

Where is the Lamb ?

God, *We are so thankful that You are great, that You are sovereign over all things – **all things** – and that in Jesus Christ, You have **proven**, for **all eternity** that You are **utterly** for us. So we say with Paul, If God be for us, who could be against us? ¹*

We come with faith today that is born of seeing Jesus, crucified, dead, buried, raised and ascended to Your right hand, interceding, advocating, silencing the voice of the accuser and inviting us to be co-laborers. This is our heart, God, that we co-labor with Christ as His brothers and sisters in the mission of telling the whole world of Your love.

Lord, we are eager to be filled with Your grace, for Your grace is sufficient for us, and we're eager for the power, the efficacy of Your word, to come, to spill out, to wash over us and to fill us. Take over our attention, Lord, cause our spirits to stand at full attention to Your word, and let it be, Lord, that we behold the Lamb. If we see Him, we shall be as He is. ² In Jesus precious name we pray, amen. Amen.

¹ Romans 8:31

² Romans 6:4, 8:29; Ephesians 4:23-24; Colossians 3:10

Today, in Genesis chapter twenty-two, we will be reading one of the most puzzling and sometimes misunderstood stories of all of the Old Testament narrative, but a story which, if you gain insight of the Gospel in it, will lead you into unsearchable riches of the nature of God's mercy and will engender explosive faith.

This is the story of God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac as a burnt offering. Earlier in the Scriptures, (Genesis 15:7), we read that when Abraham was seventy-five years old, God called him up out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him a promise. God said that he who had no children, would be the father of a nation, that he and his wife Sarah would bear a son in their old age. *Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them*, God said, *... so shall your offspring be*. And God said that His blessing would be marked in Abraham's life.

Abraham believed God, but when the promise seemed to tarry, Abraham and Sarah attempted to fulfill it on their own through Sarah's Egyptian

handmaid, and Ishmael was born. But Ishmael was not the son of promise. The son of promise was Isaac, who was not born until Abraham was a hundred years old.

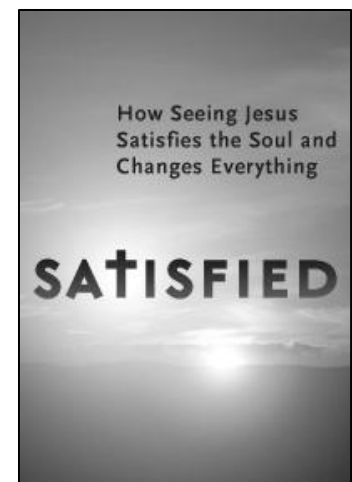
And Abraham loved that boy. Thus as you are reading this story in Genesis chapter twenty-two, it is absolutely shocking and scandalous, and it causes you to wonder: *What sort of God is this?*

GENESIS CHAPTER 22 (NIV 1984)

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*



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Part 3
January 29, 2012

*But where is the lamb for the burnt offering?
God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering.*

only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. [This is the place where Solomon built the Temple of the LORD³ and it is the current site of the Islamic Dome of the Rock].

And the command was:

Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.

³ Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled 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.'

This is, by the way, the first mention in the Bible of the Hebrew word for worship.

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* [*Jehovah Jireh* in the transliterated words from the Hebrew. It literally means, *the Lord sees*].

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.'

¹⁹ Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba.

Are you ready for some good news?

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST is the power of God unto salvation, transformation, wholeness and life. And I want to show you today that all of the power of the Gospel for your transformation will come, not by your commitments to greater sacrifice, but by a greater revelation of God's commitment and sacrifice in Jesus Christ.

GREAT SACRIFICE

There is a sweet story, a favorite of preachers and one I have used myself. A little girl was in a shop and she saw a strand of faux pearls priced at two dollars. That was all that she had, but she spent it on the necklace, which she treasured and wore day and night. One evening her father went to her and said, *Honey, I love you. Do you love me?* She said, *Yes,*

³ 2 Chronicles 3:1

Daddy, I love you. And he said, *Will you give me your pearls?* She turned away.

The next night as he was putting his little girl to bed, her daddy once again said, *Honey, Do you love me?* And she said, *I love you Daddy.* He said, *Will you give me your pearls?* She turned away.

On the third night, he said again, *Honey, do you love me?* And she said, *Yes Daddy, I love you.* But as he began to say, *Will you give me ...*, she removed the strand of play pearls from her neck and handed them to her daddy. The father smiled and brought from behind his back a beautiful velvet box. So the little girl opened the box to find a strand of real pearls, and her daddy fastened them on her neck.

This is a heartwarming story. It has all the elements of a good sermon illustration, and it leads to some important elements of truth:

There are secret ways in which God has stored up blessings for you; there are times in life in which God will ask you to give up things that are precious to you; taking up your cross is part of the Christian life; you lay down your life in order to find it; God will test you to see how much you are willing to sacrifice and, when you pass the test, he will give you something even better.

And so, the story is moving. It seems right. Something in us resonates with it - to follow God means to trust Him as your Father and, when He asks you to make great sacrifices, you ought to do so because He'll bless you for it in the end. That is generally the way we use a story like that, saying essentially, *Are you willing to give up your pearls for God?*

Yet there is something so subtly and gravely wrong with the story.

God's Sacrifice

This story misses the point of the Gospel because it makes the pivotal event the sacrifice of the daughter, not that of the father. The father could afford the real pearl necklace. The little girl had given everything she had for the artificial one. She made the bigger sacrifice. The story makes it sound like God blesses us based on our sacrifice to Him, and in telling it, we tend to announce our message like this:

How much are you willing to sacrifice for God?

Are you willing to give up what is most dear to you?

*The Christian gospel
is not an announcement
about being blessed
because you sacrifice for God.
It is an announcement
about being blessed
because God sacrificed for you.*

Are you willing to let go of your dreams, your friends, your family and go wherever God tells you to go, to do whatever God tells you to do?

Will you take up your cross?

The natural line of reasoning that then follows this line of exhortation is:

The reason that you haven't received more from God is that you haven't sacrificed enough for God. The reason that you aren't blessed more is that you haven't given enough for God. You're still holding on to too much. There's probably something precious in your life that you need to let go of, and then God will give you some real pearls.

But, beloved, the Christian gospel is not an announcement about being blessed because you sacrifice for God. It is an announcement about being blessed because God sacrificed for you. The Gospel is about the Father Who gave His only Son, Whom He loved. You are God's pearl of great price and He gave His all, His one and only Son, to redeem you.⁴

Revelation of God's Sacrifice

This story also misses the point of the Gospel by assuming that, like little children, we are to have blind faith and trust and therefore should be willing to make great sacrifices. It defines faith by painting a picture that says, *Your Father is telling you to do something difficult and to make a big sacrifice. You don't understand why and can't see any point in it, but if you have faith, you'll make the sacrifice.*

This line of thinking misses the essence of biblical faith. If this story were to be accurate to biblical faith, it would be rooted in promise. The father would say to his daughter:

⁴ John 3:16; Ephesians 5:2; 1 John 4:9-10

*People who were called
to make great sacrifices
all throughout the biblical story
did so with faith
that was rooted in their vision of God,
born out of the revelation
of the sacrifice that had been made
for them.*

I see that you love those pearls, but I need to let you know they're not real. They are precious to you, but they're not nearly as valuable as real pearls. I have some real pearls. If you will give me your phony pearls, I'll give you real ones that are worth far more than those.

Then, because she knows that her father is good, that he's never lied to her, that he's wealthy and he only wants what's best for her, and because of the faith that she has in the truth of his promises, she gladly hands over her faux pearls for a strand of the real ones, even though she may not fully understand everything.

It is true that we are called to be like little children in our faith and to trust in our Father, but it is not a blind faith or a blind trust that invites you make amazing sacrifices. People who were called to make great sacrifices all throughout the biblical story did so with faith that was rooted in their vision of God, born out of the revelation of the sacrifice that had been made for them.

Such is the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospel is about you having a vision of God's finished work in Jesus⁵ and having the Holy Spirit poured out into your heart as a deposit, guaranteeing your inheritance.⁶ God does not withhold information from you to make you take a blind step, sacrifice, and thereby demonstrate how committed you are. God's heart is to reveal Himself in all of His grace and glory so that you will know that His promises are yes and amen in Jesus Christ.⁷

⁵ Matthew 27:50; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46; John 19:30; Romans 10:4; 2 Corinthians 5:18; Galatians 3:13; Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 10:5-10; 1 John 4:10

⁶ 2 Corinthians 1:22, 5:5; Ephesians 1:13-14

⁷ 2 Corinthians 1:20

WORLD SHAKING, EXPLOSIVE, BIBLICAL FAITH does not come to you by focusing your eyes on your sacrifices for God. World shaking, life giving, peace-filling, Holy Spirit-empowered faith comes by a revelation of the sacrifice of God in Jesus Christ. And the real power of God flows in our lives, not by us making a blind leap of faith into the darkness. It is by the revelation of Who Jesus is. Therein we are satisfied, seeing Jesus, and as we are satisfied in the vision of Jesus, it changes everything.

ABRAHAM & ISAAC

Of all the stories that highlight our wrong-minded emphasis on how much we need to sacrifice for God, I can think of none more poignant, more misunderstood, or ultimately more powerful than the story of Abraham offering Isaac. It is a story about a father's love and a beloved firstborn son in whom rests not only the great love of his father, but also the hope that had been planted in his father.

All of the promise of God was in the seed of Isaac, and Abraham loved his boy.

A Father's Love

The beginning of interpreting the story must start with Abraham's unspeakable love for Isaac. It is very hard to explain, but any of you parents know that upon the birth of your first child, there is something that forever changes

We walked those halls of the hospital, hoping to hasten Anne's labor with our firstborn. We walked and walked, and she labored and labored. She was exhausted. When finally little Bennett was born, and they announced, *It's a boy*, I wept more than anyone, [Anne was too exhausted to weep], and I knew everything had changed. EVERYTHING had changed.

In that moment no one had to say to me, *Are you willing to sacrifice for your child? Are you willing to do this for your child*, or, *Are you willing to do that for your child?* There was no question, for within me was a love that meant I would sacrifice, as much as needed.

And so whenever I was home, I was the one who rocked Bennett, and put him in his little crib. I would sing over him and pray over him. And when he learned to crawl, I crawled on the floor with him.

When he learned to toddle, I toddled with him.
When he learned run, I ran with him. And as he
grew, my life was bound to his, and will forever be,
because of a father's love.

In the story of Abraham and Isaac, it is both interesting and ironic that Abraham was called to sacrifice his son yet the story is all about love. The Hebrew grammar is very clear. It says, *Take your son, your only son, whom you love*. Only at the end of the sentence does it say *Isaac*. This is repeated twice in the story, *your son, your only son, whom you love*. God, Who is outside of time, was seeing the moment of Calvary when He said to Abraham, ... *your son, your only son, whom you love*. God knew, first-hand, how a Father loves a Son.⁸

Abraham placed the wood on his son Isaac for him to carry it, but Abraham carried the fire and the butchering knife. I like what one commentator said, that it is so like a loving father. Abraham didn't want Isaac to carry the dangerous things. *You carry the wood, I'll carry the sharp knife lest you be cut*, he was essentially saying, even though they were on an ascension to an altar where Abraham was supposed to slay his son.

The Dilemma

The sacrifice of Isaac was a dilemma. How could it be true that God would require a sacrifice of Isaac when Isaac was the answer to the promises of God for Abraham and the whole hope of the future? The promise rested in a living Isaac, and it seemed the command would kill the promise. Calvin plainly stated Abraham's dilemma: *The command and the promise of God were conflicting within him*.⁹

As you come to grasp the Gospel, there will be a point at which you accept an unimaginable mystery, that there is at the same time God's justice and God's mercy; that somehow, in the mystery of the Gospel, what is unveiled is how two things that seem impossible come together and are possible; that God could demand that the world be judged in

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justice,¹⁰ and yet God's steadfast love would go on forevermore.¹¹

Also, there was a seeming contradiction of the law of God, for throughout the Scripture, it is made apparent that child sacrifice is forbidden. Deuteronomy 18:9-12 gives an instance of such a command.

⁹ *When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there.* ¹⁰ *Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire ...* ¹² *Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD, and because of these detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you.* (NIV 1984)

The pagan cultures would sometimes offer their own children in sacrifice to the pagan deity, Molech. The deep deception had from time to time evidently fallen upon even the people of God. Repeatedly God says in the Scriptures that this is detestable and an abomination.

And so it seems that there was a command that stood in opposition to God's Word.

⁸ Matt 3:17, 17:5; Mark 1:11, 9:7; Luke 3:22, 9:35

⁹ John Calvin, John King trans, Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis, Volume 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993) 436. Accessed Jan 31, 2012 at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/calvin/cc01/cc01027.htm>.

¹⁰ Psalm 9:9; Acts 17:31

¹¹ Exodus 4:6-7; Psalm 106:1; Psalm 107:1; Isaiah 54:10

*If you never fully accept
that our condition in this world apart from Christ
is of an enormous debt we can't pay,
you'll never be able to appreciate the magnitude
of the Good News of the Lamb of God.*

A DEEPER DILEMMA

The dilemma, however, was not just that there was a promise and there was a command that seemed to not fit, or that there was a command of God which seemed in opposition to God's command to not ever sacrifice a child. One dilemma was actually much deeper.

THE UNFOLDING PORTRAIT OF REDEMPTION

If you will join your heart and your mind for a few moments to go into these depths, you will see the richness of the Gospel and the depth of God's mercy. Think with me about this. This drama that is being played out by Abraham and Isaac is one that would be played out in many different pictures until finally it is played out at Calvary in Jesus.

A Debt to the Lord

The picture of the firstborn being required to be sacrificed, but then being given back to the father, becomes more clear in the story of the Passover in Exodus. The story of the Passover was simply this: The Hebrew people were slaves in Egypt and they were oppressed by an evil Pharaoh. God heard their cry and brought a series of plagues against the Egyptians to convince Pharaoh to let His people go. But Pharaoh would not let the people go until the final plague, the tenth plague, the death of the firstborns.

God told the people of Israel that for one night in Egypt, the destroyer would pass through, for one night they would experience a preview of what judgment would actually be like; that on that night there would be judgment against sin and unrighteousness, ungodliness, oppression and

tyranny; and on that night, payment would be exacted.

The only difference between the Hebrews and the Egyptians was that the Hebrews were given a special revelation. They were told that if they would take the blood of an unblemished lamb and place it in faith over their doorposts, when the destroyer came through Egypt to destroy every firstborn of the families and of the livestock, the destroyer would be forbidden to enter into the Hebrew homes, and the firstborns of the Hebrews would be saved. No harm would come to them wherever there was the blood of the lamb.

And on that harrowing night, as the destroyer came through, it left in its wake, in the words of Tim Keller, *every house with either a dead son or a dead lamb*.¹²

Every Firstborn Belongs to the LORD

At chapter thirteen of Exodus, the LORD in light of all this said to Moses: ² Consecrate [that is, set apart, offer] *to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether man or animal.* (NIV 1984)

What God was saying here is a HUGE proclamation of the foundation of our gospel. He was saying,

I want you to notice this, your firstborns should have also been slain. The only difference was that you had the lamb that substituted. I want you to always remember this and to remember that there is a debt on every family. It was as if this Old Covenant scripture was simply proclaiming, *All have*

¹² Dr. Timothy J. Keller, *The Story of the Lamb* (Sermon), September 29, 2002. Mp3 file accessed January 30, 2012 at <http://sermons2.redeemer.com/sermons/story-lamb>.

fallen short of the glory of God.¹³ Being Hebrew did not make you more righteous.

The message to the people was: *You were given a revelation that you could put the blood of the lamb over your life. And so consecrate, offer to Me, your firstborn. EVERY firstborn belongs to Me. It is a picture of the debt that remains. Never forget that your firstborn is alive because there was a lamb. And never forget, it could have been you and your household grieving over the death of your firstborn, but instead it was the Egyptians. The death of the firstborn of the Egyptians, which compelled Pharaoh to let the people go, will be forever a reminder that someone else died, and you were set free.*

If you never come to a place in this postmodern world of moral relativism to fully accept that our condition in this world apart from Christ is of an enormous debt we can't pay,¹⁴ you'll never be able to appreciate the magnitude of the Good News of the Lamb of God.

So God instructed the Israelites to offer their firstborn to Him. He was, though never commanding it, never requiring it, and in fact, calling it an abomination, saying that rightfully their firstborns should have died, so they should be offered to Him.

Every Firstborn Must Be Redeemed

By sacrifice of a lamb

Moses explained this more at verse eleven of Exodus thirteen:

¹¹ After the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites and gives it to you, as he promised on oath to you and your forefathers, ¹² you are to give over to the LORD the first offspring of every womb. All the firstborn males of your livestock belong to the LORD. ¹³ Redeem with a lamb every firstborn donkey, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck.

The firstborn of all livestock were to be sacrificed to the Lord, but a lamb could be substituted for a valuable firstborn donkey. The Lord then said:

¹³ ... Redeem every firstborn among your sons.

So the firstborn son was to be offered to the Lord – literally he belonged to the Lord – but he could be bought back with the sacrifice of a lamb.

By consecration of the Levites

Throughout the Scripture the practice of the consecration of the firstborn evolved until God claimed the Levites as His own as a substitute for the firstborn among the people of Israel.

Numbers 3:

people of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the people of Israel. The Levites shall be mine, ¹³ for all the firstborn are mine. On the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I consecrated for my own all the firstborn in Israel, both of man and of beast. They shall be mine: I am the LORD.

¹⁴ *In days to come, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'With a mighty hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ¹⁵ When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed every firstborn in Egypt, both man and animal. This is why I sacrifice to the LORD the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons.'* ¹⁶ *And it will be like a sign on your hand and a symbol on your forehead that the LORD brought us out of Egypt with his mighty hand.'* (NIV 1984)

Prior to this time, every family was to take their firstborn son to the Temple to be presented as a priest, forever. He would never again be in their home. The Levites had now become symbolic of the firstborn, and they belonged to God. They served as priests, but the principle was still the same. Every firstborn belonged to God.

By a redemption ritual

This picture of redemption then evolved into a redemption ritual that is later described in Leviticus and Numbers¹⁵ and continues in orthodox Jewish homes to this day. In this ritual, a month after a firstborn son is born, the father brings his son and five shekels to the Temple to present him to one who is to represent the priestly class. [In this day it has become five coins, or five things that represent something precious to him]. The representative of the priests says, *What do you prefer? Do you want your son or do you want this money?* And the father says, *I want my son.* And so the son is bought back, or redeemed.

¹³ Romans 3:23

¹⁴ Romans 3:23

¹⁵ Leviticus 27:6; Numbers 3:44-48, 19:16

*Do not strip the Gospel of its power for your life
by continually asking yourself,
'What can I do for God so that He will love me and bless me?'
Instead, fix your eyes upon Jesus.*

AND SO, when Abraham was commanded to sacrifice his son, it appeared that God was calling in the debt. In envisioning this scene of Abraham and his son, his only son, whom he loved, we begin to see the magnitude of the debt that must be paid.

Isaac was bound to an altar beneath a pile of wood, and Abraham stood with a knife in his hand. An angel intervened, and called from Heaven, forbidding him from touching the boy, and then God swore by Himself to bless Abraham. Abraham returned to his servant, and two chapters later, he sent out a helper to go find a bride for his son, who had figuratively come back from the dead.

What a story!

ABRAHAM & ISAAC THE TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION

Traditionally when we preach this story we essentially say, *Look to Abraham. Be like him. He was willing*, we preachers say, *to sacrifice his all. Are you? He was willing to lay down what was most precious. Are you, or are you holding on to the precious things in your life?*

When we say of biblical characters like Abraham, *Be like Abraham*, in the tone of our voice we are often saying, *Why can't you be more like Abraham? Look at all the sacrifice he was willing to make, and he became a great father of a nation because he was willing to make such a sacrifice.*

I surfed online to look at the hundreds of sermons that are out there about Abraham and Isaac, and some of the best ones point out the principles of Abraham's sacrifice. I've preached some of these myself. It starts with: *God called*. It always begins with God's call. *And Abraham said, 'Here am I.'*

I could preach a good sermon on that from Isaiah chapter six. *Here I am, Lord, send me. You have to have a willingness.*

The next point is then that Abraham got up early in the morning. *See, he acted promptly. When God tells you to do something, act promptly. In fact, you ought to get up earlier than you are getting up now.* [If getting up early is a qualification for holiness, there are people in my family that are disqualified].

Here is a good example of this from one of the sermons I found online. Please understand that I am not in any way meaning to say that other preachers aren't getting it but I am. No, I'm not. What I am saying is that this is the way our minds work as preachers. We tend to focus on this question: *Where is your sacrifice?*

So here is the conclusion of a typical sermon. I quote:

I could give you a list of sacrifices, but it is different for each of us.

What is God calling you to sacrifice?

Is your time spent on your own kingdom with very little given to God's?

Is your money used all for your own welfare, rather than for Christ's work through the church? Do you give regularly but have yet to enter into the realm of sacrifice?

Is God calling you to a deeper level of intimacy, but the screams of the world drown Him out?

What is God calling you to do today? Are you listening and responding? Are you willing - willing to go, willing to stay, willing to help, willing to serve, willing to die to self, willing to offer yourself as a living sacrifice for whatever God calls you to?

The problem, amongst all the abundant problems with these questions, is that if we are going to proclaim the message like that, then we must go all the way and say, *Are you willing to kill your firstborn son?* No preacher is going to say that because that's stupid and it's a violation of God's law. But everything else was leading right up

towards that, wasn't it? *Are you willing to sacrifice more? What are you willing to sacrifice?* And what we are really saying is, *I think you are holding on to some things, and God is going to wrestle that away from you.*

And we wonder why the world is not rushing to meet Jesus.

So we come away from a text like this confused and conflicted. We walk out of church and we say,

I ought to be more like Abraham. Man, I'm hardly willing to give up anything, and that's probably why I'm not blessed.

That's what we do. *If you would give up more, then you would be more blessed. Where's your sacrifice?* Beloved, our gospel is much better than that. Much better indeed!

ABRAHAM & ISAAC

THE GOSPEL INTERPRETATION

I suggest to you today that the question of the Gospel is NOT, *Where is your sacrifice?* The question of the Gospel is, *Where is the Lamb?*

And the answer of the Gospel is, *God Himself will provide the Lamb, my son.*

The answer of the Gospel is to turn us away from the impotence of our own fearful, condemning attempts to make ourselves more blessed by offering our sacrifices to God, and instead to turn our attention to the Lamb.

The invitation of this text is to see that Abraham had faith, but his faith was not in believing that he could kill his son. His faith was in believing that God would provide a lamb.

When you are in the midst of the biggest predicament of your life, and you can't understand it, you don't understand all the inscrutable ways of God, you are wondering about your circumstance, and you are wondering how you are going to make it through, the tendency of the human flesh is to say, *What sacrifice can I make so that God will start blessing me?* And THAT is the wrong question. The right question is,

Where is the Lamb?

Where is Jesus in this? That is the question, because God has already provided for you in Jesus Christ and finished the work. That is why Paul said

you have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ.¹⁶

When there are moments in your life when you cannot understand what's going on, do not think that the problem must be that you are not sacrificing enough. We belittle the cross and deny its power when we turn the Gospel into something about ourselves. The power of the Gospel is in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ,¹⁷ Who was dead and buried, Who rose from the grave¹⁸ and ascended to Heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father,¹⁹ Who is interceding for you, advocating for you,²⁰ and pouring out the blessings of Heaven upon your life.²¹ HALLELUJAH!

Do not strip the Gospel of its power for your life by continually asking yourself, *What can I do for God so that He will love me and bless me?* Instead, fix your eyes upon Jesus.²²

Behold the Lamb!

Somehow Abraham saw the gospel in the spirit eighteen centuries before Easter. He saw Jesus.

I don't understand everything about this, my son, but I've come to know God, and God will not let His promise fall to the ground.²³ He has promised me a nation. He promised me you, and you are the seed of that promise. So I know He is not going to let you die on this altar today. God has a lamb that He will provide. And that lamb will substitute for you. That's what I know. I don't know exactly how it's going to come about; I don't know exactly how the rescue will take place; I don't know exactly when it will manifest; but BEHOLD! There will be a lamb that will be a substitute. You, Isaac, may be a debt that is owed to the Lord, but His promise is greater, and you will be redeemed!

Now when I read a story like this, instead of saying, *I need to be more like Abraham*, I just admit, *No, I'm more like Isaac, the one in whom God has*

¹⁶ Hebrews 1:3

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 1:18

¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

¹⁹ Psalm 110:1; Mark 16:19; Luke 22:69; Acts 2:33; Romans 8:34; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 8:1; 1 Peter 3:22;

²⁰ Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25, 8:1, 9:24; 1 John 2:1;

²¹ Acts 2:33

²² Hebrews 12:2

²³ Genesis 28:15; Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 3:19

put much promise, who sometimes has a hard time believing it; the one that should have borne the wood, the cross, taken the penalty, and but for the grace of God would be destroyed, but instead has been redeemed by the Lamb.

God saw it all and He was painting a picture, a picture of many years later – 1750 years later – when Jesus said, *Can this cup be taken from Me?*²⁴ and the Father said, *No, my Son, My only Son whom I love. This time I'm calling in the debt. This time the Hebrew, first born son must die.* And so Jesus went to the cross for you. That is why HE is your redemption.

And on the third day, He was raised from the grave. He ascended to the right hand of the Father, and the Father sent a Helper to get His Son a bride.²⁵

And that is the Gospel!

Amen? AMEN!

Father, we are so thankful for what Jesus did for us, and we pray today that no matter what predicament we might be facing, or whatever obstacles or difficulties are in any way puzzling us, that you would grant us a fresh vision of the risen Lord Jesus. We ask that we would see the Lamb on the throne, that You would enable us by Your grace to behold the Lamb, and as we see Him, that You would cause us to become like Him. Open up the eyes of our hearts and let us see Him, we pray, in the precious name of Jesus, Amen.

An Invitation

You may be in need of a provision from God today, and the Lord Himself will provide. The Bible tells us that He is *Jehovah Jireh*, which means the Lord will provide, or literally, *the Lord sees*, and that beautiful word, *provision* [pro-vision], is to see beforehand. God sees what you need, whatever it might be, just ask Him for His provision.

Our invitation to you today is not for you to make a sacrifice, but for you to know in faith that the sacrifice has already been made so you do not spend your time thinking, *I messed up. I didn't sacrifice enough and God is waiting for me to do so.*

It will change everything.

Closing Remarks

I will tell you where your faith starts exploding. It is not when somebody tells you that you ought to sacrifice for God that strand of faux pearls that you have been holding onto, and you reluctantly release them. Your faith explodes when the Father holds up the shimmer of the real pearls and says, *These are for you*, and your spirit says, *WOW!*

Nothing else matters compared to the real thing!

Don't say today, *Where is my sacrifice for God?* Instead say, *Where is The Lamb? I know the Lamb is with me every day. Jesus, the Lamb, is with me every day!*

²⁴ Matthew 26:39, 42

²⁵ Matthew 22:2; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Revelation 19:7

*May the Lord God bless you and keep you,
And be kind and gracious to you,
And make His face to shine upon you,
And give you His peace
Today and every day, forevermore.
Amen*



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