

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, ⁿ because you have obeyed me.”

In the name of Jesus, the Lamb of God, dear friends,

What are you giving up for Lent? Oh, you don’t have to give up anything, but some people do just to remind themselves by their small sacrifice, that Jesus sacrificed for them. I have joked an number of times in the past about giving up jogging for Lent many years ago...and sticking to that sacrifice since then! I’ve joked about it because it is not something that God commands his people to do. On the other hand, many would not consider it a joking matter since the purpose for giving something up for Lent is serious because it reminds a person of the most serious thing—the sacrifice of God the Father giving up his Son, and Jesus giving up many things in order to serve us as our Savior, including his very life. If you want to give up chocolate or beer or whatever for the six weeks of Lent, it can be a beneficial thing. Doing that for a time can move you to focus on God giving up his only Son and Jesus giving up his life for you.

In our first lesson for today, we heard about the Father of all believers—Abraham. Would he be willing to give something up for God? Would he go all the way and give up something that would not just be for six weeks, but something that would be gone for the rest of his life? Abraham’s story also turns our thoughts to our God the Father and his Son Jesus. Would God go all the way and give him up? As we consider the Genesis 22 account, we view...

A TREMENDOUS SACRIFICE! As we do that, I urge you to

1. LOOK AT THE LOVE
2. LOOK AT THE LAMB

Abraham was God's man. God picked him out and called him to follow his lead. He gave him many, many blessings, including a beautiful wife and many possessions and workers. But above all God gave him promises. Abraham and Sarah's boy, Isaac, was the immediate fulfillment of God's promise—not that he was born immediately, because he wasn't; they had to wait—but he eventually was born and they could see him with their very eyes. The longer-term fulfillment of God's promise, that they would not be alive to see, was that through Isaac's descendants, God would send a Savior from sin—the Messiah.

As you hear these words of God himself, you can sense the drama in what the Lord is commanding Abraham. If this were a movie, I imagine music in the background that swells in intensity with each phrase as God says to his faithful follower: ***Take your son*** (the music grows in intensity), ***your only son*** (more intense), ***whom you love*** (even more intense), ***Isaac*** (incredibly intense), ***and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you (v.2).***

What a thing to ask of Abraham! What would a father who dearly loved his son do? You heard how he showed that love to his Son as they went along with God's command, but did you didn't catch that love? Did you notice that Abraham did not tell his son why they were travelling to Mt. Moriah? In love, he didn't tell Isaac everything that the Lord had told him. Can you picture the innocent face of this teenage boy looking up at his father and asking ***The fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering (v.7)?***" His loving father tells him the truth—but not the details—as they journeyed. He would not worry his son or have his heart aching the way *his* did as they walked along. Can you imagine his agony as they walked that last stretch alone up the mountain, Abraham carrying the fire and Isaac the wood? Can you imagine how Abraham must have been turning things over in his mind the whole way? *"How can God's promises of a great nation and a Savior come true if Isaac is to die?"*

No matter how much he loved his son, Abraham loved God more. And he had confidence that both things could happen with God. Although Abraham had never witnessed it, he knew that God could raise the dead if he wanted to (Hebrews 11:17-19). That was his consolation as he hiked side by side with his son. I should say something else about this father and son. What faith must have also lived in that boy, raised well by his father to always put God first! Once on the mountain, Abraham must have told the boy what God had commanded because Isaac ended up on the altar. When the moment came, Isaac did not fight his 115-year-old father, nor did he run away. I imagine a teary-eyed father and son who went about the task of obedience to their God. What love, not just for each other, but also for God!

Now think about God the Father's sacrifice of his Son Jesus. You don't think that broke his heart? You don't think the love between God the Father and Jesus is at a level that far surpasses the love that existed between Abraham and Isaac? You don't think that the eyes of Jesus looking up at his Father as he pleaded *"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"* weren't filled with as many tears as Isaac's were when he looked up at his father raising the knife above his throat?

What about God the Father's breaking heart as Jesus walked up the mountain to Calvary? What about Jesus' love as he too carried the wood for his sacrifice—the cross he would be nailed to? Was it fair to ask Abraham to sacrifice Isaac? Was it any more fair for God to sacrifice Jesus?

The love of God the Father and of Jesus is incomprehensible! It only becomes more so when you know the reason God asked it of his Son and why Jesus was willing to die. It was because of our sin—our ugly, awful, self-serving sin! We are not capable of the kind of love Jesus showed. We are selfish and unloving creatures when it comes right down to it. On Mt. Moriah, we very well might have said “no” to God because we wouldn't have been willing to put God before our only child—just like we say “no” to God all the time. He says “*do this*” and we do the opposite. He says “*believe this*” and we don't trust. That's the kind of creatures God saw when he sent his Son, his only Son, Jesus, whom he loved, to be sacrificed on the mountain of Calvary. LOOK AT THE LOVE—totally undeserved love!

Can you even begin to imagine the look of relief and love for God when Abraham and Isaac heard the “angel of the Lord” (really Jesus!) and saw the lamb—a male sheep, a ram, stuck in the brush?! This was not God trying to trick his child. God was strengthening Abraham's faith in this test. As he looked at Abraham's behavior and the intent of his heart, his faith and love for God were obvious. The LORD would not ask him to complete the task. We do well to take Abraham as our example when we face difficult situations and see that reliance on God and faithfulness to our Lord are the most important things. The God who loves us will not leave us on our own nor will he let temptations bombard us that we cannot handle with faith in him.

What a relief it must have been for Abraham to look and see the lamb that he would sacrifice to the LORD with praise and thanks and love! What a relief for Isaac to see the lamb that would substitute for him on that altar of wood and fire. The lamb would suffer and die so that Isaac could live. The lamb would cry out as it died in Isaac's place. Isaac would no longer have to worry about painful flames and death.

What a rich and vivid real-life illustration this is! No doubt, you see the similarities. No doubt as I've been explaining what happened on Mt. Moriah, your mind started to drift already to Mt. Calvary where the Lamb of God—Jesus Christ—was the sacrifice.

We are Isaac. We were headed for the death and flames of hell because of our sin. But look—there! A lamb! Not just a lamb—THE Lamb of God—the perfect sacrifice whose death paid for our imperfect love and imperfect lives! While we are disobedient to God, Jesus was obedient to his Father's will and suffered and died as our substitute. It was Jesus, the Lamb, who cried out on the cross “**It is finished!**” as the sacrifice for the world's sin was completed. Jesus' sacrifice means that we no longer have to worry about death and the flames of hell consuming us for eternity! LOOK AT THE LAMB for forgiveness and life! Just as the lamb caught in the thicket gave new life to Isaac and renewed the hope of Abraham, so the Lamb of God gives hope and new life to every believing heart!

Whether you give something up for Lent or regularly sacrifice things for God, like your time and offerings, that isn't going to be what brings you forgiveness for your sins and earns you eternal life. The TREMENDOUS SACRIFICE is not what we do for God, but what he has done for us! The story of Abraham shows his example of faith and trust and love for God above all else. That is inspiring for us and our lives of faith.

More importantly, it directs our attention to the TREMENDOUS SACRIFICE of God where we stand in awe as we LOOK AT THE LOVE of God and the LAMB of God, Jesus Christ, our Savior, through whom we are spared from death and hell and are given freedom to live—to live for him now and to live with him later in heaven. Give all thanks and praise to God as you LOOK AT THE LOVE of God and as you LOOK AT THE LAMB of God! Amen.

Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.