

## 29. The Precious Seed Laid on the Altar (2007)

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, if you would turn with me to the passage we read in Genesis chapter 22, that would be a great help. A passage which is all about the precious seed laid on the altar.

I said with this chapter we come to the climax of the story of Abraham. The last verses of chapter 20, which we didn't read, are like a bracket with the last verses of chapter 11.

The family genealogy of Abraham that's at the very beginning of his story. Then the next few chapters, 23 to 25, are really a transition to the story of Isaac and his progeny in the promised land.

The focus in those chapters is on the fulfillment of all the promises God gave to Abraham. Sarah, we read about in chapter 23, is buried emphatically in the promised land.

Then chapter 24 sees Rebecca, the wife being found for Isaac to guarantee the future of the promised seed. Then finally in chapter 25, Abraham himself is buried again in the promised land, in real estate that he owns.

[ 1 : 1 4 ] And we have the genealogies of his descendants that show the certainty of the future of his seed. But in chapter 22, with the end of the story of Abraham himself really, we certainly don't have his story ending with a whimper, do we?

Surely, this is one of the most dramatic chapters in the whole of Genesis, perhaps in the whole of Scripture. And as well as drama, it's full of rich and poignant associations and insights into the wonder of the gospel of God.

We've seen that, haven't we, in all the stories surrounding the birth of Isaac. The beginning of God's redeeming patterns of grace, even then, way back in time and history.

The promised seed whose birth brought delight. And yet, from the start, he was a persecuted seed. His life brought division also.

Yet, his was a powerful birth that brought peace, even with pagan kings, as we saw last time, with Abimelech, who strives to make a covenant of peace with God's covenant servant.

[ 2 : 2 3 ] And here, in the climax of Abraham's journey of faith, we see, I think, most tellingly of all, most strangely of all, perhaps most shockingly of all, we see the precious seed, the precious, only, beloved son.

We see him laid upon the altar of God. Verse 1, After these things, God tested Abraham. This is a story which reverberates all down the history of God's redemption.

I want to look at it in the light of that, under three headings this morning. First of all, let's look at the story itself as it unfolds in this chapter. A story where we see God's servant in the crucible of suffering.

That's my first heading, a patriarch in the crucible. It is an exquisite narrative. It's written in such a way as to magnify the drama for us.

I hope that some of that came across, at least, as I read it. It is a literary masterpiece. You might not notice all the devices that are used, but they work together to enormous effect nonetheless.

[ 3 : 34 ] For example, the parallelism in the structure. It begins and ends with God's word, doesn't it? Beginning with God's ultimate command to Abraham and ending with God's ultimate promise about his future.

And in between, we have Abraham's response to God's command and then God's response to Abraham's action. Also, I'm sure you noticed that three times we have Abraham's name called out and each time he says, here am I.

And each time, that question and answer ratchets up, cranks up the tension all the more. Then we have the last voice from heaven, bringing it to the climax of the great promise.

You see, God hasn't given us, as his people, a textbook of theology. Thank goodness for that. He hasn't given us a book of abstract theories and points of doctrine. No, he's given us a Bible full of real life encounters with the living God.

And he touches, therefore, our minds. Of course it does. But it also touches our hearts. It challenges our will. God is speaking to us as real people. Not like machines.

[ 4 : 38 ] And he deals with us in dramatic and in emotive ways. So let's get a feel then for this drama. I reckon, actually, you divide this whole thing up into 12 scenes in these 19 verses.

But let's just not be so ambitious and let's just take it as four. Abraham's test, followed by Abraham's trust. And then God's provision, followed by God's promise.

First of all, Abraham's agonizing test in verses 1 and 2. Verse 1. After all these things, God tested Abraham. After, well, everything that had gone before, but particularly, I think, after the last verse of chapter 21, where at last it seems that Abraham's living in peace and quiet in the land of promise with his family.

Isaac's growing up. Everything, at last, it seems, is as it should be. And then, suddenly, comes this shattering of peace.

I wonder if you've ever felt like that yourself. Perhaps you've got through, you think you've got past, all sorts of struggles in your Christian life, maybe in the early years of being a Christian.

[ 5 : 48 ] And perhaps you think, well, now I've actually arrived, I've got past all of these struggles, and life's going to be just much more calm and quiet and as it should be. Well, unfortunately, you see, God doesn't really know that particular script.

That idea that somehow we get to a golden time in our life as believers, and we'll, from now on, have a kind of trouble-free ride of test-free discipleship.

No, that's not in God's repertoire, I'm afraid. Not in the Bible, anyway. Not in my Bible. And God won't let Abraham go into spiritual retirement. And he won't let you either, by the way.

Some Christians seem to want to go into early retirement, for that matter. But let me tell you, the Christian life is not superannuated like that. Not the real one. It was God who stepped in here to shatter Abraham's peace, to test him, says verse 1.

Now, realize that that is for us to know so that we read the story properly. But of course, Abraham didn't know that, did he? God didn't say, Abraham, and Abraham says, here am I. And God says, I'm going to test you, Abraham.

[ 6 : 55 ] Of course not. Abraham had no idea what was coming. None at all. And in fact, when he did hear what God said, he must have been absolutely shocked.

It must have been agonizing for him. Mystifying. It must have seemed absolutely absurd. Derek Kidner says, Abraham's trust was to be weighed in the balance against common sense, human affection, and lifelong ambition.

In fact, against everything earthly. And that's true. But it was even more than that, wasn't it? His whole life's purpose was tied up with this precious seed, with his son Isaac.

And his whole spiritual future was tied up with Isaac. And Abraham knew that the whole future of God for the world was tied up with this son Isaac and the promises to him.

And he believed that. But what on earth could God mean when he said, go and put an end to Isaac's life? It wasn't just against all earthly reason, it seemed to be against all heavenly reason too.

[ 8 : 01 ] And agonizing for Abraham. Agonizing. It's emphasized, isn't it, in verse 2. You see, in the way that God says these words, your son, your only son, Isaac, whose name means the one who brings laughter and joy to your life, Isaac, whom you love, and go, offer him as a burnt offering.

Now Moses knows only too well that his hearers understand what a burnt offering is. They knew fine that it had a double reference, that on the one hand it was an offering signifying the total giving of everything that you are willingly to God as the offerer.

But also, they knew that on the other hand it meant to do so, you could do it because the victim was slaughtered to remove the offense of your sin. And the Israelites also knew something else.

They knew that in some sort of a strange way God did require from them their firstborn males. They were to set apart all of their firstborn as an offering to the Lord, just as it were to do with every firstborn animal.

You can read about it later in Exodus chapter 13. So somehow they understood that fellowship with God demanded that their firstborn's life belonged to him.

[ 9 : 22 ] So maybe, maybe they could just understand something of what God seemed to be asking of Abraham here, but they also knew at the same time that God absolutely abhorred the taking of human life.

And they knew that God had made it plain that they were never actually to offer their son, their firstborn to God in that way. They were to redeem him with the life of an animal. So anybody listening to Moses or reading what Moses had written for the first time, the people of Israel in the wilderness, they would be utterly shocked and perplexed at what God was asking of Abraham, just as we are.

the very thought of sacrificing a child. But not just any child, this was Isaac. This was the long-awaited son of promise.

This was Isaac, on whom the future of God's whole salvation was the rest. Could God's plan and purpose for Abraham's future and for the world's future, could it possibly entail God asking him to offer his son Isaac holy on the altar?

Surely not. Surely that would have totally destroyed everything that God had said about his plan and purpose for the world. Well surely it must have been thoughts like that, mustn't it, that were going through Abraham's mind when God spoke these words to him.

[ 10 : 46 ] What an agonizing test. But it's interesting, isn't it, that the writer doesn't mention anything, does he, about Abraham's thoughts or his feelings or his anguish? What he does focus on in verses 3 to 10 is Abraham's absolute trust.

Verse 3, so Abraham arose and went to the place that God had told him. There's a strong echo there, isn't there, of God's very first call to Abraham back in chapter 12.

In fact, the only other place in the Bible where there's specific words, go, go on your own to the place that I tell you to go, is used. Very deliberate. And Abraham went.

That was an agonizing command right back at the beginning too, of course, wasn't it, to leave his home, his family, his life, his culture, to sacrifice everything that he had in life for the bare promise of God.

But not as agonizing as this. And he went immediately, it says, early in the morning. It almost seems to us as though it was an easy thing to do, doesn't it? Abraham got up and off he went.

- [ 11 : 57 ] But it wasn't easy. The text builds up the dramatic tension for us so clearly, doesn't it? Verses 3 to 6 emphasize the coming sacrifice. Abraham takes Isaac and he cuts the wood for the burnt offering, verse 3.

And they went for three days' journey. Imagine it, three days of that father's silent pain, contemplating the sacrifice of his precious son, his only son.

Three days bearing the deep darkness of death, surely, in his own mind and heart. And then verse 6, he takes the wood and lays it on his son and he has to watch his own son carrying the means of his own sacrifice up the hill to the place of death.

Haunting echoes, aren't there? And we're told he took in his hand the father's own hand, the fire and the knife and they went, both of them, together.

You can feel the agony, can't you? And then in verse 9, it all goes into slow motion, doesn't it? Let's read it again. And they came to the place of which Abraham had told him.

- [ 13 : 15 ] And Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and he bound Isaac his son and he laid him on the altar on top of the wood and Abraham reached out his hand and he took the knife to slaughter his son.

It's full of the most intense emotion and agony, isn't it? And yet, the emphasis is squarely not for us on what Abraham felt but what Abraham did.

He obeyed God. Because to God what matters is not so much what we feel about his commands but what we do in response to his commands.

William Steele put it this way, not that these heartbreaking sensitivities don't matter but that something matters more, the will of God. If the will of God is paramount in our lives, although God may wrack us with pain and very likely he will at some points, we shall bear it and obey.

Abraham obeyed God's words. Even when to obey was an agony of darkness, an agony of mystery, an apparent folly, an absolute absurdity. How could he do that?

- [ 14 : 33 ] Well, you see the little dialogue in verses 7 and 8 are really the centerpiece of the whole thing, the key to it all, aren't they? Abraham obeyed God's words absolutely because he trusted absolutely God's character.

He was sure of the God that he worshipped. See, that second call of Abraham's name in verse 7 is deeply poignant, isn't it? He hears his name again and yet this time it's an even more intimate name.

My father, says Isaac. Here am I, my son. How did that voice sound? Was it a cry of innocence and ignorance?

Or was there a sense of foreboding in Isaac's words? Where is the lamb for the burnt offering? What a piercing question that must have been for Abraham.

Children sometimes do that, don't they? They pierce us with their questions. But this. And yet, Abraham's reply reveals an absolute trust in God that was the source of his obedience.

- [ 15 : 42 ] God himself, he says, in verse 8, will provide the lamb, my son. Abraham trusted absolutely in his God, even in the dark, even in the mystery and the agony.

What could he have meant by that? God will provide. Well, it must be one of two things, mustn't it? Either, that God could at the last provide a substitute for his offering so that he could offer a burnt offering to God without actually sacrificing Isaac, his son.

Or, that even if God didn't do that, then God could and would bring Isaac even back from the dead after death. He reasoned that just as his birth was an absolute miracle of God, so God could do the same again.

That's implied, isn't it, in verse 5. Do you see? Where Abraham says, we shall go to worship, he says to his men, and emphatically, we shall come back to you again. That's made explicit in the New Testament in Hebrews 11, verse 19.

Listen, the apostle says, Abraham considered that God was able to raise Isaac even from the dead. You see, Abraham obeyed and trusted God's promise absolutely, and therefore, he trusted God's provision and God's power to keep that promise.

[ 17 : 02 ] Even death cannot stand in the way of the promise of God. He trusted so absolutely that despite the agony, Hebrews 11 tells us, he was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, through Isaac shall your offspring be named.

That's what the Bible calls the obedience of faith. And just like in the story of Job, when you remember God's servant was tested, God's trust in Abraham, his servant, was fully vindicated.

He knows that this is no spurious, good times only faith in Abraham. No shallow, feel-good worship experience, but this is real and absolute trust.

One writer says this, what God wants is not the effervescence of our emotions, but the obedience of our hearts. And that's what God saw in Abraham that day on Mount Moriah, verse 10.

Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. Abraham. But, verse 11, for a third time, Abraham hears his name.

[ 18 : 20 ] This time with urgency. Abraham, Abraham, here am I, he says, I'm ready to obey. Verses 11 to 14 show that Abraham's trust in his God also is absolutely vindicated, isn't it?

God's amazing provision. You've done enough, says the Lord. Now I know everything that I need to know about your heart, Abraham. That you really do fear me, that you take me seriously, that you really do love and cherish me above all earthly things.

Now I know. It's often pointed out by scholars and writers that, of course, God knows everything and he knew Abraham's heart anyway.

And he could have said, well, I knew, I know that if I tested Abraham, then he would obey me and that would be enough. Why did he actually have to go through all of this? But you see, the Bible doesn't talk like that.

That isn't enough for God. God doesn't have the kind of attitude that says, well, actually, it's the thought that counts. Nor do we, actually, if you think about it, do you?

[ 19 : 26 ] Just think about this, if you're a wife. Speaking of you, one day say to your husband, look, I do love you, but you never give me any compliments, ever. And speaking of your husband, says, well, I think about it often enough, isn't that enough?

What are you going to say? No, that's not enough. I want to hear it. And it's the same with God, you see, he doesn't want people who think that they trust him and stand for him when the chips are down.

He wants people who actually do stand for him when the chips are down, who actually do obey him when the going is really hard. He doesn't want people who think about serving the Lord, who think about being generous to God's people and his kingdom.

He wants people who do it. See, real faith in the Bible isn't an imaginary thing. It's not a hypothetical thing. It's a real thing. It's a visible thing. It's a tangible thing. That's why Paul in his gospel calls it the obedience of faith, not the idea of faith or the thinking of faith, far less the feeling of faith, not the effervescence of our emotions, but the obedience of our hearts.

That's what God wants and he wants to see it. It's the doers of the law who will be justified, says Paul in Romans 2, not just the hearers. That's why he says we'll be judged by our works.

[ 20 : 46 ] Not Lord, Lord, says Jesus. It's doing the will of the Father that matters. Apostle James says just the same, doesn't he? Hearers, or just thinkers of God's word, they're self-deceived.

It's doers of the word that God accepts. And James goes right on, doesn't he, to quote this very chapter in Genesis. Abraham says James was justified by his works when he offered up Isaac on the altar.

Faith was completed by his works. And the scripture was fulfilled that says Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness and he was called a friend of God. Why?

Because of Abraham's merit? No. Of course not. Because of his faith. He believed God. But he believed God with the real obedience of real faith.

God knew he believed him because he obeyed him. God saw his faith when he saw Abraham truly worshipping. Isn't verse 5 striking?

[ 21 : 45 ] I and the boy will go there to worship. Think of all the nonsense that's talked today about what Christian worship is. What was worship to Abraham? Abraham.

Well Abraham understood that worship is giving over to death on God's altar the dearest things of our hearts in the faith and the trust that God will bring a true resurrection of new life through the deaths that we offer to him in obedience to his commands.

That's what Abraham understood worship to be. And where faith is real, where there's real trust in the God of promise, then there is true and real provision.

Verse 13, the Lord did provide the lamb, the substitute for the offering so that Abraham might indeed have fellowship with God through the shedding of blood. Yes, but through the shedding of the blood of God's provision.

Not Abraham's. And to this day, says Moses and his readers and many more generations afterwards, to this day it shall be said on the mountain of the Lord it shall be provided.

[ 22 : 54 ] On the mountain of the Lord the Lord will see to it. On Mount Moriah which of course was the site of later Jerusalem where centuries later Solomon would build his temple, the place of sacrifice, the place of God's amazing provision for sin.

God's amazing provision. But the final call to Abraham brings the story to its climax, doesn't it? In verses 15 to 19.

God's amazing provision leads to God's absolute promise. Because you have done this and not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you.

I swear it. I swear it by myself. That's even greater than a covenant promise. It's a double promise. God gives a covenant to Abraham and now also an oath.

An absolute promise that seals it forever. Nothing can ever, ever negate this now. Listen to Hebrews 6 verse 17.

[ 24 : 00 ] When God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of his promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to him for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.

Because you have done this, says the Lord, because, verse 18, you have obeyed my voice, it's settled forever.

that's God's verdict. That's God's reward for Abraham's costly obedience and trust.

Not the reward of merit, but the reward of faith. The New Testament tells us God delights to reward the obedience of real faith. He delights to reward those who seek him.

It's what Hebrews 11, 6 says. It's what pleases God. It pleases God to see real faith and to reward gratuitously that faith that's shown to him. What Genesis 22, you see, is telling us in a very real way is that by the obedient trust of this one man, the blessings of salvation came at last to all the nations of the earth.

[ 25 : 21 ] By the obedience of the one, the many are made righteous. A patriarch in the crucible. What a glorious outcome.

Abraham's agonizing test and yet his absolute trust led to God's amazing provision and God's ultimate promise for the blessing of the world. But of course, this story for us above all is glorious, isn't it?

Because it's more than just history. It is history, but it's more than that. It's prophecy. Because in this passage we have not just a story about a patriarch in the crucible.

In this story we also have a picture of the Christ. We've already noted, haven't we, how this story echoes down the centuries of God's promise, the promise of the true seed.

How it's full of the shadows that are actually being cast backwards through history from the climax of Abraham's story, which is the story, the story of the coming of the Lord Jesus himself, the promised seed.

[ 26 : 30 ] It's rather like when you read a book for the very first time, you read a story, you don't necessarily notice, do you, all the hints and the echoes until you come to the climax of it. But when you read that book again and again, you notice more and more as you go through and you realize, ah, I should have picked up that hint.

Think of the Narnia stories with C.S. Lewis. Every time I read them I see more and more. And it's like that with the Bible, isn't it? We can't help now reading the beginning of the story in the light of the end. And when we know the whole story, we're bound to see so much more.

We just can't read this story, can we, without taking Jesus' words seriously. John chapter 8 where he says, Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad. We can't read it without Paul's words in Galatians where he speaks about the gospel being preached in advance to Abraham.

And what Hebrews tells us about the real focus of Abraham's faith. It was resurrection faith focused on a new world. So when we read in the light of these things, when we read this story sensitively, it's not hard to realize that it's in this agonizing experience that Abraham is not only being tested, but God is revealing things to him.

He's whispering to him how it is going to come to pass at the last that his seed would become such a blessing to the world. He's acting out in Abraham's own experience so that Abraham shares in his own experience something of the great grace of the gospel for the whole world.

[ 28 : 08 ] Can't read this story, can you, without hearing whispers of another man? Another man obediently setting his face towards Jerusalem, to the mountain of sacrifice in obedience to God.

Or another beloved son and only son carrying the wood of his own cross on his own back to the place of sacrifice. The one who cried out also, my father.

And asked that his hand would be stayed, but bowed also obediently to his father's will. His father's will was to crush him and to make him an offering for the sins of the world because in his place there was no substitute because he was the lamb.

Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, said John the Baptist. You can't read, can you, of Abraham, the grieving, heartbroken father after three terrible days contemplating the death of his son as an offering and as a sacrifice.

Hebrews 11 says, receiving back his son from the dead. You can't read of that, can you? Without thinking of the joyous resurrection of Jesus on the third day according to the scriptures.

[ 29 : 24 ] As the father and the son had gone together in perfect harmony to the mountain of sacrifice so that they were reunited then in the joy of resurrection afterwards. Why are the words in our text in verse 12, why are they so laden with acclaim for this man Abraham?

seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son. Well, it's because in Abraham's heart God himself has seen the reflection of his own heart and his own love that gave his son, his only son, the supreme gift that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

in this agony for Abraham was more than a test. There was a revelation to him of the glory of the cross of Jesus Christ.

It's a picture, it's a prophecy of the Christ himself. And moreover, it's a picture, isn't it, of the cost to God the Father.

That he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all should be understood. Abraham saw my day, said Jesus.

[ 30 : 45 ] He lived it out. He lived it out in a shadow, a pale shadow but a real shadow and a painful one. And he saw it and was glad though perhaps no mere mortal human being either before or after has ever felt or experienced so keenly or so deeply what the day of Christ would mean to God the Father himself who did not withhold his son, his only son.

Abraham saw the pain of redemption of the Father and the beloved son. So, the provision of redemption in the Lamb of God.

He experienced the power of redemption that he received back his son from the dead according to God's great promise. But perhaps above all he saw and he experienced the pattern of God's redemption that the way to life is through death.

That whosoever would save his life will lose it but whosoever loses his life for my sake says Jesus will find it. That brings us to the last thing perhaps perhaps the thing that's most important for all of us here this morning.

This story isn't just history about a patriarch in the crucible of suffering nor is it just prophetic a picture of the Christ himself in history.

[ 32 : 16 ] This story is personal gospel for you and me. This story is a pattern for the church because the Bible makes clear that the pattern of the truly redeemed will always reflect the pattern of the true redeemer.

That we who are in Christ who are Abraham's seed who are heirs of the same promise the ultimate promise we are so because we are united forever to a crucified and risen savior.

What does that mean? Well it means three things at least. First there is great confidence for everything that God has done for us.

Some Christians live in great fear. They lack assurance. Will I really be able to be standing before God on the last day? Can I ever really be right with God? Can my past ever really be truly put away for ever?

Maybe that's you. There are lots of Christians like that. They lack assurance and confidence. But the answer to all of those questions is yes because God has provided the sacrifice.

[ 33 : 28 ] God has promised his blessing to all who are in Christ. All who are heirs of offering. He of Abraham. He has provided the sacrifice and the future is secure because of his obedience even to death.

Because he is a spotless lamb. And because of that you who are Abraham's offspring as verse 17 says shall possess the gate of your enemies. You will possess the gate of your enemies.

You will have victory over every enemy that would stand against you. Every sin, every guilt, every failure, everything that would keep you from standing tall before the presence of God.

It's guaranteed by an oath in which it's impossible for God to lie. So that if you flee to him for refuge you also will have sure and certain hope that by the obedience of one the many are made righteous.

Do you sometimes feel that your faith is sorely tested? Then you must trust him as Abraham did. That he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for you, will he not also with him give you all things?

[ 34 : 41 ] You can have confidence in the gospel of Christ. You can have assurance for the future. Second, it's not just that we have confidence in what God has done for us, we can have great comfort in what God is doing in us.

Now in the present, especially in the midst of great trials and struggles and apparent agonies of testings, because the New Testament tells us those the Lord loves, he disciplines.

To be in the crucible of suffering, the crucible of testing is to be in the place where God himself is most intimately involved with us, because it's where we're most closely united to the pattern of his son, his only son, the Lord Jesus.

If that's where you feel that you may be this morning in your Christian life, then be comforted. God's not playing with you. He's shaping you wonderfully into the shape of his own son, his only son.

And like Abraham, he's seeking to draw out your trust to the utmost, to make you more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ, so that God's confidence in you as his servant will be vindicated on the great day of Jesus' return.

[ 35 : 55 ] That's what he wants for your life. William still used to say, God doesn't want a heaven populated with infants for eternity. He wants mature people.

he wants oaks of righteousness. That's what Paul says to the Philippians, he who began a good work and you will bring it to completion on the day of Jesus Christ. How will he do that?

Well, not without pain. Paul says it's been granted to you not only to believe but also to suffer for his sake. Like Abraham, like me, says Paul, sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I also may attain the resurrection of the dead.

That doesn't take the pain away, friends, when you're in the crucible. But what a comfort that he's at work in us, even as he's at work for us. Great confidence, a great comfort.

But finally also, it is a great challenge. God said to Abraham, because you have done this and not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and I will surely bless others through you.

[ 37 : 08 ] And what that means for you and me is this. See, for God to bless us so that our lives are actually a fount of blessing, that doesn't just come from wishful thinking.

That doesn't just come from exciting or ecstatic experiences of what we might call worship. That flows from the lives of real worship. It flows from lives that are marked by the same costly obedience of true faith.

See, when Abraham said, I will go there to worship, he was going to lay himself, his life, his future, everything, he was going to lay it on the altar of God and consecrate it to death at the command of the Lord.

That's what he meant by worship. It's interesting, you know, that an older generation of Christians used to talk a lot about consecration, to talk a lot about laying their lives on the altar to God.

Sometimes, of course, it was foolish, it was hyper-intense piety, it was accompanied by unhelpful theology, but not always, by no means. And when that generation talked about consecration, when they talked about worship, they meant exactly that, consecration.

[ 38 : 25 ] And it strikes me that nowadays I never hear anything about that. when I hear young people today talking about worship, not consecration, they're talking about it, celebration. But you know, those in a younger generation, particularly, need to recover something that we've lost from our older brothers and sisters, an understanding of that pattern, that challenge upon our lives.

Somebody was just speaking to me this very week, about somebody in our congregation in their 70, and they said of them, I've never met somebody who is more of a servant than that particular person.

They live to serve Christ by serving others. And we were reflecting together and I realized that when I really want somebody I can depend upon, somebody to serve, especially in a background job, an unglamorous job, something that requires total commitment so that I know that it will always be done and never neglected.

I find myself looking for people in their 60s or preferably in their 70s, not in their 30s or 40s or their 20s. I find myself looking for somebody who understands what real worship is and that real worship costs.

See, Abraham understood that. It cost Abraham to go to worship God on Mount Moriah. David understood that centuries later, didn't he, when he went to the very same spot on Mount Moriah and the threshing floor of Arunna and he paid hard currency for that place to sacrifice to his God, even when it was offered to him for nothing because he said, I will not offer to the Lord my God that which does cost me nothing.

[ 40 : 17 ] You see, the life of fruitfulness, the life through which God's blessing will flow out to others is the life given over to death.

It's a life lived willingly in true worship. It's a life lived upon the altar of God. We conclude by quoting some words from someone who taught me more about this than anybody else.

Is it altogether surprising since Abraham was so centrally placed in the line of promise that God should show him in this way that the promised seed must be laid on the altar of sacrifice and that only thus could the blessing of salvation come to all the families of the earth?

Indeed, we can go further and say that this is the pattern for all whom God calls to his service. Only by a fiery baptism can the chosen of God enter into the resurrection ground of his fulfillment.

Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abides alone. but if it dies it brings forth much fruit. This is a permanent principle in the spiritual life, the lower one might say of spiritual harvest.

[ 41 : 34 ] All the lives that have ever blessed men are lives in which their obedience to God has borne the marks of sacrifice on the altar.

It's a pattern for the church. These things says Paul are written for us. To give us great confidence, yes, in Christ's provision for us. Hallelujah.

To give us great comfort in what he's doing in us. That too. But also to give us a great challenge. Because the call to follow Jesus Christ is the call to follow the precious seed whose life was laid on the altar.

Whose death worked life. But when we do that, we'll find that that way is still the way and it's still the only way to real blessing and fulfillment in spiritual life.

Let's pray together. In the words of George Matheson's profound hymn which we would have sung had it been in our book.

[ 42 : 50 ] So love that will not let me go, I rest my weary soul in thee, I give thee back the life I owe, that in thine ocean depths its flow may richer, fuller be.

O cross that liftest up my head, I dare not ask to fly from thee, I lay in dust life's glory dead, and from the ground there blossoms red, life life that shall endless be.

Give us hearts, O God our Father, to walk with you this way all the days of our lives. Amen. We sing to close number 862.

O Lord who came from realms above the pure celestial fire to impart, kindle a flame of sacred love upon the altar of my heart. 862. Lord his love Jesus knows how he loves He ch MM that honey love forever that astron Diet Give us the help of saints in hell.

Now our kingdom to much wow fine. And now this surely immerage, The holy Jewish man tells him, as they call in holy fear in heart Rogersolor94.

[ 45 : 14 ] See life on earth and art in blind, in all chance they will live for me.

Text Thank you.

Amen. May the God of all grace be with you and surround you and strengthen you and abide with you now and forever. Amen.