

After three months in Genesis, and the assurance from me that we were taking a breather you might feel a bit like I'm an Italian mob boss, when you think you can get out they pull you back in; As we kick off Advent in Hebrews 11 and Genesis 22!

Today as we walk up Mt Moriah with Abraham and Isaac, thinking of the world they lived in we **{Slide 2}** will see that i) in the darkness God provides. As we think of the world we live in, after Jesus, we will be encouraged to hold fast to him as ii) in the darkness we believe.

Pray.

i) in the darkness God provides:

{slide 3} It's not hard to fathom the darkness in the Genesis reading is it? It's confronting and confusing.

Abraham, the Father of the Jewish people's faith is tested, in a way that is almost inconceivable to us.

When we read this passage we know it's a test (v.1) we are given this piece of information, but Abraham didn't know.

From the outside we are made aware that God is testing Abraham who had no idea. He was responding to the situation as it unfolded, responding in obedience at every step.

God asks Abraham to do the unthinkable. **{slide 4}** v.2 "'Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.'"

Look at how he responded. v.3 he packs up his donkey, and off they go. **{slide 5}**

What does the heart of that father feel like? Can you imagine it breaking inside him, as he thinks about what he is going to do?

How does Abraham make any sense of what God is asking him to do?

It seems crazy.

Not crazy because God has asked him to sacrifice a child; several times in our journey through Genesis we've been reminded of the religious tone of the ANE world. Child sacrifice isn't unusual, it's a given.

It's horrific to us, and we know that Yahweh himself deplores the practice . It's not something of his intent or making, through the prophet Jeremiah God makes that loud and clear 'They have built the high places of Baal to burn their children in the fire as offerings to Baal—something I did not command or mention, nor did it enter my mind.'

In the life of Israel the sacrifice of children to moloch would infest their worship. **{slide 6}** King Ahaz the king of Judah is an example 'He followed the ways of the kings of Israel and even sacrificed his son in the fire, engaging in the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites' (2 Kings 16:3). Both Judah and Israel had adopted child sacrifice. **{slide 7}**

This was a long time after Abraham, but the practice of child sacrifice was well and truly alive in his lifetime, and it continued. Abraham lived in a dark world. So dark that he doesn't even bat an eyelid when God asks him to sacrifice his son.

The idea of sacrificing a child doesn't seem crazy to Abraham, but the idea of sacrificing his only son might.

I'm sure many of us know the story: Abraham and his wife Sarah were well past child bearing age. They had no children of their own and their names would be forgotten. They had no future. Until God stepped in and changed all that. Abraham was one who found favour with God. He was promised a future. His name would endure. He would be remembered, and be made into a great nation. **{slide 8}** God had said

'I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'" (Gen 12:2-3)

To be a great Nation, **{slide 9}** to have an enduring family line, to be a blessing to all the people's on earth he needs a son, and in what is an act of worship v.5, it looks like that life, that light, that future, that flickering flame of hope will be extinguished with the sacrifice of Isaac.

And yet for all the darkness on the surface of it, look at the heart of the exchange between Isaac and Abraham in vv.6-8. With the gentle, small voice of the son asking "Father? Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham, in the midst of the darkness, the personal darkness of walking up this mountain - the mountain where one day the temple would be built in Jerusalem, and the darkness of the world around him, in the midst of all that darkness there is still a spark....

'God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering my son" v.8.

Is he lying? Is Abraham just trying to trick Isaac so that he doesn't flee or struggle? Not for a minute. Abraham trusted God.

Hebrews 11:19 unpacks it for us; We heard it read, Abraham believed God would raise his precious son, Isaac, from the dead.

He believed that God would fulfil his promise to Him, he believed that God was trustworthy, that Yahweh was a faithful God. Abraham's faith, his trust in God was such that he was fully committed to going through with the sacrifice, to the point where he is plunging the knife towards his son the angel of the Lord; Jesus himself stays his hand. 'Do not lay a hand on the boy' He calls from heaven.

Isaac is spared, and a sacrifice is made from God's own provision -a ram caught in the bushes v. 13, God himself provides. The sparing of Isaac is not where the emphasis lies in the outworking of Abraham's faith; his obedience is. Through his obedience we see the fulfilment of God's promise.

In all of that darkness God provided; a son for Abraham and Sarah, a promise for him of a future, a ram to sacrifice in this moment of deep darkness, and a blessing for all humanity. Through this family the Lord Jesus would enter the world and break into it with an unending light.

The Lord Jesus would make a way, for the darkness of death and sin to be overthrown. God would provide what we needed, like a lamb led to the slaughter, but this time, no hand would be turned away. Cruel nails would hold him down. God would not spare his own son, who must be a sacrifice, a sacrifice for the sin of the world. In the darkness God provides. A messiah. The light of the world. **{slide 10}**

ii) In the darkness we believe:

We live in a dark world too don't we?

We see it first hand. Right now our world is groaning and suffering. Millions are perishing in these dark days as COVID-19 surges again. We are weak and frail. There is division and hurt in families, churches, workplaces, schools as we grapple with personal rights, and mandates, - it feels like everywhere we look disunity is banging on the door.

We know our own sinfulness, our own brokenness, our own personal darkness. The light of Jesus, seems to have faded away. Often we look at the brokenness of our world, and we have no idea how on earth God could do anything with it.

Yet Hebrews has reminded us that 'faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.'

It's what Abel, Enoch, Noah and Abraham were commended for.

This is why we start with them at Advent. We begin with Patriarchs because they had faith. They could not see the future. Abraham didn't know how God was going to bless him and grow his

family, he didn't know how the nations would be blessed; he didn't have a monkeys - but he had faith.

He trusted the God who was as good as His word.

And so can we.

We can be absolutely clueless about how God will bring about justice, how he will release the oppressed, about how he will bring equality, restoration, reconciliation, turn swords to plowshares,

But like the Patriarchs we can believe. We can have faith, and we can have, believe it or not a faith that is even greater than theirs. Because we have seen the great light. We have seen the Lord Jesus revealed to us in the pages of Scripture, brought alive by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We can see and study his life, and we can remind ourselves of who we used to be and who we are now. We can see the redemptive work of God in our lives and we can believe more and more in a god who is faithful. Faithful to His word which never fails, and faithful to his people who he loves.

Who he loved so much that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life.

We live in the last age, a perpetual advent - a time of preparation and eager expectation, as we wait for the return of Jesus. We live in a. Time where it is hard to see the light through the gathering gloom,

And so in a world where people amass wealth for security, we trust the promise of God to provide all we need, and we give away our cold, hard earned cash to the work of the Kingdom.

In a world where celebrity is the goal, we seek to see ur own reputation and the name of Jesus glorified and raised up.

In a world where sexual conquest is a key driver, we discipline ourselves and use sex and sexuality in ways that honour God.

In a world where lines are being drawn between vaccinated and unvaccinated we do what we can to find unity, and reject division. Even if we warn't able to gather together as we have been we will find ways to love our brothers and sisters no matter where they fall on this issue.

In a world where YOLO is the catch cry of the day, we live for an eternal future rather than the passing moments of this life.

In all of these different ways we show our faith. Our trust in the promises of God to come true, even when we can't see how. Because God is faithful. He was faithful to Abraham and he is faithful to us. Not one of his promises will be broken.

In a dark world, as we await the second Advent, the return of the Lord Jesus we live by faith.

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In the darkness God provides, and in the darkness we believe.

Pray: