

Hello again. You're stuck with me one more time. If you weren't here last week, we kind of took a hiatus from Luke and went to the Old Testament, went to Genesis to look at the story of Abraham. So that's where we're going to pick up again today. Now, Abraham's story is pretty long, and it's hard to cover in two weeks; so trying to hit like two of the biggest highlights, if you will, of Abraham. So, let me just invite you to have this kind of mindset before we pray and get started. A lot of times, when we have the worship, we think that's when we participate. We're participating in worship, and then now it's time for the talk; so we just kind of sit and—"You speak to me, and it better be good." That's kind of the deal, and I want to just break that and say this is worship too, what we're about to do. We're about to get into God's Word. I'm going to ask you to engage with me in God's Word. And let's jump into this story and open your heart to God and say, "God, speak to me." I really believe that today could be a stake in the ground, spiritual marker, life-changing moment. And not because I'm speaking at all. Because I'll just tell you right now, I kind of come with fear and trembling speaking about this passage we're going to look at, because it's almost impossible, because you can't learn what we're going to talk about just by listening to it. It really has to be learned by experience. You can't learn it by rote. You can't learn it by teaching it. You've got to really just kind of go through the crucible. You've got to learn it by experience. So, it's kind of impossible what we're about to do, but I want you to put yourself in the story; and I want you to go with me through this. Again, I think because of what we're going to look at, this could be life-changing, not because of me but because of this text.

So would you take a moment right now and bow your head and close your eyes and just take a moment and just silently pray and say, "God, prepare my heart. God, speak to me. Remove distractions. Speak to me exactly where I am on my journey." Would you just pray that for just one moment? I'm going to close us in a second.

"Father, we love You. We thank You, God, for Your Word. We thank You that Your Word always accomplishes its purpose and does not return to You void, Lord. And so we just pray, God, that we would just open our hearts and, God, prepare the soil of our hearts, God, for Your Word just to rain on us, God. And I pray that we would not try to conform, change your Word to us, but rather that we would conform to Your Word. Allow Your Word to have Your way in us, God. I pray for the person here that maybe doesn't know what it means, what it looks like to follow You, Jesus, God. Would You speak directly to us, to them? Lord, to us who do know You, Lord, would You speak directly, God, about what worship really looks like? We love You. In Christ's name we pray. Amen."

So here's where we've been in the story of Abraham. Now, go ahead and turn to Genesis 22 if you want, but as you're turning let me just tell you—we did Genesis 15 last week, but let's do a running start again. So in Genesis 12, Abraham receives this incredible promise from God. God says to him, "I will make you a great nation." The greatest promise He makes to him is that, "Through you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed," which ultimately is speaking of Jesus Christ Himself, that, "Through your descendants, but ultimately the descendant Jesus, salvation and the message of salvation of the gospel will go not just to the Israelites but to all the earth, to the Gentiles." What an amazing promise Abraham gets. So he's told to leave the land of his father, to leave the Ur of Chaldees. So, this is an incredible sacrifice that he has to make of letting go of his past. So he first has to sacrifice his past, let go of the idol of maybe comfort, of all the comfort, the possessions, the stuff he had in his home and to go into a strange land and be an alien. That was a huge test. So he first sacrifices his past. Then last week we looked at Genesis 15. Again, we're jumping a lot, but in Genesis 15, he sacrifices, if you will, his present. What I mean by that is he's in between what we called last week living

in the gap between the promise coming to us, being proclaimed to us, and the fulfillment of that promise. We are all living in that gap, and so in our present the idol is doubt, to doubt God that His promises are going to come about. We doubt Him. We think that maybe He's forgotten His promises. Abraham had to sacrifice that idol of doubt, if you will. He had to sacrifice his present and trust God, that God was there. We said it was an amazing story where he makes this sacrifice, if you remember, and then he has to fight off the vultures. It's not a "once and done" sacrifice. I hope you were here last week. If you weren't, we talked about persevering and maintaining and preserving the sacrifice. Then ultimately we said last week, something huge, that the reward, especially in the gap, is not even the fulfillment of the promise. The reward is His relationship, that we already have the reward and that's Him. We said last week that God came and brought the covenant, and He said, "I'm going to be God to you, and also I'll give you the land." What we do is we say, "What? The land?" We put all our hopes and everything, and we just grope for the land; and God is saying, "I'm your reward." So for us to come to that understanding that He's the reward—the relationship with Him is the reward. So, we've seen this all through Scripture. David says in the Psalms, "One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in His temple." Moses, in Exodus 33, when he leads the people out of the bondage of slavery, and then they build the golden calf; and God says to them, He says to Moses, "Take your people"—the first time He calls them "your people" and not "my people"—"take your people into the land which I have promised them." Remember the land and God? "Take them into the land, but I will not go in your midst." In other words, "You can have the land, but you're not going to have Me." Moses cries out and says, "If You don't go with us, don't take us into the land." In other words, "We don't want the land if we don't have You." Over and over again. So I'm hoping you're with me that the goal and the reward ultimately is being in His presence, is being with Him. That's going to be key in what we're going to go to.

So he sacrifices his present, and then in Genesis 21, the beginning of the promise is starting to be fulfilled in the birth of Isaac. So he finally has a son through Sarah, his own son and a son that is— think of 25 years of waiting to have a child, an heir. He finally has a son, and in that son, all of his hopes and dreams and all of the promises of God for the future are wrapped up in that son. Now we're going to look at Abraham has to sacrifice his past, present and in Genesis 22, he has to sacrifice his future. What an incredible act of worship to say, "God, You have all of my future. You have everything. I give it to you. My hands are off of it." So look with me in Genesis 22. We're going to just walk through this again. There's a whole lot. We're going to split this up into three parts: the call, the journey and the sacrifice. In all three sections there's a place where Abraham's going to say, "Here I am," to God. But I want you to see that the tone by which he says it and the style, the manner that he says, "Here I am," is completely different all three times, I believe. Let's look at the call first. Verse 1, "After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' 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.'" Wow. In one fell swoop—bam—in one verse, what an incredible call. But let's break this down really quickly. The first thing I want you to see—it says that after these things—God tested Abraham. Let's first get this concept in that God's not testing Abraham as if He doesn't know, "Is Abraham really my guy? Is Abraham going to come through? Does Abraham have what it takes?" It's not that God's testing Abraham for Himself. Really the tests come into our life more for us. It's like James says, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." So God is doing something through our test, and we've seen it if you've read Genesis all through the life of Genesis—Abraham is being tested and molded by the fire. I'm the man I am today because my father disowned me, because I had to walk away from one job and go into ministry. You're the person you are today because of the tests and the fires and the trials you went through. So the test is more God is developing Abraham. He tests Abraham, and He calls him by name—Abraham. Now we skipped this in Genesis 17—he has a name change, doesn't he? He first was Abram which means, "blessed father," and then Abraham means, "father of many nations." So his name declares really the promise of God that, "in you, that through you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed." So He calls him by the exact name which refers to God's promise for his future. Isn't that

interesting? He calls him by name. He says, "Abraham." So here's what I want you to capture. This is huge. Our calls are specific to us. God gives you a specific call. My sacrifice may not look like your sacrifice. We get into trouble when we start to look horizontally at other people and what are they sacrificing compared to what I'm sacrificing. If you know my story, my dad disowned me for being a Christian because I used to be a Muslim. I had to let go of my dad, but I only did it by God's strength. It had nothing to do with me. Praise God that my relationship's been restored with him. Now you may never have to go through that, but I may never have to lose my son, maybe. I may never have to lose my job, maybe. We get into trouble when we start comparing sacrifices. Our sacrifices may be different. Think of it this way. In John 21, I believe, Jesus is talking to Peter, and He tells Peter something amazing. He says, Peter, "...when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." The Scripture says it refers to the kind of death that Peter would go through, that Peter himself would die a sacrificial death on the cross upside down for his faith. When Peter hears that, he looks at John and goes, "What about him?" Do you know what Jesus says? "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me." Beware folks, when you start looking horizontally. This is between you and God. Listen, no one can crawl into the deep parts of your heart—you have got to go there with God. This is a personal call. You've got to—it's like the Psalmist said, "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" You've got to open up your heart and say, "God, look in. Where are the idols?"

So it's a personal call. Then he says to Him, "Here I am." The first "Here I am" I think is kind of a confident—he's received the promise of God in the previous chapter, and now he's in the presence, he's walking with God. In the presence of God is where again he found the reward, is where true, I believe, fulfillment and joy comes. He comes out and says, "Here I am." Now I want to contrast this with Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:8. When Adam and Eve—hear this—when they hear God walking through the garden, the Bible says that they hid themselves from His presence. That's what sin does to us. When we're trapped in a lifestyle of sin, it draws us away from the presence of God. We want to draw back from God, from the very thing that's our reward—His presence. We want to get away from it. Isn't that a shame? We miss out on God. So here he's walking with God. He cries out, and he says, "Here I am, Lord. Here I am." Worship begins with that affirmative response to God's call. By the way, faith begins with God's Word. Romans 10:17—"So then faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." When God speaks, we say, "Here I am." Now look what happens. Here's the call, verse 2. He said, "Take, go and offer." "He said, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love...'" Now it's interesting. You have a four-fold characterization of Isaac. "He said, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac'" —calls him by name—"whom you love..." Wow. It's almost like, "Okay God, I know who You're talking about." But He just is pressing down. "Take your son, your only son..." Now, I've got to park on, "your only son," for a second because this is huge. You've got to go back really quickly to Genesis 21, verse 12, with me. As you're turning there, let me say this. If you remember, when Isaac is born, Ishmael, who was the son that came from disobedience, that Abraham slept with Hagar—they had a son, Ishmael. Ishmael scoffs at Isaac. Sarah is upset by this and basically tells Abraham, "Get rid of Ishmael." Now Abraham is wrestling in his heart: should he let go of Ishmael, or should he hold on to him? Now certainly he loves his son, right? But I think there was something more at play here, and we see it in verse 12. Look at this, "But God said to Abraham, 'Be not displeased because of the boy or because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named.'" It's interesting that God seeks to comfort Abraham by saying, "Go ahead and let go of Ishmael because Abraham, in Isaac your seed shall be called. The promise is through Isaac." And I wonder if just maybe Abraham was wrestling with letting go of Ishmael because, "Hey, maybe I ought to hold him for a backup plan. What if Isaac doesn't turn out to be really the promise?" And maybe again Abraham is wrestling with this idol of comfort, of holding on. He's trying to hold on to backup plans and God's saying, "No, let go of him." In Genesis 15 last week we said he thought Eleazar, his servant, was probably going to be the heir. He propped him up as the heir for God, and God said, "No, he's not your heir. Isaac—I'm going to give you a son." Now He's saying, "Get rid of Ishmael." So catch this. Abraham has gotten rid of all backup plans, all reserves. All replacements are gone, and he has

one son. Now God turns around and says, "Give me your only son." So listen. God desires from you and from me that indispensable thing in your heart, the one thing that you cannot replace if you let go—your one and only. That is true worship. When you say to God, "This one thing I have that's irreplaceable, indispensable, I offer to You because You are infinitely more valuable to me than this"—that's worship. That's what God wants from us. You see, the value of the offer we give God goes up as the number of replacements, if you will, goes down. Have you ever gotten a gift from someone—like someone says, "Hey, here you go"—gives you a gift—I've done this before—where they hand me something—and I feel stupid afterwards because at first, I'm like, "Oh, thank you so much. That is so cool," and then they immediately go, "Oh, no worries. I've got a hundred of them." Right when they say that, I'm still grateful, but I feel kind of stupid for being so excited about it. It kind of cheapens it a little bit, because he's got a hundred of them. But when someone offers me something that they only have one of, the value of that... That's what God did for us. John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." That's the value. That's what God wants from you—your one and only.

Then it says, "your son, your only son, whom you love." Now this is pretty interesting. God knows what we love in our hearts. God knows what we sacrifice for. You sacrifice for whatever you love, and God looks into your heart. He knows who you love. Here's the thing that we've got to grab here. We don't choose what our sacrifices are. We don't come to God and say, "God, this will be my sacrifice." No, God looks and says, "That's your sacrifice—your one and only son, whom you love." God chooses our sacrifices. You see, I'm really good at offering up my own sacrifices to God. I'll say to God, "God, come on, man. I went to the Middle East for You. I suffered for You. The facilities were bad." In January, you can pray for me—I'm going to India. "God, I went all over the world for you or something." I'll prop up all these sacrifices. And let me tell you, you can be so busy doing sacrifices and serving God all you want and still at the same time have an Empire-State-Building-sized idol on your heart. You can. All those sacrifices you make are just a smoke screen, and God sees past all of that; and He sees that big, honking idol in your heart. He's saying, "I want that thing you love, your one and only. I want that." God gets ticked off. Jesus got ticked off—the Pharisees were really good at that, weren't they? They did all kinds of sacrifices for God. They did all kinds of works for God. They had this whole tradition, this whole ritualistic religion set up that they were meeting and they were doing. And God says about them—Jesus says, "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me." God wants the thing that's in your heart that you love.

So He says, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah..." Now this is interesting. The name Moriah talks of vision, that in the hill of the Lord, the mountain of the Lord, the Lord shall be seen. Then he's going to call the mountain that he sees the Lord, "The- LORD-Will-Provide." That word, "Provide," and, "seen," here, are related. So, we get a taste of the salvation that's going to come right here. Ultimately the goal, the destination is the top of the mountain where the Lord shall be seen. Now keep that in mind as we keep going, because ultimately again the presence of God is the reward. What's interesting is in 2 Chronicles 3, we learn that Moriah is where Solomon built his temple. So today if you go to Jerusalem, if you go to the Temple Mount, the Temple's not there anymore. Now is this thing called the Dome of the Rock, which the Muslims have built. I've been there. I've walked inside. There's a big, giant rock where they claim—catch this, if you read the Quran—that Abraham offered up Ishmael. Now, I don't want to bash Islam today. I have a lot of Muslim friends. I love them. I speak to them. I respect them, but I've got to tell you I have a lot of problem with this for a couple of reasons. First of all, how are we going to believe one man in a cave, Muhammad, who goes against all kinds of historical evidence and tradition, Judeo-Christian tradition, that says that Isaac was the one offered up? Then one man says, "No, it was Ishmael," and we're going to with him? That's the first one but put that aside. The second one is this. Now hear this. This story makes absolutely no sense apart from Christ. If you don't have Christ, if it doesn't point to Christ, this story is meaningless. It makes no sense in the model of Islam, that you still have to earn your salvation by your works. Keep that in mind. We're going to keep going. So he gets this call, and He tells him to go and offer. Now I'm going to say a word on that real quick. I said to you that we all have a specific call; now here's the deal. You may never have to let go of your father, as I said, of your son, of your job, but here's where we

all fall under the same umbrella. Hear this—the word “offer.” That’s where we all have the same calling. We all are called to offer to God, our very best, our all, our one and only thing. Whether or not He gives it back to us is another story. But all of us are called to that. Does that make sense? All of us are called to offer to God as an act of worship. So, he gets this call and then that night—I can imagine—because verse 3 starts off that in the next morning—he wakes up and he starts off. So can you imagine that night? Let’s transition between Act 1 and Act 2 real quick. The call and that night—can you imagine Abraham laying under the stars? Can you imagine the scene that night under the stars looking at, really, the promise? “As many as the stars are, so will your descendants be.” Can you imagine the anguish? Talk about a dark night of the soul. An anguish that he had thinking about what he was about to do? It reminds me of Jesus Christ Himself. In the garden of Gethsemane before He went to the cross—He’s in the garden praying, and the Scripture tells us that He was in such turmoil and anguish that literally blood was dripping down His face. So listen, if you are going through anguish because of what God’s calling you to let go of, you’re in good company. They went through that dark night of wrestling with God.

Then the morning comes. Let’s go to the journey. Now let’s read this. Verse 3. “So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, ‘Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.’ 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 a knife. So they went both of them together.” Now that’s the journey. Let’s real quickly talk about this. The first thing that I want you to see is that so much is written about the journey, by the way, much more detail than really the call or the sacrifice. The journey. Why does God go into the detail, the minutia of...I mean, he saddles his donkey, then he cuts the wood. Do we really need to know all this? He calls the sons. Is all of this really important for us to know? I think it’s important that God takes time to write in His Scripture the details. Because, listen, here’s the truth. Worship is not just on top of the mountain when we offer the sacrifice. Worship is the journey, too. Worship is obedience to God, day in, day out, through the routine of life—you worship God. So hear this: Abraham was worshiping God when he saddled his donkey. He was being obedient to the call at that moment. When he was cutting the wood, he was being obedient to God, and he was worshiping God. When he called the men, when he was walking with his son, he was worshiping God. Obedience is worship—not just sacrifice. We don’t worship God only on Sunday morning or on Saturday night or on Sunday night. We worship God on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday—through the day in, day out routine in obedience to God. Saul took a sacrifice. He did it himself. He didn’t wait on Samuel like he should have. When Samuel came on the scene in 1 Samuel, he told Saul, “Saul, to obey is better than sacrifice”—meaning God would rather see obedience in your life. You see, Abraham here does the sacrifice, but he also does obedience. The point is this: not to throw out sacrifice but to say sacrifice without the obedience is incomplete. Sacrifice without the heart is incomplete. God wants to see it in your life, not just on Sunday or Saturday in singing to Him in worship. He wants to see it in obedience. Turn to Micah 6:6. It so points right to Isaac. I want to read this to you. “With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” That points right to Isaac. Does God just want that sacrifice? Look at this in verse 8: “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” Ultimately what God is trying to train Abraham to, is obedience, that, “When I speak, you move.” That’s worshiping God.

I love it in verse 3 of Genesis 22, it says, “So Abraham rose early in the morning...” By the way, in the previous chapter when God told Abraham to go ahead and let go of Ishmael, that we read in verse 14 of Genesis 21, the same thing: “So Abraham rose early in the morning...” Same thing. I love that about Abraham. God speaks—he doesn’t wait. He wakes up the next morning early and gets moving. God wants that kind of obedience from us. I think of Philip in Acts 8, when

God tells him to overtake this chariot where a man is reading from Isaiah, ultimately to witness to him. He says, "Go overtake this chariot," and the Scripture in Acts 8 says, "So Philip ran to him..." I love that. Philip didn't mosey over. Philip didn't send someone else. He didn't walk over. Philip ran to him. That kind of obedience God wants. We worship that way. One time—this may speak to you—one time I got an incredible offer to preach at this big church that was a historical church. It was just one of those incredible, nice opportunities. Well, it just so happened that I also had something else on my calendar on that same day. I was at lunch with this pastor. He asked me, "Do you want to preach this Sunday?" I'm like, "Are you kidding me?" The other thing that I had was that I was speaking in Duluth, Georgia, to a group of college students, about 20 of them, poolside. Duluth, Georgia, 20 college students—this big, giant church—an amazing opportunity. Now what I didn't tell you is earlier that morning, I was having a quiet time, and God was speaking to me through the Proverbs about integrity. He said, "Integrity...integrity...integrity, Afshin. I want to see integrity in your life." So I prayed, "God, I want integrity to be the hallmark of my life." Here's the test. So here I have this option, and I'm like, "Wow." I call my friend in Georgia because he's a buddy of mine, and he'd give me a bunch of dates. I'm like, "Hey, do you still have those other dates available?" He's like, "Yeah, man, it doesn't matter. Do you want to switch?" So we go through all those other dates, and it just so happens that all the other dates now are not working for me. So now I just say, "Don't worry. I'll be there." He's like, "No, no, what is it?" He drags it out of me, and I tell him where I got the offer to preach. He's like, "Bro, go preach there. You're not coming to my little Bible study. Go preach there. You don't even have to pray about it. I'm telling you—go preach there." He was totally okay with it, but God was saying to me, "Afshin, integrity...integrity...integrity." So I call the office of the pastor. The secretary answers, and I'm like, "I can't do it. I got a prior engagement." To add salt to the wound, she's like, "Man, he never gives up his pulpit." I'm like, "Thanks. Thanks a lot for that one." So right then—and this is how God does it—right then she goes, "Oh, wait, hold on,"—she puts me on hold because the pastor was walking through the office. The pastor goes, "Hey, have you heard back from Afshin?" She's like, "Oh, actually, he's on the phone, and he can't do it." He goes, "Oh, that's great because actually I got another date that works better." So she gets on the phone with me and asks me the date, and like, "Yes!"—it works on my calendar. Let me tell you, I have never been more excited to speak to 20 college students, poolside. Like, "I'm supposed to be here for some reason." But here's the deal. The point of that whole story is this. He would have been totally fine with that. I could have preached that first Sunday and been okay. But listen—I would have moved a little further away from, "When God speaks, I move. I'm obedient." That's not worth giving up for any opportunity.

God wants obedience from us. David took the ark into the city, and there was a prescribed way to take the ark on the acacia poles with the Levites carrying it. Do you know what David does? He throws it on a cart. He starts weeble-wobbling this ark into the city. It starts to tip over. A man there reaches up to grab the ark. As soon as he touches the ark, God strikes him dead. That's how serious God is with obedience. He wants to see it in your life. So David goes back, and he sees how God told him to do it; and he walks in obedience. It's not just this legalistic thing because listen—after he takes the six steps, then David is free to sing and dance and worship God and make a fool of himself if you know the story. You know why? Because obedience leads to freedom every time. Disobedience leads to bondage. Worship is obedience day in, day out. So the journey is important.

Let's keep going. He lays the wood on his son. Don't let that slip you how important that is as Jesus takes His cross up the hill—the journey to the sacrifice. Ultimately Simon grabs the cross, carries it up for the sacrifice. So then verse 7—wow—Isaac breaks the silence—says to Abraham his father, "My father!" Here's the second "Here I am." He says, "Here am I, my son." Now this "Here I am" is completely different than the first. The first one—"Here I am"—confident before God—"Let's go."—this one is probably a cringing—he probably knows what his son is thinking. "Here am I, my son." His son asks him a question. He says to him, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" What a great question. "I see the fire. I see the wood—this doesn't make sense. I don't see a burnt offering." Let me say this real quickly. That exactly is the message of the gospel. Hear this. It doesn't make sense. In fact, 1 Corinthians tells us that the message of the cross is foolishness to the world. "The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing,

but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." 1 Corinthians says. It doesn't make sense to the world. In fact, it goes on and says, the Jews, they want a sign. Jesus said, "The only sign I'm going to give you is the sign of Jonah. Just as Jonah went into the belly of the whale three days, I'm going to go into the belly of the earth three days." They were looking for a sign. The Greeks were looking for wisdom. Like Acts 17, when Paul goes into Athens, they're reasoning. They're looking for wisdom. Do you know what he says? The cross, the message of the gospel, is a stumbling block to the Jews because they're thinking the Messiah's going to be an earthly ruler that's going to set up an earthly kingdom, and it makes no sense for the Messiah to die. It's foolishness to the Greeks, to the world. Foolishness. Why would God sacrifice His own Son for us? It doesn't make sense. Now listen. Just because it doesn't make sense doesn't mean it's not from God. In fact, that's where God really is. God takes the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. So that cross divides everyone in this room. You are either on the group that's perishing today or in the group that's got salvation today because of that cross.

Let me say this real quickly. When I left Houston to go into ministry, I had \$4 in my pocket, didn't have a job. I had the 1st semester's tuition paid for by my church. My dad was going to pay for my entire medical school. I was going to take over his practice. Talk about foolishness. My dad's friends called me and said, "You're an idiot. What are you letting go of?" It didn't make sense to them. But whoever said it has to make sense to the world? God calls you. You step out. Listen to his answer here, verse 8. "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." Now I love this. Really quickly. This is faith, that you take a step of faith before seeing the provision. That's what he says. "I'm going to take this step, and I know God's going to provide." He says it in confidence to the men that, "We're going to come back to you, not just me. We will come back to you." So he takes that step of obedience before the provision. We see this all throughout Scripture. The Israelites, when they were in the wilderness—God gave them manna, bread from the sky, just sufficient for that day, didn't He? Why? Because He's training the people that, "You take the next day and you take the step, and you go in anticipation that I will provide." That's faith. Just for the day. Jesus Himself, in Luke 10— He sends out the 70 two by two. He sends them out, and He tells them, "Don't take a knapsack. Don't take money bag. You just go. I'm going to provide. I'll meet you there." That's what God does. So sacrifice sometimes—the call of worship is us taking that step without even seeing it. It's like Isaiah 30:21 that says, "And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left." So you take the step. God speaks. "I'm there with you."

Now, so there's the call, there's the journey, and finally we get to the sacrifice. Look at this. Verse 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. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son." I love this whole idea of worship. Go back to verse 5 when he says, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship." Let's camp on this. Worship is what's about to happen on this mountain. It's not just obedience; it's the sacrifice too. There were two worshipers that day. First, there was Abraham. Abraham is again offering up to God his one and only, his precious son, all of his future, all of his hopes and dreams—the one indispensable thing he's giving to God. I've already said this. That is true worship. When you say to God, "You are infinitely more valuable than everything in my life, this most important thing." Like last week we said, it's like the man and the wife at the wedding altar, when the man tells the wife, "I do"—in that same moment, he's telling all the other girls in the world, "I don't." He's saying, "I forsake all of them. I burn all the ships. I'm letting go of everyone else because you're more valuable to me. I want to be with you." In the same way, that's how we worship God. "To be with You in Your presence is more valuable than any of these things." That's worship. The second worshiper that day is Isaac. Isaac himself. He's not a little baby infant. He was old enough to carry wood, wasn't he? He was old enough to reason, to understand—"Hey, where's the sacrifice?" Some commentators say he was probably 9-10 years old. Some say he was a teenager. Either way, understand that Isaac knew what was happening as he was being bound up, and he offered his very life on that altar, didn't he? He laid himself down. That's Romans 12:1. "I appeal to you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." You worship God when you lay your life down, and it's this

incredible transaction that happens at the cross. Jesus put it this way: "If you want to hold your life, you're going to lose it." Matthew 16:25. "But if you lose your life for My sake, you will find it." You lose your life, and you find life.

Now here's what I want you to see. This is the beautiful part. Let's run to the end here. At the end when he's on the mountain, then, verse 11: "But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' And he said, 'Here am I.'" Now that's a whole different tone. The first one was a confident, "Here I am. What do You have for me, God?" The second one was a cringing, "Here I am, my son." This one is a, "Whew!" This one is a joyous, exhilarating, jubilant, "Here I am, God." I want you to see it this way. Literally, he's saying, "Here I am," in the presence of God. The Lord will be seen on top of that mountain where He provides. Listen. Why? At that moment, Abraham had lost every idol of his heart. He had let go of all of them. A.W. Tozer in his book, which you've got to read, *The Pursuit of God*—chapter two will rock your face off. It's called, "The Blessedness of Possessing Nothing." Every time I read it, I'm like, "Oh my gosh. I'm not a Christian." I'm just kidding—I don't do that. "The Blessedness of Possessing Nothing." Do you know what he says? He talks about this story. He says at in the moment Abraham offered up Isaac, he said at that moment, he possessed nothing. He says you may say, "Hey, wait a minute. He got his son back. Wait a minute. He still had all the cattle, all the livestock, his wife. He had all that still." He said this. He has a lot of stuff, but he doesn't possess anything. At that moment, his hands were off of everything in his life—God possessed them. Hear this. That's where the presence of the Lord is. Why? Psalm 24: "Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false." Jesus says this: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Pure in heart—no idols, completely surrendered to Christ— that's where God is found. You see God. You're in His presence. You have that reward. He says, "Here I am." What a beautiful picture on top of that mountain. That's what it's going to take to get there. It's going to take that kind of sacrifice. But look at me here. The message is, it's worth it.

So we've got to go to the beautiful ending here. We can't close without this. Here's the ending. A sacrifice still happens, doesn't it? Look in verse 13. "And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns." As we go into Thanksgiving weekend, Aggies know that salvation comes by the Horns. Sorry. That's horrible, I know. "And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son." Now this is the awesome ending. Jesus said it this way. In John 8, Jesus said this. Don't miss this. Jesus comes. Bunch of Jews. He looks at them, and He says this: "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see My day. He saw it and was glad." John 8. He didn't say, "Your father Abraham longed to see My day, and that was it." He said, "He saw it, and he was glad." Where did he see it? Here in Genesis 22. Abraham saw the Lord. In the mountain, the Lord shall be seen. The Lord will provide. He saw the ram. He saw the picture of Jesus Christ. Again I say to you, the story is meaningless apart from Christ. So hear me here. This is where Jesus is proclaimed louder, I believe, than anything else in the Old Testament right here. This sacrifice.

Let me take you to a story of a man named Barabbas. Barabbas was condemned to die. He led an insurrection against the Roman Empire. He was a thief. He was condemned to die. You know the story. Jesus—they want to kill Him. They want to crucify Him. They bring Him to Pontius Pilate. They say, "Crucify him." Pontius Pilate—the custom was he could release one prisoner before Passover, and so he brings out Jesus. He brings out Barabbas, and he says to the people, "Who do you want me to release to you, Jesus or Barabbas?" They shout out, "Barabbas." So he releases Barabbas. "What do you want me to do with Jesus who is called the Christ?" They shout out, "Crucify him!" That story has been debated. We saw when "The Passion" came out people hotly debated, "Is this anti-Semitic? Does this mean that the Jews killed Jesus? Or did the Romans kill Jesus?" We all want to point to other people—let me tell you something—all of us need to point to ourselves and see ourselves in the person of Barabbas. Listen. Barabbas was condemned to die. There is nothing he could have done to wriggle himself out of his predicament. He couldn't say, "Wait a minute. Let

me do some good things now. Let me try to help some people. Let me give some money. Let me try to do some good things and get out of this." He was condemned to die. Now look here. If there was no Jesus Christ that day on the scene, if there was no substitutionary sacrifice, you can be sure that Barabbas would have been nailed to a cross between two thieves. The only reason Barabbas is set free is because of a substitutionary sacrifice—Jesus Christ Himself. The only reason Isaac is restored to his father is because there's a ram caught in the thicket by its horns. 2 Corinthians says that God was reconciling the world to Himself through Jesus Christ, not imputing their trespasses to them. So you are reconciled to the Father only because of that cross, because of the sacrifice. So today if you have not repented and turned to Jesus Christ, accepted His work on the cross as payment for your sins—hear this—you still stand in judgment. John 3:35-36 say it this way: "The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him." You don't have the Son today—you still have the wrath of God on you. The only way for you to be set free is through that sacrifice, Jesus Christ. The greatest act of worship you can make today is to come to Him and say, "Jesus, I need You. I can't do this. I offer myself. You are more valuable than everything in my life. I've tried doing it myself. I lay myself down. I need You." Let me tell you something. That's where the Lord will be found.

I want you to bow your heads with me and close your eyes. I want you to just take a moment and respond to God's Word before we go. If you're here today, and you don't know Jesus as your Lord and Savior—I mean, never been a time when you've repented and turned to Him—you don't have to go through a bunch of hoops and loops—there's got to be a day Jesus calls a day of spiritual birth. "Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." If you're here today and there's never been a time where you cried out to God; and you offered yourself to Him and said, "I need You"—if you've never lost your life in order to find it—all you have to do in your heart, confess in your heart that you're a sinner. You're saved by grace through faith, through faith accept what He did on the cross. So why not right now just call out to Him? Just pray, "Jesus, I'm a sinner. I'm separated from You. I need You. Thank You for dying on the cross to pay for my sins. Come into my life. Cleanse me of my sins, and I offer my life to You, to follow You." If you're here, and you know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, if there's that one and only, indispensable thing, right now as an act of worship, would you offer it to God? Say, "God, it's Yours. You are infinitely more valuable than everything in my life. I worship You." Say to God, "God, I'm going to worship You through my obedience to show You Your worth by the way I live."

"We love You. Jesus, we thank You for dying on the cross for us. Forgive us for holding back our lives. And God, I pray that we would be surrendered on top of that mountain and let You have every part of us. For Your glory and in Your name we pray. Amen."