



## A Post Tenebras Lux Sunday Sermon...

### The Day Abraham Saw Jesus...

#### Genesis 22:1-18

Father, we come to you this morning confessing to you our great need. Father we need and we desire that the Holy Spirit come now and take the things of Christ and make them real to our hearts...to come and take the written word and as its true author and therefore its infallible teacher to instruct us in the truth of your Son. Open the book we pray to see what you have accomplished on our behalf, in Christ, in whose name, we pray, Amen.

The Jewish religious leaders were after Jesus for the things he had been saying...for all the things He had been doing. They were hounding Him...trying to trip Him up...trying to get Him to say something...anything by which they could condemn Him.

They even insulted Him by drawing attention to His mysterious birth...hinting that He was illegitimate...while they were...were properly born sons of the covenant...sons of Abraham. So the Lord Jesus picked up their argument and turned it against them. He said to them, **"If you were the sons of Abraham, you would do the same sort of works as Abraham...but you don't. Instead, you want to kill me and you want to kill simply because I have told you the truth...that is not the sort of thing Abraham would have ever done."**

And then right there is the midst of their argument, Jesus said the strangest thing...something so profoundly wonderful and strange that it startled the Jews.

What He said was this...

<sup>NAS</sup> **John 8:56... "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad."**

Now I want you to think about what He said for a moment. He didn't say, **"Abraham wished he could have seen my day...wished he could have seen all that you Scribes and Pharisees have seen...but never got he chance."**

No, what Jesus said was strange. What he said was, **"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he did see *it* and he was glad."**

The Greek is even stronger than that. It is something like, **"Abraham rejoiced in the idea that he might possibly get to see my day and he did see it and was glad."**

Now the question is, and it is an important question I think, what does that mean? What does it mean and when did it happen...that is, when did Abraham see Jesus' day?

Now if you are not really up on your Bible stories and characters, I ought to tell you by way of background information that Abraham was the Father of the Jewish nation. He was the first Jew. Originally, he lived in what is modern day Iraq and then he was called by God to leave his homeland and to go to the land

of Canaan, modern day Palestine, where God promised to build a nation out of him...to make him the father of multitudes...and when He made that promise He gave Abraham a sign of His covenant with him...the sign of circumcision...so Abraham as an old man circumcised himself and his whole household.

He was the first Jew...he was the father of the nation of Israel.

Now it ought to be obvious to you from everything I have said so far that Abraham lived a long time before the Lord Jesus...a little over two thousand years before Jesus. Think about that...there was about as much time between the lives of Jesus and Abraham as there is between us and Jesus...a little over two thousand years. And yet, Jesus said the Scribes and the Pharisees, Scribes and Pharisees who claimed to be the rightful heirs of Abraham that "**Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he did see *it* and he was glad.**"

Now some scholars...indeed some very good men...think that the reference here to seeing Jesus' day is a reference to just some sort of general idea about a coming Messiah. That is, they think that all that Jesus meant is that Abraham realized that he was not the hope of the nation...that he was not Messiah...that he was not the redeemer...that one day, later on, a redeemer would have to come to redeem His people.<sup>1</sup>

But I have to tell you I don't think that is right. Rather, I agree with commentators F.F. Bruce and James Montgomery Boice that Jesus had in mind here a specific instance...a specific situation...a specific moment in time when Abraham saw Jesus' day and was glad...very glad indeed.<sup>2</sup>

Now in order for you to understand how this passage in John hangs with the passages we read earlier, I need to take a moment or two and paint for you a thumbnail sketch of Abraham's life.

God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldeans, modern day Iraq, when he was already an old man. In fact, Abraham was seventy-five years old when God called him and when God called Abraham He told him to go to a land he would show him and that once he was there He would make a great nation out of him.

Now I want you to think about how remarkable that promise was. It was remarkable because Abraham and his wife Sarah had no children of their own. They had no children...were too old to have any children...and yet God promised them that they would have a child and that He would make a great nation out of the child and that through that nation all the people of the earth would be blessed. Now the story of Abraham...and his waiting for God to make good on His promise to give him a son goes on for nine chapters in Genesis...it runs from chapter twelve through chapter twenty and as it does it covers a period of some twenty five years...and then at last, in chapter twenty-one, Abraham's wife Sarah did indeed have a baby...a baby they named Isaac...a name which meant **"laughter."**

And they did indeed laugh...first because of the utter ridiculousness of a hundred year old man and a ninety year old woman having a baby...and then secondly...and more appropriately because the baby was the fulfillment of God's great covenantal promise to them. They reasoned, I think, that if God could actually...really and truly give them a baby when they were so old...that He might also give them the rest of the promise that He had made regarding the

baby and the baby's future...that is, that the baby might grow into a great nation and be the source of great blessing to the whole world. I think they may have been thinking, **"If God could do something some profoundly wonderful as in giving us this child when we are old, might He not also go all the way with His promise."**

Still, it was not the birth of Isaac that Jesus was referring to when He spoke of Abraham seeing His day...and being glad. It was a great day...a great day indeed...a glorious day...but it was not that day.

Now chapters twelve through twenty cover twenty five years in the life of Abraham. Chapter twenty-one starts with the birth of Isaac...the promised son...and it ends with Abraham digging a well at Beersheba...

Now the story of Abraham digging a well at Beersheba is not simply put there in the story to fill space. It is put there for a purpose. You see the name Beersheba means **"The Well of Seven"** and the idea was not so much that there were seven wells there but rather that the place was a wonderful place of abundance and prosperity. It was a little bit like saying, **"I live in the 'City of Roses.'"** It is not the idea that there are only roses there but it is a way to emphasis the beauty of Tyler.

Anyway, Abraham and his wife and son and servants lived there and prospered...and yet we don't know any details about what went on there in their time at Beersheba. Now quite a few years passed between the end of chapter twenty-one and the beginning of chapter twenty-two. There is no way to know exactly how several years passed...perhaps as many as fifteen or twenty. And

then all of a sudden God spoke again to Abraham...but His words were not words of promise or of blessing, they were not the words of a friend...they were words filled with darkness and thunder and despair.

Look at verses one and two.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Genesis 22:1**...Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. <sup>2</sup> Then God said, "**Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.**"

Now the verses are extraordinary in their simplicity and in their starkness. There is no explanation to Abraham as to why what is being commanded is being commanded. Oh the reader is told...told that God was testing Abraham...but not even the reader is told why he is being tested. There are only those words...those terrible dark words...**"take, go...sacrifice."**

Calvin would later say that there was a sense in which Abraham's obedience called for the destruction of his faith. That is, the command itself called for the destruction of every visible sign of God's promise to him.<sup>3</sup>

Luther would later say of the passage that the command was God contradicting Himself...that it was God taking away the very thing He had promised.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, there is wonderful story about the first time Luther read the story at home during family devotions, his wife Katie shouted at him, **"I don't believe it. God would have never treated his son like that."**<sup>5</sup>

That is, of course, the very emotion we are meant to feel when we read the passage. It is an outrageous command and contrary to everything we know or think about God...and yet there it is, **“Go, take, sacrifice.”**

Now as modern Christians, we are shocked by God asking Abraham to do something so horrific and yet we are also inclined to want to know what Abraham was thinking...what he was feeling...and yet as Moses relates Abraham’s story he chooses not to fill in the gaps...instead, he simply lays out the facts...leaving them plain and bare and stark and the story is all that much more powerful because of it.

I remember when my wife and I were first married, we were watching the movie **“The Bible”** in which George C. Scott portrayed Abraham...and I remember when the Lord gave Abraham this horrible command in the movie my wife started weeping...not crying...but weeping out of deep sorrow and bitterness...and I realized of course that she didn’t know the story...that she wasn’t aware how it turned out and my heart ached for her.

But that is what the Holy Spirit writing through the hand of Moses intended...and it works doesn’t it...it moves us because of the pathos...because of the innate understanding each of us has with losing something we have waited for so long...something so precious...something irreplaceable.

So here in verse one and two we see the terrible command of God Almighty to his friend Abraham.

Now in verses three through five we see Abraham's unswerving obedience to God's command and we catch for just a fleeting moment the first hint of hope.

Look at verse three with me.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Genesis 22:3...**Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled 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. <sup>4</sup> On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. <sup>5</sup> 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.**"

Now I want you to notice that Abraham obeys almost instantly. It must have been a horrible night for him. Still, he rose early the next morning and set out. And he left nothing to chance. He even cut and collected the wood he would need to make his burnt offering. He loaded the donkey and he and his servants and his son set out.

It was a three day trip from Beersheba to Moriah...about forty five miles...over rough hilly terrain.<sup>6</sup> I imagine that it was an awkwardly silent trip. Verse four tells us that on the third day they were able to see the mountain God had in mind. And then Abraham tells the servants to stay where they are and then...then there is this extraordinarily strange and cryptic word...spoken by Abraham 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.**"

I think it is an expression of faith. Some commentators think Abraham was simply trying to put the best face on things...some think he was saying whatever

it took to get Isaac to go with him but I think what Abraham said was more than that. I think it was an expression of hope.

Anyway, what we see in verses one and two is God's terrible command. What we see in verses three through five is Abraham's instantaneous, unswerving, uncomplaining obedience.

In verses six through eight what we see is an insightful question by Abraham's son Isaac. Look at verse 6 with me.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Genesis 22:6**...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, <sup>7</sup> 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?**" <sup>8</sup> Abraham answered, "**God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.**" And the two of them went on together.

Now Isaac's question adds to the pathos of the story doesn't it. "**Father, we have the fire and we have the wood...but we do not have the most important thing...we do not have the lamb for the sacrifice. Where are we going to get the lamb?**"

How difficult it must have been for Abraham to answer his son. I imagine that Abraham was tired...that the trip had just about done him in...he was somewhere between a hundred and fifteen and a hundred and twenty years old and three days of riding and of walking and grieving would have had to have taken a toll on the old man...Abraham's answer must have hung in his throat for a moment.

You see his answer probably ought to be understood as something like this, **“The Lord will provide the lamb for the sacrifice and in fact has already done so...it is you my son.”**

And you know I do not think that is forcing anything upon the text. I think Abraham really believed that he was going to have to do what God commanded. And yet the text is remarkably clear at the end of verse eight, **“And the two of them went on together.”** Of course, the question is, **“How? How could they go on? How was he able to go on knowing that God Almighty...the great God of the everlasting covenant was asking him to snuff Isaac...to snuff ‘Laughter’ out of his life?”**

Well, I have to tell you...Abraham did so not out of emotion, or out of fear or even, I think, out of love. No, the New Testament tells us that he pressed on out of logic...out of reason. That is why this morning during the Scripture reading I thought it was important that you hear what the Holy Spirit says in Hebrews chapter 11, verse 17.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Hebrews 11:17**...By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, <sup>18</sup> even though God had said to him, **“It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.”** <sup>19</sup> Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.

Do you see what the verse is saying?

It is saying that although Abraham really believed he was indeed going to have slay his son...he also really believed that God was able to raise him from the

dead. You see he reasoned that God would do so because he had come to understand that God could be trusted to keep His promises...and that since God had promised him that he would obtain many descendants...he would do so even if it meant God had to raise him from the dead.

Now when Abraham said, **"God himself will provide the lamb for the sacrifice"** he was speaking prophetically. He was speaking prophetically even though he had no idea that he was.

What we are going to see in verse nine through fourteen is God's provision for a substitute for Isaac. In other words, we are going to see God Himself provide a ram to take Isaac's place on the altar.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Genesis 22:9**...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. <sup>10</sup> Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. <sup>11</sup> But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, **"Abraham! Abraham!"** **"Here I am,"** he replied. <sup>12</sup> **"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."** <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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."**

Now that mountain of the Lord...that Mount Moriah is a real place...a place known to everyone of you here. Today there is a Muslim mosque there...a very

famous mosque called the Dome of the Rock. Now the **“rock”** that is referred to in the phrase the **“Dome of the Rock”** juts up through the soil and is considered by almost all Jewish, Muslim and Christian scholars to be the very rock on which Abraham bound and laid out his son. In Jesus’ day, it was the site of the Herod’s Temple...perhaps even the site of the Holy of Holies.

But the interesting thing about Mount Moriah is that this famous rock is not the highest place on the mountain. You see the mountain has a rather long ridge and to the north and to the west of the temple mound the backbone or ridge of the mountain juts up another ninety to hundred feet and that high spot which would have been outside of the city wall in the time of Jesus is traditionally believed to be another important biblical site...a site we know today as Golgotha...as Calvary...as the place where the Lord Jesus Himself was crucified.

Now I have to tell you, I think that was the real place where Abraham prepared to offer Isaac...I think that was the real place where God provided a substitute sacrifice for Isaac...I think that was the real place and the day where Abraham saw Jesus...where he saw Jesus’ day and was glad.

You see, he was glad because he saw God provide an offering to take the place of his beloved son...he saw God provide a way to meet own His terrible demand.

And you know, as Christians, we see the same thing when we look to the cross...because there on the Mountain of the Lord He provided a substitute for us to bear the penalty of our sin. It was there Abraham saw Jesus...it was there he saw Jesus day and was glad...let us do the same.

Now there is one other thing I wanted to share with you. Do you remember that story about Katie Luther? That is, do you remember that story about her shouting out at her husband, Martin Luther, **“I don’t believe it! God would have never treated his son like that?”**

She meant, of course, that she did not believe that God would have ever treated Abraham’s son like that...but the way she said what she said left it unclear as to whose son she was actually talking about.

Luther seized upon the idea and looked at his wife and said, **“But he did Katie...didn’t He?”**

He did indeed and Christian He did so for you and for me. Let us rejoice like Abraham that we see that...let us rejoice and be glad.

Let’s pray.

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<sup>1</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John Rvd.* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 418.

<sup>2</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary...Five Volumes in One* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1985), 572.

<sup>3</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis*, 22:1.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Luther, *Commentary on Genesis, Vol. 4*. 22:1.

<sup>5</sup> Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1950), 370.

<sup>6</sup> B. W. Johnson, *The Christian International Lesson Commentary for 1887*, Lesson 10 dated March 6th. See also Derek Kidner, *Genesis in the Tyndale Old Testament Commentary Series*, (Downer’s Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1967), 143.