

## God Promised a Sacrifice

Genesis 22: 1 – 18<sup>1</sup>

### God Promised a Son.

Last Sunday morning we saw that when Adam and Eve fell into sin, God promised a Son. To the serpent who tempted them by lying about the character of God, He said,

<sup>15</sup> And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” Genesis 3:15 NIV842

Then, God in His mercy

<sup>21</sup> ...made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them. Genesis 3:21 ESV

“And truly,” wrote John Calvin,

...it was a sad and horrid spectacle; that he, in whom recently the glory of the Divine image was shining, should lie hidden under fetid skins to cover his own disgrace, and that there should be more comeliness in a dead animal than in a living man!<sup>3</sup>

So, God, having promised a son, sent the man out of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken, and the human race started off on the long and winding road that would lead eventually to Bethlehem where, in the fullness of time, God would keep that promise,

<sup>6</sup> For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given... Isaiah 9:6 KJV4

God keeps His promises. But it wouldn't be enough for the Son of God to merely take His place in history, even though He was recognized by some at the time as having been born “king of the Jews.”<sup>5</sup> The Son, even according to the promise in Genesis 3, would have to become a sacrifice. In crushing the head of “that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan,”<sup>6</sup> the Son Himself would have to be stricken, and while the serpent would be the immediate cause, we're told that ultimately,

<sup>10</sup> ...it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief... Isaiah 53:10 ESV

And this is portrayed for us nowhere better than in the text we read earlier from Genesis 22, where a father took his son into the wilderness according to the will of God to make of him a burnt offering and sacrifice.

### Take Your Son, Your Only Son...

Now a word about illustrated Bibles... Classic paintings and illustrations may have left us the impression that Isaac was a very small child, or even a toddler. I have heard sermons that

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture citations, unless otherwise noted, *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984).

<sup>3</sup> John Calvin and John King, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis, vol. 1* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 183.

<sup>4</sup> *The Holy Bible: King James Version*, electronic ed. of the 1769 edition of the 1611 Authorized Version. (Bellingham WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1995), Is 9:6.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Matthew 2:2.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Revelation 12:9.

portray a small child lying on an altar of stone, begging his father through tears not to do this horrible thing. On top of that, bad theology and biblical illiteracy have left us thinking that Abraham went to that mountain fully expecting to come home alone—that he closed his ears to the pleas of his little boy and just raised the knife. But here's the thing. None of that is true.

First, as to whether or not Isaac was a toddler, in the text itself, the word used to describe the two servants who accompanied Abraham and Isaac into the wilderness on this occasion, translated “young men” in verse 3, is the very same word used to describe Isaac in verse 5. It stands to reason then that if the servants were “young men” (and of course they were), then Isaac was the same.

Then, there's verse 6.

<sup>6</sup> And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son... Genesis 22:6 ESV

Now, I've seen pictures of a small boy carrying maybe enough kindling to roast a marshmallow, but the amount of wood required to burn even a ram or a sheep would be far more substantial. Even a smallish boy would not have been able to carry it.

Finally, there's this. Josephus in his work, Antiquities of the Jews, wrote;

Now they had brought with them everything necessary for a sacrifice excepting the animal that was to be offered only. **Now Isaac was twenty-five years old.**<sup>7</sup>

Does that change the picture here? Rather than a little boy unknowingly carrying a bundle of sticks to his death, is there a portrayal in our text of another condemned man who would willingly carry the means of his own death? See, if Isaac was old enough and fit enough to carry the wood, as the text indicates he was, then he was probably old enough and fit enough to fight off his father, who was probably about 120 years old at the time, unless of course the father and son discussed all of this, and the son agreed to go willingly if that's what it took to be obedient to God.

So, once again, are there is the portrayal of a covenant struck between a Father and Son, even before the world began, in which the Father said, “If we're going to save them, someone will have to die.” And the Son replied, “Not my will, but yours alone be done.”

### He Who had Received the Promises.

And what about Abraham's blind obedience to this horrific command? Well, we have a divinely inspired commentary on this passage in Hebrews 11, which tells us more about this particular test of faith. Hebrews 11, verse 17:

<sup>17</sup> 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... Hebrews 11:17 ESV

And what promises? Well, the very next verse tells us that this son was the one

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<sup>7</sup> Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 43.

<sup>18</sup> ...of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." Hebrews 11:18 ESV

The whole thing, then, from beginning to end is a test of faith, and we're told that once again, Abraham believed God. He went to the mountain believing—knowing—that God would keep his promises. His was not blind obedience, it was the obedience of the sort of faith that perseveres as seeing Him who is unseen. Even so, Hebrews 11, verse 19:

<sup>19</sup> He considered that God was able **even to raise him from the dead**, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. Hebrews 11:19 ESV

So, Abraham obeyed because he believed. It's that simple. That is what saving faith does. Abraham, and most likely his son too, believed that even if Isaac had died there on that mountain, God's promises were so absolutely certain that God would have raised Isaac from the dead before he would let one single word go unfulfilled. This is the logic of true faith.

And the reward of such faith? Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son,

<sup>11</sup> But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." <sup>12</sup> 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."

<sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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." Genesis 22:11–14 ESV

Consider that statement for just a minute. On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided. Ultimately, here in Genesis 22, we have, not a story about a god who is so cruel and demanding that he would make his servant give up his son as a burnt offering, it was God who stayed his hand, and God knew from the beginning how the story would end. In other words, God is not just another character in the story; He's the living author.

So, what we have here is the black and white version of a story that would be retold 1500 years later in living color when another Father, according to a covenant that he made with his Son before the world began, would lay the wood of the sacrifice on his Son's shoulders and watch as he stumbled beneath the weight. And He would take him to a mountain (almost certainly the same one) and he would stretch him out (not on an altar, but on a Roman cross). The biggest difference is, in the latter story, when the moment came for the dagger to fall, no one would stay his hand. Like it says in the song,

How great the pain of searing loss, the Father turns his face away...

But in this version, we **know** that the Son was a willing participant, and we **know** that it was for the same reason, because the Son, above all (even above Abraham, his grandfather

according to the flesh), believed the promises of God. He trusted above all in the God who said to Abraham,

<sup>16</sup> ...“By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup> I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, <sup>18</sup> and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.” Genesis 22:16–18 ESV

“What does that have to do with Jesus, the Son?” you may ask. Well, once again we have a divinely inspired commentary. In Galatians, chapter 3, Paul wrote:

<sup>16</sup> Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ. Galatians 3:16 ESV

See, the promises made to Abraham were never made to Abraham and to all the generations of his offspring that would be born naturally through Isaac. They were made to Abraham and to his seed (singular), “meaning one person, who is Christ.”<sup>8</sup> So, it was not to the descendants of Isaac, Jacob, or the people of Israel then—not to the blood descendants of Abraham—that these promises were made. It was Abraham and to Jesus, who is the Christ. This is the promise of Genesis 22, verse 17:

<sup>17</sup> I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore... Genesis 22:17 ESV

But there’s another promise in verse 17. Yes,

<sup>17</sup> I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore... Genesis 22:17 ESV

But also,

...your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies... Genesis 22:17 ESV

See, the Son would become a sacrifice, but as we will see in coming weeks, if the Lord is willing, this too is only the beginning of the story. In Psalm 110, verses 1 and 2, God says to the Son,

<sup>1</sup> ...“Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.” <sup>2</sup> The LORD sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies! Psalm 110:1–2 ESV

And quoting this Psalm in 1st Corinthians 15, the Apostle Paul reminds us that Christ must reign until God has subjected all of his enemies beneath his feet, which will take place finally and definitively at the resurrection of the dead.

### Father Abraham Had Many Sons.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Galatians 3:16 NIV84.

But there's one more promise spoken to Abraham and to his offspring in Genesis 22. It's found in verse 18, which says,

<sup>18</sup> ...in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice." Genesis 22:18 ESV

Now, this has often been mistaken as a promise that God will bless all people through the physical descendants of Abraham, that is, the modern day state of Israel, but this promise was always—always—"spoken to Abraham and to his seed...meaning one person, who is Christ." So, here, above all (if that is possible), is the Gospel spoken to the patriarch, Abraham. In Christ, and through Christ, the blessing of God would be given to people of every tribe, language, and nation.

But, just one more thing. Do we believe this? In Romans 4, Paul wrote that

<sup>13</sup> ...the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith...in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, <sup>17</sup> as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. Romans 4:13–17 ESV

Hebrews 8 tells us that God's covenant in Christ is enacted on even better promises than those of the old covenant, so, if anything we have far more reason to believe and to entrust ourselves to God than any of the patriarchs. Still, we learn from them.

Abraham believed God, and with the logic of true faith, he reasoned that God was able even to raise the dead. So, when God commanded him to take his son Isaac into the wilderness and offer him there as a sacrifice, there was nothing else to be done. His faith declared that God was both good, and faithful, and if God was both good and faithful, then he must be obeyed.

We, of course have the word of prophecy made more certain. We have seen God's goodness and faithfulness demonstrated to us in the sacrifice of His own Son for salvation of His people. But does that affect the way we live? Does it affect the way that we deal with bad news? In the midst of all that we experience in this life, do we trust in the unfailing goodness of the God who gave His only Son as a sacrifice for us and for our salvation.

We can, and we must. Because Genesis 22 is not just good news for Abraham and his physical children; it is good news for the world. It is the gospel, as God proclaimed that good word to patriarchs long centuries ago, and through them, to us,

<sup>26</sup> ...for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. <sup>27</sup> For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup>

**And *if you are Christ's*, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.**

Galatians 3:26–29 ESV

It's true then. "Father Abraham had many sons; many sons had Father Abraham." And, in Christ, "I am one of them, and so are you..." because on the mountain of the Lord, God promised a sacrifice, and God keeps His promises. He always has, and He always will, so let's just praise the Lord