

In Jesus' name. Amen.

Dearly Beloved,

The account of the near sacrifice of Isaac has puzzled many first-time readers of Genesis 22, and probably not a few second, third, and fourth time readers.

How is it that God would command Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, the very act that God would expressly forbid in His OT laws given through Moses?

The end of the account tells us what God was doing as 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.”

It was a test. A test of Abraham's faith, although, probably not a test as we immediately think of it.

It wasn't as if God didn't already know Abraham's faith. He is the author and giver of faith.

Nor was it a test so that Abraham could see how much faith he had.

Instead, this is more a test for Abraham to consider what he actually believed of God's Word.

And that is where we are going to see Jesus take us to in our text for meditation today from John 8:46-59, reading selective verses.

We read as follows in Jesus' name:

[Jesus said:] “Whoever is of God hears the words of God... Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word, he will never see death.”

The Jews said to Him, “Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet You say, ‘If anyone keeps My word, he will never taste death.’” ...

Jesus answered, “... Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see My day. He saw it and was glad.” ... (ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

This is a wild text, isn't it?

It seems to jump from one subject to another and it wasn't a comfortable conversation, either.

But what do you expect when you jump into the tail end of a conversation without any context.

It was the feast of Tabernacles, and Jesus had been teaching in the temple since the middle of the feast.

The Jewish leaders were seeking to arrest him as He was teaching,

but the temple guards wouldn't do it because even they recognized His authority and truth.

The leaders had already been seeking to kill Him, but His time to suffer and die had not yet come.

But if they couldn't arrest Him, they tried to quiet Him by dishonoring Him before the people.

They tried the same tactics we see today.

If they can't win an argument by sound reason, then they revert to *ad hominem* attacks, calling him a Samaritan and possessed by a demon, in order to discredit Him.

But Jesus wouldn't back down.

Instead, as they became more bold and ridiculous in their accusations,

Jesus became bolder still and calls them out on their unreasonable unbelief and wickedness.

This is what is happening when He asked, **“Which one of you convicts Me of sin?”**

If I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me?

He was challenging them to show where He deviated from the Scripture, both in His teaching & life.

But they couldn't. ... They knew the truth. They were simply refusing to believe Him.

...

Abraham had come up earlier in the conversation.

They had pointed out that they were children of Abraham.

This claim was their national pride and joy. It is what made them special, so they thought.

God had promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation,

and that God would give him and his descendants the land of Canaan for a possession.

Jesus' adversaries were satisfied with these two promises. They didn't need the third & final promise,

the one that said that **through Abraham all the nations of the world would be blessed,**

the one that promised the birth of the Savior of the world through Abraham's descendants.

But the benefit wasn't in being the biological descendant of the man, but being the heirs of his faith.

St. Paul writes of the blessings that Abraham's descendants were given in his letter to the Romans^{9:4-5}

To them, to the Jews, belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.

To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

They were the recipients of God's divine revelation, the Scriptures,

and the temple sacrifices which pointed them to the atoning sacrifice of the Messiah once for all.

And so Jesus puts that faith plainly out in front of them and said,

"Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word, he will never see death."

But these Jewish leaders were not the heirs of such faith.

They were not children of Abraham but, as Jesus said, children of the devil, children of death.

To these unbelieving Jews, Abraham was dead. He did not exist anymore.

And this would be their fate, as well. Their "faith" was only good for this life.

And so you can see why they would hate and fight with Jesus so much.

He was disrupting their power and prestige among the people,

not that Jesus was undermining the true authority given to them by God,

but that He was uncovering their false power and false teachings and false beliefs.

And in their place, He was again revealing the true faith, the faith of Abraham.

Abraham believed in the resurrection to life everlasting by the atonement of the coming Christ.

And so Jesus pointed to Abraham seeing His day and rejoicing

(in stark contrast to these Jewish leaders who were seeing His day and hating it).

But how is it that Abraham saw Jesus' day? Consider two different ways.

The first: when Abraham was on Mt. Moriah, near Jerusalem, where he nearly sacrificed Isaac.

As Isaac carried the wood up to the place of sacrifice, and saw the fire in his father's hand,

he asked about the sacrificial victim, Where was it?

Abraham's response was, **"God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son."**

As Abraham raised the knife to slay his son, the Son of God, the true victim, called him off,

and told him not to kill Isaac, and then provided a substitute ram in the thicket to be offered.

And so Abraham taught his family, **"On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."**

We ask, how could Abraham have done that?

After all, God had promised that through Isaac and his children, all His promises would come to pass. ... We hear his faith already in what he said to his servants as he left them with the donkey.

He said, "**I and the [young man] will go over there and worship and [we will] come again to you.**"

Though he intended to kill and sacrifice Isaac, he trusted the Lord's power to raise him back to life.

The second way Abraham saw Jesus' day was the day that God's Son, His only Son, whom He loves, actually carried the wood of the cross for His sacrifice up the mountain.

The fire of the Father's wrath was in His hand to consume the sacrificial life of Jesus.

For Jesus, there was no substitutionary ram.

He was the substitute, the ram with His head caught in the crown thorns.

There, "**On the mount of the Lord... He provided for Himself the lamb for... offering, His Son.**"

Abraham, the living soul, witnessed the sacrificial death of his greater descendant and Lord.

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How easy it is for us to be influenced by the power of the devil and his lies and deceit.

He, like those Jesus admonished in our text, would have you fear Jesus, even hate Him.

He would have you argue with God's Word and simply not believe it.

He would have you not believe that your lies are killing you.

That your cheating heart and lusting eyes aren't doing anyone any harm.

That your vain use or your neglect of God's name is nothing to be concerned about.

He would lull you into thinking that this life is all there is, all you can be certain of,

and so you need to do everything you can to enjoy it and get the most out of it.

He would have you fear death and doubt the gift of life that Jesus died and rose to give you.

But don't believe the devil's lies. Look around you.

Are those who live for pleasure here in this life any happier?

Or do you see them growing less and less content, never satisfied?

Their lies get bigger. Their lust unsaturated. Their cursing by God's name ever bolder.

They play the same game against God and His Church as they did against Jesus.

They try to discredit by calling names instead of proving their arguments.

And though they try to prove that words don't have meaning, they are threatened by words, especially by the power of the Word of God, and so they try to silence it.

Their actions are the actions of someone who has a troubled or terrified conscience.

They have shame and guilt, but they don't have the answer for it,

or rather, they don't want to believe in the answer for it.

Instead of confessing them, they hide and deny them, or try to compensate for them...

But this isn't just a "them" problem. It is an "us" problem.

We all struggle against God's Words. It is our sinful human nature. It is our guilt and shame.

Abraham, struggled with God's promises, and so Ishmael was born, not of promise but by nature, as we heard in last week's Epistle.

Abraham, like us, like everyone else, had sins that needed to be cleansed and paid for.

He needed a substitute, a sacrifice. Not his son, Isaac. Not a ram in a thicket.

But his Son and God's Son, Jesus Christ.

Abraham found relief and joy in this life, and rejoiced to see Jesus' day.

He rejoiced because he saw in it the full and complete answer to his guilt, sin, and shame.

He rejoiced because he saw in it the complete reversal of punishment and death: eternal life with God.

Though Jesus was arguing with the Jewish leaders, He did so so that they might hear God's Word.

He told them plainly, **"Whoever is of God hears the words of God."**

And again, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word, he will never see death."**

This is God's promise to you.

As you hear His Word today,

as you see Jesus as your great High Priest offered up to the Father for your lust, and lying,
and for your vain use or neglect of His name,

then hear that same name used upon you, as it was in your Baptism, to cleanse you of your sin,
and to pronounce upon you, His child, the divine declaration that your sins are all forgiven,
that heaven is opened to you and eternal life is already yours.

Then come and receive that Word in the flesh, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins.

Come and receive that Word in the flesh that gives you Christ's eternal life and strength.

And remember, it is not the quantity or the strength of your faith that saves,

but what that faith clings to: the life, and death, and resurrection of your Savior Jesus Christ
that conquers all sin, fears, doubts, and death.

Thanks be to God.

Soli Deo Gloria