

This morning we are observing the third Sunday of Advent, the season leading up to the celebration of Christmas. And I've said it before, but I think it's worth explaining again WHY we celebrate Advent. First, it's intended to put us in the same position as those OT saints who embodied this sense of waiting and watching and yearning and longing and anticipating the coming of the promised Messiah. Second, it's for us to slow down and prepare our own hearts over the course of 4 weeks to really understand and appreciate and rejoice in the incarnation, the coming of Jesus in the flesh, as a man, as one of us, to save us through His life, death, and resurrection. If we are able to capture that mindset of expectancy the OT saints had, it can help us to better cultivate that attitude toward our annual celebration of Christmas. And then third, it can help us cultivate an attitude of expectancy toward the return of

Christ, His second advent, when He comes back to claim His own, judge the world, and rule over all creation forever. So this is our third week of striving to do those three things.

And the way we've approached that task is to go back to the OT and look at various figures – in some cases, people, in one case, an object – that very intentionally point us to and prepare us for the coming of Jesus. We began two weeks ago looking at Adam, and we mostly saw a contrast, the differences between Jesus and Adam: that where Adam was a man who desired to become like God, Jesus was God who truly became man, where Adam failed, Jesus succeeded; where Adam disobeyed, Jesus obeyed; where Adam brought a curse on mankind, Jesus bore a curse for mankind. So Jesus is the true and better

Adam by undoing the sin and death that Adam caused.

Then last week Caleb helped us look at the ark. We saw that, like the ark had to be built to save Noah, Jesus had to be born to save sinners. And like Noah and his family had to be inside the ark to avoid judgment, we have to be found “in Christ” to escape God’s wrath. So last week was more of a focus on the similarities between Jesus and the ark. Jesus is like the ark because he comes into the world to save all who would be found in Him.

Well this week I want us to look at a figure whose experience is, in many ways, similar to that of Jesus, but who ultimately does not and cannot accomplish what only Jesus can. This morning I want us to turn our **attention to Isaac** in the book of Genesis, and I want us to see that he is an OT picture that helps prepare us for what Jesus will

be and do. Christ is the true and better Isaac. And I want us to see this and believe this by looking at five comparisons between the life of Isaac and the life of Jesus. So let me invite you this morning to take your Bible and turn with me to Genesis 12. And just to make you aware up front, I'm going to be bouncing all over the Bible this morning, but our anchor point will be the book of Genesis.

So let's begin with the fact that Genesis presents Isaac as **the promised son** whose birth comes about through miraculous means. Isaac is the son of promise who comes into the world by supernatural means. We see that beginning in Genesis 12:1-3 [READ]. So God chooses one man out of all the people on the face of the earth (Abram, who is 75 -years-old), comes to him, and makes him a

series of promises. God is going to bless Abram, He is going to make him into a great nation, and He's going to bless all the peoples of the earth through Abram. So the promise isn't real clear and obvious – sort of vague and ambiguous – but at the very least there is the promise of descendants. Fast forward to Genesis 15:1 and it begins to get a little clearer [READ GENESIS 15:1-6]. What do we see here? God promises, even though Abram's wife Sarai is barren, that He will give them a son who, in turn, will produce more offspring than there are stars in the sky. Jump ahead to Genesis 17. This is 25 years after God's initial promise to Abram, and still no son. But in v.5 God changes Abram's name to Abraham, and then in v.15 we read this [READ GENESIS 17:15-19]. So once again, even though it's been 25 years, even though Abraham is 100 and Sarah is 90, God reaffirms that promise to give

them a son, and this time He tells them what to name the child: Isaac, son of laughter. Jump ahead to Genesis 18:10 and we see it coming closer [READ GENESIS 18:10-12]. It's been 25 years, now just one more year and maybe the promise will finally be fulfilled. Look at Genesis 21 [READ GENESIS 21:1-7]. God keeps His promise to Abraham and Sarah. He gives the old man and his barren wife a child, the son of promise. It took just over 25 years, but God fulfills His word.

And what do we know about Jesus? Well, His birth was also prophesied, but way longer than 25 years before He was born. In fact, Jesus is promised before Isaac is, before Abraham is ever born, way back in Genesis 3 right after Adam and Eve have committed the first sin. Before God pronounces a curse on the man and woman, He says

this to the serpent: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” It’s the promise of one described as the seed of a woman who, even though injured, will ultimately crush the enemy. That’s what Jesus will do through His life, death, and resurrection. Then in Genesis 12, in God’s words to Abraham, He tells him that all the families of the earth will be blessed through his descendants. That’s a promise about Jesus, who will bring the blessing of salvation to those from every nation, tribe, and tongue. In Isaiah 7:14, we have this prophecy: “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” That’s a promise specifically about Christmas. A son born to a virgin, and His name is Immanuel, God with us. And Isaiah

9:6-7, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.” That’s a promise about Jesus, the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, the One who will reign in justice and righteousness on the throne of David. So you have all those promises to God’s OT people. And then, after centuries of silence, God sends an angel to a young, engaged girl, Mary, and tells her those age-old promises will be fulfilled in HER, “And behold, YOU will conceive in your womb and bear a son,

and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.” And sure enough, when the fulness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. Just like Isaac, Jesus was the son whose birth had been foretold by God. And just like Isaac, who was born to a

barren woman, Jesus' birth is miraculous in that He is born to a virgin.

But not only was Isaac a promised son; he was **the beloved son**. In fact, the first time the word "love" appears in the Bible, it's in reference to Abraham and his son Isaac. Look at Genesis 22:1-2a [READ]. How is Isaac described? Your son, your only son, whom you LOVE. Not just the son of promise, but the son loved by his father. The same word used to describe the love between Isaac and his wife Rebekah, between Isaac and his son Esau, between Rebekah and her son Jacob, between Jacob and his son Joseph, between the people of Israel and God Himself. It's a deep affection and loyalty that Abraham felt toward his son, Isaac. Which is totally understandable after waiting

for his arrival, believing that he would come for 25 years. He loves his Son with a deep, abiding, selfless affection.

In the same way, Jesus is described as the beloved Son, loved by His Father. At His baptism by John in Matthew 3:17, a voice from heaven declared of Jesus, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." The same voice from heaven proclaims the same thing in Matthew 17:5 at the Transfiguration where Jesus is transformed to reveal His radiant, shining glory. In John 3:30 we read, "The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand." In John 5:20, "The Father loves the Son and shows Him all that He Himself is doing." Jesus is not just the Son of God. He is not just the promised Son of God. He is the beloved Son of God. The Father has set His eternal affection on Jesus. Which makes total sense as the Father

and Son have been one through eternity past. There has never been a time the Father did not love the Son. Much like Isaac, Jesus is the Son loved by His Father.

But then comes the truth that's difficult for our minds to reconcile: Abraham, the loving father, **determines to sacrifice** his promised, beloved son, Isaac. Look back at Genesis 22:1-5 [READ]. Take your son, your only son, whom you love, and offer him as a burnt offering. Kill him. Slay him. End his life and burn his body to ashes. And while certainly Abraham's heart was shattered into a million pieces at the thought of something so horrific, there's no record of him arguing or questioning or doubting or hesitating. What does it say? Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, took two servants, cut the wood, gathered his beloved son, the son of promise, and

set out to the place God told him to go to do the thing God told him to do. Now you can make the argument – and it's one I happened to believe – that Abraham believed that God would, at the very least, raise Isaac from the dead, since he tells the servants, "WE will come back to you." But he seems resolved to obey the Lord and offer the life and body of his son, the boy he waited for and longed for and ached for over 25 years. I don't care if you think you're going to get him back or not, the thought of plunging a knife into the chest of your only son is unfathomable. And yet Abraham is determined to obey the word of the Lord.

Well what do we know about Jesus? We, of course, know that He eventually died. He was crucified. He was nailed to a Roman cross until he was dead. And if you read the

story, there's a lot of people who might be held responsible for that death. You can blame the Jewish religious leaders. You can blame the Roman authorities. You can blame Herod the king. You can blame the crowds for demanding the release of the criminal Barabbas when they could have let Jesus go free. You can even blame us and our sin for His death. And there's truth in all of those. But you know who we seldom blame for the death of Jesus as an atoning sacrifice? God the Father. You may not often hear someone say that God the Father killed Jesus. And yet, if you look at Isaiah 53, you find, "...we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted...Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief..."

Whose will was it to crush Jesus? The Lord, God the Father. Who has put Him to grief? He has. In Acts 2:23 Peter, in his sermon at Pentecost, declares, "...this Jesus,

delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.” Lawless men carried out the deed, but they did so according to the plan and purpose of God the Father. Or Acts 4:27-28, where the early church prays, “...for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.” All the human actors simply did what God had determined for them to do. That doesn’t make them unaccountable for their hatred and sin and murderous intentions. But it shows that God’s plan was the ultimate determinative force at work in Christ’s death. Or Romans 3:25, “God put Jesus forward as a propitiation by His blood.” Or Romans 8:32, “God did not

spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all.” While responsible, sinful men carried out the act of sacrifice, God the Father, much like Abraham did with Isaac, determined to sacrifice His Son Jesus.

So the next question becomes, “What did Isaac do?” Did he run? Did he hide? Did he argue? Did he fight? Here’s what we’re told in Genesis 22:6-9 [READ]. What does Isaac do? He **willingly submits**. He willingly takes the wood on his back, he willingly ascends the mountain, and he willingly allows himself to be bound and placed on the altar. The ultimate act of submission to the will of his father, Abraham. He effectively offered himself up as a sacrifice. And we find the same attitude of submission and sacrifice in Jesus. In John 10:17-18 Jesus says, “For this reason my Father loves me, because I lay down my life

that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.” Or John 19:16, “So he (Pilate) delivered him (Jesus) over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of the Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha.” We see the same thought in Hebrews 12:2, “...looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross...” Both Isaac and Jesus, in submission to their fathers, go willingly, bearing the wood on their backs, ascending the hill – the same mountain, by the way (Moriah and Golgotha) – to offer themselves as a sacrifice.

But that's where the similarities end. Both Isaac and Jesus are the promised son, loved by their father who determines to sacrifice them, and they willingly submit to the plan of their fathers, offering themselves as a sacrifice. But here the stories diverge. On the one hand, you have Isaac's story. Keep reading in Genesis 22:10-13 [READ]. What happens? Isaac doesn't die. Abraham doesn't take his life. Instead, God **provides a substitute**, a fitting sacrifice in the form of a ram. You even see the language of substitution there, "And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering INSTEAD OF his son." The ram dies so Isaac doesn't have to.

But what do we see in the story of Jesus? We see that, for generations, human priests had been offering sacrifices day after day, year after year, that could not take away

people's sin or cleanse their conscience. But what happens when Jesus comes in the flesh? In John 1:29, John the Baptist declares the Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus isn't rescued by a lamb. Jesus doesn't have a sacrificial animal take His place. HE IS the lamb. He is the sacrifice. He is the one who takes away sin. Ephesians 5:2 says that Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. He wasn't spared at the last minute. He fully became the offering in His death. In Hebrews 9:26 we read, "But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." Jesus offered Himself to the point of death, not just as an anticipated, possible sacrifice, but as an actual, atoning sacrifice, and that sacrifice has brought an end to the need for any other sacrifice for sin ever again. This is what

makes Jesus not just like Isaac, but the TRUE and BETTER Isaac. Where Isaac didn't die, Jesus did. Where Isaac was rescued by a substitute, Jesus WAS the substitute. And where Isaac's death would not have had any ultimate benefit for anyone else, Jesus death secured forgiveness and life for anyone who would trust in Him.

But why does that matter to us today, here, now? Is it just a neat connection? Is it just a curious thing we know now that we didn't know before? What do we do with that?

What do I want you to walk out of this room thinking and saying and believing this morning? I'll give you a hint: it's not "Hmmm, that was interesting." I think the key to what this means for us is found in the very last verse of the story, Genesis 22:14 [READ]. Abraham's takeaway was, **"The Lord will provide."** God provided a substitute for

Abraham and Isaac; He will provide whatever we need at the right time, in the right way, in the right measure. On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided. That should be the exact same takeaway for us, for me, for you. The Lord will provide. Only in our case, instead of, “On the mount of the Lord it SHALL be provided,” it’s “On the mount of the Lord it HAS BEEN provided.” In His death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus provided for our deepest need. He took our sin, He took our guilt, He paid our debt, He conquered death, all to bring us to Him. He forgives us and declares us righteous and gives us life so that we can be with Him forever. All at the cross. And if He has provided that, is there anything else too big for Him? Is there anything else He can’t provide? Is there anything else that even matters after that? No, there’s not. We have Him, and that’s all that we need. God has given His Son,

His promised Son, His beloved Son, who offered Himself up as a sacrifice according to the plan of His Father as a substitute for us so that we might live. That's the story that Isaac is meant to point us to. It's the story of Jesus.