

A Sermon for Fathers' Day

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 June 2026

Preacher: Evan Macdonald

[0 : 00] Our scripture reading this evening is taken from Genesis chapter 22. I think on the screen it's 21, but it's actually Genesis chapter 22.

! And we'll read from verse 1 to verse 19. This is the Word of God.

After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, Abraham. And he said, here I am.

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.

So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and his son Isaac.

[1 : 11] And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. Abraham said to Abraham, stay here with the donkey.

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

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.

So they went, both of them together. And Isaac said to Abraham, my father. And he said, here I am, my son.

Abraham said, behold, the fire and the wood. But where is the lamb for a burnt offering? Abraham said, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.

[2 : 28] So they went, both of them together. When they came to the place of which God had told him, 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.

Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, Abraham, Abraham.

And he said, here I am. He said, do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, 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, the Lord will provide. As is said to this day, on the mount of the Lord, it shall be provided.

[3 : 50] And the angel of the Lord called to 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. Amen. May God bless that reading of his word and our meditation over.

Amen. Well, fathers, have your children been good to you today?

[4 : 56] I hope they have. Breakfast and bed, perhaps. At least given a Father's Day greeting card, surely.

So when asked by Colin to preach this evening, I noted that it was Father's Day and it seemed a good idea to choose a subject relevant to that subject.

We've just been reading a story about an earthly father being tested for his obedience and his faith. And the testing of Abraham we've read about there is what I have chosen to be the backdrop to this subject.

I've got four headings. First of all, the testing of Abraham. Secondly, the sacrifice of the Father. Thirdly, the sacrifice of the Son.

And finally, the sacrifice of the Christian. So God willing, let us consider these heads based on this chapter and also, of course, on the New Testament readings.

[6 : 18] Firstly, then, the testing of Abraham. The story of Abraham and Isaac is primarily a story of testing, of faith and obedience.

We read there, after these things, God tested Abraham and said to him, Abraham, and he said, here am I. 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.

Take your son. What meaning there is in that word take? Abraham is being asked to be active in taking his son to be part of a sacrificial act, which we, and surely Abraham, must have found so perplexing and even repulsive.

Your only son, Isaac. Hadn't God promised Abraham that it was through Isaac that God's promises were to be fulfilled? I will establish my covenant with Isaac, he said, as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.

As one commentator has written, the death of the divinely designated seed of promise would terminate the program of salvation and empty the promise of meaning.

[7 : 59] Your son, whom you love. Isaac was the son of his parents' old age. And so especially loved.

Can you, can I enter into the pathos of this story? 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.

We read in 2 Chronicles 3, verse 1, that this site was possibly the site that Solomon chose later to build his temple around which the city of Jerusalem would grow.

And so we read, 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. On the third day, Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar.

[9 : 09] 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's description of the sacrifice he was about to offer up. How his mind must have been in great turmoil.

And come again to you, he said to his servants. How could Isaac return unless he was alive? Is this a suggestion of the resurrection?

Abraham's faith overcame the conflict between obedience and hope by believing that God was able to raise up even the sacrificed one. So they went, both of them, together.

Note the strong bond between father and son. 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.

[10 : 20] So they went, both of them, together. A phrase that's mentioned twice. And Isaac said to his father, My father, and he said, Here am I, my son.

He said, Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering? Abraham said, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.

So they went, both of them, together. And when they came to the place of which God had told him, 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.

Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, Abraham, Abraham.

And he said, Here am I. And he said, Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.

[11 : 27] And then we read that 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. The Lord had indeed provided a lamb, a substitute for his son.

What can we conclude about this story? A story of testing, of faith and obedience. Yet more than that, for we know that Abraham must have had a glimpse of what Christ would accomplish, because you read in John chapter 8, Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day.

He saw it and was glad. Yes, it's a story of testing, faith and obedience, but it's also a story which has beautiful parallels with the love which God the Father had for his son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And also of the obedience of the Son towards his Father. And using the story that we've just read in Genesis chapter 2 as a sort of template, we can now look at the sacrifice of the Father and the sacrifice of the Son.

[13:01] Secondly then, the sacrifice of the Father. Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you loved, we read.

Take your son. God the Father and God the Son had a special and eternal bond with each other. The word was towards God, we read in John 1.1.

The relationship between God the Father and God the Son was active and dynamic. It was a face-to-face relationship. As Donald MacLeod has said, their hearts went out towards one another. Their life, their being was for one another. Your only son. Not Isaac, but Christ, through whom God's covenant promises would be fulfilled.

We are reminded that God gave his one and only Son. The Son whom you love. God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

[14:25] And as Paul writes in Romans 8, he who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

They went, both of them, together. Yes, Abraham and Isaac went on together. And throughout the ages of eternity and throughout Christ's life on earth, Christ was conscious of the Lord's presence and the Father conscious of the Son.

At his baptism, our Lord was reassured of his Father's support and approval. Remember the words, this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.

Always the Father was with the Son and the Son with the Father. From his birth through to his baptism, through to his transfiguration, to the road to Jerusalem, the modern Mount Moriah, right up to the threshold of the cross, our Lord could say, I am not alone for my Father is with me.

Yes, they went, both of them, together. But there came a time when that togetherness was fractured.

[15:54] God the Father gave up his Son to abandonment. There followed an awful period of abandonment as the Father made that indescribable and un-understandable sacrifice.

A sacrifice born out of love for the world for you and for me. The Father had to bruise the Son he loved.

He had to treat him as sin. The wrath of the Father was placed on his dear, dear Son. He had to close his ears from that cry, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

But the Son could not be spared. God himself will provide a lamb for the burnt offering.

My son, Abram said. Yes, indeed, the Father provided the Lamb of God. The Lord Jesus Christ, his only Son, as a burnt offering on the cross.

[17:01] He made him who knew no sin to be sin for us. The unity of the Trinity remains unbroken throughout this passion.

When the Son suffered pain, the Father suffered pain. The Spirit suffered pain. And to quote Donald MacLeod again, the pain of the cross is the pain of the triune God.

But we see, thirdly here, the sacrifice of the Son. Christ's whole life from the cradle to the grave was one of suffering.

The cross was its climax. He came from heaven's glory to a world where he was surrounded on all sides by the sights of misery and wickedness, the sound of profanity and blasphemy, and the stench of poverty, death, and corruption.

The Father gave him up to poverty, to homelessness, to temptation, to the darkest emotions, to pain, to hunger, thirst, weariness, the point of the spear, the jab of the thorns, the agony of the nails, the torture of the cross to death itself.

[18:40] Donald MacLeod. Go to the land of Moriah, Abram was told. Moriah, of course, we've noticed, became Jerusalem. And our Lord faced that journey.

We read that as the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, the sun, resolutely set out for Jerusalem.

He set his face like a flint, we read. I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you. Well, Jesus himself said, the son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised.

Isaac could have struggled out of his father's arms. Christ could have called on myriads of angels to rescue him from the jaws of death. But both Isaac and our Lord complied with the will of their fathers.

Now is my heart troubled and what shall I say? Save me from this hour but for this purpose I have come to this hour.

[20 : 04] Father, glorify your name. As Paul put it, the Lord Jesus became obedient to death, even death on a cross.

On the cross Jesus was to utter that cry of dereliction, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Consider some of what that meant to be the son so movingly described by Professor MacLeod. It's quite a long quote, I hope you find it helpful. But for a moment, we do not know how long towards the end, God the Father is not there.

The Lord is forsaken. The experience is all the more terrifying for its unfamiliarity. In a way, we ourselves could have borne it better.

Long years of life without God have familiarized us with the loss and almost trained us for it. But for him, it was utterly unfamiliar.

[21 : 14] He had had no training for it, not a moment. God had always been there. They had never been separated.

Never had the one been without the other. Throughout eternity, they had been face to face. In the years of growth and development, God had always shown his favor. In the gathering gloom of the final days, God had been there.

Now suddenly, he was not there. The Savior was without God. He was crying and God wasn't listening.

He was reaching out and not touching. There was no help. There was no sense of his presence. There was no assurance of his love. There was no assurance that even that he was father at all or that he was son.

for the one and only time Abba, father, becomes impossible and God is grasped only in the awesomeness of his Godhead, Eloi, Eloi.

[22 : 26] What he had dreaded in Gethsemane, what had made him feel so helpless and afraid, had come upon him. He was in the far country, a new country, where there was no reassurance to be drawn from his divine sonship, no light from the divine promises, no certainty of victory, no vision of the joy set before him.

There was only darkness and the terrible pain and the sin, the sin which he bore and which he even was and from which God recoiled.

And beyond that, who knows? End of quote. The son sacrificed his own life, and in so doing, offered up his life as a sacrifice for sin.

When bound to the altar of the cross, no voice called out, do not lay your hand on the boy. There was a substitute to take Isaac's place.

God had indeed provided a ram, but on the cross, Christ himself was the substitute, taking the place of sinners, the Lamb of God who was to take away the sin of the world.

[24 : 06] It is clear that Jesus saw his death as a sacrifice. John the Baptist referred to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Paul refers to Christ as the Passover Lamb.

At the Last Supper, he broke bread, saying, this is my body which is for you, and taking the cup, he said, this cup is the new covenant in my blood.

An appropriate theme to mention as we look forward to communion next Sunday evening. He who knew no sin became sin for us.

For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous and the unrighteous to bring you to God. He who did not spare his own son, but delivered him up for us all.

He came to give his life a ransom for many. And then we read in 1 John these wonderful words, he is the propitiation, the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

[25 : 20] On the cross, the wrath of God was turned away from us and placed on his beloved son. On the cross, he not only bears the sins of the world, but is the sin of the world.

2 Corinthians 5. We will go over there and worship and then come again to you, we read in the story in Genesis.

Yes, Isaac did indeed come again, but of course he never died. It was Christ who came again. The Son of Man must suffer many things and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. The resurrection, the validation of Christ's claim to be the Messiah, it proved that his sacrifice for sin was accepted and marked the ultimate triumph over death, spiritual darkness and the grave. as a result of the resurrection, believers are united with Christ. They have been spiritually resurrected to new life, now and possess the promise of a physical resurrection in the future.

[26 : 39] Just before leaving this head, as I was preparing this sermon, my thoughts wandered about the whole concept of the Trinity and how the Trinity was affected by the sacrifice of the Son.

Now, theologians will agree that unity of the divine Trinity remained unbroken throughout the time of the cross.

But, did the relationship between God the Father and God the Son alter in any way as the Son was prepared to offer up his life?

We might ask in human terms, did it put the unity under pressure? From before the foundation of the world, the Trinity was in perfect tri-unity, but was there a cosmic change in the direction of that unity as the Father hid his face from the Son and the Son bore the suffocating guilt and punishment of sin in his own body, mind, and spirit?

And further, now that the Son has been raised from the dead and is glorified and is now seated at the right hand of the Father in a position of great honor and praise, God's face?

[28 : 08] Has the relationship between God the Father been affected in any way at all as he looks on his Son now in that position of honor?

I ask questions, I don't provide answers. It's something that perhaps you could discuss with each other because there are theologians here who will be able to answer that much better than I could. Finally, let's look at the sacrifice of the Christian. The sacrifice of Christ reminds us that the Christian, he or she is called to a whole life of sacrifice.

Paul reminds us that we are to present our bodies as living sacrifices, as we read in our opening call, to present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

We are asked not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, that by testing we may discern what is the will of God and what is good and acceptable and perfect.

[29 : 31] Our Lord said, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. What will taking up our crosses involve us?

Sacrificing our time, our talents, our wealth, or perhaps our marital status.

It might mean suffering unjustly for what we believe, being overlooked for promotion because we're Christians, becoming the recipients of fun, sarcasm, and derision by our work colleagues, suffering in personal relationships with fellow believers when disputes arise among godly men and women.

Our Lord said, blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven. And for hundreds of believers today throughout the world, it might mean sacrificing our own physical lives to the sword or the bullet.

[31 : 07] We've quoted C.T. Studd's comment often in this church. it is worth repeating. If Christ be God and he died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him.

We have been reminded this is Father's Day. I trust that the fathers among us have been shown many tokens of love and affection from their children.

But human fatherly love pales into significance when we consider our heavenly father's love. The sacrifice he made by giving up his son for us all and the willingness of the son to become a substitutionary sacrifice for sin.

We have been reminded that the Christian life is one of sacrifice and denial. May God bless to us these meditations on his word.