

Jesus Died For Me (1): Abraham and Isaac

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[0 : 0 0] In his recent Easter Sunday service to us, our Kenyan friend, the Reverend John Calvin, said, religion is man's way to God, Jesus Christ is God's way to man.

Let me say that again, because as I see it, John has masterfully put into just a few words the beauty and uniqueness of the Christian religion. Religion is man's way to God, Jesus Christ is God's way to man.

If the 16th century reformer John Calvin, the real John Calvin, had been with us that day and had heard these words, I'm sure he would have added his amen also. And wondered why in the light of such a succinct definition of what Christianity is, he'd ever gone on to write his institutes of the Christian religion.

Now you know that every year during the summer break, I break off from the consecutive exposition of a gospel and turn to a different series of studies.

Sometimes it's a life study, the study of John the Baptist. But this summer I wanted to devote five weeks to the study of how it is that Jesus Christ is God's way to man. I want us together to enjoy the divine ingenuity of God's way of salvation through Jesus Christ.

[1 : 2 3] And how it is that even the greatest and wisest of human minds could never have dreamed up such an impossible and unlikely way of salvation that through the death of his own child, Jesus Christ, atonement can be made for a sinful humanity.

To break it down into an even more specific aspect of John Calvin's definition, Kenyan John Calvin, not the French one, how it is that Jesus Christ is God's way to man.

You can call it a doctrinal summer series if you like, but I prefer to think of it in family terms, because that's who we are, a family. This is how our loving Heavenly Father demonstrated his love for us.

But while we were yet sinners, his Son died for us. Theologians call this doctrine substitutionary atonement.

These are big words, complicated words, they're precious words. I'm not ashamed to use them. But simply put, the doctrine of substitutionary atonement states that Jesus died for me.

[2 : 3 9] That bearing shame and scoffing rude in my place, condemned he stood. That on that cross, Jesus took the punishment of our sins and died in our place, bearing our iniquity and our transgression.

It should have been me on that cross being punished for the sins that I'd committed against God. But Jesus, the perfectly beloved child of God, hung there in my place.

While I was yet a sinner, Christ died for me. That is the doctrine in a nutshell. And every true Christian believes that. Even though they may not know the doctrinal terminology, they'll tell you, Jesus died for me.

My way to God is through the cross of Christ. You know who you are. I want to thank the person who suggested that I engage in a series of studies on this subject.

I have found it spiritually enriching and deeply gratifying as I myself have engaged with the purpose of God in sending his son to take away my sins. I was thinking last evening after I visited Alex and Susie and Hallie in hospital that perhaps I should change what I was going to say this morning.

[4 : 06] But then I thought to myself, in light of what Alex and Susie's testimony is about the grace of Christ and their great loss, and in the light of baby Hallie's passing before she'd even taken one breath, that I can think of no greater tribute to her than in Hallie Cheryl Nelson's name.

I commend to you Jesus Christ as your Savior. I've chosen to trace the doctrine through the first five books of the Bible, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, to see how God unfolds this wonderful purpose of providing his son as our sacrifice, even from the very earliest times, or to put it perhaps in even starker terms, the gospel in beginnings.

The gospel in beginnings. Now, there are many hundreds of passages in the first five books of the Bible that speak of atonement, of how we are reconciled to God, made right with God.

But not many which speak of a direct relationship between the sacrifice offered to take away sin in the Old Testament and the unmistakable work of Jesus Christ in the New Testament on the cross.

For that reason, I'm diving straight in today with Genesis 22. Oh yeah, we could talk from Genesis 3 about how God prepared coverings for Adam and Eve from animal skins, but I think that to read the text in that way is perhaps to read things into it that simply aren't there.

[5 : 38] So turn with me to Genesis 22. You'll be familiar with the storyline. In many ways, this chapter along with Isaiah 53 has the most important contribution to make regarding the doctrine of substitutionary atonement in the whole Old Testament.

Its language is repeated throughout the Bible. Its imagery repeated. Its promises fulfilled. The key words in this chapter are found in verse 14.

So Abraham called the name of that place the Lord will provide. As it is said to this day, on the mount of the Lord, it shall be provided. Now, of course, as Christians, we use that phrase, the Lord will provide pietistically in a whole range of settings, but in its original context, it directs our focus to how God himself will provide a way of salvation through a sacrifice he himself will offer for us.

God will provide a sacrifice of atonement, and that sacrifice will be his one and only son, Jesus Christ, whom he loves.

Now, let me, as we unpack this doctrine from this chapter that Jesus died for us, hanging on the cross, being punished for the sins that we had committed, let me suggest we want to see two things.

[7 : 09] First of all, God will provide the sacrifice. And second, God himself will be the sacrifice. God will provide the sacrifice.

God will be the sacrifice. My prayer is that as we engage with all these things, this most important of subjects that Jesus died for us on the cross, we will be blessed as Christians, and those who have not yet put their faith in Christ would find in Jesus the greatest and most beautiful love which ever existed.

First of all then, God will provide the sacrifice. God will provide the sacrifice. I'd like to think we all know the story of Genesis 22 well enough.

It's not a pleasant story to begin with, but at least we know it. God commanded Abraham to offer a son up, Isaac, as a sacrifice. I don't think I'll ever be matured enough to understand God's command here or to begin to enter into Abraham and Isaac's levels of obedience.

It just seems wrong at every level. But in the last analysis, it provides the perfect backdrop for God to demonstrate how the ultimate sacrifice shall not be that of Isaac on the mountain called Moriah, but of Jesus on the hill called Golgotha.

[8 : 41] I would also emphasize caution in trying to understand the psychology of Abraham and Isaac in this story. Did Abraham love Isaac any less than I love my children?

Did Abraham think that human sacrifice was any less repulsive than I think it is? The point is that although Abraham obeyed God, I believe he knew God better than to expect that God would follow through in the sacrifice of his son.

Or even if he did, that God would bring his son back to him. In speaking of the faith of Abraham, concerned with this event, the writer to the Hebrews says, Abraham considered that God was even able to raise him, Isaac, from the dead.

Let's put the morality of this passage to the side for a moment. Focus your eyes on verse 8. When asked where the sacrifice was, Abraham responded, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering.

God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering. Abraham was convinced that God himself would provide the lamb. Abraham wasn't lying or deceiving his son when he said this, rather he truly believed that God himself would provide the lamb for the burnt offering.

[10 : 03] That ultimately it was God's prerogative and responsibility to provide the lamb. As it was, we all know that Abraham's faith and obedience were proved right when at the very last moment God provided a ram to take Isaac's place on that altar.

God did what he promised Abraham he would. God always does what he intends to do. He provides for his people.

But let's go back to what Abraham says in verse 8. God himself will provide the lamb. I want you to think about that for a moment and why at the end of the day it's necessary for God himself to provide the lamb.

Answer me this question. What can we offer to God that would be sufficient to take our sins away? What can we offer to God that would be sufficient to take our sins away?

What can we offer to God that would be sufficient to take the infinite offence of our sins away? We learned last year through the study of the book *Cordes Homo* by St. Anselm that our sin is an infinite offence against an infinitely holy God.

[11 : 25] What about we give him an hour on a Sunday morning? Is that enough to take our sins away? What about we give him the best of our flocks and the best of our herds? Is that enough to pay off the debt of our sin?

According to the Greek classics King Midas had the ability to turn everything he touched into gold. According to reality in the Bible we are completely the opposite.

Rather than turning base metals like lead into gold we turn gold into base metals. We taint everything we touch with our impurity so that even if we were to offer up the best we had to God it would not be enough.

The hymn writer Isaac Watts puts it this way where the whole realm of nature mine that would be an offering far too small love so amazing so divine demands my soul my life my all.

Suppose we we gave everything we had to God it wouldn't be enough because everything we touch is tainted by our sin and so I ask again what what then can we offer to God that would take away the infinite debt of our sins sheep goats obedience time talents money there is nothing you can offer to God nothing at all that will take the debt of your sins away nothing I want you to imagine that you've been invited to someone's house for dinner you sit down at a dirty table with a dirty fork and a dirty knife and then you notice that your hostess has dirty hands she takes the food out of a dirty oven and transfers all the dirt from her dirty hands onto that food she then gives you that dirty food and a dirty plate and fills up your dirty glass with dirty water from her dirty tap

[13 : 30] I rather think you'd make your excuses get out of that house very quickly lest you caught salmonella or something even worse but that's what it likes that's what it's like when we offer to God even our very best because it's tainted with our sin it's dirty and so given that there is nothing we can offer to God that is enough to take the offense of our sins away it is necessary that God himself provides the sacrifice I hope you can see this only God himself can provide the kind of sacrifice that can take the debt of our sins away nothing we can do or pay goes even close to paying off our debt to him and so we say not only will God provide for himself the lamb for the burnt offering but God must provide for himself the lamb for the burnt offering anything less is not worthy of him it's a dirty meal eaten with dirty utensils from a dirty table with dirty hands slugged down with dirty water for our sin to be taken away

God himself only can and must provide for himself a lamb for the burnt offering nothing we can give him yes it won't be the finest lamb of the flock and the finest bull of the herd yes though it be our lifelong obedience to the law or our body surrendered to the flames it's not enough because everything we can give him is tainted by our sin the only way that true and genuine atonement can be made with God is that God himself makes it for us there's nothing we can offer him or sacrifice for him that would be enough that's one feature that separates biblical Christianity out from every other religion in the world tell me do you really believe that praying five times a day to the east can get rid of your sin if you do your God isn't very holy and you aren't very sinful tell me do you really believe that washing in a sacred river in India can get rid of your sin if you do your

God isn't very holy and you're not very sinful do you really think that spending your life in a monastery high up in the mountains taking a vow of celibacy and silence can get rid of your sin well if you do then your God isn't very holy and you aren't very sinful there is nothing we can offer to God nothing big enough nothing that would be enough stop thinking there is for in so doing you forget two things one just how sinful we are as human beings and two just how holy God is as our sovereign Lord why are you here at church today is it to try and make your own form of atonement to God with God to try and put yourself right with God if only I come to church God will be happy with me God will forgive my sins if I come to church that's the way you're thinking forget it nothing you can do is enough to pay the price of your sins before him you need him to provide the necessary sacrifice only that will be enough there is no other good enough to pay the price of sin only God can provide the sacrifice we need to take our place to bear the penalty of our sins only God can only God will and only

God must provide that sacrifice God himself shall provide the sacrifice but then secondly God himself will be the sacrifice God himself will be the sacrifice if the words of verse 14 the Lord himself shall provide are the theme of Genesis 22 of no less importance are the precise words of verse 2 verse 2 take your son your only son whom you love take your son your only son whom you love earlier on as I'm sure many of you do also when you read Genesis 22 we questioned God's motive in commanding Abraham to offer up his son Isaac as a sacrifice and yes I guess God wanted to know and examine Abraham's faithfulness but the God we worship already knows our faithfulness or unfaithfulness to him there must be something more to it than that and there is there is far more

I want to suggest to you that Genesis 22 is a dramatic enactment pre-enactment of what shall happen some 1500 years after these events when God himself will offer up his own beloved child on the cross as the sacrifice to take our sins away by the way you may or may not know that Mount Moriah where all these things happened in Genesis 22 would later be the center of the sprawling city of Jerusalem in fact it would be the mountain on which would be built the temple where for thousands of years the blood of bulls and goats and lambs were sacrificed to take away sin but it's these words in verse 2 which act as reminders to us of the greater picture which will later unfold listen again Abraham take your son your own son whom you love do these words sound familiar well listen to what we read in

[19 : 38] John 1 14 concerning the birth of our Lord the word became flesh and dwelt among us we have seen his glory glory as of the only son from the father full of grace and truth listen to John 3 16 for God so loved the world that he gave his only son so that whoever should believe in him should not perish but have eternal life furthermore listen to what God the father says to God the son in Mark chapter 11 on the occasion of his baptism you are my beloved son I love you with you I'm well pleased and again in Mark 9 7 on the occasion of Christ's transfiguration this is my beloved son I love him you see the New Testament writers are self-consciously using the language of Genesis 22 to describe the relationship between God the father and Jesus

Jesus is the son of God the only son of God the son the father loves whatever Isaac was to Abraham Jesus is to the father a million times more and the New Testament writers are self-consciously using the language of Genesis 22 because they want their readers us to understand that what nearly happened to Isaac namely that he was to be offered up as a sacrifice would most definitely happen to Jesus they wanted their readers to understand that while God did not go the full way with Isaac he did with his own son can you see this can you understand this that Jesus Christ the son of God God himself would be the sacrifice that God would provide to take away our sin and our guilt that he would stand in our place bearing all the punishment of our sin dying the death that we deserve to die on account of our sins not only would

God himself provide the sacrifice for our sins God himself would be the sacrifice for our sins yes we recall in horror and rightly so at the thought of Abraham sacrificing his own son and yet according to the apostle Paul Romans 8 32 he that is God the father did not spare his own son gave him up for us all the knife that God prevented from being thrust into Isaac's heart was thrust into the holy heart of Jesus instead only God must provide the sacrifice to pay for an infinite offense against his infinite holiness and therefore only God himself could be that sacrifice whereas Isaac didn't die

God's son died in love God gave him up for us all to the sacrificial death of the cross that bearing shame and scoffing rude in my place in my place condemned he stood sealed my pardon with his blood hallelujah what a savior that the God we had offended himself became our sacrifice this is the doctrine of substitutionary atonement in Genesis 22 and it is marvelous marvelous as we close I'm not sure they may be watching I Facebooked the murder on to see whether they'd be on this morning I want to tell you about Bob and Pam Dykema Bob and Pam are a delightful couple from Savannah Georgia a few years ago

Walter and myself were across in Savannah and we were invited to share in Bob and Pam's I think it was their 60th wedding anniversary is that right Walter 50th wedding anniversary meal down at a local yacht club I say yacht club but but the food was mega expensive and the cuisine was like Michelin starred I don't know about Walter but I although I didn't begrudge it because you know what I really really really like Bob and Pam Dykema I was scratching about in my wallet wondering whether the \$200 spending money I'd taken with me to America would be enough to pay for even my starters after Bob had very kindly asked me to say grace Bob approached both myself and Walter and he said to us whispered into our ears you don't have to worry about paying for any of this guys I've got it

[24 : 53] I've got it well you know as I say I really love Bob and Pam but that let me tell you that made that left me feeling awkward and pretty useless the thing is I don't like being given things for nothing I don't like other people paying for my food I like to contribute what I can especially if it's a top class Michelin starred meal in a top class restaurant in the antebellum south isn't it true there is a lot of people who just out of their sheer generosity pay for our meals it kind of leaves us feeling a bit useless a bit awkward Bob and Pam mirrored and modelled that evening the message of salvation to us today at Glasgow City Free Church because here's the deal

God himself has provided the sacrifice for our salvation God himself is the sacrifice for our salvation and he says to us listen carefully you don't have to worry about paying for any of this I've got it I've got it you can't contribute a dime to paying your sin off to God only he can do it and only he has done it by sending his one and only beloved son to die for us on the cross imagine how rude and insulting it would have been had I refused to have eaten the meal that Bob and Pam had paid for me in that Savannah yacht club the greatest compliment that I could pay to them was to eat it heartily and thank them sincerely the greatest compliment you can pay to

God today if I may use that language is to accept what Jesus has done for you on the cross by dying as your substitute to make a torment for all your sins stop trying to contribute to your salvation just accept it by faith he's got it he's paid it all and then say to him I believe that you've paid it all I believe you've got this I believe you've paid the price for my sins on the cross I'm no longer going to worry about paying for any of this because I know you've got it now show you show me how I can thank you with my mind my heart my actions you see for sure John Calvin was right religion is man's way to

God Jesus Christ is God's way to man let us pray