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Lent Day 4: The Test

5-6 minutes

Genesis 22:1-14 (ESV)

After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "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 of which I shall tell you." 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. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." 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.

When they came to the place of which God had told him, 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 Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. 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, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, "The Lord will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."

This is one of the most well known and difficult passages in the Bible. Abraham is introduced in Genesis 12 as the one through whom "all the peoples on the earth" will be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3). And so as we arrive at the scene above we find that what started as God's call to Abraham to leave his home has now reached a dramatic climax. God has now included in that call the ultimate sacrifice and test of Abraham's faith — the willingness to sacrifice his only son. The pain and poignancy of this moment is heightened by the fact that Abraham and his wife, Sarah, had waited years without seeing the fulfillment of God's promise of a son. God's promise that a nation would come through their family seemed impossible to Abraham and Sarah, given their inability to have a child.

So now having answered their prayers and given them a son, God has asked Abraham to do something that seems completely cruel and irrational. How will God create a people through the sacrifice of Abraham's only heir? How will this death lead to the blessings

promised in Genesis 12? The answer comes as we move from the events of Abraham's life to the events of the life of Jesus.

As you reflect on this story of faith and sacrifice in light of this season leading up to Holy Week, take the time to reflect on the way it foreshadows the faith and sacrifice of Jesus. Abraham's declaration that God himself will provide the lamb (Genesis 22:8) reminds us of God's gift of the Lamb to save the world (Mark 10:45; John 1:29, 36). God's provision of the ram on Mount Moriah foreshadows his sacrifice of his only son, Jesus Christ — the true Lamb without blemish who died in our place on the cross. Like Isaac, Christ is the lamb led to the slaughter, yet unlike Isaac, Jesus didn't open his mouth. Just as Isaac carried his own wood for the altar, Christ carried his own wooden cross (John 19:17). Go back and re-read the passage with eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith (Hebrews 12:2).

Prayer

Holy Father, I thank and praise you for sending your only Son into the world. Give me eyes to see the beauty and perfection of Jesus, the spotless Lamb who willingly sacrificed himself so that I might receive forgiveness and new life. And in light of your grace may I live a life of faith, trusting in your goodness and laying down my life for others. In Christ's Name, Amen.

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