

Abraham's Commitment

by William MacDonald

The sermon emphasizes the importance of commitment in the Christian life, using the story of Abraham and Isaac as an example of total surrender to God.

Duration: 39:10

Scripture: Genesis 22:2, Genesis 22:13, Hebrews 11:17

Topics: "Abraham"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher reflects on the story of Abraham and Isaac from the Bible. He describes the intense moment when Abraham is ready to sacrifice his son Isaac as an act of obedience to God. Just as Abraham is about to plunge the knife, an angel of the Lord intervenes and stops him. The preacher emphasizes the faith and determination displayed by Abraham throughout this ordeal.

Transcript

This morning, Brother Allen was speaking about the latter days when men will depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons. And I was thinking of what is happening even in the evangelical world today, the appalling drift that is taking place. And I'd just like to recommend, if you'd really like to know what's going on, and it will be a shock to you, I'd like to recommend that you subscribe to a little paper put out by our brother David Hunt, called The Berean Call.

How many, any of you get The Berean Call? That's very encouraging to see that. It's a very good paper. It's only about a four-page leaflet.

Really, it comes out every month. There's no subscription price. There are a lot of Scottish people subscribed to it, including me.

Of course, it's helpful if you do send the little out with postage. But I'd like to give you the address to The Berean Call, if you'd like to write it down. Berean, B-E-R-E-A-N.

Post Office Box 7019. Is anybody writing? I can't hear the screech of pencils. The Berean Call.

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And additional digits, dash 7019, if you want to add that. You know, as I travel around, I find that many Christians in the assembly are supporting organizations today, Christian organizations, evangelical organizations that in past years were very fine works of God. But when you support them today, you're helping to build up the Catholic Church.

You really are. That's what the ecumenical movement has brought about. If you need any proof of that, just talk to me after the meeting.

And Dave tells about it. He has some very, very valuable information. Recently he had a quote from the New York Times.

Cardinal O'Connor of the New York Diocese. He says, I do not know as of this moment that I will be in heaven. The Pope does not know as of this moment that he will be in heaven.

Mother Teresa does not know that she will be in heaven. And of course, he was telling the truth. Because if your salvation depends on works, you never can know.

You can't have assurance of salvation if works are the foundation of your salvation. Because you never know if you've done enough or the right kind of work. Well, I find quotes like that very helpful in witnessing to the Catholic people.

Lately, he's been having articles about what's going on, territorial warfare. And it's very interesting. Tom McMahon actually is the one that's been writing that.

I recommend to you, The Berean Call. If you didn't get the address, see me afterwards. In our ministry this week, we've had as our subject, My Life, My Heart, My Life, My All.

And of course, the subject is commitment to Christ. And we started last night to move through the Old Testament and find pictures and examples and types of commitment to Christ. And tonight, we come to Abraham.

So, let's just turn to Genesis chapter 22, please. Genesis chapter 22. And we'll just read a few verses here.

They're so familiar to you. Genesis 22, verse 1. Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham and said to him, Abraham. And he said, here I am.

And he said, take now 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 of which I shall tell you. So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, 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 up his eyes and saw the place afar off. And 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.

And so on. We'll go over this again. The Old Testament abounds in examples of commitment.

Dedicated men and women cross the stage of history, and they draw us to admire their staunch devotion to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And one person in whom we find outstanding commitment is this man Abraham. His obedience to God shines out in his willingness to offer Isaac.

Now we know, and we're often reminded, there's no such a thing as total commitment, right? Because we're all human. But I want to tell you, I don't know any place in the Bible where a mere human comes closer to total commitment than it does in the story of Abraham. It all started at Beersheba.

It's about 50 miles southwest of Jerusalem. Beersheba lies on a trade route that goes from Egypt north through Hebron, Bethlehem, and points north. And this day had begun like all other days.

It had its usual chores to be done, usual work to be accomplished, usual shopping to be done for food in the local market. There was no indication whatever that anything momentous was about to occur. There was no indication that history would be made on this day, that we would be talking about it in 1997.

No idea that the ordinary routine of life would be shattered as it was. And then Abraham heard someone call his name. Abraham.

And he said, I'm here. And the voice said to him, take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains there. And God said, in effect, I'll tell you which one.

Moriah is a ridge of mountains. The temple site is on Mount Moriah, and so is Gordon's Calvary, if you will. Not the same place at all.

There was no question as to who was speaking. I tell you, when God speaks to you, you know who it is who's speaking. And there was no misunderstanding of what he said.

It was as if the Lord took a knife and drove it into four successive layers of Abraham's heart. Thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom you love, the knife went plunging down into the heart of that father. Abraham, it was about his only son, his unique son, his son by a special birth.

It was the son of his love, the son who held first place, really, in his life. Abraham had been a hundred years old when Isaac was born, and Sarah was ninety-one. And this was the son to whom God promised to raise up a numberless posterity and to bless all nations.

And now that ominous command from God to take him. I would say that Isaac was about twenty-five when the word came, and he was still unmarried. And yet God was commanding Father Abraham to take him up and offer him as a burnt offering.

And even the place was specified where it was to take place, one of the mounts on the ridge of Moriah. The message was absolutely shocking. Never before had the Lord sanctioned human sacrifice, let alone command it.

I've been sharing some Bible riddles with some of the young people, and there's another one. God commanded, but never intended. The work was begun, but never ended.

The offering of Isaac. Here God is commanding him to offer his son as a burnt offering. I tell you, it was really heart-rending for that father.

He was no longer a young man. The older you get, the harder it is to cope with the crises of life. But this was no time for questions.

And this is remarkable when you think of Abraham's background. Really raw heathendom. He never had an Old Testament.

First time probably he ever heard a voice of God speaking to him. And yet there was no time for arguing with God. No time to ask for a delay.

No time to put it off. Abraham received his order, and marvelously he was ready to obey. In preparation, he might have turned in for a good night's rest.

He might have turned in early for a good night's rest. But I want to ask you, what father could sleep under those circumstances? By dawn's light he was awake. There was work to be done.

There was wood to be chopped. There was a knife to be honed. There was an axe to be sharpened.

And everything but an animal for the burnt offering had to be prepared. Two young servants had to be readied. And oh yes, Isaac, yes.

There would be no sacrifice without Isaac. Maybe it was good that Abraham was kept busy. There was no time to think of what lay ahead.

Plenty of time for that in the hours ahead in the journey north. Now, humanly speaking, that father's feet should have been as heavy as lead. But there's no indication of that in the sacred record.

He moved with firm determination in obedience to the voice of the Lord. He seemed to be propelled by a special inflow of grace and strength. So, see that little caravan moving out.

What was to be a three-day journey from Beersheba. And I think it was probably then that poor Abraham's mind started racing. Surely he felt a tangle of conflicting emotions, didn't he? How long he had waited for God's promise of a son to be fulfilled.

And then how the boy came. And how Abraham loved him. How he loved him.

How he dandled him on his knees. And he almost burst with pride when he looked on that little fellow. And he thought of God's promise.

Descendants as numerous as the stars in the heavens and the sand which is by the seashore. They would become a great and mighty nation. And all the nations of the earth would be blessed in his seed.

And Isaac was the one to whom the promise would come to pass. And now God told Abraham to kill him. Problem.

How could the promise ever be fulfilled? That would nullify the promise, wouldn't it? How could they ever be fulfilled if Isaac was to die unmarried? And even if the patriarch could have another son, it wouldn't do. He did have another son, he had Ishmael. But the promise was to be through Isaac.

And so there's a seeming impasse there. And I want to tell you it's understandable if the old man was quiet for most of the trip. If for three days he barely spoke a word.

And I can see that donkey plodding on, its head bobbing up and down. Patiently moving north on the trade route. Carrying that father, that loving father, to the place of destiny.

Surely he anguished over the impending death of Isaac. What father wouldn't? And every time he sneaked a look at his young son, undoubtedly his eyes bubbled with tears. He didn't dare look too long.

But then he would think about the Lord. After all, God had made the promises. He's a God who cannot lie.

He's a God who cannot deceive. He's a God who cannot be deceived. And God himself is the God of the impossible.

But what seems impossible to Abraham is possible with God. And if God has promised a numerous posterity through Isaac, and he commands that Isaac be slain, there's only one conclusion. God will raise him from the dead.

I think perhaps Abraham was startled by the audacity of his faith. There never had been a case of resurrection in the history of the world up until that time. If I can just say so, Abraham's faith invented the idea of resurrection.

Because he knew God. Because he knew God. He realized that resurrection would be a moral necessity if he had to kill his son.

Are we justified in thinking that at night he slept with Isaac, and every once in a while might have put out his hand just to touch him to make sure he was still there? I think it's all too possible. He cherished these last few hours together. Now they've passed Hebron.

And now they've passed Bethlehem. And on both sides of the road they see these rock strewn fields. And then they come to a brow of the hill.

And that's the first place where they can look off into the distance and see the ochre tinted houses on Mount Moriah. And just think of the emotions that swept through Abraham's heart as he looked there and saw the place toward which they were traveling. We could really call that heartbreak hill.

For that's what it must have been for Abraham. There he would face the greatest test of his life. There Isaac would be flamed and totally consumed by fire in an act of worship to God.

Because that's what the burnt offering is. The body is totally consumed. The body of the animal is totally consumed except the skin of the animal.

Surely Abraham's heart heaved as they came to the brow of that hill. Surely Isaac noticed it, but he said nothing. And finally the father broke the silence and turning to the two young men he said, you stay here with the donkey.

I and my son will go yonder and worship. And we will come again to you. What is this? We will come again to you.

Should he not have said, I will come again to you? No. He knew what he was saying. It was no slip of the lip.

We will come again to you. For some reason that father and son had to walk the remainder of the trip alone. No one else could share in the poignancy of that last segment.

Abraham picked up the pile of wood, tied it to Isaac's back. Just think of it. Picked up that pile of wood and tied it to his son's back.

That left the torch of fire and the knife for him to carry. All the components of a burnt offering. Was there animated conversation between Abraham and Isaac as they plodded on toward Moriah? We're not told.

No suggestion of complaint. No suggestion of reluctance. No suggestion of foot dragging.

There seems to be no temptation to turn back. They both press on. It's so incredible.

So unreal. Finally, Isaac asked a question. Father, the wood and the fire.

But where is the lamb for a burnt offering? Isaac, why did you have to ask that question? Your father's heart already crushed. Your father's heart is already shattered as he thinks what lies ahead. And now you say, where is the lamb for a burnt offering? Abraham knew.

And the question cut down into the very deepest depths of his being. But once again, faith triumphed over human emotion. And Abraham deflected the sharpness of the question by assuring Isaac that God would provide for himself a lamb for a burnt offering.

This is all so otherworldly, isn't it? This isn't something that a fiction writer would ever put together. Only God could have ever conceived such a thing. At last, they come to the designated place.

And Abraham gathered a group of stones, a pile of stones, and shaped them into an altar. Then he placed the wood on top of the stones. And then that father who loved God supremely took his well-beloved son and tied him up.

Was his hand shaking? There's no suggestion of that. No suggestion of that. He not only tied him up, but he lifted him up and placed him on the altar.

You know, Isaac could have rebelled. I think Isaac could have overpowered his father, don't you? No suggestion of it all. Meek and uncomplaining, he allows his father to bind him, to lift him up, and to place him on the altar.

I tell you, no artist could ever do justice to this scene. I don't think a brush and all the paint in the world could ever tell this story. Here's a man who's ready to offer his son.

Here's a son who, in obedience to his father and to God, is ready to die. Then that closing scene of anguish, where that dear father takes the knife and lifts it up. And as he lifts it up, he looks down into the face of the one who's dearer than life to him.

Into the face of Isaac. And Isaac looks up and he can see the sun glistening in the knife. It's different.

It's an age-long minute, isn't it? It's an age-long minute. And just as that knife is about to take its plunge into Isaac, Abraham hears a familiar voice now. Abraham! Abraham! And just as he had at Beersheba, he said, Here I am.

The speaker is the angel of the Lord. Isn't it marvelous? The angel of the Lord. It's the Lord Jesus in a pre-incarnate appearance.

Can you believe it? It's the Lord Jesus Christ in a pre-incarnate appearance. And he says, in effect, You don't have to touch your son. You've passed the test.

Now I know that you fear me so much that you wouldn't withhold your unique son from me. Now I know that yours is a total commitment. Just then Abraham hears a commotion in the bushes behind him.

We talk about providence. Why should that ram come into the bushes just at that opportune moment? He didn't come in a half an hour ago. He didn't come in a half an hour later.

Just at that moment, the ram appears and gets caught in the tangled briars. And it all came to Abraham in a flash. He would offer the ram to God in place of his son.

Frankly, I don't believe the ram was the lamb, because the ram isn't a lamb. The ram was a substitute now. The lamb was when the Lord Jesus went to the cross of Calvary.

God had provided a sacrificial victim at just the right time. So Moriah got a new name that day. The Lord will provide.

In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen. It was there that God provided a suitable offering. Can't you see Abraham helping Isaac down from the altar? Slashing the ropes that bound him.

And hugging him as he had never hugged him before. His tears must have flowed without restraint. Tears of joy.

Tears of deliverance. How God had interceded. But the angel wasn't through with him yet.

Because the patriarch had not withheld his only son from the Lord. The angel swore that he would bless and multiply Abraham's descendants as the stars in the sand. And they would triumph over their foes because Abraham had believed in his seed.

All the nations of the earth would be blessed. Abraham then returned south to the hilltop where the two men were waiting with the donkey. And the little group returned to Beersheba.

It would be interesting to hear the conversation along the way. What a conversation they must have had. What a rehearsal of the Lord's wonderful providence.

Of the marvelous circumstances that the ram should be caught by the horns at that particular time and that particular place. Surely it was more than chance. God had vindicated his promise.

And Isaac was spared. Centuries later another father would ascend that hill with his son. Only this time he would not spare him.

This time the son would die. He would die to put away our sins by the sacrifice of himself. Jehovah lifted up his rod.

O Christ, it fell on thee. Thou wast sore stricken of thy God. There is not one stroke to me.

Thy blood beneath that rod has flowed. Thy bruising healeth me. For me, Lord Jesus, thou hast died.

And I have died in thee. Thou art risen. My bands are all untied.

Now thou livest in me. The Father's face of radiant grace shines now in blight on me. The story of Abraham and Isaac.

Sometimes total commitment means giving to God the dearest thing in your life. And when we make our commitment to him, we must face that fact bravely. We move on.

There are two rituals in the Old Testament that deal very especially with this subject of commitment. And interestingly enough, the first one that we're going to take up is the burnt offering itself. The burnt offering.

First we see a Hebrew coming to the courtyard of the tabernacle. He has a young bull. And he has a halter around the neck of the bull.

And the bull is reluctant. Never mind. He's dragging it there to the door of the enclosure of the tented courtyard of the tabernacle.

And as he comes with that animal, he's meditating on how good the Lord has been to him. He's meditating on the faithfulness of the Lord. And the blessings that have come to him from the Lord.

And now in an act of worship, he wants to pour out his thanksgiving to the Lord. He wants to commit himself to the Lord. And so he's going to use this young bull to illustrate his commitment.

He wants to say it's a full surrender of myself as symbolized what's going to happen to this animal. And he remembers that the animal must be clean. That is that it must chew the cud and have cloven hooves.

And it must also be without blemish. And he's now going to offer it of his own free will. Passing through the entrance of the enclosure there, he comes, of course, to the altar of burnt offering.

Doubtless ties the legs of the animal, rolls it over its side. And then with a knife, he makes a deft slit across the throat of the animal. And the priest hurries with a container to capture the blood.

He takes blood and he sprinkles it on the altar of burnt offering. It's full of meaning. The man has already put his hand on the head of the animal.

And he's saying, in effect, this bullock is here in my place. I'm identifying myself with it. What happens to it is what happens to me figuratively.

And he skins the animal and cuts it in pieces. And the priest puts those pieces up on the altar. And I think it's now that the unique feature of the burnt offering appears.

The individual parts are burned on the altar until the whole carcass, except the skin, is consumed. Of course, this is a type of the Lord Jesus in his total commitment to God, his father. He was totally consumed by the fires of God's judgment there at Calvary.

And the fragrance of his sacrifice rose as a sweet aroma to the very presence. But to the man there in the Old Testament and to believers today in the new, it speaks of our presenting our bodies a living sacrifice to God. Holy sacrifice to God and acceptable to him, which is our reasonable service.

The burnt offering speaks of our saying, his hands and feet and heart, all three, were pierced for me on Calvary. And here and now to him, I bring my hands, feet, heart and offering. An important part of the

burnt offering is that it's what they call a sweet savor offering.

The priest shall bring it all and burn it on the altar. It's a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the Lord. And when a Hebrew offered that, he might have thought, well, it's just a local ritual, you know, and carried on here in Canaan.

No big deal. But you know, when he really did that from his heart, a fragrance arose from that altar and stole through the universe to the very throne of God. God was pleased.

God was very pleased. And so it is with believers today when the Lord Jesus finds people, men and women, young men and young women, who come to him and present themselves as a living sacrifice to him, holy and acceptable to him. Isn't it wonderful to think that something we can do down here has an impact on the throne room of the universe? And it really does.

It really does. The fragrance steals there. And the lesson of the burnt offering is, give all that you are to God.

All for Jesus. All for Jesus. All my being's ransomed powers.

All my thoughts and words and doings. All my days and all my hours. Let my hands perform his bidding.

Let my feet run in his ways. Let my eyes see Jesus only. Let my lips speak forth his praise.

May we all be living sacrifices that the fragrance of our lives, of our offering to God, might have an impact in heaven. Shall we pray? Lord, our hearts abound when we think of that dear father. What it meant to him to take that son on whom he doted.

That son whom he loved so passionately. That son of whom he was so proud. And having to go through that ordeal on Mount Moriah.

But we think of you, blessed father. And of a greater sacrifice you made. You spared not your son.

Delivered him up for us all. All the way to Calvary. He went for us.

Because he loved us so. We say in return tonight, we love you, Lord Jesus. For what you did for us.

Lord, we know there's only one proper response. What you've done for us is that we come to you. And just present our bodies to you.

Our lives to you. All that there is of us to you. That you may do with it whatever you please.

We give you thanks in the savior's name. Amen.

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