**Genesis 22:1-19 | Hebrews 11**

One month today it will be Christmas Eve, I don’t know whether you’re feeling Christmassy yet but lots of Christmas markets have always begun, Christmas lights are already on in Oxford have been for a few weeks. And there’s lots of Christmas films already being shown on TV. I was asking people the other day what their favourite Christmas film was and lots of people said Love Actually. Now I don’t know what you think about Love Actually, it’s not my favourite but I do like the opening scene. If you’re not familiar with it, it’s a series of clips from people getting reunited with their loved ones at the Heathrow airport arrivals gate. Then, you have Hugh grant’s voiceover saying:

“Whenever I’m gloomy with the state of the world, I think about the arrivals gate at Heathrow airport”

Then to build his case that *love actually is all around,* he proceeds with a list of relationships that he imagines getting reunited:

“fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, husbands and wives, boyfriends, girlfriends”

I don’t know whether there is a hierarchy here but it’s very interesting that the relationship he mentions first is “fathers and sons”.

Well, believe it or not, this *does* have something in common with the passage today. Because in the passage that we’ve just read we get the first mention of love in the whole Bible, and it comes in verse 2 “take your son, your only son, whom you love”

Hopefully by the end we’re going to see that it’s both an amazing account of faith, and a story that points forward wonderfully to the Lord Jesus. [pray]

I don’t know how much you know about Abraham, but the New Testament talks about him quite a lot (Hebrews says he was a man of faith, in James’ letter he’s called a friend of God, the Apostle Paul in his letters certainly talks a lot about Abraham’s faith and the promise that God made to him as well). You might know already the event in this passage here and remember it as being pretty shocking. I remember first reading it as a Christian and getting very uncomfortable reading it, then breathing a sigh of relief when I got to verse 12 “Do not lay a hand on the boy”. But it still left me confused as to why Abraham had to do this, or why he had to face this test. That’s what verse 1 says – God tested Abraham. He’s got to sacrifice his only son Isaac (verse 2) and go to the region of Moriah which is in Jerusalem.

Now, there are two things that are shocking about this test:

1. The first is the obvious one: why is God commanding Abraham to sacrifice his child? A lot of people that have done some thinking on this passage think that Isaac is not as young as maybe people have in mind, he’s a bit older, but still why is this taking place? Doesn’t this go against God’s character? Didn’t God call Abraham *out* of a pagan land full of people who would have done child sacrifice all the time, along with all the nations surrounding them?
2. The second thing that is shocking is that it goes against God’s promise. To recap, God had made a promise to Abraham that he would be a father of many nations, and that the seed would come through Isaac. Flick over the page to Genesis 21:12 (in Isaac your seed shall be called). Abraham does have another son, Ishmael, but he said it will come through Isaac, not Ishmael. But if Isaac is dead, he can’t have any children so how is God going to fulfil his promise? Remember, Abraham had struggled with infertility for so long, he’s about 100 years old. It’s been such a long process to get to this stage of having a child, so why now would it all be thrown away?

Point 1 -Unwavering obedience/faith

What’s maybe also shocking to us is that He obeys this command from God. Just like that, it says in verse 3, Abraham got up, he got the wood personally, knows what to do and he does it, making the journey down to Moriah. Hopefully we’ll see that this isn’t madness but an example of unwavering trust in God.

One example of this is verse 5.

“We will come back”. He believed somehow that they both would return.

Says in verse 8, “God will provide himself the lamb” - didn’t quite know how its going to work, but he trusts God.

This isn’t to say that he knew it was a test. Hebrew 11:17-18, the second passage that we read, gives us a clue when it says “Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead”. This makes sense from what’s happened so far, Abraham knows God and knows that he’s already worked a miracle with Isaac being born.

So there’s a history, this sacrifice doesn’t come from a random voice in the wilderness, it comes from a personal God that has revealed himself to Abraham and done wonderful things in his life already.

So I think there’s a challenge here for us too – God has revealed himself to us in Jesus and in all of Scripture – arguably we have way more reason to trust God than Abraham, but do we? This is a unique moment in biblical history, God is not going to command us to sacrifice any of our children, if we have them, but do we trust his character to “when all seems hopeless”. You might think - Is God really going to rule the nations when it seems like they wars will never cease? Well - bible tells us they are like a drop in a bucket. Am I really saved if… ?

Well the bible says, “If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” So there’s lots for us to learn here from Abraham’s example.

Point 2 – See the prophetic picture

The second thing I want to draw our attention to is what this event is pointing to, what it’s foreshadowing. Now you might have rightly already drawn the connection to the crucifixion, where God the Father also sacrifices his son. There’s a number of reasons to think that, that I’d love to point out.

Firstly, I think it’s very telling that Isaac isn’t reluctant. We’ve established he’s not a baby and verse 6 actually says– “he Himself carried the fire and the knife” He’s carrying the instrument that’s going to be killed on, obedient to his father. Similar perhaps to the Lord Jesus carrying his cross.

We know from other parts of the bible that this was a mountain in Jerusalem, also where Jesus was crucified.

We also know it’s a 3-day, journey – verse 4 “On the third day, he got up and saw the place”. Why is that significant? Well, when God commanded Abraham to do this, Isaac was essentially pronounced dead. Yet on the third day, he’s brought back. That’s what Hebrews 11 says “a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death”. And of course, similarly, after 3 days, Jesus rose from the grave.

Finally, the way that Isaac is delivered is interesting: there is a substitute for the sacrifice.

In verse 13, we see there’s a ram that Abraham can sacrifice instead. So, substitution and salvation is also a part of this narrative. And notice this is all framed through the lens of provision.

That’s what verse 14 is about isn’t it: “On the mountain of the Lord, it will be provided”

See Abraham was a prophet. I think in this event, he also foresaw a day when God the Father would provide a perfect sacrifice, God the Son, on a mountain in Jerusalem, for the sins of a rebellious world.

“God Himself will provide the lamb” verse 8 tells us.

What does John the Baptist say when he sees Jesus? “Behold, the lamb of God, who comes to take away the sin of the world”

Going back to this chapter, what’s the result of Abraham passing this test? It’s God praising Abraham and reaffirming his promise to make his descendants as many as stars in the sky. 17-18

Why? God says in Verse 16 : it’s because “you have not withheld your only son”. In this act of obedience, Abraham shows the ultimate gesture of love, and commitment by giving his son.

That’s significant isn’t it. What is the ultimate marker of love and commitment? A Father giving his son.

That’s just like John 3:16 “*For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*.”

This beautiful prophetic picture points forward to the Cross of Christ and the resurrection, events that would ultimately fulfil the promise to Abraham to make him a Father of many nations.

So, let’s trust not just God’s promises, but trust the God who gave them and let’s see and the prophetic picture that this passage points to.