

Genesis 22:1-18

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. Then God said, "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."

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, ⁷Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?" "Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "The fire and 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 a 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 is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."

The angel of the LORD called to 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."

Dear people of God,

The frilled neck lizard, or frilled dragon always draws attention on TV. It is a medium sized lizard from Australia that most of us have seen before but maybe didn't know its name. It's so memorable for its reaction to danger. It's unforgettable, really. When an enemy approached it puffs out its frill creating a hood behind its head and making itself appear much larger. It will hiss up a storm and maybe even lunge at its attacker. Once, the frilled dragon realizes its attacker is not intimidated it begins to sprint away. And the way it runs is also memorable. This four-legged lizard sprints on two legs like you and me. Those in the scientific community call this the classic fight or flight mentality.

This fight or flight mentality is an animal instinct, but they aren't alone. Think about how we deal with adversity or danger. If danger approaches our natural instinct is to either battle them or to run away. When God places challenges in our lives, how do we react? Like that frilled neck lizard, we want to return to our comfort zones. So, what is our comfort zone?

Sermon Theme: What Is Our Comfort Zone?

- 1. Are we quick to flee?**
- 2. Are we bold to trust?**

Abraham was forced far out of his comfort zone; he was told to sacrifice his one and only child, the son of the promise. God said, "**Take your son...to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt**

offering.” Few of us can fully appreciate the pain and sadness in Abraham’s heart. If he would have tried to fight or flee from God, it would’ve been understandable. What God asked was ridiculous wasn’t it? Abraham probably wished to return to his comfortable life before he spoke with God.

We can be sympathetic with Abraham; God asked a difficult thing. At least God spoke with him directly. But he didn’t speak with Isaac. You and I might wonder what Isaac knew and when he finally realized that he was the burnt offering. If it were reasonable for Abraham to fight or flee from God; it would also be for Isaac. After all it was his life on the line. What could be more uncomfortable than lying on an altar waiting for your father to sacrifice you? So what was Abraham and Isaac’s comfort zone?

To fully understand what was going on in their minds, let’s back up a little. Remember how God promised he would bless the world through Abraham and Isaac. Isaac was their one and only son. Even knowing God was with them; the journey to Moriah must’ve been heart-wrenching for Abraham. God asked him to sacrifice his only son, the one God promised for so many years. Doubt must have swirled in Abraham’s mind. Did God really say sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering? He couldn’t have...that just doesn’t make any sense. Why would he say that?

But, Abraham followed God’s plan anyway. He woke up early, split the wood, packed up the mule and brought Isaac with him to the place only God knew. And Isaac followed along, unaware of God’s plan. He saw some of the normal sacrificial ingredients. Fire, wood, a dagger—it was all there, except for one key part. **“Where is the lamb?”** Isaac followed alongside his father for a time, trusting Abraham knew best. Finally, he asked Abraham, **“Where is the lamb?”** Abraham responded, hesitation and doubt replaced by faith in God—**“God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering.”** That was enough for both of them. God was faithful to them in the past. He was with them in Ur and on their travels to and from Egypt. Abraham and Isaac walked together in faith to the place God would show them. God provided for them in the past, and God would provide for this sacrifice.

By faith alone they continued on. Logic says bring a lamb, you know “just in case” God doesn’t provide something else. This was the same logical Abraham that had a son, Ishmael, with Hagar, Sarah’s maidservant, just in case God had forgotten his promise. These were flawed humans, as susceptible to doubt and missteps as you and I. This “bring the lamb” logic kicks in for you and I today. When we are confronted with a difficult situation we react with either fight or flight. We want to put some cushioning between our lives and God’s plan. We want to return to our comfort zones. So, where is your comfort zone?

Sometimes God places looming layoffs in our lives. How do we deal with this? Do we get angry at God? “God, why do you let bad things happen to good people?” Our sinful nature wants to react like Jesus’ followers in the Garden of Gethsemane on Maundy Thursday. When difficult times come, we might react like Peter and attack our foe with a sword. Other times we become frightened, like the young man, who fled so quickly he left his clothes behind. Our sinful nature doesn’t want to rely on our God, because sometimes it flies in the face of self-preservation.

God also allows real tragedy and hardship in the lives of his believers. It can be something simple; a co-worker or friend mocks the name of God or takes his name in vain frequently. It can be easy to think, “God would want me to turn the other cheek here.” Or like the good book says, “Judge not.” We manipulate God’s Word to suit our own plans or “needs”. If we are honest with ourselves, we will admit our silence is just more comfortable. We flee from this conversation because it could be awkward and uncomfortable.

But it’s not just awkward conversations that we avoid. What about when God asks us to do something difficult? Are you and I so quick to put our lives and our family’s on the “altar” for God? When we have challenges thrown in our face aren’t we quick to flee to our comfort zone? When our hours or position at work isn’t as secure as it was a year ago, do we see a lack of trust that God knows what is best for me and my faith? It easy to do, isn’t it?

And how do we react when God speaks through his representatives? Not always respectful. Don’t always remember who they represent. We focus on their flaws and mistakes and dismiss their authority. Children sigh and mutter under their breath that the teacher is out to get them. And it isn’t just children. Adults look at government officials and church leaders as selfish or incompetent. “God couldn’t want me to obey such a flawed person?” Remember Isaac didn’t have a message straight from God, only Abraham did. And Abraham was a flawed human. God expects us to put our lives in his hands and his representatives. This is true when it is easy, when they serve faithfully and make our lives comfortable. But this is just as true

when times are tough, when their human nature is all too obvious. These are the moments we pray for an extra measure of faith and trust in our God and his earthly representatives.

How did Abraham and Isaac react to God's plan when it was uncomfortable? Isaac didn't fight Abraham or try to flee. Remember Isaac was a young man and Abraham was 100 when Isaac was born. Scripture says nothing of a struggle. It seems unlikely that a man near 120 years would have the strength to lay his son upon an altar if Isaac were struggling. Isaac knew that he was in the trusted hands of his father, and more importantly in the trusted care of his God. **"Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son."**

Now, our hearts go out to Abraham and Isaac. Imagine the heartbreak that Abraham was going through and the fear pulsing through Isaac. Abraham and Isaac knew how brutally violent the burnt offering was. If this were a lamb, Abraham would have slit its throat and drained all the lifeblood out and then lit the whole sacrifice on fire. But this wasn't just the choice animal from his flock of hundreds. This was his choice child, his only son, the firstborn whom he loved. This was his life, his future on the altar just as much as it was for Isaac. Logic says "bring the lamb" just in case.

So how could Abraham make this ultimate sacrifice? Well, Abraham, by himself, couldn't have. Rather it was the power of God's promises. God was with him the whole time. Logic says "bring the lamb"; but faith says "bring trust in God". As he was about to kill Isaac he was stopped by the angel of the LORD. Isaac was replaced by a ram caught in the thicket. The LORD really did provide. Isaac's life is spared and both Abraham and Isaac are reminded of God's blessings. His gracious hand was with them the whole time. Guarding and protecting. Reminding them of his promises. That Isaac would have many descendants. That all people would be blessed through his line. God accomplished what he desired, when he desired. Accomplishing what was ultimately best.

This is what God cares about -- what is ultimately and eternally best for his children. He wants all people to be saved. That's why he spared Isaac and did not spare his only Son when our lives were on the line. It was God our Father who sent his Son down. With Christ hanging upon the wood of the cross, there was no ram in the thicket. Just pain, punishment, sadness, and the torments of hell — all for our ultimate good. Christ was the ultimate sacrifice. Remember that look that Abraham had in his eyes? And he didn't even see his son suffer and die. God the Father watched his Son suffer and die at the hands of those he came to save—for you and for me. Christ set aside his life for our salvation.

This was God's plan from the fall in the Garden, but it didn't make it any easier. Christ struggled with God's plan as you and I do. Remember those agonizing moments in the Garden of Gethsemane? When he begged his father **"Take this cup from me"**. How did he end his prayer? Go ahead, you know the words, **"Not my will, but yours be done"**. It wasn't easy for Christ, but he knew that God's will would be done. Christ put his life in God's hands for all the times that you and I couldn't, didn't, or wouldn't.

Earthly speaking, God's will can be quite uncomfortable. But this is all part of his plan of salvation — to bring us to our ultimate comfort zone, with him in heaven. God hasn't asked any of us to suffer and die for the sins of the whole world. That's why Jesus came. He has told us to live Christian lives in a world that will hate us. The world will mock us for our beliefs, call us bigots, judgmental. We will want to cry out "LORD, take this cup from me!" Sometimes he will, but other times we must realize that it is part of his plan.

He doesn't send us out unarmed. We have his blessings to lean on. Just like Abraham and Isaac did. He promises to be with us and lead us through these difficult times. He promises he'll take care of our earthly needs, just like the sparrows. Our Father promises that he'll work everything for the good of those who love him – that is us. And he promises he's preparing a place for us in heaven.

Brothers and sisters we can rest secure upon God's altar, with our lives in his hands. This is our comfort zone. Laid on an altar. With our lives in his hands. When difficult times come, and they will, we can replace fight or flight with faith. We can look to the power of God's promises. Because his Son offered the ultimate sacrifice on the cross, for you and me, we know that his plan is better than ours. We know that God cares for our eternal good. We have a God that is preparing a place for us in heaven, our eternal comfort zone. Amen.