

During November and December, I am preaching through a series I'm calling "Jesus in the Old Testament." That may seem like an odd title, seeing that the Old Testament never mentions the name Jesus. But the reality is that, even though the 39 books that make up the OT were written by many people over many years in many different places, the whole Old Testament points to Jesus' coming, telling the story of the redemption God is bringing into a broken, fallen world that culminates in the giving of His Son Jesus for the sins of the world. ⁴⁴ *He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."* ⁴⁵ *Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.*

It is important to understand how the whole OT points to Jesus because many of you have been taught to read the Old Testament like they are stories about moral examples – trust God like Noah did, even when people think you're nuts. Worship God like David did, no matter who disapproves. And there are some examples to follow, of course, but truly the Old Testament is primarily about the redemption God is bringing into a broken, fallen world that culminates in the giving of His Son Jesus for the sins of the world.

Two weeks ago we looked at Adam and Eve. Last week the covenant God made with Abraham. Finally, after a long 25 year wait, Abraham and Sarah have a son, Isaac. The child of promise is here; God has been true to His word. But then comes the unexpected twist in chapter 22.

Genesis 22:1-19 - *Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. ² Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."*

Wow, did not see that one coming. What is going on here? God asks Abraham to take his son Isaac, the child of promise, and offer him as a sacrifice, a burnt offering, on a mountain. Certainly we live in another time and culture, so let me give some context. In the OT, the lives of all sinful men are forfeit before God; in His justice, God can require the death of any sinner. It is only by his mercy that man takes another breath. Every day we wake up it is because of the mercy and grace of God. **How far we have come, to feeling so entitled today, that God owes us a long and healthy life.**

Further, the demand of God's judgment is directed against the firstborn as the representative of all. Firstborn sons of Egyptians, flocks and herds: **Exodus 22:29-**

30 - *“You must give me the firstborn of your sons. ³⁰ Do the same with your cattle and your sheep. Let them stay with their mothers for seven days, but give them to me on the eighth day.”* God can and must require of Abraham not only the dedication of all he has and is, but also the full satisfaction due to God’s holy justice. His own life was forfeit as a sinner, deserving death as the judgment of God.

And so God asks for his son as a burnt offering. A burnt offering, which was a typical sacrifice in Israelite history, involved cutting up and burning the whole animal on the altar, and signified two things: that the offerer was giving himself entirely to God (for the animal represents the offerer) and that the animal’s death atones for the worshiper’s sin.

Let’s keep reading to see how Abraham responded:

Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. ⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance.

If you’re wondering how Abraham felt about all of this, you’re not alone. But interestingly, **the storyteller leaves out all of Abraham’s emotions**, leaving them completely to our imagination. Instead, he just gives us the facts, the actions – Abraham got up early the next morning and prepared for the journey. So, at the very least, we learn this – **Abraham could have taken his son and run away**, in order to keep his child for himself. But instead, he got up early the next morning, ready to obey God’s request.

And as if this whole experience wasn’t torturous enough for Abraham, notice that it took them **three days to even reach the mountain** where the sacrifice was going to occur. Not only did God ask him to sacrifice his son, but he made him do it on a mountain that was a three day journey away, just to really test Abraham.

Abraham continues:

⁵ He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.” ⁶ Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, ⁷ Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?” “Yes, my son?” Abraham replied. “The fire

and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"⁸ Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together.

This story is just incredible in how it is told. Again, any emotion is left out, and just the actions are recorded. Of course, there are a couple things that Abraham says in this exchange that reveal that perhaps he did believe that God was going to provide a way out. First of all, he tells Isaac that **God will provide the lamb** for the burnt offering, whether or not he really believes it. And secondly, he tells his servants that he and the boy are going to go worship, and then **"we will come back to you."** Notice that he says "we." Of course, he could just be saying that so as to not have to explain to the servants what he is about to do. But more likely, he knows that God has promised him that Isaac would be the child through which millions of descendants would come, and he knows that God will find a way to fulfill his promise, just like he did when he provided the child.

Let's keep reading in verse 9 to see what happens to Isaac.

*⁹ When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. ¹² "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." ¹³ Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called that place **The LORD Will Provide**. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."*

Amazingly, Abraham is ready to go through with the sacrifice – he binds Isaac on the wood, he lays him on the altar, and he takes the knife in his hand. But thankfully, the angel of the Lord stops him, and says to him “Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.” And he provides a ram caught in a nearby thicket so that Abraham can offer a real sacrifice to the Lord. And Abraham calls the place “the Lord will provide.”

Abraham has had all sorts of experiences of God along his adventure, from bargaining with God for the lives of the people in Sodom, to experiencing God cut a covenant with him, but this is certainly the pinnacle. Remember that early on in

this adventure, **the one thing he struggled with the most was believing that God would provide, that he could trust God to take care of him.** Remember that when there was a famine, he moved his family to Egypt instead of staying in the promised land, and wound up almost wrecking the whole promise by losing his wife to Pharaoh. Remember again that when he slept with Hagar to produce a son, it was again because he did not believe that God would actually come through with a son through Sarah. But now, when faced with sacrificing his own son, who he has waited for so many years, he trusts that God will provide. Even when obeying God means death for his son, he obeys and trusts God. And in celebration he calls the place “The Lord will provide.”

Let’s look at how the story ends:

¹⁵ The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time ¹⁶ and said, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, ¹⁸ and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

The Lord repeats promises that he has said before, that Abraham will have numerous descendants, that they will expand their territory, and that all nations of the earth will be blessed through him. But this time **he highlights Abraham’s obedience**, saying that these promises will happen not only because of the Lord’s good favor but because of Abraham’s obedience, because he trusts God with all his heart and would not even value the life of his son above obedience to God.

The writer of Hebrews writes about this story, saying:

Hebrews 11:17-19 - *By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, ¹⁸ even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." ¹⁹ Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.*

God tests Abraham’s faith, and Abraham shows that he is willing to give up anything, even his one and only son, in order to obey God.

So what is going on in this story? Is it just a story about a man’s journey of faith for us to emulate? Be willing to give up everything for God, just as Abraham did?

Well, it is that, but it is so much more. This story, and the story of Abraham, testifies about Jesus. It points ahead to the redemption God is bringing to the world through the giving of His Son.

Because Abraham was not the only Father who brought His Son up a hill to be sacrificed.

1 John 4:9-10 - This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Isaac carried the wood up the hill to the altar, but Jesus carried the cross up the hill to his death. Abraham brought his one and only son up the mountain, willing to sacrifice him, but God gave Isaac back to him, providing a ram instead, a substitute in his place. But as Jesus made his way up the hill, asking “Father, where is the Lamb?” the only response was “You are the Lamb.” And on that hill, God made His Son an offering for our sin. God willingly sacrificed his one and only son to save us from our sins. And doing so fulfills the prophetic word spoken by John the Baptist when he sees Jesus:

John 1:29 - *The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*

The story of Abraham and Isaac proved to God that if Abraham would give up his son, he would give up anything. *“Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”*

But only God the Father follow through, giving up His Son for sinful humanity, for those who were His enemies. And so we know that God would give us anything. **Romans 8:31-32** - *What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*

Do you understand how crucial that verse is in your life? God is good, God loves us, God can be trusted. Why do you trust God when you don't understand what He is doing? Because He gave His Son. Do you trust the Lord on this adventure of faith? *¹⁴ So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided." Jehovah Jireh – the Lord will provide.*

So what does this story mean for us this morning?

The Lord will provide. He gave His son, and he will provide what we need. And so we can lay it all on the altar. The lesson the Lord was trying to teach Abraham through the ordeal we looked at today was certainly that in the adventure of faith, **you need to lay everything on the altar before God. You need to be willing to give up anything and everything that will keep you from obedience to God, trusting that He will provide for you, that He will take care of you, that He loves you.** God is a jealous God, because he knows that everything and everyone else in this world will let you down, while he is always trustworthy. And this is what I want us to spend some time looking at this morning – what does it mean to lay everything on the altar?

For Abraham, it was pretty literal. If he was going to obey God, he had to be willing to put a knife through his son. And he could do this because he trusted that God was true to his promises and wouldn't actually make him go through with it. But for us it is not so literal. What does it mean to lay a spouse on the altar? A child? Our money? Our possessions? Our hopes for the future? What does it mean to be willing to sacrifice them out of trust of God?

To lay something on the altar is to be willing to give it up, with no expectation of ever getting it back. The Lord may return it to you, as he did Isaac to Abraham, but he may not. To lay something on the altar is to declare that holding on to that something is not as important as declaring that God is trustworthy. And this is crucial to the adventure of faith – if you want to experience God, you've got to be willing to give up anything else, with no expectation of ever getting it back.

Lay our reputation on the altar. Lay our dreams of size on the altar.

And what about as individuals? We may have **hopes for a job** we really hoped to have, whether it's a promotion at work or a career we wanted to go into. But maybe as we follow the Lord it becomes clearer and clearer that he has different plans for us. Would we be willing to lay those hopes on the altar, trusting that whether or not we get them back, the Lord will provide, the Lord will take care of us? We may have hopes for a certain level of **financial independence**, that we would have a savings account and retirement and money put aside for our kids' college educations. And then we might sense the Lord calling us to give money to families in need in foreign countries, or to take in a disabled child that would sap our income. Would we be willing to give up our dreams of financial

independence, trusting that whether or not we get them back, the Lord will provide, that the Lord will take care of us? Or, like Abraham, we might be challenged **to lay a child on the altar**. Perhaps we have a child who is drifting away from God, and in order to lay him on the altar we need to give up trying to convince and pressure him into faith and let go and let God work in his life.

These questions are central to the adventure of faith, because the adventure of faith is an adventure of FAITH, with risks that will only succeed if God comes through. They are steps that we take because **we trust that God will provide**, that what he has is better than what we can see with our own eyes.

***Matthew 6:31-34** - So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

What do you need to lay on the altar this morning, trusting that the Lord is good and that He will provide, even if you never get back the thing you give up?