

The Sacrifice of Isaac

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Preacher: Taylor Hollingsworth

[0 : 00] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! Genesis chapter 22. 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 down to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.

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

[1 : 16] I and the boy will go over there and worship and come to you again. 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. And he 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. 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.

[2 : 19] 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.

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.

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 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.

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 the heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore.

[3 : 37] 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.

May God bless the preaching and the hearing of his word. The kids were out of school. Cookies and mint tea were out on the table.

And my wife and I were way out of our comfort zone. We tried to listen and to learn as we experienced our first ever feast of sacrifice with our Muslim host family while living in North Africa. During this annual festival, family and friends would spend days together, kind of like our Christmas vacation over the holiday. But the centerpiece of this event was not the birth of Jesus or trees or

presents.

[4 : 44] The centerpiece of this event was a ram. According to Muslim tradition, every family is required to slaughter and cook a ram. Perhaps the part that amazed me the most was when some of the men from our host family made a small cut in the ankle of this freshly slaughtered ram and they inserted the hose of a bike pump inside of it.

And I marveled as they pumped the ram up like a giant balloon in order to separate the hide from the muscles to prep it for a long roast over the fire. So go home and try that next time you're trying to field dress a deer.

The whole thing was just utterly fascinating. It made me want to know the meaning of this event. And as we talked with the family, we found out that this feast commemorated the story of Abraham nearly sacrificing his son before God intervened and provided a ram.

Sound familiar? I thought, wow, that sounds so similar to our story in the Bible that we just read Genesis 22. But when we asked about the significance of the event, we were just kind of met with blank looks.

What do you mean? Well, what does this story point to? Does it point to anything? Why do you celebrate this event? Well, it shows Abraham's good works.

[6 : 09] We commemorate it because we were told by the prophet Muhammad that it is a tradition that was passed on from Abraham. I was kind of unsettled by that response.

And I didn't know at the time. I couldn't quite put my finger on it. The story sounded so similar to our story, what we see in our Bible. But I still couldn't see the purpose of the event.

Was there any point to the story? That made me wonder. Is the Bible any different? Is this story we have in front of us just this independent, arbitrary story?

Does it show us anything about God? Why is this story in our Bible? My friends, even though this story may sound similar in and of itself to the story in the Quran, we must understand that Genesis 22 is a part of a bigger story with very glorious purpose.

Genesis 22 is not primarily about Abraham's good works, but God's gracious provision of a substitute.

[7 : 28] Genesis 22 is not an arbitrary, independent story, but it's an installment in an unfolding story embedded in history leading us to Christ.

That is the point. Glenn Shrybner said, Genesis 22 should be read the way the whole Bible should be read. First and foremost, it's a biography.

The Spirit's testimony to the Son. And when we see it this way, the entirety of Scripture comes into focus. So if you are wondering this morning if you can trust God, if you're wanting to know if you can give him everything, even that which is most precious and beloved, if you're wondering if God is able and willing to provide in the midst of your uncertainty, if you want to know whether or not God is for you, if you're wondering if God can forgive you, make you clean, bring you close, this installment in the story is intended to shine a floodlight of encouragement in your darkest doubts. I believe that the main point for us this morning is to trust in the Lord, who graciously provides all that we need in Christ, our substitute.

Trust in the Lord, who graciously provides all that we need in Christ, our substitute. We're going to break this out into two points this morning. Surrender everything while trusting God and receive God's substitute.

[9 : 12] So first, surrender everything while trusting God. Well, this chapter, as you're well aware, features a very perplexing command from God.

I mean, it's caused so many people to tiptoe around it, put it back on the shelf, and even to scoff outright at it. How can God be so cruel and seemingly inconsistent?

How can he demand a child sacrifice? But we must be careful not to rush to conclusions, because this is not, like I said, a standalone story.

You've got to remember that Abraham, at this point, has had a lifetime of encounters with God that have shaped his trust and understanding in this perplexing moment.

It would be similar to hearing a man yell to a kid to jump from a 25-foot precipice. In isolation, without any other context, such a man would seem despicable, right?

[10 : 21] However, what if we knew that the man was the loving father of the child, and he was calling him to jump from a high dive into a pool for the first time?

And what if the child had enough experience with the father to know that he could be trusted, even though he was being called to do something intimidating and maybe even perplexing?

There was more to Abraham's relationship with God outside of this moment and forming his response. Verse 1, if you look with me, it says, After these things.

After what things? Abraham has had decades of ups and downs in the life of faith.

Just think about it. We started 11 chapters ago with Abraham. Genesis 12, Leave your family and your land and go to a place I will show you. I will make you a great nation and bless you and all the nations through you.

[11:21] This is an up in the life of faith for our boy Abe. It's going good. Genesis 12, the same chapter, he then goes on to lie about his wife being his sister in Egypt.

The very same chapter. Down in the life of faith. Genesis 14, He refuses a get-rich-quick deal with the king of Sodom so that he can give all glory to God.

That's an up. Great. Genesis 15, He frets over the fact he still has no child. Down. God reiterates the promise. Abraham believes more than his eyes can see.

God makes a covenant, swearing on his own life to bring about what he said. Up we go. Genesis 16, He listens to Sarah. Let's just help God out by having a child with Hagar.

That's a big down. Big time. Chapter 17, He changes, God changes his name to Abraham, meaning a father of a multitude.

[12:28] Not Ishmael, but the son of the promise. God's not done with him, even with all of his foibles. That's an up in the life of faith. Genesis 20, He misleads Abimelech about his wife because he's afraid.

Down again. Genesis 21, Isaac is born. Big up. The son of God's promise has come. Because of a family feud, however, and the tangled web of sin, Hagar and Ishmael are banished.

The chapter before this. Back down. Up and down. Up and down. Life of faith. Up and down. The life of faith is filled with ups and downs.

Victories and defeats. Counselor David Pallison said that the pattern of our life and growth is kind of like a yo-yo. Up and down.

Up and down. However, we ultimately belong with all of our successes and failures in the hands of our God.

[13:36] So in this way, the pattern of our life and growth is like a yo-yo in the hands of a man walking up a flight of stairs. Even in our ups and downs, we are tethered to our God and he is working with us and moving us in the right direction from one degree of glory to another.

Have you seen glimpses of God's provision in your life? Can you look back and recognize moments of conviction, correction, even rescue?

Often, it's looking back over the lifespan of your walk with God that prepares you to look forward with faith into the perplexing moments ahead.

David Pallison, we have this quote for you. He said, we must have a vision for a long process, lifelong, with a glorious end, the last day, that is actually going somewhere today.

You put those three things together in the right way and you have a practical theology that's good to go and good for the going. So what we see here in Abraham is a response rooted in decades of ups and downs, walking with God.

[15:07] In fact, if you even see Abraham's eager reply here when he says, here I am. He's a man that recognizes his God and he is postured to respond when called.

But what God commands next really exceeds the intensity and uncertainty of all the other moments in Abraham's life of faith.

Verse two, 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.

The word son is really a key word in this passage. It pops up ten times just in this small passage. Our attention is being drawn to this word because we are encountering another episode in the drama of the promised offspring.

Remember in Genesis 3 that God promised that there would be war between the offspring of Eve and the offspring of the serpent.

[16:27] There would eventually come a son who would crush the head of the serpent. So as God upholds the covenant with Abraham, this promised son is in view.

But each and every step is contingent upon the promise and the provision of God himself. And now you look at this command in verse two.

It's increasingly specific and increasingly intimate. Your son, your only son, whom you love.

This is no mistake. God is very intentionally narrowing the focus on this beloved promised son.

The crisis of Abraham's faith and the promises and provisions of God will be no greater than in this testing right here. Remember that this text comes immediately on the heels of Hagar and Ishmael leaving.

[17 : 34] Meaning that the son of the slave woman is no longer even an option. Off the grid. In other words, there is no plan B in case God's plan A fails.

Now, only the son of the promise remains. That's it. And many questions surface at this point. Of course, we wonder about the character of the God that would demand such a thing.

It seems just so inconsistent with everything that he's revealed about his character up to this point.

He's the God of life after all. He's the God who lamented the murder of Abel.

He's the God who judged the earth because of their violence and murder. He's the protector and the initiator of life. Not only does it seem morally inconsistent with God's character, we also wonder what Abraham is thinking in that moment.

How, how could he plunge the knife into this precious, long-awaited gift from God? Well, that's perplexing as these questions may be.

[18 : 48] There's still one more foundational question that remains. The most important question is how can God remain faithful to his promise if the one and only promised son is dead?

Did God not make a covenant and swear by himself to bring about this promise through this offspring?

God made the oath, if you remember just a couple weeks ago, and bound himself in blood to make good on his promise or he invites the curse of death on himself?

How can God keep his promise and still be God when what he's demanding seems to undercut all that he's promised and provided?

Was all this a cruel trick? Is this some kind of strange inconsistency? Is this the unraveling of all that God claimed to be?

[19 : 58] Is the sacrifice of this son also the suicide of God? Or is there something more to the story?

Well, we're alerted in verse 1 that this was a test from God. So it was not a temptation. Satan tempts people in order to destroy them, but God tests people to strengthen them.

So when God tests us, he challenges us at the place of our deepest vulnerability, not to destroy you, but in order to build you up and to strengthen your faith.

And he strengthens your faith not in yourself, but in him. But in him. So when reading this, we must remember that this kind of test came earlier in the unfolding story of God's plan of redemption.

This is not a prescription for how we should seek to hear from God. Be very clear about that.

Hebrews 1, 1 and 2 says, long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.

[21 : 29] That was then. But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom he also created the world.

bring that up to say all dreams, thoughts, impressions, all of them must be held up in light of the clear, complete, authoritative, revealed word of God in scripture.

The revelation we see in our text is a description, not a prescription, but a description of a unique season in the life of an ancient patriarch of the faith.

But even though the situation is unique, the call to trusting faith in the midst of confusion, that's universal. God may examine our faith by calling us to obey him in ways that seem inexplicable.

God, this is a call to surrender everything. Everything. It is a call to surrender all precious earthly hope.

[22 : 50] This shocking call is not at all uncommon throughout the Bible. This is not the only place we see this. Just think about how many times God's people may have uttered the words, you want me to do what? Think of how many times that thought pops up in the minds of his followers.

Moses, I want you to lead my people out of slavery. Oh, you're not a good speaker and you're a runaway murderer? That will work.

Tell Pharaoh I am sent you. Joshua, I don't want you to fight. I just want you to walk around and shout. That's right.

I'm with you. Gideon, I know you don't have many guys to fight, but we need to get rid of more. Oh, you did get rid of a lot already?

That's still too many. I am with you. Peter, James, John, I want you to leave everything and follow me. Oh, you're an educated ordinary fisherman?

[23 : 53] Perfect. I'm with you. One commentator said, the test God asks Abraham to choose God over his own son and to trust God to fulfill the promises he has made.

Even when it appears he is putting to death the hope for those promises. You see, in the life of trusting faith, trusting God often looks like a surrendered walk to put to death our earthly hope, in order to see God provide in unimaginable ways.

I can think of several moments like this in my own life, but one that comes to mind is the surrender of a vocation. Elizabeth and I moved overseas shortly after being married to pursue what we thought would be the first step as lifelong missionaries.

It was after just a couple years, Elizabeth experienced some major health complications that ended up bringing us home. And we wondered, why would God let this happen?

Why would God sideline his servants? I mean, we wanted to share the gospel with people, his gospel, for crying out loud, with people who'd never heard.

[25 : 25] It seems like he'd want us to move forward, not hold us back. So what's the deal? He was calling us to surrender our Isaac.

We thought in the moment that God had become the enemy of his own plan in our lives. You want us to do what?

We asked the same questions as all those other guys that he called. You want us to do what? What we didn't understand was that God was going to provide something even better in our surrender. He didn't need us as missionaries. We needed him to change us from the inside out. That's what we needed. And he did. He is.

In the surrender of that vocation, he provided something better. For one, he taught me that my identity is not in my work, but the one that I work for.

[26 : 37] That's a game changer. Is there an Isaac he's calling you to surrender? Is there a job or relationship or freedom that he's calling you to surrender in order to display his radical commitment to do you good?

Look at verse 3. It says, 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. I'm not sure Abraham rose early because he was just clicking his heels and eager to get at it. I don't think that's what motivated him to get up early. I wonder if he rose early because he was wrestling all night with anxious thoughts and he just couldn't sleep.

I wonder if he was just waiting for daybreak. The call to trust God is not promised to be easy. Verse 4 says, Abraham had a three-day journey to think about where they were headed.

[28 : 06] Three days, this was not a quick and easy decision. There was a painful resolve to walk forward in dependent obedience.

obedience. And the same is true for us. But, but we can pray while walking every difficult and perplexing step, I believe, help my unbelief.

Take another step, I believe, help my unbelief. And then we take the next step in front of us by faith with what we do know about God.

God. It appears that Abraham was still clinging to the Lord's promise as they moved toward the mountain of sacrifice. Verse 5 says that Abraham said to his young men, stay here with the donkey. I and the boy will go over there and worship and then come again to you. The language indicates that Abraham believed he and the boy would both return.

[29 : 11] I don't think he was crossing his fingers behind his back. He doesn't know how God will work it out but his faith harmonizes God's promise of providing offspring through Isaac with God's command to sacrifice Isaac.

Perplexing but we do find some help in the New Testament in regard to the story. Hebrews 11 17-19 says, 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, Abraham considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead. From which figuratively speaking he did receive him back.

So according to this scripture, Abraham recognized that God being God could not fail in his promise. So he must be able to bring what is dead back to life.

He didn't know how but he did know who. God must be able. God can bring what is dead back to life.

[30 : 30] point to receive God's substitute.

In one sense, scripture calls us to emulate Abraham's faith that we're seeing here. Hebrews in the New Testament calls our attention to the faith of Abraham as an example to be commended.

But, that's not the only point of the story. The story, like I said, is not isolated. It's also a signpost pointing to a greater event to come.

Throughout the Bible, God asked prophets to act things out that he said he would do. God called the prophet Hosea to act the part of God in marrying a prostitute.

And he told Ezekiel to lie on his side for over a year to symbolize the siege of Jerusalem. The imagery of this event is meant to point us to see God's purposes for his people in Jesus Christ.

[31 : 44] So let's consider some of the implications of these next few verses in light of that unfolding story of the promised offspring. So Abraham binds his son Isaac in order to offer him as a sacrifice to the Lord.

But as his knife is raised there is divine intervention and a ram is in a nearby bush. So we see in verse 13 it says Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.

Instead of his son. the ram functioned as a substitute for the son. It died so that he could live.

The concept of substitutionary sacrifice was not new. From the very beginning after the first sin of Genesis 3 you remember that God provided a covering for Adam and Eve's shame through the death of an animal.

And this picture we see here of substitutionary sacrifice would have really resounded in the hearts and minds of that original audience. Remember that Moses wrote this story for the people of Israel the offspring of Isaac.

[33 : 03] He wrote it for them after they'd been released from their slavery in Egypt. What did it take for them to be free from their captivity? Do you remember? Every firstborn son would die in the judgment of God unless the families spread the blood of a lamb over their doorpost to indicate their faith in the Lord's offer of escape.

So in a very real sense every father that's reading this in Israel experienced the need to redeem their firstborn sons through God's provision of a substitute.

And then after the Israelites were freed from Egypt God gave them his law. The law was good but it highlighted a pretty significant problem.

The biggest problem. The law revealed how holy God is and how sinful they were. The law didn't save them it pointed out that they needed to be saved.

So they could not be in the presence of a perfect God while they were sinful or unclean. So as a part of his provisions in the law the Lord included animal sacrifices to serve as a substitute for the people and their sins.

[34 : 30] And we know that according to verse 2 in our passage the Lord directed Abraham to a hill in the vicinity of a mountain called Moriah. Well after the institution of the people of Israel we find that it is on this very same mountain that Solomon built the temple.

Right there. Same place. It was the temple. It was there that the substitutionary sacrifices were made day in and day out year after year.

Though God made provisions for sin through these sacrifices they were ultimately temporary and insufficient to fix the problem. So this is the great problem presented in the drama of scripture.

It is the horrendous problem of sin that disconnects the creation from the creator. How can God remain good and just without destroying sinners?

How can sinful people ever be brought back into the presence of a perfect God? How can you and I have any hope of being reconnected to our God?

[35 : 43] But the story of Abraham and Isaac, if you think of it like a sign sitting on that hill to point toward a wonderful building project in the future.

It's pointing forward to the main event, the big building project that gives a picture of the final product and it stakes out the hill until groundbreaking.

And it says, in big red letters, coming soon. That's what it says. Verse 6, if you look at it, 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. The father laid on the son the wood, the very item on which he would be sacrificed the son carried himself.

The sign on the hilltop says, another son in this very spot will also carry wood on his back up a hill in order to be sacrificed. It's coming soon.

[36 : 49] In verse 6, Isaac looks to his father and says, behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? Where is the lamb that will satisfy the demand of God?

Not knowing the fullness of what he was saying, Abraham responds in verse 8, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering. My son, the sign on the hilltop says, God will provide for himself the lamb.

It's coming soon. Both verses 6 and 8 end with, so they went, both of them together. The father and the son work together in harmony to carry out the plan.

So the sign on the hilltop says, another father in the fullness of time will send forth his son who will do all that the father has sent him to do.

It's coming soon. Verse 9, 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.

[38 : 07] Now we don't know the age of Isaac nor how he responded other than what's included here. What we do see is Isaac is obedient. He trusts his father and trusts in God's provision.

He was strong enough to carry a load of wood sufficient for a sacrifice. So he was likely old enough to resist an aged father if he wanted.

So it appears that he willingly submitted to his father in this moment. The sign on the hilltop says that another son will willingly lay down his life.

No one would take his life from him, but he would lay it down on his own accord. It's coming soon.

At the pinnacle of verse 10, as Abraham had his knife raised to slaughter his son, God pressed pause and provided a ram as a substitute for the son.

The provision of a substitute is what prompted Abraham in verse 14. If you look to call that place, the Lord will provide. On the mount of the Lord, it shall be provided.

[39 : 19] The sign on the hilltop says that the Lord shall provide in that very place a once and for all sacrifice to stand in the place of sinners. It's coming soon.

Verse 15 to 18. Help us continue to look forward beyond Abraham and Isaac to another day. The Lord reiterates his promise even more decisively that he will bless Abraham's offspring.

We have yet another installment in this unfolding drama of the offspring. The sign on the hilltop says, in your offspring, all nations of the earth will be blessed.

It's coming soon. So Trinity Grace Church, this story serves as a sign on a hilltop that points forward to something far greater.

And it's my joy this morning to announce to you this wonderful news. The wait is over. It's over. The building project of God is now complete. God the Father has done something about the problem of our sin.

[40 : 27] The story of Abraham and Isaac is intended to help us see that what God demands is impossible. It's impossible. But the good news is this, that God is also the one who provides what he demands.

God provides what he alone demands. John 3.16, for God so loved the world that he gave.

He provided. Jehovah Jireh, our provider. God gave his one and only son. That whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Jesus is the once and for all substitutionary sacrifice for our sin. John the Baptist saw Jesus approaching. He made this stunning declaration.

Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He takes it on himself. A substitute has come. 1 Peter 2.24 gloriously says, Jesus, he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree.

[41 : 40] A substitute has been provided truly once and for all. Why did he do this? 2 Corinthians 5.21 gives us a wonderful explanation.

It is for our sake. For our sake he, God, made him, Jesus, to be sin. Who knew no sin.

So that in him, the sacrifice, we sinners, might become the righteousness of God. This is the great exchange.

This is it. This is what we've been waiting for. This is what the sign was pointing to. Christ takes on all our sin and then he gives you all his righteousness as if you were the ones that did it.

God made a way when there was no way for us. He took the initiative to provide what we could not provide. A substitutionary sacrifice that could perfectly cover our sins so that we might be able to have access to him once again forever.

[42 : 48] Praise to the lamb. Praise be to the lamb of God who takes away our sin. How do you get this? What's the qualification?

To believe in the one the father has sent. Turn from sin and put your trust in Jesus Christ. In a word, receive it.

Receive the substitute. So if you are wondering if you can trust God, if you're wanting to know if you can give him everything, even that which is most precious or beloved.

If you're wondering if God is able and willing to provide in the midst of your uncertainty, if you want to know whether or not God is for you, if you're wondering if God can forgive you, make you clean and bring you close.

Let me quote God to you from Romans 8. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

[44 : 02] 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?

Let's be a church that trusts in the Lord, who graciously provides all that we need in Christ our substitute. May God help us.

Lord, we thank you that you are our provider. Jehovah Jireh. What you demand is perfection. And we can't provide that.

But what you demand, you also provide. We praise you this morning for the Lamb, Jesus Christ, slain for sinners, a ransom to buy us back from the penalty of death so that we can have his righteousness and be with you forever.

Thank you that you save us. Through your substitute, we give you all the praise, all the glory in the name of Jesus, our great Lamb. Amen.

[45 : 19] You've been listening to a message at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at