

**Genesis 22:1-18**

If this story had taken place in our modern day, Abraham would have been arrested for child abuse and attempted murder. Instead of being called a hero of faith, he would be doing twenty-five to life in the state penitentiary. Isaac would be receiving court-mandated counseling sessions to deal with the traumatic experience of being bound and tied as a sacrifice. Abraham's only defense would be that God told him to do it; but what judge in our day would buy that argument? No, for the sake of the church, it's a good thing that this story took place 4,000 years ago; that we read about it not in some police crime journal, but in the very Word of God; and that God presents Abraham to us not as a child-hating villain but as a man of faith and the father of all the faithful.

Would you be willing to do what Abraham did? To sacrifice your only son, and by your own hand? There wasn't even an argument from his lips. God said, "Take your son, Isaac, and go..." And Abraham went. No hesitating. No "but Lord, you can't be serious; let's think about what you're commanding me to do here!" God said, "Go," and Abraham rose early in the morning and went. He did not first stop and try to analyze the situation. His human logic did not get in the way and cause him to say, "Wait a minute...murder is wrong...I should not be doing this...I should not obey God by taking the life of my son." God said, "Go," and Abraham went.

When we compare ourselves to Abraham it's pretty apparent that we don't measure up. Unlike Abraham, when God speaks a clear word to us, we think of every reason under the sun why we do not need to listen and obey. I can think of two right off the top of my head, and you can probably think of others as well. God's Word to us about regular worship is very clear; as clear as was God's word to Abraham. "Take your son and go," God told him; and to us also God says, "Go." Go to My House of worship regularly; keep the Lord's Day holy by the hearing and studying of My Word. Yet, we hesitate. We analyze. We let our human logic get in the way. "He can't mean every Sunday. Once in a while should be good enough. I can worship God wherever I happen to be, not just in His House where His Word is preached. He doesn't realize how busy I am right now. He doesn't understand what a sacrifice it is for me to obey this particular command." And so, unlike Abraham, instead of rising early in the morning and going as God tells us, we show how very much unlike Abraham we really are.

Here's another one...God says for us to offer ourselves to Him as living sacrifices. This means all that we are and have—our time, our abilities, our money. Yet, we hesitate. We analyze. We let our human logic get in the way. "He can't be serious about offering money to Him; I'm in a financial crunch right now—how can I know that He will take care of me? He can find someone else to serve in His church; I'm too busy." And so, unlike Abraham, instead of trusting in the Word of God, we hold back from serving Him with ourselves and what He has given us.

God's word to Abraham made no sense. Isaac was the child of promise. Through him the Savior would come. Through him Abraham would have children as numerous as the stars in the sky. Why now tell him to end Isaac's life? And perhaps God's words to us don't make much sense either. But they're God's words. What He speaks in the Scriptures is the truth. There are many who twist God's words around; who misinterpret them. Not Abraham. He did not say, "God is only pretending here...He doesn't really want me to go

all the way with this; He's speaking figuratively, not literally." No! Abraham took God at His word. When God said it, in Abraham's mind Isaac was as good as dead.

Do you know that in Hebrews 11 it says of Abraham that he offered up Isaac as a sacrifice? It doesn't say he "almost" did; it says he did it, because in his mind and will he did. But it says that Abraham did it believing in the resurrection. Abraham was not hoping that God would quick change His mind. He believed that after Isaac was dead God could raise him to life again. Even though God's words made no sense at all, Abraham put them first in his life even ahead of the life of his son.

If we here in Augusta were like Abraham, our pews would be full for every service, we would have no money problems, and we would never have to beg members to serve in our congregation. According to the Law we don't measure up. If Abraham is the father of the faithful, then it's pretty unclear whose children we really are—according to the Law.

But now hear the Gospel. The good news of Christ is that you are just like Abraham...not because you and I obey God's Word to us day after day; not because you and I are so faithful—we're not; but because, like Abraham, you lift up your eyes and you behold the ram caught in the thorns—you see Him as the substitute sacrifice. Genesis 22 tells us that God stopped Abraham's hand from plunging the knife into Isaac, and Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw a ram caught in the thicket by his head, and that ram was offered in Isaac's place.

Friend, that ram is Christ. He is your Substitute. He was bound and tied, as Isaac was, by Pilate's soldiers. His head was caught in the thorns they put upon Him. Your cross was ready. The wood was laid down for you as it was for Isaac. Your place in hell was ready. But they offered up Jesus in your stead. Like Isaac, you are released from the bonds; you are free from your sins. No knife for you. Jesus felt the sharpness of the nails in your place. No fires of Judgment for you to be placed upon. Jesus endured those fires for you. No eternal death awaiting you. Jesus took your place. He is the ram offered in the place of Isaac. He is the one God chose to be your substitute.

Do you believe this? Then you are like Abraham. As you lift up your eyes away from the heavy burden of your conscience, away from the accusing Law; as you lift your eyes, like Abraham did, and see God's Ram, Jesus, offered up for you—then you, like Abraham, are a man, a woman, a child of faith.

And God's good word to you may make no sense: "This is My body given for you...This is My blood shed for you." But in faith you do not hesitate. You do not analyze. You do not apply human logic..."How can this bread and wine be Jesus' flesh and blood? He must be speaking in a pretend way. This is not literal; it is only figurative speech." No! In faith, like Abraham, you come up to God's altar and you see the Ram here for you. The Ram who was killed in your place, and who God raised from the dead. You see, you believe that this Jesus is for you; that you are one for whom He died; that His blood was shed for your sins.

And so even though you and I do not measure up to Abraham; even though we are far from faithful; even though we struggle with the words of God, this Ram is for you. He died, and

you are forgiven. He was made alive, and heaven is yours. He is your Substitute. You are His forgiven child cleansed of all your sins.

And leaving this altar, leaving Mt. Moriah you can go back home with joy. Abraham with Isaac at his side, you with your family at your side and Christ leading you. Until next week when we come back with Abraham to behold the Ram for us because, like Abraham, we walk not by sight, but by faith; faith in Christ, the Ram, the Lamb of God. Amen.