Genesis 16-24 July 29, 2018

*He Was in the Beginning, Part 7*

*(Abraham & Isaac)*

Rev. Meagan Boozer

 Since June 17th we have looked at the Creation of all things, the Fall, Noah, the Tower of Babel, and Abraham – searching for Jesus in the midst of Genesis. We have discovered that it is not difficult to see him, to see the way the story of God and his people consistently prepares us for and points us to Jesus. After today we only have 3 more sermons in this series. Next week we look at the story of Jacob, then the story of Joseph, and finally the sons of Jacob – taking us to the very end of the book of Genesis. What I hope this has done for all of us is two fold: I hope it takes us to a new place of gratitude to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit for always having a plan to save us for an abundant, eternal life with him, and I hope it causes us to look for Jesus in whatever book of the Bible we are reading whether it is in the Old Testament or whether it is in the New Testament. When we search for him, we will find him – for he is there – before all time, and now, and forevermore. Let us pray:

 *Good and gracious God, thank you for always providing a way for us to leave the old ways behind and cling to you as you make all things new. We are and will continue to be your kids, under construction. Thank you for speaking so clearly and consistently to our hearts, our minds, and our souls. Thank you for your blessed Word. Thank you for the firm foundation of your written Word and your living Word, Jesus Christ. May we honor him now with our attitude and our attention. This we pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.*

Last week we looked at the call of Abraham. We looked at God’s promise to give him a son in his old age and that through that son the number of his descendants would be more numerous than the dust of the earth or the stars of the sky. God also promised to make Abraham’s name great and that through his offspring all the families of the earth would either be blessed or cursed. And as if that wasn’t mind-blowing enough, God promised to give the land of Canaan to Abraham and to his offspring forever, to make Abraham into a great nation, and that Abraham would be the father of many nations. All this to a regular, hard-working man like you and me. And Abraham, despite what he saw happening around him that did not point to any such glorious fulfillment, Abraham believed God. He believed God’s promises for him - and into Abraham’s spiritual account was credited the gift of righteousness.

 The gift of righteousness, folks, given to us by our faith in Jesus Christ, is our admission ticket to Heaven. Without the gift of righteousness being given to us, we cannot and will not enter into the land promised to us beyond this life. Abraham’s faith in God, his belief that God will fulfill his greatest promise to us through the promised offspring, pleased God and caused God to give to him the gift of righteousness. Though it was physically impossible for Abraham to see 2000 years ahead, God gave him the spiritual understanding, the spiritual confidence, and the spiritual sight that he needed to see the coming of Jesus Christ as the promised offspring. That is why Jesus said in John 8:56, “*Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad!”*

 So, the descendants had to start sometime. And Abraham waited. And waited. He didn’t wait perfectly. He didn’t wait patiently. In his waiting he tried to fulfill God’s promise by his own actions and ended up with an illegitimate heir, Ishmael. God said, ‘No.’ I will do this. Wait.” Abraham waited approximately 25 years after the promise was first spoken. He was about 100 years old when Sarah became ‘with child.’ Listen to several Scriptures about that time:

* Genesis 17:19, *“Sarah, your wife, shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.”*
* *Genesis 18:10-14****10****Then one of them said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.” Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him.****11****Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing.* ***12****So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, “After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?”* ***13****Then the Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Will I really have a child, now that I am old?’****14****Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son.”*
* Genesis 21:1-2, *“The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised. And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him.”*

 We hear those Scriptures, and surely we are transported to Christmas, aren’t we? And that’s exactly where we are meant to go! The promised child for Abraham and Sarah was always meant to point to THE promised child. Hearing about God’s power at work in bringing Sarah’s womb from death to life enabling Abraham & Sarah in their old age to conceive a son prepared God’s people to trust that another woman who could not possibly conceive because she had not ever been with a man will in fact conceive by the power of God. Sarah’s question about how this could happen point us to another woman who cannot understand how she will conceive. And just as God assured Sarah by asking, *“Is anything too hard for the Lord?”* the angel said to the virgin Mary, *“For nothing will be impossible with God”* (Luke 1:37). It’s easy for us to see this connection, isn’t it? What a blessing it is for us to live on this side of the promise! We can see how it all unfolded!

 So, Isaac was born. He was the delight of his parent’s lives. They had long-before given up hope to have a child, and here he was, laughing along with them, learning to eat, learning to walk, learning to run, learning to help his aging parents around the tent and in the fields. What an incredible gift he was to them! And they praised God with their lives for this promise fulfilled!

 *“After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”****2****He said, “Take 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.”*

 What do you do with that? If God came to me and said, “Take your son, your only son Douglas, whom you love, and go up to the Knob, and offer him there as a burnt offering,” I could not do it. I’m telling you straight up, I wouldn’t even consider it. Would you? What kind of a God would ask such a thing?

 Think about Abraham. So happy, so joyful to have this long-awaited boy in his household! Did he ever forget that God did it? That Isaac was a gift straight from the heart of God? Remember, Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born. Sarah’s womb was dried up. Did they ever forget from whom this child had come? I don’t think so. So, when God spoke to Abraham about taking Isaac off to sacrifice him as a burnt offering, let’s remember all the history Abraham had with God so far. It was big-time stuff, and God had come through just as he had promised. As gut-wrenching as it was for Abraham to even consider following God’s instructions, he continued to believe God, to trust God, and to obey God.

 It was a three-day journey. I said, “It was a three-day journey.” Those of us who live on this side of the resurrection of Jesus Christ know the significance of three days, don’t we? When a bunch of us went to see Sight and Sound’s production of the life of Jesus several weeks ago, I sat beside the two youngest grandchildren who were with us that day. At intermission I said to Mia (7) and Brady (6), “Now during this second half it is going to get very sad at one point, because we’re going to have the crucifixion of Jesus. But remember…” and before I could finish my sentence, Mia said with great vigor, “three days later he came alive again!” We know this. We see this with the eyes of history and eyes of faith. We know the significance of a three-day anything in the Bible!

 ***4****On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar.****5****Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boywill go over there and worship and come again to you.”*

 By the end of those three days, as Abraham pondered all that God had done, and all that God had promised, he must have become convinced that the outcome of his sacrifice would not be the end of Isaac. He said to the young men who had gone with them, *“I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.”* Both of us are coming back. We might look the same, but we will be different after we climb this mountain. This is how it is when we follow God into hard places where our faith is being tested, if we go not on our own strength, or by our own wisdom, or with our own agendas. When the time of trial is over, we may look the same, but we are different on the inside as God continues to build our character as only he can.

 ***6****And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together.****7****And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”****8****Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together.* ***9****When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.****10****Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.****11****But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”****12****He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.”****13****And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.****14****So Abraham called the name of that place, “The Lord will provide”;as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.”* And we all breathe a sigh of relief.

 Biblical, historical accounts like this are what cause some people to reject God as a loving, merciful, Heavenly Father who wants a relationship with them. What kind of a God asks this of a person? Gives a gift then threatens to snatch it away in the cruelest way possible? What kind of God? “Well I’ll tell you, no kind of God I want anything to do with!” This is the danger of just reading a story here, a book there, a verse here or a verse there without reading and knowing the whole story. This account of Abraham and Isaac happened. They had to go through it. We cannot imagine what they experienced in those three days. Abraham wasn’t giving himself a pep talk as they walked up that mountain. No pep talk was going to be peppy enough. Abraham’s confidence was not in himself, it was not in his own will or obedience. Abraham’s confidence was in God and what God would provide. He believed God’s promises even in the midst of the test of tests. In Hebrews 11:19 we read (from The Message), *“Abraham figured that if God wanted to, he could raise the dead. In a sense, that’s what happened when he received Isaac back, alive from off the altar.”* It was a type of resurrection on the 3rd day!

 I want you to notice with me that afterwards, the mountain did not become a monument to Abraham’s obedience. “This is the place Abraham received the gold medal of obedience!” No! The mountain became a monument to God’s provision – to what God provided! Here, God is revealed as *Jehovah Jireh* – the God who provides! This story is not recorded for us primarily to inspire us toward sacrificial acts of obedience. This account of the near-sacrifice of Isaac was not given to us to inspire us to sacrificial living before God. We are called to that – but that is not primarily what this story is about. If we make it about us, we are going to miss the Big Picture! This account was given to set before us, in a real, living-color, heart-wrenching way not the sacrifice of any man, but the sacrifice of God – what God was not only willing to sacrifice, but DID sacrifice to demonstrate his love for you and for me. *“For God demonstrates his love for us in this, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”* Romans 5:8

 Many of us go along accepting easily that we are loved by God, until something happens that seems to be completely at odds with love the way we’ve defined it. And so we think, “If God loves me, he would never have let this happen to me.” “If God loves me, he would never ask this of me.” “If God loves me, he would make everything work out the way I want it to…”. What is happening in our minds is this: We are making God’s story all about us. We are determining for ourselves what God’s love should look like. We’ve decided that we are the more reliable judge of what true love should look like, and if God does not express his love for us on our terms, we conclude that though God apparently loves everyone else (because their lives look perfect to us), God doesn’t love us. Where should we look to know if God really loves us? We should look not at the wind and waves around us, but we should look right into the face of Christ on the cross of Calvary.

 Isaac asked his father, *“Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”****8****Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.”* This is the question that was asked again and again throughout the centuries before Christ came. “Where is the lamb? When will he come? When will he show up to save us? Where is the lamb who will die for our sins once and for all?” The question was finally answered when John the Baptist saw Jesus walking toward him and said (John 1:29), *“Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”*

Look with me at other words written about Jesus 700 years before he was born from the prophet Isaiah 53:7-12. With all we have learned so far, and all we know as those blessed to live on this side of the crucifixion and resurrection, may there be a new understanding of these words, yes, but more than that, may there be a new level of gratitude in our hearts for the plan in place from before the beginning of time to bridge the gap created by our sin through the sacrifice of the beloved Son of God, our Savior, Jesus Christ:

“He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
    and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.
**8**By oppressionand judgment he was taken away.
    Yet who of his generation protested?
For he was cut off from the land of the living;

 for the transgression of my people he was punished.
**9**He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death,
though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

**10**Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer,
    and though the Lord makeshis life an offering for sin,
he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.
**11**After he has suffered, he will see the light of lifeand be satisfied;
by his knowledgemy righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.
**12**Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,

 and he will divide the spoils with the strong,
because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors.
For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

 After Abraham’s hand was stayed, the angel said to him, “*Now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.”*

 I picture Abraham standing at the foot of the cross with his eyes lifted as they once were to see the stars of the sky. I picture him lifting up his eyes to the one dying there for him, saying, “Now I know the reality of your love, seeing that you have not stayed your own hand. You have not withheld your Son, your only Son, from me and from all my descendants.” That includes you and me by our faith in Jesus Christ. Let’s sing together of the love of God for us:

*Hide Away in the Love of Jesus* by Steve & Vikki Cook

*Come,* [*weary*](https://www.definitions.net/definition/weary) *saints,* [*though*](https://www.definitions.net/definition/though) *tired and weak, Hide away in the love of Jesus*

*Your* [*strength*](https://www.definitions.net/definition/strength) *will* [*return*](https://www.definitions.net/definition/return) *by His* [*quiet*](https://www.definitions.net/definition/quiet) *streams, Hide away in the love of Jesus*

*Come,* [*wandering*](https://www.definitions.net/definition/wandering) *souls, and find your home, Hide away in the love of Jesus*

*He* [*offers*](https://www.definitions.net/definition/offers) *the rest that you* [*yearn*](https://www.definitions.net/definition/yearn) *to know, Hide away in the love of Jesus*

*Hear Him* [*calling*](https://www.definitions.net/definition/calling) *your name, See the* [*depths*](https://www.definitions.net/definition/depths) *of His love in the* [*wounds*](https://www.definitions.net/definition/wounds) *of His grace, Hide away*

*Come,* [*guilty*](https://www.definitions.net/definition/guilty) *ones* [*weighed*](https://www.definitions.net/definition/weighed) *down with sin, Hide away in the love of Jesus*

*The* [*freedom*](https://www.definitions.net/definition/freedom) *you long for is* [*found*](https://www.definitions.net/definition/found) *in Him, Hide away in the love of Jesus*

*Hear Him* [*calling*](https://www.definitions.net/definition/calling) *your name, See the* [*depths*](https://www.definitions.net/definition/depths) *of His love in the* [*wounds*](https://www.definitions.net/definition/wounds) *of His grace, Hide away*

*Come,* [*hopeless*](https://www.definitions.net/definition/hopeless) *hearts, do not despair, Hide away in the love of Jesus*

*For ten* [*thousand*](https://www.definitions.net/definition/thousand) *joys* [*await*](https://www.definitions.net/definition/await) *you there, Hide away in the love of Jesus*