

THE PURPOSE OF THE INCARNATION

ADVENT SERIES 2021

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TO ESTABLISH GOD'S KINGDOM: GENESIS 22

Pastor Anthony Ferguson

At the beginning of this sermon series, I asked you to think and write down your best answer to the question, why does the incarnation exist. That was four weeks ago, and since then we've learned that the incarnation exists so that God might say of us, "My son; my daughter" (John 1:1-18) and to make us righteous (Romans 5:12-21). We described this as Jesus rewriting our history and giving us a new future. Last week, we saw that the incarnation exists to help the helpless (Hebrews 2).

I hope that these truths shaped our minds and our hearts, church family. I hope that the truth that God is most glorified in showing grace gave us immense and incredible joy (John 1:1-18)! The reality that sin and death are no longer threats to us because Jesus has given us his righteousness as a gift should have moved us to delight, and the reality that Jesus helps us by saving us and by helping us overcome temptation should move us to pay much closer attention to Jesus. Church family, I hope that our hearts were shaped over these last four weeks.

We will conclude our study of the incarnation today by studying Genesis 22. Genesis 22 is the story of Abraham nearly sacrificing Isaac, and most of you might wonder what this story has to do with the incarnation. That is what we'll discover today, and as we discover this truth, I hope that again our hearts are shaped.

Preliminary Details

Let's discuss a few preliminary details before we get started. Genesis informs us of several important doctrines. In this book, we learn about the goal of creation (God's kingdom spreading throughout the entire planet by image-bearers), the problem with creation (sin), and the solution to fixing this problem and achieving this mission (a coming redeemer-son). When we study any passage of Genesis, we must examine it considering this context.

I preached the book of Genesis in 2020 and finished it in early 2021, and I preached Genesis 22 on October 18, 2020. You all can access that sermon on YouTube. You can also read that sermon on our website: all our manuscripts are posted on our website under the tab "resources." I am not simply redoing that sermon today, church family. I preached that sermon in a context: we were preaching through Genesis at the time. My goal today is different than it was a year ago. Last year, I was preaching Genesis and when we came to Genesis 22, we preached it considering that context. Today, I am preaching on the incarnation, and we are studying Genesis 22 in that context. I am convinced that when we pay special attention to Genesis 22 considering the storyline of Scripture as a whole, the incarnation becomes an important theme. Thus, today, we will spend less time on the details of Genesis 22, and more time on the relationship between this passage and the surrounding context.

With this in mind, let's now get started. Let's investigate Genesis 22 with an eye to the theme of the incarnation.

Genesis 22 and the Storyline: Genesis 22:1-19

When Genesis 22 is connected to the wider story of Genesis and the entire Bible, we see the incarnation. Let's examine a few details of Genesis 22 and connect them to the wider story. First, Moses tells us that *Genesis 22 is a test* (Genesis 22:1) and this is a vitally important

test since there is a major problem in the storyline of Scripture. In Genesis 3-11, we see the extension and horrific nature of the curse of sin and death. It extends to all people and every aspect of humanity. There is not a category of humanity – the mind, the body, the heart – that is not corrupted by sin (see Genesis 6). Creation is broken, and we need a new creation. That is exactly what Genesis 12 is. The call of Abraham is an act of new creation. In Genesis 12, God calls out of darkness something new (see Romans 4:17 and Peter Gentry in Kingdom through Covenant). The remedy to the curse of sin and death is the call of Abraham.

Although Abraham and his family are the remedy, they too are broken, and this forces us to ask the question of whether Abraham can be the pathway to something new. The curse has infected them too so that blessings are not extending to the nations, but curses. God cursed Egypt because Abraham lied about Sarah (Gen 12:10-13:1), and God cursed a philistine king for the same reason (Gen 20:1-18). Abraham even resorted to “helping” God out by taking Hagar to be a wife, and this act led to strife within Abraham’s family (see Genesis 20). Sarah and Abraham connived that they could get the child promised to them by God through their efforts and ingenuity rather than on waiting on God. Abraham’s lies and practice of having a child through Hagar is less than blameless behavior, and the question we are asking as we read about this guy is, Can God keep his promises through that guy? Thus, it makes perfect sense that God would test Abraham (22:1). The curse that he and his family are to remedy infects him too.

Second, this test was designed to reveal the nature of Abraham’s faith. God had already promised that he would give Abraham a son in Genesis 15:4 and God specified that Sarah would bear that son in Genesis 18:10. Isaac was the child of promise who would be heir to

Abraham. Yet, now, in Genesis 22, God tells Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. This test creates a dilemma; every test creates this dilemma. The dilemma is God's promises, at times, appear to conflict with his commandments. In this situation, God promised that Isaac would be heir to Abraham but now he tells Abraham to sacrifice him. This dilemma does something in Abraham and us. It reveals if our faith is genuine or not; it reveals if we trust God or not. Will we obey the Lord even when it seems like we can't?

Abraham did. He knew that Isaac would be his heir as is clear in verse 5 when he tells his servants that soon he and Isaac will return and in verse 8 when he tells Isaac that God will provide the sacrifice. Abraham will obey the Lord because he trusts in God's promises: Isaac and Abraham will return because God told him so (Genesis 18:4).

Third, God tells him that he will bless Abraham because he obeyed (22:16, 18). Now, God had already promised Abraham that God's kingdom would come through him and his family in Genesis 12. Then, in Genesis 15, God sealed these promises with a covenant. Genesis 17 explains how God will uphold his covenant with Abraham, and the timing of this is important since Abraham had just taken Hagar as a wife and had Ishmael. Even though Abraham resorted to "helping" God out with his ingenuity and resources, God will not forsake him. The covenant will be upheld. Now, in Genesis 22, God reiterates this promise because Abraham obeyed. Moses wants us to get this point, so he repeats it twice: God's promise to establish his kingdom on earth for the good of sinful humanity because Abraham obeyed.

Considering this point, let's remind ourselves of Genesis 15. Genesis 15:7-21 records for us the covenant ceremony, and something glorious happens here. The ceremony includes the ripping up of animals and laying them side by side. Typically, both parties would walk through the pieces. This act symbolizes the oath that if they break the

covenant, then you should do unto them what you've done to these pieces. Yet, in Genesis 15, only God walks through the pieces, not Abraham (see Gen 15:17). The idea is significant. God promises to uphold his covenant with Abraham with his life. The covenant depends on God (many details of this discussion depend on Gentry's analysis in Kingdom through Covenant).

The Incarnation of Genesis 22

Considering this reality, let's again return to Genesis 22:16, 18 which says, "because" you have obeyed. Here we learn that the covenant depends on a faithful covenant human partner who trusts God no matter what. In the storyline of Genesis, Moses is constructing for us a narrative that affirms two doctrines: if God's plan of establishing his kingdom on earth is going to be achieved, it depends on God (Genesis 15) and it depends on a faithful human covenant partner (Genesis 22).

Abraham is that covenant partner in Genesis 22, but he is not the ultimate covenant partner. We have examined Abraham's life and we have seen that it is less than blameless. He has lied about the identity of his wife twice, and he has resorted to helping God out by taking Hagar as a wife; yet, his faith is real as we see Genesis 22. He is not perfect, but he truly trusts God's promises. Therefore, we say that true saving faith does not express itself in perfect obedience, but true obedience. As such, he points us forward to the faithful human covenant partner who would trust God perfectly. Jesus would not waiver in his faith but would trust the Lord even when staring at a cross and tomb.

The covenant is upheld by God and by man. It is upheld by Jesus the one who is fully God and fully man. The incarnation exists to establish God's kingdom on earth!

Application

I'd like to challenge us in three ways today. First, today's sermon focused mainly on the storyline of Scripture. I want to challenge you to read Scripture this way. When we read Scripture, we must pay close attention to the details of the passage we are reading. Most sermons that I preach focus on this level. We are aware of the words being used, the images used, the setting,

and the narrative comments. We focus most of our time on the words before us. Although this is where we must start, we cannot end here. The authors of Scripture have a purpose in telling us the stories they do that move us beyond explaining some of the details of Abraham's life. Therefore, when we read Scripture, let's go beyond simply reading individual passages, but let's pay careful attention to how each passage of Scripture contributes to the overarching story of Scripture. To do this, we must trace the most important concepts, themes, and characters from say Genesis 22 to the NT. Let's begin to ask the question, "How does this story contribute to the wider story of Scripture?" Let me challenge us to read Scripture this way: with an eye to the surrounding context.

Second, Abraham points to Jesus, church family. Because Jesus obeyed the Father as the faithful human covenant partner, we are blessed (22:16-18). Let's be grateful.

Third, the obedience of Jesus – the faithful human covenant partner – leads to us and the nations being blessed (22:16-18; Matthew 28:18-20). Church family, who is getting blessed because you are a child of God? Who in your family, community, and among the nations? The blessings of God spread as the gospel is preached, so have you been sharing this news recently with anyone? How about with your "one"? Have you been taking steps to reach them?

Church family we are approaching a new year, and wouldn't it be glorious if we saw 10, 20, 30 people come to know Jesus this year throughout our ministry? So, let's consider two items. First, how would we reach them? What would need to change about the way we do ministry? What about our building? What about our lives? The way we spend our free time?

Second, church family, I think you all do well with goals – we have a goal-oriented church family! By God's grace through your faithfulness, we doubled our Lottie Moon giving! Seriously, that signifies that we care deeply about the mission of God to the nations. So now let's consider our context. What would be an appropriate goal for our church? How many people should we beg God to save through us this year?

I want to give everyone a few minutes to pray individually or as family units about these items, and in a minute or two, I'll close us in prayer.

Prayer

Thank you, God, for the incarnation. Without it, the mission would have failed, and we would have been lost. Your mission is achieved because of Jesus, so help us to play our part this year. By your grace and for your glory, let us act strategically as a church and as individuals so that we can see people transformed this year. Help us in this task for your glory. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

