

Faithfulness and Faith

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[0 : 00] Most people love a good story, a good dose of good drama, right? It's because that's the stuff of human life, right? Love, betrayal, jealousy, hatred, conflict, escalation, and resolution.

And we find in these few chapters of Genesis a highly dramatic story of Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac, and Hagar, and Ishmael. And we see everything. We see faith and doubt.

We see love, joy, and jealousy. We see, you know, hatred as well. And the rollercoaster, but through, it's like a rollercoaster, but through it all, God's faithfulness is the stream that keeps it all steady and constant.

We see his faithfulness all throughout this passage. And it serves kind of like the rails that keep this rollercoaster in place. And in this way, these chapters teach us that we can trust God completely because he's faithful to fulfill his promises, that God always fulfills his promises, and therefore we can trust him completely.

So in first two chapters, chapters 20 to 21, we see God's faithfulness toward Abraham in spite of his faithlessness. And in chapter 22, we'll see Abraham's faith. And chapter 20, if you've been with us, reads like a *deja vu* of chapter 12, right?

[1 : 15] Because there, Abraham was in Egypt, and he passed off his wife, his beautiful wife Sarah, as his sister, so that the Egyptians wouldn't kill him so that they could claim his wife as their own.

And here, again, instead of fighting to defend his wife, through whom God promised to fulfill his promise of progeny and making him a great nation, he opts to preserve himself, again, to protect himself at her expense.

And at that point in Egypt, God intervened to protect Sarah. And here, once again, God intervenes, despite Abraham's faithlessness.

So in chapter 12, verse 3, no, not chapter 12, verse 3, that's when God had promised Abraham that whoever blesses him, he will bless, whoever dishonors him, he will curse. And so here, Abimelech dishonors Abraham, though unwittingly, and now God will fight for Abraham's vengeance.

And so here, in verse 3 of chapter 20, God says to Abimelech, Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife. Though Abraham is a coward who doesn't defend his wife, here, God is a strong advocate for Sarah and Abraham.

[2 : 32] And he says, in essence, to Abimelech, you're as good as dead because of what you've done in taking Abraham's wife as your own. And then Abimelech defends himself, saying, Well, but he said this is her sister, this is his sister, and she said this is her brother.

And I did this in innocence. And that's true. And the fact that, you know, the king of the Philistines here, Abimelech says that, Will you kill the innocent to God?

Shows that God's answer is going to be no, because we just found that in chapter 18, that God does not sweep away the righteous along with the wicked. That's what happened in Sodom. So Abimelech's question, Lord, will you kill an innocent people, anticipates a negative answer.

And that's what, indeed, what we find in verses 6 to 7. Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore, I did not let you touch her.

Now then, return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, so that he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not return her, know that you shall surely die at you and all who are yours. So that encounter with Abimelech began with the threat of death, and it ends with the threat of death once again.

[3 : 40] So God's very serious about defending Abraham and Sarah, so that his promise to them might be fulfilled. And then we see Abimelech's response in verses 8 to 10, and his response is

prompt, and it's pious, really.

He's honoring God in his response. And it says that the men were actually very much afraid, and they regarded seizing another man's wife as a great sin.

So it seems that these people, even though Abraham didn't think much of them, actually had a fear of God in them. And in contrast to Abimelech's pious response, we find that Abraham's response is quite pathetic, right?

He explains in verses 11 to 13, I did it because I thought there is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife. And besides, she is indeed my sister. Well, first, it seems like from this passage that Abraham, this is not the second time he says, he says whenever he went to a new place, he said he did this.

He passed off his wife Sarah as a sister so that he could be preserved. So that's terrible. And then secondly, not just that, his answer is a total distraction. It's a misleading answer.

[4 : 53] Well, yeah, she is my sister, but I mean, that's really not the point of the question, right? It's not unlike the time when someone asks you, like, hey, what's up? And then you answer, well, the ceiling or the sky.

I mean, well, that's just a misleading, because that's not the point. It doesn't answer the question. That's not what's going on. Here, Abraham, sure, she is your sister. Sarah is your sister. But when someone comes because they're interested in claiming her as their own wife, the question at hand is not whether she's your sister.

Even if she is sister, the question you need to answer is whether she's your wife. And she is your wife. And Abraham didn't tell them that. And so he is totally, it's an inexcusable act that he does. And even though he judged the nation to have no fear of God in the place, it shows clearly in this passage that they had the fear of God. In fact, the only person in this dialogue that seems to lack the fear of God is Abraham.

It's not Abimelech. It's not the Philistines. And so Abimelech returns Sarah and gives a handsome fee, pays a handsome reward as a sign of vindication, as a sign of Sarah's innocence, that she was not harmed or touched by him or anyone in his household.

[6 : 05] Yet in spite of Abraham's faithlessness, God is faithful to fulfill his promises. And so he protects Sarah so that his promise of progeny might continue. And not only that, he also gives him the promise.

He had promised him the land of Canaan. And through Abimelech, you get a first glimpse of that promise coming to be fulfilled. In verse 15, Abimelech promises Abraham, Behold, my land is before you.

Dwell where it pleases you. So now Abraham gets to really take a stake, put a stake down on his land in this property in Canaan because Abimelech has given him permission to do so.

And at the end of this, we find out that Abimelech's family, the woman of his household, were punished by God by closing their womb. And that kind of gives us also a glimpse of, a glimmer of hope.

If God could so close and open their womb, could God also open the womb of Sarah? And she had said earlier that God had prevented her from having children.

[7 : 05] And we find the answer to that question in verses 1 to 7 of chapter 21. And the Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised. And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him.

And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. So the fact that God kept his promise to Abraham is emphasized throughout this passage.

It says, The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and he did to Sarah as he had promised. This is something that God already promised him. And then Abraham reciprocates by obeying God's commandment.

He says that he circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. And appropriately, because Isaac has brought them such joy and laughter, they name him Isaac, which means laughter.

And this miracle boy grows up and is weaned in verse 8. And this is an occasion for great celebration because babies in the ancient Near East were breastfed for much longer than babies in our culture are, usually up to the age of three or so.

[8 : 11] So Isaac is probably three years old. He's a toddler walking around. And because infant mortality rate also was much higher then, this was a great occasion for celebration.

It was a milestone when a baby was weaned. So from now on, it seems that God's promise to fulfill through Isaac, that Isaac will be the heir through which God's promise of progeny and nation will be fulfilled.

But then conflict and uncertainty is introduced once again as an old rivalry between Hagar and Sarah is revived. Verses 9 to 10, it says, But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing.

So she said to Abraham, Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac. So the context suggests that, you know, that Hagar's son Ishmael is not laughing innocently, but laughing at Isaac, presumably mocking him.

And he was, and just to be sure, this was, there was something, you know, laughable about the son of Abraham. Abraham is, at this point, 103 years old.

[9 : 22] And he's old enough to be Isaac's great-grandfather. And here he is holding this weaned child. There's some situation that, to Ishmael, seemed laughable. And he, this child, will now compete with me for my father's inheritance.

And that seems to be the even deeper underlying question. Because when it says that Ishmael laughed, remember, Isaac means to laugh.

So literally, what you find here is that you find Ishmael Isaac-ing. Isaac-ing here. He's acting the part of Isaac. And so that's what's threatened to Sarah as Isaac's mother, is that Ishmael's acting the part of Isaac, and she says, no, he will not inherit with my son.

This is the son of a slave woman, and he will not inherit. So that's what's motivating Sarah to act, lash out in this way. And so Sarah clearly doesn't see them as part of her family.

She refers to Ishmael as the son of a slave woman. But Abraham refers to him as his son. So he has an affection for him, and he wants to keep him in.

[10 : 29] So this is very distressing to him. In fact, he is described as being very displeased. And that phrase suggests explosive anger.

In fact, in other places in the Old Testament, just being displeased suggests great anger. And when God is displeased, usually there's spilled blood, judgment, and death.

And so, but this is the only place in the entire Old Testament where someone is described as being very displeased. So this is, Abraham is infuriated that Sarah would suggest such a thing.

Yet, in a surprising way, God intervenes and calms Abraham down and then tells him to listen to Sarah. 12, 13. Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman.

Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you. For through Isaac shall your offspring be named. And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also because he is your offspring.

[11 : 28] Because God had promised earlier that it is through Isaac that his promise will be fulfilled. So he reiterates that, reaffirms that, and says, don't worry, don't fret. Listen to Sarah because this is part of what I'm doing.

It's part of this fulfilling my plan for you and for your family. And so Abraham sends off Hagar and Ishmael. And he says that he rose early in the morning, verse 14, and he personally takes bread and skin of water and puts it on Hagar's shoulder.

And then lastly, perhaps showing his reluctance, he hands off Ishmael to Hagar. But unfortunately, Hagar gets lost on her journey.

It says in verse 14, she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. And the story continues in verses 15 to 16. When the water and the skin was gone, she put the child under one of the bushes.

Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off about the distance of a bow shot for she said, let me not look on the death of the child. And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept.

[12 : 31] So the word she put the child under the bush, the word put, it's really kind of the word for dumping. You know, it usually refers to people dumping a corpse somewhere or dumping someone into a well or a pit to die.

So that's the, so here it shows Hagar's despair and desolation. So he's saying she's, she's dumping Ishmael down and despairing. I mean, can you imagine, for those of you who have children or for at least for those of you who don't, you could imagine, can you imagine the pain of seeing your own

child die and being helpless to be able to do anything about it?

That's the pain that Hagar is in now. And so she weeps and she says, I can't bear to watch him die, so I'll dump him off here. And then she goes and wails. But God always takes care of the oppressed and rescues the needy throughout scripture.

As Psalm 82, 3 to 4 says, God gives justice to the weak and the fatherless. He maintains the right of the afflicted and the destitute. So that's what he does. He intervenes.

And he says, he heard the voice of the boy. That's an allusion to the name Ishmael, which means God has heard. So God heard Ishmael and then he intervenes on their behalf.

[13:47] And this is a great example for us as a people, even though Hagar and Ishmael are not part of God's elect line. They are not chosen people. They're not the people through whom the Messiah will come.

Yet God reaches out to them. He has compassion on them. And he rescues them from this dire situation. And that's because God always advocates on behalf of the powerless and the voiceless. In society. And that's what Christians throughout history have been known to do. Alvin Schmidt, a historian, writes in his book, *How Christianity Changed the World*, that it's Christian influence on government that was primarily responsible for outlawing infanticide, child abandonment, abortion, and gladiatorial games in the Roman Empire.

And for instituting prison reform, such as segregating of male and female prisoners. Stopping the practice of human sacrifice among the Irish, the Prusians, and the Lithuanians, as well as among other nations.

Outlawing pedophilia. Granting of property rights and other protections to women. Banning polygamy. Prohibiting the burning alive of widows in India. Outlawing the painful and crippling practice of binding young women's feet in China.

[14:58] Persuading government officials to begin a system of public schools in Germany. And like William Wilberforce in England fighting again to abolish slavery.

God heard the voice of the boy. Are we hearing the cries of the oppressed in our society today? Even if they are not part of God's elect, even if they are not going to believe in Jesus and on account of what we do, do we care for them?

Because God cares for people creating his image. He advocates on behalf of the weak and the powerless. And so that's not even the main point of this passage.

But that's a side point. And now we return to the main plot line which is with Abraham. And Abimelech appears on the scene again in verses 22 to 23. And he says, he's acknowledged that God is with Abraham.

He just wants to make sure he gets a piece of that pie. So he says, you know what? When you are thriving and well in the future, don't look down on us but be favorable toward us is basically what Abimelech is trying to do.

[16:03] And he makes Abraham swear an oath. But then Abraham rebukes him. He reproves him, bringing up the fact that some of his people had seized the well that he had dug. And so they hash out about that and make a covenant in Beersheba.

And this is significant because in verse 33, it says, Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and called there on the name of the Lord the everlasting God.

People don't plant trees in the yard that they have in a condo that they're in. Because you're not going to be there long enough to see the tree grow.

You plant trees in your permanent home where you're going to where future generations live. And that's what Abraham does here. So he plants a tree in this property and that's a sign that it's a development and advancement once again of God's promise to him that you will inherit this promised land of Canaan.

And so he plants a tree there and the guarantee of the well that Abimelech grants him is a sign of that because without a well, what good is land? You can't live there. And so we see here in these chapters 22 to 20 and 21 that we can trust God completely because he is faithful to fulfill his promises.

[17:12] And we see how he does that for Abraham. And having seen God's faithfulness toward Abraham, we see now the pinnacle of Abraham's faith in response to God in chapter 22.

Verse 1 begins, After these things, God tested Abraham and said to him, Abraham, and he said, Here I am. This is the first of three dialogues in this chapter and each dialogue begins with an

address of Abraham and then his response, Here I am.

And then each of the dialogues mention burnt offering, his only son Isaac. So each of these dialogues, three dialogues in this chapter, advance the story and build the tension until the climactic moment that comes to Isaac, the sacrifice of Isaac.

And what God says to Abraham in verse 2 is it's totally out of the left field. It's shocking. Right? He says, He said, Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.

Note the similarity between this and the command in Genesis 12, 1 when he said to Abraham, Leave your country, your kindred, and your father's house and go to the land I will show you.

[18 : 30] So both involve going to a place that God will reveal to them. And in chapter 12, that command was progressively more difficult and narrow and specific. Right?

First, leave your country, then your kindred, your relations, and then your family, your immediate household, father's household. And now here also, the command becomes progressively more difficult and narrow, specific.

Because first, he says, Take your son. And Abraham could be wondering to himself, which son? I have two sons. Maybe God wants me to go find the Israel again. But then God specifies, Your only son.

Not the son by your slave wife, Hagar, but the only son you have by your wife, Sarah. Isaac, he names them. And then, not just that, your only son, Isaac, whom you love.

Yes, your son, your only son, Isaac, the one you love, the one on whom all of your hope is riding. Yes, that one.

[19 : 30] Take him and offer him as a burnt offering in the land of Moriah. That's a devastating command. Abraham had waited 25 years for Isaac to be born.

And from the moment he first cradled Isaac in his arms, he was probably the apple of his eye. And as he watched Isaac grow and as he helped him take the first steps and when he finally was weaned and he threw a party to celebrate his growing up and now he's a teenage boy.

That's what boy is referring to. And every year, probably, Abraham's heart was knit closer to the life of this child. God tells him, take him.

The one thing in his life that he was least willing to give up, God tells him, take him, sacrifice him on Mount Moriah. Hey, at least in chapter 12, God sweetened the deal by giving him a promise.

Here, there's no such promise. In fact, the very act of sacrificing Isaac seems to negate and reverse and nullify the promises that God had given him.

[20 : 45] That's why this is a test. Right? This is God tested him. A test reveals the true character or nature of someone or something. So is Abraham willing then to give up what is most precious to him in order to obey God, in order to follow God?

Does Abraham trust God enough to go through with even this? That's the test. Whether Abraham loves Isaac more than he loves God, whether Abraham loves the gift more than the giver, whether Abraham has turned Isaac into an idol by treasuring him and enjoying him more than he treasures and enjoys God.

What are the precious things in your life? What do you love? What would be the thing that you'd be least willing to give up for God?

That's the idol of your heart. This could be any number of things. It could be your family. It could be your boyfriend. It could be good grades.

It could be people's approval. It could be a business success, wealth, and the power and prestige that come with that. It could be your sports team or the carefully curated image that you project on your social media profiles.

[22 : 08] It could be your dream career. And it could be good things, yet if you treasure them and cherish them above, God, then it becomes an idol.

And there's a few telltale signs that you have an idol lodged in your heart. At first is fear because you're afraid of losing it. Fear, you're afraid. You're afraid of losing your job, your child, your health. And the second telltale sign is discontentment. You're discontent, unsatisfied, unhappy, so you complain and grumble. Or if you don't get what you want, you become angry.

You're discontent because God is not enough for you and God's not enough for you because you don't have enough of God because you're making him share a part in your heart with the idols. The third telltale sign is lust.

Not just sexual lust, but inordinate desire, any insatiable appetite for something that you can't control. Maybe it's your addiction to TV shows or your smartphone, video games or alcohol, porn or drugs.

[23 : 22] You believe the lie that you must have this and that's a sign God's not sufficient for you. What's the test that God is putting before you this morning?

What is he asking you to sacrifice? And God commands you as he did Abraham to offer it up as a burnt offering. To burn it up. You might have faith in God, but your faith is not enough if your faith is not evidenced in your works, in your obedience.

So James uses this example of Abraham in chapter 2, 21 to 23. He says, Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?

You see that faith was active along with his works and faith was completed by his works and the scripture was fulfilled that says Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. Faith without works is dead. Only the faith that produces good works, that produces sacrifice, that produces obedience counts toward eternity. And so here, it's Abraham's subsequent obedience that proves the genuineness of his faith.

[24 : 32] It says in verse 3, So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

So Abraham obeys completely and immediately. And on the third day, he begins to see the place that God has shown him. So imagine this, you're having to sacrifice your only son, your beloved son Isaac, and it's a three days journey.

So for three days, he's playing in his mind what might happen, what he would have to do, the unthinkable thing, the pain. And the verses 5 to 8 are written so beautifully and poignantly.

Read it with me, verses 5 to 8. So they went, both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, My father. And he said, Here I am, my son.

He said, Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? Abraham said, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son. So they went, both of them, together.

[25 : 38] You could hear the irrepressible affection, the paternal affection, My father. Here I am, my son. And Isaac's unknowing innocence is heart-rending, right?

He doesn't even know. So where's the offering that you're going to bring to God? And then Abraham answers, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering. And notice how these verses are grouped together.

It begins and ends with the statement. So both of them went together. So you see, that structure makes it seem like they're on this long, silent, ponderous journey together.

They're not really talking, just walking. And then after a while of silence, it's interrupted by Isaac's question. Where is the lamb for the burnt offering? And then after Abraham answers that question, they resume once again on that long, silent walk together.

Both of them. It's really just, there's so much tension and sadness, a tinge of sadness in this passage.

[26 : 41] But we see more than just emotion here. We see Abraham's faith. In Hebrews 11, 17 to 19, it said, 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.

In other words, because God had promised to Abraham that through Isaac, his offspring will be named, Abraham believed that in spite of this ordeal, even through this ordeal, somehow he would end up receiving Isaac back.

Because God has told him, it's through Isaac that your offspring will be named. Even if it meant having to kill his own son, he believed that God could raise him from the dead.

And you can see glimpses of this faith throughout this dialogue. Because in verse 5, Abraham said to his young men, Stay behind, and then my son and I will go and will return to you.

[27 : 51] Both him and his son, he said, they will return. And we see this again here in this passage that we just read in verse 8, where Abraham says to Isaac, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.

This is an allusion to the name Moriah, which means the land will provide. So there's faith that God will provide. But from where and when this provision and deliverance from the Lord will come, Abraham has no idea.

So he has to go through with the act. And we come to that moment of truth when he arrives at the place which God had told him. Verse 9, it says, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac, his son, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood.

Then in verse 10, Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But in the nick of time, God intervenes. Rather, the Lord intervenes.

He says in verses 11 to 12, but the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, Abraham, Abraham. And he said, here I am. He said, do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him.

[29 : 07] For now I know that you fear God seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me. Right? Throughout this entire narrative, God was referred to generically as God.

It's a generic word that all the people use for God, the creator God. But it's here at this juncture when he is addressed for the first time as the Lord, the angel of the Lord responded.

And this usage is most likely theologically motivated because when God asks Abraham to surrender Isaac, he does so as God the creator. But when he comes to intervene to redeem him, to save him, to deliver him, he comes as Yahweh, the Lord, the great I am that we've been singing about.

He comes to deliver and rescue Isaac from the offering. And he provides a substitute, a ram, a male lamb that can be offered as a burnt offering in the place of his son.

dramatic story. It's an amazing story. I mean, anyone tells you the Bible is boring, tell them to read this. Up to this point, we haven't asked the question, was God right to command such an unthinkable act?

[30 : 20] Right? And was Abraham right to obey him? Clearly, the narrative commands Abraham for his obedience, right? So God rewards him and he says, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you.

Right? So clearly, the narrative commands Abraham for his obedience. But elsewhere in the New Testament, for example, in Leviticus 18, 21, 22 to 5, God forbids offering child sacrifices to Molech, right?

But of course, that's wrong because Molech is an idol, right? It's a false god, so it's wrong to sacrifice your children to Molech.

And so we can answer this question in a couple different ways. So first, in a more general way and then later in a specific way. In a more general way, the simple answer is yes, God has every right to demand Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac.

Right? And of course, it's not murder, right, if you kill with the proper authority. In the same way, soldiers do not murder when they go to war. It's sanctioning authority of the states that they send them.

[31 : 35] And God, elsewhere in the Old Testament, commands Israel's army to kill, right, as instruments of God's judgment. So killing is wrong only if it's not sanctioned by the proper authorities.

And God's sovereignly in control over every birth and every death in this life. He is the source of all life. And in fact, today, approximately 150,000 people will die.

God takes every single one of those lives. Over the course of our service, God will claim 12,000 lives. So yes, it's entirely within God's rights as the creator to command Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac for every life belongs to the Lord.

Lord. But more specifically, there is an expectation throughout the Old Testament that the firstborn son in particular belongs to the Lord.

And firstborn son as representative of all future progeny, really. And so Abraham here journeyed for three days to worship God upon a mountain. And this foreshadows and parallels the time when Moses and the Israelites will journey three days upon a mountain.

[32 : 45] And there they received the law in Exodus 19, 11, 16, Exodus 22, 29. And the law stipulates the firstborn of your sons you shall give to me.

And then God later specifies in Exodus 34, 20 that the firstborn males of all the animals had to be sacrificed and the firstborn males of all are the families, all the firstborn male sons.

They had to be redeemed. They were not to be sacrificed but redeemed. Right? They were supposed to provide a substitute and offering an animal that would die in place of the firstborn son. And why did God command this in Exodus? In Exodus this was looking back to God's deliverance of Israel during the Passover. When God rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt he killed all the firstborn males of Egypt.

However, he spared the Israelites families because they had a substitute, a male lamb, a ram die in their place and they had daubed the blood of the ram on their doorpost. And so this, really the sacrifice here of Isaac and God providing a substitute is foreshadows that, even precedes that.

[33 : 49] And God spares Isaac here because of the ram which is a substitute and God spares, right, Israel in Egypt because of the lamb that died in place. And God ultimately spares people, anyone that he saves because of Jesus who is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And that's what this points to. That's the ultimate thing, the ultimate spiritual reality that this points to because Jesus is described as the lamb that takes away the sin of the world.

He is God's only son, the one he loves, and he too will carry the wood up the mountain as Isaac carried the wood on his back. Jesus carries the cross on his back up the mountain.

And the key difference, of course, is Isaac is spared, but Jesus actually dies. Jesus dies and is forsaken by the Father so that people who believe in him, so that we might have eternal life and be reconciled to the Father.

Jesus absorbs God's wrath towards sinners so that we, the sinners, might receive his mercy. Jesus puts himself on the cross of judgment where only we deserve to be so that we can join God on his throne and reign with him where only he deserved to be.

[35 : 15] That's what this passage is pointing to. And Romans 8, 32 says, 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?

If you seek spiritual life, if you seek spiritual vitality, meaning, if you want your life to be full of the love that God pours out to his children, the only way you can do that is to believe in Jesus, his life and death and his resurrection for your salvation.

He's the ultimate fulfillment of all these promises. And when God does not condemn because his son has died in our place, who can condemn us?

The great I am, the Lord has made provision and the Lamb of God has been sacrificed on our behalf so we can go to him and place all our hope and trust in him.

And that's what this passage exhorts us to do. So whether you're a believer or an unbeliever, I exhort you today, put all your hope and trust in him and let your lives revolve around that truth and that's where you'll find life, love, and fulfillment of all that God has given you.

[36 : 24] God has promised to us, to his children. Let's pray together. Lord, let us never lose the wonder of what you have accomplished for us on the cross.

You pay the ultimate price. Your most precious son, your only son, your beloved son, so that we might be called sons and daughters of God.

What grace, what love. Now help us to be challenged and changed by that love you have shown us through your son, Jesus Christ, so that we would consider no sacrifice too great when he's laid at your altar so that we would be ourselves transformed to love others around us.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.