

Genesis 22A (2011)

- The Bible calls Abraham the father of faith
 - Abraham is the man Paul uses as his example when he taught the way to salvation was always by faith in God's promises
 - Abraham has seen God appear before him seven times and make amazing promises
 - And Abraham has taken some bold steps in following God, but he's also made some mistakes
 - In fact, his life has been a mixed bag of good and bad
 - And yet God wants Abraham to stand as the example to all who follow
 - So now that Abraham has sent Ishmael away, God decides it's time to bring Abraham's life to a test of faith
 - The testing will expose Abraham's true heart

Gen. 22:1 Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."

Gen. 22:2 He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you."

- The events of Chapter 22 are set after the events of Chapter 21
 - In fact, this chapter is probably 20 or more years later and maybe as much as 30 years later
 - In Chapter 21 Isaac had just been weaned
 - In this scene, we'll see him as a full-grown adult capable of carrying a heavy load of wood up a mountain side
 - One thing is we know for sure...Isaac can't be a teenager
 - If he were a teenager, then killing him wouldn't have been a sacrifice ;)
 - At this later point in Abraham's life, God appears an eighth time to Abraham to test him

- A test from God is always an opportunity to demonstrate faith
- Tests are not temptations; they are not designed to cause us to fail
 - Tests are intended to let us succeed
 - They are designed to show us approved
 - They give us opportunity to show what we have learned
- If we fail a test, it's not the the fault of the teacher
- As God appears to Abraham, He announces the test
 - Abraham must offer his son as a burnt offering on a mountain God will show him
 - Has any man been given a more difficult test of faith?
 - As if to increase the degree of difficulty in this test, God announces the test with special emphasis on Isaac's importance
 - God describes Isaac as Abraham's only son, the one Abraham loves
 - God is demanding Abraham make a human sacrifice to please him
 - The very notion seems out of keeping with God's character
 - Remember that other pagan religions in Abraham's day routinely practiced human sacrifice in their rituals
 - So God was asking nothing more of Abraham than unbelievers were willing to do in keeping with their faiths
 - Of course, human sacrifice is wrong, and God has no intention to actually bring Abraham to the point of murdering Isaac
 - Remember, Moses begins the chapter telling us this is a test
 - What can we imagine went through Abraham's mind in the moment he heard these words?

- First, he must have felt shock and confusion over why God would expect him to do such a thing
 - God was right...Abraham loved Isaac
 - So killing him would be an unimaginable horror
- But Abraham loved God also
 - He has trusted God's promises for something like 60 years at this point
 - God has been faithful time and time again
- Abraham knows that God has promised to bring an uncountable number of descendants from Isaac
 - So Abraham determines to do two things
 - Obey God's instructions
 - While trusting in God's promises

Gen. 22:3 So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

- Everything about Abraham's response demonstrates a heart of obedience
 - He rises early in the morning, he prepares his donkey and chops the wood for the sacrifice
 - Then he leaves for the place God has told him
 - Apparently, the Lord has revealed the location for Abraham to travel
 - And this place is some distance away, three days travel in fact
 - Abraham decides to bring two young servants with him for this trip
- Three days is a long time when you're on a mission to kill your son
 - Many things must have gone through Abraham's mind on that trip
 - What kind of conversation took place between the father and the son?

- Abraham hasn't revealed the purpose of the trip to his adult son, except that the Lord has instructed them to make a sacrifice on a distant mountain
- I wonder if he ever had a moment of doubt or second thoughts?
- Reading a story like this we can't help but ask ourselves if we would do something like this?
 - Perhaps the better question is, under what circumstances would we be willing to obey a command like this?
 - We know that Isaac is the son God has deemed to be the one through whom the world would see blessing
 - We can't understand how God could keep that promise while still asking us to kill the son
 - The only way we could go forward in obedience is to assume that death isn't the end of God's plan
 - That God's promises aren't stopped by physical death
 - We would have to believe that we go on living even after this physical body dies – resurrection into a new body will follow
- This is exactly what Hebrews says Abraham did believe

[Heb. 11:17](#) By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son;

[Heb. 11:18](#) it was he to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED."

[Heb. 11:19](#) He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.

- The writer of Hebrews reminds us Abraham had heard that Isaac was the one who would lead to many descendants
 - Yet God directed Abraham to kill him
- So Abraham considered or concluded that God was able to raise people from the dead
 - Abraham already knew that God had a plan that transcended his physical lifetime

- That's why Abraham has been living in the desert as a wanderer rather than living in cities in comfort
 - It was a lifestyle God directed because it reflected a willingness to wait on God to provide the eternal inheritance
- So if Abraham was willing to wait for the promises of land to be fulfilled after death, then he reasoned the promise for descendants would also be fulfilled after Isaac's death
- This is the heart of Abraham's test
 - Where did Abraham place his trust? In God's word or in what he can see?
 - Was there anything in his life so dear to him that he couldn't give it up to God?
 - How ironic it would have been had Abraham denied God the sacrifice God required?
 - After all, the child Isaac was given to Abraham in a miraculous way as a result of Abraham's trust in God's promise
 - So now that God is asking Abraham to offer that son back to God, is Abraham going to withhold the very one that God gave Him in the first place?
 - God has also given you a miracle birth
 - As we sat in our sin and ignorance, the Lord gave each of us a new birth in faith
 - And with that new birth came promises of great eternal blessing
 - Now the question is whether we will give this life back to God as a sacrifice to Him
 - Paul says this is exactly what God requires of each of us

Rom. 12:1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

Rom. 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

- God asks each of us to turn our life back over to Him
 - And the specific sacrifice He requires is that we do not conform our lives to this world
 - Rather, we transform into people that prove or demonstrate the perfect and acceptable will of God
 - We become walking billboards for what we learn in God's word as we renew our minds in accordance with His truth
 - And then we live it out, demonstrating that truth outwardly
 - It will be a sacrifice to live this way, because it will run counter to the world in so many ways
 - We will live in opposition to the world but in accordance to God's will
 - And as we mature in our walk with the Lord, He will continue to turn the dial up on our spiritual sacrifice
 - Our life in Christ is a never-ending push toward holiness, and the Lord will forever demand we live what we learn
 - He wants our billboard to grow brighter and brighter
- Abraham has been given his opportunity to shine by obeying a difficult command
 - Will Abraham withhold Isaac? If Abraham trusts God's word concerning Isaac, then he will obey God's instructions
 - And by his obedience, Abraham will display God's perfect plan
 - What is the plan or story God wants to tell through Abraham's obedience?
 - It's a story connected to God's promises to Abraham concerning the blessing
 - That through Abraham's seed would come a blessing for the world
 - Hebrews 11:9 alluded to this story when it described Isaac as a type

- Because of Abraham's obedience in this test, Isaac becomes a type or a picture of something greater
 - Specifically, Isaac becomes a picture of Christ
 - And if Isaac is a picture of Christ, then we can say that Abraham is a picture of the father in a way
 - For he is the one offering to sacrifice his son, his only son, just as the Father was willing to sacrifice His only Son
- To see that picture more clearly, let's move forward in the story

[Gen. 22:4](#) On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance.

[Gen. 22:5](#) Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you."

[Gen. 22:6](#) 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 the two of them walked on together.

[Gen. 22:7](#) Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

[Gen. 22:8](#) Abraham said, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together.

[Gen. 22:9](#) Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

[Gen. 22:10](#) Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.

- After three days of walking, they see the mountain in the distance
 - The young men are told to stay with the donkey and the father and son walk the rest of the way alone
 - This explains the need for the men to accompany Abraham and Isaac
 - They stay behind to watch the donkey
 - Abraham says he and his son will go to the mountain to worship
 - This entire episode is worship for Abraham
 - This is the same way Paul described our life of sacrifice
 - Our spiritual service of worship

- How do we worship God? By obeying Him
- By making sacrifices in our lives to demonstrate our trust in Him and His word
- By conforming ourselves to His word and not to the world
 - That's worship
- Abraham is going to worship God by obeying Him
- It's also important to note that Abraham says he and Isaac will return
 - It's a simple statement, but it says a lot
 - It says that Abraham didn't expect to be without a son
 - It says he knew God would yet still fulfill His promises to bring a nation by Isaac
 - It says Abraham trusted in God's word and God's faithfulness and God's goodness MORE than he trusted in his own understanding
 - Abraham's obedience isn't remarkable because Abraham was willing to lose Isaac
 - Abraham's obedience is remarkable because he was so confident death wouldn't be enough to take Isaac from him
 - And then the two depart, with Isaac carrying the wood for his own sacrifice
 - Isaac is picturing Christ again here
 - He traveled to the sacrifice on a donkey
 - And like Christ, Isaac is carrying the wood on which he will be sacrificed
 - And as they walk with wood, knife and fire, Isaac calls to his father with the obvious question
 - Where is the lamb for the sacrifice?
 - Interestingly, Isaac uses the term "Abba" for father
 - The same way Jesus refers to His Father in Heaven

- Isaac is a full grown man, a man capable of disagreeing with his father, of running away or overpowering Abraham
 - It's beginning to dawn on Isaac that something's not right
 - Yet he's still following his father obediently
- Abraham answers that the Lord will provide for himself a lamb
 - But the sentence construction in Hebrew can be translated another way
 - The same Hebrew words can mean "the Lord will provide Himself as a sacrifice"
 - Probably without knowing it, Abraham was preaching the Gospel
- The answer satisfied Isaac, but soon enough they reached the top of the mountain
 - This region of this mountain is Moriah, the mountainous area upon which David built his altar and later Solomon later builds the Temple
 - This becomes home to the Temple mount
 - And on these same hills, Jesus is sacrificed on a cross
 - Yet another way in which this story pictures Christ's sacrifice
 - As they reach the place, Abraham built an altar from uncut stones, as was God's direction
 - And then he arranged the wood on the altar to burn the body
 - And then he bound his son
 - Up to this point, Isaac has been absolutely obedient to the father
 - And at this point, the truth of what will happen is clear to everyone
 - Since we know Isaac could escape, the fact that he remains is proof of his faith as well
 - He is remaining fully obedient to a father who has made clear his intentions to kill his son

- Abraham binds his son we're told, but even this detail adds to Isaac's obedience
 - Isaac obviously submitted to the binding
 - Abraham probably bound him to ensure he would not try to stop him at the last minute or struggle in death
 - This is a perfect picture of Christ as well
 - Christ went willingly to the cross; no one forced Him to go
 - He was obeying the Father's direction despite the pain and suffering He knew He would experience
 - Yet Christ was also bound by nails to the wood of the cross
 - So that even the binding of Isaac was a parallel to Christ
- Finally, in v.10 we reach the climactic moment
 - Abraham stretched out his hand with the knife
 - He's ready to draw the knife across his son's neck as he might a lamb's
 - In this moment Abraham's faith has been fully demonstrated
 - No one witnessing this moment could doubt Abraham's trust in God
 - His behavior makes clear his faith
 - More than that, Abraham's obedience has perfected or completed his faith
 - His faith has produced the work God intended, it has served its purpose for God's glory
 - James makes this point in using Abraham as an example

James 2:20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

James 2:21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?

James 2:22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;

[James 2:23](#) and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,” and he was called the friend of God. [James 2:24](#) You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.

- Abraham’s faith was perfected or completed
 - Abraham was declared righteous in Chapter 15 of Genesis
 - But if we look back at his life since that moment, it’s been a series of ups and downs
 - No one’s perfect, of course, but Abraham’s life could cause some to question exactly what he believed
 - Abimelech is certainly wondering
- But now there is no doubt
 - One of the reasons the test in Chapter 22 of Genesis exists is to demonstrate the strength of Abraham’s faith in God’s promises
 - Without this chapter, Abraham’s testimony would have been a lot murkier
 - But not so now...James says he was perfected or completed in this moment
 - In other words, his life’s purpose in faith has been met
- God has a purpose in saving each of us
 - He didn’t choose us on the basis of our merit or our worth
 - His plan was in place before the foundation of the earth
 - But we do matter to Him, of course
 - So we should be always seeking to understand how our life of faith will be perfected in obedience to God’s test
 - Will it be a call to mission work?
 - Will it be a call to leadership, or to devotion in prayer or giving to the needs of the saints?
 - Will it be a service of teaching or hospitality or music?
 - Will it be in devotion to a spouse or to raising godly children?

- Will it be some combination of these or something altogether unique?
- Our role in all this is just like Abraham
 - To hear the Lord when He calls, to answer “here I am”
 - And then to obey sacrificially
 - To hold nothing back
- To determine to obey completely while trusting in God