

Genesis 22:1-19

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Preacher: None

[0 : 00] Please do grab your Bibles again. Turn to Genesis chapter 22. That's on page 16 of the church.! Look at the first 19 verses. Genesis chapter 22.

! Let me pray for God's help. Lord God, we are weak and we need you.

And so we pray that your spirit would be with us this evening. Would you apply your wonderful and powerful word to our hearts so that we may live faithfully for you. We pray all this for the sake of our Lord Jesus. Amen. A few years ago, a godly Christian friend of mine lost someone they loved. And my friend said this to me. I don't understand this. I don't understand why God would do this to me and make me go through this. This makes no sense. God is meant to love me. How is this good for me?

And at that time, my friend's faith was being pushed to its limits. God was asking her to go through something that was pushing her to the limits and it made no sense to her. Why would God ask her to go through this pain? Her faith was really being pressed by this overwhelming confusion of, I don't understand why God is doing this. And now some of us have felt exactly like that painful, confusing loss. Or maybe some of us have felt something, maybe not as severe, but a similar confusion. When your faith is really being tested in your job or at school and it looks like you might lose your job or real hardship is happening in your home life or a severe illness is in your life. And you have thought, I don't understand why God is doing this. How is this good for me? In fact, all of us will go through situations that we don't understand what God is doing.

[2 : 15] And those situations, when they come, can seem impossible. And our faith is really put into action. Well, today, Abraham is going through just that. A situation where he thinks, I don't understand why God is doing this. Abraham is going through a confusing and agonizing test of faith. And it really is agonizing because God comes to Abraham and says, Abraham, I want you to lose everything.

And this is the first thing to see today. Abraham was asked to lose everything. Abraham was asked to lose everything. Look at verse one with me. After these things, God tested Abraham. So after God came to Abraham and made a covenant with him and promised to bless Abraham and promised that a great nation and kings would come from Abraham and he will inherit a land to dwell in. And God said to him, you will have a son in your old age and all these promises will come through your son. And after Abraham finally had his son Isaac, after these things, God tested Abraham. Now, when God tests someone, he isn't trying to trick them. He isn't trying to break them. He's trying to put their faith into action to show the world how tough someone's faith is. So it's a bit like when engineers test metal girders to show that they're strong enough for a building. And so they put the metal girder in a machine and it presses down on it. And the engineer tests to see if it can take 10 tons or 100 tons of pressure on it. And he isn't trying to break the girder. He wants it to hold up. He's trying to show everyone involved that this girder can take it. Look, this girder can hold this building up. And so it is with

Abraham. God is testing his faith to show the world what kind of man it takes to carry this covenant and to carry these promises and blessings. And what exactly is this test? What does God ask him to do?

Verse 2. 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. God asks Abraham to kill and sacrifice his son. God asks him to lose his son.

Now when you hear this, it feels crazy, doesn't it? That is shocking, isn't it? Sacrifice your son.

[5 : 16] And if you think it is shocking, you're right to feel this way. This is the point. It's meant to be shocking. God knows what a big thing he's asking of Abraham. He knows what a big and weighty thing he's asking. He knows a big test requires big faith. So you're right to be shocked. But actually,

what Abraham is being asked to do, it's actually even more shocking than you think.

So the first shock is that this is a human sacrifice God is asking for. But on top of that, this isn't just any old human life. This is Abraham's son.

And not just his son. Look how Isaac is described. God doesn't just say, take Isaac and kill him. No, in verse 2, look what God says. Take your son. And not just that. Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love. God knows how much Isaac means to Abraham.

This is Abraham's precious, adored, his cherished, beloved son. It's his lovely little boy. And this boy means everything to him. I have a little girl, Lydia. I'm sure a lot of you have met her. And she's my precious little girl. And I always call her my love. That's my nickname for her. So when I come home from work, I come through the doors and I say, I missed you, my love.

And so she's not just my daughter. She's my precious daughter, whom I love. And that is Isaac. In fact, this is the first time the word love is used in the whole Bible.

[7 : 18] And that's interesting, isn't it? The first time it's used, it's used to speak of Abraham's love for Isaac. Isaac means everything to him. If Abraham had an iPhone, all his photos would have been of Isaac. And now Abraham is being asked to take the little boy whom he cherishes so much, his only son, whom he loves. God says, take him and sacrifice him. Abraham was asked to lose everything.

God knows how much our children mean to us. And that's the point here. God isn't asking this because he knows Isaac doesn't mean a lot, like he's expendable or something. No. God asks this because he knows Isaac means everything to Abraham. And can I just say here, we see here that God knows how much our children mean to us. He knows how hard it is to lose them. He knows what an awful and painful thing that is. And so if that is you, as you read this story, be assured that God knows. He knows how much your child means to you, and he knows how painful it is to lose them. He knows it means losing everything.

And that was for Abraham too. He knows how much your child is to lose everything. But actually, this test, it's even more shocking and confusing. Because Isaac is the promised covenant child. He's the promised one. And in him, in Isaac, he's holding all God's promises. All the blessings of God are in Isaac. Through this child, all the nations of the world will be blessed. In this child, God has promised to save the world from the curse of sin and to crush Satan. In this child lies our salvation.

And God says, kill that child. Kill the promises. Burn the blessings. Destroy the hope of salvation for the world.

God says, kill that child. Abraham was asked to lose everything. Now, we know Abraham is being tested. But Abraham doesn't know that, does he? To Abraham, this is real.

[9 : 51] This is very real. And to him, this is an absolutely makes no sense situation. What are you asking of me, God? Be blessed by killing the blessing? Receive the promises by burning the promises? What?

I don't understand why God is doing this. You're asking me to lose everything. This makes no sense. How is this good for me? Why would God put me through this? I don't understand why God is doing this.

And this is just like my friend. And this is just like any of us. God can put us in situations where our faith is really tested, where it's put into action, and it's being clamped down, and the pressure applied, and in those moments, it can make no sense to us. We can wonder, Lord, why have you asked me to go through this? Why are you putting me through this? And like Abraham, we may even be asked to lose something very dear to us, asked to lose everything. And in those moments, we will ask, why is God putting me through this? How is this good for me? I don't understand why God is doing this.

And in those moments, we first need to know God has not abandoned us. God is not trying to break us. Rather, like the iron girder, he's pushing our faith, and he's doing it with a purpose. There is purpose to it. It is for our good. And it may not make sense. We may not know the full plan, but we need to know God is in control, and he has a purpose. God knows what he's doing with Abraham here, and he knows what he's doing with you. But what do we do when we're in those moments? What does God want us to do? Well, let's see today how Abraham responds, because Abraham is a wonderful example of exactly how we should respond in these situations when we don't understand what God is doing, because what did Abraham do? Abraham trusted and obeyed. And this is the second point today.

[12:09] Abraham trusted and obeyed. Abraham trusted and obeyed. And just look what happens next in verse 3. So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey and two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. Abraham didn't refuse. He didn't push back. He didn't grumble. He didn't complain.

Abraham heard God, packed his bags, and went. He trusted what God was asking for him, and he obeyed entirely. And his obedience really is solid here. In verse 3, he even cut the wood for the sacrifice, the wood his son would burn on. And then off he went to Moriah. So although he didn't understand, and things made no sense, you can imagine Abraham thinking, Lord, I don't understand, but I will trust and obey you. And so he and Isaac and the two servant boys travel for three days, and then they finally get to the mountain where God said to go. And verse 4, he lifted up his eyes, and he saw the place from afar. And you can imagine it. He peers ahead, and he knows this is it. That's where it's happening.

That's where I say goodbye to my boy. He knows what lies ahead. But he still trusts God. And he still obeys, and he still keeps going into the scary unknown. But he doesn't just trust God in general, which he does. He knows God's goodness and leans on that. But his trust is specific here.

He trusts God will provide for him. Look at verse 5. 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 a real insight into Abraham's faith here. Abraham knows God has to keep his promises. They're utterly unbreakable. God has to bring blessing through Isaac. God has to rescue the world through Isaac. And so even though Abraham doesn't understand why God is doing this, he knows those promises have to come true. He knows God will provide in some way. And so he says, whatever happens, I and the boy will return. Even if Isaac dies today, I know we will return together. We have to.

It's impossible for God to break his promises. The book of Hebrews in the New Testament speaks about this moment in Abraham's life and says this, by faith, Abraham, when he was tested, he considered that God was able even to raise Isaac from the dead. Abraham trusted that God would keep his promises, even if it meant raising Isaac from the dead. Abraham trusted and obeyed. And he trusted God would keep his promises and he trusted that God will provide somehow. But still, Abraham had never been told Isaac would rise from the dead. For all he knows, he's going up there to kill Isaac. And so his faith is being pushed. The agony continues. Verse 6, 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.

[16:00] The moment is, it's drawn closer and closer. And you can imagine this is getting harder and harder. The iron girder of his faith is feeling the strain. He has in his hand the fire and the knife.

He can see his son carrying the very wood that he's going to burn on. And Isaac turns to him and says, Dad, I see the fire and the wood, but where's the lamb for the burnt offering?

And as he looks at his son, Abraham knows, my son, I've come to sacrifice you. But he still trusts God and he knows God has to stick to his promises. So he says in verse 8, God will provide for himself the lamb. You can almost hear Abraham's thoughts here. Lord, I don't understand what you're doing, but I trust you, Lord. And I know that you will provide.

But he doesn't know how. So he continues up the mountain, ready to kill his beloved son. And he finally reaches the place in verse 9. The time has come. He builds the altar.

He stacks the wood. He binds his only son, the one he loves. He lays his precious boy on the wood. He reaches out for the knife. He takes it in his hand. This is it. He goes in to plunge it into him.

[17:34] But wait. There's a voice. Abraham, Abraham. It's the angel of the Lord. Abraham stops. Here I am, Abraham. He hears, do not lay your hand on the boy. What? He can drop the knife? Can you imagine the relief? I've got my boy back. My son, my only son, whom I love. I haven't lost him. He's back.

But it doesn't stop there. Verse 13. 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. The Lord provided a lamb, a ram to be specific. This is God's goodness and provision right here. The Lord provided exactly for what Abraham needed. Abraham was in a situation that made no sense. Everything seemed hopeless. But he just trusted and obeyed God. And the Lord, what did he do? He provided for him. He even named that place, the Lord will provide. It's like God stamped on planet Earth a sign saying, hey you, the Lord will provide.

And this is a glorious truth for you, brothers and sisters. Our Lord is the Lord who provides for your needs. He is the one who has promised to bless you and love you and sustain you. And he has to stick to those promises. And he will provide for you. He will provide all that you need in those times when we find out our faith is being pushed, when we're confused about what God is doing. And it's like God is asking you to lose everything. In those moments, trust that God will provide and obey him.

Which means, if you are put in a difficult place in work, if you're in a difficult place in work and you're needing to lie or cheat or deny God in your work, and you could lose your job if you don't do that, lose everything if you don't do that, and you think in this moment, Lord, why are you putting me through this? In those moments, trust and obey.

Obey by being faithful to the Lord and honest in your work. Do not deny Christ. And trust that the Lord will provide. He will provide the grace that you need to stay godly and upright in your work situation. He will provide the daily bread that you need for your family.

[20 : 30] Now, this may mean losing your job. It may mean more difficulties. It may mean a very hard relationship with your boss or your colleagues. But the Lord will provide for you and strengthen you in all that you do. Trust that the Lord will use this for your good. And we, as a church, the Lord could ask us to walk into the scary unknown, and it could make no sense.

We could be asked to keep worshipping God and keep proclaiming the gospel, when it could actually be on the verge of being illegal to do so.

We could be asked to walk into conflict with the government, into persecution, all for just being normal, faithful Christians, a faithful church.

And if that time comes, we could well ask, Lord, how is this good for us? How is this good for IPC Ealing? Lord, how is all this good for your kingdom? And it could be scary.

Well, in those moments, trust that the Lord will provide. Keep obeying. Worship the Lord in the face of danger. Walk into the unknown. Trust and obey our Lord.

[21 : 53] Or if God has put you in a situation like Abraham, and he's asked you to lose someone so dear to you, and it feels like you've lost everything, and it makes no sense. You have no idea why God would ask you to go through this, and you just can't see how this is good for you. God wants you to trust him.

He wants you to know he has a purpose in all this. And he wants you to obey by keep on following him. Keep coming to him with your grief. Keep following him into the unknown.

And sometimes the greatest form of obedience is to just keep coming to church and keep praising God's name. Even in your pain, crying out, the Lord gives and takes away, but blessed be the name of the Lord.

That is obedience. That is faith in action. And it may feel like heading up a mountain toward darkness and gloom, but he will provide for you.

He'll provide the grace that you need to keep going. The Lord provides healing to our hearts, and he provides a hope to you. He says that there's a light at the end of this dark tunnel.

[23 : 16] For those in Christ, a day is coming when the pain in your heart will be no longer, and we will be reunited with everyone who belongs to Christ. God keeps his promises, and he will not stop working all things for your good.

He will uphold you. The Lord will provide. So, brothers and sisters, trust and obey. And we can be sure of all of this because God has already provided for you in the most astonishing way.

He's provided in the greatest way for your greatest need. He has sent his only son for you. And this is my third and final point today. The Lord has provided his son.

The Lord has provided his son. The ram wasn't the only thing that God provided that day. Look at verse 16. Because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, what happens?

I will surely bless you. I will surely multiply your offspring. Your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies. In your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.

[24 : 26] On this day, on this mountain, God provided salvation to the world. Because it's from this family line of Abraham and Isaac that Jesus comes.

Isaac is Jesus' great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather. God saved the world when he saved Isaac here. On this day, the Lord provided his own beloved son for us.

And this story is God telling us beforehand how he would provide for the world in his son. You can think of this story in front of us, it's kind of like a faint portrait of Jesus.

And you take all the characters, you take Abraham and Isaac and the ram, you line them all up and you see this faint portrait of Jesus. Because who is the true son whose father did not spare him for a sacrifice?

Who is the true son, the only son of God who is so loved by the father, whose life is so precious, who carried the wood for his own sacrifice, who holds all the blessings of salvation for the world?

[25 : 39] Who is the man who was willing to lose everything, even his own life, in obedience to God? And who is the lamb that God provided? Who is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world?

The Lord has provided his son, Jesus Christ, for you. He's provided for you. Look at Jesus, the Lord has provided.

And so please know, brothers and sisters, he will continue to provide for you. Christ reigns now and he's ready to bless you and to provide for you.

All the grace you need, all the strength that you need to keep going, the Lord will provide. So even in those darkest moments, when you don't understand what God is doing, like you're heading up into the scary unknown, trust and obey, and the Lord will provide.

Amen. Let me pray. Amen. Amen.