

11.15.15 Primer

True and Better Isaac

The Point:

Like Abraham, by faith, you can see the promised land, be part of the promised people, and experience the promised blessing of redemption.

Final Thought:

[As] God said to Abraham, “Now I know you love me because you did not withhold your son, your only son whom you love from me,” now we can look at God, taking his son up the mountain and sacrificing him. and say, “Now we know that you love us because you did not withhold your son, your only son, whom you love from us.” - Tim Keller

Read:

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 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; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.” 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.” 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. 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.” 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 up 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 heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. 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." (Genesis 22:1-18 ESV)

Summary from the ESV Gospel Transformation Study Bible:

The Lord called on Abraham to journey to Moriah to sacrifice his son. The choice of Mount Moriah as the place of Isaac's sacrifice providentially anticipates the location of the temple (2 Chron. 3:1) and the area of Jesus' crucifixion. The mountain of the Lord would later on evoke the image of Zion, the special place of God's dwelling (Ps. 24:3; Isa. 2:3). The journey toward his son's death took Abraham three days, and on the third day he experienced the reversal from death to life. He believed that the Lord would provide (Gen. 22:8), probably through somehow bringing Isaac back to life (cf. Heb. 11:19). Trusting the Lord at great personal cost, Abraham bound his son to the wood of the altar. Everything was at stake—the long-anticipated covenant promise to Abraham of many descendants, finally at long last fulfilled in Isaac, seemed to be slipping away. Yet at the last moment the Lord himself provides a ram, which is sacrificed as a substitute in Isaac's place.

We cannot avoid difficult questions about God testing Abraham (and instructing us) through the shocking instructions to sacrifice Isaac, but the ultimate purposes revealed on Mount Moriah help us navigate those difficulties: (1) we learn that it was never God's intention to sacrifice Isaac; (2) we learn that it is God's nature to provide what he requires (even a gracious sacrifice); and (3), far from approving human sacrifice, God's stopping the hand of Abraham in a culture where human sacrifice was common clearly indicates that God did not approve worship that sought to appease him with human suffering or effort.

Not only is this a marvelous account of the mercy of God in keeping his promises to his people, it is also a striking foreshadowing of another substitutionary death centuries later. Abraham was called to sacrifice his one and only son, but was spared from finally going through with this horrific act. God himself, however, sacrificed his one and only Son (John 1:14; 3:16) without sparing him. Christ himself is the substitute sacrifice for all who would renounce their own moral record and look in trusting faith to him.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What was your big takeaway from this week's sermon?
2. Go through the passage and circle anything that is unclear, requires further study, or needs follow up questions. Work through these questions as a group.
3. Try to imagine what it would be like to be Abraham being asked to sacrifice your only child for whom you waited 25 years. What thoughts and doubts would be going through your mind?
 - a. Have you ever felt like God was prompting you to give up something in your life that you simply did not want to let go of?
 - b. Why do you think God tests us in these ways?
4. How do you think it is that Abraham had the faith to go forward with this action of going to sacrifice his only son of promise?
 - a. Was he crazy? How do we react to people who feel like God is telling them to do things? Can you think of a negative example? A positive example?
5. Clearly Abraham had strong faith. How does faith grow?
 - a. c.f. Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Romans 5:1-5 ESV)
 - b. According to Paul, after talking about Abraham in Romans 4, he says that suffering leads to endurance, which leads to character, which leads to hope [faith]. Faith and hope do not put us to shame.
 - i. So, we need to go through rigorous trials to grow in faith. Do you see this as true in your life?
 - ii. Do you have a trial that you are going through right now where this is a struggle?
6. The ultimate manifestation of faith, and of this passage, is displayed upon the cross. How does this historical narrative in Genesis 22, coupled with what Pastor Bill explained in his sermon, give you a deeper appreciation for the gospel?