

The Birth of Issac

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Genesis chapter 21. Just got a few verses today, a few precious verses today. You look with me there. It says,

It says, And she said,

It took a little while for that to settle. That's all right. In a similar way, there are some texts of Scripture that are just a few words.

Our text is one of those. After eight chapters of repeatedly reminding us about the promise that Abraham would be a father of many nations, it devotes seven simple verses to the birth of Isaac.

[3 : 27] It says, It says, Sarah conceived. Sarah gave birth. Sarah gave birth. Sarah laughed.

Sarah laughed. Like that lady in the dinner party saying, Come on, there must be more. Why so quiet? Is this all there really is?

After all the buildup, after all the repeated promises, all the drama, all the tension, just seven verses? But the key to this text is not in what it doesn't say, but in what it does.

It carefully and quietly underlines the promise of God. It carefully reminds us of the promise. It quietly tells us how the promise was fulfilled just as God promised all along.

It may have seemed like things were out of control, that Abraham was too old, that he needed to look somewhere else for an heir, that he needed to figure things out for himself. But the promise of God was actually never uncertain.

[4 : 37] It's important for us to remember this text. God is speaking to us. I believe he has a word for us. God's addressing us. God is calling us to trust him.

God is urging us to take him at his word. The promises of God fill the scripture, but they come down to just a very few core things. I will never leave you. I'll never forsake you.

I'll supply every need of yours. I will deliver you. No good thing will I withhold from you. All things work together for good, and God is calling us to cling to those things.

The promises of God are no less certain today than they were then. All that God has spoken in his word is no less certain. So in a word where we're going, take God at his word and everything else will fall into place.

Take God at his word and everything else will fall into place. I think this text has a message. There's three simple points, principles for living by faith, which is what we're all doing.

[5 : 40] The first is that God keeps his promises. God keeps his promises. God always keeps his promises.

Look at verse 1 and 2. It kind of begins by telling us the facts. It says, The Lord visited Sarah, and the Lord did to Sarah, as he had promised, and Sarah conceived and bore to Abraham a son in his old age.

So it says, The Lord visited Sarah. The Lord came to her. The Lord, she conceived. She bore a son. Sarah finally has a child of her own, finally has a son.

Abraham finally has an heir. It's just wonderfully reminding us that God's promise overcomes every difficulty. Now, before we're told of the promise God made to Abraham, we're told that his wife, Sarah, is barren.

We have it there for you, but if you remember, several weeks ago, we studied this. Genesis 11, 30. Now, Sarah, Abraham's right wife, Sarah, was barren.

[6 : 51] She had no child. So at the beginning, before, we're told that he's going to have a great kingdom. We're told that his wife cannot have children.

And so this difficulty begins when God promises to make a great nation of Abraham. The tension begins in the story.

How is Abraham to become a great nation when his wife cannot have children? Years go by, and this promise continues to be held out while Sarah continues to be barren.

Years go by, and then Abraham still doesn't have a child, and God comes to him. I love this. In Genesis 17, it says, you know what? Your name right now is Abram, which means exalted father.

I'm going to make it Abraham, which means father of a multitude. I mean, can you imagine being Abraham now and going to get a reservation at a restaurant?

[7 : 53] You know, I'd like a table. What's your name? Abraham. How many are in your party? Two. What?

Two? I mean, where are all your kids? I have none. I mean, every time someone uttered this name, they knew it meant father of a multitude, his friends.

Father of a multitude. Yeah, right. You got nothing. But the difficulty is not just barrenness.

The difficulty is also age. Genesis carefully underlines this as you go. Abraham was 75 when God called him out of Ur of the Chaldeans. Abraham was 86 when Ishmael was born to one of Sarah's servants.

Abraham turns 100 and still has no children. While Sarah is already 90.

[8 : 55] As we're sometimes painfully made aware, the ability to conceive and carry a child does not stay the same as you age. It declines. When the Lord comes to Abraham at 100 and says he's going to have other children, Abraham laughs.

Genesis 17, 17 says, Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, Shall a child be born to a man who's 100? Shall Sarah, who's 90 years old, bear a child?

Just verses later when Sarah heard this as well, the Lord promised to her she laughed as well. Genesis 18 says, Do you see, the life of Abraham is making clear the promise of God is not stopped by difficulty.

It's not thwarted by barrenness. It does not wear out with age. Is anything too hard for the Lord? The promise of God is not dependent on anything but God.

And God is not dependent on anything. That's what that means. Is anything too hard for him? No! He's the God who created everything with a word.

[10 : 21] Ex nihilo. Without anything else. I love that kid song. My God is so big, so strong, and so mighty. There's nothing my God cannot do.

Amen. Amen. But this word is not just telling us God's promise overcomes every difficulty. It also overcomes disobedience.

You know, life does not just include twists and turns. It includes ditches that we stumble into. One song by Jason Isabel captures this well.

He says, From the sky, the highway straight as it could be. A string pulled home to Tennessee. That's when we all cheer.

And still, somehow, those ditches took a better part of me. From the sky, the highway straight as it could be. You know, you could read Genesis this morning.

[11 : 22] You could read Genesis 12 to 21, and you might think it's a straight line. But nothing could be further from the truth. It's filled with ditches.

It's a long road and many difficulties and many ditches of disobedience. After receiving the promise, just verses later, days later, when they're passing through Egypt, the threat of dying is coming upon Abraham and Sarah.

He says, Hey, you just tell everybody that you're my sister. That way, if they kill you or they take you into their house, then perhaps they'll leave me alone and the promise will continue through me.

That's not the will of God at all. We see the same thing when Sarah can't have a child. Years go by. She says, Here's my servant. Go into her and bring a child to me.

We see it later on. Right before this in Genesis 21 when they're passing through the Negev. And he does the same thing. He says he lies. He tells his wife to lie and say it's my sister to try to protect himself and protect the promise.

[12 : 37] All of that is not good protecting the promise. It's just scheming. It's disobedience by scheming. By trying to get what God has promised by taking it into your own hands.

It's lying and deceiving and cheating. We do the same thing. We think the ends justify the means. We stop waiting and take things into our own control.

But listen. The brevity, the shortness of Genesis 21 is meant and the quietness of it is meant to say all the difficulty, all the delay, and all the disobedience are finally over.

And the Lord comes. Look in those verses again. It just carefully reminds three times. The Lord visited Sarah as he said.

The Lord did it to Sarah as he promised. Sarah conceived Borson in his old age at the time of which the Lord had spoken to him.

[13 : 41] Threading through those facts is a careful emphasis on the promise of God. The disobedience, the difficulty, and the delay were no match for the promise, Derek Kidner says so well, so simply.

The matter of fact style and the emphasis on what God had said, spoken, spoken, expressed the quiet precision of his control.

Genesis 32 is telling us the promise of God was never hanging in the balance. It rested securely in his control.

In this life of faith, we must remember God always keeps his promises. Several months ago, my wife and I went to the parliament.

We visited parliament in Quebec City. Quebec City is the capital of the province of Quebec. And as you know, Canada is a part of the United Kingdom.

[14 : 51] So they're under, now they're under King Charles III. When we toured the parliament, we saw something very fascinating. They had this massive case with a scepter in it.

You know, scepter, kind of like this globe thing on top. A beautiful golden scepter representing the king's rule over the land of Canada.

They told us that every time the parliament met, the president would walk in or the moderator of the parliament would walk in. And behind him, someone would walk in carrying the scepter.

And then they place it down on the table so that during all their debate, all their discussion, all their deliberation, they would know that everything they're doing is under the rule of King Charles III.

We have a scepter as well. The scepter of the word of God. All that happens to us happens in accordance with his word and under his certain, unshifting control.

[15 : 57] Oh, isn't that wonderful? And the life of faith, it's just a call to take up the word, to hold on to it. The life of faith is a path in the dark.

And it's a path that's lit up by the word of God. So we go to the word. We say, oh, Lord, I know that no good thing you will withhold from me, but I need faith to believe. I know that the sun sets me free indeed, but I need faith to turn and stand on it.

I know that those who sow will reap in joy, but I need faith to act on it. God always keeps his promises.

Point two for walking in the dark, walking by faith is obedience is always best. God always keeps his promises. Obedience is always best.

The text continues and describes very simply, in a lot of ways, Abraham's response of obedience. Look in verse 3. Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac.

[17 : 04] And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight years old, as God had commanded him. Three times, you'll notice, in these three verses, three to five, is the name Isaac.

Isaac, underlining. Each verse includes this name, Isaac. Each time that Isaac is spoken in these three verses, it includes the description, his son.

His son, Isaac. His son, Isaac. It's emphasizing, this is the son. This is the one.

This is the one. This is the one that will bring blessing on all the nation. This is the one whom he's been waiting for for 25 years. And along with his emphasis, it just simply says, Abraham named his son Isaac.

Then Abraham circumcised his son. Now, why is the text telling us that? Because God commanded him to. God commanded him in chapter 17 to name his son Isaac.

[18 : 14] Again, chapter 17, God commanded him to circumcise his son on the eighth day. The Lord kept his word and provided a son. Abraham keeps the word and obeys and circumcises his son.

That's what it's getting at. And obedience is always right in life of faith. That's what we must remember. Abraham is showing us not merely the way to walk by faith. When we receive what is promised, Abraham is showing us the way to walk at all times.

The life of faith is one in which obedience is always best. You know, in the most famous of the Arabian Nights stories, Aladdin discovers that magic lamp.

You remember that? He rubs the lamp. I don't know what I'm doing with my hands. But he rubs the lamp and the genie comes out and says, Your wish is my command. I mean, you know, I could do with that.

Just for a couple days, you know, just one day. You know, just a genie doing my command. The genie is expressing what a servant does to a master. A servant says to a master, To hear is to obey.

[19 : 25] Everything I hear from you, I will obey. In the life of faith, there's meant to be this similar hearing and obeying. Hearing and obeying.

Who are the ones that truly hear are the ones that obey. The ones who just hear and don't obey aren't the ones that have ears to hear. It runs to the scripture. Who are my brothers and sisters?

Our Lord said outside the house in Capernaum. They are not the ones by blood. They are the ones who do the will of my Father in heaven. Those who obey, who do his will.

Obedience is always best. And the life of faith walking in the dark. But it's not always the path we choose. You know, sometimes I just feel like I do this. Far too often than I would like.

I forget to obey. One of my favorite verses I prayed earlier is, Call on me in the day of trouble. I will deliver you and you will honor me. I don't know how many times I've prayed this verse for a difficult day, a difficult meeting, a difficult decision.

[20 : 26] But how many times I've failed to turn back and honor the Lord when he's delivered? How many times he's gone to bed, forgot it the next morning?

How often are we like the nine lepers who are healed and don't turn back? If there's any time in Abraham's life where he could have been tempted to not obey, it's this one.

He's got this baby that he's been longing for. And yet the first thing that's recorded is he goes and obeys the Lord. I fear that sometimes we often halfway obey.

We don't want to be associated with those who disobey. And so we kind of halfway obey the Lord. We give some of what we should back to the Lord.

We don't want to be those who do not give anything. We confess some of what we should to our friends, to others. You know, sometimes your kid confesses something.

[21 : 29] You're like, okay, what else? Yeah, it's like, well, the real thing's down here, you know. We do that too. We serve in some of the ways we should. But we do not do all of what we should.

Far too often we don't do it fully with our own, with all our hearts. I mean, wonderfully, as we know, the gospel is not to obey and be right with God.

Blessed are those who do not work and are blessed to receive the righteousness of God. That's the truth of the gospel. Not to obey, to be right with God.

And yet, obedience after becoming right with God is our food. The old hymn says that the duty becomes the delight.

We become like our Lord. My food is to do the will of him who sent me. We refuse halfway houses and halfway obedience. We want our hearts to be united.

[22 : 30] It's David prayed. Unite my heart to fear your name. We reject halfway obedience as disobedience because we long to obey.

Still, other times, I believe, we refuse to obey. Sometimes we refuse to obey because of the risk. We don't want to be known as those who do not affirm this or that.

We don't want to lose friends. We don't want to lose friends, man. I've lost so many. It's not a good path.

Not that I'm trying to make enemies, but you know what I mean? We don't want trouble. We want peace and harmony. Just one day where there's not a fight. We want security.

It's so easy to stumble in this way. It's so easy to begin dodging the risk of telling the truth. But once you stop telling the truth, you're lying. That's the truth.

[23 : 38] Charles Spurgeon exhorts us, helps us. My dear brothers and sisters, it will sometimes happen that to do the right thing will appear most disastrous.

It will shipwreck your fortune. Ever made a decision like that? And bring you into trouble. But I charge you to do the right thing at any cost.

Instead of your being honored, respected, and accounted as a leader in the Christian church, you will be regarded as an eccentric and bigoted if you speak straight out. Anybody been accused of being a bigot?

But speak straight out and never mind what comes of it. You and I have nothing to do with what becomes of us or our reputation or what becomes of the world or what becomes of heaven itself.

Our one business is to do the Father's will. To hear is to obey. That's the line. Sometimes we refuse to obey because we're unwilling.

[24 : 47] Life, life hits us broadside. Sometimes things go sideways. Sometimes our hopes are dashed. Our dreams are crushed.

When it does, we're knocked down and have a hard time wondering, will we ever get up? The question in those moments is not, are we unable to obey?

Or are we unable to obey? Or are we unwilling to obey? You know, sometimes there are moments in our lives when we're unable to obey.

We're so fainthearted, so broken, so discouraged that you cannot think of or figure out the next step to make. There are those times when life goes sideways to that degree.

But I feel that far more than that is are we unwilling to obey? Are we so disappointed, so frustrated, so bitter that we do not want to make the step we know we need to?

[25 : 51] Most often that's what I find in counseling. I'll never forget when I was 13 years old, my best friend and my cousin was riding a bike and was hit by a drunk driver and killed immediately.

To say it's crushing on our little town and on me personally is a serious understatement. One week later, my uncle, one of the elders in the church, was standing up serving communion.

You know what that said to my little 13-year-old heart? I'm not giving in. I'm not folding the cards. I'm not giving in to self-pity.

I'm not going to wallow. I'm going to keep moving. Are you willing to be helped? Are you wallowing in self-pity and sulking?

I mean, I say that with all the love in the world in my heart. Are you willing to stand up? Are you willing to be encouraged? Sometimes we're discouraged, and our problem is not that we're not being encouraged, but that we're unwilling to be.

[27 : 02] Thou shalt not encourage me. I mean, sometimes our hearts are like that. That is not the place to go. Are you willing to be helped? Are you willing to be?

This side of the cross, we must know that there is no pit so deep that Christ cannot reach, because this is the one who parted the heavens to come down to be crushed on a Roman cross for you.

So in the life of faith, obedience is always best. Take God at his word. Take a hold of his word and take God at it. Hold him to it, just like the prophets of old had.

Trust him that everything else will fall into place. Thirdly, in this life of faith, the best is always yet to come. The best is always yet to come.

Our text concludes with Sarah's response to the promise. Look at verse 6, and Sarah said, God has made laughter for me. Everyone who hears will laugh over me.

[28 : 13] Sarah said very little the past seven chapters, but what she says here is staggering. Look back at Genesis 16. We have it for you.

Look at what she says about the Lord. Sarah said to Abraham, Behold, now the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Go into my servant, Abraham.

It may be that I shall obtain children by her. The Lord has prevented me. The Lord has said, The Lord has said, No glory here. No life here.

But look at what she says here. God has made laughter for me. I didn't just conceive. That's what we're celebrating this morning with baby dedication. I didn't just conceive. God has done it.

God has done it in my old age. God has done it to prove to the world that he is glorious. It's an astonishing, heart-scratching, head-scratching joy.

[29 : 10] God has done it to the world that he is glorious. God has done it to the world that he is glorious. God has done it to the world that he is glorious. It's that overwhelming joy, an unexpected answer to prayer. I mean, I love those little videos that often go viral on whatever.

Whatever your poison is. Of like a soldier coming home from the war and surprising his family.

Surprising his little kid. Sawdust always gets in my eye while I'm watching those videos. Got to get it out. I'm just crying. And it's that joy. It's astonishing.

Dad, what are you doing here? That's what's going on in Abraham's forest. She's overwhelmed. The Lord has done this wonderful thing. The Lord has blessed her.

That's what's happening. She said, everyone who hears of my story. You remember? Our story was traveling around town. I was Abraham, the father of a multitude with no kids. Well, now the Lord has heard.

[30 : 10] That's my story. The Lord has delivered. Not only that, there's a lot of laughter in these verses. In five verses, the root word for laughter comes again and again.

We see that. The root word for laughter comes twice in verse 6. That she laughed. But also the name Isaac is literally he laughed. So this idea is that everything about Sarah now will be defined by this astonishing laughter.

This astonishing joy and amazement. I just love this. There's so many incredible things going on in Sarah's response. Let me name a few. The Lord is covering her shame with laughter.

Some of you need this. You remember the first time Sarah laughed? It wasn't a laugh of joy. It was a laugh of unbelief. The Lord said, did you laugh when I said I was going to give you a child?

No, no. Are you sure you don't? No, no, no. She's afraid. She's ashamed. The Lord, she could have just said, forget it. You know, you're not going to believe in me? I don't want anything to do with you.

[31 : 23] The Lord gives her a child. Then the Lord names her child laughter, not so he can throw it in her face so that she can remember. The Lord is covering all her laughter of unbelief with a laughter of joy and amazement.

That's what they are. God is not a God who comes to repay you. His heart is not bad. His heart is good. And that's what we see. The Lord said, now everyone will call his name.

And they'll think, man, look at what Sarah, look at what the Lord did with her. Praise the Lord. He covers her shame. He swallows her sorrow with joy.

That's the other thing going in. Can you imagine waiting 90 years for a child? Can you imagine the sorrow of waiting and waiting through many, many years of barrenness?

But unto her a son is born. The sorrow swallows the joy. Years ago, we had a lot of trouble getting pregnant or staying pregnant.

[32 : 34] Kim had a miscarriage in 2009. In God's kindness, a year later, we had our son, oldest son, Rev.

But after Rev, we had two more miscarriages. We longed to have a family. I remember walking around the neighborhood that we lived in. Lord, come on. I'm taking you at your word.

But I want a family. We sent tissue to the specialist to see what was going on with Kim's womb.

We got our blood drawn to find out our DNA or genetic code, genetic makeup. And then Kim got pregnant.

And then while she was still pregnant, we found out the results from our genetic testing. Without going into a bunch of details, a bit overwhelming. We found out I have a rare genetic condition. There's a few screws loose.

[33 : 45] No, I'm just kidding. They're all there, I think. I put in a few extra. Falling and doing dumb stuff. But we found out that theoretically, with a genetic doctor, theoretically, 88% of our conception should end in miscarriage.

And here we have this baby in the womb. We're suddenly assaulted by what's going to happen to this baby. What if she's deformed?

What if something's wrong with her? What if she's born and only lives a few moments or a few days or a few months? We decided against any invasive testing because we decided we wanted this baby.

We wanted to protect this baby in any way we could. And I'm telling you, it was a fight, you know. We fought these fears every day. Kim had an OB that said, why don't you just come in every week for an ultrasound to help you?

She went every week from like week 12 all the way to 40. And then on June 14, 2013, God gave us a little girl that we named Wren.

[35 : 05] She was normal. She was normal. As normal as an Alexander can be. My dad's a pediatrician.

I'll never forget. So we had this baby. My dad's mom rushed up there. My brother and his wife rushed up there. My dad comes in the room with that concerned joy on his face and begins to check her out.

The concerned heart of a grandpa. It's just baby okay. I'll never forget later that afternoon.

A friend called and had walked with us through it all. He said, enjoy it, brother. All that pain is being swallowed up with joy.

That's what today is. All that pain is being swallowed up with joy. That's what's going on with Sarah. All that pain is being swallowed up with joy.

[36 : 08] And beloved, I'm here to tell you that the best is always yet to come in the life of faith. There is a great swallowing day planned for your life. Over which all the pain and all the trials, all the tribulation will be swallowed up with an overwhelming weight of glory and joy.

The story, this story is placed in our Bible to whisper to us that for the Christian, on the other side of sorrow is joy. That's where this is going.

Blessed are those who weep now. For you will laugh. You will laugh. You'll look back on your life, on whatever's going on, on whatever's weighing you, and you'll laugh.

You will laugh. You'll be amazed. You'll be blown away. Weeping may tarry for the night. But joy is coming in the morning. Joy is coming. God wants his people to laugh at the days to come.

Not because tomorrow doesn't bring trouble, but because trouble will not remain. How do we know for sure? Because Abraham's greater son, Jesus Christ, has come.

[37 : 16] I love the first announcement. The first public announcement of Jesus Christ. Fear not. I bring you good news of great joy for all the people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord. This one is not the one that's going to come and rescue you from feeling lonely or feeling sad or unworthy or anything.

He's coming to rescue you from the wrath of God. To set you right with God forever. That is the gospel we offer. Not a gospel of health, wealth, and prosperity. But a gospel of eternal life and endless joy.

That's what he came to do. To cancel forever the sin, the record of debt. To remove forever. To satisfy forever the wrath of God that should be hanging over like a dark cloud over all your future days.

And to satisfy it once and forever. And then promising a feast that swallows it up completely. The best. He's always yet to come.

[38 : 21] Always. Take God at his word. Everything else will fall into place.

We're in a fight of faith. We're fighting a good fight of faith. We're walking by faith, not by sight. Some of us are in a season of prosperity.

Everything's going according to plan. All our prayers are being answered. You know, you get those seasons. Oh, my gosh. Others of us are not there. You know, the truth of this is, with Wren, we experience this life swallowing.

But that doesn't always happen. In the mystery of God's providence, sometimes the swallowing will be in the life to come.

We know that the word says, for those who love him, call according to his purpose, all things work together for good. If you're right there, I want to spur you on.

[39 : 34] You're walking in the dark. You know what you do in the dark. Hold on to the word. Hold on to the promise. Press forward in faith.

Even when your eyes are filled with tears. Dr. Piper says it so well.

In Psalm 121, it says, those who sow in tears shall reap with joy. Dr. Piper says, when there are simple, straightforward jobs to be done, and you are full of sadness, tears are flowing easily, go ahead.

Do the job of tears. Be realistic. Say to your tears, tears, I feel you. You make me want to quit life.

But there's a field to be sown. Dishes to be washed. Car to be fixed. Sermon to be written. I know you will wet my face several times today, but I have work to do, and you will just have to go with me.

[40 : 55] I intend to take the bag of seeds and sow. If you come along then, you'll have to wet the rose. That's faith.

Then on the basis of God's word, taking God his word, say, tears, I know you will not stay forever. The very fact that I just do my work, tears and all, will in the end bring a harvest of blessing.

So go ahead and flow if you must. But I believe. Though I do not yet see it or feel it fully, I believe. I believe.

The simple work of my sowing will bring sheets of harvest. My tears will return to joy. That's truth. It's the word of God.

God always keeps his promises. Obedience is always best below. And the best is always yet to come. Let us press on.

[42 : 00] Father in heaven, we offer ourselves to you sincerely and completely. God, we refuse any halfway house.

We want our heart to be a sanctuary for you. That you would dwell in our heart by faith. That we would have a sincere faith, united in the fear of you and the love of you.

God, there's nothing we want than to do what you say. We want to obey. Wonderfully, we've been satisfied. You have made us content. You've set us free. And now, though, with our freedom, we want to obey you.

We want to please you. In the dark. Help us, Lord. Follow our Father. Follow Sarah.

Taking you at your word. We pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.

[43 : 06] For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com. Thank you. Bum Bum Bum