

Guest Preacher - Rev. Thomas Davis

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Preacher: Rev. Thomas Davis

[0 : 00] Well, I'd like us this morning to turn back to Genesis chapter 22. We're going to look at the whole section that we read, but we can read again verses 6 to 8.

And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac, his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife, 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. As we spend a few minutes looking at this chapter, I want to start by saying that I think that this chapter is possibly the most distressing chapter in Genesis, maybe even in the whole Bible.

It's a distressing chapter because it's a difficult situation to be reading about. That whole idea of Abraham sacrificing his son, it just seems unthinkable.

[1 : 31] And we always have to be careful that familiarity with something like this doesn't in any way stop us from recognizing just how awful the whole thing seems.

So it's a distressing passage. But at the same time, what I hope we'll see today is that I think that it is also one of the most comforting chapters in the whole of the Bible as well.

And the reason I say that is because this chapter is a powerful picture of the incredible love that lies at the heart of the whole Christian faith.

Now, in order to understand a chapter like this better, it's important that we understand how the Old Testament and the New Testament fit together.

That's a really important area for us to understand whenever we're coming to look at a passage like this in the Old Testament. As you know, the Bible is split into two big chunks, Old Testament and New Testament.

[2 : 42] And the theme that runs right through them is the theme of covenant. That's really what the word testament is referring to. So we could just as easily say that we could just as easily talk about the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

Covenant is the Bible's term for describing the relationship between God and humanity. So when you think of that word covenant, you could think of a special particular relationship between God and humanity.

And the message of the Bible as a whole is of how that relationship between God and humanity was created, then broken, then restored.

So if you like, the Bible is kind of like in three big chunks. That relationship's created, it's broken, and restored. But the chunks are not of equal length because the first two happen in the first three chapters of the Bible.

Genesis 1 to 3 is where the relationship's created. Genesis 3 is where the relationship is broken. And then from Genesis 4 all the way through the rest of the Bible, we read about the restoration of that relationship.

[3 : 55] And the way in which the Old Testament and the New Testament fit together is in the sense that the Old Testament is a shadow of the full reality that's revealed in the New.

So when we go from Old Testament into New Testament, we're not saying that the Old Testament is completely just abandoned, forgotten, and done away with, as though the two things were completely separate.

We don't think that. Some people do. We don't. We believe that the Old Testament gives us a shadow of the full plan of salvation that's been implemented through the coming of Jesus in the New Testament.

So if you imagine it in terms of buildings, you can think in terms of a building. We mustn't think that the Old Testament is one building and the New Testament is another building. And then when we go from the Old to the New, the old one just gets kind of blown up and demolished.

We mustn't think like that at all. It's not a separate building. Instead, the New Testament is the building and the Old Testament is the shadow that that building casts.

[5 : 01] And so the two are inseparable. The two are very closely related. But one is a shadow and the other is a reality. The Old Testament is the shadow that the New Testament building is making.

And so just like another shadow, if you could see my shadow, it's connected to me. It's an outline of me. But it's not the real thing. It's not the full consummation.

And that's exactly the relationship we have between the Old Testament and the New Testament. So you see it in lots of ways. In the Exodus, that's a shadow of the New Testament reality of God delivering us out of slavery to sin.

In the Old Testament, you see the temple. That's a shadow of the New Testament reality that God comes to dwell within us by his spirit. In the Old Testament, you see King David.

He's a shadow of the New Testament reality that the kingdom of God has come and that Jesus is king. And it's amazing how it all fits together.

[6 : 06] And it's something that we can spend a lifetime doing. The reason I want to say that is because exactly the same applies in Genesis 22. This chapter is a shadow.

It's a shadow of what happened on the cross. And I want us to look at three things together.

The first two we'll do in a wee bit more detail. The last one is just very brief as we conclude. Our three things are a shadow of a son who's precious. A shadow of a substitute which is provided.

And a shadow of a blessing which is poured out. So first of all, a shadow of a son who's precious.

Please look again at verses 1 and 2. After these things, God tested Abraham and said, Abraham.

And he said, here I am. 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, which I shall tell you.

[7 : 11] In these verses, Abraham's given a command by God to offer his son Isaac. And when God gives that command in these verses that we just read, there's one key truth that is being strongly emphasized.

And the key truth is that this child is precious. You can see that if you look at the words that God uses in verse 1 and 2.

He doesn't say, take Isaac, take the boy. He says to Abraham, take your son. This is Abraham's very own child. But not only that, he is your only son, which you can see is repeated there.

Isaac is unique. There's no other child born to Abraham and Sarah at this stage. And they had waited 25 years for Isaac to be born. And so Abraham is being asked to offer up someone utterly unique, someone utterly irreplaceable.

And that's reinforced by the third thing that God says. He says, take your son, your only son Isaac. Can you see what he says next? Whom you love. Isaac's not just a unique child.

[8 : 21] He's an utterly cherished child. Abraham loves his son. For Abraham, there's no one in the world like Isaac. And that father-son relationship between them is so strong and so deep.

So from the very moment that we start this chapter, there's a big emphasis that Isaac is precious.

And of course, at this stage of the chapter, that just reinforces how shocking and distressing God's command to Abraham is.

It all just seems unthinkable if we start to put ourselves into Abraham's shoes. But that immediately means we have to ask the question, is God being horrible?

Or is he showing us something? And the fact that the Old Testament is a shadow is telling us that it's the latter. God is showing us something.

Isaac is a son who is incredibly precious. But he is actually a shadow of the son who is the most precious son of all.

[9 : 28] And that, of course, is Jesus Christ. And we see that when we go right through to the New Testament. Because there's two crucial moments in the Gospels when God the Father speaks from heaven.

Two big moments when the voice of God the Father from heaven is heard. One is at Jesus' baptism. The other is at the transfiguration. The voice from heaven is heard.

And both times, God says the same thing. This is my beloved son. And that's reinforced again by Jesus' own words in John 17.

Where he's praying to the Father. And he speaks about the fact that he says, You loved me before the foundation of the world. So in Genesis 22, Isaac is probably about 12 years old.

For every second of those 12 years, Isaac has been utterly loved by Abraham. But God the Father has had God the Son with him forever.

[10:37] And for every second of that eternity, the Father has poured his love into his precious Son. So here in Genesis 22, we're getting a shadow and a glimpse into that intimate bond that there is between God the Father and God the Son.

To the Father, there is no one else like Jesus. He is God the Father's one and only. He's the Father's beloved. He's been the object of the Father's love forever.

And so when the Bible says that God is love, that's not just some kind of vague, nicey statement.

It's a logical fact that from forever until forever, at the very heart of the being of God, is a Father who loves his precious, beautiful, treasured Son.

And this is a moment when I cannot in any way exaggerate this. In fact, exaggeration is just understatement. I can't think of words big enough. I can't think of enough words to describe how precious Jesus is to the Father.

And even if I talk all day, which I'm probably more than capable of because I talk too much, even if I did, I wouldn't get close. I would not get close to conveying the fullness of what it means when God the Father says, this is my beloved Son.

[11:59] And for those of us who are parents, every ounce of love that we have for our children is just a glimpse into this.

In fact, that's part of what it means to be made in the image of God. The fact that we love our offspring, and particularly for us as fathers, we love our children and we look after them.

Now, I'm not a sheep expert, but all around us, lots of you guys have been doing lambing, and it's been a busy time of year. And it's lovely to see the lambs thriving in the crofts all around us in our communities.

I hope I'm not wrong in saying this, and please correct me if I am, but I think it's the case that I have never seen a ram looking after his children.

As I say, I may be wrong, but I'm not sure they're even aware that they have offspring in any meaningful sense. And they certainly don't seem to treat their lambs as though they're precious.

[13:07] The ewes do in so many beautiful ways. Rams, not so much, I don't think. And even when we do see expressions of care towards offspring in the animal kingdom, it's only temporary.

Humans are different. And that, of course, is why when a father fails to love their children, it's because we're failing to be what God wants us to be. And that, of course, is an awful thing for anyone to experience.

But it's reminding us that for us as fathers especially, we are part of the fact that we bear the image of God is the way in which we are to pour our love into our children.

All of this is pointing us to the fact that when you think of Jesus, alongside recognizing that he is king, he's teacher, he's savior, he's guide, when you think of Jesus, please always also remember that he is the precious, unique, beloved son of God.

In Isaac, we see a shadow of Jesus, the son who is incredibly precious. Second shadow we see is a shadow of a substitute which is provided.

[14:27] You see that if you look at the section from verse 9 down to verse 14. They came to the place that God told them. Abraham built an altar and he took his son, bound him and laid him on the wood.

He reached out his hand, took the knife about to kill his son. And at that moment, an angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, Abraham, Abraham.

And Abraham says, I am here. And he says, do not do it. At that moment, Abraham then sees a ram caught in a thicket by its thorns. And as you read at the end of verse 13 there, Abraham took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.

I want you to imagine that you were reading Genesis 22 for the first time today. And sometimes when I'm reading it, I try to imagine that I don't know the outcome.

Imagine you didn't know that this was what was happening. You're reading about what's going on and the tension builds up as the chapter goes on. And you think, what on earth is going on? What is God asking Abraham to do? And there is such a sense of relief when you come to verse 12 and God says, stop.

[15 : 44] And even though I know the outcome and I've known the outcome of Genesis 22 since I was a child, I'm always still relieved when I reach verses 12 and 13 and God provides a ram to die instead of Isaac.

There's two very important things that are emphasized here. The first is that the ram is provided by God.

So even as they were walking towards Mount Moriah, Abraham was looking to God to make a provision. And at that moment, when it looked as though the worst was about to happen, everything changes because of the provision that God makes.

And in response, Abraham names the place the Lord will provide. The ram is provided by God. But the second key point, the second very important thing, is that this ram that God has provided functions as a substitute who's offered instead of Isaac.

And you can see that emphasized very powerfully by two little words at the end of verse 13. It says, he offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. Those two words, instead of, are so important.

[17 : 00] That's the reason why God has made this provision. The ram is provided so that Isaac is protected. The ram is a substitute that takes his place.

And again, the key point is that in all of this, God is showing us something. This is a shadow of a substitute being provided. Now, all of this is raising the whole question, the whole issue of sacrifice. Isaac is almost a sacrifice and the ram is offered in his place as a substitute, as a sacrifice instead of him. And as you read through the rest of the Old Testament, you see that there's this big emphasis on sacrifices.

Why is that? Why is sacrifice such an important part of the Bible's message? Well, central to this emphasis on sacrifices that you see running through the whole Bible is the fact that as far as the Bible is concerned, death is a massive problem.

Humanity was created to live and to thrive. But sin has ruined that and has put us on a path to death, to God and to us.

[18 : 15] That is a massive problem. And it's a reminder that if you are ever wondering if the Bible is relevant to you, then ask the question, ask yourself the question, is death a problem for me?

And if it's not a problem for you, then the Bible is probably not going to do very much for you. But if death is a problem for you, then the Bible is exactly what you need.

The Bible tells us that death is a problem. And that problem is caused by sin. Now, this raises what's really a bit of a dilemma and a tension.

Death is a problem for all of us. And death is caused by sin. So the way to get rid of death is to get rid of sin. Yes? If we want to get rid of death, we need to get rid of sin.

But the only thing that gets rid of sin is death. So I'll say that again. I don't want to be confusing. The way to get rid of death is to get rid of sin.

[19 : 25] But the only thing that gets rid of sin is death. Let me try and illustrate what I mean. I want you to imagine my heart, the actual physical organ that pumps blood around my body.

If you imagine that or imagine your own heart. Imagine that your heart was contaminated with radiation. So every time my heart beats, it's producing radioactiveness in my blood.

Now, this is not true. This is just an imaginary illustration to make a point. Okay? So imagine every time my heart beats, it's pumping radioactiveness into my blood.

And bit by bit, that is going to kill me. As that is circulated around my body again and again and again. So my heart is pumping away.

Imagine that it's putting radioactiveness into my blood. And that is slowly going to kill me. So that needs to be stopped because it's going to kill me. The only way to stop my heart from producing the radiation that's going to kill me is to stop my heart from beating.

[20 : 29] But what will happen then? I'll die. So either way, I'm going to die.

And that is the situation that sin has left humanity in. Humanity needs to get rid of sin in order to avoid death. But the only thing that gets rid of sin is death.

Sin creates an unstoppable path to death. And that is why God hates sin. And that is why God judges sin.

Because sin is so utterly horrible. And radioactiveness, which probably isn't even a real word, but I hope you know what I mean.

Radioactiveness is a good illustration for sin. Because if something is radioactive, you can't un-radioactify it. So imagine this bottle was radioactive. You can't un-radioactify it.

[21 : 30] That's not a word either, but you know what I mean. All you can do is get it away from you and put it somewhere else. And that is exactly what sin is like.

That's exactly what the sacrificial system of the Old Testament is pointing us towards. It's grounded on the principle that the death that sin makes inevitable is diverted off us and onto a substitute. It's like you're just getting it away from you. Getting that death away from you and onto something else. And Genesis 22 and the rest of the sacrificial system in the Old Testament is a shadow of that. Ultimately, it wasn't effective in and of itself because it's a shadow. It's not going to be. And as the New Testament reveals, it's impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin. Animals cannot adequately substitute for humans. And they were never intended to be effective. It was intended to be a shadow. A shadow of the sacrifice where a perfect substitute would take the death resulting from all of our sins instead of us.

[22 : 51] And that's why in Genesis 22 we see a shadow of a precious son and a shadow of a substitute provided. And the key point is that on the cross both of these things come together.

On the cross, the precious son of God becomes the perfect substitute provided for us. On the cross, Jesus dies in our place as our substitute.

And in doing so, all of our sin is placed on him. His perfection and preciousness is placed on us. If you go back to the radioactive heart illustration, our broken, contaminated heart is transplanted to him.

And his healthy, perfect, righteous heart is transplanted to us. And the result is that we are saved. And the fact that Isaac was saved because the ram took his place is a shadow of the fact that we are saved because Jesus takes our place.

But the key point of Genesis 22 is that the magnitude of what Abraham almost had to do is giving you a glimpse into the magnitude of what God actually had to do in order to provide salvation.

[24 : 15] In Genesis 22, there is massive relief when Abraham's precious son is spared. But when God the Father saw Abraham's son being spared, he knew that when it came to his own precious son, there would be no ram to take his place.

So in Genesis 22, the son is replaced with a ram, and that's the pattern for the rest of the Old Testament shadow. But at the cross, all the bulls and goats and rams of that Old Testament shadow come to an end.

And in the New Testament, the rams are replaced with a son. And so, when Abraham said, the Lord will provide, I don't think he ever realized just how much that meant.

Maybe he did, but it means so much. That's why, as Romans 32 says, God did not spare his own son, but gave him up.

And this is where we see the massive cost of the cross. The awfulness of Genesis 22 is a glimpse into the awfulness of the cross.

[25 : 40] It's no wonder that Jesus was in agony at Gethsemane on the night before the cross and prayed that this cup might pass from him. It's no wonder that he had to be strengthened by angels. Because the cross costs God everything.

His son is not spared. The father has to give him up. At the cross, God provides a substitute, and that substitute is his own beloved, precious son.

And in the midst of all the agony and pain and distress that this causes, we've got to ask the question, why? Why on earth would God do this? And the amazing thing is that you can answer that question in one word.

When you look at the cross and when you see God's precious son being sacrificed and you ask the question, why is God doing this? The answer is one word.

It's because of you. And that's why when Paul says, he who did not spare him up, spare him but his own son but gave him up, he says, he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all.

[27 : 02] All of this is so that you can be saved through faith in Jesus Christ. And if you can see how precious Jesus the son is and if you can see just how perfect the provision that has been made is then you will see just how much you are worth in the eyes of God.

Because the massive cost of the cross is paid in full because of how precious you are to God. And I heard this summed up so beautifully by Eric Alexander who was a preacher in Glasgow for many years in Scotland and if you listen to sermons online then I wholeheartedly recommend listening to Eric Alexander's sermons.

Speaking about Genesis 22 he said this and I've never forgotten it. He said, when you look at Abraham you think to yourself wow see how much Abraham loves God. But when you look at the cross you think wow see how much God loves me. On the cross we see a perfect substitute provided and that substitute is God's own precious son. And then the last thing we see very briefly is a shadow of a blessing which is poured out. Let me read from verse 15. The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said by myself I've sworn declares the Lord because you've done this and have not withheld your son your only son I will surely bless you and I'll surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that's on the seashore and your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed because you have obeyed my voice. [29 : 20] The key point here is that as a result of the fact that Abraham did not withhold his son blessings were poured out upon Abraham and upon others.

There's the blessing of a family his offspring will be multiplied. There's the blessing of security that's what it means when it talks about having the gate of your enemies that they won't be a threat to you and there's a blessing for all people all the nations of the earth shall be blessed as you can see in verse 18.

And this too is a shadow of the cross because the fact that God did not withhold his own son has meant that incredible blessings are being poured out on humanity because if you're a Christian or if you become one through faith in Jesus Christ we have the blessing of a beautiful family we're all brought into God's family as his children and as brothers and sisters in Christ we have the blessing of unshakable security sin and death cannot threaten us nothing can snatch us out of the father's hand and we have an amazing blessing for all nations and the good news of Jesus is transforming lives across the world and we have the incredible privilege of continuing to share that message we have this amazing message to proclaim and it's all summed up perfectly with the words that we opened our service with when

Paul said 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 Genesis 22 gives us a shadow of a precious son it gives us a shadow of a substitute provided it gives us a shadow of a blessing poured out and the amazing thing about the cross is that all these shadows become a reality the last thing I want to say however is this in the Old Testament we have shadows in the New Testament we have the reality today we have pale imitations and what I mean by that is the fact that today people are looking for peace and joy and hope and self-worth and security and love but they're looking for them in things like their health their possessions their house their social media profile their sex life their work their status their reputation their political party and in hundreds of other places and the thing

I want to say to you is that all of these are pale imitations of what God is offering you in Jesus and for anyone here who is maybe not yet a Christian or thinking about things or wondering about things all I want to ask you to do as you go away and think about this is to just compare compare what the stuff in the world around us is offering us compare that with what God is offering you and also compare what you are worth in the eyes of all that stuff so whether it's your political party or your job or your status or your whatever it is compare what you are worth in the eyes of all that stuff compare that with what you are worth in the eyes of God

[33 : 14] Amen let's pray dear God our Father help us help us to see just how much you have done for us in Jesus help us to recognize that all the distress and horror of Genesis 22 is actually just a fraction of what you had to do for us to be saved through the cross but we pray that that wouldn't lead us to feelings of distress or of anxiousness but we pray that instead that it would show us just how incredible your love is and we pray that for for every one of us here we would see that that we are not excluded from this but that you're calling us all into it we thank you so so much for the precious son and the perfect substitute and for the amazing blessings that have come through the cross of our saviour

Jesus Christ amen our closing psalm is from psalm 67 we're going to sing verses 3 to 7 psalm 67 it's the sing psalms version oh god may the peoples praise you may all people sing your praise for you judge the nations justly ruling over every race verses 3 to 7 let's stand as we sing these words to god's praise may the peoples praise you may all people sing your praise for it's as the nations justly ruling over every race may they sing with joy and gladness may they all rejoice as one oh god may the peoples praise you as they all unite in song then the land will yield its harvest god will pour his gifts across god our god will surely bless us all the earth will fear our god the grace of our lord

jesus christ the love of god and the fellowship of the holy spirit be with you all amen you