

Series: Before the Manger

Title: Shadows of Substitutionary Atonement

Text: Genesis 22:1-14

Last week we saw that in the garden of Genesis 3, humanity's first sin shattered innocence and introduced shame, fear, and distance from God. Yet in the midst of judgment, the heart of redemption is unveiled. It was more than the failure of man, it was glimpse into the faithfulness of God! It there that God calls "Where are you?" not for information but for restoration, and delivers the first gospel promise that a future Offspring would crush the serpent's head.

Adam and Eve's fig-leaf coverings reveal humanity's futile attempts at self-righteousness, but God Himself provides garments of skin through the shedding of innocent blood — a foreshadowing of substitution and grace. In Eden we witness both the tragedy of the fall and the first whisper of the cross, where the God who pursues, promises, and provides begins His unfolding work of redemption.

What began in the garden was more than the story of how sin entered the world — it was the unveiling of how God would redeem it. In Eden we saw the first whisper of grace: a God who comes looking for the sinner... a promise of a coming Deliverer... and a sacrifice that would cover what sin exposed.

But the garden was only the opening chapter. The shadows we saw there begin to stretch across the pages of Scripture, appearing again and again — each time a little sharper, a little clearer, a little closer to the day when the promised Offspring would come.

And so the story doesn't stay among the trees of Eden. Redemption's shadow moves forward. And it leads us to another place — not a garden this time, but a mountain.

A mountain where faith is tested, where a father raises a knife, where a son willingly yields, and where God once again provides what man could never provide for himself.

If Eden showed us that sin demands a covering... then Moriah will show us that redemption demands a substitute.

Everything we saw in seed form in Genesis 3 begins to bloom on the slopes of this mountain. The whisper becomes a declaration. The shadow takes shape.

So as we leave Eden behind we follow the promise up a rugged hill called Moriah, where the mercy of God interrupts judgment once again...

—and where the shadow of the cross comes into even clearer view. Let's take a look at this incredible in the life of Abraham!

Genesis 22:1–14 (ESV)

22 After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ²He said, "Take **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.”³

So Abraham rose **early in the morning**, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

⁴On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. ⁵Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; **I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.**”

⁶And Abraham took the **wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son**. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together.

⁷And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” ⁸Abraham said, **“God will provide for himself the lamb** for a burnt offering, my son.”
So they went both of them together.

⁹When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

¹⁰Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.

¹¹But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” ¹²He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.”

¹³And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering **instead of his son**.

¹⁴So Abraham called the name of that place, **“The Lord will provide”**;
as it is said to this day,

“On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.”

As we leave the garden behind, we climb the rugged hill of another place where faith and sacrifice meet — this mountain called Moriah. The centuries have passed, but the pattern remains: sin requires a substitute, and God alone provides it.

Abraham, the friend of God and the father of faith, is tested in a way that defies reason.

To really appreciate this scene, its important to know that in Genesis 15 God promised Abraham a son, through Sarah who would be the fulfillment of God’s promise to make of him and a great nation... Issac was the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham...

And now, the same God who promised him a son now commands him to lay that son upon the altar. “**Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and offer him there as a burnt offering.**” **Every phrase cuts deeper than the last.**

Yet Abraham obeys. Early the next morning, he rises, saddles the donkey, and begins the three-day journey. Can you imagine those steps? Each one heavier than the last, each one echoing with the silent question, “Why, Lord?” A question Coupled with a quiet confidence that God is going to work this out... because he knew God was going to continue His promise through Isaac... but how?

When they reach the mountain, Abraham places on Isaac the wood that he would carry up the hill — the very wood on which he would soon lie upon— while Abraham carries the fire and the knife.

“Father,” the boy asks, “where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”
Abraham answers with trembling faith: ***“God will provide for Himself the lamb.”***

When Abraham assured Isaac that “God will provide for Himself the lamb”, his words carried more than immediate comfort—they were prophetic.

Abraham, holding onto the promise of God was expressing that God would supply a substitute sacrifice in place of his son. Throughout church history, many theologians have seen in this phrase, God will provide for Himself the lamb, a deeper, intentional foreshadowing of Calvary itself.

It was Augustine, who when considering those words “provide for himself a lamb” said, “He said not, ‘**for us,**’ but ‘**for Himself,**’ for in due time He would offer Himself as the Lamb.”

Likewise, early commentators such as Chrysostom and later expositors like Matthew Henry and John Calvin viewed this scene as a “type” a “foreshadow”—God not merely providing *a* lamb, but ultimately providing ***Himself as the lamb***, namely in the person of His Son.

To be honest, the story of Abraham and Isaac never sat right with me ... it makes no sense... God doesn’t learn anything here ... neither does Abraham other than, the Lord will provide ...

This is why its so important to view Old Testament through the lens of the New. Abraham knew that God would provide, but he could not fully grasp *how* God would provide. His faith looked forward to an unseen fulfillment, one that would not come into focus until centuries later— when the shadow of redemption finally has a face placed upon it.

On the banks of the Jordan River, John the Baptist pointing to Jesus declares, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (**John 1:29**)...

In that moment, the mystery of Moriah found its meaning—**the Lord who provides became the Lord who provides Himself**. The shadow gave way to substance, and the promise spoken in Genesis finds its fulfillment in Christ, the true Substitute and the ultimate Provision.

On Moriah, the altar is built, the wood arranged, and Isaac — willingly — lies down. The knife is raised, this moment is suspended between obedience and heartbreak. Then heaven shatters the silence: “***Abraham! Abraham! Do not lay your hand on the boy...***”

Shoulders dropped ... breath exhaled ... YES! I KNEW YOU'D COME THROUGH!

When heaven broke the silence on Moriah, it was not the voice of a mere messenger. Look at it again:

Genesis 22:15–18 (ESV)

¹⁵ And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven ¹⁶ and said, “**By myself I have sworn**, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ **I will surely bless you**, and **I will surely multiply your offspring** as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, ¹⁸ and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed **my voice**.”

Scripture tells us “the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven” (Genesis 22:11), **yet this Angel speaks as God, not for God**—swearing by **His own name** and **receiving Abraham’s worship**.

For this reason, many throughout church history have seen this as more than an angelic visitation—it was a divine manifestation.

Early Fathers like **Justin Martyr** and **Augustine** affirmed that “the Angel of the Lord” was the pre-incarnate Christ, the eternal Word who would one day take on flesh... BEFORE THE MANGER!

John Calvin called Him “no created angel, but the eternal Word of God,” **Spurgeon** and **MacArthur** echoed the same view, recognizing this as a **Christophany**—a pre-incarnate appearance of the Son of God right there on Mount Moriah!

How fitting that the very One who stopped Abraham’s hand on Moriah would one day stretch out His own hands on Calvary, taking the place of, not only Isaac, but all who believe.

And there, caught in the thicket, in the shadows is a ram — God’s provision, God’s substitute.

The Scripture says, “*Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.*” That phrase — *instead of his son* — is the language of substitution, its the heart of the gospel. A life given in place of another.

And Abraham names the place **Jehovah Jireh** — “*The LORD will provide.*”

This is incredible ... but it gets better!!

This scene on Moriah is beyond our comprehension... we have Abraham and Issac walking up the hill of Moriah. Issac, the promised son is carrying the wood that will be used, unbeknownst to him, for his own sacrifice ... but soon it would become clearer and we learn that Issac, with no argument, lies down on the wood, willing to be bound in the sacrificial position ... looking up at his father, who held in his hand the sacrificial knife that was about to make the downward plunge... until God calls him!

This all happens on Mount Moriah...why Moriah, why a three day journey to this location... what is it about Moriah that marks it as the place of substitution?

Genesis 22:9 (ESV)

⁹When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

It was a very specific location!!

2 Chronicles 3:1a (ESV)

Then Solomon began to build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah

That very mountain range, Mount Moriah, would later become the site of Jerusalem itself, where another Son would carry wood (a cross) on His back, and as he journeyed up a hill called Golgotha where this Son would likewise willingly lay down his life as a sacrifice (John 10 nobody takes my life...)

It would be on Golgotha, where another Father would offer His Son. But this time there would be no voice from heaven to stay the hand, no ram in the thicket to take His place. (Is 53:10) it was the will of the Lord to crush Him... The knife would indeed fall, and the Lamb of God would die — not in place of Isaac, but in place of us. We have been crucified with Christ!

He is our substitute! He is our Ram in the bush! He is our sacrifice ... **Moriah is a shadow of the substitutionary atonement of Christ on the cross...** what's that mean?

Substitutionary atonement is the heart of the gospel — It is Christ taking the full penalty of sin on Himself in the place of sinners. God's wrath fell on Him instead of us, so that His righteousness could be credited to us ... and we see the shadow of that on Moriah!

The garden teaches us that sin demands a covering; Moriah shows us that redemption demands a substitute!

And now, as we stand in awe of this story, we realize that **the shadow of substitutionary atonement** has led us here. From Eden to Moriah to Calvary, every scene has been whispering the same truth—**God Himself would be both the Provider and the Provision.**

He has not only *provided for Himself* a Lamb—He has *provided Himself as* the Lamb.

Genesis 22:14

¹⁴ So Abraham called the name of that place, “**The Lord will provide**”;
as it is said to this day,

“**On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.**” (**Future tense**)

Every shadow we’ve traced finds its substance in Jesus Christ. The garments of skin pointed to His atoning death that covers our guilt. The ram in the thicket pointed to His substitutionary sacrifice that takes our place. Together they declare the heart of the gospel—that what man’s sin exposed, God’s love has forever covered.

The Garden **revealed** it.

Moriah **foreshadowed** it.

But the Cross **fulfilled** it.

Before the Manger has walked us through the long anticipation of redemption — from the covering of sin in Eden, to the substitute on Moriah... from the Passover lamb, to the bread from heaven, to the water flowing from the rock, even to the bitter waters of Marah made sweet by God’s mercy.

Each scene has been more than a memory; it has been a shadow cast by a Savior still to come, holy previews that stirred the longing of God’s people as they waited for the One who would fulfill every promise these pictures pointed toward. Together, they have helped us feel that waiting, that ache, that expectancy... the sense that something — Someone — was drawing near.

And next Sunday, as we step into Advent, our next series, **The Dawn of Redemption**, will carry us from *Before the Manger* to the breathtaking moment when the Savior is **laid in the manger**.

Here, the story turns: **what was presented in shadow is now present in person** — heaven’s Promise wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

Next week, we’ll step into that moment.

The silence is about to break.

The promise is about to breathe.

The long-awaited dawn is about to rise.

In the weeks ahead, redemption will step out of the whispers and into the wonder of full proclamation, from foreshadowed to fulfilled, as heaven announces that the Savior has come.

The story that began in the garden is now unfolding in Bethlehem — Once again, the Bread from Heaven has come down...and the Christ we’ve seen in shadow will soon stand before us in glory and grace.

Advent simply means “waiting”... Let’s enter Advent with eyes wide open, hearts expectant, and faith anchored in the God who keeps every promise.