

God Provides
Genesis 22:1-18

“Something is wrong here!” I can’t help but think Abraham had that thought running through his mind. Even though we know how things turned out – that God did provide an alternate sacrifice – we can think the same: Something is wrong here. It just seems so wrong for God to command Abraham to sacrifice his son.

Even if Abraham did not love his son, it would still be wrong. But he does love Isaac. The child brought great joy and delight into the lives of his aged parents, Abraham and Sarah. God says, *Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love.* Abraham loves Isaac, born to him in his old age. You can hear that love in the conversation between Abraham and Isaac. *My father, here’s the wood and the fire, but where’s the lamb for the sacrifice? My son, God will provide.*

A father is told to sacrifice his son he loves. Something is wrong here, but not just on that human level. On another level, God’s promises are at stake here. He has promised that Abraham will be the father of many nations, that his offspring will be as numerous as the stars in the sky or the sand on the beach. The promise was given that out of Abraham’s line will be born One who will be a blessing to all nations. To kill Isaac is to break a promise, to renege on what God has told Abraham.

Something is wrong when God tells a father to slaughter his son and when God’s promises come into question.

But not just back in Abraham’s time. Today, when we see what happens to children, we say, “Something is wrong.” This congregation has experienced it. Shortly before I moved to Manchester, the Kehrli family lost their son Kollin in a farming accident. Since I have been here, I have buried 3 young men I had in confirmation class, Alex Padilla, Robert Robbins, and

Mike Breckenfelder. The Brase family laid Emma to rest after she after she was stillborn. And I don’t even know how many of you have lost children through miscarriage. Something is wrong here. Parents are not supposed to have to bury their children.

Take every school shooting—Columbine, Parkland, Marshall County, Sandy Hook, all the others—and add to them the other mass murders: the Las Vegas concert, the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, the Boston Marathon bombing. Every one of those victims was somebody’s child. Something is wrong here.

Then, beyond that human level, God’s promises are involved. When children come up to communion with their parents I say their name, and I usually get it right. Then I speak a blessing: “Jesus bless you and keep you in all your ways.” God has promised that hasn’t He? “The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace.” But when we see what happens to children, we begin to wonder about God’s promises. Something is wrong here.

And yet, Abraham traveled the three days to the mountain. Those three days must have been hard because he knew what he was going to do at the end of them. But a couple of sentences indicate that Abraham had hope. He trusted that somehow God would provide. He says to the two servants, *You stay here. I and the boy will go up to the mountain and will come back to you.* He doesn’t say, “I will come back,” but, “I and the boy will come back to you.”

Is Abraham simply lying to cover up his plan? ... Scripture says no. In Hebrews 11 we read: *By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” He considered*

that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back (17-19).

With these words, and with those of Abraham himself, we see that he was not lying. He was trusting in God. Isaac asked him, *Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?*” Abraham replies, *God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.* Abraham has hope that God will work out the details here. And that trust, that hope, takes him all the way to the moment when he has the knife in his hand ready to use in on Isaac’s throat.

At that moment, Abraham’s faith held on to the promise that God would provide. In this case, God did provide by sparing Isaac’s life. But also on a bigger, deeper level, God provided.

Isaac carries the wood for a sacrifice. Jesus carries the cross for His sacrifice.

Isaac is the son, the only son, whom Abraham loved. Jesus is the Son, the only Son, whom the Father loves.

A ram is in a thicket to be sacrificed in the place of Isaac. Jesus, on the cross, takes our place, and is sacrificed for us.

The promises come true. Through Isaac, Abraham’s descendants are numerous. From Abraham’s offspring comes Jesus. God provides forgiveness, life, and salvation. God provides and keeps His promises for us!

When everything looks so wrong, God provides by keeping His promises for us and being with us.

Lazarus’ death and Jesus’ conversation with Martha and Mary show both the “for us” and “with us”. When Jesus arrives, Lazarus’s sister, Martha, meets Him and says, *Lord, if you would have been here, my brother wouldn’t have died.* Can you hear it in her voice? “Something’s wrong here, Jesus. You weren’t here for us.” Then in the conversation, Jesus makes an incredible promise for us: *I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever*

believes in me, though you die, will rise again. Do you believe this, Martha?” (John 11:21, 25-26). She makes the good confession. She believes in what Jesus will do for her. Then He goes to Mary. She has been crying. She, too, says, *Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died* (v 32). But this time Jesus doesn’t have a conversation with her. This time Jesus does something different. He cries with her.

Knowing the end of the story doesn’t mean you can’t cry during the sad parts. You know how every Hallmark movie is going to turn out, but how many of you still cry? (Come on, guys.) We know how the life in Christ will turn out – resurrection and life eternal – and yet there are still sad parts. At those moments, God provides. God keeps His promises. Jesus is with us even when things are so wrong.

God provides by keeping His promises with a cross and an empty tomb. He is always by your side. You are never alone. He hears your prayers. He surrounds you with His grace. God is never more than a prayer away.

Like Abraham, we are simply called to believe, to trust that God will provide, that He is with us, and to hope.

You will still cry when things seem so wrong. But there will come a day of no more tears. Jesus will return! On that glorious day of resurrection, He will do for us what we could never do. Children will no longer have to worry about being killed or think about suicide or die of horrible diseases. But until that day, we will cry at the sad parts. And like Abraham, when that happens, all we can do is trust that God will provide because Jesus is with us and He keeps His promises. Amen.