

Communion Service

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[0 : 0 0] Turn with me to the New Testament and to the letter to the Hebrews chapter 11. Letter to the Hebrews in chapter 11. I'm reading at verse 17.

Hebrews chapter 11 verse 17. By faith, Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac. And he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.

He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. By faith, Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. Verse 17. By faith, Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac. This chapter reminds me of when I walk through the perfume shop in an airport.

When you walk through a perfume shop in an airport, you're confronted with all of these different types and blends and colors and scents and fragrances.

[1 : 3 9] And, of course, the idea is to stop and to try out this one or that one or whatever. Men's and women's, it doesn't matter. And sometimes you get these little packs with samplers for those who can't make up their minds as to which one they prefer or not.

You get maybe a half a dozen, a box of a half a dozen in them as a sampler pack. Each fragrance being slightly different from the other one.

Hebrews 11 is like a pack that describes to us the lives of people who lived in the Old Testament. Each one of them leaving a fragrance that is slightly different from the other one. And yet each one of them pointing in the same direction.

Hebrews 11 is a list of people who lived long, long time ago and who lived. And the one thing that brings them all together is that the foundational principle by which they lived was their faith in God.

[2 : 5 0] They had heard the voice of God and they responded in obedience and in faith to that voice and they lived. But each one of them was slightly different, leaving us a slightly different example and a slightly different fragrance.

Well, we're concentrating today on one of them, which is Abraham. And Hebrews 11 has a lot to say about the life of Abraham. It starts off in verse 8, breaks off in verse 13 and resumes again, takes up the story in verse 17.

And it tells us that Abraham's faith enabled him to do three things. Three things that Abraham's faith enabled him to do.

First of all, Abraham's faith enabled him to see the invisible. We get that in verse 8 onwards.

Abraham's faith, secondly, enabled him to accept the impossible. And then thirdly, Abraham's faith enabled him to do the unthinkable.

[4 : 0 0] What do I mean by that? Well, first of all, it enabled him to see the invisible. We're told that he looked for a city that wasn't visible at that time to Abraham.

And yet, for him, it was as real as anything that was around him. Because it was the city that was promised to him by God.

He looked for a city that the Bible tells us has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. And because of that, he went out in faith, not knowing where he was going, being led only by the promise of God, dependent on his word alone.

And he was led by God into a land he had never been before. Now, which one of us would ever have the faith to do that? Left all his comforts, hour of the Kaldese, his home, his family, everything that he was accustomed to.

And he was led by, called by God to go to a place and to uproot everything and to go into a place he had never been before. Why? Because somehow he saw the invisible.

[5 : 10] And that new life that God gave him wasn't an easy life. It was one that involved all kinds of difficulty and testing and times of worry and stress and famine and trouble.

And yet, he never went back to where he had come from. Because when you sample the life that God gives you in the Lord Jesus Christ, you never want to go back.

No matter how difficult that life is. He was able to see the invisible. He was also able to accept the impossible.

God told him at the age of 75, he told him again at the age of 99, that he would have a son. His wife was 90, well beyond the age of childbearing.

And yet, no doubt with a lot of questions in his mind as to how God was going to accomplish this, he believed God. He believed God.

[6 : 11] And we're told that God credited that to him, his promise to him as righteousness.

Abraham's faith allowed him to see the invisible and to accept the impossible.

And sure enough, when Abraham was 100 years old, his wife had a baby. She had Isaac, the son of promise. But then the third thing, and what I want us to think about today for a few moments, is the third thing that Abraham's faith allowed him to do, which was to do the unthinkable.

Because when Isaac had grown, we don't know how old Isaac was in Genesis 22. But God told him to do something which was unthinkable.

He told him, if you want to go all the way back to Genesis chapter 22, because that's where we read the story. After these things, God tested Abraham and said to him, Abraham, and he said, here am I.

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.

[7 : 24] Now, of course, when we read this story, there are all kinds of questions that arise, and hopefully we'll be able to answer some of them in a few moments' time.

And yet, we can't get away from how unique this chapter is, because even although we tell ourselves that our faith is always tested, nobody's faith was ever tested in this manner before.

But it's not just that Abraham was asked to take a son and to put him to death. That is exactly what God was asking him to do.

But it goes beyond that. Because in Abraham's reasoning, this wasn't just a son. This was the son that God had promised to him.

And through him would be his family. A family which God promised one day would be as many as uncountable as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore.

[8 : 29] Now, here's Abraham's reasoning. If God is going to do that, then how can he possibly be asking me to kill my son? Because if I do what God is asking me to do, then there will be no son through whom the promise can be fulfilled.

Yet, God has told me, he has promised me, that one day my descendants will be like the stars of the sky or the sand of the seashore.

On the other hand, he's telling me to kill my son. He's telling me to put him to death. One thing I know for sure, I don't know how he's going to do it, but he's going to keep his promise.

I know that the two things are contradictory. They cannot possibly, according to our reasoning, go together. They can't correspond.

Because if God is taking away my son, how is he going to keep his promise? However he's going to do it, he's going to keep his promise. And it was on that basis that Abraham, the very next day, we read, early in the morning, he rose and he saddled his donkey and off he went to obey in every detail the command that God had given him to do.

[9 : 51] He even, Hebrews tells us, he figured out in his own mind, Hebrews tells us, that he reckoned that God was going to raise Isaac from the dead.

Now it's easy for you and I to talk about raising from the dead because we have it in the New Testament. But remember that Abraham, nobody had ever been raised from the dead in Abraham's day. This was a completely new concept.

And yet Abraham had gone all through, he had worked this whole thing out in his mind. The one thing that he knew was that whatever impossibility he was being faced with, God could never, ever go back on his promise.

And it was in that strength that Abraham took every step of the way and he did not stop until God stopped him.

But I have a deeper question than that this morning. My question is this, why did God ask Abraham to sacrifice his son?

[10:53] Why did God place before Abraham such an unthinkable, an unimaginable challenge?

Why was it? Well, you might say, well, you've already told us it was to test Abraham's faith. No doubt that there was a test element to it. But I believe that there was much more than that.

Because this chapter stands in an important place in the whole picture of the Bible that culminates in the coming and the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So my question is, what place does Genesis 22, where God commands Abraham to sacrifice his own son, have in the gospel, in our completed understanding of God's revelation to us?

See, we're in a tremendously privileged position today. Abraham, although he knew something of what God was going to do, he had the promises and he lived in the promises. He didn't know what we know.

[11:57] He wasn't able to look back the way we are today and to see how God fulfilled these promises in the person of Jesus Christ. But we are in that position.

And I want to suggest to you today that God never asks anyone to do anything for no reason. God is not a random God. Some people think, the critics of the Bible think that this chapter is awful.

They think it's inhuman. How can you believe in a God who asks somebody to kill their own son? How can you believe in a God who just randomly comes to Abraham and he says, kill your own son?

And Abraham does it. Is that what your religion is all about? Believe me, you will find lots of people who will attack or try to attack the Bible in these terms.

And they'll try to tell you that God is so ferocious and vicious. How can you believe in a God like that? I don't need to live in the 21st century to know how unthinkable this command was.

[13:05] Abraham himself knew how unthinkable this command was. We don't need to live in our modern culture to know how incredible this command was.

It doesn't matter when you live. It doesn't matter where you live. It is unthinkable for a God to expect. He must be doing it for a reason.

God doesn't do these things at random. He doesn't just pick commands out of the blue. He does it for a very specific reason. And those who attack Genesis 22 need to remember that.

Remember that God stopped Abraham. Abraham did not go through with the command. God spoke to him just at the last moment. And showing very clearly that this whole episode was part of God's plan.

I want us to remember also that whenever we come to the Bible and ask questions like that, we have to ask it in terms of what is God showing us about himself?

[14:15] And I believe that that is the best way of understanding Genesis 22. What is God showing us about himself? How is God revealing himself?

Not just how faithful Abraham was. We've already talked about that. But there's something that lies deeper than that. And that is how God is revealing himself to us in Genesis 22.

He's telling us something about, he's telling Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, because in this episode, he will be revealing to the generations that come after Abraham in Israel and on through the New Testament and even to 2,000 years beyond, he's telling us something about himself.

So what is God showing us about himself in this chapter? Well, you'll notice, let me just pick two or three points just as they relate to the question that I've just asked.

First of all, I want us to notice the relationship between Abraham and Isaac. In verse 1, in verse 12, and verse 16 of chapter 22, you have the relationship between Isaac.

[15:37] But it's not just father and son. There is a particular love that you would normally expect to find between a father and his son.

But there is also that re-emphasis on, take the son, your only son, the son that you love, your only son, the son that you love.

And it's said time and time again to stress the point again and again that this is a unique relationship between father and son.

You know where this is going, don't you? Because we're already reading this in the light of the New Testament. And so we should. In the light of God's revelation to us through Jesus Christ.

What is that? When God comes to describe his son in the New Testament, what does he tell us?

He tells us, he tells the disciples, the voice from heaven at Jesus' baptism, this is my only beloved

son.

[16:40] This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased. When Jesus was transfigured with his other disciples, again, a voice from heaven, this is my beloved son.

Hear him. And if we listen to what Jesus says about his own relationship to the father, in John chapter 3 and verse 35, for example, where he tells us that the father loves the son and has given all things to his hand.

John 5 and verse 20, for the father loves the son and shows him all that he himself is doing. when we talk about the son of God, we must remember the perfect, eternal, unchangeable love that there exists between the persons of the Trinity in heaven.

I've often said this before, if you and I were able to go into heaven today, we would first of all sense the joy, the unbroken, the perfect, the unblemished joy that there is and the love that there is between the persons of the Trinity.

And it was within that context of love that the father gave his son to be our sacrifice, the sacrifice for our sin.

[18:27] In Romans chapter 8, Paul tells us that he who did not hold back his own son, his beloved son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also freely with him give us all things?

But then the second thing I want us to notice is the precise instructions that God gave to Abraham. He was to take his son, your only son, whom you love, and offer him as a burnt offering.

A burnt offering was a kind of sacrifice. And you remember the place that sacrifice had, the central place that sacrifice had in the Old Testament.

The whole purpose of sacrifice was to effect a reconciliation between God and the person who was sacrificed. It goes all the way back. It didn't just start at Moses.

It started all the way back in the Garden of Eden when God came to visit Adam and Eve after they had sinned. He provided skins for them, coverings to cover their nakedness.

[19:42] Where did these skins come from? They came from an animal that God had himself put to death. Why? In order? Because God's purpose is ultimately our reconciliation and our salvation.

But it can only take place through the shedding of blood because the Bible tells us that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. That's the message all the way through the Old Testament.

And it starts way back in the Garden of Eden. And it continues through Abel and the sacrifice that he offered up in comparison with Cain.

And on through Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and on through Moses. And the system of sacrifices through the high priest and through the tabernacle and so on.

The message of God is this. God's plan is to reconcile humans to himself. Lost, broken, sinful human beings through the shedding of blood.

[20:45] And so sacrifice stands at the very heart of Genesis chapter 22. Not only was Abraham commanded to put his son to death but it had to be as a sacrifice.

You can't help noticing thirdly how willing Isaac is to go along with what his father is commanding him to do. There is no reluctance on his part.

Father and son went together. The son at no point until the very end when he asked his father where is the sacrifice? Where is the lamb? That was a perfectly reasonable question.

But it looks to me as if Isaac exercised the same faith as his father. The same trust in a loving and in a faithful God.

You know where that's going as well don't you? You know how that points to how willing the Lord Jesus Christ as the son of God was to face the awfulness and the darkness and the pain and the suffering that he had to go through in order for us to be saved through his sacrifice.

[22:02] I lay down he said my own life no one takes it from me I lay it down of my own accord and then fourthly you can't help noticing what Abraham said to Isaac God will provide a lamb for the burnt offering sure enough at the very last second when God stopped Abraham from committing the final act of killing his own son he told him to stop and then when Abraham looked there was a ram a substitute caught in a bush and that was the whole point of that was to was to put to death instead of Isaac but when it came to the sacrifice of Jesus

Christ on the cross the father did not stop the way he had stopped Abraham he had to go through with every step of the process till death itself because only death itself secured our forgiveness and our reconciliation he spared not his own son and but gave him up for us all so I hope that in some

small way we're able to see how Genesis 22 points us forward to what we know as the basis of our salvation which was the day when Jesus laid down his life on the cross and when he laid down his life it was a transaction between between the son and the father they were alone just like Abraham and Isaac there were the father was the father and the son despite the crowd of onlookers and mockers and the disciples who had fled and all those who watched on that occasion the real transaction that was taking place was between Jesus and his father you notice that in the prayers in what Jesus said to his father father forgive them for they know not for they do not know what they are doing into your hands I commit my spirit my God my God why have you forsaken me because on the cross Jesus was made sin for us that is what a sacrifice was all about the sacrifice was when when symbolically the person who was offering the sacrifice laid his hands on the animal and and in the eyes of

God the sin was transferred so that the animal became guilty the fact is that no animal ever became guilty but it all pointed to the day when Jesus as the sacrifice would become guilty Paul tells us that he who knew no sin was made to be sin for us so that we could be made the righteousness of God in him father and son every step of the process with all the pain and the horror and the darkness had to be experienced by Jesus as our sacrifice until the very end when he said it is finished today it is finished it is complete what was foreshadowed by Abraham and Isaac was completed and fulfilled by Jesus Christ which is the reason why we can rejoice that our sin has been forgiven and that we've been set free from our guilt that we've been raised from new to newness of life we've been born again

God has given us a new beginning he has given us a new purpose he has showed us how to live he has transformed our hearts and our lives and he will show us every day how to live for him we come today to give thanks to remember that great act in which Jesus became sin for us so that we could become the righteousness of God in him let's pray our father in heaven we give thanks then for his willingness for Jesus willingness because he so loved us that he gave himself for us and that love is something we can lay hold on afresh today a love that will not let us go and a love that will continue to the very end Lord we pray that you will remind us of that love afresh as we eat the elements that remind us and that represent to us his broken body and his shed blood for we ask in Jesus name amen we're going to sing now in psalm number 1 psalm 40 and it's the traditional version of the psalm psalm number 40 and it's verse 4 it's on page 259 verse 4 oh blessed is the man whose trust upon the

[28 : 03] Lord relies respecting not the proud nor such as turn aside to lies we're going to sing from 4 to 8 psalm number 40 from verse 4 down to verse 8 and it's on page 259 and we'll stand to sing oh blessed is the man whose trust upon the Lord relies respecting not the proud nor such a star a sight to life oh Lord my God for many are the wonders thou hast done thy creation thou hast to us thou hast thou above all thoughts are gone in order none can recommend to thee hear them declare and speak of them

I would they more than can be never die never die no sacrifice nor offering this love at all desire all desire my dear the born sin offering love and birth is not required then to the Lord the Lord he swear my words I come behold and see within the volume of the book the volume of the book it written is of me to do thy will

I take delight O thou my God that heart yea that most holy love thy I have within my heart Before we go any further I'd like to just give a word of explanation as we normally traditionally do at a community service about the table and particularly who it's for and I want to read words that we find in the first chapter of the Gospel of John John chapter 1 I want to read from verse 9 the true light which enlightens everyone was coming into the world he was in the world and the world was made through him yet the world did not know him he came to his own and his own people did not receive him but to all who did receive him who believed in his name he gave the right to become the children of God children who were born not of blood or the will of the will of man but of God children who were born not of blood or the will of the flesh or of the will of man but of God this verse is very important in explaining to us the difference between someone who is a follower of Jesus and someone who isn't it creates a separation separation

Jesus often created separations but the one separation that he created was between those who chose to follow him and those who chose to reject him and that's what it tells us here he came to his own his own people the very people that should have recognized that Jesus was the son of God and yet these were the people who turned their back on him and they refused to trust in him for their

salvation but there were others who did receive him verse 11 and the first thing that we are told here is that they received him they they received him those who sit at the table are those who have received Jesus Christ that's what it means to believe in Jesus Christ believing is not just a matter of believing that Jesus was a real person who lived in history and that he did marvelous things and that he changed the course of the world a lot of people believe that but a believer is someone who has gone one step beyond that and has received Jesus personally by faith and that person has received what he has done on the cross as the sacrifice for our sin we are here today to remember the Jesus by whose death we have come to be saved it's all about Jesus it's about him and what he did for us and the pain that he bore the darkness that he suffered the punishment that he took for our sin and then we're told that they believed in his name in his name in his name what was the name of Jesus what did it mean it meant saviour we're not here because we believe that by our own good works and by our own good efforts we can earn our way to God we are here because we believe we need to be saved saved and we believe there's nothing we can do to save ourselves we are completely incapable of doing anything to please God because we're sinners that's why we need to be rescued and saved from our sin very often you see rescue rescue on the TV don't you and I'm glad that we've been joined by the Sunday school you very often see a rescue on the TV particularly when there's a boat out in the sea

I'm sure you've often seen it when there's a boat in trouble on the sea and they send out a helicopter and the helicopter will hover over the boat that's in trouble and a ladder will come down and somebody will come down on the ladder or a rope or something and then they'll pick the people that need to be rescued they'll collect them and then they'll take them all the way the helicopter will lift them out of the boat and then disappear that's not how God has rescued us God rescued us by sending his own son into the boat where we are to be part of our world and to die in that world so that we could be rescued from sin all those who believed in his name but they're also children of God that's what God has given us that's the place that God has given us through what Jesus has done he's not only forgiven our sins he's brought us into his family and so that we have every right today to come to him and say our father who is in heaven hallowed be your name we can come to a God who loves us just as a father or a mother loves their children that's the love that God has for his children that he has redeemed and purchased do you know that love?

[38 : 05] have you come to trust and to believe in Jesus Christ as your savior? have you come to know him? and to receive him just like all of these people who received Jesus and who God gave the right to become his children who were born not of the flesh or of the will of man but born of God only because of what God has done for us that we are here today and we want to remember what he has done for us now in the Lord's Supper we are going to sing again and this time from Psalm 103 and the the it's the sing psalms version it's on page 135 Psalm 103 we are going to sing from verse 6 down to verse 14 and during the singing the elements the bread and the wine will be placed on the table Psalm 103 and the sixth verses on page 135 the Lord is known for righteous acts and justice to downtrodden ones to Moses he made know his ways his mighty deeds to Israel's sons

Psalm 103 from verse 6 to 14 and we'll we'll remain seated for this for this singing verse 6 the Lord is known for righteous acts the Lord is known for righteous acts and justice to the and rotten ones to Moses he made know his ways his mighty deeds to Israel's sons the Lord is merciful and kind to anchor slow and full of grace he will not constantly reprove all in his anger hide his face he does not punish our misty or give his face he does not punish our misty or give our grace he does not or give our sins their just reward how great is love how great is love as high as hell towards all those who fear the Lord the Lord as far as he is is from the west so far his love has borne away our many sins and trespasses and trespasses and all the guilt that on us live just as the Father loves his child so God shall so God trust who fear his name for he remembers we our dust and well he knows our feeble people frame in first corinthians and chapter 11 we read the following for I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed he took bread and when he had given thanks he broke it and said this is my body which is for you do this in remembrance of me we are now also going to give thanks let's bow our heads in prayer our our Father in heaven there are many things for which we should be giving thanks today there is there are our circumstances and there is our health and strength there are the many privileges which we enjoy in this world a world in which we have come to recognize that you are the creator and the provider and the sustainer of every good and perfect gift and so Lord in a natural sense how can we not be thankful every one of us ought to recognize the generous hand of God yet Lord

there is something unique that we want to give thanks for we give thanks for the indescribable gift of the Lord Jesus Christ and for the extraordinary love with which he came into the world to be a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief we give thanks for what he was prepared and willing to go through in order to rescue us and to redeem us from sin we give thanks that that involved the giving of his very life itself it had to be that way there was no other way in which our sin could be removed but by the death of the sacrifice we ask Lord that we will be given now the eyes of faith to see what Jesus did for us and to understand to discern the Lord's body and to discern his death we ask Lord that these elements may speak to us and remind us of the day when Jesus gave himself we ask that you will bind us together in fellowship with one another around the table and meet with us and take away our sin for we ask in Jesus name Amen

Amen Amen Amen because it's true isn't it that as we follow Christ we keep needing to learn the same lesson over and over again because we keep forgetting them and then we have to relearn the very basics of what the Christian life is all about for example when we come to Christ at first we confess that we cannot save ourselves and yet as we live the Christian life how many of us we fall into the trap of doing exactly that trying to live as if we could save ourselves but then God brings us back to that realization time and time again that it is Christ who has saved us and Christ in his death on the cross and his resurrection is the basis of what we are and who we are may we never tire of being brought back to the source of our salvation and that's what we're doing today and that's why Jesus gave this supper to his disciples and to the church as a constant regular reminder of what his death accomplished and how much we need to come back to that death as the source of our salvation boys and girls we're going to be we're going to be remembering the death of Jesus in a very special way right now you possibly can't see but in front of me there are three plates of bread just ordinary bread like this and there are cups of wine and we're going to be passing that bread along the rows in a few moments time and people who are sitting here are going to be just eating little pieces of bread and sipping little sips of wine and by so doing we are remembering what Jesus did when he died on the cross because when he died on the cross his body became broken and this broken bread it reminds us of

Jesus' broken body and this red wine it reminds us of how Jesus' blood was shed when he died on the cross and when we eat that bread and drink that wine we are thanking God and we're remembering what God did for us on the cross so it's important for everyone to understand what is happening even our young people we need to understand what happens when we take communion it's a very special occasion one that is very precious to those who love God and love the Lord Jesus Christ and I hope that you too will love the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior and as your Lord well Paul tells us that I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed he took bread and when he had given thanks he broke it and said this is my body which is for you do this in remembrance of me in the same way also he took the cup after supper saying this cup is the new covenant in my blood do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me for as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes