweh who desires to give of all of himself to moon God worshiping people and call them for himself and give all of himself, hoping that they will give all of themselves to him.

[ 41 : 03 ] Verse 12, he said, do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him for now I know that you fear Yahweh, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked and behold, behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by his horns.

And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place Yahweh will provide. As it is said to this day, on the mount of Yahweh it shall be provided.

And the angel of Yahweh called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, by myself I have sworn, declares Yahweh, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply your offsprings, the stars of heaven and the sand that is on the seashore and your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed because you have obeyed my voice.

The living God is only good and gives all of himself to all of me and all of me. So God gives all of himself to us.

You know, we have a lot of fear in our world today about relationships and relationships break down, marriages break down, friendships break down, families break apart, institutions fail us and we have this deep fear.

[ 42 : 25 ] But God is unchanging. He's always good. He's only good. He gives all of himself and so the response that God desires from us is what we see in Abraham that goes from this very, very first call in chapter 11 to leave his land and leave the worship of the God of the moon and to come and follow God and to know God and to be God's people and to be blessed.

And here, if you could put it up, Andrew, faith in the living God begins with a sliver of me and grows towards encompassing all of me.

Right? We don't have to have it all together. We can't always have it. We'll never have it all together. We'll never, ever, ever, ever, ever have it all together. And you know, this is just how relationships work. You know, my relationship with my wife, Louise, began when I first noticed her in the library stacks as a philosophy section of the Carleton University Library.

And there's a sliver of me that goes out to her. And then there's sitting at the library table and the glances across the table a sliver of me. And then there's finally when I meet her and I talk to her and there's a sliver of me.

And the whole part about a marriage and a relationship is it begins with a sliver but it moves towards all of me. That's what a good marriage is to be, is to move towards all of me. Starts with a sliver and moves towards all.

[ 43 : 50 ] And that's how it works. Abraham doesn't know everything when it begins in chapter 11. But the direction of a real and living faith, it grows and it moves towards all of me.

Because God has given and offered all of himself to us. Andrew, could you put up the second painting?

It's actually not a painting. It's by Mark Chagall. I don't know if I pronounced that correctly. It's a sketch with pastels. And it's a very, very interesting, this is a painter who is in a sense haunted by the Christian faith.

He never became a Christian to our knowledge. and we see here this picture of the Abrahams and Isaac. And in the background, up in the corner at the top, you can see the crucifixion.

You know, in a very, very real way, Jesus authenticates this text. The text doesn't authenticate Jesus.

[ 45 : 04 ] in a very real way, it's because, you know, in this story, Abraham says that God, Elohim himself, will provide a lamb.

He provides a ram. And the very, very first recorded time that Jesus is seen by anybody, he's introduced as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

It's in John's Gospel, the first recorded time that Jesus comes about and is introduced to his disciples and is, behold the Lamb of God. The people who will become as a behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And Christians, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, and they understand, they start to understand Luke 24 talks about it, all these things in the Old Testament that point to Jesus.

And in one sense, it's because Jesus rose from the dead that he authenticates passages like this. Yet on the other hand, it's because of passages like this that we understand the significance of Jesus.

[ 46 : 02 ] You see, this is maybe before some of your time, there used to be a lot of joking about Elvis was still alive, that he hadn't died, that he was still alive. But if Elvis came back from the dead, well, what on earth would that mean?

Like if Elvis was in the building, like what on earth would that mean? That would just be weird. That doesn't fit in with science, with philosophy, with narrative, with emotions, with imagery. It would just be bizarre. But the resurrection, the death and resurrection of Jesus, it isn't just something bizarre. It takes place within the context of centuries of prophecy and of centuries of imagery and an entire narrative and an entire way of sort of understanding the world. And it takes place within this larger narrative and of insight about the human heart and about right and wrong and the nature of God.

So the resurrection of Jesus comes as the culmination of imagery, of narrative, of story, of overarching meta-narrative and of ethics and philosophy and understanding of creation.

[ 47 : 11 ] And it's on this whole big, this whole world that in that context, the death and resurrection of Jesus, you go, it fits.

it's not just weird like Elvis being in the building, it fits. And at the same time, the death and resurrection of Jesus becomes a light and then you look back on this story and you look back on the things of Abraham and his only son and of the promise of a future lamb and you understand on Isaac carrying the wood upon which he's going to be sacrificed and Jesus carrying his cross upon which he's going to be sacrificed and you understand that on one hand, there's going to be a true and greater Isaac who will carry the wood, that there will be a true and greater lamb that will one day die upon the cross, that in fact, all of the imagery of the story of the only son, that it's imagery and it's linked and it's all pointing to Jesus and at the same time, the true death and resurrection of Jesus, the empty tomb, the resurrection appearances, it vindicates this story.

The fourth point, Andrew, God kept his promise to do what only he could do, provide a lamb as a substitute for everyone, Jesus, the crucified Messiah.

God kept his promise to do what only he could do, provide a lamb as a substitute for everyone, Jesus, the crucified Messiah. How do we live? Two things very briefly in closing and I was trying to figure out how to word it and then I figured out that Romans 8.31 verse 8.32 that Romans actually does, 8.32 does a great job to summarize what this means for us to live.

Once we receive Jesus as our Messiah, the crucified one, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, once we understand that God is good, that he desires to give himself to us, that the way that we understand this is thinking and meditating upon the fact that God did not spare his own son to deal with our gravest need so that we can receive a power of God for salvation whereby God himself gives all of himself to us so that we moon God worshippers who will willingly do crazy, chaotic, morally insane things that God calls us who are at times morally insane and he calls us to himself to desire to give himself to us that we might start to learn to give all of ourselves to him in the context of his grip and what Jesus does for us on the cross.

[ 49 : 44 ] We could have this fifth point up. If God 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? If God 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?

That I can live every day praying to Jehovah Jireh, my provider, whose grace is sufficient for me. An image for the sermon, Jehovah Jireh, you're my provider.

My need to have a difficult conversation, Father, you are Jehovah Jireh, you have not spared your own son. I come to you and ask that you would help me with this particular thing. Our need for direction, our need for encouragement, our need for strength in times when we go through a dark night of the soul or a lonely walk of faith, that we, as we reflect upon Jesus who died upon the cross for us, we have a ground to always come to God in prayer as our Jehovah Jireh.

Please stand. Andrew, if you could put the final point up. The final point is a prayer. It said, Jehovah Jireh, please grip me with the gospel and grow in me a humble, trusting, persistent knowing that as I follow Jesus, you will provide for me today and every day for all eternity.

We don't have to do life by ourself. If God did not spare his own son, will he not graciously give us all things?

[ 51 : 21 ] Will he not be our Jehovah Jireh? If God has touched your heart in any way about this, I invite you to pray with me this prayer, which is on the screen.

Let's pray it in closing. Jehovah Jireh, please grip me with the gospel and grow in me a humble, trusting, persistent knowing that as I follow Jesus, you will provide for me today and every day for all eternity.

Father, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us. Make us disciples of Jesus gripped by the gospel who live for your glory. Help us to live, Father, not with presumption, not with arrogance, not with superiority, but humbly trusting that you meet our deepest needs and will meet our other needs as well.

Help us, Father, to always be drawn closer day by day towards you. Move us from a sliver of faith to a faith that encompasses all of me and all of us.

And this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.ab cuD