

Genesis 22:1-18

Lent 2, March 5, 2023
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After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ² 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." ³ 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. ⁴ On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. ⁵ Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." ⁶ 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. ⁷ And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" ⁸ Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ¹² 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." ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ 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." ¹⁵ And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven ¹⁶ and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ 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, ¹⁸ and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

The painting on the front cover of your bulletin is entitled "The Lord Provides," painted by Yvonne Benzinger in 1991. There's clearly a lot going on here, such a mishmash of vivid colors and shapes, that when you first look at it, you can't really tell what's going on. If you had this painting hanging on your wall at home, guests might walk past a hundred times before they really start to look and recognize that it's *not* just a random array of colors. What it *is*, is a painting of the text that we just read. If you examine the painting, you can see Abraham there, dagger outstretched, Isaac in front of him. You can make out an altar, a sacrificial lamb in front. And if you look closely, you see the Angel of the Lord right behind Abraham. There's probably a few other details that I might have missed, but it's the type of painting that if you study it longer, you'd probably start to notice even more little details.

That's really kind of the same way the Bible is. You could read it through a hundred times, and still on the one-hundred and first time find some new details, notice a few things you'd missed before. It's a book so chockfull of depth and wisdom, that we *need* to study it over and over again, and be taught more and more, because there's always more there.

That's the case with our text here today, too. This is probably one of the hardest accounts from Scripture to read, one that rightfully might leave you disgusted, because the premise is disgusting. We have a man willing to kill his young son, his only son. He leads him to his death, he ties him up and lays him on an altar. He raises a knife above the boy. The scene laid out in our text is so colorful and distracting and abstract, so shocking and offensive to us, that we could potentially miss the meaning behind it. And yet as we dig in and look a little more closely, we find a scene that is truly beautiful. So, as we dig into the text today, we'll be **Looking from Mt. Moriah to Mt. Calvary.**

- I. We'll see a father's willing sacrifice
- II. We'll see a son's unquestioning obedience
- III. We'll see a lamb offered as a substitute

Sacrifice isn't something that we're all too familiar with in America. If we make sacrifices, typically it's something like eating leftovers for dinner instead of going to eat at a restaurant. Our types of sacrifices are buying a new 50" TV instead of the 72" TV that we really want. We really don't have to often make genuine sacrifices. And I think that's one reason why this account stands out so prominently in our minds, because this *was* a genuine sacrifice. The Lord was testing Abraham—told him to sacrifice his son, his only son Isaac, as an offering to the Lord.

This is an account that's so familiar to us, that we might not really think of Abraham as a real person. But he *was* a *real* person, just like us. He was a real person who, together with his wife, tried again and again and again to have a child. Years went by, all hope was given up, until the Lord brought about, finally, the birth of this beautiful child. And this was a real family that had real concerns, real love between them, real work before them, real activities they liked to do together, real plans for their collective future. And then God threw a wrench into that happy, little family. ***"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."***

I don't know if you've ever asked yourself, "What would I have done if I were in Abraham's shoes?" I've asked myself that many times. We see Abraham so resolute to follow God's Word, seemingly never questioning, just going, and I think that most of us probably assume, "I could not have done that." Yet, I'm not sure that is entirely true. The Bible tells us exactly *why* Abraham followed through on this command. It wasn't because of any inner strength of character within him that would set him apart from weaklings like us. No, God identifies the reason in the letter to the Hebrews: ***"By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac..."*** (Hebrews 11:17) *By faith*, he did this. Which is to say, that it wasn't *his* strength that helped him follow through, but *God's* strength that overcame his fears.

You see, ***"By faith,"*** Abraham knew a few things about the Lord. For one thing, He *knew* that God loved Him. He *knew* that God was merciful. He *knew* that God had blessed him. And He also *knew* that God had promised to bless all the people of the earth through this boy, Isaac. And even though He had not seen the fulfillment of this promise of universal blessing, and even though now it seemed with every step that this promise was falling further into doubt, He believed. He believed that faithful God, in love, would figure out a way to make this whole ordeal work out. And so Abraham drew the knife and held it above his own son, because he had faith in the one Who had told him to do so.

Now, it's easy to make a sacrifice for someone who loves you, and whom you love back—maybe not a sacrifice like this—but if you have someone who truly loves you and whom you love in return, it's a lot easier to sacrifice your time or energy to offer them help. And Abraham knew he was sacrificing his son to a God who loved him dearly. But with that thought in mind, let's turn our attention from Mt. Moriah to Mt. Calvary. There on Mt. Calvary, we see another dearly beloved Son being sacrificed by His Father. Except, this time, the Father isn't doing it for someone who loves Him. He's doing it for a world of people that He knows *does not* care, a people who cried out against His Son, ***“Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”*** (John 19:6)

Yes, this Father is raising the knife over His own beloved Son, His only child, all for a people who hate Him, who mock Him, who constantly ignore Him, who pretend He doesn't exist. The Apostle Paul paints the picture of this sacrifice for us in his letter to the Romans: ***“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*** (Romans 5:6-8) This is another very real sacrifice—the heart-wrenching, agonizing account of a Father who had to turn His back on His own Son-in-need to take care of others instead. There is the Son on the sacrificial altar, crying out, ***“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”*** (Matthew 27:46) And this is another scene that we could look at and get lost in, but when you look closely, you see great love painted here. The love of God who considered each of you worth this costly sacrifice. And if sacrificing His own Son meant that even only one of you might be saved, He would have done it. Because He would have been doing it for you.

If we look back on that scene on Mt. Moriah, we can watch closely and start to notice a few other details. Now we see a son carrying the wood up the hill on his back, following his father unquestioningly. And I don't think it's a coincidence that Abraham laid the wood on Isaac's shoulders to carry it up the hill. We can clearly see here a parallel to Jesus. As Isaac follows his father up the mountain, a question arises in his mind. ***“Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”*** Isaac has been a part of many such sacrifices by this point in his life, and the fact that there was no lamb would have been very obvious to Isaac, very out of the ordinary. Abraham's response: ***“God will provide Himself a lamb for the burnt offering, my son.”***

Abraham was not just lying to the boy to get him to stop asking questions. Again, Abraham had faith. And not a generic faith—just a blind trust that everything would work out. He had faith in God's promises, promises which had been made regarding this boy Isaac. And Isaac shares that same faith. So, the rest of the hike, no words are spoken, none recorded for us anyways. All we read is, ***“So they went, both of them together.”*** This sentence has been described as the most poignant and eloquent silence described in all of literature. It's the silence of a young man with unquestioning obedience to his father. The silence of a father who is knowingly leading his son to his death. Even as Isaac is laid upon the altar, that silence is continued, neither of them saying a word but simply trusting in faith.

If we shift our focus to Mt. Calvary, we see the same silent obedience. Isaiah records the scene for us in his prophecy: ***“He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.”*** (Isaiah 53:7) Jesus too was led by His Father up that mountain, carrying the wood of the

cross on His back, the whole way in silent obedience. He knew what was coming, but He trusted His Father. He knew what He had come to do. And so He went on in silence, even as He was beaten and nailed to the cross, the silence continued. And then...*God* spoke. The Son broke the silence as Jesus cried out, ***"It is finished."*** (John 19:30) The sacrifice was complete. The Son of God gave up His life, and it was finished. All of it. All of our sins with their condemnation, finished. Our forgiveness, finished. The opening of the door of heaven to sinners like you and me, finished. Taken care of. The sacrifice was made, and our debt was paid. Jesus endured death with silent obedience so that we might enjoy life with songs of joy.

Of course, this is where the two accounts from the two mountains differ. Because our Genesis account did not end in the son's death. Thankfully, a substitute was offered. As Abraham raised his dagger over his son Isaac, the Angel of the Lord appears. And maybe you didn't know this, but every time in the Old Testament when we come across ***"The Angel of the LORD,"*** do you know who that is? That's Jesus. That's the Son of God before He took on human flesh—we call Him the Pre-Incarnate Christ when He appears in the Old Testament. Jesus again breaks the silence when He cries out, ***"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 Jesus provided a different sacrifice instead. The boy could live, and Jesus would provide another way.

And it happens. Abraham found the ram caught in the thicket and offered it up on the altar in the place 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."***

How *clearly*, we see Jesus on Mt. Calvary in this whole exchange. God could not just sweep our sins under the rug. In His justice, God demanded that payment needed to be made. Sin could not simply go unpunished and ignored, and we know from Scripture that the one who sins is the one who is held responsible. And that means you and me. That is until Jesus spoke up, and said, ***"Father, let me provide the sacrifice instead."*** Jesus stopped the Father's death stroke and took it upon Himself so that we could live. As St. Paul testifies in his letter to the Galatians: ***"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."*** (Galatians 2:20)

So, this whole account, it's really shocking. And if you just read it at a surface level without really digging or trying to understand, you'd leave simply mortified at the whole exchange. And yet, digging in, we find the most beautiful picture. The painting of God the Son who did not consider His own life to be more valuable than yours, of God the Father who considered it a fair trade to sacrifice His own beloved Son so that you and me, sinners, could live.

But let's not stop there, let's keep on digging. Keep reading through that Word of God which is so deep that you'll keep finding more and more. And take particular note of those promises that God has made to you through His Son. Promises of a future, of blessing, and of a real reason for hope. And then, like Abraham, cling onto those promises in faith. Just as the Lord provided the sacrifice for Abraham, just as the Lord provided the sacrifice for you, so He will be faithful to *all* of His promises given to *you*. Thanks be to God, in Jesus' name. Amen. ***"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*** (Philippians 4:7) Amen.