

A Son Saved: Part 2

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



Sacrifice of Isaac (1966) by [Marc Chagall](#)

Prayer of Illumination

O God, you know us better than we know ourselves.
As the scriptures are read, we will listen for your voice.
By your Spirit lead us out of our fears
and into faith and the knowledge of your love,
through Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God
who takes away the sin of the world.
Amen.

Background

Soren Kierkegaard in his classic *Fear and Trembling*, which explores in depth our morning's Scripture, says, "There were countless generations who knew the story of Abraham by heart..., but how many did it render sleepless?"

The rabbis also convey the anguish of Abraham when they say at the height of the story, when Abraham is preparing to sacrifice Isaac and the angel hasn't yet appeared, tears drip from his

eyes into Isaac's eyes, and Isaac's vision is impaired for the rest of his life. That's why Isaac has difficulty seeing in his old age when his sons Jacob and Esau visit him in his tent.

But if we read this story as one *not only* about horrific anguish, but also about faith, trust, obedience, and resurrection, we'll see with greater clarity the picture God is painting for us. Abraham's life has been full of tests since God first called him. But this event was Abraham's ultimate test of faith. Will he, will we, respond in faith...or fear?

Let's hear now the word of Lord from:

Scripture: Genesis 22:1-14 (NRSVue)

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. And 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." And 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.¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill^[a] his son.¹¹ But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."

¹² He 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."¹³ And 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.¹⁴ So Abraham called that place "The Lord will provide,"^[b] as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."

***The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.***

SERMON – “A Son Saved: Part 2”

“Abraham!”

“Here I am.”

“**Here I am.**” In Hebrew it’s only one word, but it means so much more than just “present.” It means, God, I’m here—ready, available, listening, attentive, receptive. Three times Abraham will say “here I am” in this story. Here I am to God. Here I am to Isaac. Here I am to the angel. Abraham is “a man ready to be addressed.”

“**Go forth**” Abraham. Follow me!... But I won’t tell you where I’m going... *yet*. There are only two times God says “go forth” in Scripture.

First, at Abraham’s call: Go forth from your country, your kindred, and your father’s house to a land that I will show you.

- **Break with your past, Abraham.**

And second, here at the binding of Isaac: Go forth with your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and offer him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will show you.

- **Break with your future, Abraham.**

Will you let go of and sacrifice your dearest hope?

Will you trust *only* God and trust *fully* in God?

Abraham had been standing on God’s promises—and he finally received the gift of Isaac. Now Abraham, in faith, had to **let go** of God’s promises. Let go of his son. Let go of his great nation. Without Isaac, Abraham would be back where he started—alone and barren.

Job learned this too. God is the God who **gives AND takes away**. God **promises AND God tests**. It’s tempting to want a God who only provides but doesn’t test. All rights, and no responsibilities. But we can’t pick and choose. Abraham couldn’t either. He didn’t answer God’s command with words. Abraham answered with actions. Without delay Abraham departed early in the morning after making preparations for the journey. Three days he traveled with Isaac. Three long days, for sober reflection and soul searching. Yet he didn’t reconsider. Didn’t turn back. Abraham was resolved to obey the Lord, no matter the cost.

On the third day Abraham looked up. On the third day. What would later happen “on the third day?” Jesus, the Son of God, rose from the dead. Crucifixion on Friday, but Resurrection on Sunday. There’s a foreshadowing of hope.

On the third day, Abraham looked up and saw the place from far away. He told the servants, “Stay here, the boy and I will worship, and we will come back to you.”

“**We**” will come back.



"Isaac Carries the Wood" by [Weylon Smith](#)

He then placed the wood for the sacrifice on Isaac's back. If Isaac was a teenager, he could have overpowered the centenarian, Abraham. And so it seems Isaac is willingly a participant. This was not only the testing of Abraham, this was the testing of Isaac. Would he be willing to be led forth to be sacrificed?

"The two walked *together*" up the mountain wordlessly. As they approached the summit, Isaac could hold it in no longer. "Father!" "Here I am, my son." —*Ready, available, listening, attentive, receptive.* "We have the wood and the fire." (Notice he didn't mention the knife.) "**Where's the lamb for the burnt offering?**" "**God himself will provide the lamb.**" God will see to it, my son.

The two walked together, returning to their silent ascent. They eventually arrived at the place God had shown Abraham. Silently, methodically, Abraham built the altar. The first altar Abraham built was when he was called by God. The last altar he built was where he was commanded to sacrifice his son.

He bound Isaac. Laid the wood on the altar. Lifted the boy upon it. Reached out his hand. Took the knife. Raised it above his only son, the son he loved.

"Abraham! Abraham!" The angel of the Lord called from heaven. "Here I am." —*Ready, available, listening, attentive, receptive.* "Do not lay a hand on the boy." The knife dropped. "Now I know you **fear the Lord**, since you've not withheld your son, your only son, from me."

What does this mean, the **fear of the Lord**?

Well, it isn't to be frightened of God. To fear God is to love God—more than anything or anyone else in the whole world. Nothing and no one will get in the way. Not even God's promises. To fear God is total surrender to God. No hesitation. No holding back. No matter the cost.

It's to trust and obey God—even when it hurts, when you don't know what's going on. When you're scared. Having to make tortuous decisions. When you're going through hell on earth.

Abraham **looked up** and **saw** the ram caught in the thicket. He took his son off the altar. Put the ram in Isaac's place. God gave back to Abraham his promised son. Abraham called that place "The Lord provides." More accurately, in the original language it's "**The Lord Sees.**"

God sees Abraham's courageous faith. God sees us. God sees to it that we'll be provided for. God helps us see there's a way. On the mount of the Lord there's sight and insight. It's there our **tunnel vision** is transformed into **true vision**. God helped Abraham to see the ram to spare Isaac. God helped Hagar see the well, that would spare Ishmael. Two sons saved.

God helps us see that sacrifice doesn't necessarily end in loss or death. In sacrifice, we get back Isaac. What we give with open hands—can be taken from us, but also can be given back. Faith is open hands.

If we hold on tight, clinging with clenched fists—we can't receive. We're closed. Faith is letting go...and entrusting that person, that thing into God's hands. It's out of our hands. Will we give up what we love? Are we willing to give to God the most important thing or person we have—no matter the cost?

Are we willing to lay down our ego on the altar? Our hopes and dreams and ambitions? Anything that comes between us and God? Even good things. It's all not really ours anyway—it's all God's. We can only gain and retain what's most precious to us by willfully surrendering it to God.

The angel of the Lord spoke a second time later in the chapter:

"Because you've listened to and obeyed my voice Abraham,
I will make your offspring as numerous
as the grains of sand on the shore
and the stars in the sky."

The story begins with **testing** and ends with **blessing**. As Christians, we see in this story the testing of crucifixion AND the blessing of resurrection. Death and life. We see Jesus as the **New Isaac** and God as the **New Abraham**:

"For God so loved the world
that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him
may not perish, but have everlasting life."

We are a believing people—like our Father Abraham.

Amen.

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