



The God of Promises

Pastor Dillon Barber // December 3, 2023

Text: Genesis 22:1-19

Big Idea: Jesus came into the world as the fulfillment of God's covenant promise to Abraham.

Good morning friends and welcome back to Foothills Church. My name is Dillon and it's a pleasure to be here with you this morning. I'd also like to make sure to greet our friends joining us (9:30 Classic, or online, thanks for tuning in this morning).

It's hard to believe that it is December 3rd already, isn't it? We are getting really close to the end...of the year, and I was reflecting on what has happened the last 11 months or so. This year has had its challenges for sure. The economy has continued to sputter along, inflation is killing all of us, the news reels are constantly full of depressingly bad news. The war in Ukraine has ground down to a virtual standoff with countless dead on both sides, and now more recently our attention has been drawn to the Hamas terror attacks in Israel and the IDF's counteroffensive. I was starting to hope that next year might be a better year until I remembered that it's going to be an election year. That means for most of the next 11 months all we are going to hear are countless ads and debates where politicians are blaming the other side for all the problems in the universe and making vast, boastful promises about what they will do to fix things if we elect them. The empty promises are the most annoying to me. In a time when America has the least amount of confidence in our government and institutions in history, these people come out and promise to fix things for all of us if we will just re-elect them again.

I don't know about you but I need some hope this morning in something bigger than empty promises.

Today we continue our series we are calling Christmas Hope. In this series we are going to revisit some of the key passages of the Bible that build our foundation of hope in the coming of the Messiah on Christmas morning. Last week, Phil kicked us off with the story of Adam and Eve

and the fall in Genesis 3. We were reminded of the consequences of sin in God's curse on Satan, on creation and on Man and Woman. But it wasn't just a curse, there was also a promise that one day the offspring of the woman would crush the Serpent with his heel, and we see that fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ, when he overcame sin and death through the shedding of his blood on the cross.

Today, we are going to look at another story in Genesis, this time in chapter 22. This is a story about Abraham and Isaac and a long journey to the top of a mountain where they have an encounter with God. This is both a historical retelling of events and a foreshadowing of what was to come. Before we can get there, we need to remember who Abraham is and how he got to this test that takes place in the story.

When looking back at the life and calling of Abraham we discover that **God, Yahweh, the God of Abraham, is a God of promises.** Way back in Genesis 12, God called Abram and told him to leave his family and clan in Haran and travel to the land of Canaan and sojourn there. So, Abram obeyed God and he took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew with him. Now over the course of the next 9 Chapters, Abram had a number of adventures and misadventures and did some really dumb things, but God stuck with him. Not only that, God began to reveal his plan to Abram and his promise to Abram and to his descendants. The Promise is important and it has three parts.

1. The Land: God promised to give all the land of Canaan, the Promised Land, the land of Palestine, all of it to Abrams descendants forever.
2. Seed: God promised that out of Abram would come a great nation. One that is as numerous as the dust of the earth, as many as the sand on the sea shore or the stars in the heavens. These illustrations don't have to be taken literally to understand that God means, a great multitude of people will be his descendants, too many to count.

3. Blessing: God promised that he would bless Abram, that everyone who blessed him would be blessed, whoever cursed him would be cursed, and ultimately all the peoples or nations of the earth would be blessed through him.

Three parts to God's promise: Land, Seed/Offspring and Blessing.

God explained these promises to Abram multiple times and then he made a covenant with Abram. Through this covenant God gave him a new name, Abram means 'exalted father,' his new name Abraham means 'father of multitude.' The sign of the covenant would be the circumcision of all the males in his household and all their offspring. Don't ask me why God picked that as a sign, but it is what it is.

Now the Bible is clear, Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. Abraham had faith that God would do what he said he would do, but it wasn't perfect faith. You see, Abraham was pretty old, and his wife Sarah was getting old too, and they didn't have any children. So, first he tried to use his nephew Lot as a surrogate son, but that didn't work out well. Then Sarah had the idea to have Abraham sleep with her servant Hagar. He seemed to think that was a good idea, and Hagar bore him a son Ishmael. You see, Abraham and Sarah believed God, but they also tried to make things happen their own way in their own time.

[Application] How often do we do this ourselves? We trust God, we pray, we seek him we seek his guidance and if we don't hear an answer, or the answer we like, or if God takes too long, we try to take control and make it all happen ourselves. Have you ever tried to take control? How did that work out? We pay lip service to God and then do our own thing. Sure God, you are in control, right. I'll just be over here doing my own thing my own way and when you are ready you can bless it and clean it all up for me. Am I the only one who has ever tried this? It doesn't always work out so great.

Abraham and Sarah were tired of waiting on God so they took things into their own hands. Fortunately God intervened. He made things abundantly clear to Abraham and Sarah. In Genesis 17 God appeared as the Angel of the Lord (some think this is the pre-incarnate Christ), and told them that they would have a son, Abraham and Sarah together in their old age, would bear a son, and he would be the child of God's promise. God would overcome Sarah's barrenness and she would give birth in a miraculous way. When Sarah heard this she laughed and consequently, when she gave birth to a baby boy, she named him "laughter", Isaac. Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah 90, when she bore a son. God performed the miracle to demonstrate that he always fulfills his promises. And the consequence of Abraham's and Sarah's attempt at influencing or controlling God's plan, is that there has been enmity between the line of Isaac and the line of Ishmael for the rest of human history, including today.

All of this back story helps us understand Abraham's faith. God had promised and delivered on his promises and Abraham believed.

[Transition]

Now, let's look at Genesis 22 and see how God asks us to trust his promises. (Read verses 1-3)

God tested Abraham. We don't see God actively testing people very often in the scriptures. We know he does it, but this is a rare thing to see. He is allowed to test us, he is God after all. But I must ask the question, why? Why did God test Abraham? God knew what would happen. He already knew if Abraham would pass the test. So then we have to wonder if the test is for God or for the one who is being tested. James 1:2-4 gives us a glimpse into this. James says "Consider it all joy my brothers, whenever you face trials of any kind, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance, and perseverance must finish its work, that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing." The test must have been for Abraham, and maybe for Isaac, to mature them and grow them.

Maybe you have experienced this in your own life. A medical emergency, a lost job, a struggling marriage, a life crisis, where the only way out is for God to show up in some way, and it really put your faith to the test. And through those trials you experienced a nearness to God you never would have learned or experienced otherwise. I think God tests us or allows us to be tested for our good, not for his good.

The next thing we see is the important phrase, where God says “take your son, your only son, Isaac.” He actually repeats that phrase three times in this story. Any time God repeats himself, we are supposed to pay extra attention. Two things are happening here. God is reminding Abraham that Isaac is his only option for fulfilling God’s covenant promise. Isaac is the miracle son that God brought into the world to carry out his plan for redemption. Isaac is plan A, there is no plan B. And now God has asked that Abraham offer him up on an altar. We should feel the tension in this situation. What is God doing? How is this going to work out? The other thing that is happening is a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. If John 3:16 has popped into your head when you read this, you are on the right track. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son.” In Matthew 3 it says, “And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water. . . a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased’ (Matthew 3:16). The words that God chose to use with Abraham are a clear foreshadowing of Jesus, God’s only son whom he loves.

My third observation from these verses, is that Abraham obeyed urgently. He did not delay. God commanded, and the next day he packed up and was on the road with everything he needed. Abraham, Isaac, a couple of men to help with the journey, and they set off for Moriah. Notice there was no argument, no hesitation, no pleading or begging for another option, no bargaining. I mean think about it. If God asked any of us to offer up one of our children as a burnt offering how would we respond? I don’t want to blaspheme God, but honestly I would seriously question my faith, my sanity, or God’s sanity. One of those things would have to be

messed up for me to offer up one of my children. Am I right? Thankfully I don't think God has ever asked anyone to do this since Abraham, but he does ask us to obey his command and follow his leadership.

[Application Question] How has God asked you to obey him? Has he asked you to pack up and move to another state? I hope not. That's happened to a lot of people in our church though in the last few years. Has God asked you to give something up? Something you love? Something that is good, but needs to get out of the way so you can focus on Jesus? Maybe God has asked you to stop doing something that you shouldn't be doing. Maybe a sin issue or addiction that is damaging you and your relationships. Maybe it isn't even a sin, but it's become a distraction that is getting in the way of something even better. Better intimacy with God, better intimacy in your marriage and family. Has God been nudging you to do something? Maybe join Celebrate Recovery. Maybe God is asking you to invite someone to church and you feel reluctant. What is God asking of you? Are you listening closely enough to hear him?

[Transition]

Let's look at the next part of the story. Verses 4-8. When God's promises seem impossible, the Lord will provide.

Abraham continued on his journey. On the third day, he left his servants behind and headed up the mountain. Isaac must have been at least a teenager at this time because he is strong enough to carry a load of wood up the hill on his back. I want to pause for a moment and look at Isaac's question and Abraham's answer. Isaac said, "behold, the wood, but where is the lamb?" This is another indication that Isaac is a teenager, because he is old enough to question his dad's actions like every teenager does. And look at the "dad" answer Abraham gives. "God will provide for himself the lamb."

Again, this is such a profound foreshadowing of the promised Messiah. John Chapter 1, in a different telling of Jesus' baptism, John the Baptist

sees Jesus and declares, "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). Later, John tells us that when Jesus was crucified "he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place of the skull, in Aramaic it's called Golgotha" (John 19:17).

Do you see how Jesus is the more perfect fulfillment of Isaac? Isaac the miracle baby, the son of the covenant, carrying the wood on his shoulders up the hill to his own sacrifice. Jesus, the beloved and only son of God, carrying his own cross to the hill of his death, as a pure and spotless lamb that God himself provided as a satisfactory offering. It's almost as if God planned these two stories thousands of years apart just so that we would understand the significance of what he was doing.

I can only imagine what Abraham was thinking to himself as he set off for the mountain with Isaac. What questions was he asking? God, what are you thinking? Ok God, I'm hiking this hill with my son, how are you going to fix this? Ok God, I'm ready for you to tell me the real plan here. Did I hear you right, God? Imagine the questions. And yet he faithfully obeyed, one foot in front of the other, he's over 100 years old, remembering all the times God had been faithful, and trusting literally one step at a time.

[Transition]. You guys probably know how the story ends, but let's read it anyway. (Verses 9-19)

There are a few amazing things in this part of the story. They climb up the hill, set up the altar, prepare the wood, then Abraham binds Isaac and throws him on the pile of wood. Did Isaac resist? Did he fight or try to run? Was he looking Abraham in the eyes when his dad pulled the knife? I can only imagine his fear increasing as the events unfolded.

What a stressful scene, the tension is palpable. The author of Hebrews said that Abraham believed in God's promise so completely that he even believed God could raise Isaac from the dead if he needed to. (Hebrews

11) What would it be like to have that kind of faith? To have that kind of trust in God's provision?

God waited until the last possible moment to intervene. He stayed Abraham's hand. And then God provided a ram, an offering that was suitable, just as Abraham said he would, and the place was called "the Lord will provide." You know the only other time the mountain in Moriah is mentioned is in 2nd Chronicles, it's the mountain top that David purchased and later Solomon chose for the building of the Temple. We can't know for sure if it is the exact same spot, but it wouldn't surprise me. The mountain where God provides would become the mountain of his Temple in Jerusalem.

God said something else to Abraham. He reiterated his covenant promise. His offspring would be numerous, they would possess the gates of their enemies (in other words, they would possess the Land of Canaan and all of its cities), and his offspring, singular offspring, one descendant in the line of his descendants, would be a blessing to all the nations. All the peoples of the earth will be blessed through him.

The hope that Abraham had all those centuries ago is the same hope that we have this Christmas season. It was the hope in God's promise that one day, one of Abraham's descendants would come as a redeemer and be a blessing, not just to the Jews, but to all the peoples of the earth. That descendant was Jesus the Messiah, born on Christmas day. Jesus is both the Promised One, and the Promise Keeper.

You may be in a place this morning that feels completely out of your control and beyond your abilities. Maybe God is asking you to obey him and it seems impossible right now. Maybe he is asking you to give more than you think can give, or do more than you can do, or trust him when you don't know how to trust him. Maybe you are facing something so difficult you don't know if you will even survive.

The Bible is full of God's promises. Some are promises to bless, some are promises to judge, even to destroy. Some are promises we are still waiting for him to fulfill thousands of years later.

I want to remind us of just a few of God's promises that he gives for us today. For us who believe in him. Maybe one of these is just what you need in this season of life. Feel free to close your eyes and let these promises wash over you as I read them, then I'll close in prayer.

God promises:

1. He will fight for you. (Exodus 14:13-14)
2. He has redeemed you. (Col 1:13-14)
3. He will give rest to the weary. (Matt 11:28-30)
4. He will give you strength. (Is 40:31)
5. His love never fails. (Is 54:10)
6. He will give you the wisdom that you need. (James 1:5)
7. He will make your path straight. (Proverbs 3:5-6)
8. He will never change, he is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. (James 1:17)
9. Nothing can separate us from his love. (Romans 8:37-39)
10. He promises to give us what is good for us. (Mt. 7:9-11)
11. All the promises of God in Him are yes and in Him are amen, to the glory of God through us. (2 Cor 1:20)
12. He is coming again soon to make all things new. (Rev 22:12)

Let's Pray.