

Blogging toward Sunday

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Preachers have often imagined an anguished Abraham staggering toward Moriah as he leads his son to his death. But the biblical account contains no anguish, no heated arguments with Sarah (“Yahweh told you *what?*”), no teetering on the edge of faith. Abraham is every inch Kierkegaard’s “knight of faith,” the greatest of heroes because he expects the impossible, which is to say, resurrection. (See Kierkegaard’s meditations in *Fear and Trembling*, [available online](#)).

Abraham already knows resurrection. At his birth, Isaac rose from the dead earth of his aging parents (Rom. 4), and Abraham has every confidence that Yahweh will resurrect again. “We will worship and return to you,” he tells the two young men who accompany him. Abraham “considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead” (Heb. 11:19).

Moriah is later the temple mount (2 Chron. 3:1). Thus Abraham’s altar serves as prototype to Solomon’s, and Isaac’s “sacrifice” is the foundation of the sacrificial system. It points us to the substitutionary nature of sacrifice. As later in the Passover, a ram is slaughtered in place of a son (Gen. 22:13; cf. Exo. 12), and over the centuries the blood of bulls and goats is added to the blood of the ram slain for Isaac. In the latter days, Jesus is the Passover sacrificed for us, the Lamb of God who delivers Abraham’s seed by ascending to the altar. Suffering outside the camp, the new temple rises where he sheds his blood.

Isaac’s experience also shows that sacrifice is not only blood and slaughter, dismemberment and destruction. Like Isaac, all of Israel’s sacrificial victims are both slaughtered and raised up – “turned to smoke” is the phrase in Leviticus. As John shows, Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross exalts him as he returns to the Father.

In Romans 6, Paul reminds the Romans that they participate in the entirety of Christ's sacrifice, death, burial *and* resurrection. Paul believes in a future bodily resurrection (1 Cor. 15; and N. T. Wright's *Resurrection of the Son of God*), but he also teaches that we live bodily resurrection now. Since we have died to sin, we are to present the "members of our bodies" as tools for God's justice. After Moriah, the life Isaac lives in the body is a life on the far side of resurrection. Baptism is our Moriah.

Resurrection means freedom, but simultaneously brings slavery. Paul assumes that we are always slaves to something or someone. There is always a commanding voice to which we respond, and the only question is, Whose? We are liberated from being "under law," but for Paul the alternative is not to be free from life "under" anything at all. The alternative is to be "under" grace.

According to James, Abraham is justified by his obedience in offering Isaac (2:21). His obedience is rewarded; instead of losing his son, he receives back a new Isaac. In his instructions to the Twelve, Jesus also promises rewards for obedience. Supporting the controversial Rabbi Jesus in the charged political climate of first-century Israel was risky, and Jesus promises a disciple's reward to anyone who gives a disciple the minimal assistance of a cup of water.

Glowering like Jonah, we protest the inequity. How can someone who welcomes a prophet receive the same reward as the prophet? By what right is Abraham rewarded for offering Isaac? He gets Isaac back, so he doesn't even lose anything! As always, it is not Jesus' stinginess but his excessive generosity that offends us.