

## “Abraham’s Faith (Part 4)” – Hebrews 11:8-19

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*[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, [www.welovethegospel.com](http://www.welovethegospel.com)]*

Take a copy of God’s Word and meet me in Genesis 22...

We have been looking at the story of Abraham because the New Testament mentions him as a man of faith in Hebrews 11. We have been studying the book of Hebrews, but have lingered on chapter 11 so we would have time to explore some of the Old Testament stories and figures it calls to mind. Abraham is the character that gets the most attention so we have spent three weeks so far dipping into one story from his life that evidences the faith the writer of Hebrews envisions for his audience. This will be our final week considering Abraham in this series and next time we will move a bit further in Hebrews 11.

But we still have the most important lesson to learn from Genesis 22 ahead of us, namely, that this story is about Jesus. It’s not about you. There are lessons for you to learn about God’s ways in your life, the nature of biblical faith, and the obedience that should follow. But ultimately this story is, first and foremost, about someone else—the Son of God. We have to learn to read the Scriptures as pointing to Him. He’s the center of the story, not you. And, by God’s grace, I pray that we would have ears to hear and eyes to see that in this text.

To that end, let’s look at the text. I’ll begin again in verse 1 of Genesis 22. Follow along as I read. The most important thing I will say to you today and the most important thing for you to understand today I am about to read. This is God’s Word...

*“After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’<sup>2</sup> 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.’<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar.<sup>5</sup> 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.’<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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?’<sup>8</sup> Abraham said, ‘God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.’ So they went both of them together.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter 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 22:1-14)*

So after three weeks of studying these verses, what have we learned?

**Abraham's Unforeseen Circumstance**  
***God Tests People of Faith***

**Abraham's Unconditional Obedience**  
***People of Faith Obey God***

*Faith Is Marked by Humble Submission*  
*Faith Accepts Both Promises and Commands*  
*Faith Seeks Understanding Through God's Word*  
*Faith Does Not Require All Explanations*  
*Faith Is the Root and Obedience Its Fruit*

With these truths firmly established in our minds, we went on to consider several lessons on obedience. But before I review those let me add a remark or two about Abraham's faith. If all we had was Genesis 22, we would be tempted to think that Abraham was a man of unshakable faith, a man who never struggled with doubt like the rest of us. But that is simply not true. The Bible is a very honest book. And Abraham is presented, throughout his story in Genesis, in a very honest way, blemishes and all. In a book I'm reading with one of my children, Elyse Fitzpatrick catalogues a number of those less than stellar moments:

- Abraham doubted God's protection, so he told his wife to lie...twice (see Gen. 12:11-13; 20:2).
- Abraham doubted that God would give him a son, so he suggested that God use his servant instead (see Gen. 15:2-3).
- After believing the promise of a land as an inheritance, Abraham doubted and demanded a sign (see Gen. 15:8).
- Abraham gave in to Sarah's unbelief and fathered a son, Ishmael, by her servant (see Gen. 16). Again he tried to substitute Ishmael for the promised one (see Gen. 17:18).
- Both Abraham and Sarah doubted God's word and laughed at his promise (Gen. 17:17; 18:12).<sup>1</sup>

So the Bible isn't interested in spinning the story of Abraham. Fitzpatrick's assessment seems spot on when she writes:

“While Abraham did have shining moments of certainty, most of the time he was trying to fight off doubt and unbelief. In fact, it wasn't until after the birth of Isaac that his faith grew strong. Both Abraham and Sarah seem to have had a much easier time walking by sight than by faith. Did they believe? Yes. Did they doubt? Yes. They were just like us. Doubt didn't disqualify them, and it won't disqualify you either.”<sup>2</sup>

I think she is correct. People of faith still have struggles with doubt and even seasons of doubt. That's normal. More normal than you probably realize. And the Bible gives that impression. Unfortunately, sometimes our knowledge of the Bible is rather incomplete. We know the stories that get a lot of attention and those stories tend to involve many of the high points of the stories of faith. This can create the wrong impression and lead us to draw the wrong conclusions.

“Perhaps you've heard sermons about Abraham's great faith and you've surmised that there's something innately wrong with you because you can't picture yourself sacrificing to God like that. Don't worry. You're not alone. Even if God is asking a difficult obedience from you, he has also promised to be with you. Perhaps part of your doubting has to do with what you fear God *might* ask of you. Don't test the

strength of your faith in imagined scenarios. If God calls you to a difficult time of sacrifice, he will strengthen you for it.”<sup>3</sup>

The Abraham we encounter in Genesis 22 is not the same Abraham we encountered in Genesis 12. His faith has grown. He has matured. The struggle was real, but so was the progress. As Christians, our struggles are just as real, but by God’s grace we too are making progress even if at times it is so incremental that it’s hardly discernable. But the God who started the work in us is faithful to complete it. God’s tests serve a purpose. And His tests are never premature in the life of people of faith. Where He guides, He provides (as we will consider in a moment).

But Abraham’s faith was connected to obedience. His obedience evidenced his faith because people of faith obey God. Last Sunday we considered several lessons about obedience from this text, which included the following:

*Obedience Should Be Prompt*  
*Obedience Should Be Comprehensive*  
*Obedience Should Accept Responsibility*  
*Obedience Should Be Sustained*  
*Obedience Should Trump Our Feelings*  
*Obedience Should Focus on God*  
*Obedience Is Often Contagious*

To these lessons, I would like to add a couple more. The first one concerns...

**Abraham’s Undeserved Providence**  
***God Gives What He Requires***

Right before the knife came crashing down upon Abraham’s dear son, God provides a ram. Perhaps you have heard God referred to as “Jehovah Jireh.” The “Jireh” derives from the Hebrew word for provision, which itself derives from the another word that means, “to see,” which gets translated with various shades of meaning throughout the Old Testament. Back in verse 8, after Isaac asks about the absence of the lamb for the burnt offering, Abraham replied, “*God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.*” What he was saying was “God Himself will see to the matter, my son.” Abraham was declaring that God was in control and that God would see to the details at the right time. And indeed God did provide, God did see to it, so Abraham names the place, “*The LORD will provide*” (22:14).

Do you look to God as your provider? Do you believe that God will “see to” the details of your need? This text is teaching us to look to God for our provision. We must believe that God will provide for the needs of those who seek Him. We can trust Him. We can trust that the God who tests is the God who provides. When God calls us to lay our “Isaacs” down—those things that are most precious to us—we must remember this truth about God.<sup>4</sup> I appreciate the words of John Calvin at this point. “This example is for our imitation....In such straits, the only remedy...is to leave the event to God, in order that he may open a way for us when there is none....We pay him the highest honour, when, in affairs of perplexity, we nevertheless entirely acquiesce to his providence.”<sup>5</sup>

But what do we learn about the nature of God’s providence here? One lesson is that God provides the very thing He demands from Abraham. He tells the man to offer a sacrifice and then provides the sacrifice to offer. If God calls us to a task, He will provide what is required to carry it through in obedience. This is why Augustine

famously prayed, “Lord, command what you will and give what you command.” That should be our disposition before the Lord.

We are also reminded in this text that God’s provision comes to us in the place of God’s assignment. Why would we expect to find it, if we don’t go up the mountain as God has instructed? God’s provision is always on time and never late. And it’s always found on the path or in the place He is leading us. It comes at the moment we need it and not a moment before, just ask Abraham. The writer of Hebrews tells believers,

*“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”* (Hebrews 4:16; cf. 1 Corinthians 10:13).

God will provide the grace and mercy as we draw near to Him. It comes to us in our “*time of need*.” It may seem like He is waiting until the last second, but He always has a reason. And He’s never late.<sup>6</sup> Trust Him.

Again, that doesn’t mean that he will lift every burden in this life. Sometimes His deliverance comes *through* trial and not *from* it. Sometimes following Him creates the trial. It’s not a coincidence that the life of discipleship is likened to carrying a cross. It will cost us. We should count the cost. But Jesus tells us that...

*“...everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.”* (Matthew 19:29)

In the end, Jesus will never disappoint His people. If He requires something of us now, He will either give what He requires so that we can press forward or give back in abundance in the age to come. He may not provide for our desires. But He can be trusted with our needs. He can be trusted for what is best.

In this case, Abraham’s faith was met with God providing a sacrifice to die in the place of Isaac. In other words, Isaac was saved through a substitution. A ram is provided “*instead of his son*” (Genesis 22:13). Isaac is spared. The ram is not. This picture of substitution is one that reverberates throughout the Bible. It is a picture of how the grace of God works. It’s a picture of the Gospel.

And this brings us to our final point...

### **Abraham’s Greater Son** ***Behold the Lamb***

It’s interesting that in verse 5, Abraham tells his servants that he and the boy will return from the mountain, but in verse 19 there is no mention of Isaac returning with Abraham. In fact, Isaac will not be mentioned again until he meets his bride in chapter 24. Do you think Isaac stayed a little longer atop Mt. Moriah pondering the wonder of God’s provision for him?<sup>7</sup> Well that’s what I want to do with you in the rest of our time together. Have you considered the wonder of God’s ultimate provision for you—the person and work of Jesus Christ? I need you to tune in here.

This is not a mere morality tale designed to teach us about faith and obedience.<sup>8</sup> If that’s all it is, then we have a problem because who among us could muster that kind of faith and obedience? The name of the mountain is “*The LORD will provide*” not “we will obey.” Hebrews 11 calls this exact story a “parable” because, like all Scripture, it’s a story that is meant to point and prepare us for Jesus Christ, God’s ultimate provision.<sup>9</sup> Genesis 22 testifies to Jesus. “Abraham’s near sacrifice of his son Isaac is pageant and prophecy of the actual sacrifice by God of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, on Calvary.”<sup>10</sup>

Isaac asks his father, “*where is the lamb for a burnt offering?*” (22:7). Abraham responds, “*God will provide for himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son*” (22:8). Yet curiously, in verse 13, the Lord provides an older

critter—“*a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns.*” A different word is used in Hebrew for that animal. Perhaps we are meant to ask, “Where is the lamb?” Perhaps our hearts were meant to be gripped by that question.

Furthermore, when Abraham names the place, “*The LORD will provide.*” Not, “The Lord has provided” (in the past). But the “*The LORD will provide*” (in the future). It’s like a little breadcrumb that points ahead to some future lamb of God’s provision.

Maybe Moses asked about the lamb when he was faced with his own sin and the sins of his people. “Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” Abraham had already given the answer—God will provide the lamb. King David, a man after God’s own heart, may have asked about the lamb when he was confronted with the darkness of his own sin. But Abraham had already given an answer—God will provide the lamb. Do you think Isaiah was asking about the lamb when he wrote of the man of sorrows who would one day suffer in our place? Abraham had already answered—God will provide the lamb. And what of Zechariah and Malachi and the prophets of old? Do you think they wondered where the lamb was? Abraham had already answered—God will provide the lamb.<sup>11</sup>

“Where is the lamb?” It’s the question that the people of God had been asking for centuries in various ways (whether they knew they were asking the question or not). And then one day, a man called John the Baptist, lifted up his eyes and answered:

*“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”* (John 1:29).

And all of the sudden, it’s meant to click—“Abraham’s walk with his son to Mount Moriah foreshadows the journey of another Father and Son on another mountain many years later.”<sup>12</sup> Actually, it wasn’t even another mountain. According to 2 Chronicles 3:1, Jerusalem and temple were later constructed upon “Mount Moriah.” Of all the places on planet earth, Mount Calvary and Mount Moriah are connected. So what is the story of Abraham and Isaac preparing us for?

Like Isaac, the Son of God is the Son of promise who would enter the world through a miraculous birth. Like Isaac, the Son of God is introduced to us in the very first verse of the New Testament as “*the son of Abraham*”, the one in whom all the promises given to Abraham for the good of the nations would find their fulfillment. Like Isaac, the Son of God was the beloved Son of the Father (Matthew 3:17). Like Isaac, the Son was led to the hills of Moriah by a donkey He would eventually leave behind (John 12:14). Like Isaac, the Son of God would have wood laid upon His back as we approached the place of sacrifice. Like Isaac, the Son of God surrendered His life to the Father, saying, “*Not my will, but yours be done*” (Matthew 26:39). The Bible says, “*he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross*” (Philippians 2:8). Like Isaac, the Son of God willingly laid down His life without protest. In the words of Isaiah 53:7, He was led like a lamb to the slaughter and, like a sheep before its shearers, he remained silent, not opening his mouth. Like Isaac, the Son of God was led up the same hill of Mt. Moriah by the Father who carried the instruments of His execution (Abraham carried “the fire and knife” and God the Father poured out His wrath in judgment on the One who bore our sins). As the prophet foretold, “*it was the LORD’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin*” (Isaiah 53:10). Like Isaac, the Son was bound and prepared for sacrifice.

But unlike Isaac, God the Father would actually offer up His Son on that mountain. His hand did fall upon the Son. He crushed Him. There was no substitute for the Son of God. He was the Substitute. He was the Lamb of God we had been waiting for to take away our sins through His sacrifice. And like Abraham, God the Father surrendered His Son, His only Son, the Son that He loved. Abraham, the writer of Hebrews tells us, “*considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back*” (Hebrews 11:19). God the Father literally raised His Son from the dead (cf. Isaiah 53:10ff). He is risen! And like Isaac, who we don’t see again until he is given in marriage, the next time we will see the glorious Son of God is when He returns to claim His Bride, the Church, at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

No wonder the Apostle Paul wrote,

*“And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’<sup>9</sup> So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”* (Galatians 3:8-9)

No wonder Jesus Himself said,

*“Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.”* (John 8:56)

So when we read this story of Abraham’s offering up of Isaac, we are meant to think of the divine Father and Son. We are meant to think of the way the Father willingly sacrificed His Son for us and the willing self-giving of the Son. We are meant to think about the way they acted together for our salvation (Galatians 1:4).<sup>13</sup>

*“In our sin we have made a monstrous substitution. We have substituted God’s gifts for God himself. In God’s grace, he has made a glorious substitution. The Son of God was slain for us; he took the pain, and bore the wrath, so that we can stand forgiven at the cross. If we have placed our faith in him, he has become our perfect substitute.”<sup>14</sup>*

We must believe this and receive His rich sacrifice. And if you already have, then you must recognize that you will never be able to live like Abraham and Isaac by mere trying. You will only walk by such faith and in such radical obedience by looking to the One to whom Abraham and Isaac point—Jesus Christ. When you look to Him, you will find what you need for the trials of this life. So let me close with these words from Paul, which I pray will be received like a warm blanket for your soul...

*“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?”* (Romans 8:32)

Behold, your God! Behold, the Lamb!

Let’s pray...

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<sup>1</sup> This list was drawn directly from Elyse Fitzpatrick, *Doubt: Trusting God's Promises* (Phillipsburg, NJ; &R Publishing, 2018), 17-18.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing* (PW; Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), 304.

<sup>5</sup> See Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1994), 109.

<sup>6</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Obedient* (“Be” Commentary Series; Wheaton: Victor Books, 1991), 112-113.

<sup>7</sup> Alistair Begg, “Faith Put to the Test, Part Two,” accessed online at: <https://www.truthforlife.org/resources/sermon/faith-put-to-the-test-pt-2/>.

<sup>8</sup> “The Scriptures are not an ancient history lesson or an ethical handbook. Not ultimately. If we attempt to read the Bible primarily as a rule-book, it crumbles before our fingers. With such a mindset, Genesis 22 is a scandal and a barrier to faith. Yet when the Bible is read as intended we see it as a testimony to Christ. At that point Genesis 22 becomes not a barrier but a boost to faith. Suddenly we realize that all the Bible and all believers in every age are fixed on the truth that tower above all others: ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world’ (John 1:29).” Glen Scrivener, *Long Story Short: The Bible in 12 Phrases* (Christian Focus Publications, 2018), 50.

<sup>9</sup> “The ultimate focus of all God’s redemptive activity is Jesus Christ. Anything or anyone else that is held up as a legitimate alternative is only snow on the satellite dish, distorting the clear picture of salvation that God is sending us in his Son.” Michael Williams, *How to Read the Bible Through the Jesus Lens: A Guide to Christ-Focused Reading of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 15.

<sup>10</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 683.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 691.

<sup>12</sup> Trent Hunter and Stephen Wellum, *Christ from beginning to End: How the Full Story of Scripture Reveals the Full Glory of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 124.

<sup>13</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *How to Preach and Teach the Old Testament for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 136.

<sup>14</sup> Josh Black, “The LORD Will Provide,” a sermon accessed online as of April 24, 2019, at: <http://firstfreewichita.org/sermons/sermon/2013-03-17/the-lord-will-provide>.