

Summer Sermon Series: It's Worth Repeating

“Abraham, Abraham!”

(Genesis 22:11)

Introduction

➤ Typically, during the summer months, we take a break from our (exegetical) study of a particular book of the Bible in favor of a more topical series. In the past, we have studied the Lord's prayer, unbiblical sayings, misinterpreted Scriptures, the beatitudes, spiritual disciplines.

This summer's sermon series is called, “It's worth repeating” as we will be studying all the times in which a word is consecutively repeated in Scripture. For example: when God called out of the burning bush, “*Moses, Moses!*” (Ex.3:4); or when the seraphim/angels declared of God enthroned in heaven, “*Holy, Holy, Holy*” (Is.6:3; Rev.4:8); or when the Psalmist and Jesus cried, “*My God, My God*” (Ps.22:1; Matt.27:46); or when the risen and glorified Christ confronted Saul on the road to Damascus saying, “*Saul, Saul*” (Acts 9:4).

Simply put, such repetition in Scripture serves as an emphasis (similar to us underlining or italicizing a word today). When such an expression is used, it calls special attention to the occasion or to the person – to the importance of what is about to happen and/or what is about to be stated. Each of these repeated words will launch us into a study of amazing passages of Scripture. There will be twelve in all in our series, which covers most of them in Scripture [for the sake of time, we will not be studying any of the 25 “*Truly, Truly*” statements from Jesus recorded in John's Gospel].

➤ For this morning, we are going to look at the very first (consecutively) repeated word in the Bible. “*Abraham, Abraham!*” (Gen.22:11). Seeking to understand the importance of this expression, compels us to look at the entire passage. The story of Abraham and Isaac is an incredible, even inconceivable, story of God's amazing love and grace. This is a true story – real people, real places, real events – and a gripping, heart-wrenching, exhilarating story. As we study this passage together this morning, we will be confronted with a unique glimpse into the depth of God's love for us and the extent that He went in order to redeem us from our sins and adopt us as His children. As sure as thunder follows lightning, so the story of Abraham and Isaac causes us to reflect on our salvation in Christ.

Gen 22:1 ~ “After these things...”

➤ As we begin reading in chapter 22, we are immediately confronted with the quandary, “After what things?” Indeed, this is an important question to ask. For what has transpired in Abraham's life up until this moment sheds light on what is recorded in this chapter. We are first introduced to Abraham (Abram) in Genesis chapter 11. Abraham lived in the early 2nd millennium B.C., a descendant of Shem several generations after the flood (see Gen.11). Although Abraham was born in Ur (a prosperous city in Mesopotamia, 186 miles southeast of modern Bagdad in Iraq) his family moved NW to Haran (an important commercial city, today located in southern part of Turkey near the border of northern Syria). They had intended to go to Canaan, but instead settled in Haran. Abraham made this journey with his family, including his nephew Lot, and his wife Sarah (Sarai); who was barren (Gen.11:30).

Gen 12:1-3 ~ “Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ²And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’”

➤ What a promise! According to Joshua 24:2, Abraham had grown up in a pagan family; making Abraham a first-generation believer. For Abraham responded to God's call with an obedient faith. At the age of 75, apparently without any hesitation or excuses, Abraham took his wife and his nephew Lot, packed up all their possessions, and set out for Canaan (Gen.12:4-5). Once there, Lot and Abraham decided to separate because their possessions were too numerous to live together. Abraham gave Lot

first choice as to where to settle, and Lot chose the most first land for himself – near the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (“*the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the LORD*”, Gen.13:13). God would later destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, but Abraham was instrumental in saving Lot and his family by interceding for God to spare them (see Gen.18-19).

➤ After Abraham settled in the land of Canaan, God reaffirmed His covenant with Abraham:

Gen 15:1-6 ~ “After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: ‘Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.’ ²But Abram said, ‘O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?’ ³And Abram said, ‘Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.’ ⁴And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: ‘This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.’ ⁵And he brought him outside and said, ‘Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ ⁶And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.”

➤ Known as the “Abrahamic covenant”, God promised to make Abraham the father of a great nation! One problem (humanly speaking): Sarah was barren, and Abraham and Sarah were not getting any younger! In Genesis 17, we read that God promised Abraham that he would have a son through his wife Sarah. In response to this promise, both Abraham and Sarah laughed for Sarah had been barren all her life, and they both were well beyond their “child-bearing years” – Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90 years old (Gen.17:17, 18:11-12; Rom.4:19; Heb.11:11-12). While this was (is) physically impossible, nothing is impossible for God (Gen.18:14)! Indeed, at God’s appointed time, Abraham and Sarah gave birth to their firstborn son: Isaac (the name given to him by God which means “he laughs” or “laughter”, as both Abraham and Sarah laughed at the prospect of having a child at their old age; Gen.17:17; 18:12).

➤ In Genesis 21, we read of Isaac’s birth just as God had promised; the supernatural work of God. At this point, it seemed as though “all was right with the world.” Abraham and Sarah hand their son, the baby boy for whom they had waited so long. Isaac was the beginning of the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham, to make him a great nation with descendants as numerous as the stars. Through Isaac, Abraham would be the first great patriarch of God’s chosen nation Israel.

➤ Although Abraham was credited with righteousness for his faith in God (Gen.15:6; Rom.4:3), God needed him to be spiritually strong and mature if he was to be the first great patriarch of Israel (God’s chosen nation) – the father of “a great nation” – and the person through which God would execute His redemptive covenant with Israel. Even though Abraham believed God, he struggled to trust God when facing fearful or dangerous circumstances [he gave his wife away, not once but twice!; Gen.12, 20), and sinned against the Lord by having a child through Sarah’s maidservant Hagar (Gen.16, 21)]. Abraham needed to learn to trust God in everything, he needed to become a man of great faith in God, he needed to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that God is sovereign – that nothing is too difficult for God and that God always keeps His promises.

Gen 22:1 ~ “After these things God tested Abraham...”

➤ The Hebrew word translated here “*tested*” (*nasah*) means to prove, try or put to the test, and it denotes the proving of one’s loyalty or faithfulness by obedience. Interestingly, the word “tested” is often used in the Old Testament in reference to humans testing God – mankind trying to make God prove Himself!

Deut 6:16 ~ “You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah.”

Ps 78:40-42 ~ “How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness and grieved him in the desert!

⁴¹They tested God again and again and provoked the Holy One of Israel. ⁴²They did not remember his power or the day when he redeemed them from the foe”

Ps 95:7-9 ~ “Today, if you hear his voice,⁸ do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,⁹ when your fathers put me to the test [*nasah*] and put me to the proof [*bahan*], though they had seen my work.”

➤ But here in Genesis 22:1, as in many other places in Scripture, it is God who is testing man. This must not be misunderstood as God tempting Abraham with or into sin. The Bible is clear that while God *tests* us, He will never *tempt* us. God will never tempt us to sin, but He may test our faith.

James 1:13-15 ~ “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”

➤ So, after all these events and after Abraham and Sarah finally had their promised son, we read these shocking words:

Gen 22:1-2 ~ “After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here am I.’ ²He said, ‘Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.’”

➤ What? After all that God has promised and miraculously accomplished in the birth of Isaac, He now commands Abraham to kill his son as an act of worship? Thankfully, at the outset of this story, we read that God is only testing Abraham – God never intended Abraham to kill Isaac (but Abraham did not know that). God is testing Abraham. So, what does it mean to be tested by God (see Ps.26:2-3, 139:23-24)?

- 1) Test of (your) faith ~ Does Abraham truly believe in God? Does Abraham really trust in God’s character? Does Abraham truly believe in God’s Word?
↳ *Do I truly believe in God? Do I trust that He will always do what is right (good and just), even when it causes me pain or loss?*
- 2) Test of (your) faithfulness ~ Will Abraham obey God even though God’s command seems irrational, or too difficult? Will Abraham give to God whatever God demands? Is Abraham’s profession of faith, superficial, conditional, or self-centered? Will Abraham submit to God’s will in everything?
↳ *Do I follow God because He does good things for me, or because I know and trust Him as God? Is my obedience to God conditioned upon what benefits me? Do I truly surrender my life unconditionally to God?*
- 3) Test of (your) affections ~ Does Abraham really love God more than anything or anyone? Does Abraham love Isaac more than God? Does Abraham truly believe that God loves him, and is for him and not against him?
↳ *Do I love the gifts, more than the Giver; His presents more than His presence? Do I cherish God’s blessings more than I cherish Him? Is God my supreme treasure?*
- 4) Test of (your) worship ~ Will Abraham worship God above all, for nothing in return? Will Abraham honor, glorify and serve God over everything and everyone?
↳ *Do I desire to honor, glorify, and serve God in everything, and over everyone?*

➤ God does not test us to inform Himself of anything – He already knows everything; everything we will do and everything that we could do. God tests us to expose the truth of who we are, and our relationship with Him, to us! In testing, God does not learn anything, but teaches us more about ourselves and more about Him as our Sovereign Creator and Redeemer. God’s testing of His children may be one of His more underappreciated and precious gifts to His children.

James 1:2-4 ~ “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

1 Peter 1:6-7 ~ “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (see Rom.5:2-4)

- “God loves you just the way you are, but He loves you too much to let you stay that way.” God wants to perfect, mature, purify, and strengthen us. He wants us to know Him, to love Him, to trust Him, to worship Him and to follow Him. God wants us to know that He alone is God, and our only hope for forgiveness and salvation. He wants to humble us, for us to know that we are fully dependent upon Him, so that we will turn to Him and find His saving love and amazing grace. God wants us to know that He created us on purpose and for a purpose – that He has a divine design for our lives – that He is our heavenly Father and we are His children. He wants us to be saved from His just wrath, to be saved by His loving grace, to be saved into His forever family. God’s testing is for our good and His glory.
- So, how does Abraham respond to this test from Almighty God?

Gen 22:3 ~ “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.”

- Abraham responds to God’s command with unconditional obedience. But this is far from a mindless or heartless obedience. We know by God’s own declaration that Abraham loved Isaac (vs.2), so there is no doubt that this was gut-wrenching for Abraham. But Abraham is responding to God in faith, trusting in God’s character and believing in His promises.

Gen 22:4-5 ~ “On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. ⁵Then Abraham said to his young men, ‘Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.’”

- Was Abraham simply lying (as he had been prone to do in the past), unable to bring himself to tell his servants that he was going to sacrifice Isaac? Or is this a “new” Abraham, a man of strong faith in God? Thankfully, the writer of Hebrews gives us insight into what Abraham was thinking.

Heb 11:17-19 ~ “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, ¹⁸of whom it was said, ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’ ¹⁹He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.”

- Abraham wasn’t lying, not even a “white-lie.” In fact, he was absolutely telling the truth. Abraham truly believed that he and Isaac would return to these servants, for he believed that God would keep His promise to make him a great nation, through his son Isaac, even if God had to raise Isaac from the dead. Abraham trusted that God would not forsake him, nor forget His covenant.

Abraham also understood that his obedience to God, to slay his only son, was an act of worship – a worship service like none other! In a remarkable act of faith and faithfulness to God, Abraham told his servants, “You wait here with the donkey, for I and my son are going to worship God alone.” And what a worship service it would be.

Job 1:20-21 ~ “Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. ²¹And he said, ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.’”

Gen 22:6-8 ~ “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. ⁷And Isaac said to his father Abraham, ‘My father!’ And he said, ‘Here am I, my son.’ He said, ‘Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?’ ⁸Abraham said, ‘God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.’ So they went both of them together.”

- What a heart-wrenching question from Isaac! Rather than tell his son, “None of your business”, Abraham gives Isaac a much greater answer: *“God will provide for Himself the lamb...”* (vs.8). Nothing is said about Isaac’s age except that Abraham refers to him as *“the boy”* in verse 5. While we cannot be adamant concerning Isaac’s age, it seems clear in the context that Isaac was neither a baby nor a young child. Most scholars place Isaac in his teens at this time, and Josephus (the Jewish historian) recorded that he was twenty-five. He is obviously old enough to walk, to carry wood, to talk with his father and to process the necessary inventory for a burnt offering and to notice that they are missing the most important item – a lamb.

In all of this, it seems as though Isaac was submissive to his earthly father as Abraham was to God, his heavenly Father [note: if Isaac was 20, Abraham was 120 and seemingly unable to physically force Isaac onto the altar]. In fact, in my opinion, the context seems to indicate that both Abraham and Isaac were both trusting God through this incredibly trying experience. Apparently, amazingly, Abraham’s answer “God will provide...” was sufficient for Isaac.

Gen 22:9-10 ~ “When they came to the place of which God had told him, 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. ¹⁰Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.”

- Notice how the author deliberately slows down the pace, and increases the details, of this narrative in order to bring us into the palpable tension and drama of this experience. The beginning of the story spans three days in just a few words, now the narrator gives us a “frame-by-frame” account of the degree to which Abraham submitted to God’s command. With each pain-staking step, Abraham built an altar, prepared the wood, bound Isaac, and presumably raised a knife over the body of his only son. For us as readers, verse 11 cannot come fast enough!

Gen 22:11-12 ~ “But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here am I.’ ¹²He 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.’”

- Abraham passed the test, his faith in God was proven by his faithfulness to God (Jms.2:21-23). Abraham’s obedience to God was Abraham’s faith put into practice. Abraham’s proved his loyalty to God through his obedience to God. His faith was not superficial nor self-centered, and his faithfulness was neither conditional nor self-serving. Abraham knew God, he believed God, he obeyed God, he loved God, and he worshiped God. We are reminded that we are not saved by good works, but unto good words (Eph.2:8-10). Our faithfulness to God’s commands (His Word and His will) is the practical outworking of our faith in God.

Gen 22:13-14 ~ “And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴So Abraham called the name of that place, ‘The LORD will provide’; as it is said to this day, ‘On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.’”

- After seeing the ram the Lord provided Abraham put away his knife, unbound his son, and sacrificed the ram as a burnt offering unto the Lord. What a worship service this must have been – an indescribable time between father and son! Surely they would never forget this moment, and they would never again be the same. Abraham called this place, *“The LORD will provide”* (vs.14; transliterated: “Jehovah-Jireh”) which means “The Lord provides” or “YHWH sees.” This would serve

as a vivid reminder to Israel that God is sovereign, and a dramatic illustration foreshadowing the reality that God would provide a substitutionary sacrifice for our sins.

➤ Then the angel of the Lord reiterated God's covenant with Abraham:

Gen 22:15-19 ~ “And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven ¹⁶and said, ‘By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷I 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, ¹⁸and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.’ ¹⁹So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba. And Abraham lived at Beersheba.”

➤ The lesson from the story of Abraham and Isaac is not that we should sacrifice our children to God. Nor is it that we should sacrifice that which is most dear to us, in order for God to know we love Him. God's ultimate desire for us is not that we bring Him our stuff to be sacrificed, but that we surrender to Him our own lives as a sacrificial offering.

Hos 6:6 ~ “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.”

Matt 9:10-13 ~ “And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. ¹¹And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, ‘Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?’ ¹²But when he heard it, he said, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Mic 6:6-8 ~ “With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? ⁷Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” ⁸He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Rom 12:1 ~ “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

Conclusion

➤ When we read the story of Abraham and Isaac, we are confronted with the question, “Who would do such a thing?” In the Bible, we are given the answer: God did (Is.53:10). God *never* intended for Abraham to sacrifice his only son, but God *always* intended to sacrifice His Son for us (Acts 2:23).

Genesis 22:14 ~ “So Abraham called the name of that place, ‘The LORD will provide’; as it is said to this day, ‘On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided’”

Isaiah 53:5-6 ~ “But He was wounded for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

John 1:29 ~ “The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’”

John 3:16-18 ~ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Whoever believes

in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” (see Jn.1:14; 1Jn.4:9)

Rom 8:31-32 ~ “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³²He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”

➤ Three times in the account of Abraham and Isaac we are told that Isaac was Abraham’s *“only son”* (Gen.22:2, 12, 16). Isaac was Abraham’s one and only son (according to God’s covenant, Ishmael had left Abraham’s household). Of course, the point is not that the devastating impact of killing Isaac would be erased if Abraham had several sons (or children). To be sure, having other children can bring consolation to a one’s heart after losing a child. But no matter the circumstances, losing a child is a terribly devastating loss. Furthermore, actually sacrificing your child to God is an utterly incomprehensible, if not outright reprehensible, thought to most parents.

In addition to the potential of Abraham and Sarah’s parental loss, was the fact that Isaac was the son with whom God’s promise was to be realized (cf. Heb.11:17-18).

➤ Who would do such a thing? God did. This story of Abraham and Isaac is a unique and dramatic illustration of God’s gracious and costly gift of salvation. In a limited sense, from this story we see the crucifixion of Jesus Christ from God’s perspective.

- ◆ It affords us an opportunity to try to comprehend (to empathize with) the extent of God’s sacrificial gift of sending His one and only Son to die for us (Rom.5:6-8).
- ◆ It forces us to contend with the reality that God provided His own Son as a substitutionary sacrifice for us (Is.53:10).
- ◆ It challenges us to be impacted with the degree and depth of God’s salvific/saving love (Eph.2:4-5; 1Jn.4:9).
- ◆ It confronts us with the fact that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not just doctrinal, but also deeply personal (Jn.3:16).
- ◆ It awakens us to the sobering reality that Jesus willingly submitted to His Father’s will and lovingly gave Himself to be crucified for us (Eph.5:2; Jn.10:17-18; Heb.12:2).
- ◆ It encourages us to trust God, completely and unwaveringly, with everything we have and hold dear, and specifically for our salvation (Prov.3:5-6; Eph.1:12-13; Phil.4:6-7; Jd.1:24-25).

➤ According to 2Chron.3:1, Mount Moriah is the location in Jerusalem where Solomon built the temple. The fact that God called Abraham to go to *“the land of Moriah”* (Gen.22:2), leads many scholars to conclude that Jesus, God’s Son, was crucified near where Abraham went to sacrifice his son Isaac. Other parallels include:

- ◆ Isaac being Abraham’s only son, and Jesus being God’s only Son;
- ◆ Isaac carrying the wood for the sacrificial fire, and Jesus carrying His own cross to Golgotha;
- ◆ Isaac apparently submitting to his father’s will, and Jesus definitely submitting to His Father’s will;
- ◆ Abraham believing that God would raise Isaac from the dead, and God literally raising Jesus from the dead.

➤ Who would do such a thing? Who would sacrifice their only son for someone else? God did. He sent His one and only Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for our sins. Furthermore, what son would willingly give his life for others? Jesus did. Jesus laid down His own life as the substitutionary atonement for our sins, that whoever would believe in Him – receiving Him as Lord and Savior – would be forgiven of all their sins and saved forevermore.