

Abraham Friend of God - Abraham's Supreme Sacrifice

by J. Glyn Owen

Abraham's faith is tested when God asks him to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, but he responds with obedience and trust, discovering that God will provide all the needs of the obedient.

Duration: 45:01

Topics: "Abraham"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of complete surrender to God. He explains that true provision and assurance from God can only be discovered when one is willing to sacrifice everything for Him. The story of Abraham and Isaac is used as an example of this kind of obedience. The speaker also shares a story about Mahmud, the conqueror of India, who discovered hidden treasures when he destroyed idols. The sermon concludes with a reminder of the hymn 'When I Survey the Wondrous Cross' and the idea that true gain comes from surrendering all to God.

Transcript

Shall we pause for one moment's prayer as we come to the word of scripture this morning? Will you turn to the Lord with me to make one petition of his throne? Let us pray. Father in heaven, as we come to the end of this series of meditation on the life of your servant Abraham, we pray that we shall not miss this concluding point and its significance, but rather that by the Holy Spirit working upon our minds and our consciences, our wills and our hearts, we shall see and hear and understand and in so doing be brought into perfect alignment with your purpose and a place of equal dedication to yourself with that of your ancient servant Abraham, our Father in the face. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Now if you have your Bibles open at Genesis chapter 22, I invite you to come and meditate with me upon this concluding chapter in the remarkable life of God's servant Abraham. There are one or two things that are necessary for us to remember as we come to this chapter, otherwise we shall be perplexed all the way through and may be so absorbed with some of the problems that we shall not see the principle that is blazing through the scriptures.

The first thing that we need to remember is that human sacrifices were commonly made in the cause of religion among Abraham's contemporaries. Men manifested the extent of their dedication to their particular religious faith by bringing of their offspring and offering them as their particular mode of religion required,

offering them to their supposed deity. That is one thing we need to remember.

The other thing we need to remember is this, God tested Abraham, but it was simply a test. God did not really require Abraham to offer up Isaac. God was not asking for Isaac's blood, but for Abraham's heart.

What God was doing in this test was something like this, if I may put it in our my own language, he was saying something like this, Abraham, you know that those around you who worship other gods are prepared from time to time to give of their sons and daughters and sacrifice them in order to show that they really are honest and sincere in their profession. Are you prepared to go as far as those pagans, Abraham? Will you offer your son Isaac back to me? And when God saw that Abraham was willing to do so, God said, don't touch the lad. I don't want you to touch him.

I don't want him scarred. I was only testing you, not tempting you. There's a world of difference between temptation and testing.

In temptation someone is allured to do evil. God never had evil in mind. In being tested, Abraham was given the opportunity of expressing the genuineness of his devotion to his God.

There is a record extant of the then emperor of Austria, the Tsar of Russia and the in Europe for a conference. They met in the second story of this particular building and they were discussing many things, but at long last they came to discuss the question of the allegiance of their own soldiers to each of them. And when they'd been discussing this for some time, they decided that they would put some of their soldiers to the test.

Now this was something quite spontaneous. First of all, a Prussian was called in, a Prussian soldier. And the king of Prussia said to him, look, he said, I want you to throw yourself out of the window there.

But soldier looked at him and said, but sir, that would mean death. The emperor of Austria summoned one of his troops into the room and he said, I want you to throw yourself out of that window there. The soldier looked at him with considerable surprise and said, sir, he says, if you mean it, I'm happy to do it.

The Russian Tsar got his soldier in and he offered that he issued the same command. And without a word, the Russian soldier made for the window and was in the act of hurling himself out into the street below when someone restrained him. Now something of that order took place on Mount Moriah.

God had no intention that Isaac should be harmed from the very beginning. What he wanted was to know that he had Abram's heart, all his heart, his total dedication, his utter obedience, his whole being. Now let's look at the picture and see two or three things here that are very, very eloquent, I believe, as they speak to us this morning and as they have spoken to successive generations of God-fearing men and women.

First of all, I want you to notice that we have here the most challenging demand that Abram has yet had to face, and he's had to face some very challenging requirements from his God. The birth of the long-awaited child of promise did not mark the end of trial and trouble. Far from it.

Indeed, the incident that we are now considering must be seen as one of the most painful in the entire experience of this God-fearing man, Abram. First of all, it was a challenge that called for the crucifixion of his paternal feelings. Look at verse 2. Then God said, Take your son, your only son.

God is well aware of the fact that Isaac was his only son. Your only son, whom you love. God knew Isaac was now the object of tremendous affection.

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 that I will tell you about. Now, to offer up any child would be a paralyzing experience for any normal parent, but for Abraham to offer up Isaac was surely the most difficult and the most painful that any man could ever be asked to do.

And you see, that is brought out here. It is as if God is wanting to press the point. He knows it's hard.

Take your son. At last, Abram and Sarah have got their own child, their own son. They've waited so long.

This is the miracle child. This is the child of promise. This is the child of what was not conceived naturally.

They were beyond years and it was impossible for them, humanly speaking, to have a child. But the child has appeared. Take now your son.

You've waited for him so long. At last, you've received him. Take this miracle child whom you love.

Take this one upon whom all the promises depend for their fulfillment. Take him and offer him. But I think we must look a little deeper still for the dagger point in that demand.

Because, you see, God did not simply ask Abraham to hand Isaac over for someone else to do the sacrifice, to perform the sacrifice. God commanded the old saint to do it himself. And if ever there was an excruciating experience envisaged by any man, surely this is the most painful of all.

Here is the man asked himself to put the knife into the body of his only son. Neither is that all. I suppose if one were asked to do that, blindfolded or on the spur of the moment, with one fell stroke to get it over and done with, it might be something.

But you notice the way God puts it. He says, Isaac, I've appointed a place and it's four days away. And because of that very choice of God where Isaac was to be sacrificed, it meant this.

First of all, Abraham and Sarai had to make the decision in their hearts. That was a big thing to do. Then they've got to get the wood.

And then they've got to set out. And then they've got to keep going for three days, four days, knowing that at the end of those four days journey, they are going to come to a place where the father is expected, as it would then seem, to slay his son. This is nothing other than sheer self-crucifixion, the slaying of all paternal feelings.

It was a challenge that called for the crucifixion of the very self. Along with that, Abraham was challenged to face the costliness of an act that apparently meant the cancellation of all that God had promised. Now this is the most anticlimactic moment in the life of a man, so it would appear from this vantage point.

Right up to this point, God has been building this man up to expect something and that something, or should I say many things, emerging for Abraham himself and for his generations. They are all hinging upon the life of this one boy, Isaac. Everything depends upon Isaac.

They have no other children. And God has said that the child of promise is to come from their own bodies. Now God is asking that they would deliver back Isaac and that in sacrifice.

It seems, you see, as if God has changed his mind. The whole of Abraham's faith, the whole of Abraham's belief, and the whole of Abraham's obedience has been related, right up to this point in time, has been related to the fact that God has promised certain things in Isaac. Now God says, I want you to slay Isaac.

And it would appear that in so doing, he is going back upon his promises. And it just doesn't make sense. This was a massive demand.

It was the most challenging demand that Abraham had yet met. Involving, let us repeat, the crucifixion of his paternal feelings and the cancellation of the divinely promised future. Would you be prepared for such a challenge? That God should withdraw his promises for you? How would you think of him? How would you respond to him if he said to you today, look, my friend, you've built upon this supposition.

Now I'm asking you to give me back all that I've promised. And I'm asking you to forgo every promise that relates to your future. Would you still worship him? Would you still adore him? Would you still obey him? That's what we have here.

Then that most challenging demand was met by the most complete response that Abraham has yet made. I say as yet made because I think we need to see. And I have no time to develop it.

Those of you who've been with us on previous Sunday mornings, I'm sure will be familiar now with the facts and you can fill in the details. But you see, Abraham's life has been one of progressively growing in faith and in confidence in God and in obedience to him. It is a peculiar concoction of arrogance and ignorance that creates the delusion in some people today that when they've only walked with God for a couple of days or a couple of weeks or a couple of months, they know everything.

There is to know. They've experienced everything there is to experience. There is no place beyond their present horizons.

They've come to the end. I say it is nothing short of a delusion. This man kept on going on and this brings him toward the end of his life and toward the climax of his faith in God, which has already justified him and which here brings out something of the qualities of grace and of glory that are already resident in his soul.

This was the crowning sacrifice that Abraham was asked to make and did make. I want to summarize a lot of things here at this point. If you read the life of Abraham, you will find that there is one simple principle that operates all along.

Now it would oversimplify the case if we were to say this is the secret of Abraham's growth in grace and in faith. So I only say it with that rider. It is an oversimplification and yet it's very near the truth.

If you ask what is the underlying principle in Abraham's life, I guess one would have to respond in this way. It is this principle giving on, giving up to go on, giving up to go on. There is no going on without giving up something.

Now this is the life of Let me refer to some things without commenting. In order to set out from Ur of the Chaldees in the first place, Abraham had to give up his home, his family associations, his country and so forth. That's the first thing.

Then he arrived in the land and you remember there was a famine there and he went down to Egypt and God said to him, Abraham, you've got to give up Egypt and depending upon pagan human powers to support you in my work and in my labor, you've got to give up that notion and trust in me. Come back to the land, come back to the famine, trust in me. Give up that notion of depending upon other powers.

Then Abraham had to give up all thoughts of making lot his heir. Chapter 13. The child of promise was so long coming and there was this, this nephew of his already available and very often in Abraham's day a nephew would in those circumstances be looked upon as the natural heir.

And so Abraham said, Lord, let, let, let, let lot be the heir. God said, give up that notion. I have something better for you.

I have a child of promise for you who is going to come out of your own flesh, out of your own body. Next we see Abraham having to give up the possibility of riches from the hand of the king of Sodom. You remember following the battle with the four confederate kings, the king of Sodom who was immensely rich.

Kings of Sodom generally are, but you mustn't ask how they get their riches. And he had heaps of riches to pour upon Abraham, the man of faith. Abraham said, keep them.

I will not have you say that you enriched the servant of the living God. I don't want anything. Give them up.

We next see Abraham having to give up the idea that his servant Eliezer should be the seed. You see the child is so slow in coming into the world. God is so slow in fulfilling his promise.

Now, last time it was, it was lot. Now it is Eliezer, his servant. Later on, Hagar's child Ishmael was born.

You remember, we won't go back into all the circumstances and Abraham doted on him. And he said to God, Oh, that Ishmael might live before you. And it appears that the significance of that is this, that he wanted Ishmael to be the heir.

No, says God, I've got something better for you. Give up the notion. Can you see the point? Give up to go on.

If there is anything, if there is any testimony that I can bear to the call of God, as I stand in this pulpit and come to this communion table this morning with you, it is this. I know of no other way to go on that does not involve giving something up for God. And if you try it, you live in a dead end cul-de-sac and you'll never know the high peaks of communion with God to go on.

There is always something to give up. And not only was this painful to the feeling, it was unreasonable to the natural mind. It just did not make sense.

Yet Abraham was assured of the command to give up Isaac as he had been sure of the command in the first place to leave Ur of the Chaldees and to go out to a place he knew not where, but God was sending him there and promising to go with him. It did not make sense, but he was prepared to obey because he knew that God was the God of glory. That's not all.

We must note that the crowning sacrifice was a confident one, not a grudging one. Take a look at Abraham as he sets about to make this supreme sacrifice of his life. I don't, I don't think we can really enter into the ethos, the atmosphere of it at all.

It's very difficult. You and I can hardly get into this. Just try to.

See the old man getting up early in the morning and choosing two servants to go with him. And he gathers the wood together, possibly to make an altar or probably to set the fire on the altar or both. And then he takes the light, the torch or whatever there was the fire, something with fire in it, and then a knife and they go and they march.

Or I shouldn't say much, but they go together like men going on a journey. Now my question is this, what was the spirit of Abraham as he set out and kept going? Was it a grudging one? Was it the spirit that says, Oh God, I don't understand what you're saying to me or what you're requiring of me. And I think you're a bit of a fool.

I really wouldn't do this kind of thing that I'm sure you're calling me to do it. And I'm sure it's going to be a major blunder. And I hate you because you're asking this kind of thing of me.

Is that the spirit? Would you like to turn to verse five? See what Abram's mood was as he traveled. I find this one of the most challenging statements in the whole episode. Now they've arrived at the bottom of Moriah.

Abram tells the young men that he'd brought with him, stay here with a donkey while I and the boy go over there. This is a fairly literal translation from the Hebrew. We will worship and then we will come back to you.

Now let me repeat that. Did you really get it? Let's please try and get this. Here they are within sight of Moriah, the place where the sacrifice is to be offered.

God said, stay here with a donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will what? Oh brothers and sisters in Christ, get it. Let's get it.

Let's get it. We will worship. We will worship.

God is asking for Isaac. Abram is going to sacrifice his son as far as he knows in his intention, but he's not doing it in a grudging spirit. He's not doing it with a spleen in his soul.

He's not doing it arguing against God. He's not doing it in that way. He is doing it out of confidence that somehow or other God will make things plain and will vindicate what he's doing.

He's going to worship and you can't worship with a spleen in your soul. Neither is that all. The narrative even goes beyond that.

The latter part of verse five goes on, then we will come back to you. Now that verb, we will come back to you is in the plural, not in the singular. What does that mean? You say, well, it means this.

Abram and Isaac are going yonder to worship. They were the only two that were going. Abram knew in his own heart, as far as he could foresee, he was going to offer up Isaac.

He was going to sacrifice Isaac. Isaac was going to be handed back to God as a sacrifice, just as the heathen did. They offered their children in sacrifices.

Now Abram is going to do the same. He thinks as much of his God as the pagans do of their petty deities that are nonentities. He's going to sacrifice.

But wait a moment. Abram is going to sacrifice in faith. He says, if you stay here, I and the lad will go and worship.

And then, Mark, we will come again to you. Abram, what on earth are you talking about? He can't understand you here. No, no, you can't understand it, save on the supposition that Abram believed that if God required him to put the knife in Abram's body and in Isaac's body and shed his blood, God would raise him from the dead to fulfill his purposes and his promises.

That's the faith. Now some of you may think that I've gone too far and all that's my own. I want to assure you it isn't.

Hebrews 11 verses 17 to 19 will tell you this is the inspired commentary upon what took place. By faith, Abram, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.

Abram reasoned that God could raise the dead and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death. Oh, this is the climactic response of this man of faith and it's such a magnificent one. Now that brings us lastly to the most consequential discovery yet made.

What is the discovery that Abram made when he responded in such faith and confidence and with such wholeheartedness to God? What was the discovery? First of all, he discovered that proven faith, proven faith discovered that the Lord will provide all the needs of the obedient. There's something very simple about this and yet something almost startlingly wonderful. The voice of God came, don't touch the lad, when the lad was already tied on the altar and the knife was in Abram's hand, ready to come down.

Don't touch him, says God. Well then does not God require a sacrifice? Yes, God still requires a sacrifice and as it were by some strange instinct, Abram looked behind him and he saw a ram caught in a thicket and he said, my here it is again. God will provide, God will provide for himself the sacrifice that he requires and he took the ram and he sacrificed him in the place of Isaac, his son.

That's the first discovery. God will provide. Provide what? Well you know the answer is simple but profound.

Everything, everything necessary in the pathway of obedience. Now it's as challenging but it's as real and it's as daring as that. The one thing necessary now was this but God provided it.

Jehovah Jireh. He's the Lord who provide. The act and attitude of Abram served to bring this to light.

God will provide. Look at verse 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 your only son and in place of the son God provided another sacrifice that would be pleasing in his sight. You know this is the kind of discovery that can only be made when you have literally consecrated your all to the Lord.

You can't make it until then. You can only discover the reality of God's provision of everything necessary when your all is on the altar and your life is one of a progressive obedience to God at any cost to yourself.

Second thing of course is this.

Proven faith discovered that God will provide all the needs of his obedient children and practiced faith discovered a yet renewed assurance that God would perform all that he had promised. I find this recurring note most comforting. Let me read from verse 15.

The angel of the Lord called to Abram from heaven a second time. He called before to stop him putting the knife in his son. He calls again.

What's he saying this time? Well this is what he says. I swear by myself declares the Lord that because you have done this and have not withheld your son 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 and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed because you have obeyed me.

What's God doing? He's coming back again to the man and saying look man you've obeyed me. You've honored me. I know you truly honor me as God.

Now he says you don't need to worry a thing. Every promise I've made I'll fulfill. This is the umpteenth time that God is saying that to Abram.

But this time he is saying it in response to the totality of Abram's self-giving and self-crucifixion. But let me assure you Abram was crucified on Moriah. Now what does all this got to say to us? Well I suppose it has something to say to those who are not committed to be followers of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Over and over again I have heard people say I'm afraid to set out upon the Christian pathway because I just don't think I can keep it up. And if I take a first step and I make a profession of faith what will happen to me in the setting the circumstances in which I'm called to be a Christian? See where I work. If you only knew the circumstances of my home or where I labor.

Here's the principle. The Lord will provide. The one thing he asks of us is obedience even to the point of handing over our Isaac.

Now many of us will have to pass through some such crisis as this old Saint Abram before we enter into the joyful experience and realization of God's adequacy and faithfulness and sufficiency and thus have peace in life and peace in death. The question is of course what is our Isaac? Some have to face undo face this issue right at the beginning of their Christian lives. And I think this is the proper this is the ideal that in becoming a Christian we should recognize that our Lord Jesus Christ is Lord and that we should recognize his Lordship from the very moment of our of our confessing him as our Savior.

Oftentimes however we don't at that point know what's involved in the Lordship of Jesus Christ. And as we read the scriptures we find that there are implications of his Lordship that we only discover as we progress in knowledge. In that case we have to heal something new every day.

There's always something to give up in order to go on. But there will come a point in our lives when we have to give up Isaac. Your Isaac may be your comforts.

The comforts that you've accumulated. The material success of life or your own personal ideas and hopes and wishes. The things you hope for yourself.

The things you dream about which are oftentimes less than God's will. There are those who have offered their Isaac when they've handed in their resignation to a board, to a company, to a president, to whatever it perhaps whoever the person may be. And they've had to hand in their resignation because the Lord has called them away from there to be somewhere else to do something less lucrative.

But something significant in his will. Your Isaac of course may be your own child. Not physically.

No no no. God does not ask that of us. But some of you parents here this morning may be asked literally to make it possible for your children to serve the Lord.

That's without the hope of prestige. Of becoming rich in the things of this world and in a material age such as ours. I know it is very difficult for some of us to think of our children going anywhere other than into a sphere where they can make a lot of money and make it fast.

I don't know exactly what your Isaac may be. But I'm asking you this morning are you prepared to offer your Isaac to put the knife in Isaac to go on with God? It is said that when Mahmud the conqueror of India took the city of Gujarat he proceeded to destroy the idols in the city and in the pagan temple there. And he was very strongly urged by all kinds of people to spare the idols.

And when he insisted that he could not do that particularly to spare one magnificent idol the most significant one in the whole pantheon in the temple. It was 15 feet high. Mahmud said no give me a hammer he says and I will use my own hand to destroy this massive idol.

Glittering though it may be. And he got something like a hammer in his own hand and he smashed it to smithereens. And I read when forthwith there rained at his feet a shower of gems and pearls and diamonds.

All treasures of centuries gone by of immense value that he only discovered when he smashed the idol. We sometimes sing that hymn of Isaac Watts's. When I survey the wondrous cross on which the prince of glory died.

My richest gain I count but loss and poor contempt on all my pride. Then it comes were the whole realm of nature mine. Man alive.

Have you ever sung that? You ever sung those words? Were the whole realms of nature mine. That were an offering far too small. Love so amazing so divine.

Demands my soul my life my all. My Isaac. Let us pray.

Shall we spend a moment in contemplation. Each man each woman old young middle-aged. Single married.

Communing with our own hearts and our own souls as to what this means for us. Willing to have the Lord show us what is necessary to do in order to experience sweetest deepest constant progressive communion with himself and prove his faithfulness to his promises. Will you come to worship God by offering him what he's asking of you today.

Offering it as a sacrifice. Lord grant us your grace that as a people we shall hear your voice and sense the movement of your spirit. Know your will and by your great grace do it.

Many of us are unable to go on because we're clutching the things that bind us to the spot. Other gods have had dominion over us and do we would denounce and renounce them. For Jesus sake win us over our father.

Win us over to yourself afresh today. As we acknowledge our sins of spirit and attitude and action and enable us to be as loyal and as faithful as Abram your servant. Through the grace of Abram's seed.

Jesus your son. Amen.

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