



# Pentecost Series

28<sup>th</sup> June 2020 | 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pentecost

## *Only One King on the Throne*

Genesis 22:1-14 | Psalm 13 | Romans 6:12-23 | Matthew 10:40-42

**It is only as we lay down what we love most that God can grow our faith to trust Him completely to bring to pass His plan in our lives.**

Today the lectionary calendar leads us to one of the most perplexing, heart-wrenching passages in the whole Bible. I am very willing to admit, I was tempted to skip over this difficult passage, because with only 12 minutes to preach, it is really hard to do this complex passage justice.

However, today's Genesis passage, provides a model for what Paul was talking about in the second half of Romans 6. As I gave attention to our freedom from slavery to sin last week, I thought we would delve into this complex passage to learn much the same lesson which Paul was teaching the believers at Rome.

I'm aware that most of you are vividly aware of this controversial passage. Right from the beginning we are confronted with God making a disturbingly unethical request. How could a loving God ask such a thing of Abraham - to sacrifice his beloved Son?

This dilemma has led some critics to dismiss the story on the grounds that it presents a grotesque caricature of the God of the Bible.

But, before we give into the temptation to stand in judgement against the heart and mind of God, let us enter into the story, not with an attitude that baulks at God's horrific request, but rather, with a heart that seeks to understand how this difficult passage challenges us even today.

Although it is extremely unlikely God would ever ask of us, what he requested of Abraham, God does indeed often ask us to lay down the things we truly love and value, testing us to step in faith in His ability to bring to pass His plan and purpose in our lives.

Let's turn to the passage. Some years after Abraham and Sarah had given birth to their miracle son Isaac, Abraham heard the voice of God,

**"Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." (v2)**

**Point 1: God tests our faith, calling us to trust in Him alone**

It would have been enough if God has simply said, "Take your son." But he qualified that phrase three ways.

*Your only son*—remembering that Ishmael was also Abraham's son, yet God identified Isaac was son through whom His promise would come.

*Isaac*—the son for whom Abraham and Sarah had waited for 25 long years.

*Whom you love*—which, although, might seem as if God were mocking him, these words were meant to reassure him that God knew what He was asking. By saying it this way, Abraham would know that God understood what it would cost him to obey.

After hearing God's command, Abraham only has two options. Either he obeys or he doesn't.

There is no way around it, the truth is: God asked Abraham to put his own son to death. And Abraham agreed to do it.

**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 for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."** (v 3-5)

**Point 2: Abraham's response is immediate, unquestioning and filled with faith**

Even at this early point, Abraham's response to God's command is exemplary:

First, Abraham's obedience is *immediate*. Second, it is *unquestioning*. Third, it is *filled with faith*.

Nestled in Abraham's comment to his servant, is a very faith-filled statement:

**"We will worship and then we will come back."**

Hang on! Nowhere had God promised to spare his son. Yet somehow Abraham understood enough of God's character that he was willing to do what God required in the faith that somehow God would work out the details and spare his son.

As Abraham and Isaac proceeded on their climb up the mountain, Isaac realised they were not carrying a lamb, Abraham answered,

**"God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son."** (v8)

Across the centuries Christians have seen in these words a prefiguring of the death of Christ on the cross. There is Abraham (*representing God*) placing the wood (*representing the Cross*) upon Isaac (*representing Jesus Christ*). It is the father offering his son freely and in painful, sacrificial love, just as God the Father offered Jesus for the sins of the whole world.

Somehow Abraham understood something of the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement. When he said, **"God himself will provide the lamb,"** he was pointing not simply toward the altar on Mount Moriah, but to a greater sacrifice to be offered at the very same location almost 2000 years later when God provided the Ultimate Lamb—Jesus Christ—for the sin of the world.

As soon as they reached the place God had appointed, Abraham prepared an altar and reached for the knife he would use to slay his son.

**Point 3: Abraham is called our father of faith, for he trusted and obeyed God believing Him for the impossible**

It is at this point that we see Abraham's faith at its highest and best. Even though the command made no sense from a human point of view, Abraham intended to obey it anyway. Looking back on this incident some twenty centuries later, the writer of Hebrews explains it this way:

**By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death. (Hebrews 11:17-19)**

Abraham was prepared to kill his own son to obey God's command - even though it meant killing God's promise. How could a man do such a thing? Because he believed that God could raise the dead.

Just as Abraham was about to obey God's horrific command, the Lord stopped him.

**"Do not lay a hand on the boy," ... Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." (v 12)**

Did Abraham know in advance how the story would end? No.

We read, just at the moment, God provided a ram to be the sacrifice.

Did Abraham know God was going to provide the sacrifice? By faith, Yes.

And that is not all Abraham knew. He knew that God had promised to give him a son through whom he would bless the world (Genesis 22:18). What he didn't know was **how** God was going to reconcile both His promise (to bless the world through Isaac) and His command (to offer Isaac as a sacrifice). Yet Abraham demonstrated to God that he was willing to **not** even allow his love for his son to stand in the way of his obedience and devotion in God.

No wonder Paul reminds the believers in Rome that there is good reason to regard Abraham as our spiritual father of all who believe (Romans 4:12-17).

### **Application | What idols could be growing in your heart?**

But, how do we apply this powerful story into our lives?

Why did God make such an outrageous request to a loving father?

We could surmise, perhaps, that Isaac had become too important to Abraham.

Perhaps, this promised child had begun to take God's place in Abraham's thinking or his heart?

We have no way to know whether these suggestions are true or not.

But we are intimately aware, that it is extremely easy for things that we love to become so important to us, they begin to take God's place on the throne of our heart.

God does indeed orchestrate the affairs of our lives—both the good and the bad—to bring us to the place where our faith will be tested. At these times, we will be asked to decide 'who are we allowing to sit on the throne in our heart?'

When something or someone takes the place of being loved more than God – It has become an idol.

When something or someone promises to provide us with meaning or worth, but also threatens that if we do not serve them our lives will be worthless, meaningless and empty – it has become an idol in our heart.

Idols of the heart can take many forms: they are the things we say we can't live without.

Heart idols usually come under four headings: Power, Approval, Security and Comfort.

Let me leave with you four questions – which are trigger questions to assist you to delve deeper into discerning what idols may be attempting to grow in your heart:

- Do you love control, influence, admire strength and like to be the person who has the last word? There may be an **Idol of Power** growing inside.
- Do you try to hide your weaknesses from others, tend to be overbearing and impatient with others? You may have a **Security Idol** developing.
- Are you overly concerned with what others think of you and crave recognition and praise to give you meaning and acceptance? This could be an indication an **Approval Idol** is present.
- Lastly, if you are constantly working hard to create a comfortable life and are fearful of anything which could jeopardise your life of pleasure, it could be that an **Idol of Comfort** has taken root.

You are the only one who can discern if something or someone is attempting to sit as an idol on the throne of your heart. But our response should be the same:

**“Do not let sin control the way you live,”** Paul writes. (Romans 6:12) **“Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So, use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God.”** (Romans 6:13)

Let us make a commitment to not allow anything to stand in first place before our love for God. Let us ensure God alone sits as King on the throne in our heart. **Amen.**

### Devotional Questions on Idols of the Heart

Often when one thinks of idolatry, images of handmade objects that people bow before come to mind. But idols of the heart are as offensive and destructive as idols of the hands. Things we set up as gods in our hearts are idols, and they determine and drive how we live. Martin Luther said, “Under every behavioural sin is the sin of idolatry.” Tim Keller, David Powlison, and Dick Keyes have written much more extensively and eloquently on the idols beneath the surface, but here is a snapshot of four root idols that drive our behaviour.

- *Power & Control*: a longing for influence or recognition, and everything going to my plan
- *Security*: a longing to safety, routine and a fear of the unknown.
- *Comfort*: a longing for pleasure
- *Approval*: a longing to be accepted or desired

How do these four idols manifest and work themselves out in our lives?

#### **The Idol of Power and Control (Result: selfish decision-making)**

When a longing for power takes root in a person’s life, they need to be recognized. The motivation is not to serve and bless others but to be known and rise to a position of authority. They will inevitably believe they alone know the right way things should be handled, believing, “no one can pull this off like I can.” In the person’s heart the first question is “What is best for me?” and *not* “What is best for the relationship?” or “What is best for the community?”

#### **The Idol of Security (Result: fear of the unknown)**

When a need for security drives a person’s life, they will be fearful of the unknown and will go to great lengths to keep change from occurring. This fear drives the person to maintain the routines they are familiar, as routines build a sense of safety, taking the place of trusting in God’s guidance, provision and fulfilment during troubling times.

#### **The Idol of Comfort (Result: unresolved issues)**

When a longing for comfort rules in a person’s heart, painful and necessary decisions are delayed. They fear anything that would jeopardize their personal comfort and routine. Stagnancy and issues that are never dealt with are the result.

#### **The Idol of Approval (Result: tolerance for mediocrity)**

When a longing for approval reigns in a person’s heart, the person needs to be liked rather than obey what God is requiring them to do. Instead of seeking for the good of those they are called to serve, they

will relate in a way so others will like them. The result is often the person will fear confrontation, as it could lead to rejection and attack.

So how do I repent of the idol beneath the surface? How do we keep ourselves from idols, as the apostle John instructed (I John 5:21)? Thomas Chalmers said, "The best way to overcome the world is not with morality or self-discipline. Christians overcome the world by seeing the beauty and excellence of Christ. They overcome the world by seeing something more attractive than the world: Christ."

*I repent of my idolatry not by looking myself in the mirror and telling myself I can displace it in my energy, might, or goodness. I repent of my lesser gods by remembering the Great God who is above all gods. We can repent of our longing for:*

- *Control and Power by submitting to His greater power within me [Ephesians 5: 12-14, 18]*
- *Security by trusting in God as the great provider [Philippians 4:19, Genesis 22:8]*
- *Comfort by remembering He is the greater comfort [2 Corinthians 1:3-4]*
- *Approval by rejoicing in His gracious approval [Galatians 3:13; Numbers 6:24-26]*

*His Control and Power is greater. His Security is perfect. His Comfort is satisfying. And His Approval is eternal. There is no god like our God.*

**What idols may be present or starting to take root in your heart?**

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**Further study on the prophetic re-enactment of Abraham may be found here:**

<https://bibleproject.com/blog/why-did-god-ask-abraham-to-sacrifice-isaac/>



*A quick survey to find out your worship intentions during these changing times:*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone No: \_\_\_\_\_

Which form of worship are you currently taking part in on a regular basis?

- I read the Service Sheet and Message Transcript which is delivered to me.
- I watch the video recorded Sunday Service.
- I book and attend the Sunday Service (or mid-week service) at Southlakes.

As we look toward the next six months of the year, which one best describes what you anticipate participating in:

- I would like to continue reading the Service Sheet & Message by delivery.
- I intend to continue watching the video recorded Sunday Service.
- I intend to book and attend the Sunday Service (or mid-week service) at Southlakes.

What is the main reason for your choice in the previous question?

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If you are attending the Sunday Service please indicate which of the following activities you are prepared to undertake:

- I could do a Bible reading.
- I could do the prayers and intercessions.

Would you be interested in assisting with existing or future activities?

Please indicate as many activities as you wish:

- Borne Again Boutique     Garage Sale preparation     Garage Sale operations     Cafe
- Home visits and Pastoral Care     Prayer ministry     Home group leadership
- Sound Desk     Welcomer
- Unable to assist at this time.