

March 29, 2024 Sermon Manuscript

Genesis 22:1-18 (NIV)

¹ Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

² Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.”

³ Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. ⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. ⁵ He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”

⁶ Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, ⁷ Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?”

“Yes, my son?” Abraham replied.

“The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

⁸ Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.

⁹ When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

¹² “Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”

¹³ Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.”

¹⁵ The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time ¹⁶ and said, “I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, ¹⁸ and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”

1 Peter 2:19-25 (NIV)

¹⁹ For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. ²⁰ But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. ²¹ To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

²² “He committed no sin,

and no deceit was found in his mouth.”

²³ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” ²⁵ For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Violence of God in the OT: The Binding of Isaac

*Then God said, “Take your son, your only son,
whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah.
Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.”*

—Genesis 22:2

If you found this verse - and the story as a whole, from Genesis 22 - if you found it disturbing, I can assure you: you are not alone. Indeed, feeling disturbed or unsettled is part of this story’s intent. But why and to what end? Well, that’s what I want to explore today/tonight. In reflecting upon the story of the Binding of Isaac as it relates to the crucifixion of Jesus, this will actually serve as a final chapter to the series on the Violence of God in the Old Testament that I stumbled into this Lent.¹

¹ Read or watch at <https://www.saintmatthiasoakdale.com/ot-violence>

For those of you who were here for any of the sermon on the Violence of God, you'll recall that I've been employing a model by theologian Chris Green, where Green recommends approaching such Old Testament passages using a combination of three principles:

- First, that God is God and we are not (option B, so we can trust in God's goodness even when particular passages seem to cast doubt on it.
- Second, that God revealed Himself gradually in scripture, even if that meant being misunderstood, until fully revealing His character in the life and teachings of Jesus
- And third, there may be something more going on in the passage that meets the eye, including that it may be intended to test us.

But ultimately Green encourages us to integrate all three of these options, but with an emphasis on considering how it relates to Jesus and our life with Him. So that is what I intend to do here today.

Today/Tonight, I want to show how Genesis 22 helps us understand how God overcame human sin in Christ through love: by making Himself vulnerable and enduring agony faithfully. And the good news is that Jesus invites us to *participate* in His victory over sin through taking up our own cross in our daily life and trusting God will bring good through it and vindicate us, just like we know He did with Jesus. #

In the series of sermons on the violence of God in the Old Testament, we looked at an instance of God perpetrating violence himself, such as with the Great Flood of Genesis 6 to 9, as well as God commanding His people to carry out violence, as with Israel's conquest of the Promised Land in the book of Joshua. And the Binding of Isaac strikes me as sort of a hybrid of the two categories, as God commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, but simply *the command itself* feels like God doing violence to Abraham, as He's not asking Abraham to kill some enemy, but his own son; for three days Abraham travels under the assumption he will have to put his son to death, and goes so far as binding Isaac to the altar and reaching for the knife before the angel of the Lord intervenes.

But I want to frame this story as a further development of what we learned from the Flood story in particular (with the pertinent excerpt from Genesis 9.² Those of you who were present when we considered that story on Lent 1 will recall that using the Flood God showed how He *could* respond to human sin, through an exercise of His power, but that in the end it didn't work. It only multiplied the damage of sin - as it wiped out a ton of people and precluded any further relationship with them and it didn't change the human heart: the humans who remained kept on sinning. And something similar happens when we respond to people hurting us with powerplays of punishment like unforgiveness or revenge, it just makes a tough situation worse. And so, we saw the Flood story conclude with God promising to deal with human sinfulness in a different way: not through exercises of His power, but through sacrificial love. With His rainbow in the sky - which the Hebrew is actually just the word "bow", like a bow-and-arrow - God aimed this bow-in-the-sky at Himself (upward), as a symbol that He would

Summary of Chris Green's presentation on Responses to the Violence of God in the Old Testament

- **OPTION A: Tear it Out of the Bible** [heretical option: Marcionism]
 - Ignore difficult Old Testament passages
 - Decide there is a mean Old Testament God and a separate, loving New Testament God. [Penal Substitutionary Atonement arguably does this]
- **OPTION B: God is God and we are not.**
 - God does what God does, who are we to question?
 - Weaker Version: God was good in it, but it is a mystery how.
- **OPTION C: God revealed himself gradually in the Bible**
 - Jesus is the fullness of God's self-revelation
 - In the Old Testament, God is showing some of Himself, but choosing to work with people where they are by letting them think what they do at that time and then later teaching better thinking (ultimately in Christ)
- **OPTION D: More than meets the eye**
 - The historicity or depiction of God in troubling Old Testament stories is not as important about what God is doing now, spiritually, in our relationship with Christ.
- **Option E (the Best): Leave behind option A and integrate options B, C & D, with the weight on how it relates to JESUS.**

² Genesis 9:11-17

¹¹ I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."

¹² And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: ¹³ I have set my rainbow* in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow* appears in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. ¹⁶ Whenever the rainbow* appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth."

¹⁷ So God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth."

seek to overcome human sin by making Himself vulnerable to being harmed by humankind and yet forgive. And God would do this, of course, by sending His Son into the world for our sakes, knowing full well what we would do to Him.

Well, fast forwarding from the Flood to Abraham, when God had originally called Abraham, God promised him that He would bless all the world through Abraham's progeny, which we now understand would be through Jesus, who descended from Abraham and Isaac. But in Genesis 22 God is giving Abraham - and us, as readers - a sense of what it will be like for God to bring that blessing about. The agony that Abraham and we as readers experience is a taste of the agony God opens himself up to in Christ, by coming to earth and going to the cross. When Isaac says to his father in verse 7, "The fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?", Abraham answers cryptically, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." But these words are also prophetic of Jesus.³

- As is the ram, who God ultimately does provide (v13) a symbol of Jesus. After the angel tells Abraham not to "lay a hand on the boy," his horns are caught in the thicket. And is this not a metaphor for the son of God coming into the world and subjecting himself to the sin of worldly powers?
- Abraham's naming of the place "The Lord will provide" (v14) and it being said *from* this story that "on the mountain of the Lord it will be provided" - are these not also prophecies of Jesus going to Calvary?⁴

And so, in Genesis 22 the Lord allows Abraham and us as readers to feel the agony He is willing to experience - and therefore, the depth of His love - in overcoming our sin by making himself vulnerable to it for our sakes. ##

However, this is not God's only purpose in using Genesis 22 to provoke feelings of consternation or agony in us. Even though Abraham did not ultimately have to put Isaac to death (and even though Jesus went to the cross for our sakes), Matthew Lynch suggest that God's call for Abraham to put to death what he loves most - to do something he absolutely does not want to do - "anticipates the call of Christ to take up our (own) cross daily, and the call to recognize that we are crucified *with* Christ."⁵ I can't help but think of Peter's consternation in Mark 8 (and also Matthew 16 & Luke 9) when Jesus predicts his own death, but after rebuking Peter, Jesus insists that (quote), "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it" (Mk 8:34-35).⁶

Well, as Peter learned and wrote much later in our second reading today, Jesus bore the injustice of human sin on the cross, but he responded righteously - with forgiveness, not retaliation - as an example for how we can respond to the wrongs and slights done to us. First Peter 2:21 says when Jesus suffered for us he left us an example, that we should follow in his steps. Jesus responded according to

³ Fleming Rutledge notes that a "crucial difference between the *Akedah* (Gen 22) and the cross...is that the Father is not sacrificing the Son. God the Father and God the Son *together, with a single will*, engaged the eternal purpose of God..." (Rutledge *The Crucifixion*, 266)

⁴ Or even the Mount of Olives, where Jesus is arrested.

⁵ Matthew Lynch: "These stories (including Gen22) anticipate the call of Christ to take up our cross daily, and the call to recognize that we are crucified with Christ."

As Paul writes in Romans 6:3-4, when we are baptized we are baptized into his death

⁶ "The concept of substitution grates against the call to participate in the cross since, by definition, it conceptualizes Jesus's death as something he endured *so others can avoid it*. Penal substitutionary atonement names the cross as what those who benefit from Jesus' death necessarily get to *escape* since it is constructed as "in our place" and "instead of us. It thereby opens the door to the satanic idea that one can be a disciple of Jesus and avoid the cross (Mark 8:33). That is the exact opposite of what passages like 1 Pet 2:21-25, 3:17-17, and Mark 10:38-45 say. The consistent message throughout the entire NT is not that Jesus died *instead* of us; rather, it repeatedly indicates that Jesus dies *ahead* of us so that we can unite with him and be conformed (to) the image of his death (Rom 6:5, Phil 3:10)." (Andrew Rillera, *Lamb of the Free*, 273-274).

the ethic he had established in His Sermon on the Mount: turning the other cheek, loving His enemies, praying for those who persecuted Him. Peter continues in verse 23, writing that “When they hurled their insults at him, (Jesus) did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.²⁴ ‘He himself bore our sins’ in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; ‘by his wounds you have been healed.’”⁷

When we are hurt or wronged, our sinful impulse is to retaliate and it balks at Jesus’ call to do otherwise. But, in Jesus we have been given the example, in His crucifixion, and the strength, in His Spirit, to respond righteously and in love like He did, that others might glimpse the greatness of His love!

In Jesus, we are called to daily place *ourselves* on the altar, like Abraham did with Isaac. In Romans 12, Paul writes, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” And, in doing this, we ask Jesus to live in and through us, to help us to remain faithful in the midst of our days trials: to trust that following in His ways will somehow be best for others *and us!* #

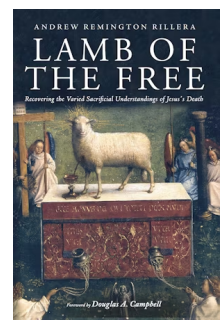
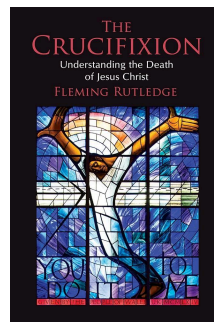
This is the sort of faith that God required of Abraham. God had promised to bless the world through Abraham’s line and Isaac was Abraham’s only son and Abraham’s wife was past the childbearing age. This is why Soren Kierkegaard insisted that the only way Abraham could have responded with the obedience that he had over those three days - to the extent of reaching for the knife - is that Abraham must’ve believed that God would surely raise Isaac from the dead.

And the same was true for Jesus. Prior to His passion, Jesus had predicted multiple times that he would have to die, but that God would then raise him from the dead. And He must’ve discerned from the scriptures, but this is what allowed Him to respond faithfully in the face of injustice (even unto death): His belief that the Father would vindicate Him with resurrection.⁸ #

Well, the same goes for us. We can trust the Lord’s commands of love even when we don’t feel like it - even when it feels downright agonizing to us - we can ask for His help to be able to imagine and do the next right thing and trust that it will turn out to be well for us and others, just as it did for Christ.

The Binding of Isaac helps us understand how God overcame human sin in Christ through love: by making Himself vulnerable and enduring agony faithfully. And the good news is that Jesus invites us to *participate* in His victory over sin through taking up our own cross in our daily life and trusting God will bring good through it and vindicate us, just like we know He did with Jesus.

In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.



⁷ “The idea of “bearing our sins,” as Peter goes on to make plain, means Jesus endured being treated unjustly and handled it well. He responded justly to the injustice and to the sins he suffered (2:23). Then, Peter says that Jesus deals with our inclination to sin and thus we are now able to live justly (2:24)... what Peter is talking about is healing us humans of our proclivity to sin/live unjustly.” (Andrew Rillera, Lamb of the Free, 244).

⁸ Philippians 2:8-9 -

^{8b} And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name...”