

Harris Creek Baptist Church
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Abraham and Isaac

Genesis 22:1-14

Good morning! Hey, I just wanted to let you guys know something that happened this morning. Before a sermon was preached; before anyone led worship; a man out in the lobby became a Christian right before this service! That is the God that we serve, He does not need us, but He uses us – which is awesome! And that is what is happening in this place, life change is happening. Like Scott said, my name is Derek and my wife, and I we became foster parents. About two years ago we decided to walk through the foster care process, just trusting God and His heart for foster care ministry. And something that you need to know about our God is sometimes you say yes to something, and you are saying yes to much more than you bargained for. We, actually in the last year and a half have gone from 0 kids in our house to 4 kids in our house. Not 1, not 2, not 3, but 4. A 7-year-old, a 6-year-old, a 4-year-old, and 15-month-old. So, it is about as crazy as you can assume, but it is all so full of joy! And yes, I said over the last 18 months. Thankfully, that has been a really easy time in our history. (Crowd laughs). I know some of you got pandemic puppies, we got a pandemic instant family."

And it has been awesome! Being a dad is fun! I do things that have never done before in changing diapers – that is not awesome. Fixing toys. Now I drive a white minivan. Just cruising

down the streets in that thing. It is a gift. Being a Dad is so fun! But one thing I have been doing recently that I had never done before is sing nursery rhymes.

Guys, nursery rhymes are weird. I just want to talk about a couple of those this morning. Please do not leave me hanging, I am going to sing a little bit and I want you to sing it with me. I know it is kind of early, but you guys are the second service so you should be awake by now. The first one is a classic- Rock-A-Bye-Baby. So, *Rock-a-bye baby in the treetop...* (Crowd finishes: *When the wind blows the cradle will rock.*) I do not know why we are leaving babies in trees. But next is *when the bough breaks, the baby will fall...* (Crowd finishes: *and down will come baby cradle and all.*) You guys were kind of fading there at the end. Because it is weird; you kind of just stop singing it. This is strange. Why are we singing that song as you hold a baby? Or how about Ring-Around-The-Rosey? *Ring around the Rosey, a pocket full of posey...* (Crowd finishes: *ashes, ashes, we all fall down.*) We have got to stop encouraging our children to sing that and while they hold hands with each other. It is a strange song. And do not even get me started on Jack-n-Jill and someone breaking his head – I do not want to know what happens after that. Those are weird stories and weird songs. Sometimes the Old Testament can feel like that.

I was driving around two days ago, and I saw a sign for a Noah's Ark preschool. Noah's Ark is a cute story to put on a kid's craft because you can build a boat and have little lions and giraffes loading onto the boat. But at some point, we all got old enough to realize what happened to the rest of humanity. They drowned... It is a dark story. Or King David – you know you grow up hearing about this faithful king that led Israel. A man after God's own heart. Maybe you are a guy and your Dad told you, "He be like David, follow God faithfully." Except for that one time that he took advantage of a married woman and had her husband killed. That is a little more complicated than we remember growing up. The Old Testament sometimes can be messy. It can

be dark. In a lot of ways, it reflects the world that we live in. I think because of that, it can cause confusion in us. It can make us not want to read the Old Testament. Like, ‘Hey I am good with my Bible that has the New Testament, Psalms, and Proverbs. I do not need the Old Testament.’ We can just avoid it because it is messy and confusing and dark at times. But we learn the character of God through Scripture. And unlike those nursery rhymes, the Old Testament has something deeper going on. Something much more beautiful going on because it all points towards one thing. The whole Old Testament points us to Jesus.

It is really fun for me to be preaching up here this morning. Throughout the year I get to help out J.P. a lot, and Nate when he preaches, with sermon team. We get to help plan their sermons. There is a whole team of us here and you will be hearing from us this summer as we go through this series B.C., as Scott said. We are calling it B.C. because 2,000 years ago our calendar was reset because of the person of Jesus. It was reset based on His life.

But the reality is, that there is nothing before Christ. Colossians 1:17 says this, “**Christ is before all things and all things are held in Him.**” There is nothing before Christ because Jesus is God and God has been from eternity past until now. So, as we read these Old Testament stories, we will realize that these are actually about Jesus too.

And today’s story is a story in Genesis 22 – Abraham’s test or the binding of Abraham and Isaac. And this is one of those stories that is a little bit darker than we remember. My kids were watching this sermon this morning and our oldest son volunteered himself if we had to sacrifice one of the kids. And we said, “Well you know that is not what the story is about!” But it is one of those stories that can be confusing when you read it. But I hope that as we get to the end of

today, you will realize that there is more going on as we talk about what tests reveal. As what we talk about what this story reveals. And we talk about what the Old Testament ultimately reveals.

So, we are in Genesis 22, starting in verse 1. **"Sometime later God tested Abraham. He said to him," Abraham!" "Here I am." he replied. Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love- Isaac- and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you." Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded 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. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. 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."** That's an interesting detail, Abraham said WE will come back to you.

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So, Isaac carried the really heavy wood up the hill. Abraham is carrying the fire and the knife. **As the two of them went on together, 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?** That's a valid question... In that time, they would sacrifice animals to God as an act of worship and Isaac is like, "Hey dad where's the animal?" **Abraham answered, "God himself will provide animal for burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together. When they reached the place God had told them about, Abraham built an alter there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the alter, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called out to him from**

heaven, **“Abraham, Abraham” “Here I am” he replied. “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 me from your son, your only son.”**

Man, if we believe that this is a real story, of real people, in a real place this is a little bit uncomfortable. If anybody walked out of this room today and said God was telling them to kill their kid, we would all rightfully call the police. Because that would be wrong. But it does reveal something. There is more going on in this story.

1. *God tests us to reveal our faith.*

Or God uses test to reveal our faith. So, we have to start here because that is what the story says. God tells Abraham, “Now I know that you fear me. Now I know that you will follow me anywhere because you are willing to even give up your son.” Hebrews 11 in the New Testament talks about this story. It talks about Abraham. It says, **“By faith Abraham when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned (or called).”** It is through Isaac that your offspring will be called. **Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.** By faith Abraham did this.

We have to get some background here. Abraham was chosen by God; scripture gives no reason why. Just the fact that God chose him. He said, “Follow me and I will make a mighty nation out of your people, and the whole world will be blessed through your offspring.” That is an amazing promise! The issue was Abraham, and his wife Sarah, had no kids. They were barren, childless, unable to conceive a child. I know some of you know the pain that that brings. The confusion

and the questions that brings. But God promised, “I will give you a child, and through him there will be a mighty nation. Lots of generations that will call you, their forefather.”

Decades later, when Abraham and his wife Sarah are very old - 100 years old – they finally have this miraculous child. And it is a miracle because 100-year-olds do not normally have babies. They have this miracle child named Isaac. And then God tests them with that son in this story. And what is interesting is that God had tested Abraham multiple times before this. Abraham is following God where He is leading him. And at some point, he is moving through a foreign nation. And he actually gives his wife over to the foreign king because he didn’t trust that God would protect them. Another time, him, and his wife, they decided to conceive a child through one of their maids – because they did not trust that God would fulfill the promise that God had said to them. So, they do it their own way. Abraham had failed multiple tests before this, yet God in His grace and His mercy decided to continue to use Abraham. And in a similar way, He continues to use us despite our flaws. And then Abraham passes this test. I do not know exactly why.

I do think it is because Abraham knew God more. He had walked with God longer and he trusted that God would still fulfill the promise that He told them long before. Hebrews alludes to that. That maybe Abraham thought that God would raise Isaac from the dead. The story even alludes to that, Abraham says that WE will be back to you. Maybe he is lying or maybe he knows that God can still bring something out of nothing. He trusted God; he knew God. And in this test, his faith was revealed. That is what tests do – they reveal.

My freshmen year of college, I decided to take the third level of Spanish - Spanish 3. Because if I took Spanish 3, I only had to take one year of Spanish. If I started earlier on, I would have to

take two years of Spanish and I just wanted to do the minimum amount of work. The problem was that I showed up to my first day of class and I realized that I did not know Spanish. Because I walked in and the professor was speaking Spanish – which makes sense, it is a Spanish class – and I did not know anything he was saying. One month later I sat down for my first test in this class. I took my test. I got my score back and guys, I bombed it! Terrible. I know that some of you are the kind of people who get home from tests and say, “Hey I did really poorly – I got a 92.” That is not me. I got a 34%. Just putting it out there. I knew one third of the things that were on this exam. So being the resilient man that I am, I dropped the class and changed my major and never took Spanish again in college. Thank you.

But what this test did is it revealed two things very clearly. One, it revealed that I had taken for granted my college education. Because I was not spending time studying. I was spending a lot of time playing video games and playing pick-up basketball. And I was taking for granted the thousands of dollars being spent on my education. And second, it revealed that I knew no Spanish or un poco amount of Spanish. I knew one third of the things in this class.

Tests reveal. It is like a magnifying glass that shows everything. We can trust that God will never test us like this, God will never ask us to kill our child. We know that from the character of God revealed through Scripture. But that does not mean that God will not test us. There are lots of passages in Scripture that point to the testing of our faith. Jesus, in Mark 10, interacts with a man that we call the rich young ruler. And He tells him, “Sell everything. Give everything away and follow me.” And the man cannot do it because his wealth and his possessions were more important to him than God.

Let me ask you and myself a hard question. What is the one thing that you do not want God to ask you to do? What is the one thing you do not want God to ask you to give up? Maybe you do not want God to ask you to call that one person you need to reconcile with – you do not want God to ask you to do that. you do not want God to ask you to turn down that amazing job promotion that has a high salary, but it will take you away from your family. Maybe you do not want God to ask you to confess sin. Maybe it is a dating relationship that you do not want God to ask you to give up, but it is unhealthy. Or maybe you do not want God to ask you to give up the idea you have in your head of what your kids should be. Maybe you do not want God to ask you to do that, but God may. God uses life situations. God uses tests to reveal where our faith lies.

The beautiful thing is that we know God’s character revealed through Scripture, Abraham did not have that gift. In fact, it was pretty normal in the context and the era that Abraham lived for a God to ask for child sacrifices. There is an example of it in Scripture in 2 Kings 3. **“When the king of Moab saw that the battle had gone against him, he took with him seven hundred swordsmen to break through to the king of Edom, but they failed. Then he took his first-born son, who was to succeed him as king, and offered him as a sacrifice on the city wall. The fury against Israel was great; they withdrew and returned to their own land.”**

So, this king was losing a battle and his response was to sacrifice his child on a city wall, so that the “gods” would see him so the battle would turn. And this happened quite frequently in the ancient context. People would try to prove themselves to the gods, that they were willing to give up anything to them in hopes of getting prosperity and success and security. But our God is not like that, and our God does not ask for that. Which is my second point.

2. This story reveals God’s character.

God's character is revealed through this story. The ancient Israelites would tell this story to each other for two reasons. At some point Scripture was written down, but before that they would tell these stories to remind themselves. And this story would remind them of two things: one, who their forefather, Abraham, was and the faith that he had. The second, to remind themselves of the God that they served. As other nations would sacrifice humans, they would remind themselves we don't do this. And this is the story that tells us why we don't do this.

I have been on staff here now for six years – which has just been awesome! I love serving in the youth ministry. I love my co-workers. I love this church. But there is something that happens here quite frequently for me, and it is that you guys sometimes confuse me for someone else. It is okay. I do not get that offended, but I do want to set the record straight this morning. I am not that guy (picture of Nate Hilgenkamp -college pastor- and family). That is Nate Hilgenkamp; that is not my wife; that is not my child. I am not on the Becoming Something podcast. And I am absolutely not from Minnesota. Please never ever ask me if I am a Vikings fan, that is really offensive.

I am just kidding. I love Nate. Nate is one of my closest friends here and you are welcome to compliment me for his sermons whenever you would like. I will receive those compliments. You may have someone around you – maybe you have a twin - or someone that looks like you and confusion happens. And it is fun. You can laugh about it; you can make jokes about it. But sometimes being confused for someone else can be really, really horrible. Do you guys know who this guy is? (Picture of random man on screens.) Anyone? Really? This is Taylor Swift. Taylor Adam Swift. Taylor Adam Swift is a fisherman in Seattle. He is a photographer on the side. And as you can imagine the last 10-15 years of his life have been very confusing. Can you imagine applying for credit cards with the name Taylor Swift? Can you imagine the

disappointment on people's faces when you check into hotels or check into your flight? The amount of times he has had to tell people, "No – I am not that Taylor Swift. I am a dude. I am sorry. I do not sing, and I do not hate Kanye." It would be confusing to be named Taylor Swift.

And as weird as it sounds, I think that is what is happening in this story. God is trying to make it clear that He is not like other gods. Do not get Him confused. There is another passage about child sacrifice in Scripture - Leviticus 18. **"Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molek, for you must not profane the name of your God, I am the Lord."** So, people around the Israelites were sacrificing people to this god named Molek and God in this story is waving His hands really big and saying I am not like those gods. I am not like those gods. I would never ask you to sacrifice a person in order to gain prosperity or security. I am not like those gods.

Thankfully, we do not have that issue today. We are not struggling with whether we should worship Molek or not. But there are false gods in our life that are robbing from us. There are false gods in our life that are stealing from us. I do not know what it is for you. Maybe it is the false god of materialism that is taking all of your resources. Maybe it is the false god of perception management, and it is robbing you from authenticity in your relationships. Maybe it is the false god of false intimacy. You are bonding with people over gossip – creating enemy relationships. Or you are pursuing pornography and these quick fixes of feeling known and it is robbing you from real relationships. Or it is the false god of pride - this is one that I can struggle with – and it is causing you to be angry as you think you are better than anyone else. And it is stealing you from real friendships. Our God is not like those other gods. He does not steal from us; He gives us life and life abundant. His yoke is easy, and His burden is light. He says, **"Lose your life for my sake, and you will find it."** Our God does not take, our God gives. Our God is not like those other gods.

The Israelites would repeat this story to one another to remind themselves of God's character and we repeat the stories and the passage in Scripture to remind ourselves of who our God is like. Of what His character is like. Because our God is good! Which leads me to my final point.

3. *The Old Testament Reveals Jesus.*

This story, and the whole Old Testament, reveals Jesus. I do not know about you guys, but I love the Marvel movies. I love walking into a movie and knowing that two hours later I will have gotten at least a solid B of a movie. It is going to be kind of funny, I am going to have some actions scenes, and I just walk out really satisfied every single time. I love the Marvel movies! And now watching them over the years it is fun to see how the stories weave together. J.P. has talked about this up here before, but throughout the Marvel movies there are all these Easter Eggs or hints that point to different movies. And now, if you have seen the last movie Endgame, you know that all those movies point to this last battle. It is all about this last battle with Thanos. Then if you go back and watch the other movies you can see how they all point towards this one – the last one, the end.

God in His sovereignty orchestrated details and events in the Old Testament that points to His ultimate rescue plan. It all points to Jesus. There are so many crazy happenstances and details and all stories that point to Jesus. And this one has more than you can even imagine. I am just going to go through some of these – the similarities between Isaac and Jesus:

- They both have miraculous births
- They both fulfilled promises
- They both were pronounced by angels

- Both loved by their father – When Jesus was baptized God says, “This is my beloved Son.” We see this same phrase in this story.
- They were both mocked – Isaac by his brother, Jesus by the soldiers
- They both carried wood – Isaac the wood for the sacrifice, Jesus carried the cross
- The detail of 3 days – Isaac walked for three days up the mountain, Jesus was in a tomb for three days
- Age – I always thought Isaac was kid as I grew up hearing this story, but he had to be old enough to carry the really heavy wood. His dad was not strong enough to carry it, so he carried it. And most scholars agree that he was an adult when this happened based on chronologies looking at the age of his parents. And a lot think that he was around the age of 30. Jesus was around the age of 30 when He was crucified.
- They both were accompanied by two men – the two servants that went with Abraham and Isaac, the two thieves that were on the cross with Jesus.
- They both asked questions of their father – Isaac asked, “Hey Dad, where is the sacrifice?” Jesus said, “Father, why have you forsaken me?”

The similarities go beyond chance, this story points to Jesus. Then there is one key difference - Isaac lived and Jesus died.

We left off in verse 12 of Genesis 22. I am going to read verses 13 and 14 right now. **“Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns.”** This is right after God had yelled, “Stop.” **“He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide.”** The Hebrew for that is Jehovah Jireh – 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.

God provided a ram in place of Isaac. Jesus died the death that we deserve so that we can live with God forever. 2,000 years ago, on a mountain, God proved fully that He is Jehovah Jireh – the One that will provide. The One who is willing to give anything, to go to any lengths, in order to reconcile Himself with His creation. In order to prove His love to us. This is all about Jesus. This is all about what God has done for us. This whole story points to Jesus. And that is what the whole Old Testament points to as well.

In this story we have seen Abraham's faith that passes tests. We have seen God's character fully revealed – that He is not like those other gods. And we see that this story ultimately reveals Jesus. It points to Jesus. And I know for me, and it could be similar for you, you may get to the end of this and be like, "Hey I get that this revealed God's character. I get that this was a test of Abraham's faith. But couldn't there have been a different way? This probably effected Isaac and Abrahams relationship after that. I do not know how you come back from this moment, right? That is super hard and could there not have been a different way. Is this fair to Abraham and Isaac?" I think if we asked Abraham and Isaac they would say, "It is a gift." Because this test invited them into the story of God's reconciliation of our world. Every time we read this story; we talk about the Gospel. We talk about what Jesus has done in our life. And they have been invited into God's story. God used them to talk about what He was going to do through Jesus. Because that is what God's tests are – they are invitations in our life. God's tests are not meant to make us fail. God's tests are not meant to trip us up. God's tests are invitations to see Him work in our world.

Foster care, for my wife and I, has definitely been a test. It has been hard. It has been difficult. It has been challenging. It has also been an invitation to see God's healing; to see God work miracles in our kids. As we have needed help more than we have ever needed in our life, it has

also been an invitation to see God step up. We have an amazing foster care community in this church. Lots of foster families that support one another and then people who are not foster families that support those foster families through prayer, generosity, and relationships. We have seen the people of God step up and it has been an invitation to see that. God's test has been an invitation.

Do you know that in the last month, in the state of Texas, there were 182 children that had to spend more than one night in a CPS office? What that means is that 182 kids in the last month in our state had to sleep on a floor, or sleep on a couch, because there are not enough foster homes in our state. Just two nights ago my wife and I got a call from a mom who is now walking through this process that wanted us to take her kids and we can't. All of those kids are invitations to see God work miracles, to see God change lives. It is an invitation.

Honestly, an invitation that I miss weekly is the invitation to share my faith. I get to sit under the amazing leadership of J.P., and I get to feel challenged often and convicted often as he talks about how he shares his faith when he is out and about. And I have that same invitation in my life, but too often – more often than I would like to admit – I feel God calling me to that and I do not do it. I miss the invitation to see God change a life. I do not know what the test is in your life right now, but what I do know is it is an invitation. Maybe it is an invitation to move across the world or pick-up and move across our town. Maybe it is an invitation to use the emergency fund that you have for someone else's emergency. Maybe it is an invitation to confess sin for the first time. Maybe it is an invitation to call that family member that you have not talked to in ten years. I do not know what the test is that God has for you right now, but what I do know is that it is an invitation. Every time God calls us to something, we get to see God move and God work – that is who our God is.

We can trust God's character – He revealed Himself fully 2,000 years ago to be Jehovah Jireh – He will provide – no matter where He is leading you. And we can trust that if we pick up our cross and follow Him fully, He will be with us. He will go before us. And His tests are just an invitation to see Him move – because that is what our God does.

My prayer for myself this week is that I will not miss that invitation and my prayer for you guys is that you will not miss that invitation either. Let me pray for us.

God thank you for your grace when I don't say yes. God thank you for your mercy, that you would still use broken vessels like myself and like the people in this room and watching online. God you are so gracious and merciful to use us. And God thank you that when you said, "Go throughout the whole world and make disciples of all nations" that you also said that you will go with us to the end of the age. God, we do not do it alone, but you go before us – you are Jehovah Jireh, the one who does provide. God, I pray for myself and my friends that we will say yes to the invitations you have for us today and this week and as we follow you. God you are good, and you are awesome! Amen