

Our Response to Calvary

by William MacDonald

William MacDonald emphasizes the profound commitment required in response to God's love as exemplified by Abraham's faith at Calvary.

Duration: 32:41

Scripture: Genesis 22:1

Topics: "Faith And Obedience", "The Cross"

Description

This sermon reflects on the profound act of commitment displayed by Abraham in his willingness to offer his beloved son Isaac as a burnt offering to God. It draws parallels to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus on the cross at Calvary, emphasizing the depth of love and obedience required in our relationship with God. The narrative showcases the testing of faith, the provision of a sacrificial substitute, and the profound impact of total commitment to God's will.

Transcript

In the meetings past we've been thinking about the unthinkable. We've been trying to express the inexpressible. Our minds have gone back to Calvary and 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, let him die. Oh, it is wonderful that he should care for me, enough to die for me.

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

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 six and verse five. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, and strength.

And 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 as well. And that's the logic of Calvary, isn't it? Love so amazing, so divine, demands my heart, my life, my all.

We're going 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 north. 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, he said, here I am. And then came a heart-rending 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 show you which one. 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 through 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. Jehovah even specified the place, one of the mounts of Moriah. Moriah is a range, and it has different peaks on it.

Actually, the Temple Mount in Jerusalem is one of the mounts of that range. The message was shocking, absolutely shocking. Never before in human history had the Lord ever sanctioned human sacrifice.

Never. And now he was commanding it. And you know, when God spoke, it seemed as if he was plunging a knife into four layers of Abraham's heart.

Take now your son, your only son, layer two. Isaac, layer three. Whom you love, layer four.

Just put yourself in that father's position. Think of how he had doted upon that little fellow, how he had dandled him on his knees, how he had looked forward to the birth of that child. And now comes this rending command of the Lord to take him, 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, and 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. There was 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, and wood to be split for a burnt offering.

Everything but an animal for the sacrifice. Oh, yes, two servants had to be ready. And Isaac.

Isaac. There could 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. But for some strange reason, they weren't.

It seemed that there was a great inflow of strength and grace into that man's ancient body that could ever go out on this journey. And 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 the route. How long he had waited for the promise of a son to be fulfilled. 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 to Abraham, no question of it. And he thought of God's promise.

Descendants as numerous as the stars in the heavens as the sand which is by the sea shore. 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 through 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? Only say maybe Abraham could have had other sons.

No, it was in Isaac that the promises were made, not in some other son. In Isaac shall your seed be called. It's really quite understandable that the old man was quiet for the rest of the trip.

Yet for hardly three days he didn't speak a word. I could see that donkey plodding on, its 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, don't you think so? He didn't dare look too long. 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 your seed be called. And if God said it, it will come to pass, because God cannot lie, cannot deceive, and he cannot be deceived.

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

But 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. Such a thing had never happened in the history of mankind up until that time. It didn't make any difference.

There was 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 for God to do it.

I think maybe Abraham was startled by the audacity of his own faith. He had never heard of resurrection before, and 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 from time to time Abraham would just reach over to touch Isaac to see if he was there.

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

That dear father sets his face with grim determination. On the third day they come to a brow of a hill, and it could very well be called Heartbreak 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 ochre-tinted buildings on Mount Moriah. That was the first time that Abraham saw where it was going to take place. That was the place where Abraham would face the greatest test of his life.

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

I can believe that that father's heart heaved as he stood there on Heartbreak 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. What was that? We will come again to you? Shouldn't you have said, I will come again to you, Abraham? No. 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 the 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 of a living sacrifice. Was there animated conversation between Abraham and Isaac as they walked the rest of that journey? We don't know.

I can just picture Isaac ahead there and Abraham following on his donkey, and Abraham watching the live, handsome form of his son walking ahead. 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.

Seems to be no temptation to turn back. They both press on it so unreal, it's so incredible to see them walking along there. And finally, Isaac breaks the silence and he asks that most unsettling question.

He said, father, the wood and the fire, where's the animal? Or bird offer. It seems to me that up to that time, Isaac didn't have a full realization of what was going to happen. I see the wood, father.

I see the fire. But where is the lamb for a bird offering? Abraham knew, and I want to tell you that question cut him to the very depths of his being. Why did you have to say that, Isaac? That was a question to break your father's heart.

But once again, faith triumphed over human emotions. And Abraham deflected the sharpness of the question by assuring his son that God would provide a lamb for a bird offering. 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. He formed them into 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, laid him on top of the altar.

And you know, the Bible record is kind of sparse. Isaac was a stronger man than Abraham was. Isaac could have struggled free from that at any moment, but he didn't.

He didn't. Strange as it seemed. And think of what it meant to that dear father to lift up the son of his love, probably with difficulty, and lay him on that wood on top of the altar.

His hands were probably shaking, and yet he was given strength to lift his adult son and place it there. And the son who could have easily overpowered his aged father submitted without protest. I tell you, no artist could ever do justice to this scene.

Is a father ready to offer his son to God? And here's an innocent son ready to die in obedience to the word of the Lord. Then that closing scene of anguish, where is it we use in connection with the hymn, the closing scene of anguish, when that father grasped that knife and raises it up. And Isaac looks up and he can see the son glistening in the middle of that knife.

And 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 had it, 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 pre-incarnate appearance.

Jesus was there that day. Anytime you get that expression, the angel of the Lord, you won'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

pre-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 from me. Now I know that yours is a total commitment. Remember, Abraham never had a New Testament.

He never knew the story of Calvary. He rejoiced to see, I know, 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.

The ram would die that Isaac might be saved. This was not the lamb, instead, that God promised. 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 Moriah got a new name that day, Jehovah-Jireh, the Lord will provide me.

It was there that God provided a suitable offering for Abraham. Abraham must have quickly slashed the ropes that tied Isaac, don't you think? 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 of joy.

Tears of deliverance. But the angel wasn't through with him yet. Because the patriarch had not withheld his only son from God, the angel swore that he would bless and multiply Abraham's descendants as the stars and the sand.

They would triumph over their foes because Abraham had believed all the nations of the earth would be blessed in his seed. And then Abraham and Isaac returned south along that same route to the two young fellows that were waiting there with the donkey. And 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 providence. Why did that ram get caught in the thicket right at that particular time? The timing was absolutely perfect.

Surely it was more than chance. God had vindicated his promise. Isaac was spared.

Centuries later, another father would ascend that same 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. God spared Abraham's heart, a pain he would not spare his own. Jehovah lifted up his rod.

O Christ, it fell on thee. Thou wast sore stricken of thy God. It was not one stroke for 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, and now I live in thee. The Father's face of radiant grace shines now in light on thee.

Abraham, a wonderful picture of commitment to God, willing to offer up the son of his love to God as a burnt offering. Sometimes total commitment means giving to the Lord the dearest thing in your life. Shall we pray? 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 anti-type there, see the son of your love, in whom you find all your delight.

We see him going to the cross, to bear away our sins by the sacrifice of himself.

Video: https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/e0MMvT_Y9BA.mp4
Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/william-macdonald/our-response-to-calvary/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net