

The Sacrifice

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[0:00] Good to see you all. We've been waiting for 25 years. We've been waiting for 25 years for Abraham and Sarah to have a baby.!

The sleepless nights begin here, and from here on out, everything's going to be fine. It is not the case. In fact, Genesis chapter 21 was not the climax of Abraham's life. It is Genesis chapter 22, which is today.

And we're going to be looking at that today. And I'm going to invite the lovely Emily to come up to read the word of the Lord to us. As is our tradition, we love to stand for the word of the Lord because it's just God breathed.

It is God's word to us. And so we stand in reverence and also, can I invite you to stand for the word of the Lord as Emily reads Genesis chapter 22 to us. Thank you. Lovely, James.

Genesis 22. After these things, God tested Abraham, and he said to him, Abraham. And he said, here I am. He 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.

[1:25] 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 which God had told him.

On the third day, Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then his eyes... Oh, sorry. Then Abraham said to his young men, stay here with the donkey.

I and the boy will go over there and worship and come against you. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac, his son. And he took it 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 he said, here I am, my son. He said, behold, the fire and the wood.

But where is the lamb for the burnt offering? Abraham said, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son. So they went both of them together.

[2:26] 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.

Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the Lord called him from heaven and said, Abraham, Abraham.

And he said, here I am. He 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 his 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 today, on the mount 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.

[3:38] I will surely bless you and 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 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. Thank you, Emily. Please take a seat. Thank you so much, Emily. We're going to go through this.

But before we go through chapter 22, there's one verse that really just kind of jumped out at me. It was just the verse just before that at the end of chapter 21. And it says, because he's got the baby

now.

And then he says, and Abraham sojourned many days in the land of the Philistines. What an interesting thing. Honestly, this has been, going through Genesis and going through the story of Abraham has been good for me.

[4:34] Because if you've, if I've had a chance to talk to you these last few weeks, this is something that I've been wrestling with. And actually the story of Abraham has really been blessing me. Because as someone who really, right now, is a little bit of just sojourning going, well, is home England?

Or is home Hong Kong? Or actually, where is home? Or what is home? And then I'm looking at Abraham's story. This guy was promised so much. His family would own land.

Lots of land. And yet he spends the majority of his life as a sojourner living in a tent. Oh, that just kind of speaks to me that, man, despite all the stuff that he's been promised, and yet he's actually happy just to sojourn through foreign land, the land of the Philistines.

In fact, one of the only pieces of land he actually ends up owning is a few chapters later where Sarah finally dies and he actually has to buy her land to bury her. That's the only thing. It makes me think, we weren't built for this world.

The city that we belong to is not on this planet. It's somewhere else. We're sojourners just like Abraham. And I'll tell you about my idol. My idol as in the Christian term of the idol in terms of what I really hold on to and what I really struggle with.

[5:45] I was talking to Jay and Emily about this the other night. Control. Control and comfort. I love to know what's happening tomorrow. I love to know that's why children are just a complete wrecking ball into the lives of parents because you no longer have control.

You don't, you're unable to dictate where things go. You see here at the beginning again, this is interesting. Genesis chapter 22 is almost a repeat once again of Genesis chapter 12.

That first call when God says to Abraham, hey, go. You see the call again where he says, go. It reminds me, many of you will have heard me tell this story as a 16-year-old when I'd done something that wasn't so good.

And then my dad takes me. He takes me to the church that we grew up in in Leicester. We went there just this last summer. And this crazy thing happens. He goes and he takes me up to the sanctuary upstairs.

And then he starts bawling his eyes out. He starts crying. And then he lies just at the stage, just underneath the cross. And then, of course, as a teenager, I'm like, OK, I'm in trouble.

[6:51] But I'm the one who's supposed to be crying, not you. And what's going on? And then it was that when he told me, there's a feeling that the Lord is going to take him away early.

And it would be a time that would be unexpected. And he made me promise him. He said, James, one thing that you have to promise me, it isn't about education. It isn't even about looking after your brother and your mother. Just be true to your calling.

I interpret that as to being, if God tells you to go, you go. That's it. And honestly, that's the journey that I've been on since then.

Christina and I, these last few weeks, since we came back from sunny England, maybe a little bit too hot with our air conditioning. But coming back going, God, where is it that you're calling us to? What are you calling? What do you actually want us to do?

We seem like sojourners. What are we doing here? And I realized the Christian life is not just about becoming good people who have good behavior. The Christian life is about responding to the call of God.

[7:53] Time and time and time again. The scary thing is, God calls you to go somewhere. He often doesn't tell you exactly where. Genesis chapter 12, he says, go.

I want you to leave home and I'll tell you where you'll end up going. Genesis chapter 22. Remember those seasons I talked about a couple of weeks ago? He's gone through a lot of seasons. He's gone through 25 years, 26 years of just seasons of making mistakes, going up and down, up and down.

And now we reach the climax because God tests him once and for all, one final time and says, go. Go where? He said, go. 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.

Again, he says, go. Head in that direction, but I'll tell you where later. How often when we want to hear the voice of God, it's saying, hey, go. And God, can you tell us exactly where you're going to tell us to go and what we're going to be exactly going to be doing?

And yet God doesn't do that. And so we see here Abraham again responding to God, not knowing where to go. And I love it. God just calls him by name, Abraham. So often we think of this God who's just distanced, saying, little minion, little human, obey me, follow me.

[9:03] But no, it's Abraham. Abraham, go. And go and take your son, your only son, almost just to rub salt in the wounds. Why? Because just a couple of chapters ago, there was another son. There was another son, Ishmael.

And God said, I know there was another son. But I'll bless him and I see him and I hear him. I want to be okay. But now Isaac is the only one you have left. Take your son and offer a burnt. Go to the land of Moriah where the mountains are and then offer him as a burnt offering.

A lot of us think this is, wait, he's telling him to kill him? No, it's offer him as a sacrifice, as a burnt offering.

If God was like, hey, I want you to show me how much you love me. I want you to kill your son. You'd have to climb a mountain for three days to do that. You can just go into the tent and make it happen straight away. But that's not what God's calling him.

God's saying, hey, I want you to take your son, your only son, whom you love, and go to the land and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.

[9:59] Just a little bit of context because this is horrifying. As we read through scripture, sometimes there are things that we don't understand, especially the modern day reader does not understand what this is really about. Bearing in mind, Abraham lived in a time where there was so many societies, so many pagan societies that would offer human sacrifices to the gods to satisfy them.

And often they would be offering the firstborn, the firstfruits. You see Cain and Abel, they were offering the firstfruits, right? So actually, this is not a foreign concept to Abraham. It's like, whoa, especially because it's the firstborn.

Well, this is the onlyborn now, but this was not a foreign concept to him because it would have been like, okay, I think God's doing something. Just a bit more of Jewish context around this. This idea of the firstfruits or giving your best to God was something that they would have been familiar with.

Why? Because there is a God, there is a holy God. There is a God that we need to satisfy. There is a God, there is a debt to be paid. And by offering up the sacrifice was almost a symbol of that gratitude, of that repentance.

And so this is not that foreign to Abraham. And to us, it's just like, whoa, why is this happening? But to God, he's testing. Actually, does Abraham truly cherish me, follow me, believe me?

[11:11] That thing that my dad told me to promise him, to go when God tells you to go, to be true to your calling. We did that when I was a teacher in England, and then Christina was working in the hospital.

And so we went. We have friends here who were with us during that time. And so we decided, okay, let's quit our jobs. Let's go work in the church. But what about kids? How are we going to provide for our kids? And then what we found is God just provided more and more for us at each step.

Every time we took that leap of faith, God provided more for us. But this was all in England. This was all in the relative comforts of our own home. And then until God said to us and challenged us eight years ago saying, hey, do you know all those good gifts that I've given you?

When you took that leap of faith and I came good for you, what if I took all those away? Are you most appreciative of me because of my gifts?

Or are you appreciative of me because I'm the giver? And that was the hardest one. When God gives you gifts and you're like, oh, thank you for this. Thank you so much. God, can you just please give me that job?

[12:10] I would love to work for that company. It would be such a good thing. What if God gives it to you? And then what if then God asks you to take it away? What's he actually trying to show us in doing that? And so we see that here as well.

He gives him Isaac finally. Now, bear in mind, it says, verse 1 says, after these things. So Isaac was born. But actually, scholars aren't quite sure exactly how many years have passed since then.

If you go to the National Gallery in London, you'll see portraits, paintings of this scene in Genesis chapter 22. And often it will actually be Abraham holding a knife, ready to sacrifice his baby boy or little child.

But this isn't the case. Isaac is actually at least, at the very least, a teenager at this point. But some believe he's either somewhere between 13 to 30. Okay? So it's been a while.

And so then God says, after all these things, take him up. And then what you see here is just a fascinating turn of events. And this is where we'll go, verse 3. So Abraham rose early in the morning.

[13:12] A lot of people will then use this to say, well, this is radical obedience. This is just waking up the next morning and just going straight and just, and that's almost the lesson of the sermon.

Hey, when God tells you to do something, do it without questioning. I'm not sure. Imagine, who's a parent here? Who's a father here? Let's put your hand up with your father. God tells you the night before, hey, I need you to offer your son, your only son, the one whom you love, as a sacrifice.

And I need you to head to those mountains over there. Do you think you'll be sleeping that night? I think he rose up early because he couldn't sleep. He's lying in bed going, what am I going to tell Sarah?

25 years ago we've been waiting for this. Finally, our marriage is in a little bit of a better place. Really? Is this what, you know what he's battling with? He's like, God, this doesn't make sense. When the command of God seems to conflict with the promises of God. He's like, wait, God, but you said you'll give me the son and actually then I'll be the father of many. But now you're telling me to, this doesn't make sense.

[14:18] Your commands don't seem to match up with your promises. And no doubt he would have just been spiraling in this. And so finally day breaks. He's like, you know what? Through my life, especially these last 25 years of learning and mistakes constantly, there's one thing.

God must be trusted. God must be obeyed. And he always provides, I remember that time when I, in Genesis 12, when I went to Egypt and I lied about Sarah. And yet somehow he still blessed me with more. And that time I made that mistake with Hagar.

And yet somehow he continues to still bless me with a son. And then I went again and I lied about Sarah again. And then somehow he kept blessing with me more. So he must be wrestling with these things going, you know what? My conclusion in the last 25 years, the one lesson that I've learned is God must be trusted.

God must be obeyed. It's daybreak now. Let's go. So he takes, he wakes Isaac up. He takes him and he takes two young men to go with him. And this is where you know that Isaac's not just like a two-year-old boy. He cuts the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

And on the third day, this is a walk. Like you, I challenge you to even take me for a hike for three hours, but for three days. Just a walk. Can you imagine?

[15:24] Okay, so I don't think he sleeps. And then he finally goes and gets up. And then they walk for three days. This is the constant internal turmoil, the wrestling that he's going through. Wait, what does this mean?

God, your commands. God, your promises. It doesn't make sense to me. And then just when he sees the mountain, and then 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.

This is really interesting. He says, okay, this final route, this final part of the route, I'm going to go myself with Isaac. And this is a really interesting moment here because this is the first, very first mention of the word worship in scripture.

What does the word mean to Abraham? It means to fall face down, to surrender, to prostrate oneself. To a holy God. Fast forward many, many years now.

What does the word worship mean to us? For some of it, it means dim lights, synth pads, good songs. Sometimes not so good songs.

[16:29] Oh, yeah, the worship of that church wasn't great. The worship leader sang too long. I mean, just kept repeating the chorus over and over and over again. I got bored. Yeah, the worship wasn't great there.

It was a little bit too lively for me, a little bit too charismatic. Or a little bit too old-fashioned and boring. Yeah, I'm not vibing with the worship of that church. We've come so far from the original

meaning and mention of the word worship, which meant to prostrate oneself, to surrender oneself to a holy God.

In the New Testament, the word worship would mean to ascribe worth. That's where you worship worth. It's the saying, God, you are the most valuable thing to me, even more than the son that I've waited for for 25 years.

I'm going to worship him with you there. Hey, you guys wait here. I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you. So he kind of knows that this is a little bit of a test.

And as he's wrestling with this and he's not sleeping and then he's walking these three days, he's like, okay, well, the command of God doesn't seem to match with the promise of God, but God is pretty powerful, so he's going to do something. Maybe what will happen is I will pretend, maybe I will offer the sacrifice.

[17:41] Maybe for a moment, Isaac, our fear will even faint. And maybe then he'll wake up again and we'll be okay. Or maybe I do have to actually offer him and maybe he will die. But God, his promise, his promise, maybe God will then raise him from the dead is what it says in Hebrews 11.

So actually Abraham, with the full knowledge going, okay, something's going to happen here that's going to be special. It isn't just going to be me going up with two people and coming down by myself. There's going to be more to this is what he's saying.

And so they do it. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac, his son.

Clever man. Remember, Abraham's quite old at this point. He's about 110 years old. So he's not carrying the wood up the mountain. So he's saying, teenager, Isaac, this is what I fed you for.

You're going to carry this wood up. So then he straps the wood onto Isaac and he took his hand, the fire and the knife. And so they went, both of them together. And Isaac said to Abraham, and this is where it should break every father's heart.

Verse 7 and 8. This is kind of the turning point of the passage here. It says, my father, I know enough to be kind of doing this with you, to trust you. We have the fire and the wood, but there is no lamb.

[18:44] I've seen you offer burnt offerings before, and there's usually a lamb. Where's the lamb? Abraham says, actually, he says, here I am, my son.

This is the second time he says, here I am, by the way. He says it to God first, and then he says it to Isaac here. God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son. God will see to it. He doesn't say, hey, cool story.

You're going to be the lamb. It's going to be really fun, I promise. Trust me. It's going to be just fine. He says, God will see to it. I don't know how he's going to do it, but he's going to see to it.

So let's just keep going. And so they both went together, and when they get there, 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.

This is every parent's nightmare. We pray and pray for God to give us the things that we want, and often some of those include children. The children are the biggest blessing to us.

[19:51] But how often do we find this happening even in church, where when we get the gift of children, and then the first thing that becomes an idol is our children. Suddenly it's the gift that God gives us that stops us from going to God.

How often has that happened with our work? God, please, I'd love to work for that company. And then you get the job. And it's like, praise God. Thank you so much for the job.

And then two Sundays later, sorry, I can't go to church anymore because of my work, because of the work that you gave me, because of the child that you gave me needs to nap at that time, so we're not going to go to church anymore.

We will just watch Zoom online instead. And then when the child gets older, God, thank you so much for this child, but we can't come to church anymore because they have tennis lessons, because we have to take them here, we have to take them there.

God, I want him or her to follow you, but actually there's all these other things. And suddenly as parents, our whole lives revolve around our children. And suddenly the very things that God gives us become the idols that pull him away from us.

[20:53] Has that happened to any of us? And you see God here testing Abraham, whether he's fearful of God. That's what Gav has just said. That actually, when he does actually, so he gets ready and he holds the knife, and then the angel calls to him, say, Abraham, Abraham.

And he said, here I am for the third time. 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. A couple of weeks ago I quoted one of my favorite devotional books, My Upmost for His Highest, Charles Ward Chambers, who says, when you fear God, you won't fear anything else. But when you don't fear God, you will fear everything else. All of this is about do we fear God or not. The word fear isn't terrified, afraid of God. It is, is there a reverence and awe for who God is. And actually, I'm just going to trust you with everything. Even with the things that I hold the most dear to my heart. And so, because God sees that he fears him and actually trusts him, he says, hey, stop.

The experiment is over. The test is done. You have passed. There was as much risk here for Abraham as there was for God. Because if actually Abraham doesn't trust God, then actually God's salvation plan for the nations does not work.

[22:08] And for Abraham, if God actually lets him do this, then it's done. And it isn't just about the sentimental value of, this is my son who I love.

I won't be able to play football with him anymore. Now, this is actually back in those days, the firstborn son, the only son, would have held such significant value because this was basically your social hope. This was your way of surviving.

This was your way for your family to continue. In fact, in those days, the firstborn would get everything. Why would that firstborn get everything? They wouldn't separate it with all the siblings because the moment you separate the inheritance with all the different siblings, your family becomes weaker.

So it made the most sense to give it all to one person and have that person be the one who leads the clan after that. So God's saying, hey, I know I gave you this, but I want you to entrust not just you and your family with me.

I want you to entrust your whole future with me. I want you to fear me. I want you to rely on me. I want you to trust me and me alone. Thank the Lord, though. He stops him, and then he sees a ram.

[23:08] He sees a sheep that's just, you know, poor ram, just kind of minding his own business, and suddenly gets trapped in a thicket by his horns. And so that ends up being the sacrifice instead.

And then Abraham says, whew, I passed. I'm going to call this mountain the Lord will provide.

Notice he does not say, I'm going to call this mountain, this is where I obeyed.

This was not the mountain of obedience. This isn't where Abraham goes, hey, I actually managed to prove myself. That's not what he's saying. He's saying this is where God provided. This is where God provided for me.

And remember, it's not about just obedience, pure obedience. Some of us who have grown up in the church, that's what we think Christianity is about. Can we just be the good Christians that we were supposed to be, obey the rules that we were supposed to obey, not do the things that we're not supposed to do, and that's what Christianity is about.

That is not what it's about. The whole point of Christianity, the whole point of the gospel, is that God provides. Just like Gabe said last week, that God is a God of promise, and he actually provides.

[24:08] And it's only afterwards, it's only after the obedience, does the provision come. You only start walking on the water, as John Alberg would say, after you actually step out of the boat. But some of us are trapped in this place where, will God provide or not?

Well, you won't find out until you actually take that step out. And once you take that step out, you will realize that God is good for his promise, and that he will provide every step of the way.

Genesis 22 is this radical form of obedience, even though I believe there would have been a lot of internal wrestling. But you can't just look at Genesis 22 and go, okay, that's pretty crazy. So basically, whatever God says we should do, you have to take it in the context of all of Abraham's life.

That actually, only a few chapters ago, he was bargaining and negotiating with God. Right? And so you're in this place now where he has become so trusting of God. Say, okay, God, I have learned my lesson.

I know that you can be trusted. I'm going to follow you. I know you're going to figure it out some way. And I wonder whether we need to do that with our own lives. Whether it's in a relationship that we have been entrusted with, whether it's been someone that he's gifted us with, or whether it's the job that he's given to us, or whether it's just simply our future.

[25:13] Whatever it is that God has given us, do we entrust it back to him? Or do we hold on to it and say, well, now you've given it to us. Now you've given it to me.

I can't let it go because I don't know why. Because ultimately, if you keep peeling back and you keep asking why, there's only one answer. It's because I don't trust you, God. I know you're good enough to give it to me now, but actually, I don't truly, truly trust you, is what we're saying.

If we go all the way back to Genesis, at the beginning of Genesis, the fall, we see that's what it is. Did God really tell you to do that? It all comes down to a mistrust of God. This whole test here is just testing to see whether Abraham truly, truly trusts God and cherishes him, not just for the gifts that he gives him, but for the actual presence of God himself.

So that's God. And that's Abraham. He passes the test. But I want to spare a little thought for Isaac. Isaac, who at this point, remember, he's actually not a baby, not a toddler.

He's probably a little bit older than Reuben. And dad tells him, hey, look, we're going up to the mountain to worship, carry the wood. What we see here is actually a picture of a willing son, a trusting son, who actually knows that his father knows what's best for him and is willing to go.

[26:37] And you see there's actually a relationship here between the two. There's only a very short dialogue, but you see my father, hey, I can see all this stuff, but we're missing something. And then Abraham responds to him in kind. This tells me one thing, especially for his adults, especially for his parents.

If we have kids who question the faith, who question anything, let them question, talk to them, discuss with them. Don't just say, hey, what I say is it. We're going up the hill.

Let's welcome questions. Let's welcome dialogue. Let's welcome relationship. The goal is for not just God to see how faithful Abraham is, but it's actually, you can actually, Isaac can see Abraham.

One of the reasons we went into ministry is actually when Christina was pregnant with Reuben, one of the questions that was posed to us is, what do you want your son to learn from us?

And there's many things, you know, how to be a good person, how to be kind, how to study hard, and all those kind of things.

[27:44] But the one thing that we kept saying to ourselves is, we want our children to know that God can be trusted. And so when God called us out of our jobs, I loved the school that I was teaching in.

I thought I was going to stay there forever. And it was God's gift to me. But when we had Reuben, I was like, you know what? I don't even want to just teach my son that God gives us these good gifts and we should just do our best in whatever he gives us.

I want to show him that actually God can be trusted. Because if we can trust God, we will reverse the curse of sin. God can be trusted.

So imagine Isaac just following Abraham up, willingly being tied down, going, okay, God, Dad's got a plan. Dad's got a plan. Dad's got a plan. Can the plan show up anytime now, please?

But what you do see here is a son looking up at a father, going, okay, the God that my father follows and worships is serious. I should trust him with everything. And so that's why you then hear about this God not just being the God of Abraham but also the God of Isaac.

[28:53] Abraham teaches Isaac a very important lesson here. And remember, in just the verses before, in verses, verse eight, oh, and verse six, they both say, so they went, both of them, together.

This wasn't one person dragging the other person. This was a willing, this was a mutual willingness to trust in God as they went up this mountain together. And so you see that happening here. And of course, we all now know as we look at this text, even though we aren't quite going through the internal turmoil of what Abraham was going through because we look now and then it doesn't happen.

But now we look, we see something more because we don't just see the Old Testament, we see the New Testament. We see that what Isaac is, what Isaac truly was, is a foreshadowing of the willing son, the Christ Jesus himself.

He was a prefiguration of the son who willingly obeyed the father in the garden when he said, okay, not my will, but yours be done. Why? Because I trust you, father. And you see Isaac basically painting a picture going further and you're seeing Jesus doing the same thing.

And that's what this whole passage about here is really trying to hammer home this idea of trusting in God. It's funny, God tells Abraham to go to the land of Moriah and go to the mountains there and

that mountain ends up being where the temple gets built.

[30 : 08] So this mountain, this very mountain here where the Lord will provide is where the temple of Solomon gets built. Many, many years later just in the mountain just across the way, there is another son who climbs his mountain with wood on his back too.

And of course, what we're talking about, who we're talking about is Jesus. And it is the same thing that I think he was wrestling. How does the command of God reconcile with the promise of God? How does a holy God also be a gracious God? Look, that sacrifice is needed. We know that sacrifice is needed because we are sinners and there is a debt to be paid.

So we know that's the case because if it wasn't there, then he's not a holy God. And if he's not a holy God, then he's not just. And then everything in the world that we see right now, there's no hope for anything in the world if he's in the holy and just God. But there's also no hope in the world if he is not a gracious God because who of us here can say that we have not sin that we are perfect.

So we are glad that he is holy and just when we look at the darkness in the world and we're also glad that he is gracious and forgiving when we look at the darkness inside us. And you see the questions of whether he is a holy God or whether he is a gracious God.

[31 : 19] You see the battling of whether the commands of God match up with the promise of God all in one place and that is the cross. And that is the cross where you see the justice of God, the wrath of God, waging war against evil, come hand in hand with the love and the grace and the forgiveness of God on the cross.

And it's funny in the book of James chapter 2 it says this that Abraham trusted and believed God and then it was counted to him as righteousness. It wasn't Abraham obeyed God and climbed up a mountain for three days and did something crazy.

It was that he just believed. And because he believed that's all that was required and it was counted to him as righteousness. You see it's easy to surrender to God when we know who God is.

It's easy to surrender to a God who we truly believe will provide and will give us the way. And Romans 8 it says this if you're wrestling with this he's like how he gave his only son for you how will he not graciously give you all things?

How many of us struggle with trusting God with our jobs with our future with our relationships? We all struggle with this. I struggle with this. I find great comfort in the fact that Abraham also struggled with this.

[32 : 40] Final thing and then I'm actually going to bring up my good friend Jay to have a little conversation. Just imagine for a second if Abraham and Isaac were actually at the Mount of Calvary when they see Jesus on the cross when they see God's only son the son whom he loves on the cross.

Imagine just for a second if Abraham and Isaac found a time machine and they ended up there and what they would have seen they're like oh this all makes sense. Now I know.

Now I know. Because he who does not spare his only son whom he loves now I know that God loves me. He would have been shouting around to everyone going I was here well I was nearby on a mountain many years ago but now I know what it was all about.

That there is a God there is a father in heaven who loves us so much who is so holy and who is so just and who is so compassionate that he would find he would launch a rescue plan to save us and that plan would involve his son dying on a cross for us.

Guys look that is the land that was slain. Can you imagine Isaac going that could have been me but it wasn't. Oh man.

[33 : 59] I think as those of us who follow Christ we need to encounter that truth again and again. To know how deep the father's love for us that he would give his only son and because of that we are now called children of God.

So here's my question and it's probably one that you would have thought as you were just looking through this passage is what's your Isaac? What's the gift that God has given you that you're so grateful for but now you're holding on to and you don't want to give back to him?

This happens all the time with Micah doesn't it Reuben? We give him a toy and then he doesn't let us have it back and he's no mine. How many of us have that in our lives?

How many of us have that Isaac in our lives? And what if God was just saying hey I gave you this and the whole point of this the whole point of this test is that you would trust me again and that you would respond to my call again and just in case you thought that responding to God's call once is

enough Abraham tells us it is not enough it happened in Genesis 12 it happened in Genesis 17 18 20 22 to be a follower of Christ is not just about modifying our behavior once it's about a constant decision to say God you call I go you invite me I follow what is our Isaac?

And so something that I've been wanting to try because I know that if I keep speaking every week for a long time you'll all get sick of me is actually there's lots of people in our congregation who actually have really so much to say so much to bless all of us and what we're going to hopefully try and do more of is actually to get some people up to share their thoughts so what I will do is the week before I'll actually give them a passage the passage that I'm going to be preaching on and ask them to meditate over it ask them to study over it and then of course to listen to the message as well and then to kind of give us a response in real time and maybe just to represent all of us here is actually what does the word of God have for us?

[36:05] What is God actually trying to say to us and what can we put into action here? And so I'd love to invite Jay up here and can we give him a round of applause? So I gave Jay this passage to kind of just reflect on and we've been talking about ways for him to kind of just serve more and he actually feels a conviction that one of these is to actually be able to share his testimony and also just to be willing to grow in teaching the word of God so actually I gave him this passage and then he actually sent me I actually got a little bit excited because I was like oh this is like a whole sermon's worth I can actually have the week off and I realized if I did that he'll never come back again so we're gonna so Jay before I jump into the questions can you just briefly tell us what you do and just about yourself my name is Jay and I am currently working at Bloomberg I'm Korean I don't know what else to share yeah you're Korean and working at Bloomberg that is a very

Korean way of describing yourself so what made you want to kind of just get up and do this God spoke to me three years ago when I was in the military and he spoke actually really clearly to me and he said I've given you a gift and you must use it and that's to teach so I've had my own journey of trying to obey this command and trusting God when he's calling me to do this it made me a little bit scared initially and I think now I'm sitting up here and I don't feel the nerves that I used to and it's such a I mean Emily knows how nervous I used to get and now I'm up here and it's just sorry I just want to testify it's just I'm so I'm so grateful that God's changed my heart that I just want to glorify him like this I'm here to glorify him I just want to share how God has been working in my life and it's tiring to hear you all the time you know it is I first met Jay when actually it was our very first weekend here in Hong Kong seven years ago and he was still how old were you then?

19 19 18 19 he was part of the Young Life University ministries as well and that's how they kind of got connected and since then I've just watched him grow and grow both in stature both in kind of build and also in hair and every time every time I look at him there's just a little bit of disdain in me it's just it's just it's just such a waste it's just kind of it's just and the most annoying thing is he'll go to military he'll shave it all off and then just two months later it's all back again but anyway thank you for so much for doing this and I hope we'll be able to do this more and so the first question I have for you and we only have two just in case you're tracking is just as you read the passage of Genesis 22 what stood out to you the most?

Before I do that can I just quickly pray if it's okay? Holy Spirit this is your stage and I just want to speak what you want to speak through me I just sense that there's a lot of open hearts here today Lord so I just pray God that you soften their hearts even more in the next 10 minutes God whatever it is that you want to speak through me I just pray I can obey I can abide in you God and I know that you will speak because you're faithful and I can trust you and we can trust you so Father I just pray for fertile soul as you speak now in the name of prayer Amen to answer the question well firstly thanks for having me James I've been thinking about this passage for the past two weeks it's a passage that's confused me it's been a passage that's been it's challenged me a lot over the years and two weeks ago like you know when we were doing chapter 20 I was like oh okay I need to speak on chapter 22 as I was reading ahead the main thing that stood out to me was I mean James you talked a lot about what it looks like to trust in God and how Abraham trusted in God and I think the question that popped up for me was like how do we trust God more because it's something that's said a lot in church right we just trust God and when you read

Genesis 22 like let's say you didn't know anything about Abraham and you read Genesis 22 this passage makes Abraham seem like he's this really obedient he doesn't challenge God he's super like he's really he really trusts the Lord but if you if you see the context of his life everything that's led up to this point Abraham was not a very good dude he really wasn't like you know he lied he

was he's not a very honest dude he didn't trust God at many turns he took matters into his own hands many times but we read today's passage and for the person who doesn't know or doesn't have context to Abraham's life it's like oh this guy is like he's the goat like I don't think I can ever be as trustworthy as Abraham was I'm nowhere near close to that level of faith right but then we have to I think for me what's so encouraging firstly is just understanding the context of Abraham's life this dude was messed up he did not trust God he's called the father of faith in the New Testament but if you read all the context all the chapters prior to today oh man he was a mess right and James talks about how our faith is like cycles right like it's not just this linear growth it's we go through cycles and I think that was the first thing that really stood out to me so as I was thinking about okay how did Abraham actually what was different for him this time right that was the main question like why this time after all the time prior he just challenged God he was quarreling with God he lied to God what was different this time what switched on for him where he was like okay

[41:41] I can actually trust God this time and I think my main takeaway if I could summarize my main takeaway into one sentence it's this we can only begin to truly trust God when we see that he's truly trustworthy it's about God's faithfulness when we read the passage I think it's so focused on Abraham Abraham's faith like wow Abraham you did such a good job but actually the only reason he was able to do that good job is because he finally understood experienced personally in his heart God's faithfulness in his life and it's what James said earlier right only when we can actually see that he's trustworthy when we understand that God is trustworthy then our actions will follow and I think that's the thing that really stood out to me it's not trying to muster up the courage to say okay God I'm just gonna trust you in this it's that's not what God's asking of us right Abraham saw who God was he understood that God was faithful to him think about it right like it sounds like Abraham's faith but it's actually a passage on

God's faith in Abraham's life because Abraham did not hold his end of the deal so many times right but yet God still took him to that mountain and he reestablishes that covenant with him it's actually a story about God's faithfulness to Abraham and I think when we start taking the focus off of ourselves and what we can do to bring to the table to become a better Christian whatever what not and we see actually God is trustworthy I think that's when our hearts begin to change and just one last thing I think the thing that really resonated with me as well was how it took Abraham so much time to get to this point I think when we again when we read this passage it just seems like oh wow he's the goat he's like so trustworthy but it took time it took mistakes and I think as readers of this passage I think what we can take away from it is understanding you know what in this journey of faith as I grow closer to Christ I will make mistakes and I will fall short but God is gracious and when I do he'll re-invite me with open arms and I think that's the thing that has to root us back to him keep us back to him it's about God taking the focus off of ourselves and looking to the faithful God I think is what I took away from the passage today and you this incoming curveball you and I both have the idol of control we've talked about this a lot and often that leads to just lots of anxiety and a lot of stress and worry that our wives can attest to as well so when you're saying okay well the answer then is that we just have to look at the trustworthiness of God practically speaking what does that look like how do you do that how do you remind yourself of that I guess I could just share the testimony I think trusting the Lord is when we look when I read the Bible it just sounds like you make one decision once at one point in your life okay I trust the Lord and you're set but it's never like that right it's a daily decision actually it takes time and I think for me in the context of idols and my Isaac in my life it's control and sometimes that control manifests itself in very different areas of my life but control in the context of my career

I think for me I'm an Asian kid right my parents had high expectations for me and you know doctor, lawyer whatever whatever yeah you know that was the expectation of me and I did it and that's kind of where I am now and for a very long time now since I was I don't know as long as I can remember I knew that God was calling me into a different career path he was calling me I think to become a counselor and I resisted that for a very long time I'll just explain why I'm sharing this testimony in a second and how it relates to trust but I resisted for a very long time couple of reasons number one again I didn't want to I didn't want to disappoint my parents that was a big one and I think the career that I'm in now I'm comfortable it means I can control the variables in my life it means that I can eliminate a lot of uncertainty from my life and that's really important for me so when God gave me the call hey become a counselor in my head I was thinking oh my goodness like that doesn't sound like a very stable job that sounds like really difficult work

I mean the list goes on right there's just so many different things to fear and so I resisted for a very long time and then I applied to Bloomberg and I got to Bloomberg and now I'm working finance it's been three years and the start of the year I was sharing with one of my mentors that I was really struggling with this I said to him I think the Lord's calling me but I don't know how to obey and he just asked me this question that just straight to the heart he's very direct he said Jay why don't you trust God and I was like what what do you mean I do that's really rude and he was like no Jay you don't trust God and as I sat with it I realized in my head I was saying Lord I trust you and I come here to Sunday service and I say I worship you I surrender whatever I'm saying with my lips but my heart didn't show it my actions didn't show it so when he asked me that question I didn't have an answer and he started praying for me and then as he started praying for me I got this picture as a young boy just a bit of context when I was a kid

[47:08] I I guess I didn't have a really good time in school I was bullied and my first so there's there's this one particular memory that as he was praying for me I just replayed in my head and I realized it was like kind of like a traumatic memory for me as a kid and it affected the way that I trusted God but the story goes it was my first day of school and after the teacher introduced me she left and this Korean girl stood up and she was like that's kimchi boy he's smelly he's a loser no one hang out with him and from that point on just as a kid that's like the worst thing that can happen to you right and I remember that that day like the first recess I went down and I was making my rounds with the kids like some kids were playing wall ball some kids were playing catch and I was like hey can I play with you like you know my high squeaky voice and they're like oh no you're kimchi boy you're a loser you suck like no one wants to be with you and I made my rounds across the entire playground right and every single kid said no to me and the memory of me was I went to the corner of the playground and I was I was weeping I was sobbing just this little j you know and in that in that moment

I asked I asked Jesus I asked Jesus where were you in that moment why didn't you protect me and I realized that this was kind of a core memory that has been holding me back now even as adults from trusting God because that really solidified in my head and I realized it was kind of like enemy had its root in my heart God is not worthy of trusting he didn't protect you then he won't protect you now and that lie was so embedded in my heart I didn't realize it had such a strong grip on me and the coolest thing was when I asked Jesus where were you he walks out from one of the classrooms and he sits next to me like this and he puts his arm around me and he says son I'll take care of you and I'll take care of your family too and the second part really got me because I think making this making this transition has been I'm starting a new family with Emily and as a husband and hopefully in the future as a father there are certain things that we have responsibilities and I was scared that I wouldn't be able to meet those responsibilities for my family so when God said to me I'll take care of your family I realized that God knows me so intimately he saw straight into my heart he knew exactly what I needed he knew exactly what I needed to hear and so I went home that night and I went to Emily and I said and God has called me and I must obey there is no other option and I think the reason why that the lights came on for me was when I realized God's going to take care of me I have these fears it's the same thing as Abraham right he had all these fears he had all these doubts but I finally understood in my heart okay he's going to take care of me so regardless of what comes I can trust him and I can take that leap of faith and I think that's what kind of switched on for me and that's why when I read this passage it really hits home for me because I've made my mistakes I have disobeyed God for over 10 years and I'm finally making the move to do it it took time and it took a lot of mistakes and I will make a lot of mistakes there's still moments where I have to re-evaluate and re-trust God because there are moments where I'm like oh my goodness what am I doing this is a stupid decision like I should not be doing this and the call again is remembering Jesus who said I'll take care of you and I'll take care of your family too and just lastly James conscious of time Davina you asked me a question yesterday in Alpha you asked me I want to trust God but sometimes I don't feel it oh I resonate with that so much sometimes this memory of I'll take care of you son doesn't do it for me sometimes I still spiral so the real the real direction I start fixing my gaze towards is the cross and I think the cross is the only place where we can kind of recalibrate ourselves what I mean by that is if we look at the truth of the gospel it's God coming to us and it's about God's faithfulness to us and when I feel the fear in my heart and it grips me again I remember that Jesus had all the power all the authority it says in the gospels that Jesus had the authority to bring legions of angels to kill everyone in front of him in front of the cross but he didn't isn't that so

curious why didn't he he had every authority to do so but he didn't why because of you because of me that's the only reason and when I look to the cross

I think it moves me because I know that if Jesus chose to stay on the cross it wasn't like the soldiers had too much power over him and he couldn't leave he had every right he had every power to do so but he chose not to for you and I think I come back to that a lot and sorry James one final thing this is really final keep thanking me I think one final thing is I think I struggle with trusting God and what that means often I'm sharing this as if I've got it all figured out I really don't I really really don't the thing that encourages me a lot when I struggle is I realize that I'm not actually supposed to do this by myself this journey of trusting God I think that's why Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit right we're not supposed to do it ourselves and the passage that encourages me so much is in Luke 11 I'll just read it real quick it's in Luke 11 verse 11 it says what father among you if his son asks for a fish will instead of a fish give him a serpent or if he asks for an egg will give you a scorpion if you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will the heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him how much more will the heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him you can ask him anytime the Holy Spirit is there he's knocking

[53:33] I sense that there's a lot of people in this room who are probably struggling with trusting God right now the good news is you don't have to do it alone the good news is there's a heavenly father who wants to give you the Holy Spirit there's a heavenly father who wants to help you so I just can I pray actually or do you want to okay can I just pray for you it's a prayer that I pray when I feel that I don't have the strength anymore to trust in him Jesus we look to you the only reason why we can trust you is because you have proved yourself to be trustworthy Father we confess that we like Abraham have failed so many times in our lives the God that loves us the God that looks at us is the one who has so much grace who's willing to give us a second chance a third chance a fourth chance a fifth chance because that's who you are you're trustworthy so Holy Spirit

Holy Spirit I ask can you just enter the hearts of those who are willing to receive you right now if there's any if there's anyone here right now who wants to receive the Holy Spirit can I just invite you to just open your heart or even just open your hands as a posture to show him Holy Spirit I don't understand this but I want to receive you in my life I'm struggling I feel like I know where I need to go but I don't have the strength to do it Holy Spirit please come will you enter my heart will you dwell in me you promised that you would if I ask so can I just invite you to just ask the Holy Spirit in your heart just echo in your heart come Holy Spirit come we thank you Father that you are faithful you are faithful to Abraham you are faithful to David you are faithful to Samson you are faithful to Mary you are faithful to so many people who have come before us and you will be faithful to us he will be faithful to you that is his promise so whatever you're struggling with remember he is worthy of all of your trust if he didn't leave you at Calvary he won't leave you now yes so Father we come to you would you give us clean hands and a pure heart we surrender to a loving providing faithful God we finish with a response through song but also if you feel as though you need prayer we'll be at the front and don't hesitate to come over and ask for prayer and we can pray for you may may!