

# The Obedience of Faith

## By James Boice

James Boice:

I'd like you to turn for our final session to the Old Testament once again to Genesis 22, where we have this great story of the near sacrifice of Abraham's son Isaac. It's a great story of Abraham's obedience and also story of his faith. And for that reason I call this the obedience of faith, which I think captures the essence. Now, while you're turning to it, let me just say how this fits into what we've been doing here in these sessions. If you were in the Roman seminar, I've already said some of this because what this final message does is really tie up both tracks of my time here and these plenary messages. We've talked about the need of the hour, analyzing our culture somewhat the fact that we need people who know God.

We've talked about the Scriptures as the only basis for that knowledge. And then something about the nature of God himself studying that on the basis of Exodus 3. Now all of that, to some extent can be external to us, the things that we can know but not respond to. That's why in this final session, I turn to Genesis 22 because it indicates our response and emphasizes obedience. So this last [inaudible] wraps up the first three. But now it does the same thing for the Romans talks because there I was dealing with the Book of Romans chapters 1 through 4, and in a different way, I nevertheless follow the same pattern. Romans 1 talks about the need of the world, the mess the world has gotten itself into, and the fact that all are involved in that. Chapter 3 presents the solution in the Gospel, which we find in the word of God. And then in the fourth chapter, it talks about faith and the great illustration there is Abraham.

We have four great periods of faith in Abraham's life, and the apostle Paul ends Romans 4 on the third of them, and the fourth is what we find here in Genesis 22. So this study ramps up the Roman seminar as well as what we've been saying. Now let me read it, and then we'll take a look at it. I'm going to read as I have in the past, but I'm going to read just the first 18 verses.

Sometime later, God tested Abraham. He said to him, Abraham, here I am, he replied, and God said, Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love and go to the region of Mariah.

Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about. 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.

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father, Abraham Father? Yes, my son, Abraham replied. The fire in the wood are here, Isaac said, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?

Abraham answered, God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering. My son and the two of them went on together. When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called out to him from Heaven. Abraham, Abraham, here I am, he replied. Do

not lay a hand on the boy, He said. Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God because you have not withheld from me, your son, your only son.

Abraham looked up, and there in the thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place the Lord will provide. And to this day it said, on the mountain of the Lord, it will be provided. The angel of the Lord called Abraham from Heaven a second time and said, I swear by myself declares the Lord that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring, all nations on earth will be blessed because you have obeyed me.

Now I'd like to say something of how I came to understand this particular emphasis of this chapter, because it is, as I have already indicated by the title Obedience. And that is significant because this is the great high point of Abraham's pilgrimage. You recall that the third point of the set of four that you find in Hebrews is his faith that God could do a miracle in the birth of his son. Certainly we would think that faith in a miracle exceeds everything. And yet it's significant that at this great climax to Abraham's life, the point that is emphasized is not so much faith in the miracle that we had that too, but in his obedience. And I want you to see how I came to see that.

I had always been taught. And I think rightly that this passage deals with Abraham's figuring out what God had told him to do that. God had told Abraham he was to sacrifice his son. He had also told him earlier that his son Isaac, was to be the son of the promise, that is, through whom the

Messiah eventually would come, and through whom he would have all this numerous posterity. And he must have reasoned that there was a problem here if the offspring producing the Messiah was to come through Isaac. And yet God was telling him to kill Isaac. And Isaac wasn't married and had any children yet how could God fulfill his promise? And Abraham must have figured out, well, in order to do that, God would have to do a miracle. He would have to raise Isaac from the dead. Now I do think that's what he came to.

But in my own approach to this chapter, that is the limitation of my understanding. I had been taught that when I came to it and read it. That's always what I saw. I never saw anything else. But here's the way I came to see this matter of obedience. I had been asked by one of the Sunday school teachers in our church if I would come and meet with the junior high Sunday school class. I had been teaching from Genesis at the time, and they were studying Genesis in their class, and this teacher thought that it might be a good exercise for me to appear and answer some of their questions. I forgot my maxim that you always have to have somebody with you because I got a difficult question. And if somebody had been there, Ron Hafer had been there, I would have said, that's an easy one Ron, why don't you answer that?

But I didn't know the answer. And here's the question. They'd ask a number of very reasonable questions, and then one of them said, this said, look, we've been taught that this 22nd chapter of Genesis is about Abraham's faith in God's ability to do a resurrection that God had said he was going to send the Messiah eventually through Isaac. And God was telling Abraham to kill Isaac. So if God was going to keep his promise, he was going to have to raise Isaac from the dead. And I'm nodding, of course, because that's the way I understood the story myself. And then the

student said, oh, I hate junior high kids. This student said, but if that's the case, if that's really what Abraham thought, if that's what he wrestled with, if that's the solution he came to after God had told him to do this terrible thing, why doesn't the chapter tell us that explicitly?

I said, I'm very glad you asked me that question. I didn't know the answer to that question. Why doesn't it say it explicitly? If that's really what he struggled with, that's a magnificent triumph of faith. Here is Abraham the great man of faith. Why doesn't it say, look, Abraham figured it out? So I did what you sometimes do when you are confronted with a question you don't know. I stalled for time. I began trying to figure it out myself, and I said, It's not a bad way going about answering question either question you ask yourself or ask you. I said, Well, you have to begin to go back to first principles, and you have to think about the nature of the question and all of that. And I said, You're asking me, why aren't we told what Abraham was thinking about how he wrestled with this during these days?

And I said, first thing that strikes me as significant to that is that when you read the Bible, you can tell I'm stalling. Right. I'm stalling now. I hope we have time to finish here. I said, when you think along those lines, you go back and read the Bible. It does strike you, doesn't it? That very seldom are we ever told what's going on in the minds of people. I guess Job's an exception. Job's wrestling with this big question of evil, why bad things happen to people like Job. But that is all part of the dialogue. And it's a device by which this is argued out, the limitations of human wisdom and then God's revelation.

But I said, with the exception of something like that, almost never are we told what is actually going on in the minds of people. And I said, that is strange to us, of course, because when we tell stories, we always tell what the people are thinking and a good story if we read it, a good novel always tells us what's going on in the minds of people. I said, as a matter of fact, if you think about it James Joyce's, Ulysses great big long novel about 500 pages, is just almost exclusively what's going on in the mind of the one character during 124 hours period, one day in Dublin, on a certain day about 1927 or something like that. I said, That's a story for us. But the Bible doesn't do that.

Well, so far, so good. The student was still sitting there with a puzzled expression on his face, and he was probably reflecting my own. So then I got to my next point. And I thought, now, if the Bible doesn't do that, the Bible doesn't spell out in detail what the characters are thinking, that must suggest that God isn't primarily interested in what we're thinking. Doesn't mean that he's not interested at all and he knows and he cares and all that. But when he comes to put it down in the Bible, it's not our thoughts that are most important to him. Now I said, then we ask the question, Well, what is? And you go back to the story and you say, now, where is the emphasis of the story if it's not upon Abraham's magnificent triumph of faith, what does God praise Abraham for?

And at that point, you see, I came to realize that the emphasis is upon obedience. That's why I stopped reading where I did. You see, Abraham was about to sacrifice his son. The angel intervened, told him not to do it. He saw the ram caught in the thicket. He took the ram. He sacrificed the ram in place of his son. He named the place Jehovah Jireh. God will provide. If we

were writing the story, that's where we would have ended. That's the triumph. That's the end. But notice at that point, the angel speaks again and the angel says, Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies and through your offspring, all nations on Earth will be blessed because you have obeyed me. And that's the climax. It's interesting you see. That's the point at which Abraham started out. God appeared to him and was in Ur the Chaldeans.

God didn't ask him to believe in any miracles. He just said, Abraham, I'm leading you out into a new land that I'm going to give you. It's the way we begin the Christian life. Jesus just says, I'm calling you to follow me. Have faith in me and be my disciple. And we start out, then an awful lot of things happen. Abraham went through difficulties. He lived a long life. He had a promise of a son. The son didn't come. He had to believe in a miracle. All of that happens. But when you get to the very end, the thing that is emphasized is Abraham's obedience. And certainly it's appropriate to think along those lines when we end a conference like this. You've heard an awful lot in these days.

And I've thought through these things myself and I say, now the bottom line, of course, is what we're going to do about it. Are we really going to obey God? You want to grow in the Christian life, get into the habit of obeying what you know, because then God will teach you something else. And when you obey that he'll teach you something else. But if you hold back and say, Well, I want to know it all first, you'll never get beyond first base. Now look with that in mind. Let's just look at this chapter for the characteristics of Abraham's obedience that are emphasized.

When I began to see it in terms of obedience and not this great triumph of faith, rather see it as

the obedience of faith, well, then the chapter just jumped out at me in new ways. And I see all these characteristics of his obedience.

First of all, his obedience was immediate. Very easy to see that. God came to him and said, Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains. I will tell you about. Verse three says early the next morning he did it right away. And that's all the more remarkable, isn't it? Because God didn't tell him when to do it. I certainly told him what to do. And God made it perfectly clear how difficult it was. God said, I want you to take your son, and I'm not talking about Ishmael I'm talking about Isaac. And I'm not talking about Isaac you don't care about. I know you care about him, Isaac, whom you love. I want you to take that son and sacrifice him. But God did not say, do it tomorrow or next week or next month. God just said, do it.

And you see, if Abraham had been like a lot of us, Abraham would have said Right on God. Sure, I'm glad to do it. I will do it anytime now. Maybe not tomorrow, because, well, I have to take the kids out to the pool and probably not next week, because there's this I have to do next week. But I'll do it. And of course, if that's the way it responded, it would never have happened. Because in our case, once we postpone it, it's easy to postpone it a second time. The third time is even easier than the second time, and the difficult thing gets postponed indefinitely. And sometimes years later, God brings it to our minds in a meeting or in a period of Bible study. And we say, oh, yes, five years ago, God told me that, and I realized I should have done it and I didn't do it then. And God is right there with you again, still insisting on the same point.

I suppose the greatest secret about the Christian life that many Christians could learn is that when God tells you to do something, the time to do it is right away. Right away. Now, I don't know how he did it right away. I confess that. Take your son, kill your son. How did he do it? I don't know. But I do know how he learned immediate obedience, and that is, he learned it by doing it in lesser things. If you go back in the story, you find that several times earlier in the story we're told that Abraham obeyed immediately. The first time is in Genesis 17. There God is given in the instructions for circumcising all of the males in his household. The chapter is a long set of instructions by God. It ends in verse 21 and verse 22. When he that is, God had finished speaking with Abraham, God went up from him, and then the very next verse, verse 23, says, on that very day Abraham took all the males and had them circumcised.

So there was a lesser thing, but he did it right away. He learned to do it right away, and then you find it again in chapter 21. Chapter 21, concerns the tension that was building in the family between Hagar and Ishmael on one side and Sarah and Isaac on the other. Abraham was caught in the middle. Sarah wanted Abraham to send Hagar and her son away. Abraham didn't want to do it. He loved both of them. But God intervened and said, no, I want you to do it now. He didn't want to do it. He wanted to keep them there. And naturally we can understand that. But God said, no, you listen to Sarah and let them go. I'll take care of them. But I don't want them here. And so you read in verse 14 early the next morning, you see, so God spoke to him, and Abraham was in this pattern of doing it right away.

So when we come to the 22nd chapter, where we have this enormous test, something that boggles our minds and of which most of us wouldn't even be capable of doing or thinking, we

find nevertheless, that Abraham does it right away. So I repeat, if you get nothing else out of this message and perhaps even nothing else out of the conference, learn that God tells you to do something, do it right away. It is a secret of growing in the Christian life. Now, secondly, not only was his obedience immediate, it was also sustained. And I mean by that that once he decided to go God's way, he kept at it. I find that in the next verse, verse four, where it says, on the third day he looked up and saw the place in the distance. So although he had made his decision when God spoke to him and started out early the next morning, it was actually three days later when he got to the place. Now, three days in some settings is not very long.

You're about to go off on a three day weekend, at least a two and a half day weekend, and that's going to go by very quickly. Monday, you'll be back here and you'll say, Where did the weekend go? If you go off on a vacation, three days passes rapidly. Two weeks passes rapidly, and all of a sudden you're back at the grind again. There are settings in which three days passes quickly. But there are other settings in which three days is an eternity. And this was one of them. Abraham had determined to sacrifice his son and obedience to God. He set out to Mount Moriah. That was three days away. And in order to do that, he had to sustain his attitude of obedience every single step for every single minute of those three long days. Let me say there's a lot of that in the Christian life that is keeping it up day after day after day.

Some years ago I was in a Christian bookstore and I saw a book. I was attracted by the title, and I bought it just because of the title. I almost never do that anymore. It used to be books were cheap enough that you can do that. They're not anymore. And so I always want to know something about what's in the book, whether I really want to buy it or not, whether I'm going to read it, just

to use my resources wisely. But this book, the title was so good, I thought, look, it just has to be a good book. And so I picked it up. It was by a pastor from Baltimore. His name is Eugene Peterson, and it was entitled *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, and her varsity had published it. As it turned out, when I looked at it, it was a study of the Psalms of ascent, those Psalms from the Old Testament that the Jewish people sang as they were making their way up to Jerusalem for the feast. And it was a good study of those Psalms. But that isn't what attracted me. As I said, it was the title, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*.

And the reason I was attracted to that is because I said to myself, you know, that really is what the Christian life is all about. It's a long obedience in the same direction. We want the spectacular and our culture encourages us to look for the spectacular. But what really matters in the long run is obedience and keeping it up day after day and year after year. Well, I got that book and I took it home, and I looked in the foreword where the author was telling a little bit about what was in the book and giving an idea where he got his title. And I discovered that the title had come from something written by Friedrich Nietzsche, the atheistic philosopher. I never in all my life thought I would ever quote Friedrich Nietzsche favorably in a sermon. But Nietzsche, on this occasion at least said something it was really wise. Nietzsche had said, the only thing that ultimately matters in life in the long run is a long obedience in the same direction.

Now he may have been an utter pagan. He not only lived like one, he died like one. But at least in that respect he was right. What really matters is a long obedience in the same direction. And if that matters for the world, it certainly matters for us who are obeying, not some voice that comes from within, but the very voice of God. Abraham did that and is praised for it. Here's the third

characteristic of his obedience. It's a willing obedience. I get that in the next verse. Verse five, 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. The reason I say that indicates a willing obedience is because of that word worship. What does it mean to worship? Well it means to praise God.

It's based on the old Anglo-Saxon word worth. It means to acknowledge God's worth, to praise him for his worth. Philologically speaking, glorifying God praising God and worshiping God are all the same thing. So here's Abraham saying, I'm going to go up that mountain, and we, that is Isaac, my boy whom I'm about to kill and myself. We are going to praise God. We're going to glorify God for his attributes. We're going to praise Him as the sovereign God. We're going to praise Him as the wise God. We're going to praise Him as the Almighty God. We're going to praise him as the merciful God. We're going to praise him as the loving God. Loving, merciful, wise? How in the world are you going to do that? The only way Abraham could do it is that he was obeying God willingly with joy in his heart.

Now I don't know how he did it. I don't know how he found that kind of willingness, but I know he did because there's not even a breath of his reluctance or dissatisfaction or hostility to God in the whole story. I guess somebody would say to me, Isn't that point, self-evident? I mean, you're talking about obedience, being willing. It has to be willing, doesn't it? Because if you're not willing, you don't do it. And if you do it, you must be willing by definition. Well, in one sense, yes. And in another sense, no. It is true in the technical sense that you have to be willing to do it or you don't do it. But there is a kind of obedience which is reluctant, isn't there? In which we

can hear or read from the Bible, something that we know that we should do. And we look at that and we say to ourselves, Well, I guess I have to do it. God says I have to do it.

I sure don't want to do that. That's the worst thing I can think of doing. I do that, I just know I'm going to be miserable all my life. I guess I have to do it. God tells me I have to do it. He's the boss. I suppose if I don't do it, he'll make me do it. So all right. I'll do it. Well, that's obedience, I guess. But it isn't willing obedience. And that isn't the way Abraham obeyed. You know, the pattern for Abraham, even though Abraham hadn't heard of the literal history of Jesus Christ at the time, was nevertheless Jesus Christ. Because what are we told of him? We are told of Jesus that for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross. He didn't love the cross. He shrank from the cross. His prayer in the garden of Gethsemane is an indication of Adam and separation from God. He's going to take the sin of the world upon himself.

Nevertheless, difficult as it was, it was for the joy that was set before him that he did it. He was willing. He said, how I come in the volume of the book. It is written to me to do Thy will O God. And so the Lord Jesus Christ was willing. And he is our pattern. Here's, a fourth characteristic of Abraham's obedience. It was contagious. The reason I say it was contagious, is that it must have rubbed off on Isaac because as we read the story, we don't get any indication of any resistance or dissatisfaction on his son's part. I think here we're helped by a little bit of what I hope is sanctified speculation. And I want to ask the question, how old was Isaac at the time of the sacrifice? Was he just a tiny little boy? Was he perhaps a strapping teenager? Was he a young man? Was he perhaps even moving into adulthood?

Reason I asked that question is that it has bearing on his attitude. You see, if he was a tiny little boy, a little infant, which is what we generally think, because in Sunday school literature they're always pictures. Isaac is always a little boy, because Sunday school curriculum writers are always looking for stories in the Bible that have to do with children. And so they always make them look like children, so the children can identify with them. If he was like that, a tiny little boy and Abraham, his father had said, Come on, now, we're going to sacrifice you just because he was little, it wouldn't have been anything he could have done about it.

But if he was bigger, well, he could have resisted if he was unwilling. And if he didn't resist, it means he must have been willing. Which is my point. He must have learned his obedience from Abraham. So I asked the question, how old was he? Now, here's where the sanctified speculation comes in. If you look back to the previous chapter, chapter 21, you'll find that that's where Isaac is born. So the very beginning of chapter one, Isaac is zero plus one day. And then if you look ahead to the chapter that follows chapter 22, that is to chapter 23. You'll find in the very first verse that Sarah there lived to be 127 years old, and then she died. Now she was 90 years old when she gave birth to Isaac, so at this point, at the beginning of chapter 23, Isaac is 37. So at some time between his birth in chapter 21 and his 37th birthday in chapter 23, that the events of chapter 22 occur.

So I asked the question, now, does chapter 22 occur near the beginning of that period when Isaac is still small? Or does chapter 22 occur or the end of that period when Isaac is a little bit older? So now you look at those chapters for any indication of the passage of time. And there are only two places in those three chapters that indicate any passage of time at all. And they both come

between chapters 21 and chapter 22. If you look at the very end of chapter 21, Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time. Now, what does that mean? What is a long time? Well, it must be years. Abraham lived a long, long life by the time Isaac was born, he was 99. Sarah's next chapter is 127. A long, long time in a framework like that certainly means a lot, a lot of years.

And then you come to chapter 22, the first verse, the verse immediately following the one I just read, and it says sometimes later, God tested Abraham. So they have two indications of the passage of time, and they're all between chapter 21 and chapter 22. And I think what that suggests is that Isaac was not offered up when he was young, near the beginning of that period, when he was older toward the end. I sometimes speculate that perhaps he was 33 years old. He could have been about the age of the Lord Jesus Christ when he went to the cross for us, which all of this prefigures. But I don't know that. All I'm suggesting is that he wasn't a tiny little boy. He was older. He was older. He could have resisted if he had wanted to, but he didn't.

And therefore he must have learned disobedience from his father, Abraham. You know, we live in a very disobedient world. Children are disobedient in many cases and others as well. Where are people going to learn obedience? The faith is passed on from faith to faith. These characteristics are communicated from one individual to the other. You and I have to model these things. We have to show what obedience is and from us, other people will learn it. This is what happened here. And one of the great blessings of life is to have those who come within the sphere of our influence, especially children, when God gives us families who will learn these things from us and then grow up to be models of what believers should be.

Well, I've given a number of characteristics here. I've talked about his faith being immediate and sustained and willing and contagious. Let me say, in the fifth and final place that it was also rewarded. You see, when we start out, obeying God, we often think that we're doing something that is so impossibly difficult that nothing good will ever come of it. We have to do it, perhaps because of what God wants us to do, but it's never going to turn out well, because if we were planning things, we would certainly do it differently. Well, we ought to know better than that. God knows us, and he knows the world, and he knows our nature and all of that far better than we do. And if God says do it my way, it's not because he wants to make us miserable. It's because that's where fulfillment will come. But nevertheless, we don't think that way.

And what we have to see here is that Abraham was greatly rewarded by God. Now you say how? Well, one way in which he was rewarded was by his perception of what God was doing. And here's where we get back to that perception of God's ability to do a resurrection. You see, I think he really did figure that out. Just as I said, he had reasoned that if God had promised to send the Messiah eventually through his offspring, and if Isaac was the son of that promise and God was telling him to sacrifice Isaac, then in order to keep his promise, God would have to raise his son Isaac from the dead. Somebody had said to Abraham at that point, But Abraham, that requires a resurrection, and as far as we know, there has never been a resurrection in all of human history. Abraham, have you ever seen a resurrection?

Abraham would have had to say no. Well, then, ever seen a resurrection? How can you believe in a resurrection? You must be an obscurantus of the first order. And Abraham would have said something like this. He said, it's true. I've never seen a resurrection, but I do know that God is

able to do a resurrection. God can do all sorts of things. He is all powerful. But you see, if God isn't going to do a resurrection or something else, it's beyond my understanding. And if God is telling me to sacrifice Isaac and he doesn't save him some way, then that would mean that God is going back on his word and I do know that that is one thing God cannot do. It's not impossible for God to do a resurrection, but it is impossible for God Almighty to lie.

And so I'm going to put my faith in the fact that God will do the resurrection. Now we know, as the story goes on, that God actually saved Isaac in a different way. God intervened, and he taught the principle of substitution. And there was the ram caught in the thicket and the ram was sacrificed. And Abraham was so happy. Oh, he was glad that it was a substitution. He didn't have to slay his son. He called the place Jehovah Jireh, pointed forward the coming of Jesus Christ because it means God will provide, not God has provided, but God will provide. He recognized all of it this was symbolized, but it came about, you see, because of his obedience, that's how he got understanding. And if he had refused to obey, if he had said, Well, I'm not going to do that because you know dozen reasons. I'm just not going to do it.

He would never have come to this great peak of understanding that we find him to have scaled here in this great chapter of the Old Testament. If you want understanding of God in his ways, the secret to that is obedience because God reveals his heart to those who obey him. Let me close by referring to a little exchange that is in the middle of the story because it summarizes what all of this is about. You see, when they were going up that mountain, Isaac turned to his father and asked this question. He said, the fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering? And then Abraham replied, God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering.

Now that exchange the question by Isaac and the answer by Abraham are in a certain sense a summary of the entire Old Testament.

Anybody in the entire Old Testament period who had any spiritual understanding could have asked the question that Isaac asked Abraham, Where is the lamb for the burnt offering? And they would have had reference naturally, you understand that to the deliverer who should come. Adam could have asked it. God told Adam that when he ate the fruit of that tree, he would die, and he did die in spirit, and eventually he died in body. But at the same time God gave him the warning and came to pronounce judgment. God also announced the deliverer. He said, One is coming, who will crush the head of Satan.

And Adam believed that. He looked forward to that, and so when God took the animals and killed them and clothed Adam and Eve with the skin of those animals, the first sacrifice, Adam, who certainly had far more spiritual understanding in his pristine state than you and I do today, and he would actually talk with God in the garden, and it was certainly not about the weather. Understood what all of that was about. He would have said, Look, God told me that sin means death. The day you eat of that, you will die. I sinned and now here's death. The animals have died. That's what death is, but God is also teaching the principle of substitution. Physically speaking, they have died instead of me. I get all of that. And even this business of being clothed with their skins. It's like being clothed with the righteousness of God.

I understand that. But what I also understand is that that is only symbolic. It's not the blood of sheep and goats that takes away sin. This is pointing forward to the deliverer to come. And so I

asked the question, although I understand the principle and I appreciate the promise, O, God, where is the true lamb for the burnt offering? Not these animals, but the true lamb. If Abraham had been there at the time, Abraham could have responded in no wiser words than those he used with his own son so many years later, when he said, God in his own time, will provide that lamb for the burnt offering. You just have faith that he will do it. And so Abraham believed. And it was counted to him as righteousness. And Adam believed, and it was counted to him as righteousness.

You move down further on in history. You come to the time of Moses. Moses understood a great deal about God. God had given him a great deal of his revelation. He wrote it down. There was the Passover with the animal that was killed. The blood spread upon the middle of the house for the sin of the family within. And God gave him the instructions for the day of atonement, when the high priest would take that one animal and kill it. Blood would be shed and sprinkled on the mercy seat to atone for the sin of the nation. Moses understood all of that. Principle of substitution. But he could have asked the same question. You see, he could have said, I understand the symbolism, but what I want to know is, where is the reality? Where is the true lamb for the burnt offering?

And if Abraham had been present on that occasion, he could have said, with equal wisdom, God himself, in his own time, is going to provide that lamb. David could have asked that question. He sinned. He knew he needed an atonement. Where is the lamb? The answer God will provide the lamb. Isaiah could have asked it. He had that great chapter 53 all about the principle of substitution, but he's looking forward to it. Where is the lamb? God himself will provide the

lamb. That's the message of the Old Testament. But you see, then eventually the day came when John the Baptist was standing down there by the Jordan River and his relative from the north, Jesus of Nazareth came by and the Holy Spirit spoke to John and told John that that was the one.

And so John pointed to Jesus. And he said, what? Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And his disciples who were standing there, we don't have all the dialogue, but they must have turned to John, and they must have said to John, What's that I heard you say, John? Did you say, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world? Yes, that's exactly what I said. There he is. Jesus. Is that the Lamb of God? Is that the one we have been waiting for for all these centuries? Is that the one that Adam was looking for? And Moses were looking for? And David and Abraham and all of the great prophets and all of the saints, all down through the history of the Jewish people? Is that the one? And John the Baptist said, yes, that's the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And you know what they did?

They said, all right, then, that's the one we should follow. And they left John and went on after Jesus. They followed him for three years during the three years of his ministry, and the time came the end of that period, when Jesus said his face steadfastly to go up to Jerusalem, to Mount Moriah, the very place where Abraham had gone to sacrifice his son. He went up, I believe, on the 10th of Nisan, the very day the lambs were being taken up to be sacrificed for the Passover. He himself the perfect Lamb. At the very time those lambs were killed. The symbols Jesus himself died for our salvation. You see, when Abraham brought Isaac to Mount Moriah, God stopped the hand of Abraham. But when it was Jesus, the Son of God, the knife was not stopped.

And Jesus died for our sin. Jehovah Jireh, God will provide. And today we look back and we say, and he did. He provided Jesus. How do you learn that? How do you come to understand those things? Where do you get that kind of perception? You get it through obedience. And the way we obey is by following after him. Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you for this time that we've had to study your word and we confess again. We always have to do that. But there's a lot we don't understand. At the same time, we thank you for what we do because we know that spiritual understanding is made possible by the ministry of your Holy Spirit. So we thank you for working and teaching and instructing.

And we have asked that as you have blessed us in understanding. So you would add to that the blessing of obedience causing us to follow after that which we have perceived and grant that in our lives at all times, in all ways. And increasingly, as the years go by, we might buy our obedience and our faith, give testimony to your great grace in Christ Jesus because he's the one we desire to serve and serve with all our hearts. Amen.