

Jesus in the Story of Abraham

Genesis 22:1-19

Are you fighting your battle against sin alone?
Or are you fighting as one joined to Jesus Christ?

This is the third sermon on Genesis 22. In the first sermon, we focused on what I believe is the main thrust of the passage: Abraham as a model to us of faith, obedience, and love. In the second sermon, we focused on how Abraham revealed to us the love of the Father for His Son, Jesus Christ. Today, our focus will be on how Abraham reveals to us Jesus.

How are you doing today?
How are you doing in the area of self-control?
Are you driven by what makes you feel good in the moment? Or are you able to take captive your feelings and make them obedient to Jesus Christ?
Do you have your anger under control, such that peace and patience and kindness flow out of you?
Are you consumed with showing yourself to be better than the people around you? Or are you content to use your gifts and abilities to serve?
Is your attitude full of grumbling about your life?
Are you always being critical of the faults of others?
Or is your demeanor characterized by thankfulness, joy, and peace?
Do you see your brothers and sisters in the Church for who they are in Christ? Or do you only see their faults?
Would the people around you say that you are kind and gentle?
Do you inwardly love that which is good and hate that which is evil?

I hope that as you listened, one or more of my questions felt like an arrow was shooting into your soul. Maybe you were reminded of previous failures that still fill you with regret. Maybe you are currently waging an inner war with your desires and are not confident that the good will win out. Maybe you are tired and wonder if true character change is even possible.

It doesn't feel good to think about where we fall short. And it is not healthy to constantly be tearing ourselves down and focusing on the negative. But neither is it healthy to ignore the truth about ourselves.

We are not yet who we ought to be. And if we are born again, we are not yet who we want to be.

The world will tell you that you should not feel guilt or shame. It is better to believe only good things about yourself. The unbelieving world sees how anxiety and depression are destructive to the soul. Therefore they should be avoided at all costs. Even at the cost of truth.

As Christians we are bound to the truth. We cannot sacrifice truth simply to feel better.

But rather than the truth being destructive, we believe that knowing the truth leads to freedom.

We must first look at the truth about ourselves.

And then we must look to the truth about Jesus Christ.

Read Genesis 22:1-19.

How is Jesus revealed to us in this story?

I believe Jesus is revealed to us in 3 ways.

He is revealed to us in God's provision of the ram.

He is revealed to us in Abraham's son, Isaac.

And He is revealed to us in Abraham.

How does God's provision of a ram reveal Jesus Christ?

Jesus is revealed in the fact that God Himself provides what we owe.

God does this on His own initiative and is entirely motivated by grace.

God has no obligation to you except to judge you for your sin.

Stop for a moment and reflect upon the truth that you deserve God's eternal wrath, and He would be perfectly within His rights to leave you in your sin and sentence you to an eternal hell.

I know that our culture tells us to ignore and suppress any twinges of fear and guilt and shame. But what if those twinges are consistent with the truth? What if those twinges of guilt are designed for your good? None of us really wants to long entertain thoughts that we are “not good”. But what if those inner thoughts and desires accurately reflect who we are? Or were?

What if the guilt and shame that you often feel is not the product of bad parents who raised you in biblical values? What if they are there because there are still remnants within you of having been made in the image of God? What if no matter how much you want to place the blame for these feelings on others, they are an accurate assessment of God’ righteous anger for your corruption?

In the story of Abraham, what if it is true that God has the right to require not only the life of our firstborn, but also the lives of each one of us?

God’s requirement of Isaac had more to do than proving that Abraham loved God more than he loved Isaac. If that were so, when God stopped Abraham, that would have been the end of it. They would have just went home.

But God was teaching Abraham, and us, that someone had to die. God’s holy and righteous character necessitated it. The blessing could not be achieved except someone die.

And we should all be thankful that our God is Jehoveh Jireh. He is the LORD who provides for himself what we owe.

Look at vv. 12-14.

Genesis 22:12-14 ¹² He (God) 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." 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. ¹⁴ So Abraham

called the name of that place, "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

Abraham knew that God had the right to take his son. But Abraham also knew that God had promised blessing through Isaac.

The provision of the ram is essential to the story. It is not enough that God allows Isaac to live. Someone's life must be taken instead. How wonderful that God provides that someone Himself!

How wonderful that the name of the story is not: Abraham is Awesome! Abraham is more excited that God has provided than he is that he has passed the test.

As much as Abraham passes God's test in this instance, there is no hint that he now believes that he does not need God's provision.

Are you thankful that God has Himself provided for you?

When it comes to twinges of guilt and shame, it is more in line with truth to acknowledge that they are only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the evil of our old nature.

Do you have thoughts in which you condemn yourself for the evil within? Instead of feelings of "I am awesome!" you have feelings of "I am terrible!"

Do you think that Abraham never encountered such feelings?

He watched the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

On two occasions he offered his wife to a foreign king to save his own hide.

He doubted God's promises on multiple occasions.

He may have proved himself in this encounter, but he had failed miserably on other occasions.

Abraham did not have a right to the promises any more than you and I. If any of us has any hope of gaining eternal life, blood must be shed.

The only question is whose blood will it be?

So, you experience feelings of guilt and shame. Do your thoughts then run to Jesus Christ, God's gracious provision for the source of those feelings? Stuffing them down is not the answer. Facing them honestly, truthfully, humbly is a much better option. And then looking to Jesus.

The Hebrew word for provided is "ra'ah". And it simply means "sees". I do not know the history of how "sees" connects with "provides", but here is what makes sense to me.

First, God sees you. His eyes burn through to your darkest thoughts and feelings. He sees it all. There is no hiding from Him. Secondly, God wants you to "see" His provision for you. He wants you to fix your eyes on Jesus.

Jesus is revealed to us in God's provision of the ram. Look at Jesus and embrace the truth that in the shedding of His blood, all of your guilt and shame have been atoned.

God himself has provided so that all that is evil within you can no longer condemn you. God's righteousness has been fully satisfied.

When you experience those continued feelings of guilt and shame, look them straight in the face and say to yourself "Jehovah Jireh" – God has provided the ram for me.

And because of this, I now have peace with God.

Next, Jesus is revealed to us in Isaac.

Isaac's faith and submission are not where we see Jesus.

When the writer of Hebrews brings up Isaac's faith, he does not bring up this story. Instead, he focuses on an event much later in Isaac's life – that of pronouncing blessing upon Jacob and Esau.

Hebrews 11:20 ²⁰ By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau.

That should temper our thoughts that this story is about Isaac's faith and obedience.

But we can see Jesus in Isaac. But it is more by way of contrast. Abraham does not have to give up his only son to inherit the blessing. But God does!

God will offer his only Son as a burnt offering so that all His elect might enjoy the Blessing of God.

We saw this last week as we looked at the love of the Father for his Son. Isaac reminds us that the cross is not only about justice. It is also about love – the love of the Father for His Son.

Isaac also reveals Jesus in that the entirety of the promises are dependent upon Him.

2 Corinthians 1:19-20 ¹⁹ For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. ²⁰ For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.

Isaac is not merely "A" child of promise. He is "The" Child of Promise. He is the one seed through whom all the Promised Blessings would come.

Galatians 3:16 ¹⁶ Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ.

Isaac was in this way a foreshadow of Jesus Christ, the true inheritor of the Promises of God. The promises belong to Jesus alone.

We are blessed to partake of those promises of blessing. But we do not do so directly. We only have this privilege by believing in Jesus, to whom all the blessings have been given.

Our culture floods us with messages of how special we are. These are not all wrong. Each of us has been uniquely formed by the good and wise hand of God. But my worth and value have less to do with my individuality and more to do with my connection to Jesus Christ.

At the deepest level, why are you “special”? Because Jesus is “Special”, and you are connected to Jesus through faith alone.

It is our connection to Jesus that Abraham reveals to us. Abraham reveals Jesus to us in that Abraham functions here as a Covenant Head, and Jesus is our True Covenant Head.

What do we mean by “covenant head”?

A covenant head is a representative of a group of people. The covenant head performs an action which is attributed to all who are in the group. The covenant head acts on behalf of the rest of the group. And his actions affect everyone in the group.

As it relates to eternal condemnation and eternal redemption, there are two covenant heads: Adam and Jesus.

Adam’s one sinful act brought guilt upon all of us, such that we all deserve death. And Adam’s one sinful act affected each one of us such that we are born enjoying evil. We inherit a sinful nature from Adam.

When you experience those twinges of guilt and shame, they are accusing you of who you are because of your connection to Adam.

On the other hand, Jesus’ one act of righteousness, his obeying his Father unto death, has freely imputed righteousness to all who receive Jesus. And all who are in Christ are being affected by Christ’s one act of righteousness.

Those who are trusting in Jesus are receiving an abundance of grace that enables us to “reign in life”.

Let’s look at how Abraham functions in Genesis 22 as a covenant head.

Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac guarantees the fulfillment of the Covenant Promises.

15 And
 the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from
heaven
16 and
 said,
 "By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD,
 because you have done this
 and
 have not withheld your son, your only son,
17 I will surely bless you,
 and
 I will surely multiply your offspring
 as the stars of heaven
 and
 as the sand that is on the seashore.
 And
 your offspring shall possess the gate of his
 enemies,
18 and
 in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth
be blessed,
 because you have obeyed my voice."

Because of Abraham’s obedience, Abraham’s offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies.

Because of Abraham’s obedience, all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.

The important thing to see is that Abraham's obedience guarantees the fulfillment of the Covenant Promises.

The language is so strong that one might think that the promises are dependent upon our personal obedience. If Abraham is simply a model for us, then we might conclude that unless we come to the same level of obedience, we could never have assurance that the promises would be fulfilled to us.

We would always be thinking to ourselves, "I have not obeyed enough. I have not obeyed to that extent."

And since even our best works are mixed with filth, we could never have peace with God.

But if Abraham is functioning as a foreshadow of Jesus Christ then this passage gives us hope and confidence.

The blessings of the covenant are guaranteed by obedience, but not our personal obedience. They are guaranteed by the perfect obedience of our covenant head – Jesus Christ.

In fact, the promises here spoken to Abraham are promises Jesus claims for himself.

Matthew 16:18 ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Matthew 28:18-19 ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

When God tells Abraham that it is "because he has obeyed", we are to see Abraham as a foreshadow of the perfection of Jesus Christ. It is because Jesus has perfectly obeyed that these promises are secure.

God uses Abraham to help His people understand that they do not personally earn blessing. It is given to them graciously through their covenant head.

Technically speaking, Abraham's covenant head was also Jesus Christ.

That is why even though Abraham is presented to us as perfectly obedient in heart and actions, he still has need of God to provide a ram for him and his son. Abraham could not offer himself as a burnt offering as Jesus would do on the cross.

Romans 5:18-19 ¹⁸ Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹ For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

Hebrews 10:12-14 ¹² But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. ¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

“Abraham's obedience is symbolic of the sacrificial act of obedience of the Messiah, the meritorious work that secures the ultimate salvation-kingdom for God's people of all times.” Belcher – Covenant Notes.

Application...

It is absolutely critical that you repent of who you are in Adam and trust in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation. Apart from faith in Jesus Christ there is no salvation. The evil that you still feel inside, you have inherited from Adam. The only way that this evil can be overcome is by the work of Jesus Christ.

And you are joined to Jesus Christ as your covenant head by faith alone.

If you are not trusting in Jesus Christ to save you, then call upon Him today. It is as simple as saying, “Lord Jesus, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

But for those of you who are trusting in Jesus, you must learn to fight your lifelong battle against sin joined to Jesus as your covenant head.

You can begin by memorizing Galatians 2:19b-20.

Galatians 2:19-20 ¹⁹...I have been crucified with Christ. ²⁰ It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

You, as a sinner, were joined to Adam. This “you” has been crucified. When were you crucified? When Jesus died on the cross. Do you see the headship language? You have been crucified with Christ. When Christ died, you died!

You were not so much crucified with Christ at your conversion, although that is partially true. You were crucified when Christ was crucified. What is more, you are now alive with Christ. You were made alive when Christ was made alive. Because you are united to Him as your covenant head, you are now alive.

How is this life imparted to you daily? By faith. You trust in the union that you have with Jesus as your covenant head.

This faith enables you to live with confidence that Christ’s obedience is enough to forgive all your sins and earn you peace with God.

Romans 5:1-2 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

As an individual, living before a Holy God, you could never have peace. Satan makes sure to remind you of every fault. He forever wants you to believe that when you sin, this is still who you really are. He wants you to define yourself by your sin.

He wants you to live in shame and defeat.

As long as you try to oppose his barbs with your own acts of obedience, you will play into his hands.

The only way to silence him is to fix your eyes on Jesus. It is to remind yourself that you are united to your covenant head and His perfect obedience is credited to your account.

Even while you are still imperfect and struggling with the sins of your old nature, you can have peace with God and the sure hope of the glory of God.

Because you are united to Jesus as your covenant head, you can have confidence that a greater power than your own is working to defeat your sin.

Your growth in godliness is not dependent upon your strength, but on the powerful grace of God that was earned for you by Christ and demonstrated in Christ's resurrection from the dead.

Titus 2:11-14 ¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

If the grace of God is so powerful, why is it that we continue to struggle with sin.

Why do we often feel the power of sin more keenly than the power of God's grace?

I am not sure there are easy answers.

The speed with which the grace of God works is mysterious and often frustrating.

But if we have learned anything from Abraham's life, we have learned that God's word and his promises cannot be broken. No matter how weak the grace of God appears to your mind at the moment, you are called to accept and trust that this grace will powerfully train you in the way of Godliness.

This does not make us lax and uncaring about our failures and inconsistencies. We regularly go to God in repentance and faith.

Psalm 51:1-17 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! ³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. ⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. ⁶ Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. ⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. ⁹ Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. ¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. ¹¹ Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. ¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. ¹⁴ Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. ¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. ¹⁶ For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. ¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

1 John 1:8-9 ⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

The biblical path to overcoming anxiety and shame is not found in futile attempts to ignore or suppress those feelings. The biblical path is to take them all to Jesus Christ.

And having done this, we must also not think that anxious thoughts and feelings will simply disappear. Satan is the great deceiver. He may not be able to separate you from Jesus Christ, but through his lies he can rob you of joy.

We must learn to fight against his lies by a continual believing of the truth about who we are in Christ.

Ephesians 6:16-18 ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,

How do we oppose Satan?

We do it with the truth of salvation. We do it with the Word of God.

We believe what the Bible says is true of all who trust in Christ over what our feelings tell us.

I believe what I am telling you is true. But if I do not take the time to meditate upon Scripture I will begin to believe the lies of Satan working through my feelings.

I know who I am in Christ. But I still must regularly work through all of my doubts and fears in times of prayer. I must go back to the Father and plead with him to continue His work of grace in my heart.

And I must interact with other believers who are enduring the same struggles. I must pray for them and ask them to pray for me.

Christians are not to fight the fight in isolation. We are not to be isolated from Jesus. But neither are we to be in isolation from one another.

Often one simple word of encouragement refocuses us on who we are in Christ.

Our victory is assured in His victory.

If our sanctification were dependent upon the strength of human willpower, we would surely lose.

It is not the strength of our character that wins the victory. And it is not some great act that we perform that will make us holy.

God has made us holy in Christ. He has created the works for us to walk in. And most often they are to the human eye small acts of obedience.

We cannot change ourselves. But we can trust that He is changing us. What is it that brought Abraham to this moment?

How did Abraham get from living in Ur to Genesis 22?

It was God's powerful grace working in him all along.

And if God was faithful to Abraham, he will be faithful to you.

Paul also experienced frustration with his own lack of perfection.

Philippians 3:12-14 ¹² Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

The Christian who knows that he is united to Jesus Christ as his covenant head, must always press on. He can never lose hope of making progress in holiness. Why? Because this is the reason that Jesus took hold of him, to make him perfect.

One of the challenges of our modern world is that we do not have the time to fix our eyes on Jesus.

We are just too busy to think very long about things we cannot see. And what is more, even when we are not busy, our minds are cluttered. I do not have the specific answers to this. We are not to go live in a cave. But somehow, we have to think more about Jesus. And we have to think of ourselves in union with Him. Maybe memorizing the words Martin Luther's great Hymn "A Mighty Fortress" will help.

Luther was a man who often wrestled with the spiritual forces of evil. There were many times when he was tempted to despair. But Luther knew that he was united to Jesus as his covenant head.

Did we in our own strength confide,
our striving would be losing,
were not the right Man on our side,
the Man of God's own choosing.
You ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is he;
Lord Sabaoth his name,
from age to age the same;
and he must win the battle.

Do not fight against your sin alone?
Fight with Jesus the Man of God's own choosing?