

Sermon Draft

Text: Genesis 22:1–18

Sermon: “God Promises and God Provides”

During these three gut-wrenching days of Abraham’s life, I wonder if he thought to himself, “Something is terribly wrong here.” We would agree with him. Something is drastically wrong here. Even though we know the end of the story, we cannot help but read this Bible passage and say, “Something is drastically wrong for God to command a father to slaughter his beloved son.” Many times, over the years I heard people refer to these passages, this story of Abraham and Isaac and say, “I cannot believe in a god that would tell a dad to kill his son.”

When we step back from this passage and just look at what is happening, something is drastically wrong. We can see how wrong it is because of the love in this father-son relationship. God says, ***“Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love”*** (v 2).

Abraham loves Isaac, born to him in his old age. Watching him grow up, Isaac would be the apple of his eye, the light of his life. We can hear that love in the conversation between Abraham and Isaac. ***“My father, here’s the wood and the fire, but where’s the lamb for the sacrifice?” “My son, God will provide.”*** This relationship just speaks of love.

Then to hear God say, “Go sacrifice him.” Those few words had to strike at Abraham’s heart. How could you ask that of this father, God?

A father is told to sacrifice his son. Something is drastically wrong here, but not just on that human level. On another level, God’s promises are at stake here. He has promised that Abraham will be the father of many nations, that his offspring will be as numerous as the stars in the sky or the sand on the beach. A promise that out of Abraham’s line will be born One who will be a blessing to all nations. To kill Isaac is to break a promise, to renege on what God has told Abraham.

Something is drastically wrong when God tells a father to slaughter his son and when God's promises come into question.

But not just back in Abraham's time. Today, when we see what is happening to children, we say, "Something is drastically wrong." We read how children are kidnapped and sold into slavery every day and how many are killed as they simply play outside or in the local park. So, children die. And we simply say, "Something is drastically wrong." Children die of horrendous diseases, and we think, "Something is wrong here." Anxiety and worry among teenagers, perhaps the same age as Isaac in our text, have skyrocketed and, with that, teenage suicide. Something is wrong. Take every school shooting where someone's child died. Something is wrong here.

I will admit that I read this passage differently than a lot of people. Back in 1980 Cindy and I lost our daughter. We had waited 9 months to welcome her into the world and now just a few minutes after her birth we had to say goodbye.

One minute she was alive, and then she was dead. I read this passage differently because walking into a room and kissing your lifeless child good-bye changes you. I know what they mean when they say, "A parent should never have to bury a child." Something is wrong here.

And yet, Abraham journeyed the three days to the mountain. Those three days must have been horrendous because he knew what he was going to do at the end of them.

But a couple of sentences indicate that Abraham had hope. He trusted that somehow God would provide. He says to the two servants, ***"You stay here. I and the boy will go up to the mountain and will come back to you."*** He does not say, "I will come back to you," but, "I and the young boy will come back to you." He is trusting that God will provide. Or after Isaac's question, ***"Father, here's the wood and the fire, but where's the lamb?"*** Abraham replies, ***"God will provide it."***

With those words, we are listening to Abraham holding on in hope to God's promise. He has hope that God will work out the details here, and that trust, that hope, that belief takes him all the way to the moment when he has the knife in his hand at Isaac's throat.

Now someone might say that Abraham was telling a little lie so that nobody knew what was going to happen. Or perhaps it was a prophetic word. Well, in the Book of Hebrews (11:17–19) we get a better answer. ***“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.”*** Did you hear how that description of Abraham started? By faith. By faith, Abraham took Isaac up that mountain.

At that moment, Abraham's faith held on to the promise that God would provide. In this case, God did provide by sparing Isaac's life. But on a bigger, broader, deeper level, God provided. We get a glimpse of it. Isaac carries the wood for a sacrifice. Jesus carries the cross for his sacrifice. Isaac is the son, the only son, whom Abraham loved. Jesus is the Son, the only Son, whom the Father loves. A ram is in a thicket to be sacrificed in the place of Isaac. Jesus, on the cross, takes our place, and is sacrificed for us. The promises come true. Through Isaac, Abraham's descendants are numerous. From Abraham's offspring comes Jesus. God provides forgiveness, life, salvation. God provides and keeps his promises for us as well.

In Romans 8 we read ***"I'm convinced that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** And ***"If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"***

Jesus is not only for us on the cross. He has risen from the dead to be with us as well. When everything looks so wrong, God provides by keeping His promises for us and being with us.

Lazarus's death and Jesus' conversation with Martha and Mary show both the "for us" and "with us" beautifully. Jesus had a messenger come to him one day to tell him that one of his closest friends, Lazarus, was sick and about to die. For some reason, Jesus waits two days before going. When he finally arrives, Lazarus's sister Martha meets him and says to him, "**Lord, if you would have been here, my brother wouldn't have died.**" Can you hear it in her voice? "Something's wrong here, Jesus. You weren't here for us." Then in the conversation, Jesus makes an incredible promise for us: "**I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though you die, will rise again. Do you believe this, Martha?**" (John 11:21, 25–26). She makes the good confession. She holds on, she believes in what Jesus will do for her.

Then Jesus goes to Mary. She has been crying. She, too, says, ***“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died”*** (v 32). But this time Jesus does not have a conversation with her. This time Jesus does something different. He weeps with her. He cries with her.

Consider, Jesus knew Lazarus was dead, even before the messenger told him. And yet Jesus cried when he heard the news. Jesus knew he could and would raise Lazarus back to life. But still Jesus cried because his friend had died. Jesus knew that his death would defeat death for Lazarus and all people, and yet still, Jesus cried about Lazarus’s death. Knowing how the story ends does not mean we cannot cry at the sad parts.

Cindy and I have cried since our daughter died. At those moments, God provides. God keeps his promises. Jesus is with us even when things are so wrong. God provides by keeping his promises written on a cross and an empty tomb.

He is always by our side. We are never alone. He hears our prayers. He surrounds us with his grace. God is never more than a prayer away. He restores my soul.

Like Abraham, we are simply called to believe, to trust that God will provide, that he is with us, and to hope. I still expect to cry at times when things seem so wrong, so drastically wrong. I expect everyone to cry, for you to cry, when things seem so drastically wrong.

But there will come a day of no more tears. Jesus will come back. On that glorious day of resurrection, he will do for us what we could never do. Children will no longer have to worry about being killed or think about suicide, dying of horrible diseases everything will be dramatically right. But until that day, we will cry at the sad parts. And like Abraham, when that happens, all we can do is trust that God will provide because Jesus is with us and he keeps his promises. Amen