



**Jonesboro Heights Baptist Church**  
Sanford, North Carolina

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The Lord's Day  
June 28, 2009

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**“The LORD Will Provide”**  
**Genesis 22:1-19; Hebrews 11:17-19**

As *unreasonable* as it had been, when God had called him to leave his father's house and his kin and country, to go to a land God would show him, he had obeyed.

As *unlikely* as it had seemed, he had believed God when he told him that the land of Canaan was his and would one day belong to and be inhabited by his descendants, who would be as countless as the stars in the sky and as innumerable as the sand on the seashore.

As *unbelievable* as it had been, he had taken God at his word when he promised him an heir in his old age. He and his wife Sarah waited and waited for years—about 25 years, in fact. And the wait started when he was 75 and she was 65! His faith may have wavered at times, and sometimes he and Sarah took things into their own hands, only to make a mess of things. And yet when it was all said and done, he believed God's promise and saw its fulfillment when he was 100 and Sarah was 90, and Isaac was born to them.

God had reckoned his faith to him as righteousness, and it seemed like everything was coming together for Abraham, the “Friend of God” and “Father of the Faithful.”

But what God asked for next must have seemed to him beyond any reason, beyond any likelihood, and beyond all belief!

***A troubling command***

It had been one thing—a huge thing, to be sure—to leave his father's house and set out on a journey when he didn't know the destination. “I'll tell you when you get there,” God had told him. But Abraham had believed him, taking him at his word, and obeyed.

With no logical reason whatsoever to base it on, he had taken God at his word again—first about his promise to give the land of Canaan to him and his descendants, then when he had no descendants, about his promise to give him a son.

Now God was commanding Abraham to take this son he had given him—the one he had told Abraham he was going to fulfill his promises through—and go to a mountain he would tell him about, and offer him there as a burnt offering to God.

Now I have to admit that for many of us, this is one of the most troubling passages in the Bible. How in the world could God ask Abraham to sacrifice his son as a burnt offering? That's what the pagans thought their gods wanted them to do. Wasn't the LORD supposed to be different from them?

Biblical interpreters and theologians and preachers have wrestled with this text through the centuries. And when we read it from our twenty-first century perspective, we shudder at the thought that God would even ask for such a sacrifice, much less command it!

And yet, that's what the text tells us. It doesn't try to justify God or explain why he gave such a command, except to say that he was testing Abraham.

So maybe we need to approach the text on its own terms, from its own ancient perspective, rather than trying to impose our twenty-first century sensibilities. Because when we do that, we hear an amazing story of *obedience* . . .

### ***An amazing story***

So laying our contemporary ethical concerns about the story aside, and looking at it through the lens of ancient faith, what do we see?

We see God commanding Abraham to offer to him what is next to his wife Sarah, most dear to him—his son. And in offering *their* son, can you imagine what the effect would be on Sarah? It was as though he would be offering her too! And in a very real sense, he would be offering himself as well, because his heart was bound up in this boy, this son of his old age, this son God had promised them, that they had waited so long for, and that would be the way God would fulfill those promises he had made to Abraham.

But now God commanded this sacrifice.

Can you imagine what must have been going through Abraham's mind? Certainly God wouldn't require child sacrifice! His command was totally illogical; if Isaac was the child of promise, then how could God fulfill the promise he had given Abraham?

I'm sure that you and I would have thought of this command from a thousand different angles, all with the hope of concluding that we were mistaken about God's command, that somehow we had misheard or misunderstood God about the whole thing.

Maybe one of the most incredible things about the story is that nothing is said about Abraham's struggle. We can't imagine that there wasn't one, but the text simply tells us that he obeyed what God told him to do.

**Early the next morning, Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood, he set out for the place God had told him about . . . .  
(Genesis 22:3).<sup>1</sup>**

The text just says he did what God told him to do. Incredible!

Now there's no way we can know what was in Abraham's mind at this point. Many have speculated that deep in his heart, he believed that God wouldn't let him go through with it, that he knew it was a test.

But if he knew God wouldn't let him go through with it, then why did he take everything he needed? Why did he prepare an altar? Why did he bind Isaac and put him on that altar? And why did he take the knife in his hand and raise it to slay his son?

Can you imagine what that must have been like for Isaac? Can you imagine what it must have been like for Abraham when on the way up the mountain Isaac asked him, "Father . . . , the fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" (12:7). Can you

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations in this sermon are taken from the *New International Version*.

imagine what it was like for Abraham as his son looked in confusion and bewilderment as Abraham prepared him for the sacrifice?

When Isaac asked Abraham about the lamb for the sacrifice, Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son” (12:8).

Some might take that to mean that Abraham thought God wouldn’t let him go through with it. His statement to his servants that he and the boy would go worship and then return to them (22:5) seems to support that view.

But the writer of the book of Hebrews takes a different approach. In 11:17-19, he says that in his willingness to obey and his going through with it until the angel of the LORD stopped him just before he slew Isaac, Abraham did in fact offer him as a sacrifice. He had earlier embraced God’s promises, and was willing to do this even though he knew that God had said he would fulfill these promises through Isaac. So the writer of Hebrews draws the conclusion that “Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death” (Hebrews 11:19, TNIV). In other words, Abraham was willing to obey God, because he believed God would do what he said he would do, even if it meant bringing Isaac back from death!

No wonder he named that mountain “The LORD Will Provide” (Genesis 22:14)!

You see, looking at this story on its own terms, what it all boils down to is simply this: *Abraham was willing to offer Isaac to God because he believed the LORD would provide.*

### ***The continuing story***

This story is true for more than just Abraham, you know.

It challenges us and reminds us that *God calls us to a simple, deep, abiding trust*—the kind of trust that we’re willing to give up *everything* to him and trust him with everything we are and have, to relinquish control to him, to obey him in love, not because we have to, but because we want to.

It’s the kind of trust that believes God even when it seems impossible to believe him, even when all the evidence *seems* to say otherwise.

Do you remember the “Mr. McBevee” episode of *The Andy Griffith Show*? Opie has met Mr. McBevee, a telephone line construction worker, out in the woods. Opie has described him to Andy and Barney as walking in the trees, wearing a shiny silver hat, making smoke come out of his ears, and jingling when he walks because he has twelve extra hands on his belt. Andy and Barney of course think he is imaginary, and when Mr. McBevee gives Opie a hatchet and then a quarter, Andy decides it’s time to bring Opie back to reality. He insists that Opie admit that Mr. McBevee is just make-believe. But Opie can’t, because he knows that’s not true. Opie looks at Andy and says, “Don’t you believe me, Pa?” Andy tells him he does, then goes downstairs where Aunt Bee and Barney are waiting. He tells them he didn’t punish him, and then Barney asks, “Well, what did you tell him?” Andy says, “I told him I believe him.” Barney says, “But Andy, you don’t believe in Mr. McBevee, do you?” And Andy replies, “No, but I do believe in Opie.”

That’s the kind of faith God wants. To believe him even when we don’t see how, even when it doesn’t make sense.

Because you see, *as we trust him—yielding to and depending on him completely—he will provide all we need to do his will!*

He has provided for us in so many ways—in creation, in our salvation through the sacrifice

and resurrection of *his* only Son, in our daily walk with him.

And because he has, we can be confident that he will provide everything we need to do what he calls us to do when we're willing to obey him.

Now we can talk about obeying God all day long. We can put it in all kinds of abstract terms and lofty language. We can talk about the duty of obedience and doing what we ought to do.

But here's where the rubber meets the road: *Obeying God is ultimately a matter of trust!* We *do* what he asks us to do because we *believe* he will do what he says he will do. It all grows out of a loving, trusting relationship with our heavenly Father—a relationship that comes through faith in Jesus Christ, *God the Father's* only Son, whom *he* gave as a sacrifice for our sins and raised from the dead so we could have life in him!

This kind of obedience can be costly. I saw it last month when I was in Belize to teach at the Baptist Bible School for a week.

Two of the students were Donovan Grinage and his wife Lisa. Donovan used to be a teacher in what we would call elementary school. The Bible school meets for one week in January, May, and August. Last year, one of those sessions met while the elementary school was in session. The school's administrator would not agree for Donovan to be off to attend the Bible School session.

Donovan believes deeply that God has called him to attend the Baptist Bible School of Belize to prepare himself better for more effective ministry. So do you know what he did?

He quit his teaching job, and began his own welding business—so he can be off when he needs to for class and for ministry needs.

When God told Abraham to take Isaac and offer him as a sacrifice, he obeyed. He obeyed because he believed God. He trusted God to the point that he knew God would keep his promises to him, even if he had to raise Isaac from the dead to do it!

What is he asking *you* to do? Will you do it?

†MEG