

Abraham's Sacrifice (Part Three): Hope Demonstrated

Love and Obedience Produces Hope

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Many of us have committed John 14:15 to memory. "If you love Me, keep My commandments." In the same vein, we also tend to memorize I John 5:3, which is, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments." We also know Romans 13:10: "Love does no harm to a neighbor, therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law." This follows very nicely from what Jesus teaches us in Matthew the 22nd chapter, verses 37-40 when He was asked which is the great commandment in the law. He replies with, "Love the Lord your God" with everything you got and also love your neighbor as yourself. He finishes with, as He goes on there, "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets," meaning all of scripture is based essentially on this theme of loving God, loving neighbor, as well as the idea that we get from some of those other scriptures that love and commandment-keeping are linked.

These four passages that we have just gone through very quickly, among several others, construct a solid link, a connection between love and obedience to God's instructions. The commandments define loving attitudes and conduct toward both God and fellow man. The Ten Commandments, the first four define our conduct, our behavior, our attitudes toward God, and then the last six do the same thing but directed toward fellow humans. When we keep them, when we keep the commandments in their letter and in their spirit, we demonstrate love toward God. And then we demonstrate love toward other human beings in those last six.

So proper obedience manifests love and fulfills the intent of the law. Both of those things, and the intent of the law, ultimately, is to teach us to learn and to demonstrate outgoing concern toward all. That is a chief attribute, if not *the* chief attribute of God Himself. God is love, the apostle John says in I John 4. That is what He is all about, showing outgoing concern toward all—toward His Son, towards you and me, toward the world, ultimately, even if they are against Him now. Consistent obedience ingrains godly love in our

character so that we can one day be in the image of Jesus Christ and even in the image of God the Father, because They both live the same way, which is this way of outgoing concern toward others.

It is interesting but hardly coincidental that the first mention of love in the Bible appears in the narrative of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. We saw that last time in Genesis 22:2. But another one of the first mentions that appears in this passage is the first mention of obedience. It is the word "obeyed" in Genesis 22:18, that Abraham obeyed God's voice. Now, these two words, these two first mentions, bracket the story perfectly. Verse 2, where love appears in the word beloved, "your beloved son." It is the second verse of the story, second verse from the beginning. In verse 18, where the word obeyed occurs—that Abraham has obeyed the voice of God—is the second verse from the end. They mark the beginning and end of an extended process that is illustrated in the intervening verses.

So God voices His command in verse 2, obedience to which expresses godly love towards Him, especially, and in other ways we will see as we go through the story, it expresses love toward Isaac and toward all of us. And Abraham, over the course of several days, proceeds to obey God's command in its every little way and we have, therefore, a demonstration of the outgoing concern of godly love through obedience. A demonstration from the father of the faithful that shows us how it is done, how we can hear the voice of God give us a command and then work through that command until it is fulfilled. And we show our love to Him by obedience and love toward others by also obedience.

The narrative ends with God confirming His promises and rewards to Abraham because He knows at that point that the man's character, based in godly love and obedience, is set. That is how he is going to function. And so He says at this point, now that I know that you are going to obey Me and you are going to show love towards Me, even if I give you the hardest command of all, to kill your own son, he is going to do it. He is not going to shrink back, he is going to obey because he loves God first.

This is a consistent theme in the Bible, this idea, this linkage of love and obedience. Last time I went to the first mentions in the gospels of the word love. This time I would like to go to the first sayings of Jesus in the gospels

and see what He talks about. First of all, we are going to go to Matthew 4. Obedience or obeying God's voice or word is almost always the first thing out of Jesus' mouth when He begins His ministry. If you have a red letter Bible, you can see that this is the first time He speaks in this particular gospel, but just notice what the theme is here.

Matthew 4:1-4 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

So the first thing He says in Matthew is do what God says in His Word. That is how you live. We can drop down to verse 10 and see another one of these.

Matthew 4:9-10 And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve.'"

We will see in a few minutes that this idea of worship and serving God is very critical in the Abraham/Isaac sacrifice story and it links very much with obedience. But I said something wrong. I said these were those first words actually in the red letter Bible, but it is actually chapter 3, verse 15. But notice what it talks about here.

Matthew 3:15 But Jesus answered and said to him [This is not part of His ministry but this is just His reply to John the Baptist when he said, why should You be baptized by me? I should be baptized by You. But he says here] "Permit it to be so now, for it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."

Again, this is obedience to God's Word, doing what is right. So these are the first things that is on His mind as He begins His ministry.

Let us go to Mark and see another example of this. These are very well known by us, but they say very much the same thing.

Mark 1:14-15 Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent [What is it to repent? That means to change from your evil ways and do good.]

He is saying, quit disobeying God and believe in the gospel. Believing in the gospel implies following it and being obedient. So again, here early in His ministry, He is bringing these concepts forward about obedience to God. And of course, it is only to be assumed that He would do that because the Jews of His day were saying that they were obeying God, but they were not. They were obeying the traditions of the elders, doing what they basically wanted to and not obeying what was written in the Word.

Let us go to Luke 2. This one is a little different. And this one is not even at the beginning of His ministry, He is 12 years old. But what does He say? Of course, this is the time when He was at the Temple, when His parents were going home with the family and one day down the road, "Where is Jesus?" He is not to be found, "We must have left Him in Jerusalem." So they go back and they find Him and they berate Him in a way, and say, "Why didn't you come home with us?" And this is His answer.

Luke 2:49 And He said to them, "Why is it that you sought Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"

Now this tells me that at age 12 Jesus already knew that He had come to do God's will. He had come to obey the mission, the purpose that He had been sent here to do. And so He said to His dumbfounded parents, "Don't you know that I have to do what God tells Me to do? I have to do the job that He sent me here for?" At 12. "You should have known, Mary and Joseph, where I'd be. I'd be at the Temple." After this, His first recorded statement of His ministry is in chapter 4, verse 4. And it says the same thing as Matthew 4:4 says. "You shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God."

John, of these four gospel writers, is the outlier. But it is kind of interesting that you can look at what the first words of Jesus were in John 1 and see that the same theme comes up. It is just in an oblique way, because the first thing He says is,

John 1:37-38 The two disciples heard Him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, "What do you seek?" [And you know what their answer is.] They said to Him, "Rabbi" (which is to say, when translated, Teacher), "where are you staying?"

His first words to them, "What do you seek?" What is your goal here? What do you want? What is your desire? What are you looking for? And their response ultimately is what we are talking about here. "We want to be Your disciples, we want to follow You, we want You to be our Teacher." Which is to say they wanted to become His disciples and do His will and obey Him. But John does not leave it there. Obviously, that is a kind of a weak link to this theme, but he backloads his gospel with this idea with Jesus' final words. He more than makes up for his lack of this sort of thing at the beginning of his book, because he ends his book with a heavy emphasis on love and obedience, making it the climax of what he writes as his version of Jesus' life.

I, first of all, want to take you to what we read on Passover, John 13, 14, 15, and I want you to see the links to it in His final sermon to His disciples. As if this was an idea He really wanted them to understand. He wanted to leave them with something that they could chew on. A very succinct message that says, "If you love Me," obey Me. So let us just read a bunch of scriptures here starting with John 13.

John 13:34-35 [He says] "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

John 14:15 "If you love Me, keep My commandments."

John 14:21 "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me."

John 14:23-24 Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me."

So, He is pounding on the same idea over and over again. This linkage, this connection between love and obedience. If you want to love Me, keep My commandments. If you keep My commandments, it will show that you love Me. If you love one another, it shows who you are. You are one of My people who do what I say and follow Me.

John 15:9-10 "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love."

John 15:12 "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

John 15:14 "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you."

John 15:17 "These things I command you, that you love one another."

So love and obedience are intertwined through Jesus' final sermon to His disciples. He gives them a *new commandment* to obey and that is that they love one another following His example. He says we must keep His commandments—plural, all of them—if we truly love Him. If we keep those commandments, He and His Father will make Their home in us through the Holy Spirit. That is real love when your God comes and lives in you and you

in Him. That shows the closest bond there can be. And He strictly commands us a couple of times to love one another. This is *the* sign that we are truly disciples and children of God, when we have this love that has been poured out upon us through His Holy Spirit and we choose to allow that love to flow out from us toward our brethren.

Let us go to John 21 because now by coming here we have come to the last chapter and what is Jesus talking about from verse 15 all the way through 19? He is talking about the same thing.

John 21:15-19 So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" And he said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." And He said, "Feed My lambs." He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, you know all things; You know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep. Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish." This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me."

So John ends his gospel with a practical application of this new commandment that Jesus had given him. Jesus asked Peter three times if he loves Him. And of course Peter responds positively, "Yes, I love You. You know that I love You." Then Jesus tells him how he can show, or how he can manifest, or how he can demonstrate his love for Jesus. He can feed His lambs, he can tend His sheep, and he could feed His sheep, Jesus' sheep. That is one way to show love, by loving and helping those whom God has called to the flock. If he wanted to show Jesus that he loved Him, he would obey and do what is good for the brethren. And then His parting shot to Peter, and to us all really, "Follow Me." We could say He said follow Me no matter where the path leads you, because of course with Peter it ended in

martyrdom. But if he loved Jesus Christ, then he was willing to walk that path.

For Abraham, getting back to Genesis 22, following God was offering his beloved and only son to God as a demonstration of his total dedication, offering him as a burnt offering, showing his total devotion. We need to ask the question and think about it. Where will following Christ lead us? We do not know, God does not give us any specifics about the next weeks or months or years of our lives. We do not know, we do not know how this world is going to fall out in that short time period.

Ultimately, of course, following Jesus Christ will lead to the Kingdom of God. We know the end if we endure, if we stay faithful, but we do not know the details of where this path is going to take us. It may take us to a rather pleasant life with not too many trials. I doubt that for most of us that that will be the way it is. We are going to have all kinds of trials between now and wherever the path ends. We would all like an easy one.

But Jesus Christ was perfected by *sufferings*. So we know that following His path means we probably will have some suffering to do at one point or another. We are going to have to make some tough decisions. We are going to have to weigh our love for God versus our love for someone else—spouse, father, mother, sibling, whatever. But we have to think about that. Are we willing to follow Jesus wherever that path leads, no matter what He commands us to do?

This sermon is the third in my series on Abraham's sacrifice. And contrary to my introduction, my ultimate theme for this sermon is not obedience or even love, but hope. Perhaps we can say that because of Abraham's love for Isaac and his greater love for God, he responded with what we could call "hopeful obedience" knowing the unchangeable character and promises of Almighty God. So he obeyed in hope.

Now this idea of following God's command without knowing exactly where we are going is where we left off in Part Two. Remember, we had come to Genesis 22, and I believe it was verse 5. I am going to get back there. I had gone back to talking about what God had said there in verse 2 about He told him to go and offer Isaac as a burnt offering on one of the mountains in the

land of Mariah. But when he got close, He would tell him which one, exactly where to go. And so Abraham leaves on his journey without knowing the end, without knowing exactly where he was going. He had to go from Beersheba, where he was living, where God had given him the command, up to the area around the town of Jebus, or what later became known as Jerusalem. But God would only show him exactly where to go later in the journey. He had to at least make the effort to get close before God showed him exactly the path that he was to follow and where he was going to end up.

So Abraham, as he did in Genesis 12 when God told him to leave Ur of the Chaldees and go to Canaan, had to be compelled by his faith to set out on the journey, not knowing where he was going. That is what Hebrews 11:8 tells us, that he left obeying God's command, even though he did not see the end. He did not see the total goal, he did not see the exact target. He just set off in that direction because God said "Go" and he was willing to wait for further instruction. And frankly, that is how it works with most of us. We come into the church after God's calling and we do not know anything. I can tell you, we do not know spit about the whole process. We learn that as we go, but God requires us to show faith. We step forward and we start on the journey even though many things are unclear to us. And so we have to learn step by step as we go on our journey so that these things become clearer and clearer and we have a better understanding of what God is teaching us and where God is taking us.

So, in a way, the journey of Abraham with Isaac from Beersheba to Jerusalem, or Mount Mariah, is very similar to our own lifetime with God. We know the basics, what God told Abraham there in verse 2. Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Mariah, toward Me as it were, because God lived there, that is God's place. So you are walking from where you are toward God with your family. But He says, you need to sacrifice all that other stuff for Me and show your dedication to Me. And we do that all along through our lives. We are showing God that we love Him first and will dedicate ourselves to Him. At least that is what we should be doing.

Actually I said that wrong earlier. I said we had gotten into verse 5. We had gotten to verse 2. We are going to try to get the verse 5 today. If I can complete these notes, we will get all the way to verse 8.

Genesis 22:3-5 So Abraham rose early in the morning [This is after the command.] and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you."

What I find so astounding about this little paragraph, these three verses, is its a matter of fact simplicity and its moderate pacing. God had just told Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son. Now, if he had said that to any of us, most of us would be running around pulling out our hair. We would be wailing and pacing and pleading to God to please spare him. But not Abraham. Abraham is the father of the faithful. Abraham shows nothing externally that anything was wrong. The man was calm, he was cool and collected. I mean, he wakes up early! Who would want to do that? I think most of us would be underneath our covers saying, I do not want to do this. But he did not.

I have a suspicion. It does not say this *when* God actually told him this, but I think from just the way this can be put together, that God told him to do this the last evening, the prior evening, and he had gone to bed. It does not say that he slept. He got up early, but he had had a while to think about that, maybe twelve hours or so. But he got up early and he just begins to move forward. He gets up, he saddles his donkey. It is interesting they do not mention anything about food, which made me wonder if he fasted. I do not know, just throwing that idea out there. But he saddled his donkey and he calls a couple of servants and Isaac, tells them what is going on. "We're leaving on a three day trip— three days there, three days back—and so we need to get a few things ready. We need to get this, we need some fire, I'll bring my knife, and we need to get some wood and load it up and go."

But it says here that Abraham himself cut the wood. So he just proceeds. He takes his time. The Bible does not give any impression of stress on Abraham's part, or consternation, being frightened or angry or any of those baser emotions that you might expect. He did nothing that would trigger

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Isaac or the two servants into thinking anything was out of the ordinary. Just a normal trip. It was business as usual.

Now, I do not want you to get the impression that Abraham was not emotional. I am sure he was. Like I mentioned last time, I am sure his stomach was roiling. I am sure he did not really want to eat anything. He was in great mental and emotional stress but he seems to have hidden it very well. He maintained a calm and steady demeanor. This is, of course, reading between the lines, but there is no indication in Scripture that he was outwardly agitated in any way. Nor is there any indication in Scripture that he told anyone about what God had told him to do. Not Isaac. We find Isaac ignorant of things a couple of days down the road and there is no mention of Sarah at all. I do not think he told her.

As a matter of fact, I do not even think Sarah was there. The next indication we have of Sarah is in chapter 23 where it talks about her dying and she is living at the time in Hebron in Kirjath Arba. It seems to me that Sarah died just a few years after this incident here in chapter 22. My guess is that Abraham lived in Beersheba to handle the business. I understand people do not really know what Abraham's business was, but we were taught at Ambassador College in the Ancient Israel class that most likely he was a trader of some sort. So he was probably there at the exit of Egypt or if you want to look at it the other direction, he was right at the entrance of Egypt and he could sell items, probably mostly cattle or other sorts of things on the hoof, to those people as they were passing through. Remember he had great flocks and herds and that is where people think that he is a shepherd but he was also a very wealthy man. I am sure he was trading in stock as it were. He was a stock trader, one of the original ones. He did not need an app.

So he was down in Beersheba handling that and showing Isaac the family business, training him up in the way he should go. But Sarah perhaps lived in Hebron more permanently. She died earlier than Abraham by a good 33 years I think it is. He died at 170. She died at 137 I believe. So she died younger than him. Perhaps she was frailer than him. and she needed to live in a single place rather than travel, you know, living in the tent all the time because she was old and frail or maybe more sickly and frail. Hebron would have been a little bit milder climate than Beersheba. Here she was down there right on the Sinai Desert and that would have been difficult perhaps for

her to live in that environment. So I would not be surprised at all if she was living permanently in Hebron, where it was a little higher, a little milder, and easier for her so she did not have to endure the rigors of Beersheba or of any kind of travel.

If so, it was a blessing to Abraham that he did not have to try to argue Sarah into killing Isaac, that would have killed her right away. But my point is that Abraham kept all this to himself, he kept it bottled in, he knew what he had to do and he went about calmly and patiently, methodically to do the job.

Notice the work Abraham does. He was splitting wood. Here he was a 120, 130 year old man out there splitting wood. He had these all these young servants about but he did it himself. His splitting of the wood does two things. First of all, it prepares what is needed for the sacrifice. The offering needed some wood for the fire because it was a holocaust offering—it had to be burned up. Have you considered how much wood it would take to burn up a human body? I mean, he knew that if God took him to the ultimate, he would have to burn Isaac who was probably a grown man at the time. So that is a fair amount of wood. You have to get a really hot fire to burn a human body. So it makes me wonder how much wood they had to take.

Remember, Isaac was burdened with all this wood to take it up on the mountain, ultimately. So you have to think that Isaac himself was a strong, burly man to be able to carry that much wood! It is hard to put your mind around it, how much wood it was and how they would carry it.

But it is an interesting thought. That is the first thing that it does, it prepares the offering.

But cutting wood, splitting wood, is not something that is very hard to do. You have to use a little bit of effort. But the concept is not hard. Put a piece of wood up on its end and you smack down on it and it falls and you might have to do it a few times depending on how sharp your axe is, but it is not hard to do. So when you have a job like that, it gives you time to think. You are not thinking about the process of splitting logs, you are thinking about whatever it is you need to think about.

So when Isaac gets up and he saddles his donkey and calls his servants, "Hey we're going to go prepare what we need for the journey." And he goes back

behind the tent, finds his pile of logs there and he starts splitting one and that gives him time. Ka-chunk. "I've got to kill my son. God told me to." Ka-chunk. "Does He really want me to kill my son?" Ka-chunk. He is just going through this process—cutting wood, splitting it up, stacking it—he can do all that just not even thinking about that thing at all. It is just an automatic process. But all the while he is thinking, "What's God doing here? What does He want from me?"

So he has time. Time to think. He would also have had time to think even more as he traveled to Mariah. But I know that I do some of my best thinking when I am doing something easy, something routine, something like mowing the lawn. I mean you do not need a PhD in agronomy or something to mow the lawn. It is an easy job, especially if it is your own lawn. You have done it 15,000 times like every day here in South Carolina. But either that or weeding or pruning some bushes or washing the car, cleaning out the gutters, ironing, washing dishes. Those sorts of things you do not need to really think about. It does not require a lot of intellectual processes so that you are distracted.

So Abraham split the wood and he thought about God. He thought about God's command. He thought about how much he loved Isaac. He thought about all his plans for Isaac. He thought about all of *God's* plans for Isaac and he just tumbled these things together in his head and tried to put things in order and think about them rationally, logically. What does God expect of me?

He gets his wood done and suddenly finds that he is buried in splintered wood because he has not been keeping track. He says, "Okay, we've got enough," and they set off for Mariah. That journey took them the rest of that day, and all of the second day, and the first part of the third day to get close. As I mentioned a time or two, it was a 30-mile trip, uphill, from Beersheba to Jerusalem. And their mileage appears right. It would take them, let us say they went ten hours on day two and five on day three and maybe another five on day one after he had thought enough. So they could easily have done thirty miles in those three days.

It is interesting, if God told Abraham the evening before they left and Isaac was offered at the end of the third day, he would have been dead to Abraham

for three days and three nights. That is why I think it was probably that God told him at the close of the day before he woke up early and then he had all that first day and all that second day, and they got close maybe about noontime and God told him where it was that He exactly wanted him to go and he and Isaac trudged up the mountain and by the time they got there it was getting toward the end of the day and of the daylight period—three days after God had told him to sacrifice his son. So in the mind of Abraham, Isaac had been dead for three days and three nights.

Just think about that. If God is going to be exact or close to exact in His type and anti-type, that would work because the Son of God was dead to the Father for three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. When Jesus said that about asking for a sign and he said that He would be like Jonah, three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, you just wonder was He thinking about Isaac too and Abraham? I do not know. He used Jonah as the example because it would have been the easiest to explain. But I just wonder if They did not do that on purpose with Isaac's sacrifice as well.

Anyway, I am told that when you come from Beersheba to Jerusalem and you go up from the from the south into that area that a traveler does not see the mountains of Jerusalem until they are just a few miles away. So you go up and you finally crest up on the ridge and finally you can see Jerusalem and Mount Mariah. Until then it is blind. You cannot see where you are going. It is like a blind curve. You do not know what is coming around the other side. But finally when they get to the ridge and get on top of the ridge, they can finally see the mountain and that is where Abraham leaves his servants, right at the place where the mountain becomes visible. And I believe that is where God told him, He made it plain that the offering should be on top of what we know as Mount Mariah.

I have a note here. Remember in verse 2 He said, "Go up and offer Isaac on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." So it was probably not until this time, once they got up on the ridge, that God somehow told Abraham, "That's your goal. That's where you should sacrifice Isaac." Now it does not tell us here that this is where God said this is where you should go. But God does not make statements, let us say the one in verse 2, without fulfilling them. So He must have told him somehow that they should go up to Mount Mariah. It is just one of the things that is not directly mentioned, but I do not

know how He did it. Was there an angel standing above Mount Mariah like the star of Bethlehem leading him to where he should go? Was there a smoke signal? I do not know. Or did God say, "You see that mountain? That's where you should perform the sacrifice." It does not say. But obviously God did it in some way.

But notice Abraham's statement of faith and hope in verse 5. I will just read it here. "Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you." So he said, we will go, we will worship, and we will return. Sounds like Caesar many years later. "I came, I saw, I conquered." But instead Abraham says, "We will go, we will worship, we will return. We'll come back—*both* of us." His three days of thinking along the way had convinced him that God did not want Isaac to die. That that was not His intent and in fact what God required of him and Isaac was what he called worship. He wanted them to go up on Mount Mariah and worship.

Now this word in Hebrew is *shachah*. It is from a more common word *havah* which essentially means "to bow down." It could either be from the head, bow the head and the neck, or it could be bow from the waist, a very deep bow that you would give somebody of great importance. So it can be done toward a human as a mark of respect like you would if say you were pauper and a prince came by, you would bow to the prince because he was of a higher station than you and he would deserve the respect that you could give him. Or it could be reverence or obeisance to a deity. You go down and do a full bow to God. But the idea of worship in the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament, is this idea of bowing down. The bowing is an outward sign of *internal* submission. So you show by your bowing that you are truthfully submissive and revere the one you are bowing to or at least respect the one you are bowing to.

So in effect what Abraham tells his servants that he and Isaac are going to do on the mountain is to submit to God—that they were going to go up there and they were going to worship, they were going to reverence their God on the mountain. They were going to go up to the mountain and do His will. This is where obedience comes in. We show our love and reverence toward God by doing what He asks us to do and this is exactly what God had wanted him to do. He said, "I command you to go up and sacrifice Isaac." He tells

the young men we are going to go up and worship. We are going to do God's will up on the mountain.

They were not going up there to sing hymns or to participate in a prayer service or to hear a sermon. That was not the kind of worship that he was going up there to do. He was going to *bow* to God's will. He was going to submit to what God wanted him to do. Whether it was to suffer, or to die. But he was confident and this is where the hope comes in. He was confident, he had great hope that they would both return. Even though God had said take Isaac up on the mountain and offer him as a burnt sacrifice, that they would both return. When we accept God's will and conform to it, even though we do not fully understand it or know how it will turn out, that is true worship. Because we trust that One so much and know that He loves us and has the best in mind for us, that we do what He says without reluctance, without hesitancy—we obey. Obedience is the loving response to the One we love.

Let us go to John the 19th chapter. I want to connect this with Jesus Christ. This is the very last act of Jesus Christ's life.

John 19:28-30 After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!" Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth. So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

You understand where I am going here? The final act of Jesus Christ was bowing His head. Now we can say this is a natural act when one dies, but it is interesting that it is put in this way, written by a Hebrew man, John the apostle. He *bowed* His head and He *gave* His life. His final act was an act of worship. His final act was doing God's will. His final act was completing the mission that He had been given to do, which Psalm 40:6-8 prophesied He would do. I want to read this, not in Psalm 40, but I want to go to Hebrews the 10th chapter where the writer explains it a little bit.

Hebrews 10:5-10 Therefore, when He came into the world, He said, "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You

have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come—in the volume of the book it is written of Me—to do Your will, O God.'" Previously saying, "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them" (which are offered according to the law), then He said, "Behold, I have come to do your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

So the anti-typical Isaac, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, Son of Man, went up on His Mount Mariah and worshipped. He submitted to the will of God and gave His life to redeem sinners. And in doing so He did away with the Old Testament sacrifices to establish the primacy of His own sacrifice that outweighed, outdid all of those other types, and you know it had ramifications far beyond those physical types. Remember what He said there in Luke 22 right before He was arrested.

Luke 22:42 [He says] "Father, if You will take this cup from Me, I'd really appreciate that. Nevertheless not My will, but Yours be done." (paraphrase)

He was totally invested in doing God's will. And in that way He worshipped with everything He did throughout His whole life—even to His final act, He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.

So Abraham and Isaac's worship in this sacrifice, bowing to the will of God, prefigures Christ's supreme act of worship in bowing His head and dying as the perfect payment for all sin. Abraham had it right when he told his servant, we are going up the hill to worship, to do God's will, to obey His command and see it through. Notice across the page here in Hebrews 11:17-19. Now, I talked quite extensively about Abraham's thinking, and what the writer of Hebrews does here in these verses is that he explains Abraham's thinking process very succinctly. He says,

Hebrews 11:17-19 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be

called," concluding [Accounting. That means he put it like into a spreadsheet and he figured it out. If God said this, then this must be true. He went through a logical, rational process.] that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.

So what did Abraham do in terms of thinking this through? First, it seems he remembered God clearly telling him back in what is now Genesis 21:12, that his progeny, his descendants would come through Isaac. "In Isaac your seed shall be called." That is what the writer of Hebrews brings up here in verse 18. He remembered that distinctly because it is about Isaac. He remembered everything about Isaac, his only son. He said, "Don't worry about Ishmael. It's in Isaac that you'll be known. Your seed, your descendants will come through Isaac."

Well, Isaac was not married yet. He had had no children. Rebecca was years in the future. He did not get married till he was 60. So this was another 25 or more years until he would see anything of Rebecca or any kind of son or daughter. It was a long time in the future. And then of course Rebecca was barren and they had to wait a while before Esau and Jacob came out slugging each other, so grandchildren were a long time in the future through Isaac.

But God's statement in Genesis 21:12 was plain, it was unambiguous. Your descendants will come through Isaac. It is a promise. It is a prophecy and God does not lie. He knew that from the character of the Being that he had always revered. His God does not lie. He does not say foolish things. He does not do jokes in that manner. He does not get people's hopes up and dash them. That is not how He works. Abraham's God is a faithful, truth-speaking God. So if He said your seed is going to come through Isaac, well then it was going to come through Isaac.

And this is how he came to a rational, logical conclusion. Isaac must live, he must live on, he must come back down the mountain if he were to have descendants as many as the stars of heaven and the dust of the earth—another divine promise which was said at least twice before in Genesis 13:16 and Genesis 15:5. He was not just looking for a couple of grandkids here. He was looking for thousands and hundreds of thousands and millions and billions of descendants.

Do you know that the stars of heaven and the dust of the earth, or as it says later in chapter 22 the sand of the seas, that that number is about the same? Scientists have done rough calculations and they estimate that there are 10 to the 25th power (I believe it is) stars in the sky and about the same amount of sand on the earth. 10 to the 25th power grains of sand. That is a lot of descendants. Bit of an exaggeration maybe. But this is what Abraham understood.

By the way, with your naked eye, you can only count even on the clearest, darkest night, about 3,000 stars. But Abraham knew that if you had the dust of the earth or the sand of the sea, that was a lot more than 3,000. So Abraham knew that there were more than 3,000 stars just from that little comparison.

He understood these divine promises were sure, that God had not lied to him. They *would* come to pass and so Isaac had to live. He had to be able, even if he did have to slay him, he would be resurrected because that promise still has to be performed. The prophecy has to be fulfilled and so Isaac would walk down the mountain with him. He knew that. God would resurrect him if it came to that. And this reasoning, this logical, rational thought process that he went through explains his confidence in telling his servants that he and Isaac would return.

It could only add up one way. You cannot throw in any kind of going back on things with God. He would not go back on His promise. That is not how God is. He is a faithful God. He would not do something evil, He would not lure him up there to kill his son. That is just not how God works. So he was confident that he had thought these things through in a way that came to a right conclusion. Perhaps his son was as good as dead in the next few hours, but he would receive him from the dead because God could not—**COULD NOT**—let him remain dead. The faithful God had promises to keep. And as I said before, he knew God would never renege on a promise. So he told his servants, we go to worship. We are going to go do as God has commanded. We are going to do His will, but we both will come back. Do not worry.

One last technical matter before we move on. Abraham calls Isaac a "lad." I mentioned many times that I think he was in the 25, 30 or so year range. The

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word lad is the Hebrew word *naar*, which means "lad," "an adolescent," "a young man," "a fellow," "a servant," "an attendant." A very wide range of meaning. But experts in the language invariably conclude that it suggests a young person still under authority. So it could be anyone from an adolescent all the way up to a grown man ready to be married. But the big thing we have to understand is that he was still under authority. He was still not his own man, if you will.

By the way, it is the same word except in the plural, that he uses for the two servants. So the lad Isaac and the two servants that he had were all young men. We do not know their exact ages, but they were all still under Abraham's authority. So Isaac could have been an adolescent, but because he carries the wood (not a very light burden as we mentioned before, enough to burn an offering completely), he was likely a grown man in his strength, perhaps in his 20's or 30s, but still under his father's authority. There is just no way to know exactly how old he was.

Genesis 22:6-8 So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son [That is what I just mentioned.]; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife [the implements that were needed to make the offering], and the two of them went together. But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." Then he said, "Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." So the two of them went together.

Now this exchange that he has with Isaac doubles down on Abraham's faithful, hopeful determination that all would be well. The servants' concern is one thing, "Hey guys, where you going?" "Just stay here, we will be back." That is what he did. He answered to the servants' concern.

But Isaac's concern (whom Abraham knew was supposed to be the burnt offering), is quite another thing. How do you answer the burnt offering when he asked where is the lamb? And Abraham even now does not let him in on his command from God. He does not tell him, "Well you're the lamb, ha ha, let's go up the mountain." That is just not how it works here. But he confidently assures him that God Himself will provide *the* lamb. It is not *a*

lamb, it is *the* lamb. God will provide *the* lamb. Both Isaac and he used the same definite article there. It is not just any lamb but the *appropriate* lamb, the *unblemished* lamb that needed to be offered.

Now this clearly refers to what we call substitutionary sacrifice: that a life is given to redeem another's life. This is something Abraham understood; that God was going to have to give him a substitute in place of Isaac. As we know, Jesus' one time for all substitutionary sacrifice goes far beyond all human conceptions of sacrifice to provide redemption and justification and access to God, and by His resurrection after that, we can also have eternal life. Because He died in our stead we can be forgiven, justified, and still live, and because He is God, the Creator God, His sinless sacrifice of Himself can cover all sin for everyone whom God calls and who believes in Him.

Now note in verse 7, the endearing terms Abraham and Isaac used for each other. "My father!" and "my son." They hint at a very close bond between father and son. The son loved and respected the father and the father loved the son more than himself. It tugs on the heartstrings to think that they were going up there to sacrifice Isaac. It tightens the tension of the story as we get toward the climax and Mount Mariah.

This is buttressed by the final sentence in paragraph. In the paragraph in verse 8, it says the two of them went together. This is a repeat of the final line of verse 6, where it says, "and the two of them went together." So we have in this little paragraph this idea of the two of them being as one, that they were united in what they were going to do. The narrator wants us to know that the father and the son, even though the son did not know exactly what was going on, they were in perfect harmony in this mission. That is, they were of one intent. They were going to go up the mountain and worship God and bow down to Him. Abraham had his faith in God, and Isaac had faith in Abraham's faith, and his own faith in God as his father had taught him. It was not as mature as Abraham's faith, but Isaac already had great faith, which we will see next time.

Abraham in no way was compelling his son to follow his lead. We find here that Isaac was willingly accompanying him up the mountain to worship. He could easily have escaped, dropped that bundle of wood that he had on his back. He could outrun his father any day, or if there was a struggle, he could

have put his dad down. But there is no indication that he resisted the wood being placed on him or that he hesitated to walk up the mountain. They took up what was needed for the offering and hiked up the hill together. They were doing this job together. They were of one mind that the required sacrifice would happen as planned and of course Isaac was assured that there would be a lamb for the offering.

Finally, as we reach the middle of the story, the narrator reminds us in verse 8 that God will provide what is necessary. He had hinted at it in verse 2 in naming the land of Mariah, which means "God Sees and Provides," and he will bring it up again in verse 14 when they name the place, "The Lord Will Provide." It is a major theme of the story. God sees our needs. He sees what needs to be done and He always provides what is necessary and then some. He is a providing God—He gives, He loves us, He wants us to have what we need.

And just as He sees our physical needs and provides food and water and shelter and whatever else that we may have need of, He sees our spiritual needs and He provides for them over and above. Remember Jesus says, "shaken down and running over."

His greatest provision of all is His Son. When nothing else would pay for sin and make eternal life possible, He gave His Son to be the propitiatory sacrifice to pay for sin and allow for justification and fellowship with God. As John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

And as we will see in the next part of this, that the Son gave Himself, showing that He has the same mind as the Father: that He will provide, and if He cannot provide anything else, He provides Himself.