

Illustrations of Immanuel: Ram - A God Who Is Near

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Genesis 22:6-14 ⁶ So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid *it* on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together. ⁷ But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." Then he said, "Look, the fire and the wood, but where *is* the lamb for a burnt offering?" ⁸ And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." So the two of them went together. ⁹ Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. ¹⁰ And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹ But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" So he said, "Here I am." ¹² And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only *son*, from Me." ¹³ Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind *him was* a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ And Abraham called 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."

God Can AND Will

Mentally raise your hand if you ever had this conversation with your father . . .

Dad can you . . .

Then your Dad responds, "I sure can." And then he sits there doing nothing until you think to ask, "Dad will you . . ."

Now, mentally raise your other hand if you had that conversation as a Dad.

There is a difference between "can" and "will," fathers use that difference to try to be funny.

This difference between "can" and "will" is no joke when it comes to God. We often confess and believe that God "can" do anything. He is Elohim, the almighty, he "can" do anything. But at the same time, we often have trouble believing what he "will" do something today. God's salvation often feels like a thing far away, on the day of our death or on the day of judgement. We often forget and/or doubt that it is also a thing close at hand with us today.

In our text today Abraham confesses both. Twice he says "God/the Lord will provide." The first time he is speaking about what he and Isaac needed that very day, the second time he is looking forward in time 2,000 years to the coming of the Christ. Jesus' salvation is near at hand today and tomorrow

God's Salvation is Nearer than You think.

Consider Jesus' conversation with Martha after her brother Lazarus died.

In John chapter 11 Jesus confronts Martha and tells her "your brother will rise again." Martha responds, "I know he will rise on the last day." Martha believes that God can do it, but she doesn't believe he will do it today. She believes in God's power, but she doesn't believe she will see it.

Compare that to Abraham in our text. As Abraham is going up the mountain with Isaac, Abraham confesses by faith, "God will provide for himself a lamb." Abraham isn't talking about a distant future. He is talking about here today. He is telling Isaac his son, trust God and you will see the power of God not in the distant future but today, right here, right before your eyes.

We know from the book of Hebrews that Abraham expected God to provide in a different way.

Hebrews 11:17-19 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, . . . concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead,

He expected God to bring Isaac back from the dead. What God did wasn't quite as dramatic but it was more important, he replaced Isaac with the ram. That very day God provided. He provided a ram as a substitute for Isaac.

Mary had the same problem that Martha did. She believed in the can of God. She says to Jesus "If you had been here my brother would not have died." But she doesn't believe in the "will" of God. She doesn't believe that she will see that power in action today.

Jesus told Mary:

John 11:40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?"

By faith we see that God's power and glory is with us today, now, all around us.

God's Power is Seen By Faith

Faith doesn't change or effect the power of God. Faith, which is a gift from God and not a work we do, opens our eyes to see what is already there.

An unbeliever looks at the account we just read today and all that they see is a terrible story about a father who was willing to plunge a knife into the heart of his son. By faith we see an illustration of Immanuel, a picture of God's mercy to us through Jesus Christ.

This is what faith does, it opens our eyes to see that God's salvation and mercy isn't just a thing of the future but a thing that is all around us. We see the truth. We see not bread and wine in the Lord's supper but the very body and blood of Jesus. We say our dinner prayer and by faith we see not just a table full of food, but a table full of the Lord's blessings. We open our eyes in the morning and see not a day of uncertainty or fear but a day in which the Lord will walk with us and provide.

Psalms 119:18 Open my eyes, that I may see Wondrous things from Your law.

Ephesians 1:18 the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,

The unbeliever sees none of these things. Just as an unbeliever on the mountain with Abraham would say, "So what, a ram got caught in a thicket that happens all the time." Or an unbeliever standing at the cross would say, "so what," or standing at the empty tomb would also say, "so what." So also, the unbeliever looks at the design which is built into every human person and they say, "So what it only looks like design, its actually all just random chance." They can see nothing because like Saul their eyes are blinded.

God has opened our eyes by the power of his word, so that we are able to see the glory of God in all these things. This is a thing that God has done for us through the power of his word.

Abraham also, when he saw the ram caught in the thicket, knew immediately that it was given by God as a substitute for Isaac, just as Abraham had said, "God will provide." And God did provide and will provide as well

In the same way our eyes are open to see that not only has God provided for us today, but that he has also provided his son for eternity. Abraham not only believed that he would see God's power today, he also believed that he would see it in a time to come.

After the ram has been sacrificed, Abraham names the place, Jehovah-Jireh, "the Lord will provide, as it is said in the mount of the Lord it will be provided." Abraham is no longer talking about a substitute for Isaac, now he is talking about a substitute for the world. As God provided a substitute for Isaac so also, he will provide a substitute for the world, on this same mountain.

The Ram is unique in our illustrations of Immanuel, because it is the only one that takes place on the very mountain where Jesus would be substituted for us on the cross. Abraham by faith is able to see what will take place on this very same mountain two thousand years in the future.

This Ram is an illustration of Immanuel. Abraham had the knife raised, about to plunge it down into the heart of Isaac. God stopped him and substituted a ram in Isaac's place. In the same way when the knife of God's wrath is raised against us because of our sin, God himself substitutes Jesus in our place, and the knife falls on him.

Jesus is the ram who is our vicarious atonement. Vicarious means substitute. Atonement means an offering that appeases God.

2 Corinthians 5:21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

It was commonly said by the ancient Israelites that this ram which was provided for Moses was created by God on the sixth day and preserved until this time, when it was put in the bush for Abraham. The bible never says anything of the sort. It is most likely that the ram was one which lived nearby and which God caused to get caught at this moment.

However, in a figurative sense those ancient people were correct. God gave the promise of the seed of the woman who would be born and take our place under the wrath of God from the beginning of the world. Here that promise is taken out of the cupboard and put on

display above the fireplace so that everyone who would come after Abraham could clearly see what God was going to do through Jesus Christ.

Just as you get out your Christmas ornaments every year, so also God at this time took out this picture of Immanuel so that everyone could see it.

By faith we are able to see both the power of God that surrounds us and the love of God in Jesus of whom the ram is a picture. Just as the ram took Isaac's place under the knife, so also Jesus has taken our place under the wrath of God. Amen