

Genesis 22:1-14 “The Compass and the Cross”

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- [0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- My name is Lance Cooper. I'm one of the elders here at Southwood. Don't worry, I'm not preaching. I know some of you, like Alan Judge, are probably pretty nervous. But Derek called me this week and asked if I would read Scripture before he preached today.
- So I'd ask that you just kind of listen to one of these old, old stories. A story that's thousands of years old that's been listened to and read generation after generation after generation of people who have hoped and trusted in God's providence.
- And this is Genesis 22, verses 1 through 14. 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.
- [1 : 15] 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 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. 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. 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 his father, Abraham, my father. And he said, here I am, 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.
- [2 : 16] 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 it is said to this day, on the mount of the Lord, it shall be provided. One of the most famous passages in scripture has a lot to take in.

[3 : 23] There's a lot of different ways we could look at this. But hopefully we can find encouragement today from this passage. That's one of my jobs as a preacher is to encourage you from the word of God with what it says.

So before we jump in, looking at that passage and picking it apart, I want to start with a story of a guy named Luke Akins.

Has anybody ever heard of Luke Akins? No? I hadn't either. But just a few years ago, he stepped into history as the first person ever to jump from an airplane at 25,000 feet without a parachute.

A 42-year-old skydiver has made history. Luke Akins became the first person to jump from a plane without a parachute and land in a net on Saturday, falling 25,000 feet.

Here is Mireya Villarreal. Doors open. Here we go. You could call him Luke's sky jumper. Luke Akins' death-defying leap unlike anything anyone seen in this galaxy.

[4 : 30] Beginning at 25,000 feet, he soars through the air without a parachute for two minutes. Other skydivers stay by his side before removing his oxygen mask for his final descent.

There goes the chutes. Luke is on his own. Seconds later, he hits his mark, a 100-by-100-foot net. He's in! His wife and teammates rush to greet him.

I'm almost levitating. It's incredible. The words I want to say can't even get out of my mouth. He and I have Aikens has been jumping since he was 12 and has made more than 18,000 jumps with a parachute.

But as a father and husband, he says this stunt needed to be more than just a leap of faith. There's an inherent risk with what I'm doing, but I feel like it's a calculated risk. When you're out in the air after you exit, the feeling is awesome.

There's no going back. That's the feeling that I love. That's what I do this for. Mireya Villarreal, CBS News, Los Angeles. you could call him Luke's sky jumper did you hear that one unlike anyone seen in this galaxy that was a lame line but for two full minutes he's falling he trained for two years I guess you could say his whole life really but two years just for that jump and all he had no plan b and all he was trusting was that everyone who had talked to him about it being safe and catching him that that net would catch him trusting that they were telling the truth and that's a lot of what it can feel like when God calls us to do something okay you don't get all the steps outlined up front he had a few more you don't see every turn ahead but you do have just enough information to take the first leap and you had to trust that you're going to land exactly where he promises in the scriptures can you think of a time maybe in your life when God nudged you or called you somewhere and did you have every single bit of information that you needed about every step of the way

[6 : 38] I remember when I first was called into ministry I was painting houses I was out of college and it was like this song stuck in my head go talk to so and so at this church and ask him if they have a job and I knew he would say no but later that led to the call in ministry and I just knew I had to go do it I can also recall vividly when God called us to leave Washington DC where we're serving in a church for nine years it was an undeniable clear answer that it was time to go take a next step at a new church and it was incredible I was like God's in this for about two years and then it was awful and then confusion set in and then something wasn't right and little did I know we were entering into some of the the more challenging years of our life and it didn't make sense and sometimes that's exactly how God's call feels clear enough to step out but confusing enough to require faith beyond what we can see ourselves because God's call can seem confusing it really can't we want a GPS right with all of the details but so many times most all of the time actually God hands us a compass and he just says go that way I saw this fun video on the internet that uh that kind of like captures I think the heart of how confusing it could be my child this is God yes God quit your job you will not miss any money you will get a check every week for ten thousand dollars and become a millionaire okay yes God my child this is God yes God I need you to quit your job and then what hello you you ever been there so Abraham had been there he'd been there many times okay and now we get to enter into another one of those moments where God gives him a compass and not a GPS I'm going to read the first eight verses again 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 there's the compass 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 God 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 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 his father Abraham my father and he said here I am my son he said behold the fire and the wood but where's the lamb for a burnt offering

Abraham said God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering my son so they went both of them together in this passage Abraham gets another compass and God's call can seem confusing but this call seems horrific doesn't it and it's even more horrific if you understand the backstory okay so in Genesis 12 Abraham was handed a compass and he was told by God go to the land that I'll show you just head that way and then in Genesis 15 God gives him a little more info he says hey look at all the stars if you can count all those stars that's how many your offspring will be and then in Genesis 17 God makes the promise to Abraham that he will be a father of a multitude of nations but how can he be father Abraham of a multitude of nations if he doesn't have a son so he's got more info but he still doesn't have all of the information so Abraham and his wife Sarah they try to have a baby and they wait and they wait and they trust and they trust and they grow older and they grow older and then after 10 years of waiting they get desperate you ever been there where you're waiting but you get desperate and you try to fix things yourself

I think that's where they were okay and they wanted to wait but they wanted the promise and they believe the promise so Sarah says I've got an idea I think Abraham what God may have meant was that you should have a child with our servant Hagar maybe that's how he's going to provide the son because I can't have a child for you and so he did that and they named the child Ishmael but that shortcut only created more resentment and more brokenness in the family and just like in Eden what followed was shame and broken relationships there was sin involved but God's plan was not undone and his plan's not undone in our brokenness either you can take heart there and the good news is he doesn't run away from broken people this was a very messy family you ever thought your family's too messy for God well just take a little look here dig a little deeper you're not alone okay 15 years later 25 years after Abraham and God had had that conversation

God's promise shows up and Sarah she has a son at the youthful age of 90 and Abraham was the 100 year old dad and they named him Isaac and it's through Isaac that God's promises to Abraham and to us would be fulfilled the end they lived happily ever after let's pray plot twist the tension between Sarah and Hagar got so bad that Sarah sends Hagar away with Ishmael forever boom get out of here right this already broken family becomes more broken except for the joy over Isaac the miracle baby their only son and now Isaac the son that they've been waiting 25 years for who they love with all their heart the promised one

God says Abraham put him on the altar kill the promise this call seems horrific now what's happening here and was this horrific to Abraham does it seem as horrific to him as it does to us I don't think so I don't think it was as horrific to Abraham as it seems to us reading this right now because Abraham had seen God keep his promise all right and provide him and now he's trusting him to do it again I think something developed there even if it meant raising Isaac from the dead if you look at Hebrews 11 it says he considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead which figuratively speaking he did receive him back there it is okay that's what I want you to hang on today resurrection faith resurrection faith he knew the God who made the promise was trustworthy and God's promise was Abraham's net beneath him always present always secure even when he couldn't see it okay remember he had wiggled in his faith a little bit when he took matters into his own hands they had Ishmael it didn't work out so well and I think that he realized though if God still loves me through this brokenness he really loves me and he always had that destination in mind which you read about earlier in the bulletin that heavenly mountain that house that God's building so why does this feel more horrific to us today than I think it felt to Abraham first would be this we forget that this is a test if you look at the text it says it's a test and even in Hebrews it says it's a test you think about training there's no

[15 : 50] Navy SEAL that's going into training thinking man this is probably going to be pretty easy now they get in there and the tougher the mission the tougher the test this is father Abraham and God's speaking a language that makes sense to him do you remember where there were baby sacrifices on mountains there's a God called Molech this would have been all around God's speaking a language that makes sense and he's about to make a statement that I'm different than these other gods so it's a test first of all I think Abraham would have seen this as a test and he would have signed up for this right he knew that he was on a special mission I think the other reason why this may seem so horrific to us is because we've been shaped by a lie a little bit we'll dig down on that just for a second and that lie detours how we trust God in America what I mean by that we don't really have a lot of room for God to call us to uncomfortable things in our lifestyles so when we open a passage like Genesis 22 and we hear God say lay your son on the altar we flinch more not just because it's heavy which it is but because it confronts the false heavens that we are constantly trying to build here on earth now in the west we have crafted this version of Christianity that is more about comfort than it is about calling of God and it's more about escaping reality than it is about being transformed by it it's more about control than it is about surrender and we don't leave any room for tough things to happen in our plan let me try to give you a little picture of what this looks like okay imagine this desktop is your life okay it's more than just clutter it's the world we're trying to manage missed promotion will I ever retire broken relationships does anybody really like me the folder of regrets trying to be enough things I worry about shame I keep secret pressure to be the cool mom or dad parenting guilt and somewhere off to the side you're going to see this Jesus folder we say

Jesus is the center of my life but the live screen says completely otherwise we spend most of our days opening every other file trying to manage everything ourselves controlling it and fixing everything no margin no surrender just survival but watch what happens when we begin taking it all the weight of managing it all the mess the pressure the pain into one place into Jesus it's surrender and what happens more space space to breathe space to rest space to trust space to be near Jesus and somehow the very things that were holding us back the clutter and the fear and the noise they become the doorway to Jesus the doorway to trust him with everything and that that's the healthy rhythm of the Christian life not knowing every outcome but every day every moment surrendering and saying this belongs to you all of this so freedom isn't found in asking Jesus to bless our kingdoms that's where we get stuck okay it's found in surrendering and sacrificing our kingdoms to his that's why the scriptures say to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice offer your lives everything because the truth is any heaven that we build apart from Jesus is eventually going to end up in the trash bin deleted forever you ever believe this lie

I have I love God but I spend most of my time building a life that's free from need or worry or suffering and it's focused on never being bored looking the best all the time having all the best things I've ever dreamed of avoiding and ignoring suffering or hard things at all costs that is the current that we live in in America in American churches and underneath all of that paradise building is a longing for a real paradise and that's the destination that God's compass is always pointing toward if you expect paradise now suffering or heartache or anything like that that God calls us to is always going to make you feel like God's betraying you okay Abraham did not expect paradise now and I don't think he felt betrayed by God's request either because he knew that it was a test a holy test and he had room in his world view for hard things and he knew that God was going to call him to hard things and he had seen

God provide through all those hard things so to Abraham when he walked into this situation Isaac was never even truly lost you see it in the text he says we'll come back to you when they go up there we'll come back we're going to go over there and worship and we'll be back and the promise of God was more real to him than even the fear of that unknown so don't you want faith like that I want faith like that the resurrection faith and that's what it is it's not the absence of fear or the absence of bad things or the absence of suffering or the absence of discomfort it's not having all the answers and knowing how everything's going to work out but it's the presence of a net always underneath us always sure a net made of God's unbreakable promises wherever you go whatever you're going through so what about us okay what do we do when God's call doesn't match our curated versions of the good life when the call seems horrific or even just uncomfortable what do we do when the very thing that we love the most is placed on the altar what if the thing that you treasure the most becomes the thing that God invites you to surrender

I think that you you keep the destination in mind that's what I think we do in those moments because for Abraham and for us it's the destination that makes the difference in everything else okay when they came to the place of which God had told him Abraham built the altar there and he laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and he 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've 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 thorns 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 it is said to this day on the mount of the Lord it shall be provided the mountains of Moriah that's where he was that was the destination the compass that God had given him in this particular text and the destination is the difference in this story and the destination is the difference in our story

[24 : 30] God is always always always writing a much bigger story than we can see and here we get a glimpse of all of it right this is where the compass is always pointing the mount of the Lord that New Testament reading earlier you see it it says that by faith he went to live in a land of promise as in a foreign land living in tents for he was looking forward to the city that has foundations whose designer and builder is God on the mount of the Lord it shall be provided the net underneath us when we can't see and don't know the next steps Abraham wasn't walking blind okay he was walking toward a promise and that's what resurrection faith does and that's what I want us to have that's what I want to have it sees beyond the altar and it hears past the silence and it knows that even when

God's call is confusing his promises are still true and it says this belongs to you so here's the question was it really just about Isaac or was it about something bigger and something eternal when Isaac I remember reading this in Hebrew when we took Hebrew and when this part particularly stuck with me when Isaac looks at his dad and he says where's the lamb for the offering something about the Hebrew it like really guts you and Abraham says God will provide on the mount of Moriah he did but it was a ram not a lamb because the lamb came later didn't it this whole story isn't just about Abraham and Isaac it's about Jesus and us and it's a preview of the destination that makes all the difference and here's why that matters because Jesus is the difference because Jesus is the resurrection and the resurrection is the destination okay centuries later on the same mountain range mind you another beloved son would carry wood on his back he'd ascend alone he'd cry out my

God my God why have you forsaken me and this time the knife wouldn't stop would it there would be no ram in the thicket either because he was the lamb that God will provide and the true and the better Isaac who wouldn't just be spared but slain with Jesus so that we the guilty ones might live and think if you were able to stand at the foot of the cross next to Abraham and look up I imagine he would say this is the lamb he was talking about this is how much God loves me he doesn't ask us to sacrifice our loved ones like the other gods of Abraham's time he gives his own so that through faith in him we may become children of promise okay that's what this passage is about if you look in Galatians and Romans

Paul exegetes this passage a bit the son of the slave woman this is talking about the Ishmael line was born according to the flesh the son of the free woman born through promise you like Isaac are children of promise and then in Romans through Isaac shall your offspring be named okay says that not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel not all are children of Abraham but through Isaac your offspring shall be named this means that it's not the children of the flesh who are the children of God but the children of the promise okay Paul is teaching us what everything means here that Israel's line Israel's line represents the flesh what we do in our own strength Isaac's line who came through Isaac's line Jesus represents the spirit trusting only in what

God has done and provided okay where are you this is the difference okay see Paul's contrast isn't just theological it's very personal one path ends in chains the other ends in joy okay death entered the world through one man and that death is also eternal and y'all that's what we're born into children of slavery that's what it means to be a slave to sin okay and enslaved by the fear of death but what's the difference between these two Jesus he's the destination that makes the difference Jesus is the resurrection and the resurrection is the destination for those who move from that chain to joy and so how do you move from chains to joy we have to altar first we put our lives there not as victims but as living sacrifices offered to the one who gave everything for us through faith in

[30 : 41] Jesus then you're adopted into his family and you move down to that bottom line there and what is faith the assurance of the things hoped for the certainty of the things not seen right the net's not going to break it's there the final destination is no in that direction as vessels of mercy as instruments of righteousness on the mountain of the Lord it shall be provided Jesus is the provision Jesus is the promise the joy the resurrection and the destination and if he's the destination then everything belongs to him okay now remember earlier I told you about leaving DC and stepping out into what felt like a God ordained call only to find myself in one of the hardest seasons of my life ever well after that confusion after those years that felt like it was a wilderness we ended up here washed up on the shores of

Southwood Presbyterian Church Will Spink came out of his house with his broom he scooped me up and he walked over and he said preach on Abraham and Isaac right but looking back now I see what I couldn't see then God wasn't punishing me he didn't abandon me his compass never lost its destination even when I did and maybe right now I got to think some of you are in a situation that could be like that right where God's calling you to put your kingdom on the altar or something that you love on the altar and maybe he's been nudging you towards something new or something uncertain or confusing or stretching and you've got only a compass in your hand and knowing that you've got to take the first step

I want you to remember this his promises are underneath every step that you take he's with you on the road you can call him into the chaos you can put the folders away and you can go be with Jesus and sit at his feet and say take this and remember that the path underneath your feet is paved with God's promises and that the end of your journey is the same end of Abraham's journey it's called Mount Zion in the Old Testament but it's heaven and think of this Abraham looked ahead to Jesus his faith was credited to him as righteousness we look back to what Jesus did and ahead to the Mount Zion so we unite with Abraham in the destination God might be testing us too right he might be testing us too but remember he loves you and underneath that your feet are a path paved with his promises and one day we're going to be together in heaven if you put your faith in

Christ right we're going to be able to look back and talk about you remember that time we were in church and we talked about how we were going to look back one day and talk about that time in church when you talk about it we're going to do that in heaven it's a reality and you're going to be able to look back and you're going to see what you can't see now that God isn't punishing you okay he's preparing you for eternity the life that's way bigger than this life and he hasn't abandoned you he's leading you home his compass never loses its destination you can be certain of that because of Jesus all of this belongs to you let's pray father so much in this text but may we just pause for a minute and remember that you're in control and wherever we are Lord Jesus would you enter into the space enter into our spaces by your

Holy Spirit and people here don't know you would you please save them would they look to you and what you put on the altar to give them eternal life Lord Jesus would they move from chains to joy from death to life by just saying adopt all this belongs to you father to those of us who have done it and getting so caught up in managing our lives and the good life and getting all the things and don't ask me to do this or that because I've got a big life to live may we stop and remember the real life is the one ahead and the one we're living in now is a preparation for eternity I pray these things for me that I would do these things I struggle with all of these things that I'm talking about so we give it to you Lord Jesus and ask you to bless this church by the name of Jesus Christ we offer ourselves to you as living sacrifices would you do something special and give us that resurrection faith would you be the difference

[36 : 19] Lord Jesus it's in Christ's name I miracle