

*Intro:* Easter Greeting. . . Quick word about Redemption Hill. You probably will not be surprised to discover that more people attend church today than any other day of the year. This is the holy week, the days where the Christian church observes the final days of Jesus, including his brutal crucifixion and glorious resurrection.

The events of the holy week are so important because they highlight what is of first importance to Christians as Paul says in **1 Corinthians 15:3-4: "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures."**

**Jaroslav Pelikan** put it in perspective when he said: **"If Christ is risen, then nothing else matters. And if Christ is not risen, then nothing else matters."** Think about that claim: If Jesus rose from the dead, then nothing else really matters in comparison to that. In fact, that would be a truth to build your whole life upon. But if Jesus did not rise from the dead, then go ahead and live however you want to live, because in the end, there's nothing more than this life.

This morning we are going to turn to one of the most important chapters in the Bible, and like few other stories, it holds the capacity to take us deep into the meaning of Easter weekend as we celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus. Open our your copy of God's life giving Word to Genesis 22 as we consider . . .

### **"The True & Greater Resurrection"** **Genesis 22:1-19**

As we study the Bible this morning, my prayer is that every single person will . . .

**The Point: Experience God's transforming power through faith in the resurrection of Jesus.**

Story of Genesis 22 . . . *Read 1-8*

- Verse 1 begins by saying: "After these things . . ." What does that tell us? In order to understand the story of Genesis 22, we need to grasp the back story of Genesis 12-21.
- In Genesis 12, God chose a man named Abraham to be the instrument to fulfill his redemptive purposes. He called Abraham to leave his homeland and sojourn to a land where God would make him into a great nation, and bless the world through his offspring.
- Throughout these chapters, God continued to reaffirm and establish his covenant promises, including the promise that he would have more descendants than he could count.
- There was only one major problem. His wife Sarah remained childless. . .
- Foolishly, Abraham and Sarah decided to take matters into their own hands... Hagar – Ishmael.
- In spite of this, God promised the birth of Isaac in Genesis 17 though he was 100 years old and his wife Sarah was not much younger!
- Chapter 21 records the miraculous birth of Isaac, the Son of the promise, the son of laughter, which is what his name means. Abraham hosted a great celebration feast when he was weaned and everything finally seemed to be working according to God's plan.
- But it is "after these things" the Genesis narrative takes a sudden twist.

Conflict Arises in Verse 2...

- "Take you your son, your only son, whom you love, and . . . offer him there as a burnt offering."
- Isaac was his "son." We love our children don't we? Our third daughter is due really soon: Jordyn Hope. Many of you will love her, but no one will love her like Marsha and I will!

- But Isaac was not just any son. He was his “only son.” What does that mean? What about Ishmael? Isaac was his “unique son,” irreplaceable in the scheme of the Abrahamic covenant as the “son of the promise.” Take him and sacrifice him to me.
- Think on that . . . God could not have presented a more drastic request. He might as well have said: Abraham, here’s your dream: put him to death. Here’s your hope of blessing: do away with him.
- Abraham is faced with the greatest dilemma of his life. Though God commanded him to do this, and it makes absolutely no sense to us. After all, God prohibited human sacrifice. Not only that, there seems to be a contradiction between the promises of God and this command, because the promise to bless the nations was to come through Isaac. If Isaac were to die, how would the promise be fulfilled?
- The Lawgiver’s authority is above the law itself. God is absolutely sovereign. His rights are infinite. He can do and will do whatever he pleases, and whatever God commands is right.
- What is so remarkable about Abraham during this test, which is the reason God gave this command, is that Abraham: let God be God. He did not try to do his job. And we would be wise to follow his example.
- Can you imagine being tested in this way? Abraham’s loyalty to God is tested (how devoted is he to God’s will for his life?). His affections were also tested: who would Abraham love more – God or Isaac? And his faith was certainly tested: would he trust God to provide and keep his promise.

The Conflict Rises in vv. 3-8.

- Abraham goes and does not delay. He rises early and embarks on a three day journey to the place of sacrifice. Over the three painstaking days, there would have been plenty of time for Abraham to retreat, but he knew God had spoken and he obeyed.
- Even when his Isaac asked him where the lamb is for the burnt offering, Abraham appears unflinching in his resolve to obey God as we see in vv. 9-10.

Conflict Climaxes (9-10)

- Abraham fighting through a myriad of emotions continues to trust God, binding his son Isaac on top of the wood and he grabs the knife . . . And in that moment, in the nick of time we read vv 11-14.

Resolution (11-14)

- There was a ram, caught in the thicket... Abraham offered the ram God provided rather than his son Isaac. What an amazing, heart wrenching story!

*T:* As we absorb this gripping story, two pictures of life emerge that possess immense power and immense hope for us today. I want to give you two encouragements in light of these truths.

### **I. Know the God who provides life in the shadow of death (Genesis 22:1-19)**

- The overtones of death dominate this story. Go offer your son (2). Death is coming. Cut the wood for the burnt offering (3). Death is coming. He takes the wood, the fire, and the knife... death is coming. Isaac asks, “Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Death is coming...
- We understand death is coming to everyone. But not at this age, not in this way, not at the hands of his father . . .
- Now, we’re tempted to focus on Abraham . . . the primary message of Genesis 22 is not the faith of Abraham, though it is monumental. The primary message concerns the provision of God.
- The main character, the hero of this story and every story is God. This desperate situation was an opportunity for God to display his glory. As A.W. Pink said: “Man’s extremity is always God’s opportunity.”

- Paradoxically, where there should be death, God provides life. As the knife is about to fall on Isaac, God provides life in the shadow of death by providing a substitute.
- In this we see a preview of the cross of Christ. This is the story of everyone who looks to the cross of Christ
- What did Jesus do on the cross? Jesus paid the penalty we could never pay by absorbing the wrath of God in our place. The judgment we deserved for our sin fell on him. Jesus was our substitute and made the greatest exchange the world has ever known.
  - Taking on our sin, he gives us his righteousness.
  - Taking on our curse, he gives us his blessing.
  - Taking on our separation, he reconciles us to God. And . . .
  - Taking on our death, he gives us life.
- God provides what we cannot. Abraham had no other provision until God showed up! And we have no other provision until God sends his one and only Son, whom he loves, to bring us salvation.
- In Genesis 22, God provides life in shadow of death, but in the cross of Christ, God provides life and puts death to death.
- This is what **Athanasius** spoke of in 4<sup>th</sup> century when he said: **“A marvelous and mighty paradox has thus occurred, for the death which they thought to inflict on Him as dishonor and disgrace has become the glorious monument to death's defeat.”**
- Do you know the God who has defeated death on our behalf? Have you looked to Christ and found life through him? I want to urge you to consider your spiritual needs before God today. They carry eternal consequences.

T: So we must know the God who provides life in the shadow of death, but that is not all. We must also..

## **II. Believe in God's power to provide life beyond the shadow of death (22:1-19; Hebrews 11:17-19)**

When we get to the end of this story, most of us are probably still scratching our heads. How could Abraham display such radical trust in God? Listen to Hebrews 11:17-19 . . .

**“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.” <sup>19</sup>He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.” (Hebrews: 11:17-19)**

- His faith rested in the power of God. Do you see what is going on here? Abraham acted in faith because he believed God not only could, but would raise Isaac from the dead. Amazing!
- Abraham expected a bodily resurrection and he expected it immediately. Don't miss those three powerful words: “God was able.” The God of Abraham is a strong God.
- God can do anything but break his promise, even if that means raising Isaac from the dead.
- As we think about Abraham's faith in God's ability to raise the dead, it is appropriate for us to think of the True & Greater Resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- Today, as we celebrate Easter, we have to understand the implications of his rising from the dead cannot be overstated!
- Listen to what **N. T. Wright** says, **“The resurrection completes the inauguration of God's kingdom. . . . The message of Easter is that God's new world has been unveiled in Jesus Christ and that you're now invited to belong to it.”**
- The dawn of God's Kingdom fully appeared in the resurrection of Christ, and we are invited, not simply as guests, but as full participants in all of the kingdom's benefits!

- I want to give you three characteristics of the resurrection that reveal the significance of Easter for us today. #1)

### **The resurrection of Jesus offers hope.**

- Here's the bottom line for us to consider this morning: Just as Abraham believed God for something greater than most were able to conceive, so the resurrection of Jesus points to something more and proves there is something more!
- Life constantly reminds us we want something more.
- Marathon Bombing – E60... Marc Fucarile . . . His life has been forever changed by the tragic events on Marathon Monday last year.
- We know this world is broken, and we know there must be something better than this broken world has to offer.
- Be honest: don't you long for something better? Here's the good news: the resurrection guarantees it lies ahead! There is life and hope and joy and peace in the coming kingdom of God.
- The resurrection speaks hope into our fears, our doubts, and anything that disheartens us.
- Even if you sit there today and you have yet to personally accept Christ's sacrificial death in your place and believe in his resurrection, you should want it to be true!

### **The resurrection of Jesus offers life.**

- Isn't it amazing what is happening in this story? Abraham not only experienced God's provision of life in the shadow of death through God providing the ram, but he was fully convinced of God's power to provide life beyond the shadow of death.
- In John 11:25-26, Jesus said, **"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"**
- In Christ, our fear of death dies. And if that is the case, what else do we have to fear?
- Would you say that you are ready to die this morning? If it was your time to stand before God, are you prepared? Former mayor of New York City and mega-billionaire, Michael Bloomberg, who also happens to be a Medford native, revealed that he is beginning to wrestle with his mortality more now at the age of 72. However, from his perspective, he has no reason to fear death. Pointing to all of his philanthropic efforts, he said with a grin: **"I am telling you if there is a God, when I get to heaven I'm not stopping to be interviewed. I am heading straight in. I have earned my place in heaven. It's not even close."**
- What's the problem with this statement? According to the Bible: Everything! Mr. Bloomberg may not fear death but for the wrong reasons!
- We can be free from the fear of death, not on the basis of our works, as Mr. Bloomberg assumes, but on the basis of Christ's work. Every time someone looks to Christ in faith, the reign of death dies in them, and they are raised to life.
- Just as sin brings spiritual death, so grace brings spiritual life.
- If you have placed your faith in Christ, the words of Jesus in John 14:19 are for you: **"Because I live, you also will live." (John 14:19)**

T: The resurrection of Jesus offers hope. The resurrection of Jesus offers life. And finally. . .

### **The resurrection of Jesus offers power.**

- What kind of power? Power to live your life. Christ's resurrection not only guarantees a deathproof life beyond the grave, it also (are you ready for this?) guarantees a deathproof day tomorrow.
- The life of God in the Christian is indestructible. The resurrection matters down to the details of life. For the Christian, the resurrection of Jesus is not an event to celebrate once a year; it is a reality that transforms us moment by moment. That's good.

- Application: What area of your life feels a little lifeless? Be honest. I know it's Easter, but few of us can say that we are experiencing the power of the resurrection in all phases of life, right. That's why we need grace! So what is it? Where do you need the power of Christ's resurrected life in you?
  - To forgive those who offend you...
  - To enable you to persevere in the workplace...
  - To remain patient in looking for a job...
  - To strengthen you in your studies...
  - To heal a fractured relationship. . .
  - To say no to sinful desires and live the life Christ calls us to live...
- The power that raised Christ from the dead is at work in all who believe.

There is great hope, and life, and power available to us through the resurrection of Jesus.

Conclusion:

As we conclude our time, I want to leave you with the words of one of the greatest theologians of the past 50 years. **J. I. Packer** says this about the connection between Christian hope and the resurrection of Jesus.

**“Optimism is a wish without warrant; Christian hope is a certainty, guaranteed by God himself. Optimism reflects ignorance as to whether good things will ever actually come. Christian hope expresses knowledge that every day of his life, and every moment beyond it, the believer can say . . . the best is yet to come.”**