

Wandering from God

Grace Fellowship | Carlton Weathers | Genesis 22:1-19

If you take your Bible and turn with me to Genesis chapter 22, today we'll look at Genesis 22:1 through 19, the sermon that I've entitled "Willing Sacrifice." I want to start by asking a question that I'll hopefully develop through time in the sermon—a question that we all need to ask of ourselves, not just once or twice, but regularly in our lives: What in your life right now are you unwilling to sacrifice to God?

Jesus said, Matthew chapter 10, that the one who seeks to keep his life will lose it, but the one who lays down his life will keep it. For whoever loses his life for My name and for Me, truly they will have their life. In Genesis chapter 22, we come face-to-face with just how far God will go in calling His people to lay down their life.

We have to remember the whole story of Abraham, really to grasp the gravity, to get beyond the emotional part of this text. This text is an emotional text; for any of us, it is an emotional text. It has struck in the heart of lost men hate for God for centuries. It has been an act used as an accusation against the Holy God of being nothing more than a deity that's filled with hate, anger. Some have even gone so far using this text as to call God a child abuser.

There can be no doubt that this text puts us face-to-face with a God that is like no other God—a God who demands that we lay our lives down and hold onto nothing save the promise of His word. Grace Fellowship, what are you holding onto right now?

In Genesis 22:1, the text reads: "After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, 'Abraham.' And he said, 'Here I am.' And Yahweh said, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him 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 I and the boy will 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 Abraham 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 them, 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." The angel of the Lord 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 its 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 mountain 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." So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham lived at Beersheba.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

The first thing I want us to see is the test of faith, the test of faith. God, through Moses, reveals to us but not to Abraham what is behind this event. Abraham does not know that he is being tested, but Abraham, in his time, heard the word of the Lord without any explanation, and that word was the most devastating word he could have ever heard. I would go so far as to say Abraham would have gladly given up his own life; it would have been easier than what God asked him to do.

But what God demanded was that he take his son. Notice the text says: "Take your son." He doesn't stop there. "Your only son Isaac." The Lord could have said, "Take Isaac, offer him," but notice He says in the text, "Take your son," emphasizing the son of promise, the only son. He has another son, Ishmael, which by the way, he's bereaved of in Genesis 21. God has already separated him from Ishmael, the son of Hagar. He's lost him; he's gone; he'll not see him, not relate with him. Isn't that enough that he lost his son Ishmael? Surely that shows his love for God.

But God is testing Abraham's faith in Genesis 22 by taking not just any son, but demanding the life of the promised son, the heir of the blessing, the one who through him all nations will be blessed. God has already promised this to Abraham multiple times, and now in Genesis 22:1, Moses writes: "And after these things God tested Abraham's faith."

I want us to see that God tests faith to destroy competing securities. God doesn't just test the faith of Abraham, but God tests your faith and God tests my faith, and the Bible says if our faith is not tested, it is not genuine. Genuine faith requires that God put us in the flame of testing and trial, that on the other side, our faith might come out purified and holy before Him. God will not have an amalgamation of metals to show to Himself, but rather He will have pure gold; He will have tried silver. That's what God is after.

He tests our faith—God tests our faith—to destroy any competing securities we hold onto. God didn't want Abraham to trust in Isaac; God wanted Abraham to trust in God, and God alone. And so He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, and offer him."

What are you holding onto, church? What are you straddling the fence with and saying, "I trust Jesus, I trust God, I know He's my Savior, but you know, I just have to have my family. A family's a good thing, I need my family, as long as God doesn't take my family"? "I believe in God, pastor, nothing, nothing except Jesus can save, but—but I need to earn God's love for me, because I'm not the kind of person that'll just take whatever God gives, I gotta show Him that I'm worth it"?

God tests our faith to burn away that dross of sinful, arrogant possessions that weigh us down and keep us from Him. God not only tests faith to destroy competing securities, but God tests faith to produce endurance. This isn't the first time that God has tested Abraham's faith. No, remember in Genesis 12:1 when God said to an idolater in the Ur of the Chaldees, "Abram," and He said, "Abram, go to the land that I will show you"? You remember that? That was a test. That was a test. Will Abraham do what I tell him to do? Abraham goes.

The years of infertility and not being granted a child was a test and a trial. Surely the conflict and strife between Hagar and Sarah was a trial; surely going to Egypt was a trial; surely seeing Abimelech was a trial, but there was no trial, no test like this test of Abraham's faith, because this test left him with no life-preserving raft for the ship that seemed to be sinking. If Isaac dies, God is a liar. If Isaac dies and is buried in the grave, God is a liar, and if God is a liar, we have no hope.

God tests his faith to destroy his security; God tests his faith to make him, produce in him, endurance. God tests faith to cut His people away from the treasures of this world. Jesus said, "If you love father or mother or son or daughter more than you love Me, you are not worthy of Me."

And in Genesis 22, we find the first story of that truth. It is as if God said to Abraham, "Abraham, do you love Isaac more than you love Me?" God tests the faith of Abraham. God emphasizes the uniqueness of Isaac and the love of Abraham for him; notice in the text the emphasis is there: "Take your son, your only son." If you're reading this, it's repetitive, and the reason for that is an emphasis that this is the special son, this is the only son. We might say the begotten son; this is him. God emphasizes this through this story so that we can

make no bones about the fact that Abraham has no deep-seated jealousy of his son Isaac, or any dislike or hatred for him; he loves this boy. And in this boy, his sun rose and sun set. And in this son was all the hope of all the peoples of the world, and Abraham knew it.

This text emphasizes just who Isaac is and the relationship that he shares with his father. The test is not some frivolous test; the test strikes at the very heart of Abraham. God commands him to go, and I said earlier, this is the second time that He's told Abraham these same exact words. Notice in verse 2: "And go to the land of Moriah." These are the same words from Ur of the Chaldees: "Go to the land that I will show you." This is an important thing because what Moses is doing is kind of putting panels, although we're gonna have a couple more chapters that deal with it, it's kind of a bleed-over of Abraham and Isaac's stories.

But this is kind of the climax of Abraham's story; this is it, right here. And this is the one sideboard of Abraham's life and the other is Genesis 12, where we have the sideboard of the original call to go to a land I will show you. Now He says, "Go to the land of Moriah, to the mountain that I will show you." This cannot be mistaken as a voice in which Abraham just had in his head; this isn't some thought he has to show God how serious he is; this is God's test on God's terms for God's man, Abraham. This is God's test. He's testing his faith.

But next in the text we see the obedience of faith, the obedience of faith. Look at verse 3: "So Abraham..." So he gets this demand, this command, strikes at his heart, and what does he do? So Abraham rose early in the morning. He didn't wait till lunch, he didn't negotiate till evening; the Bible says God said "do this," we're left to think at the end of one day, and the very next day, early in the morning, which in their accounting would have been just as the sun is coming up, Abraham rose. He rose up, saddled his donkey, took two of his young men—the servants—and his son Isaac. He cut wood for the burnt offering, rose and went to the place of which God had told him.

Now, it's not any frivolous wording here. You say, "Why all the listing? I mean, obviously he did these things, right? How could he have an offering if he doesn't have wood, if he doesn't have fire, if he doesn't have a knife? Why is Moses straining to tell us this?" Well, because he wants us to see that obedience is immediate. Obedience is immediate, just as it was earlier in the saga of Abraham. When God tells Abraham to do something, Abraham does it.

This isn't the first time there's been knives involved in the obedience of Abraham. You remember the earlier text? "Abraham, circumcise all the males in your camp, all of them." There was a knife involved there and there was no delay; Abraham circumcised himself and every man in his camp the very next day. Obedience is immediate. We don't find here some psychological babble about Abraham negotiating better terms with God. We don't see anything about how Abraham felt at all, though we may as modern readers get hooked up on those kinds of things; Moses wants us to understand it doesn't matter how he feels

about it. It doesn't matter how improbable it seems or how impossible. God says A, and Abraham does A.

He doesn't ask for any clarification. Children, how many times will you ask why? Now, not to put down childish questioning of why, because that's just normal development. The problem is that so many of us grow up from those questioning children to questioning adults who, when God has said "do A," we say, "Well, you know, A's tough, how about B? Would C work? I mean, is there not any other way, God? I think this would be a better plan." Obedience is immediate. "Take your son and offer him." Early, the very beginning of the next day, Abraham rose.

And he prepared to go on this journey. Obedience is complete. In this text we see that this obedience is a complete obedience. He takes the donkey saddled with all the supplies they'll need for the journey, he takes the wood, he takes the knife, he takes the fire, he takes his own son. He takes everything that's needed to do what God has commanded him to do. He does it immediately and he does it completely. He holds nothing back.

Obedience is costly, obedience is costly. Any parent here, surely any of you can think with me—not to get us bogged down in the emotion, but come on now—how costly is it if God says, "Take your beloved son and offer him to Me"? Anything else would have been easier, I would say; anything else. Obedience is immediate and complete and costly, and here's the key: obedience is based on faith in God. It's not just obedience for obedience's sake. Abraham obeys because he believes God.

And I want us to see that in this text. Look what it says: "Abraham, on the third day, Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar." Now this place of Moriah that they're headed to, the land of Moriah, is significant; I don't want to derail us too far, but I do want us to think right here biblically. This is the first mention of the land of Moriah. This is a significant land. In 2 Chronicles 3:1, this very land, this very place is the threshing floor which David has bought and Solomon builds the temple.

This is it, right here. God consecrated this land in Genesis 22. David purchased this land in preparation for a house for God, and Solomon built the temple on the land in which we're looking at in Genesis 22. Every sacrifice offered in substitutionary atonement through the workings of the Old Testament were done on this spot. That's going to be key later in the text.

He chooses this land, Moriah, and Abraham goes there, and from afar he sees it, and this is where we see his obedience is based on faith. "Stay here," he says to his servants, "stay here with the donkey, and I and the boy will go over there." Okay, yep, he's gonna offer Isaac—so if that was it, we might not know that it's based in faith. But actually he says more than that: "I and the boy will go over there and worship, and we will come again to you."

This is not some hopeful thought of a dad forlorn holding onto any hope that he might have that his son will live. This is evidence that for three days Abraham has reasoned in his mind that his son will be offered, his son will die on the altar, and God will raise him from the dead. Abraham isn't saying, "Maybe me and my son will come back," he's saying, "We will come back." Why? Because in a dead womb in his mother's belly, God made a son, Isaac, to carry the heir of the promise. And God had said it is through this one that I will bless the nations, and Abraham, as solidly as he had in Genesis 15, believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.

He believed God. The writer of Hebrews chapter 11 says that Abraham believed that God would raise Isaac from the dead, and figuratively, he did raise him up from the dead. Why? Because in Abraham's mind, as he looked at his son at the base of that mountain and he began to take the journey to making an altar and worship his God, his son was already dead. His son was already dead. He wasn't going thinking maybe God will give me an out; he was going thinking he's already dead, but God will raise him up. Why? Not because he deserves it, not because I deserve it, but because God is not a liar; He cannot change His mind; He's not a son of man. He is like no other; He is holy, and if He has said it, it will happen. My son hasn't had a son, and so there's no way he's gonna be left dead.

He believed God. Obedience is always—faithful obedience is always—based in and on faith in God; your obedience is not earning you anything, but rather your obedience is showing forth the content of the faith which you already have by the grace of God, just like Abraham. James said, "You tell me about your faith, I'll show you my faith." Did not our father Abraham offer up on the altar Isaac, and I tell you he did it showing forth his faith?

There was testing of faith and obedience of faith and there's a willing sacrifice in our passage. Look at verse 9. Now we get into the heart of the passage; I think I'll get excited now. Somebody asked me as I enjoyed getting ready for this message and I said, "I've been getting ready for this message all my life." When they came to the place of which God had told them, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. A willing sacrifice. We've focused on Abraham, but I want to focus on Isaac for a moment.

Some would say that this story comes from the stories of the Near East where they sacrificed children. Truly the land and the regions around where Abraham was were famous for child sacrifice. But we need to know some things about that child sacrifice. First of all, God never required them to sacrifice their children. They did that as a wicked evil invention of their own human religion. Second thing we need to know about those Near Eastern sacrifices that is not like the sacrifice we're watching here is often it was because something tragic or awful is going on—some cataclysmic event has taken place—and so the gods must be mad, so we must make an offering to them. And third, in those Near Eastern sacrifices, almost all of them, almost all of them that we have any evidence of to this day, is of infants; infants.

Isaac, in case you weren't paying attention to the reading, is not an infant. The oldest child sacrifice evidence we have is of a six-year-old, and they're about six years old and they found the remains buried in a jar in Carthage. But Isaac isn't six years old. As most people and scholars will tell you, Isaac is somewhere between 12 and 16 years old. So that's why I say this is a willing sacrifice. Isaac has gone up the mountain with his father and he's said, "You know dad, I've done this with you many times before—there's wood and there's a knife and there's fire, and I'm sure when we get there we'll build an altar out of rocks like we always have. You're getting a little old dad, you know," because he's probably 114, 115 years old. "You know, forgetful—I know it's not intentional, but we forgot the lamb."

Isaac doesn't know what God has said; Isaac's not clued in. Abraham looks at him, and I want to say to you, make sure you understand: this is not a father lying to his son to protect him. "God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." This is typologically the prediction of not just the ram in the bushes that's coming, but the only Son of God who will die on this, on the cross. God's writing down for us a breadcrumb as it is on the trail to understand the mystery of the gospel. God will provide for Himself a lamb for the offering.

And so they go on and they get there and they build the altar and they lay the wood and he binds Isaac his son. If Isaac had decided to take off and go, he could have gone, but he stayed willingly. No mention of fighting with his dad, arguing with his dad, telling his dad you must be crazy, you've lost your mind—just a "Dad says to do it, and I will obey."

Just as the Father obeyed his Father in heaven, the Son on earth obeys his father on earth, and through that obeys his Father in heaven. He gets up on the altar; Abraham displays his faith also in this by willingly sacrificing his son. It's a willing sacrifice.

And finally we see the provision of a substitute, the provision of a substitute. In Genesis 22:11, the Lord calls from heaven: "Abraham, Abraham!" I mean, how Abraham must have been startled beyond comprehension. This was not something that he expected to hear. "Here I am! Here I am!" "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."

God saw the faith of Abraham demonstrated in his willing sacrifice of his son, his constant belief in the promise, and He stepped forward and said, "Don't take his life. Don't take his life, because now you have shown Me and your—all others—the genuineness of your faith." The test doesn't come with cheat notes; Abraham believed until he had raised that knife above his son that he would thrust it into his flesh, but God always knew that he would obediently follow the word of God and He had already provided a sacrifice. Just off in the distance, caught by the horns, a ram is in the bush.

Can you imagine the joy of Abraham and the pure unadulterated worship that must have broke forth? I bet you've never seen anyone get up off some wood as fast as Isaac did.

"God will provide a lamb for the offering, son." He said it in faith, but it's almost prophetic: God did provide. He did provide, and it's interesting here: "So Abraham... and Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked and behold behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns." The ram, the offering of a ram, is recorded for us in Leviticus and in Numbers; it's always associated with atonement and consecration unto the Lord. God has placed in this bush the symbol of atoning sacrifice, the ram. And Abraham took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering—as a pleasing aroma before God.

And looked forward to a day when God would provide a better sacrifice. How do I know he was looking forward? Look what he says in verse 14; Moses writes: "Abraham called the name of the place 'The Lord will provide.' It can also be translated 'The Lord will see.' As it is said to this day, in the future, the perfect tense here points future, 'On the mount of the Lord it will be seen.' Or He will see Him or He will provide." He named this place in honor and in tribute and in looking forward faith to a greater sacrifice that was coming—greater than Isaac, greater than the ram, the perfect lamb, the Son of God who would come.

It's almost an echo that we hear in the voice of John the Baptist as he stands in the river Jordan and looks up on the bank and sees Jesus and says, "Behold the lamb who takes away the sins of the world." I tell you a substitutionary sacrifice is needed here. God intervened before Isaac became a sacrifice; He provided the ram for a substitute to the sacrifice and it points us towards the ultimate substitutionary atoning sacrifice of our Savior, Who willingly laid down his life for his friends. It points us to not Abraham the father, but God the Father Who willingly did not spare his own Son; Paul says in Romans 8:32, the passage we read today in 8:34 is preceded by the text that He did not withhold from us His Son. Why then would we not think He will give us all things? God the Father willingly gave His Son, God the Son willingly laid down His life in substitute for sinners like you and me.

The passage ends in a magnificent culmination where all of the promises given in the past to Abraham are caught up in one great promise. God says in verse 16, "By Myself I have sworn, declares the Lord." By Myself; God will keep the covenant, God made the promise, God has sworn by His own name, for there is no name higher than His name by which to swear. "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." Here is in view the promise that God will make Abraham into a mighty nation, nations, not just one. Isaac will become a people, a nation, and from him will come the blessing for all of the earth.

The plurality of the offspring is in sight here. This is a promise to Abraham and to his descendants. "I will bless you, I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of the heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of not their enemy, His enemies." That's strange, because at the beginning of this statement of promise, God's talking about all the nation of Israel. But at the end He's talking about the

true Israel. He's not talking about the Jews possessing all their enemies' gates; He's talking about His Son, the true Israel, who will possess the gate of our greatest enemy.

As we look at this text, it moves from plural—how do we interpret offspring? How can you make that statement, Carlton, how can you make that statement? Because at the beginning of the promise, "I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars," notice the plurality here: as the stars of the heaven, as the sand of the seashore. The Hebrew language has one word for offspring that is determined—it's—it's—its whether it's plural or singular is determined by the words around it. And so the words around the beginning of this first offspring is plural. But at the end when it talks about offspring will possess the gate of His enemies, it's singular. It's not talking about plural.

Why is that important? Because Abraham's faith wasn't in Isaac; Abraham's faith wasn't in the people that will come from Isaac; Abraham's faith was from the ultimate descendant, Christ. Jesus said He saw My day and rejoiced. And this is one of those moments where Abraham looked through a dark, dim future to him and saw a bright beacon of redeeming light, Jesus Christ. He will possess the gates of His enemy, and so what does it mean for us, church, because God has kept His word to Abraham and God has kept His word to Isaac and God did multiply them and bring about from them the one who would be a blessing to all the nations?

Our enemies are defeated, the gates of hell cannot prevail against us, the church is undefeated and undefeatable. God will have His people from every tribe and every tongue and every language because the Son, the Son willingly died to make them right with the Father. It cannot be taken from you, this birthright, because you didn't earn it. Christ earned it. Christ defeated your enemies. And now because of the blessing of Abraham, we all are blessed with him.

So Abraham returned then to the young men and they arose and went together to Beersheba and Abraham lived at Beersheba. Let's pray together. Father, as we close this time in Your word, think about all that is before us in this text. We—we truly can only know in part. It's way beyond our abilities, Lord, to understand what You have done, but we believe it. Lord, help us to believe. Help us to continually, daily believe in the promise of our Savior and through that promise to obediently follow You wherever You lead us and whatever You require of us. Father, for those who do not know You, we pray that today's word has pierced the heart, has crushed the arrogance of the mind, and that You by Your Spirit will draw all men to Yourself through Your Son. It's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.