

99-05-03a

Let's begin our worship this morning with a word of prayer. Father, we thank you for this day. We thank you for the environment of freedom and safety in which we live.

We have only to watch the news on television to see that it is not so in many other parts of the world. We're very grateful for the opportunity that you have put before us to pursue the things that count in this life, the things that are pleasing and that are a part of your plan and a part of your purpose for our lives. We pray this morning as we worship together through the study of your word that God the Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth, that we will see the importance and the application of these things in our daily decisions and actions.

We pray that in all things our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, will be glorified. We pray these things in his name. Amen.

For our scripture reading this morning, you know, of course, that in Genesis chapter 22, we are looking at Abraham's perhaps the most famous event in his life, which is the sacrifice of Isaac up on the Mount Moriah, the mountain in the land of Moriah. And we know, because we've read through that story and we're familiar with it, that there is going to be a substitution made at the last moment. And rather than Isaac, there will be a ram offered in his stead.

And for our scripture reading this morning, in anticipation of that, I would like to turn over to Leviticus chapter 9. Leviticus, it's easy to remember what's in Leviticus because the first four letters of the name are Levi. And this is the regulations for the way priests were to lead and conduct worship in Israel. The Levitical system of worship is spelled out in Leviticus.

So that the first four chapters there, you have all the regulations for offerings and so on. And throughout the book, you have the regulations for the priests, not only regulating their own conduct, but also how they will lead worship and make sure worship is conducted in Israel. But in Leviticus chapter 8 and 9, you have the consecration of Aaron and his sons.

And there is a lot, especially in chapter 8, about the clothing that they will wear and the ritual that they will go through to be dedicated and consecrated. You have a bull offered and its blood sprinkled and so forth in the middle of chapter 8. Actually, beginning, we can go back and look at chapter 8. In verses 16 and 17, it talks about what happens to the remnants of the bull, the fat and the entrails, the liver and the kidneys, and these entrails are burned on the altar. But the bull, its hide, its flesh, and its offal, he burned with fire outside the camp as the Lord had commanded Moses.

Then, let's begin in verse 18 to see what happens with the ram. There are actually two

rams that are involved in the consecration of the priest. And we ask ourselves the question, why is it a ram that appears on the top of Mount Moriah as opposed to a lamb or a bull or a goat or any of the other sacrificial animals that are mentioned in Old Testament worship? Well, this is one of the clues.

Beginning in Leviticus 8.18, This all sounds pretty strange, but we'll return to it in a moment. Then he brought Aaron's sons, and Moses put some of the blood on the tips of their right ears, on the thumbs of their right hands, and on the big toes of their right feet. And Moses sprinkled the blood all around on the altar.

Then he took the fat and the fat tail, all the fat that was on the entrails, the fatty lobe attached to the liver, the two kidneys and their fat, and the right thigh. And from the basket of unleavened bread that was before the Lord, he took one unleavened cake, a cake of bread anointed with oil, and one wafer, and put them on the fat and on the right thigh. And he put all these in Aaron's hands and in his son's hands, and waved them as a wave offering before the Lord.

Then Moses took them from their hands and burned them on the altar, on the burnt offering. They were consecration offerings for a sweet aroma. That was an offering made by fire to the Lord.

Moses took the breast and waved it as a wave offering before the Lord. It was Moses' part of the ram of consecration, as the Lord had commanded Moses. Then Moses took some of the anointing oil and some of the blood, which was on the altar, and sprinkled it on Aaron, on his garments, on his sons, and on the garments of his sons with him.

And he consecrated Aaron his garments, his sons, and the garments of his sons with him. And Moses said to Aaron and his sons, Boil the flesh at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and eat it there with the bread that is in the basket of consecration offerings, as I commanded, saying, Aaron and his sons shall eat it. What remains of the flesh and of the bread you shall burn with fire.

And you shall not go outside the door of the tabernacle of meeting for seven days, until the days of your consecration are ended. For seven days he shall consecrate you. As he has done this day, so the Lord has commanded you to do, to make atonement for you.

Therefore you shall stay at the door of the tabernacle of meeting day and night for seven days, and keep the charge of the Lord, so that you may not die. For so I have been commanded. So Aaron and his sons did all the things that the Lord had commanded by the hand of Moses.

The details of the Levitical offerings are quite fascinating to study, and in my observation, very little really helpful study has been done. I have checked out of the library and been given lots of different books on the Levitical offerings. Most of them

cover the details and do a real quick job of outlining what the purpose of the sacrifices was.

But the details, why does God specify that this should take place with the skin, and this should take place with the legs and the entrails, and why is this part burned and why is this part consumed, and why the heave offerings and the wave offerings and so on. I have never found the coverage of that to be adequate, or to really explain to me why God included not only these rituals in the worship life of Israel, but recorded them in Scripture. And the New Testament tells us all these things were written for our instruction.

It would have been enough that the Old Testament could have mentioned, and behold God gave Moses the rituals for the priests, and it was all meaningful to Israel, but it wasn't put down in Scripture for us, but it is. So all of these details have meaning, and every procedure, every ritual part of the sacrifice has meaning. And it's a fascinating study, we can't get into all of it, but I would like to just point out a few things about this when we come to it in the narrative.

So we've read through it now, and we'll come back and get the explanation of this as we continue our study back in Genesis chapter 22. But you see here, just on the surface, just as a result of our reading, that the ram had a two-fold purpose. In fact, at the consecration of the priests, you have two rams, each serving a separate purpose.

And we see, even superficially, that this was a part of the dedication and consecration of the priests. It was a ram. You have a bull, and you have other offerings that are associated with the commissioning and the ordaining of these priests.

But specifically, we're looking at the ram. And the ram had the purpose of consecration, of sanctification. And we know that sanctify means to set apart for special service, set apart for service to God.

That is an idea to which we'll return when we reach that point in Genesis 22. But we're turning back now to Genesis 22, and we continue our study of this most famous episode in Abraham's life. And I'd like to review, by reading this story once again, a few of the important details.

Now, it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, Abraham. And he said, Here I am. This is fascinating, especially in the light of our study in Luke.

Just Friday night, we saw the angel Gabriel appear to Mary, and deliver the news that she is going to be the mother of the Christ child. And the extraordinary response that she gives, even in contrast to Zacharias, who's a priest. He's been a believer for all of his life.

He's been upright and blameless, and has declared righteous in the Holy Scriptures, which is no mean compliment. I mean, there aren't very many people that Scripture says he was righteous and blameless in the eyes of the Lord. But that's said of Elizabeth and Zacharias.

But even Zacharias, as he's standing in the holy place of the temple, and Gabriel appears and delivers the message to him. He has, understandably, a little bit of trouble coping with this supernatural appearance of an angel, and revelation of the fact that his son is going to be the forerunner of the Messiah. He expresses a little bit of doubt, and he says, How can I know that these things are so? And the angel says, Well, because you didn't believe me, one of the ways you're going to know it is you're not going to be able to speak for the next nine months.

And when he comes back out to try to finish up his priestly duties, and lead the crowd outside the temple in prayer and worship, he has to give a dumb show there. He has to do a pantomime, because he can't speak. And they realize that something extraordinary has happened inside the temple.

But Zacharias, with all of his training, and all of his experience, and his knowledge of the word of God, because of his role as a priest, and a son of Aaron, has trouble coping with this. And here's Mary, and she gets even more extraordinary news. She is going to conceive, without having relations with a man.

She's going to be the mother of the Christ child. And all of the details that are in that familiar message from Gabriel, when she hears all of this, she asks one question, exactly how is the conception going to take place, since I don't know a man? And Gabriel explains, hers is not an expression of doubt, but a question about the means of these things taking place, since she is a virgin, and is this going to be through Joseph, or exactly what's going to take place? And so Gabriel explains that. She says, interestingly, the very same thing that Abraham says here in Genesis 22, 1. And we saw that Friday night, where she says, Behold your maidservant, let it be to me according to your word.

And Abraham here, literally says, when it says here I am, literally in Hebrew this is, behold me. Hineni here, hinen means behold, and the suffix means me. And when God says Abraham, Abraham says, behold, me.

And this is exactly what Mary says, when Gabriel finishes his message. She says, behold your maidservant, I am here, just tell me, and I am ready to proceed. Let it be to me according to your word.

And so we see a consistent pattern of faith among those who, when they hear the calling of God, there's no hesitation, there's no question, it's, behold, here I am. Just point me in the direction, and I'm ready to do your will, oh God. Which of course is a quote, prophetically, with reference to the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

So this is Abraham's response, God calls Abraham, he says, here I am, behold me. Then God said in verse 2, take now 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. The interesting thing about verse 2, and I don't believe I pointed this out when we first covered this verse, when God says take now your son, your only son Isaac, the form in Hebrew is unusual.

There are many imperatives in the Bible, and God has given Abraham several imperatives in the past, where he gives a command, and he expects it to be followed, and this is the pattern throughout the Old Testament. But the verb here for take has a suffix after it, it has a particle, nah, N-A-H. And when you find this construction in Hebrew, this is a polite form.

This changes an imperative into a request, and usually a very intense request. It's normally translated, please, or I beseech you, or I beg you. It transforms the imperative into a very heartfelt or emphatic request.

And so this is not a dogmatic command of God to go and do, and I don't want to hear any back talk. This is much more by way of God expressing his strong desire, his request that he's making of Abraham. And it's a polite and yet very intense or emphatic way of asking someone to do something for you.

And it's quite common for people to use this with each other or with God. In fact, this construction occurs some 60 times in Genesis. But for God to use this form when he's talking to a human being, in the whole Old Testament this only happens four times.

And those four times are quite interesting to look at. Three of these are in, I should say, four times outside of this passage. There's five total.

And three of these are in Genesis. One, of course, is here. Two others are also God speaking to Abraham.

If you turn back with me just for a moment to Genesis chapter 13 and verse 14, Abraham goes and Lot separates from him. You remember the dispute about this land ain't big enough for the both of us and so Lot goes and lives in Sodom. And then in verse 14, the Lord said to Abraham after Lot had separated from him, Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are, northward, southward, eastward and westward, for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever.

But the imperative to lift now your eyes and look is in this request form. It has the suffix not. And for God to use this form speaking to a human being, as I said, is incredibly rare.

But God basically says, please lift your eyes and look at the land that I have promised you and that I'm going to give to you and your descendants. And when you remember the symbolic value of Abraham as the progenitor of the nation of Israel, in the same way

that when Abraham goes and worships with Melchizedek, Paul points out later, the author of Hebrews at least points out, that because Israel is in Abraham's loins and specifically the Levites and the whole Levitical priesthood is in Abraham at that point, this implies that the Melchizedek priesthood is greater than the Levitical priesthood because here's Abraham, who is the father of all the Levites, engaging in worship under Melchizedek's priesthood. Melchizedek comes out after the battle of the kings and shares bread and wine with Abraham and Abraham gives him a tithe or a tenth of all the spoils.

This implied submission or worship under Melchizedek, the author of Hebrews in the New Testament says, all you people that are hung up on the law of Moses and you're stuck in the past with the Levitical priesthood and the Levitical offerings, just remember your father Abraham had the Levites in his loins when he worshiped with Melchizedek and Jesus is a priest after the order of Melchizedek. This is the author of Hebrews, it is to the Hebrews, and he's trying to demonstrate to them that this is the natural progression in the course of things in God's plan. The elder shall serve the younger and so forth and here's Jesus Christ who is the great high priest, greater and grander than the whole Levitical priesthood, Aaron and all his sons.

To think back to the Old Testament and realize that the forward progress of God's plan now calls for us to worship under the Melchizedekian priesthood which is Jesus Christ as our high priest and we represent ourselves as priests before God. This is where you get into Hebrews chapter 10. Let us enter boldly before the throne of grace.

Let us present ourselves with our hearts having been sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies having been washed with pure water. It talks about the washing of water by the word and so forth and that Jesus Christ has, under the ministry of God the Holy Spirit, given us the standing before God to go and represent ourselves before his throne. The author of Hebrews makes this correspondence back to Abraham.

Here you have Abraham standing on the mountain and God says, please look at the land that I'm giving to you and your descendants. Because it's recorded in Scripture and in these books that Moses delivered to the nation of Israel, this is something God says to Israel. Please look at what I have promised you.

Please look at what is before you that I am going to give you. And it is the calling of God to the nation in Abraham to live in the light of the promises, to live in the light of God's plan and God's purpose and not get caught up in the daily routine of things and forget that they're the people of God. They're the people of promise.

And so this language that's used specifically here is very emphatic and very significant. It is a reminder to Israel and by extension a reminder to us to live the life of faith. The next place in Genesis where this construction in God's speech is found is just a page or two over in Genesis 15.5. And you will notice once again the same principle applies.

This is the word of God coming to Abram in a vision saying, Do not be afraid. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward. This is after Abraham has visited with Melchizedek, after he has separated himself from the king of Sodom.

He's returned everybody that was taken captive. And God is speaking and you remember he comes outside the tent at night and God says in Genesis 15.5, God brought him outside and said, Look now toward heaven and count the stars if you are able to number them. And he said to him, So shall your descendants be.

And this is the point where Abraham believed in the Lord and he accounted it to him for righteousness. But when God said, Look now toward heaven, it's this same construction. It's the Hebrew word for look followed by na.

Please look. This is my emphatic request to you. Please look at the land that I have promised you.

Please look at the stars and realize that this is how your descendants are going to be. In both cases, it's God's heartfelt desire that people look in faith and see the potential. Abraham doesn't own the land when God says, Look at it.

I'm giving it to you and your descendants. Abraham doesn't even have a son yet. He doesn't have Ishmael or Isaac at the point that God says, Look now toward the stars.

This is how many your descendants are going to be. It is God's fervent desire that we look in faith at the promises, that we believe that the future is real, that we believe the promises of God are real. And for God to use this form with a human being is extraordinary.

You can't overemphasize the significance of God speaking in this way. Now in Genesis 22 to our passage, God says, Please take your son. Please do this for me.

Take your son, your only son, whom you love. Go to the Mount Moriah and sacrifice him there to me. And once again, it is a call to faith.

It's a call to believe that what God says is true, that the future God promises and that God describes is real. Live in the light of it. Lift up your eyes and look.

Pack up your bags and go. This is what God calls Abraham. So three of the five times in the Old Testament when God uses this language is with Abraham.

Because Abraham represents the nation of Israel. They are incipient in him. He is their father in the literal sense of the word.

The two other places in the Old Testament where this language is used in God's speech are also quite fascinating to observe. Turn with me over to Exodus chapter 11 and verse 2. Exodus chapter 11, verse 2. God here is speaking to Moses in Exodus 11. And he is

about to announce the final great plague in Egypt that will result in the deliverance of Israel from bondage.

The Lord said to Moses in Exodus 11, I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt. Afterward he will let you go from here. When he lets you go, he will surely drive you out of here altogether.

Speak now in the hearing of the people and let every man ask from his neighbor and every woman from her neighbor articles of silver and articles of gold. And the Lord gave people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover, the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt in the sight of Pharaoh's servants and in the sight of the people.

Moses said, thus says the Lord. And then he delivers the message that God gave to him. But in 11-2, when God is talking to Moses, he says, Moses, please speak to the people and deliver this message.

It's not only the request for silver and gold, but also the information in verses 4 and following about the Passover night, the death of the firstborn. And isn't it interesting that the blood on the doorposts and the death of the firstborn in Egypt on that night, that 14th Nisan, as it would later be known, the great cry that will arise in the land of Egypt and the preservation of the firstborn because of the blood on the doorpost, this message is delivered and God says, please deliver this message to my people. This message of deliverance in death, this redemption of the firstborn, protection of the firstborn under the blood of the Passover lamb is introduced with this same language.

And it reminds us the whole concept of the firstborn goes back to Isaac, who is God's firstborn, even though technically, Ishmael was born 13 years earlier. Isaac is the child of promise. Isaac is Abraham's firstborn in God's mind, in God's eyes.

In the same way that we enjoy the privileges of the firstborn, although we came second in God's plan. The nation of Israel is the chosen people of God came first. But like the relationship with Esau and Jacob, Esau is the firstborn.

But Jacob inherits the blessings of the firstborn. That could have been Esau. The whole chosen people of God could have been the nation of Esau instead of the nation of Israel.

But Jacob, the younger son, just like Isaac, his father, is the firstborn even though he was second chronologically because God wants to make a point. It's not your circumstance, it's your faith. It's not the way things happened in fate or in the happenstances of this world.

It's the attitude you have toward God. It's whether you seize and lay hold of the promises of God by faith that counts. If you lift up your eyes and look at the land, if you look toward the heavens and count the stars, if you respond to the call of God to speak the word of truth, to treat it as reality, when Moses is going to speak this word in the hearing

of the children of Israel, they've got to believe that this is true.

They've got to believe that God is going to preserve them with the blood on the doorpost. They've got to believe that God is going to deliver them from the bondage that they've endured for 400 years in Egypt. How long is 400 years? This is 1999.

What's 400 years ago? 1599? You think about the length of time that they have spent in bondage. For them to wrap their minds around the idea that God is really going to deliver them and take them out of the land of Egypt and take them to the land that was promised to Abraham 400 or 500 years earlier, this requires faith. They have to treat the promise of God as reality.

So when God presents this final plague, this is going to be the one that springs them. This is going to be the one that delivers them, that convinces Pharaoh to let them go. He uses this same construction that he used three times with Abraham.

Please speak to my people. It's a reminder, it's a marker that this is a step of faith. God is calling someone to do something extraordinary, to do something out of the ordinary, to believe in the impossible, to believe that with God all things are possible.

Just as it will be called, as we've seen in Luke, with Zacharias and Elizabeth and with Mary and Joseph, that their children are going to be the means of a great forward step in God's plan, the greatest step. The final place where we find this construction used, and it's so significant, is over in Isaiah. Isaiah chapter 7 and verse 3. And of all of these passages, this is the one we definitely need to turn to.

Isaiah chapter 7. This makes a wonderful bracket with the use of this construction in God's speech to Abraham, because here you have, and you might as well start at the beginning of Isaiah chapter 7, verse 1. It came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah. Remember now the northern ten tribes of Israel have already gone out. They're out of the picture.

They've been taken captive in the Assyrian crisis that took place. And they're gone. This is where you get Samaria, the people that were left and intermarried with the invaders and so forth.

That's why the Jews hated the Samaritans so much. The northern ten tribes, they're gone. All you have left now is Judah and Benjamin, which is called for convenience Judah.

So Ahaz is the king of Judah. Went up to Jerusalem to make war against it, but could not prevail against it. This, of course, is the vassal king of the north, the northern tribes.

He was told to the house of David saying, remember this is the divided kingdom. I shouldn't say that they're already gone. They're about to go out.

It was told to the house of David saying, Syria's forces are deployed in Ephraim. So the king of Rezzan, king of Syria, and Pekah, the son of Ramaliah, king of Israel, they're in league now. The northern ten tribes are in cahoots with Syria, and they're coming up against Judah to attack it and destroy it.

So these tidings come, and in verse 2, the heart and the heart of his people were moved as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind. They're deathly afraid that they're going to be overrun by their brethren in the north and the Syrians with them. So then in verse 3, the Lord said to Isaiah, Go out now to meet Ahaz, you and Shir Yeshuv, your son, at the end of the aqueduct from the upper pool on the highway to the fuller's field, and say to him, Take heed and be quiet.

Do not fear or be faint-hearted, for these two stubs of smoking firebrands for the fierce anger of Rezan and Syria and the son of Ramaliah. Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Ramaliah have plotted evil against you, saying, Let us go up against Judah and trouble it, and let us make a gap in its wall for ourselves, and set a king over them, the son of Tobal. Thus says the Lord God, It shall not stand, nor shall it come to pass.

What's going on here? You have the tiny kingdom of Judah. You have this strong force of Syrians. You have the ten tribes of the north that have already been overcome politically and are in cahoots with Syria.

They've banded together. God says they are two smoking firebrands. They could set Judah alight and burn it to the ground.

They can knock a hole in the walls and overcome them. But God tells Isaiah, Go to Ahaz, who is the king of Judah, and give him this message. And when God mentions this in verse 3, Isaiah 7-3, when he says, Go out now to meet Ahaz, you and Shir Yeshuv, your son, this is the fifth and final time in the Old Testament that he uses that suffix na.

Please go out now and meet Ahaz. Why does he say this? We're going to pause here and take our break, and when we come back we'll examine the content of chapter 7 and why God marks it out with this unusual construction. We can guess from our first four examinations that there's going to be a call to faith.

There's going to be a call to believe in the impossible. And this is going to be a part of God's plan, a major part of God's plan, as it has been on the other four occasions. Let's pause here and take our break.