

99-05-16b

Let's resume our study now of Genesis chapter 22 by way of Exodus chapter 29. We noted that the rams in particular, out of the three animals that represent the work of Christ in its application to the consecration of the priests, remind us of the three-fold ministry of Jesus Christ in reconciliation, redemption, and propitiation. We've skipped very lightly over the sacrifice of the bull to focus on the two rams.

We saw that the first ram represents the Godward emphasis of the sacrifice in sanctifying the altar and making a sweet-smelling aroma that is pleasing in God's sight. The entire animal, after being divided and cleansed, is offered as a whole burnt offering to the Lord. Then the second ram has as its emphasis and its purpose the application of this work to Aaron and his sons.

In the midst of that, the blood from the first ram that has been sprinkled on the altar is removed and mixed with anointing oil and applied, sprinkled, to Aaron and his sons, their robes specifically. I've mused about this, you know, these beautiful robes that were new, they were woven from white linen and were embroidered and were so very beautiful. If you think about the practical application of these instructions, here you have these sons of Aaron and Aaron himself standing in these spotless white linen garments, and then you take animal blood and fling it at them, sprinkle them with it.

You've got blood spots all over your white garments. And in our day, if you have a white shirt on, you know, sometimes guys get ready for Sunday or whatever, nick themselves shaving and then you get a drop of blood on your white collar or whatever. We think that this is a blemish, which it is.

You know, if you get blood, it's a difficult thing to get out. And yet here, you would think, well, maybe they could get the ladies who are making the linen garments and sprinkle them with blood and then let them make these nice white garments and then they can always walk around in these beautiful white. But instead, the priests and the high priest, when they walk around serving in the temple, their white linen garments are bloodstained.

There are these larger and smaller spatters and smatters of blood on their garments. Even in the pictures that I see where people are trying to recreate what it must have looked like, you don't see the blood spots on the robe. We just don't think that looks good.

But that's what's required. And you think, you know, this blood wasn't washed. If you leave blood, you know, if you've left hamburger out to thaw or chicken out to thaw or something and blood gets on the edge of the sink or on the cabinet or whatever, what happens after a while? You get a little bit of an aroma there.

You think, oh, I need to wipe this down. I need to wash this off. This was not washed.

It was not removed. It was left on. Think about the altar, how many times that thing got sprinkled with blood.

There's this drying blood. What about flies? What about, you know, the natural things that happen when you have decomposition and so forth of all of these animals and all of this sacrifice and all of these applications of blood? We tend to wince a little bit at the thought of the actuality of this. None of us probably have seen an animal sacrificed in this way.

To see an animal's throat cut and watch it bleed to death. That's a few people that might have gone deer hunting or something, might have seen the dead animal hung by its hind legs and drained after it's dead. But we don't take the living kicking animal and lay it down and slit its throat and watch it bleed to death.

But this was a daily occurrence in Israel. All of these things are a reminder of the magnitude of this sacrifice. It involves death.

Death is an ugly thing. Death is a horrifying thing. We have an instinctive horror of death.

But death was a daily picture in the minds of Israelites, in the worship life of Israel. You couldn't pass by the tabernacle or later the temple without catching it in the air, without seeing it on the garments of the priests who were officiating before God a reminder that the only way to approach God is through death. Why is this such a powerful picture? Why does God use this powerful reminder? Why couldn't he just use one drop of blood instead of all of these gushing geysers of blood involved in the sacrifice and ritual worship in Israel? Death is the relinquishing of everything.

When we die, we no longer have options. We no longer have choices. We no longer have thoughts from a human perspective.

When you look at someone who has died there, you see their remains laid out in a coffin there. Every hope, every aspiration, every ambition, the accomplishments, the greatest men in the world after whatever they accomplished, when they lie there dead, it's all moot as far as they're concerned. Again, I'm talking about on this side of eternity.

When you look at an animal, however healthy and happy and productive and whatever else it may have been, at the point that they slit its throat on the altar, that animal is over with. Its potential, whatever its experiences may have been, it's all gone. You think about this when you lose a pet.

Almost everyone that's had a dog or a cat that they had in the household for a long time, once it passes away, I don't personally have the strong hope and assurance like we do in

the human realm that you're going to see them again. If we do, great. If you believe that, more power to you.

I don't see any reference to that in scripture. I think there are much larger issues than whether or not we're going to see our pets again in the eternal future. When you think about that, we had a white cat that lived with us for many years.

All of his experiences, when he got out, when he got sick, when he had operations, that poor cat kept getting whittled down by one operation and another. Different parts of him kept disappearing. It was probably a relief for him to finally check out.

His personality, his preferences, all of the things that you become familiar with, at the point that that animal dies, that's over with. It has perished and it is gone, gone, gone. It lives only in the memory of people who were familiar.

You think, well, did the animal suffer or did it not suffer? Well, it's all kind of academic and theoretical because only the animal really knew to what extent it suffered. The animal is gone and all of its memories and experiences are gone. So you get real existential and think, well, in what realm did that experience and pain and happiness and contentment and all that really exist? Because it was only in the little brain of the animal and that's all perished and gone away.

The point here is when you see these animals, when Israelites would look, as they did almost daily, and see these sacrifices taking place, the picture of the relinquishing of everything, the perishing of everything that that animal was and had been, is brought to mind in the sacrifice. The reality of death, that human beings come to the end of life just as animals do. Because we are insulated from death so much these days, you send your pet off to be quietly put to sleep and they bag them up and send them wherever they send them.

People don't die at home anymore. They're in a hospital and you may or may not even be there when it takes place, but there's plenty of white sheets and nurses and doctors and curtains and doors. We've insulated ourselves off from death.

In earlier days, when someone died, they died in your arms. They died in their household. You saw them die.

You saw the extinguishing of their life. You butchered your own animals. You saw animals die.

You had the wild beasts come in and kill your chickens or your calves or whatever it might be. We've gotten away in our plush environment today from the harshness and the reality of death, but God built that into the daily life of Israel. Why? Because it reminds us of the brief nature of this life where we are concerned.

Ultimately, it all boils down to your own individual life. Just like that animal, its joys and pains, its good and bad experiences really only exist in its own mind. We can guess at some of those things.

We know about a few of them, but only the animal knows. When it perishes, that all goes with it. Ultimately, everything boils down to our individual personal view of this life and of the next.

The sight of death, the sight of the sacrifices, being reminded that we have to pause and reflect on the meaning of what this life is, we've kind of insulated ourselves from that. We don't think about it. There's a lot being said today after all the school shootings about violence in the media and so forth and how we've gotten so inured to it.

Now we don't think anything about turning on the TV and seeing somebody get shot with weapons and guys flying in every direction and blood spurting here and there. I personally think it's a tribute to the ingenuity of all the special effects people. You see Chuck Norris or somebody get shot and the bullet goes in and the blood spurts out in the opposite direction.

That doesn't happen in real life where somebody is getting shot and you have this big gusher of blood going back in the direction of the bullet. That comes out on the exit side. Hollywood, we have fake death now.

The blood in most of these things doesn't even look real. When you've seen real blood, you know we have a physiological reaction to the sight of real blood, especially in quantities. Certain parts of your body just tighten up in a reflex action when you see real blood and a lot of it.

But Hollywood blood doesn't do anything to us. We see it all the time. We don't think anything about it.

The death that we see on TV, they have this movie where some guy takes over Alcatraz and wants to shoot a missile into San Francisco. It has Sean Connery in it so it's worth watching just on that score alone. But in the process of this, dozens of guys get whacked on both sides.

The good guys and the bad guys. They get shot up. There's Marines flying every which way.

In the movies, there's an understanding when you watch. You don't stop and think, well, that guy that had his five seconds on the screen there where he got shot, his parents spent 17 years raising him and educating him. He went to boot camp.

He may have a wife and a family someplace. We just think, oh, one more bad guy out of the way. It's like a video game.

I'm not subscribing to all of the comments about why high school students are shooting up their schools, but it is an undeniable fact that we have this fake life presented to us on television that doesn't have any root in reality. We don't have the normal reaction we would have to somebody being shot when we see it over and over again on television. We're insulated from a lot of this.

But God built it in to remind Israel to think about the meaning of life and the fact that the giving up of oneself to God is a responsibility. To die to self means a lot when you think about what death really is. We don't tend to put the freight and the meaning into that concept that it would have if we had a fresh concept of death in our minds.

When you have seen death up close and personal, it didn't just come up and feed the animal an herb that laid it gently to sleep and it just sort of gradually breathed slower and slower and then quit breathing altogether. This was a violent death. It was a bloody death.

The animal bled to death. Arterial bleeding, blood spurting here and there, people getting splattered, flies and stench and more animals coming up and chopping up of animals and butchering and guts and entrails and skinning and grabbing livers and kidneys and washing them and doing all this. It's a bloody, gory, awful mess.

To emphasize that death is a real and a violent thing and yet we're called upon to die to self, to put our all on the altar. When Abraham goes to put Isaac on the altar, he's not going to give Isaac a somnolence and say, here Isaac, put this under your tongue and just relax. Breathe deep.

He's going to slice his throat with a knife and his heart is going to pump the blood out of his body through his severed neck. It's a bloody, awful, you know, you think about crime scene photos. I had a teacher who got in big trouble when I was in junior high because he brought candid snapshots that he had taken in Vietnam of various people on both sides that had gotten shot up and blown up and he passed these around in class.

It was the first time I had seen the results of violent death in a graphic color snapshot. It didn't look anything like what you see on TV. It was awful.

The point is we need to be reminded of what it means to give all to God, to die to self, to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ when he said, if any man wants to come after me, let him take up his cross and follow me. Well, taking up the cross means I am willing to die. I'm not going to be dragged away.

He doesn't say let them drag you to the cross. Let them nail you to the cross. If they happen to catch you, don't resist.

He says you go pick up your cross. You take it up. You put it on your shoulder and you walk up the hill to where you lose your life because it's the will of God.

Take up your cross and follow me. Jesus Christ went to the cross voluntarily. Isaac is pictured ascending that hill voluntarily.

He didn't resist. He didn't struggle. He didn't overpower his elderly father and say, you're not slicing my throat.

What's the matter with you, old man? What have you been dreaming at night that makes you think God wants you to kill me? In the ram sacrifice, in the application of this blood, the sprinkling of it on these otherwise pure white linen garments, these men in their service are marked with the symbol of life and death. Blood is the symbol of life. The life of the flesh is in the blood.

But the fact that you're seeing that blood means that they died. The animal died. It's the symbol of life.

But it is the shedding of blood that provides remission. It is the shedding of blood that makes possible the sacrifice that pleases God. And it is the giving up of life that is inherent in fulfilling God's plan.

We today as a culture, as a society, as the body of Christ, in Christian circles, in Christianity, in churches, in groups of believers, we are too much in this world. Just like we mentioned a minute ago, we've sealed ourselves off from death. We don't typically think about what it means to put it all on the line in terms of our Christianity.

We look with awe and wonder at Abraham putting his son on the altar and we think, oh boy, if I was called upon to do that. But we are called upon to do that in small ways, in daily ways. And we think, well, it's the mountaintop experiences.

It's the ritual. It's the priests up there doing this on behalf of the nation. That's what really counts.

But you'll notice that this is supposed to be a personal thing as well. And this is where we come to in verse 22 of Exodus 29. You've had the ritual.

Moses is taking this blood. He's having the animal carved up and applying the blood and sprinkling and doing this, that, and the other. But now, God tells Moses in verse 22, take the fat of the ram, the fat tail.

By the way, the particular type of sheep that live in Palestine ever since ancient times are, within a particular kind of animal like goats or sheep, you have different varieties. The variety of sheep that live in, and I didn't know this, that lives over there is notable for having this huge tail. They have unusually large, meaty, fatty tails.

So when you see in Scripture talking about taking the fat of the tail and doing this, that, and the other, this is not a small, this is not a little wiggly thing like you'd see on some

little lamb, some little tiny. This is a significant portion of this particular kind of sheep. Take the fat of the ram, the fat tail, the fat that covers the entrails, the fatty lobe attached to the liver, the two kidneys and the fat on them, the right thigh.

You're going to take these and put them in the hands of Aaron and the hands of his sons along with the stuff from the basket and wave them as a wave offering before the Lord. They're going to take these things into their hands. And notice how much of this involves fat.

What does fat symbolize? Why is it the fat? Well, throughout Scripture, when you find fat, this is a symbol of prosperity. Not just prosperity, but this is all of the good things of life. This is the enjoyment of life.

This is prosperity in the sense not only of having material things, but of enjoying them. And that's why it can be found in both a good and a bad sense. Some of the promises of God talk about the fact that you're going to enjoy the fat of the land.

It can be a good thing that you're going to have these. Your flocks and herds will be fat. The fat of the sacrifices is an important part of worship.

It's not an inherently evil thing. But you also have the passages that talk about Jeshurun or Israel grew fat and kicked. And the evil people in the world are talked about as being rich and being fat.

And you have the idea of gluttony and excess and so forth. And so when that immersion in prosperity, when that immersion in the pleasures of this world becomes the issue, when that is the thing for which you are living, and you sort of seize and lay hold on that, and we become like Israel in their apostate days, that prosperity becomes a stumbling block. That prosperity becomes an end in itself.

And now that is the thing to which you cling instead of the God who provided it. So to take the fat of the animal. How did the animal get that fat? He ate well.

He prospered. He was out eating of the greenery of the land. He grazed.

He got grain perhaps and was well fed. And developed this fat in his body. This of course, you've heard me say this before, but I find now that they're coming out with diets and things where they say you don't necessarily have to avoid eating fat.

When they're talking about cholesterol and fat and all this, and they say, well, you've got to only eat green vegetables and live on celery and lettuce and carrots and things, and you can't eat steak anymore because you're going to get all this fat and cholesterol. Well, the animal is a vegetarian. And look at all the fat that he develops.

So how is a low-fat diet going to keep you from developing fat? I completely don't

understand that. Anyway. So here's the ram.

And look at all the fat he's got on him. And he's been eating nothing but grass and stuff. He's got a fat tail.

He's got fat covering his entrails. He's got a fatty lobe attached to his liver. He's got fat on his two kidneys.

He's got a fat right thigh. He's got fat all over him. And he's been eating a vegetarian diet.

So I don't think that's the answer just looking at the Bible. But he's prospered. He's grown fat.

And what does this speak of? Because this is the animal, this is the ram, that speaks of the manward application of this sacrifice. And what happens? This fat is taken into the hands of the priest. They take these fatty things, these symbols of prosperity, on the outside and on the in.

You can see the fatty tail wagging every time the ram leaves. When he's departing from you, that's the view you have. Here's this fatty tail.

You see his haunches and his thighs. You think, wow, that's a really prosperous looking ram there. But also on the inside, the fat of his entrails, the fat on his kidneys and on his liver.

Prosperity externally, prosperity internally. It's taken into the hands of the priest and it's waved before the Lord in verse 24. You put these things in the hands of Aaron and his sons.

They seize hold of it. This is the best. This is the prosperity.

This is all of the great and best part of the animal. They wave it before the Lord as a wave offering before the Lord. And they present this and they say, why would they do this? Why would they wave it before the Lord, hold it up and present it to the Lord? It's recognition.

This has come from God. Every good and perfect gift comes down from above. This prosperity is God given.

You recognize the source. You wave it before God. You thank God for it.

What a wonderful thing that we have a country where our rams can grow this fat. Where they're not attacked by wild animals. Where they're not disease ridden and starving and skin and bones.

Look at the fat of our flocks and herds. This is the best and the richest and the choicest of our flocks. We wave it before God and we thank Him for it.

Then what do they do? They give it back. They give it back to God. Look at verse 25.

You shall receive it back from their hands and burn them on the altar as a burnt offering. As a sweet aroma before the Lord. This is dedicated to God.

You receive it. You observe it. You appreciate it.

You enjoy it before the Lord. And then you give it back to God. This is the attitude we need to have.

We have wonderful blessings in this country. Most of us are comfortable. We're not in poverty.

We're not living in some of these foreign countries where people are refugees. And looking from hand to mouth and relying on the hospitality of strangers. And being cast from pillar to post and blown around by political winds.

And overcome with all kinds of circumstances. We are in a wonderful environment. We have so many blessings.

And we thank God for those. But we have to look at this example in the priest. We take those things in our hands.

We appreciate them. We hold them up to the Lord and we thank God for them. But we need to also be willing to give it right back to God.

And when the occasion calls for it. If it's a question of doing the right thing or doing the secure thing. Of doing the easy thing that doesn't really put us at risk.

Or doing the self-sacrificial thing. Are we willing to take these wonderful best and choicest things that God has given us. And hand them back to him.

And say this all came from you. It goes back to you. I appreciate it.

I enjoy it. I observe it. But it belongs to God.

And to not seize and lay hold of it as a possession for ourselves. You can imagine what Aaron and the priest would have looked like if they gave them all these choice parts of the ram. And then Moses tries to take it back to offer to the Lord.

And they are clinging to it. Oh no. I'm going to have a brisket type of meal out of this breast and out of this tail.

Boy you know this. You can't get this kind of meat just anywhere. Moses pulling and

tugging to get it out of their hands.

How awkward and how ridiculous that would be. But that's what we do sometimes. When we are called upon to make choices that may put our prosperity at risk.

Or may cause us to give up something that we enjoy and think is really good. This can be relationships. This can be material goods.

This can be opportunities. Where we think oh I'm in such a great position here. I've got such great benefits.

I've got security. I've got the esteem of others. I've got a good thing going here.

And then some small decision comes up where to keep that it's going to be a compromise of integrity. To keep that we are going to have to kind of wink or turn a blind eye. Or we are going to have to in some way large or small compromise our Christian faith.

Our Christian life. Our dedication to God. We are going to have to give up the nourishment of the word of God in some way.

Sometimes people are called and they say boy this is a great job. But you are going to have to move away from the church where you are getting your nourishment. Or maybe you are going to be called upon to give more time in some area that's going to take away your personal meditation.

Or your personal devotions. Or your fellowship with other believers. Or some other essential aspect of life with God.

And life in this world. And pursuit of calling. And make up your own illustration.

Sooner or later these things are put to the test. Are we willing to put these things back on the altar? Or do we want to cling to them? Do we look at the gift instead of the giver? Do we look at the result rather than the means? Because it's the life of faith and the righteousness that God assigns that is a treasure beyond value. Not these temporal reflections of it that God often blesses us with and gives it to us.

Do we cling to the blessing instead of the one who gives the blessing? Do we start to enjoy the fruit of Jesus' victory on the cross? And are not willing to take up that cross and follow him if and when the occasion arises? We just get too much in this world. And we become of the world instead of just in the world. That's what's pictured here when giving these things back.

There are portions that we do get to keep. But look on down. Verse 26.

You take the breast of the ram of Aaron's consecration and wave it as a wave offering

before the Lord, and it shall be your portion. The breast of a ram. These are where the muscles are.

These are the climbing muscles. These are the frontward muscles. These are also the muscles that cover the heart.

And so you have here the suggestion of the strength and also the seat of emotion in the breast. This is the choice portion of the ram. But it speaks of both the inner and the outer strength of the animal.

It is also waved before the Lord. You wave it and you thank God for it. You raise it up on high.

To wave it, they lifted it up over their head. They presented it to God. They showed it to God and praised God for it.

But this portion, the breast, this strength and that which covers the seat of emotion here, this is retained. This is the priest's portion. They keep this.

It is from the children of Israel, for Aaron and his sons, by a statute forever. It is a heave offering. Verse 28, it shall be a heave offering from the children of Israel, from the sacrifices of their peace offerings.

And not only this consecration offering was this portion to be kept, but all the peace offerings of Israel. This is what sustained the Levites, the sons of Aaron who served as priests. The offerings that Israel brought, this is the portion that they kept.

This choice stake, if you will, from the breast of the ram. The holy garments of Aaron shall be his son's aphron and so forth. The reminder of these holy garments are sprinkled with blood.

And it doesn't talk about going and washing the blood out at some future point. They're marked with the blood of the sacrifice. And it is their mark of consecration.

It's their mark of service, their mark of calling. And in that mark you have inherent the idea of death, of sacrifice. These things are all suggested and we're reminded of them when we see the ram caught in the thicket.

Back in Genesis chapter 22. The thing I want to point out in particular as we conclude our study of this is you remember when Abraham first embarked on this journey? He had his servants, he had the wood and the fire in his hand. He took Isaac and they traveled.

It was a three-day journey, wasn't it? And when he got into the region of Moriah, he lifted up his eyes and looked and what did he see? He saw the mountain afar off. Lots of significant things take place on mountains. Jesus calls his disciples.

He makes a point of going and climbing a mountain. He's been with his disciples down in the town, down in Capernaum, in Peter's house and so forth. Jesus leaves, goes up the mountain and then he calls his disciples to himself and he makes them climb the mountain to come up and receive their commission as disciples.

The law of Moses specifically is delivered on the mountain. Moses goes up into the mountain to receive this. You have foreshadowing, that whole system of sacrifice and of substitution.

Abraham raising his eyes and looking and what does he see? He sees the mountain. This is what is required of him. When he looks at that mountain, he says, this is where God wants me to go.

This is where God wants me to take my son and sacrifice him. It reminds us of the requirements of the law. The next time we have that phrase used is in verse 13 of chapter 22.

The first instance was in verse 4. On the third day, Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. You get the idea that his heart is heavy and his focus is on the requirement that God has on his life. The next time Abraham lifted his eyes and looked is in verse 13 and what does he see? The ram caught in a thicket by its horns.

This is the means of deliverance. This is the means of fulfilling the requirement that is the burden of his heart when he lifts his eyes and sees the mountain. Abraham went and took that ram and offered it for a burnt offering instead of his son.

The picture of Jesus Christ is so strong here, even down to the details. Israel was supposed to be, it has been suggested, the image of the vineyard, of the olive tree and so forth, of all of these things that are supposed to be fruitful and productive in Israel. But by Jesus' day, it was overgrown with thorns and brambles and it was not a fruitful place.

A thicket isn't a place that you go for fruit. You go to a vineyard or you go to an almond tree or an olive tree or a fruit tree to pick the fruit. But a thicket is a tangle of overgrowth and vines and weeds and things that are not productive.

What is it that brought Jesus Christ to the cross when he came? This is not my suggestion, by the way, but I think it's an excellent one. It's an observation that's been made centuries before us. There have been many wise and godly students of the Bible in centuries past.

I think it's a shame that often today people don't go back and read the old scholars and the old students of the Word. They had a lot of great insight. But it has been pointed out that the ram and the thicket is such a great picture of Jesus Christ because those horns, the symbol of kingly authority, this is what really got Jesus in trouble with the Jews.

Do you say that you're the king of the Jews? This is what brought Jesus to the cross. This is the sign they nailed up over his head. Jesus Christ, the king of the Jews.

The Pharisees and the scribes and the rulers couldn't stand the fact that Jesus was offering himself as the Messiah, as the king of Israel. This would have reduced their importance, reduced their role, and he didn't come to them. They felt like they were slighted.

If it really was the Messiah, why he would come to them? He wouldn't go to the lowly and the poor and the downtrodden. He wouldn't come out of Galilee and preach to the peasants. He would have marched down to the temple and said, Hi there, Pharisees and scribes and Sadducees and all you other great and wonderful believers.

I've come to let you know that I'm the Messiah. And they resented his authority. They resented his teaching authority.

They resented the authority that he claimed from his father. And this is what entangled him and this is what brought him to the cross. And so the fact that this ram is entangled in the thicket, this overgrowth, this unfruitful plant growth by the horns foreshadows the way in which Jesus Christ is going to be brought as the sacrifice.

And the other thing that strikes me about this whole scene as we step back and look at it, how many people observed this? This is one of the greatest episodes in the Old Testament. How many witnesses are there to it? Other than Abraham and Isaac, there's nobody there. Even the servants are left back at the foot of the mountain.

Nobody sees this. It's the greatest expression of Abraham's faith. It's the greatest reflection of his growth and his standing before God of his entire life.

It's greater than his victory over the confederation of kings. It's greater than his day on the mountain with God, serving him a meal and anticipating the destruction of Sodom and his intercession on behalf of Lot and his family. It's greater than his choice of the wilderness over the fruitful plain of Sodom.

It's greater than anything else in Abraham's life. Nobody sees it. It's just Abraham and Isaac by themselves.

How did this even come to light? It isn't even noised abroad until Moses sets it down when he writes the book of Genesis. The greatest victories in our life are often the least visible. I've been thinking about this recently because we're, as you know, a small group.

We don't have a building. We don't have a sign. We don't have a steeple or a parking lot or an education building or a baptistry.

We do have some wonderful things. We have a great organ. We have a great piano.

We have a wonderful provision of a talented band to play them for us. We have great opportunities, but they're invisible. In our lives as individuals, none of us are notable in a big way.

None of us have our face on a billboard or are known, and yet there are many believers who are. There are believers you can name that you see on TV that you can recognize their face. You recognize their ministry.

There are books and all kinds of videos and seminars and conferences and things where well-known men... I get these flyers in the mail all the time of, you know, thus and such a date we're going to have the following men. You've got little pictures of all these men. These are the prominent men of the faith in our day.

They're known for their radio ministries or for this, that, and the other. We are so pulled in the direction of measuring effectiveness and measuring our health and our fruitfulness as believers by what is visible. I will confess to you that I have to remind myself every so often because I keep thinking, well, you know, once in a while some of us get sick or get sent out of town or whatever, and there may only be one or two of us here.

And sometimes for two or three or four lessons there's only one or two of us here. And I think, boy, you know, we need to get some people in here or we're going to perish. And I remind myself, and I hope all of us remember, that we stand at the edge of an undiscovered country in a lot of ways because the visible areas of ministry are being plowed.

They're being exploited. There's plenty of churches. There are thousands and thousands of churches who can engage in these visible ministries who are pursuing that, who are pushing that, who are splashing themselves across media and so forth.

The undiscovered country is the country of Abraham where he looks around and God promises it to him, but it belongs to another. He's living in the land of the Canaanites. We're going to see at the end of this chapter where there's a notice that says that in verse 19, Abraham returned to his young men.

They rose and went together to Beersheba. Abraham dwelt at Beersheba. Beersheba doesn't belong to Abraham.

It's a place that he got by agreement with, what's his name, the king, Abimelech. We're going to find out, it says several times, that he's dwelling in the land of the Philistines. He has to believe by faith that this is his land because he sees if it's his land, who are all these people living there? Who are all these squatters in his land? Abraham wins his greatest victory in total invisibility.

Abimelech's not there. The sons of Heth aren't there. Sarah's not there.

The servants aren't there. Ishmael's not there. All of the great household of Abraham, all the people that he does daily business with, nobody's there when he wins his victory.

Why didn't God have something take place over in Beersheba? Why does he travel a three days journey into the wilderness? Because Mount Moriah, we saw what that name means, the name prefixed to a word that comes from Ra'ah, to see. This is where God is seen. When Abraham sees this ram, look at verse 14, he calls the name of the place the Lord will provide, as it is said to this day, in the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.

There's a word play here because Yireh, they say Jehovah, Jireh, they get that from the King James and so forth, but Yireh is also from Ra'ah. Moriah is one form of the verb to see, Ra'ah. Yireh is another form from that very same verb, to see.

It's God who sees. You go to the place where God is seen, Moriah, and when you get there, it is God who sees you. It's what God sees that counts.

As a result of what God sees on the mountain, the blessing that is pronounced, the angel of the Lord is going to return a second time in verse 15 and call to him out of heaven and speak on behalf of God. This is what God says on this occasion. This is what God sees and this is what God says as a result of what he sees.

By myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son. Abraham understands the concept of sacrifice and Abraham is willing to give up everything that means anything to him in the person of Isaac, his son. God says, I've seen this and now I know your heart.

This is like slicing the animal opening and examining the entrails and finding them acceptable. Of all of the times we've seen God promise blessing to Abraham, this is the strongest statement and the fullest statement that God ever makes. God swears by himself on this occasion because God is pleased with what he sees in Abraham.

God doesn't say, well, Abraham, I would have blessed you more, but remember that lie you told when you went to Egypt? Remember that failure you had when you did the same thing with Abimelech? Remember when you failed here and you failed there? God doesn't bring any of that up. God looks at this attitude of heart. Abraham sustains this over a period of three days, traveling to Mount Moriah, puts Isaac on the altar.

God says, because you have done this thing. And again, anybody that says that the Abrahamic covenant is unconditional, what does God say here? Because you have done this thing. Not because I have sworn by myself back in chapter 12.

Because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son. Blessing I will bless you. This is the doubling of the Hebrew verb with the infinitive.

You can't get any more emphatic than this. God says, I am really going to bless you,

Abraham. I'm going to bless you like you have never seen blessing before.

It's a doubling of the verb. And multiplying, I will multiply you. He doubles that verb.

Your descendants are going to be as the stars of the heaven. God told him that before, didn't he? But he also says, like the sand which is on the seashore. Once before, God said, step outside your tent, Abraham, and look up toward heaven.

You see all those stars? That's how I'm going to multiply your descendants. But God says, I'm going to multiply them like the stars of heaven and like the sand on the seashore. You know the difference between those two illustrations? The stars in the sky, that's something far away and unreachable, isn't it? There's a great gospel song that talks about, we're going to fly through the Milky Way one of these days.

We're going to go beyond the stars. I've got a home beyond the starry sky. Lots of gospel songs make reference to that.

But that's literally a pie in the sky kind of a symbol. We send satellites and things to get the Hubble telescope up there. They're still light years away from us.

God says, I'm not only going to make your descendants like the stars of the heavens. I'm going to make it like the sand on the seashore. Now that's something you can pick up and touch.

That's literally a concrete illustration. You can't make concrete without sand. God says, because you have done this thing, I'm going to bring that future promise down to earth, literally.

You're going to see this come to pass. It's going to be real in your own lifetime. It's going to be something you can pick up and hold in your hand.

God says, I am really going to bless you. I am really going to multiply your descendants. Why? Because of what I have seen here when nobody else was looking.

Abraham could have reneged and nobody would have been the wiser. The servants would have known the difference if Abraham had caved in and said, oh gosh, Isaac, this is what God said, but we can't do that. Let's just go back and let's not say we did.

Nobody would have been the wiser. It's God who's looking. It's God who sees.

But because Abraham is faithful in the invisible time, when he's not being watched by anybody, God says, this is what I'm looking for. This is a man after my own heart. This is why Abraham is called the friend of God.

Because when God is looking, that's when Abraham is faithful. Multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven and like the sand which is on the seashore. And he adds to the

promise.

This is something God never said before in all of those previous statements. Your descendants will possess the gate of their enemies. Not only are they going to inherit the land, not only are they going to be fruitful and multiply, what does it mean to possess the gate of your enemies? The gate is the seat of power.

That's the seat of government. That's where Lot sits when he's rendering decisions and judging the people of Sodom. Your descendants are going to possess the gate of their enemies.

They will be in a position to judge their enemies. They're not just going to get their stuff. They're going to dispose of their enemies.

They're going to decide what their fate's going to be. They're going to possess their gate. They're going to utterly take the place of their enemies.

In your seed, all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.