**The Near-Sacrifice of Isaac**

Based on [Genesis 22](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Ge22)

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Advent Midweek 1

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Advent is the season that anticipates the coming of Jesus Christ. The OT contains many prophecies anticipating the messiah. The prophetic books of the OT as well as the Psalms contain many such prophecies. The messiah is called the “Key of David” meaning he will be David’s heir. He will be the “root of Jesse,” David’s father. He will be called Immanuel meaning “God with us”. His name will be called “Wonderful counselor, Mighty God, prince of peace, and so on. He will be born in Bethlehem and of a virgin. His hands and feet will be pierced, his clothes divided. He will be wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, and God will lay upon him the chastisement of us all.

There is another, less direct manner in which Jesus Christ is anticipated in the Old Testament. The Old Testament laws are said to be “shadows” of the messiah (Colossians 2:17). A shadow shows you shape but not substance, it does not give you the full picture. Also, the Old Testament contains anticipatory “types” of the messiah. Just as if you say someone is typecast, they conform to a certain mould. “So and so is not my type” means doesn’t fit my standard. St. Paul says in Romans 5:14 that Adam was a type of Jesus Christ. Adam isn’t Jesus, but there is a pattern common to both. Just as one man, Adam brought death upon the world; so too through one man Jesus, brought resurrection.

The Old Testament Sacrifices of whole burnt offerings, sin offerings, and festivals of atonement, were shadows pointing to Christ. They, in a sense, prepared the people of Israel to understand the mission of the savior when he came. The shadow, the dim shape of salvation was there of old. And that shape is succinctly expressed in the book of Hebrews, **that under the law, there was no forgiveness without the shedding of blood** (Hebrews 9:2). The offerings of bulls, goats, sheep and lambs all--like a shadow--show the contours of the messiah, but without showing him. **And like a body comes before a shadow, causes it and is meaningless without it, so too the sacrifices only exist because of Jesus Christ, whose once and for all sacrifice on the cross was ordained by God before the OT, before Adam and Eve, even before the foundation of the world** (Rev. 13:8). God established the Mosaic Law and Old Testament with Jesus Christ “in view”, and that makes all the difference in how we read and understand it.

Throughout history, the Christian church has found other shadows and “types” in reading the Old Testament. **Today, we have a reading from Genesis 22, and this clearly foreshadows the sacrifice of Christ.** It’s uncanny, how Abrahams divine call to sacrifice his son Isaac foreshadows and anticipates what would happen to the son of God 2000 years later on Calvary’s cross.

God promised to give Abraham a son. This son would be his heir and descendant and through whom the covenant for his offspring would continue. At an old age, 100 years old, God fulfilled that promise, and gave him Isaac. **But it pleased God to test Abraham’s faith and obedience, by giving him a command that Abraham could carry out, but that seemed to contradict everything he was promised.** God promised Abraham that Isaac would be his heir, and yet God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. God’s Law, his *command*, seemed to contradict his Gospel, his *promise*. As the story unfolds, we learn from Abraham’s obedience that, in keeping God’s commands, we never hamstring Him from keeping his promises and fulfilling his decrees. Abraham’s faith was shown in his willingness to obey God’s commands and trusting God to fulfill his promises anyway. That is the clear “moral of the story” of Genesis 22.

In the narrative of Genesis, however, there is more going on than the moral of the story. The story has a shape and more than a few parallel details that align perfectly with the road that would be ordained by the Father and walked by the coming messiah. Notice the comparisons:

1. Abraham was to sacrifice his only-begotten son whom he loved. His willingness to do so proved his love for God. God was to sacrifice his only-begotten son whom he loved. And God’s willingness to do so proves his love for us.

Romans 8 says, of the Father: “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”

John 3 famously says: “God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

We see here, that not only is Abraham--whose name means “Father of nations”--a type of the Heavenly Father; but also, we see that *Our Heavenly Father’s purpose is greater than Abraham’s.* Abraham was called and willing to sacrifice his only-begotten son, but *in the end was spared having to do so.* But ***God the Father did not spare himself the loss, but gave up his only begotten son for our sake.*** The role of Abraham on Mt. Moriah is a prefigurement of the role of God the Father on Cavalry. Notice another comparison:

1. Isaac obeyed his Father --*despite obvious reservations*--and went with him up on the mountain to sacrifice relying upon his father’s will*.* Jesus obeyed his Father--despite his obvious reservations—and also relied upon his Father’s will, and went up the mountain to sacrifice. Isaac said, “**Behold the fire and the knife, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering**.” Abrahams said, “**God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering my son**”. Likewise, Jesus, on the night he would be betrayed, prayed until he sweat blood and said, “Father if it be possible take this cup from me; only not my will but thy will be done.”

Not only is Isaac, Abraham’s only begotten son, a trusting and obedient son, *a type of Jesus Christ*; but also that Jesus Christ is greater than Isaac. Isaac went up the mountain *not knowing he was to be the sacrifice;* Jesus Christ ***knew that he was to be offered up as a sacrifice to God; and he went willingly.***

These two figures, Abraham and Isaac, are thus *types* of the Father and the Son regarding the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. *The writer of Hebrews even says that, when God stayed Abraham’s hand, that was a sort of resurrection of Isaac insofar as it brought Isaac back from a death sentence.* But the story also has other clues and details, that align our minds to the crucifixion of Christ. 1) Both sacrifices were ordained to happen atop a mountain. 2) Isaac carried the wood of his own sacrifice up the mountain; so too Christ was to carry his own cross up Calvary. 3) When God commanded Abraham to not sacrifice, he said “Now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son from me”. Romans 8 likewise says of God, “He…did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all,”.

Another most important comparison is what Genesis 22 teaches about substitutionary atonement. After God stayed the hand of Abraham, the Lord provided a ram to offer in place of his son. This showed two things about our Lord’s crucifixion, 1) first that though God can relent and spare someone from death, *a sacrifice is still needed*. God can forgive your sin, but not in a vacuum, that sin still needs to be paid for. Second, the payment for sin is, in economic terms “fungible”. One sacrifice can be substituted for another of equal or greater value, according to God’s valuation of course,. The appearance of the ram teaches that 1. a sacrifice was still needed, and 2. God can substitute one sacrifice for another This is what he was to do for all people in due time, when he sent his own son to pay our ransom and be the all-sufficient sacrificial substitute for our sins. “God will provide for himself the sacrifice”—Indeed!

That is the triple fudge Sunday of substitutionary atonement, taught in typological Technicolor from Mount Moriah in the substitutionary ram provided by God. And the cherry on top is this little detail…that the ram was caught in a thicket, in brambles, literally in thorns wrapped around it’s head.

“And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head.”

Advent is about anticipating the coming of Jesus Christ and being ready to meet him. Anyone who understands the messianic template on display in near-sacrifice of Isaac is truly worthy and well prepared this Advent to receive the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.