

Three Words that Became Hard to Say

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Date: 05 November 2023

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[0 : 00] Good morning. We're going to be reading out of Hebrews chapter 11. Kara is going to be reading verse 17 down through verse 19.

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. Can we pray together? Father, you are good this morning.

You are good to your people. We thank you for allowing us to gather together and to sing your praises. We thank you that we have your word available to us.

We thank you that we have brothers and sisters who can be with us and encourage us and that we can join our voices together to sing praises to you because you are worthy.

[1 : 19] You are worthy of our praise. You are worthy of our lives as a living sacrifice, as an offering to you. Lord, would you help us by your spirit to understand your word this morning and that it would cause us to marvel at your goodness, at your wisdom, at your power, and your perfect plan of redemption for your people.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. We are going to be in a little bit of Hebrews 11, but mostly we are going to be in Genesis 22, which tells the more full scope of what we just read about Abraham and Isaac.

So I'll have you sort of put a bookmark in Genesis 22. But before we read that, I have a question for you. There are a handful of movies that I think that every person should watch at least once in a lifetime.

One such movie that everyone should experience is The Princess Bride. So my question is, have you seen it? Okay, if you've not seen it, you have homework for this afternoon.

But if you would indulge me a little bit, I want to recount the opening of that movie. You see, Buttercup was raised on a small farm in the country of Florin.

[2 : 45] And she had a servant who worked for her, a farm boy named Wesley. But Buttercup never called him that. When she would give him a task, she would say something like this.

Farm boy, polish my horse's saddle. I want to see my face shining in it by morning. And Wesley's response was, as you wish.

For every command, that was always Wesley's response. As you wish. And we soon find out that when Wesley would say, as you wish, what he meant was, I love you.

And I want you to hold on to that picture as we look in Genesis 22, where Abraham's faith is tested in the most extreme way possible.

Genesis 22, we're going to read the first two verses. It says, After these things, God tested Abraham and said to him, Abraham, and he said, here I am. He said, take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.

[4 : 09] So God knows from the beginning, and we know from the beginning, that what Abraham is about to experience is a test. But Abraham doesn't know that. He is not told that this is a test.

So just for reference in our timeline here, at this point in Abraham's life, God had already promised Abraham and Sarah that they would have a son in their old age.

And they do. Isaac has now been born, and he's been weaned, and he's been growing up. And we aren't told exactly how old Isaac is at this point.

Is he still a boy? Is he a young man? We don't actually know for sure. However, the same Hebrew word that's used for Isaac in verse 5, the boy, is also used for the young men, which is also mentioned in verse 5, who are along on this journey that Abraham's going to be taking.

And so we don't really know. Isaac could be 12. He could be 20. That much is uncertain. But regardless of that detail, this command from God is extreme, and it's shocking.

[5 : 15] Abraham is instructed to offer up his own son whom he loves deeply. And equally shocking is Abraham's immediate obedience to this command.

But I think we should be careful not to misinterpret Abraham's immediate obedience with some cold indifference to this.

Abraham loves his son. God told him that. And yet, even though Abraham loves his son, he obeys God's command. Now, the obvious question that we can ask is why?

Why put Abraham and Isaac through this test? I mean, God knows all things. He knows Abraham's faith. Before this, he has already declared Abraham righteous because of his faith.

And so why the test? The Lord does this for two reasons. To show us what real faith looks like and to show us what real love looks like.

[6 : 22] Verse 3 of Genesis 22. We already know that Abraham's love for his son is not in question.

And yet, to the surprise of everyone except for the Lord, Abraham's response is basically, as you wish. Can any of us begin to fathom how Abraham could obey this command?

What kind of faith is this? But we have to remember Abraham's history. When God called Abram, which that's what his name was at this point.

When God called Abram away from his family and from his homeland, he went out to a land that he didn't know. He obeyed God. He said, as you wish, I will go.

When God told Abram to look at the night sky and to number the stars, if he could, saying that his offspring would be as many as those stars, though it seemed impossible, Abram believed God.

[7 : 42] By believing God, Abram was basically saying in his heart, let it be as you have said, or as you wish. And when God changed Abram's name to Abraham and commanded that he be circumcised, he and his whole household, Abraham obeyed God.

As you wish. But now, God told Abraham to sacrifice his son, his only son, whom he loves.

The very son that God had promised and that had given him. So to say, as you wish, to this, those three words would become hard to say.

And though Abraham loves Isaac more than almost anything, he does as the Lord commanded.

As you wish. And when he says to God, as you wish, what he meant was, I love you. Here's a question for you, though.

[8 : 48] What if Abraham had refused? Many people have read this account of this test, and they've said, if God told me to sacrifice my own son, there is no way.

Well, first of all, take it easy. God will never command this to anyone for reasons that are clear, even from this very passage that we're going to be studying. But let's for a second explore what it would have meant if Abraham had refused.

What would have been driving that refusal? Let's take a simple analogy. Let's say that one day after school, I tell my children to do something. Let's say I say, you know, hey, please shave the dog.

It's a bad example. They would never refuse to do that. They would be jumping at that opportunity. Let's take a different one. Let's say, okay, so please unload the dishwasher right away.

There's one. Okay, so I say that to them. Please unload the dishwasher right away. And let's say that my daughter refuses. She might say something like this. Dad, you don't understand. I've already cleaned out the dishwasher.

[10 : 00] Or, sorry, Dad, but my teacher told me I have to finish all my homework as soon as I get home. A couple reasons for a refusal to do what I've asked right away.

Seems to me there are two reasons that a person would refuse a clear command. Either I know something that you don't know. Or, I'm following an authority other than you right now.

Let me say that again. The two reasons that a person would refuse a clear command. I know something you don't know. Or, I'm following an authority other than you right now.

If Abraham had refused God's test, instead of saying, as you wish. If he had said, no, I will not do it. In essence, Abraham would be saying, you don't understand, God.

Perhaps I know something that you don't know. Or, a refusal would have meant, God, I don't recognize your authority over me in this. Reminds me of a passage in Scripture in the book of Isaiah, chapter 55, verse 9.

[11 : 15] The Lord says this, For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

That's what the Lord says. But when God gives us a command and we refuse it, we are inverting this truth. We are essentially saying to God, no, I see my ways as higher than your ways, God.

I see my thoughts as higher than your thoughts. So, refusing his command is our way of saying, okay, you are the Lord, but you are not my Lord in this moment.

I am. I am. That's what a refusal would mean. So, hopefully that gets the wheels turning. Perhaps you can think of some clear commands that the Lord has given you from his word.

Is there a command that you have received from God's word, and yet you are refusing to obey? Parents, is there a command that God has given you in your parenting?

[12 : 20] Perhaps you're thinking of one. Children, is there a command that God has given you in honoring? And obeying your parents? Employees, is there a command that God has given you in your work ethic?

Believers, is there a command that God has given you to share the gospel with others? Believers, is there a command that God has given you? Is there a command that God has given you to forgive those who have sinned against you?

Do you catch yourself saying, yes, Lord, I know that you have commanded these things, but... That word but...

Two reasons a person might refuse a clear command. You don't understand. I know something that you don't. Or, I'm following an authority that's different from you right now.

So, Abraham's refusal in this test, extreme as the test may be, would have revealed either a lack of trust in God's wisdom, or a rejection of God's authority.

[13 : 26] So, let's read verse 3 again. So, Abraham rose early in the morning. He saddled his donkey and took two of his young men with him and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

He obeyed immediately. And yet, in Genesis 21, that's one chapter right before this.

In chapter 21, God had told Abraham that he would have descendants specifically through Isaac. Isn't that interesting?

He was just told, you're going to have descendants through your son Isaac. Isaac. That means that this command to sacrifice Isaac presents God with his own conundrum.

I was wondering which word I should use there. Does anyone have a different word for a difficult decision? And it's really hard to know which one is the best one.

[14 : 26] Any other good phrases or words besides conundrum that anybody can come up with? You're in a pickle. Yes. Any others? A quandary.

That's also a good one. Between a rock and a hard place. You're between a rock and a hard place. You're a quagmire. Quandary and quagmire. We are really digging deep.

There's a, some people might call it a dilemma. Perhaps Sophie's choice if you're in an older generation. One of my favorites is you might be in a sticky wicket.

Sticky situation. Thank you. I think that we should come up with a steadfast thesaurus. I think we would do just fine. But this, I'm going to stick with conundrum though just because that's what's in my notes.

Okay. So, what do I mean when I say that this command to sacrifice Isaac, this extreme command, presents God with his own conundrum? Well, let's think.

[15 : 29] Isaac currently has no children. Isaac has no children. And yet, God has already promised that Isaac would have children.

So, God will either have to intervene here or God will have to do the impossible. He will have to somehow raise Isaac from the dead.

And it's worth noting that at the time of this test, no resurrections had ever taken place. Abraham wouldn't even have a frame of reference for that. But he knew that God, the faithful one, had promised him that through Isaac shall your offspring be named.

So, there's the conundrum. Isaac would either be spared or God would have to resurrect him because Isaac's own children and his grandchildren were already promised by God.

The Lord was going to prove faithful and Abraham knew that. He just didn't know how. He would do that. And that's faith. Jeremy reminded us that we're in Hebrews 11.

[16 : 40] The beginning of that chapter, it says, Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. So, we would all do well to echo Abraham's faith.

Saying, Lord, I may not know how you are going to keep your promises, but I am fully convinced and fully assured that you will keep your promises. So, what are some promises that God has given us?

Those who trust in Jesus. Well, here are a couple and you can think of your own, but Jesus said this in John 6, 37. All that the Father has given me will come to me, and the one who comes to me, I will never cast out.

That is good news. Jesus says this in Matthew 11, Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

The voice from heaven in Revelation 24 says this, God will wipe away every tear from our eyes, those who trust in Jesus.

[17 : 50] God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. Death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.

These are promises from God himself. We don't know how the Lord will keep these promises, but we can be assured that he will. So, hear me.

If your faith is in the Lord, your faith is in the one who cannot lie. In our current series on faith, specifically Hebrews 11, we're highlighting the faith of men and women who have trusted God, and their actions proved their faith.

Two weeks ago, we looked at the faith of Abraham's wife, Sarah. If you recall, Jeremy said that Sarah had to compare an apparent impossibility with an actual impossibility.

The apparent impossibility was that she and Abraham would have a baby so late in life, and the actual impossibility was that God would break his promise. Sarah having a baby at the age of 90 seemed impossible, but God had promised, and then Abraham and Sarah saw God deliver on that promise.

[19 : 12] And here's Abraham in Genesis 22, weighing an apparent impossibility with an actual impossibility. The apparent impossibility that Isaac must die before he has children with the actual impossibility that God would break his promise of Isaac having descendants.

But perhaps God's faithfulness in Abraham's past has strengthened his faith now. Just a side note, that's why we as believers need each other.

Because when we're tempted to focus on ourselves in dark times more than on Jesus, and we forget God's faithfulness in the past, we need our brothers and sisters to come along and encourage us, to remind us of God's goodness, to bolster our faith, to remind us of God's sure promises.

Verses 4 through 6 in Genesis 22. On the third day, Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, stay here with the donkey, I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.

And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac, his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went, both of them, together.

[20 : 48] That's interesting. Abraham said that he and Isaac are going to go together and worship and that they are going to come back. He didn't know how, but Abraham was certain that Isaac would live to see children of his own.

Did you also catch that Abraham placed the wood for the offering on his own son? That means that Isaac is now carrying the wood up the hill for his own sacrifice where he's going to be offered up.

Verses 7 and 8. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, my father, and he said, here I am, my son. He said, behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?

Abraham said, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son. So they went, both of them, together.

Isaac has been around long enough to take an accurate inventory of all that is needed for an offering. And the lamb is mysteriously missing. Abraham tells them, God will provide for himself the lamb.

[22 : 16] How will God get himself or Abraham out of this conundrum? Abraham doesn't know. But he does not waver from trusting God in his promises.

Verses 9 and 10. When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac, his son, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood.

Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. We can pause here and say, how on earth could Abraham actually get to this point?

We can only speculate what would be going through Abraham's mind right now. We do know that Abraham had grown up earlier in his life surrounded by idolatry.

He was even familiar with the concept of child sacrifice, for instance. The false gods of the nations had demanded that practice.

[23 : 24] But God had called Abraham away from that. The Lord was different from the false gods. Abraham was called a friend of God and God had proved himself faithful.

But just how different was he from the false gods of the nations? Would the Lord be pleased with Abraham following through and killing his son?

Let's read verse 11 and verse 12. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, Abraham, Abraham! And he said, here I am. He said, do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him.

For now I know that you fear God seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me. The relief that Abraham and Isaac must have felt at those words, do not lay your hand on the boy.

See, we knew from the beginning that God was never going to let Abraham follow through with this. It was a test. God knew this already and now Abraham knows. Isaac is not the lamb that God is providing.

[24 : 45] I want to remind us of our text from Hebrews 11 that Kara read for us this morning. Hebrews 11, 17 through 19 says this, 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, that's Abraham, considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. Abraham trusted God's word over his own understanding.

Abraham considered that God was able, if necessary, to raise Isaac from the dead, which means death itself wouldn't have stopped God's word from proving true.

Isaac was figuratively dead. What does that even mean? That he was figuratively dead? Well, from the first moment of Abraham's test, Isaac was as good as dead.

Just like Abraham in his old age was called as good as dead in Hebrews 11 when he had Isaac. But nothing is too hard for the Lord.

[26 : 16] Upon hearing God's command, Abraham began mourning the loss of his son. Immediately, Isaac was as good as dead. Abraham mourned the certain death of his son for three days for the entire journey to Moriah.

And now, Abraham is able to stop mourning. He has now, figuratively speaking, received Isaac back from the dead after three days of mourning.

Abraham has passed the test which was designed to show us what real faith looks like. See, real faith is not merely thoughts and words.

Abraham's faith in God was real and it was active. We know that his faith was real because it produced obedient action.

By saying, as you wish, to the most extreme command, Abraham showed that he loved the giver more than his gifts.

[27 : 24] He loved Isaac, but he loved the Lord more. And God in his faithfulness has now spared Isaac and in a unique way, he provided a substitute.

I want to read Genesis 22 verses 13 and 14. After Abraham was stopped, verse 13, Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked and behold, behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by his horns and Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.

Verse 14, so Abraham called the name of that place the Lord provided. As it is said to this day, on the mount of the Lord it was provided. No, that is not what it says.

Did you read along with me? Verse 14 actually says, so Abraham called the name of that place the Lord will provide.

As it is said to this day, on the mount of the Lord it shall be provided. Huh, that's interesting. Wouldn't you expect Abraham to name that place the Lord provided?

[28 : 45] Past tense. And that it would have been said up to this moment in time when Moses wrote this and for hundreds of years people had known this place. Wouldn't it have been made sense to say that on the mount of the Lord it was provided?

but it doesn't. You see this test was also designed to show us what real love looks like and I'm not talking about Abraham's love for God or for Isaac.

I'm talking about God's love for us. That's what this test was actually about. This was God giving his people a glimpse into the future of the severity of his love for his people.

Abraham called Mount Moriah the Lord will provide future. And all the way up to the time of Moses God's people would continue to say on the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.

Future tense. Why future tense? Abraham was right to name this place in future terms. The Lord will provide. The promise the Lord will provide was fulfilled almost 2,000 years after Genesis 22 in that same place.

[30 : 08] Because that is when and that is where the true Lamb of God was ultimately provided. Remember at Moriah the Lord provided for Abraham a ram caught in a thicket by his horns in the place of Isaac as a substitute offering.

What does real love look like? What does the love of God look like? He sent the Lord Jesus who willingly carried the wood up that hill for his own sacrifice.

We find our substitute with thorns wrapped around his head. The Lamb of God slain in our place.

For us we do not look to Jerusalem and wonder what will the Lord provide and when will he provide it? We don't wonder. We look and we say that is where the Lord did provide.

It's on that mountain that Jesus the true Lamb of God fully provided my forgiveness my salvation my deliverance from death.

[31 : 21] He is my substitute. And what's more no one counseled God. No one told God take your son your only son whom you love and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as an offering.

No one counseled God there. God did this willingly out of his great love for us. The perfect son was willing to lay down his life for all who hope in him.

Let me tell you something. If you find yourself discouraged by your own sin, if you find yourself discouraged by insecurity and your own inadequacies, if you ever doubt your status as a beloved child of God, remember the words of John 3 16, which say, God so loved the world that he gave his son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Look at that cross. Look at that cross. Come to the father and in full assurance proclaim, God, now I know that you love me seeing that you have not withheld your son, your only son from me.

Can we pray? Amen. father, we we pause and we marvel at the glory of your wisdom.

[33 : 00] You've known all things from the beginning. You declare the end from the beginning. you know all things. You knew Abraham well.

You loved him and you loved Isaac. And yet this test just reminds us of what real faith looks like. Lord, we ask you to strengthen our faith, not just to talk about it, not just to think about it, but that our faith would produce obedient action.

Lord, help us to joyfully obey the things that you have commanded us because we know that your ways are higher than our ways and that your thoughts are higher than our thoughts.

We thank you for preserving this story for us over thousands and thousands of years so that we can look at real faith and that it will remind us of your love for us.

Your generosity, your forgiveness. We praise you for Jesus and his willingness to lay down his own life.

[34 : 18] We know that no one took his life from him but that he willingly laid it down for his people. Father, would you strengthen our faith today and strengthen our love for you.

We thank you for revealing to us who you are and that you call us your children by faith, that we have the same faith as Abraham.

Lord, we love you and we ask that you would continue to walk with us by your spirit. Help us to do the things that please you. and as we enter into the time of communion, Lord, let us with sober mind think of what Jesus endured and what he accomplished and what that means for us and for our eternity.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.