

Horton Haven Labor Day Retreat-10 Examples of Commitment

by William MacDonald

William MacDonald emphasizes the profound commitment to God exemplified by Abraham's faith and obedience in the face of unimaginable sacrifice.

Duration: 31:17

Scripture: Genesis 22:2, Genesis 22:12, Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 16:24, Matthew 22:37, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23

Topics: "Commitment"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of total commitment to God. He references the commandment in Deuteronomy 6:5 to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. The preacher also highlights the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and the need for believers to offer their lives fully to God. The sermon then focuses on the example of Abraham and his unwavering commitment to God, even when faced with the difficult task of sacrificing his son Isaac.

Transcript

We've been trying to express the inexpressible. Our minds have gone back to Calvary. The astounding, amazing, wonderful thing that took place there.

The Lord of life and glory died for creatures who really didn't deserve it. How true are the words of the hymn writer, I stand all amazed at the love Jesus offers me. Confused by the grace that so freely he offers me.

I tremble to know that for me he was crucified. That for me, a sinner, he suffered and bled and died. Oh, it is wonderful that he should care for me, enough to die for me.

Oh, it is wonderful, wonderful. And we mentioned that in the light of Calvary it demands a response from us. That response is not that we would give our spare evenings to him, but that we yield ourselves to him, our hearts, our lives.

And we mentioned that this is a thread that goes through the entire scriptures, that thread of commitment. Last night we heard an early call to commitment in the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 6 and verse 5. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, and strength. Then when that verse is repeated three times in the Gospels, the word mind is added with all thy heart, soul, mind, and strength.

With all your affectionate powers, with all your emotional powers, with all your intellectual powers, and with all your physical powers. And that's the logic of Calvary, isn't it? Love so amazing, so divine, demands my heart, my life. But we want to continue our journey through the Old Testament for examples of commitment.

And you see dedicated men and women crossing the stage of history and causing us to admire them for their staunch devotion to the Lord. People who never had a Bible in their hands. People who never heard about Calvary.

People who had very limited notions about God. One person in whom we see this outstanding dedication is Abraham. And his willingness and devotedness to the Lord is seen in his quick obedience, willing to offer his son Isaac to God as a burnt offering.

It all started down at Beersheba. Beersheba is about 50 miles southwest of Jerusalem. It's right on the edge of the desert of the Negev.

Beersheba is located on a trade route that goes up from Egypt, past Hebron, Bethlehem, and then points to the route that Abraham would follow. The day had begun like most other days. There was no indication that anything momentous was going to happen at all.

No indication that history would be made, that the ordinary routine of life would be shattered. Yet that was the day when Abraham heard a voice saying, Abraham, here I am. And then came a heart-bending order, an extraordinary command.

Take now your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains there. I will fill you. There was no question as to who was speaking.

When God speaks, you know it. And Abraham knew who was speaking. It was the Lord.

And there was no misunderstanding about what he said. It was about the patriarch's only son, his unique son, the son of special birth. Just remember that Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born.

Sarah was 91, and this was the son to whom God promised to raise up a numerous posterity, a numberless posterity, and to bless all nations. Isaac was probably 25 years old when this day dawned, and he was still unmarried. And yet God was commanding Father Abraham to take him and kill him, to offer him up as a burnt offering.

The Old Beholder even specified the place, one of the mountains of Moriah. Moriah is a range, and it has different... Actually, the Temple Mount in Jerusalem is one of the mountains of that range. The message was shocking, absolutely shocking.

Never before in human history had the Lord ever thanked him for human sacrifice. And now he was a man there. And you know, when God spoke, it seemed as if he was plunging a knife into four layers of Abraham's life.

Take now your son, your only son, Laodicea. Isaac, Laodicea, whom you love, Laodicea. Just put yourself in that father's position.

Think of how he had built it upon that little fellow, how he had dandled him on his knees, how he had looked forward to the birth of that child. Now comes this lending command of the Lord to take him and

offer him up as a burnt offering. But this was no time for questions.

No time for arguing with God. No time to ask for a delay either. Abraham had received his order.

He was ready to obey. In preparation, he doubtlessly turned in for a good night's sleep because they were going to leave in the morning. But I ask you, what father could sleep under those circumstances? Pretty hard, eh? By dawn's early light, Abraham was awake and a lot of work to be done.

There was a donkey to be saddled. There was a knife to be honed. There was an axe to be sharpened.

Wood to be split for a burnt offering. Everything but an animal for the sacrifice. Oh, yes, and two servants had to be readied.

And Isaac. Isaac. There'd be no journey without him.

Perhaps it was good that Abraham was kept busy that morning because there was not much time for him to think of what lay ahead. Plenty of time for that in the hours that would follow. Humanly speaking, those fathers' feet and legs should be as heavy as lead.

For some strange reason, they weren't. It seems that there was a great inflow of strength and grace into that man's aged body that could ever go out of his experience. That morning, they set out on a trip that would last them three days.

And I think it was then that Abraham's mind started racing. Surely he felt a mass of tangled emotions as they moved along. How long he had waited for the promise that the son could be saved.

And how he had burst with pride and satisfaction as the friends gathered around to see the boy, Isaac. And how he had watched the child grow. Isaac was the dearest thing in the world.

And he thought of God's promise. Descendants as numerous as the stars in the heavens and the sands which are by the seashore. Isaac's descendants would be a great and mighty nation.

And all the nations of the earth would be blessed in his seed. And Isaac was the one with whom all of the promises were going to be fulfilled. And now God tells Abraham to kill Isaac.

That would nullify the promises, wouldn't it? How could they be fulfilled if Isaac was going to die unmarried? Maybe Abraham would have had other sons. It was in Isaac that the promise was made. In Isaac shall you exceed.

It's really quite understandable that the old man was quiet the rest of the trip. If for hardly three days he didn't speak a word. I can see that donkey farting on, his head up and down, moving along patiently along the road, carrying that loving father to the place of destiny.

Surely he anguished over the impending death of Isaac. I think every time he sneaked a look at his son, his eyes probably bubbled. He didn't dare look at the young man.

But then he would think about the Lord. After all, God had made these promises. And no promise of God can ever fall to the ground.

Nothing more sure in all the world than the word of God. God said in Isaac, Shall you exceed. He has called.

And if God said it, it will come to pass. Because God cannot lie. He cannot deceive.

And he cannot be deceived. So what seems impossible to man, if God has promised a numerous austerity through Isaac, and if he commands that Isaac be slain, there's only one solution. It's a lot of laziness.

If Abraham had gone down to the local library and consulted the encyclopedia, he would have found out that there never was a case of resurrection. It's a thing that never happened in the history of mankind up until that time. It didn't make any difference.

There's a sense in which Abraham invented the idea of resurrection because he knew God. And he knew that God would fulfill his word. It was a moral necessity of God to do it.

I think maybe Abraham was startled by the audacity of his own faith. He had never heard of resurrection before. He realized that's what God would have to do.

Do you think that we're justified in picturing Abraham sleeping there at night and Isaac nearby? Perhaps sometime this time Abraham would just go over to touch Isaac's feet. He was there. Cherishing those last hours together.

Now they've passed Hebron, and now they've passed Bethlehem, and they're traveling on a route. Both sides of the road are just strewn with rocks, which you'll see today, if you follow that path. They go over rolling landscape, rock-strewn fields on either side.

That dear father, kept his faith with grim determination. On the third day they come to a brow of a hill, a brow of a hill, and it could very well be called Heart's Great Hill. And I'll tell you why.

Because that's the first place on that route when you can look far ahead there and see the over-tinted buildings. It was the first time that Abraham saw where it was going to take him. That was the place where Abraham would face the greatest test.

There Isaac would be slain and totally consumed. Because that's the feature of the burnt offering. Except for the skin, it was totally skinned.

I can believe that that father, he stood there on Heart's Great Hill and looked forward to the place to which they were heading. Isaac must have noticed it. But he didn't say anything.

And finally the father broke the silence. Turning to the two young men who had accompanied them, he said, You stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and we will come again to you. We will come again? Shouldn't you have said, I will come again to you, Abraham? He said, We will come back to you.

For some reason that I don't understand, the father and the son had to make the rest of that trip alone. No one else could share in the poignancy of the last segment of this journey. Abraham picked up that pile of wood and he strapped it to Isaac's back.

That left the torch of fire and the knife for Abraham to carry. He had all the components. Was there animated conversation between Abraham and Isaac as they walked the rest of that journey? I can just picture Isaac ahead there and Abraham following on his donkey.

Abraham watching the live handsome form. Whether he was physically handsome or not, he was to Abraham, I'll tell you that. And you know, there's no suggestion of complaint or of foot dragging or even of reluctance.

There seems to be no temptation to turn back. They press on. They both press on.

It's so unreal. It's so incredible to see them walking. And finally Isaac breaks the silence and he asks that most unsettling question.

He said, Father, the wood, the fire, where is the animal? It seems to me that up to that time Isaac didn't have a realization. I see the wood, Father. I see the fire.

But where is the lamb for burnt offering? Abraham knew. And I want to tell you that question happened to the very job. That was a question to break your father's heart.

But once again, faith triumphed over human emotion and Abraham deflected the sharpness of the question by assuring his son that God was there. At last they came to the designated place. Picture that father gathering stones and making an altar of stones there on the top of Moriah.

Formed them in the shape of an altar and then he put the wood on top. And then that father who loved God supremely took that son and tied him up, and laid him on top of the altar. You know, the Bible record is kind of thick.

Isaac was a stronger man than Abraham. Isaac would have struggled to be restrained. And think of what it meant for that dear father to lift up the son of his love.

How did it look different? Lay him on that wood on top of the altar. His hands were probably shaking. Yet he was given strength to lift the dead old son and place him there.

The son who could have easily overpowered his aged father to lift it up. I tell you, no artist would ever do justice to this scene. Here's a father ready to offer his son and here's an innocent son ready to die in obedience to the word of the Lord.

Then that opposing scene of anguish. Words that we use in connection with the hand. Opposing scene of anguish.

That father grasped that knife and raised it up. And Isaac stopped and he can see the son reaching for the beddle of that knife. The father looks down and looks upon the face of that son who means more to him than life itself.

I want to tell you, it's an age-long minute while that knife is poised up there above Isaac. And at that moment came the dramatic break. Before that knife took its fatal plunge Abraham heard a familiar voice.

Abraham! Abraham. And as he headed Beersheba he said Here I am. The speaker is the angel of the Lord.

This is very touching to me. Who is the angel of the Lord? The angel of the Lord is the Lord Jesus Christ in a free incarnate appearance. Jesus is there then.

Anytime you get that expression THE angel of the Lord You don't get it in the King James Version but in other versions THE angel of the Lord it refers to the Lord Jesus in a free incarnate appearance. It's God the Son. He says in effect you don't have to touch your son.

You passed the test. Now I know that you fear me so much. You love me so much that you wouldn't even withhold your only son.

Now I know that you're a sinner. Abraham never had a new testament. He never knew the story of Calvary.

He rejoiced to see the known. But he never knew what we know today. Hearing a commotion in the bushes behind him Abraham turns to see a ram trapped by its horns in the thicket there.

It all came to him in a flash. He would offer the ram to God in the place of his son. The ram would die as a substitute.

That ram would die that Isaac might be saved. This was not the lamb that God provided. It was a God son.

A ram is not a lamb. The ram did for that day. The lamb was to do for another day.

God had provided a sacrificial victim in the nick of time. And Mariah got a new name that day. Jehovah's Daughter.

The Lord. It was there that God provided a suitable offering. Abraham must have quickly flashed the ropes that tied Isaac.

I think he hugged him as he had never hugged him before. Such an outpouring of love. Such an outpouring of affection.

I think his tears flowed without restraint. Tears. Tears.

Tears. But the angel wasn't through with him yet. Because the patriarch had not withheld his own son from God.

The angel swore that he would bless and multiply Abraham's descendants as the stars and the sun. They would triumph over their foes because Abraham had believed all the nations of Europe would be blessed in his name. And then Abraham and Isaac returned south along that same route to the two young fellows that were waiting there at the little group.

Returned to Beersheba. What a conversation they must have had along the way. What a wonderful rehearsal of the Lord's tremendous fathering.

Why did that ram get caught in the thicket right at that particular time? The timing was absolutely perfect. Surely it was more than he could have imagined. God had vindicated his promise.

Isaac was there. Centuries later, another father would ascend that same hill. Only this time he would not spare him.

This time the sun would die. He would die to put away our sins by the sacrifice. God spared Abraham's heart.

But Cain, he would not spare him. He over-lifted up his rod. Oh, Christ, to tell him this.

Thou wast sore stricken of thy God. Thy blood beneath that rod has flowed. Thy bleeding.

For me, Lord Jesus, thou hast died. And I have died in thee. Thou art risen.

My bands are all on fire. And now, by the Father's grace, a radiant grace, Abraham, a wonderful Christian, willing to offer up the sum of his life, sometimes a total commitment, means living for the Lord. Father, our hearts are truly stirred when we think of this chapter in your word, this chapter in the life of Abraham and Isaac.

Our hearts are truly moved within us. When we read the account, our minds flash forward to Calvary. We see the antitype there.

See the son of Noah, in whom you find all your desires. We see him going there where our sins. Lord, give us the faith of a man like Abraham to give you all of our needs.

Yes.

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