

Patriarchs

THE YEAR OF THE BIBLE

Sermon 2: Abraham: Living Faith

Genesis 17 & 21-22

Dr. Matt Cassidy --- February 16, 2020

I am feeling awesome lately and some if it may be in contrast. For the last more than a year, I just haven't felt all that good. I haven't felt the closeness of God and I really enjoy the feeling of God's intimacy with me in my daily life, just walking and talking with Him. And that's been missing for about sixteen months. A gap ... something happened.

But do you know what? It doesn't matter how I feel, does it? It does not matter one bit how I feel. Because God is near because He said He is. He promised, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." And so, for the last year and four months I've been getting up and doing what I do. Because my faith is not clinging to feelings to justify it. Living by faith is living as though the promises of God are true. That's reasonable --- living as though the promises of God are true, not how you feel. And so, although the last sixteen months have not been good to feel, they haven't affected the truth of God's promise to be near.

Lately it's been awesome. I feel great! I feel His intimacy with me on a regular basis. But His position in my life hasn't changed. Living by faith is living as though the promises of God are true. That's one of those promises.

Last week we looked at Abram, or Abraham's life, and we looked at that. We're looking at him even this week as well. You can turn in your Bibles if you want to do that and follow along. This is chapter 17. He's the father of the faith, it's called. And we learn a lot about living by faith. Last week we learned about what salvation faith looks like. And this week I want us to see how a living faith shows itself in the father of faith. Genesis chapters 17 through 22 will be that living faith.

Review of Abraham's Faith Journey with God So Far

Let me just review, because it's all part of the bigger story of Abraham's life. It starts with his name being Abram, first of all. In Genesis chapter 12 God interrupts his life and says, first of all, "Leave and go to this promised land for you. And I promise you this. I promise you

an heir, and the heir will become a nation. I promise you land, the promised land. And I promise that one of those heirs will crush the curse and all the nations will be blessed by one of those descendants.”

The problem is that Abraham is seventy-five years old and his wife is barren. And the point is that God is going to have to miraculously allow this to happen. Her barrenness is the key. It brings us hopelessness.

Here’s a great quote from a scholar who says, “The barrenness of Sarah” – or Sarai – “is an effective metaphor for hopelessness. This text tells us there is no foreseeable future. The human race and human history have just hit a dead end. It’s over. And then God speaks and there’s hope again.”

Are you hopeless? That’s a great place to be. That’s a good place. In this story of salvation faith, he had to become hopeless. But this week I want to show you that in living faith it’s the same thing. We’re becoming like Christ in all of life. What area of your life needs to become like Christ? A character trait, an attribute, a habit ... Have you gotten to the place in your life where you are hopeless to change? *Only God could fix this*. That’s the place God wants to get you. Because unless you’re hopeless in this area --- you’re trying to make room for a spiritual intervention. So, look how Abraham’s life here is our life when we live a life of faith --- getting to this place of *God, help us*. That’s what happens in Genesis chapter 12 – he’s seventy-five.

Last week we saw that God interrupts again. Genesis chapter 15, verse 1. He’s eighty-five, it’s ten years later. He has no heir, he has no real estate. All he has is doubt. And so, God comes to him and says, *What are you doubting?* The theme of that particular chapter of doubt is *I doubt that I’ll ever have this real estate, this promised land that you promised*. And so, the theme of that chapter is that God says, *Well, let me help you have hope in memory of my promise by giving you --- we have real estate doubts ---* He gives him a real estate contract or a real estate covenant. God cuts a covenant in like of the real estate covenants of the day. So, He promises again, this attribute of God, giving him this land – only God can do this. And what’s great in the story that we looked at last week is that only God signs the real estate covenant. Abram slept through it. And that is a picture of the salvation covenant. The Bible will be using that particular story as the definition of salvation covenant, because that covenant is unilateral – only God did

it; unconditional; and irrevocable. Abram didn't make a promise. Abram received a promise. "He believed in God and it was accredited to him for righteousness." That's the point.

Another Visit from God

Now we're in Genesis chapter 17. God visits again. Chapter 17, verse 1 --- now Abram is ninety-nine years old and he has a lot of doubts about having an heir because he is still childless in the context of his marriage.

Genesis 17:1-2

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. ² I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."

So, this is where we pick it up in chapter 17, verses 1 and 2. It says this --- who's going to reverse the curse? Who's going to bring help to the fallen world? "When Abram was ninety-nine years old, and YHWH appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."

As we go through this covenant renewal here, I want you to see a few things. First of all, this is the first time God has a name change. He introduces himself – "And YHWH said, 'I am God Almighty'" – El Shaddai. And when Abram read that he would know that that means not the creator of all things --- he's that --- El Shaddai means *I am in control of all things. I don't submit to the laws of nature; I am in control of the laws of nature; I overpower nature.*

So God shows himself --- it's the first time it's used in the Bible – El Shaddai, *I am El Shaddai*. As we go through it's going to be a covenant renewal, but listen for these things. Because God will say nine times in this chapter "my covenant." God's the one making the covenant. And I want you to listen for who's doing the work here. This covenant will not be a reaffirmation of the real estate part, but rather, the heir part. Who will do the work? Let's see – El Shaddai.

Genesis 17:3-7

Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, ⁴ “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. ⁵ No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. ⁶ I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. ⁷ I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.

Genesis 17: 15-16

God also said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. ¹⁶ I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.

Chapter 17, verses 3 through 7 now: “Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, ‘As for me, this is my covenant with you: you will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.’”

Skip down a little bit. “God also said to Abraham” --- he has a new name – “ ‘As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be a mother of all nations; kings of peoples will come from her.’”

Do you see the big idea here, the point? God Almighty, El Shaddai, has entered the equation and He will provide this. And Abraham says, *I don’t understand. I’m ninety-nine. Help*

my unbelief. Just like last week in Genesis chapter 15, God is going to help Abraham's unbelief. He does that in two different ways.

Name Changes

The first way is He changes his name. He knows a new name about God. God has a new name now --- Abram has a new name. His name will be Abraham, the father of nations, the father of multitudes. “ ‘And your wife no longer Sarai, but rather Sarah, the mother of nations, the maker of kings.’ ”

Why? Why the name change? Because every time his faith is fading, each time he finds himself forgetful of the promises of God, someone says his name, someone says his name.

Hey, Abraham –

Wait, what?

And your wife, Sarah. Wait, I just introduced her as Sarah.

Yeah, she's the mother of nations, she's the giver of queens.

Wow. If you can imagine --- how does he say this? Can you imagine the first time he has this conversation with people? Some scholars would say he has 650 employees at this time. He's a man of great wealth. So, he has the big corporate meeting in the warehouse, right? Ninety-nine years people have been calling him Abram. And he says, Okay, new nametags for me and the wife. Call me Abraham because I'm the father of nations. And she's the giver of kings.

So, on the one hand, it must have been startling. How long would it take people to say, “Abram ... no, I'm sorry ... Abraham, boss ... Abraham.” But each time, mind you, they're without a child. And so, they're kind of snickering. *Yeah, father of nations ... good for you. Keep on hoping there, bro.* And they're doing that.

But here's a great quote. It says, “God's promise renewed to Abraham through every man who addressed him until at length the child of the promise is lying upon his lap, saying, ‘Abba’ – father, Abraham, daddy.”

Now Abraham's laughing. God helps Abraham in his doubt and his wife Sarah by renaming them. *You call me God Almighty and I'll call you Abraham. I'll call you Sarah. I will keep my promises.* What a gift from God. What a gift.

We do that sometimes, right, with our names back and forth to our loved ones? That's a good thing to do. God does this as well.

Circumcision

Genesis 17:9-13

Then God said to Abraham, “As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come.”¹⁰ This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised.¹¹ You are to undergo circumcisions, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.¹² For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner – those who are not your offspring.¹³ Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant.

The other way He helps is not just in a name change, but through the covenant ritual of circumcision. Watch this. In verses 9 through 19, “Then God said to Abraham, ‘As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be a sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner --- those who are not your offspring. Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant.’”

This is the ritual of circumcision. Yeah – it's circumcision Sunday. Jim Gaffigan is a comedian and he kind of animates this conversation with God when Abraham hears this and says, “Circumcision? That's Hebrew for ‘Owww!’” He negotiates with God. “Can't I just give up bacon or something?” God says, “Yeah, you can do that, too.” That must have been some

meeting in the warehouse – *Call me Abraham, and men, I'm going to meet with you later, all of you.*

Why circumcision? Because the covenants are related to the promise. So, the Noahic covenant is a rainbow because a rainbow is related to the promise “I will not flood the earth again. I will not judge man in that way.” In Genesis chapter 15 we saw that Abraham had doubts about his real estate promise. So, God gives him a real estate covenant. That's the kind of covenant he cut.

And so, this one – he's cutting a covenant again – and it has to do with an heir. It's about reproduction. The promise is about reproduction, so the covenant sign is about reproduction. That's why. What does it mean, this ritual of circumcision? Why does God have him do this and every descendant after that? This is their identity. This is hugely important to understand the Jewish nation. Because in this ritual of circumcision, it says that you belong to God. God is saying, *You belong to me.* It says forever. “I am making an everlasting covenant with you and your descendants.”

But from a human perspective, it says this. The existence of Israel is miraculous. The very existence of Israel is miraculous. From this day forward, in the darkest times, for whatever this Jewish person is going for, every act of reproduction, every trip to the bathroom, is a reminder that God intervened in the life of a man named Abram, changed his name to Abraham to remind him that he would be a father of a great nation, that his first heir would be a miracle. And one of those descendants would be the one who would crush the curse. Every time that sort of thing happened, they're reminded that ninety-nine years old, a man without hope, has a new identity as being the chosen one, to be the father of nations, and his wife the giver of kings.

In Israeli history – listen to this – Israeli history begins with the suspension of the laws of biology. And for 4,000 years they've practiced this expression – circumcision. And for 4,000 years when their nationality was lost because they lost their land, when they had been spread out through all the world, they would always remember this – *We are God's people.*

Men weren't circumcised until this time. And they still are today for this very purpose. On the eighth day of a young boy, a child's life, he's circumcised, and the whole family says, *We belong to God. We started by El Shaddai sending His power into the dark hopelessness of the womb of Sarah and in the life of Abraham.* Every dark place has this reminder that El Shaddai, ex nihilo, out of nothing, causes a nation to be birthed. It's a great way to remember.

Application

God wants us to remember His promises. And we practice a lot of covenants that way. Our marriage covenant, quite often we have a wedding ring attached to that. I tell people that have really righteous tattoos on their body so that when they see those they're reminded of God's promises that they received, not the promises they made to God.

Last week we celebrated a covenant ritual – communion, the Lord's table. One of our rituals, our covenant renewals, is baptism. It's an expression, it's a visual of what is happening to us spiritually. And so, we died with Christ, we're put under water, and we are raised with Christ. That's why we do that. Because in dark times, in places of doubt, when we're wondering if God is good or if we can stay there, we can think, *Oh, wait, I was baptized on that day. I was crucified with Christ, and I still am.*

If you've never been baptized, there's a little box on your bulletin. Fill out your name, check the box that you want to get baptized the next time we do that around here. Can I tell you? Don't complain. Because Abraham might hear you. And if he hears you say, *I'm afraid of a little water and I don't want to get baptized*, he's going to come down here and talk to you. Because he got circumcised at ninety-nine. There are other ways to remember – harder ways.

Abraham's Response: Obey Right Away

Abraham's response is classic to the father of faith. He immediately responds – all the way. Right away, all the way. That's the definition of obedience.

Genesis 17:23-27

On that very day Abraham took his son Ishmael and all those born in his household or bought with his money, every male in his household, and circumcised them, as God told him. ²⁴ Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised ... ²⁶ Abraham and his son Ishmael were both circumcised on that same day. ²⁷ And every male in Abraham's household, including those born in his household or bought from a foreigner, was circumcised with him.

Look what he does in chapter 17, verse 23: “On that very day” – it’s going to say it twice – “On that very day Abraham took his son Ishmael and all those born in his household or bought with money, every male in his household, and circumcised them as God told them.” He just does what he’s told.

Verse 24 says, “Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised ... Abraham and his son Ishmael were both circumcised on that very day. And every male in Abraham’s household, including those born in his household or bought from a foreigner, was circumcised as well.”

That’s what living by faith looks like. Right away, all the way.

Why So Long?

Again, I told you last week was about salvation faith. This is about living by faith. Why does God wait? He comes to Abraham at seventy-five – isn’t that old enough? They can’t have a child. His wife is clearly barren. Then he comes at eighty-five and time is no friend to this promise of having children. Still nothing. Ninety-nine years old – why wait an extra twenty-four years? Hopeless, wringing out every bit of hope that he might have that there’s any other way but a miraculous intervention by God Almighty.

Look at Bruce Waltke. He paints it quite beautifully like this. He’s an Old Testament scholar. “His body has become a dried-up tree without sap, and Sarah’s womb at ninety years of age has become like a wilted flower. This offspring clearly depends on the Author of Life, who even raises the dead.” That’s the point. This is impossible for me, but not impossible for El Shaddai.

Application

So, when we look at our lives and we’re becoming like Christ in all of life and we find that attribute of Christ that we cannot have, that seems impossible to us, good. You’re close. Reuse those words – it’s impossible. Become hopeless. You can’t change this. But El Shaddai can. He gave us the Spirit because the Spirit can do it. We have to depend on a miracle. This is what it’s like to live by faith. We thank God for the gifts he’s given us, in an area of strength. And then we pray to God that we can go through a twenty-four-hour period and He could cause us to overcome that area in our life where we’re powerless.

Let me give you a simple example, okay? As a high school student going from class to class, he starts his day and he ends his day like this: “Dear God, I am so grateful that you made me good at math. I hope that I can shine and show You glory in math. And then after math I’m going to Spanish. Oh, dear God, I don’t have a chance in Spanish. I can’t do foreign languages. So, dear God, could you make that happen in me?”

See, area of strength, you thank God for it. He gave you that. Area of weakness, you depend upon Him. So, you could say in your morning devotions, “God, you made me a kind and tender-hearted person to others and I’m grateful and I’m looking for opportunities. But dear God, help me a courageous truth teller. Help me be the person who steps in and brings light to things. I’m as barren as Sarai or Abram. El Shaddai, would You come and make me Abraham? Make me Sarah. Do what You only can do.”

You can thank God. “Dear God, thank You. I’m by nature, Your gift, a disciplined person. But God, I can become so judgmental and uncompassionate. Can You make me compassionate and not so judgmental, because I can’t do that. I am as barren as Sarai or as hopeless as Abram. But You, El Shaddai, could make me like Abram, a father of nations, or Sarah, the giver of kings. Make me like that.”

That’s how you live by faith, bringing yourself to this place of hopelessness where you say, “Only God could make this happen.” And that’s what happens. That’s how one lives by faith – dependence upon God. Grateful for things that He gives us by His gifts to us, and then absolutely daily dependent on another twenty-four hours of His miraculous intervention. He is God Almighty. That’s what is happening in this story.

Birth of Isaac

In Genesis chapter 21 Isaac is born. Know this. It was and had to be a circumcised Abraham that would impregnate Sarah. It would have to be. Because that’s a God baby right there. That’s a miracle. Isaac – his name means “laughter.” And at one hundred years old, Abraham is cuddling his son – *Come here, laughter. Sit on your daddy’s lap. I’m the father of nations. Come here, laughter.* Now who’s laughing? All the saints are laughing.

And so, there you have it in a story – the father of faith. This is what it looks like – giving up and giving it over and having God’s Spirit work in our souls to make us like Christ in all of life. Boom.

Genesis 22:1-2

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied. 2 Then God said, “Go, 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.”

But that’s not the end of this story. And that is not the climax of Abraham’s spiritual journey. Because in Genesis chapter 22 God invades his life again. In chapter 22, verse 1, God says, “ ‘Abraham!’ ‘Here I am, Lord.’ He said, ‘Take your son, your only son, Isaac, the one that you love, and go to Moriah and sacrifice him to me.’” Isaac might be thirteen to twenty years old at this time. And it says that Abraham did what Abraham does --- all the way, right away. The very next morning he wakes up and he goes on a three-day journey from his place of residence to Mount Moriah. He’s going to take his son, his only son, Isaac, whom he loves.

And the way this order comes down is very similar. It’s supposed to remind you of the first order that Abram gets in Genesis chapter 12 where He says, “Leave your homeland and go to the promised land.” And Abram did that. In that he was saying, “Leave your past.” This time God is saying, “Leave your future. Give me Isaac. You trusted me enough to bless you. Now trust me enough to give me that blessing back.”

This is a heart-wrenching story. I’m afraid I don’t have time. But Abraham in this journey – what’s strategic, what’s interesting, what’s important for all of us here, is that in that three-day walk, Abraham has to work through the paradox of these two what-would-appear-to-be contradictory truths. One, that *this son of mine, Isaac, the one I love, he is the fulfillment, the promise that God made. This is my heir. God said so.* Two, *I will sacrifice him because I do what I’m told. And then I’m going to do that. And so, I don’t know how God is going to get himself out of this fix.* And so, for three days he’s wondering, *How are these two contradictory statements or facts going to align?*

Hebrews 11:17-19

By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son,¹⁸ even though God has said to him, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.”¹⁹ Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.

And in Hebrews we go to – we’re cheating – we find out what’s going on in his soul – Hebrews chapter 11 says, “By faith, Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac up as a sacrifice. He who had received the promise was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, ‘It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.’” And this is the path of faith. “And Abraham reasoned that God would raise him from the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.” In a three-day journey Abraham by faith realizes that the only way this is going to happen, for God to fulfill His promise and for Isaac to be sacrificed, is if God raises him from the dead. Please, understand this. There was no such word as resurrection. He invents a word because it’s the only way he can make sense of this. He reasoned that God would bring Isaac back from the dead.

Doubt is the pathway to a greater and deeper faith. When you have doubts, listen --- when you have doubts, don’t run from them. Don’t be embarrassed about them, don’t shy away from them. Go after them. God said this – Jesus said this – it’s literally in the New Testament. “Come and see.”

I would put it this way. Ever seen this? God Almighty saying, “Come on. Let’s wrestle. Let’s go. Let’s talk about it. Let’s just wrestle with this. And we’ll see what happens on the other end of it.”

From 1990 to 1992, I wrestled with God about his sovereignty. I kind of believed most of that, but was He good? Sovereign and good? And what instigated it was the birth of our first child. And I was finding myself compulsively controlling all circumstances and situations because I wanted to make sure he was going to be safe. And the reason I had to do that was because I didn’t think God would. I’d been around long enough to know that not everybody lives a full and happy life. And being a pastor doesn’t help. I’ve seen what happens to missionary kids

and I thought, *All right, I love this boy and so I will protect this boy.* And I realized that I doubted God's sovereign goodness. And so, I set out to continually think about nothing else and to fight with this. I was going to wrestle with God on this. So, I read as many books as I possibly could, I interviewed scholars, I interviewed some counselors, I interviewed some saints that have been around for a while. Everything I watched for entertainment was pushing this. I'm crying during movies because "It's about God being good and sovereign."

It culminated in this. This is an inside thing that I can't explain. But it culminated in me writing a retreat – I was the youth pastor then – and it was called "Who Has the Conn?" And the theme of the retreat was the Book of Job. We kind of lived the Book of Job through Jean-Luc Picard from *Star Trek*. You kind of had to have been there, okay? But "Who Has the Conn?" That was a *Star Trek* movie. Who has the control? That's what it means. Who has the control. And that retreat – I love that retreat, because it settled everything for me. I worked through it. I wrestled with God and prevailed. And it was peaceful. And I thank God for that, because once I resolved that He was sovereign and in control and has a plan but He's also good, then I could release my life and my precious things to Him. I went to Moriah with my child and other children. And when terrible things would happen to me later on, when misery and suffering came and rang my doorbell, what was great in that is that I had already made that decision about that attribute of God. This is the name of God --- El Agape – the God of love. And so, when those moments came to me, I found myself not running from God or shaking my fist like *How dare You, how could this happen?* I was running towards God and feeling His intimacy and weeping with Him in those times of need.

So, here's the invitation from the Book of Genesis from the author of faith, Abraham. You have doubts on the attributes of God? Any particular one in mind? Come and see. Wrestle with Him. God, YHWH, has been wrestling saints for 10,000 years. He'd love a couple of rounds. Let Him have a try.

Abraham takes Isaac and takes him to the altar. He loads up Isaac with the wood. He's carrying the wood up and Abraham is carrying the torch. And Isaac says, "We have the wood and the torch, but where is the sacrifice?"

And Abraham says, "God will provide --- God will provide a sacrifice."

They get to the top of the mountain and Abraham does what Abraham does. He's starting to fulfill his promise to keep in obedience to God. And before that takes place, God comes in again, the same kind of announcement except repetitious. "Abraham, Abraham" --- twice.

"I am here, YHWH."

Genesis 22:14

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."

He says, "Now I know that you fear God and you would withhold nothing." And then He provides and it then says this. This follows in verse 14: "So Abraham called that place YHWH will provide." Jehovah Jireh. God will provide. "And to this day it is said, 'On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.'"

God provided. He took His eyes off of Isaac, Isaac is set free, and he finds a ram caught in the thicket. And then he sacrifices the ram. God provided just like He said.

Abraham finishes that story with *I am a ram. And I have no other gods before me. The blessings of God are not idols in my life. I'm free.* It's a beautiful story.

After that event, God finishes with another promise, another fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. And He says, "I swear by my own name that I will bless you with many descendants and one of those descendants will be a blessing to all eternity, to all men for eternity."

Jesus Is the Son Who Is Sacrificed

Well, that's a good story. But it's not over. Sometimes it takes a thousand years or two thousand years to tell a really good story. And that's how the story goes. It continues. In a thousand years from when Abraham attempts to offer Isaac on Mount Moriah, on that mountain where YHWH provides, Solomon will build the tabernacle on that very mountain range. And a thousand years later people are bringing and the people provides a sacrifice and the Lord provides a sacrifice and the Lord provides a sacrifice. And a thousand years after Solomon's temple, two thousand years after Abraham's event with Isaac at Mount Moriah, this happened.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His Son, His only Son Jesus, whom He loved.” And His son carried the wood up that mount. It was a cross. And then when it was time for the angel of the Lord to intervene, there was silence. The Father didn’t say anything. And the son was slaughtered. When He died His last words were, “My God, my God, why are you forsaking me?” Mount Moriah. There will be no substitutes that day, because on that day the Lord did provide. He provided the only way to fix what we broke. It was the only way that it could be fixed. We are hopeless. And so, El Shaddai and El Agape, the God of love, sends that so that we could know this to be true: that God is sovereign, and in His sovereignty, He is loving.

God would like each and every one of you to leave the auditorium with this, to resolve this: that He is a sovereign, loving God. “For God Almighty so loved the world that He gave His only Son. How will He not also with him freely give you all the things that you need?” He is a good, good God. Would you resolve that today so you can enjoy the presence of God when you don’t feel it? In times of darkness, in times of hopelessness, could you remember this covenant that He made with Abraham and you? That’s the story that we’re to live our lives with.

Let’s pray.

Lord, that You would do this, that You would share this beautiful story of Abraham’s journey so that we would find ourselves not alone on this path of faith ... this path of faith that is filled with doubt. And doubt is the same path that leads to a deeper, more transcendent, existential, fulfilling faith. So, Lord, I’d ask that we would courageously come and wrestle with You, so that we might find ourselves on the other side of Your goodness and resolve that we don’t understand Your sovereign plan, we don’t agree with it mostly, but You are in control. And in that control You never stop being loving. You’re a good, good Father. You are El Agape, the giver of love.

Lord, I’d ask that men and women, boys and girls, that are here today would resolve in their hearts who You are and what You’ve done; that they would become hopeless like they are hopeless or have been hopeless in their salvation and gave themselves over so that they might receive forgiveness; that they would be hopeless in these struggles in life, so that they might see You, El Shaddai, God Almighty, step in and for just a day, make them kind or courageous or caring or selfless, so that they might please You and honor You with their very choice, all the way, right away. We pray that we could be a people like that. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

