



The Call to Supreme Trust

Genesis 22

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The true American Idol is the family. And our temptation with our families is the temptation we always face with idols; it is the temptation to place that god before the one true God.

When we do place God first, when we truly worship God and God alone, then (and only then) does our family take their rightful place. If you really want to love your spouse, love God more. If you really want to love your children, love God most.

Scripture

Genesis 22:1-14

After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.'² 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 that I shall show you.'³ So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt-offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him.⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away.⁵ Then Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you.'⁶ Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together.⁷ Isaac said to his father Abraham, 'Father!' And he said, 'Here I am, my son.' He said, 'The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?'⁸ Abraham said, 'God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son.' So the two of them walked on together.

9 When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. ¹¹But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' ¹²He said, 'Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.' ¹³And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt-offering instead of his son. ¹⁴So Abraham called that place 'The LORD will provide';* as it is said to this day, 'On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.'**

Sermon

In the first book of the Chronicles of Narnia, we – and the Pevensie children – are introduced to Aslan, the Ruler of Narnia. We – and the Pevensie children – learn that Aslan is not a person but a lion. We learn that from a couple of talking beavers, so maybe that shouldn't come as a surprise. When the children learn that Aslan is a lion, they ask if he is a safe lion. Mrs. Beaver responds to the question by saying, "...if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most, or just silly." Mr. Beaver goes on to add, when the question of whether Aslan is safe is repeated, "'Course he's not safe."

In the context of a children's book, even one that is an allegory of the Christian world, the question and the answer can illicit a smile on the reader's part. We are amused at the idea of a God-figure in the book who is a wild lion. But we likely don't think about what that untamed lion would really look like.

In Genesis 22 we get the startling and even troubling view of the untamed God who is Yahweh. This God that we have come to know so far in Genesis is certainly unpredictable if you read the scriptures openly and honestly. The expulsion from the garden, the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah; they all speak to the "otherness" of God. But threaded throughout those stories is the greater theme of God's love and redemption. Perhaps no greater illustration of these qualities of God is given than the completion of God's promise to Abraham and Sarah that we see in the birth of Isaac.

But then we come to chapter 22 and the unpredictability of God takes what we have to call a darker turn. Again, Isaac is the focal point of this revelation of God's character. The same God that fulfilled the promise of the birth of Isaac is now demanding his killing.

It is one thing when God asks us to make sacrifices that do not depart us from our normal lives. When God asks us to live pure lives – to live with high moral character – that is one thing that he can demand of us. When God asks us to nurture our families, which makes sense and seems to be in character with what we think of God. But here, God asks Abraham to return the fulfillment of his promise, to sacrifice his son.

This is a deliberate test on the part of God for Abraham. We cannot answer all the mystery of this passage but we must begin by claiming that God here is asking Abraham to demonstrate where his primary loyalty lies. Does Abraham love and obey God over every other allegiance? We read in scripture that God is a jealous God; here we see the evidence of that. God is sovereign, God and God alone is the source of our life and our sustenance. Our ultimate loyalty is to God. This passage gives maybe the starkest reminder of that truth.

The story of Genesis is primarily a story of God and family. That story mirrors the stories of most of the people here. If I asked you to list the blessings in your life, most all of you would list your relationship to God and the blessings of your families. But which relationship has primacy? Whom do you worship?

We were talking about this passage in my small group this week, and Brian Grow asked the question: do you think that Abraham and Sarah had turned Isaac into an idol? For a guy with no seminary training it was a very insightful question (probably most insightful theological observations are made by those unencumbered by seminary educations!). The truth is, for many if not most of us, the temptation to make your family your idol is the greatest

idol temptation that you face. It is true of us in the church and it is true of most people in our culture. The true American Idol is the family. And our temptation with our families is the temptation we always face with idols; it is the temptation to place that god before the one true God.

I want to ask a favor of you this week. I want to ask all of you to prayerfully put your families before the Lord. I want you to ask God to truly come first and to reorient your allegiances from your family to God, if that is a temptation for you.

If you come to realize through prayer that you have put your family before God, then let me tell you that you have not done your family any favors. Husbands: don't worship your wives. Wives: don't worship your husbands. Parents: Don't worship your children. Children: Don't worship your parents. We were made to worship and not be worshiped. When we worship the created instead of the Creator, we place expectations on our fellow created beings that can only lead to bitterness and disappointment.

When we do place God first, when we truly worship God and God alone, then (and only then) does our family take their rightful place. If you really want to love your spouse, love God more. If you really want to love your children, love God most.

Abraham goes before us in this test of love and loyalty. And Abraham is obedient – immediately obedient. God calls him by name and Abraham answers, "Here I am." God makes this testing demand of Abraham and he takes his son (the son that he loves, God says) up to Mount Moriah to sacrifice him. The promise fulfilled by God is now the sacrifice demanded by God. And Abraham obeys that demand.

Abraham also answers Isaac, when Isaac calls him by name, by saying, "Here I am." Isaac is observant that there is no lamb being brought for the sacrifice. Either naively or suspiciously, he asks his father, where the sacrificial animal is. Abraham answers his son, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." I truly believe that this is one of the most hopeful and faithful statements in all of holy scripture. Abraham is obedient to God's demand; he is also faithful and hopeful that God's loving character will be there as well.

Was that hope and faith as strong when Abraham bound his son? Was his strong or flickering when he raised the knife? Abraham went all the way to the end in his obedience. And then his name is called out again. This time it is with urgency, repeated twice for emphasis: "Abraham, Abraham!" And the angel of the Lord comes to bring the deliverance of the Lord. Abraham's sacrifice is met by God's mercy. Abraham has been tested and has passed the test and now God delivers. God stays in character and Abraham's hope is met and his faith is satisfied.

I don't know how non-Christians can read this story without coming to the conclusion that God is cruel. But as Christians we read this story as a prologue to the greater story that is to come. In that story we read again of a Father that will sacrifice his Son – his only Son, that Son that he loves. But in that story, the Son is the lamb and the sacrifice is made; there is no ram that appears in the thicket. The agony of Mount Moriah is trumped by the agony on Mount Calvary. And in the sacrifice of Jesus, sin is overcome, and we are made whole. It is in the sacrifice of the cross that you and I given the fullness of relationship to God; to the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. No sacrifice of any animal can bring about that fullness. Only the sacrifice that God was willing to make for us would do.

The sacrifice of Jesus not only removes our sin, it also demands the sacrifice of our lives. Romans 12 says: "Present your bodies a living sacrifice." Daily, we are to place our lives before God. Daily, we are to take up our crosses and live for Jesus. What does that mean for you? In light of the sacrifice that Jesus made, what sacrifices will you make? How will you live your life? In Hebrews 12, it says that "For the joy that was set before him, Jesus endured the cross." What joyful sacrifice is God asking you to make? That sacrifice will be met by God and by a deepened relationship with him. God demands that we worship him and worship alone. The sacrifice of our lives is the only way that we can accept the sacrifice of Jesus.