



SUNDAY SCHOOL JUNE 28, 2026

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Old Testament

Genesis 22:1-14

Context: Today's reading is Genesis 22:1–14, often called “The Binding of Isaac,” where Abraham faces a terrible test and learns that God does not desire the death of the child, but trust, provision, and mercy.

THE COMMAND TO SACRIFICE ISAAC

After these things God tested Abraham.

He said to him, “Abraham!”

And he said, “Here I am.”

He 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 that I shall show you.”

So, Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away.

Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you.”

Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. And the two of them walked on together.

Isaac said to his father Abraham, “Father!”

And he said, “Here I am, my son.”

He said, “The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”

Abraham said, “God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.”

And the two of them walked on together.

When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son.

But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!”

And he said, “Here I am.”

He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy 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.”

And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.

So, Abraham called that place “The Lord will provide,” as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.”



OVERVIEW

Genesis 22 tells the story of God testing Abraham by commanding him to offer Isaac, the long-promised son, as a sacrifice. Abraham obeys, travels to Mount Moriah, prepares the altar, and raises the knife. At the last moment, an angel stops him, and Abraham sees a ram caught in a thicket, which becomes the sacrifice instead.

This passage is troubling, and it should be. It raises questions about obedience, faith, violence, child sacrifice, and what kind of God Abraham is learning to know. The ending is crucial: Isaac is not sacrificed. God provides. The child lives.

BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Immediately Before

Genesis 21 tells of Isaac's birth and the painful sending away of Hagar and Ishmael. Abraham has already faced a devastating family separation. Isaac now represents the promise: descendants, covenant, inheritance, and future.

So, when Genesis 22 begins, the stakes are enormous. Abraham is not just being asked to give up a child. He is being asked to give up the very promise God had given him.

Genesis 22:1–14 Itself

The passage begins, "God tested Abraham." That word matters. The story is framed as a test, not as God's desire for child sacrifice. Abraham responds, "Here I am," a phrase of readiness. Isaac asks, "Where is the lamb?" Abraham answers, "God himself will provide."

The turning point comes when the angel stops Abraham: "Do not lay your hand on the boy." The story moves from fear to provision, from sacrifice to mercy.

Immediately After

After verse 14, God renews the promise to Abraham: descendants, blessing, and a future through his offspring. Then Genesis moves toward Sarah's death in chapter 23 and the search for a wife for Isaac in chapter 24. Isaac survives, and the covenant story continues.

Broader Genesis Context

Genesis is a book about beginnings: creation, human failure, covenant, family dysfunction, migration, promise, and blessing. Abraham's story begins in Genesis 12 with a call to leave what is familiar and trust God's promise. By Genesis 22, that promise is being tested at its deepest level.

Theologically, this passage asks: Can Abraham trust the Giver more than the gift? And, just as importantly: What kind of God is this? The story's answer is not "God wants violence." The answer is "God provides, and the child is spared."

HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

In the ancient Near East, sacrifice was a common religious practice. Animal sacrifice was widespread, and there is evidence that some surrounding cultures practiced child sacrifice in extreme circumstances. Israel's later law strongly rejects child sacrifice, especially practices associated with Molech.

So, Genesis 22 may function partly as a dramatic rejection of child sacrifice. Abraham lives in a world where offering one's child to a god may have been imaginable. But the God of Israel stops the knife.



Politically and socially, descendants were survival. A son represented family continuity, inheritance, labor, protection, and identity. Isaac was Abraham's future. Losing Isaac would mean losing far more than emotional comfort; it would mean the collapse of the promised family line.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

The Abraham stories are usually placed in the patriarchal period, often broadly imagined around 2000–1700 BCE, though the written form of Genesis likely came together much later through Israel's oral and written traditions.

A simple timeline:

- Creation and early humanity — Genesis 1–11
- Call of Abram — Genesis 12
- Covenant promises — Genesis 15 and 17
- Birth of Ishmael — Genesis 16
- Birth of Isaac — Genesis 21
- Binding of Isaac — Genesis 22
- Sarah's death — Genesis 23
- Isaac's marriage to Rebekah — Genesis 24
- Jacob and Esau — Genesis 25 onward

BIBLE TRANSLATION UNDERSTANDING

Genesis was written in Hebrew. The story likely circulated orally before being shaped into the written text. The Hebrew title for this passage in Jewish tradition is "binding," because Isaac is bound on the altar.

Several words carry weight:

- **"Tested"** does not mean tempted toward evil. It suggests proving, revealing, or refining faith.
- **"Here I am"** means more than physical location. It is availability: "I am present. I am ready."
- **"Only son"** is complicated because Ishmael also exists. The phrase points to Isaac's covenant role and Abraham's beloved promised son, not a biological denial of Ishmael.
- **"Provide"** is central. Abraham says God will provide the lamb. Later the place is named "The Lord will provide." The Hebrew idea can also carry the sense of "see." God sees the need and provides.

Major English translation stages include the Latin Vulgate, Wycliffe, Tyndale, the Geneva Bible, the King James Version of 1611, Revised Standard Version, New Revised Standard Version, and New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition. Most translation differences are not dramatic here, but choices like "test," "only son," "provide," and "fear God" shape interpretation.

"Fear God" does not simply mean terror. Biblically, it often means reverence, awe, seriousness, and faithful trust.

SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY & GRANT COUNTY CONTEXT

Metaphorically, this passage is about the terrible danger of confusing obedience with harm. Abraham thinks he is being asked to surrender everything. But the story finally reveals that God's provision interrupts human violence.



In modern terms, we might ask: ***What are we willing to place on the altar because we think faith, success, politics, family tradition, or community pressure demands it?***

In Grant County, that might mean sacrificing relationships for being “right,” sacrificing compassion for ideology, sacrificing children’s well-being for adult battles, or sacrificing neighborliness for fear. This passage asks whether we can recognize the ram in the thicket ... ***the alternative God provides before harm is done.***

The hard grace of this story is that faithfulness may require surrender, but it does not require cruelty.

HOW SHOULD WE ACT AND REACT TO THIS SCRIPTURE TODAY?

We should not use this story to justify blind obedience to harmful commands. The ending matters: God stops the violence.

We should ask what we are clinging to too tightly. Abraham had to trust God with the promise itself. That does not mean abandoning loved ones or common sense. It means refusing to turn even good gifts into idols.

We should also protect the vulnerable. Isaac is silent for much of the story, which should make us attentive to those whose voices are often missing: children, the poor, outsiders, and people caught in decisions made by others.

Finally, we should look for God’s provision before we assume sacrifice is the only option.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *What part of this story troubles you most?*
2. *Why do you think the story begins by telling us this is a test?*
3. *What is the difference between faithful surrender and harmful obedience?*
4. *What might “God will provide” mean in this story?*
5. *What are some things people today are tempted to “put on the altar”?*
6. *Where might we see “rams in the thicket” today — unexpected alternatives, mercy, or provision?*
7. *How does this passage point us toward trust without making faith reckless?*





Gospel

Matthew 10:40-42

Context: Jesus closes His instructions to the disciples by reminding them that welcoming even the least of His messengers is, in a very real way, welcoming Christ Himself.

“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.

“Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous, and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple – truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”

OVERVIEW

Matthew 10:40–42 is short, but it carries a huge message: how we receive others reveals how we receive God.

Jesus has just warned the disciples that following Him will not always bring comfort, approval, or peace. They may face rejection, family tension, persecution, and misunderstanding. Then He ends with this beautiful promise: even small acts of welcome matter.

A cup of cold water given to “one of these little ones” is not forgotten by God.

This passage is not about grand religious performance. It is about simple, faithful hospitality. It says that receiving, protecting, encouraging, and caring for those who come in Christ’s name is sacred work.

BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Immediately Before

Matthew 10 is Jesus’ missionary instruction to the twelve disciples. Earlier in the chapter, Jesus sends them out to preach, heal, cleanse, and announce that “the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

But He also warns them:

- They will be vulnerable.
- They will be like sheep among wolves.
- They may be rejected.
- They may create tension even within families.
- They must take up the cross and follow.

So, by the time we reach verses 40–42, Jesus is not describing glamorous ministry. He is describing risky, humble discipleship.

The Passage Itself

Jesus says: “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.”

This creates a chain of relationship:

- To welcome the disciple is to welcome Jesus.



- To welcome Jesus is to welcome God.
- To offer even a cup of cold water is to participate in God's kingdom.

That is a stunning idea. Ordinary kindness becomes holy.

Immediately After

Matthew 11 begins with John the Baptist sending messengers to ask Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”

That matters. Matthew moves from Jesus sending messengers to John sending messengers. The question becomes: how will people receive those who speak for God?

Broader Context in Matthew

Matthew repeatedly emphasizes that faith is not merely what we claim to believe. It is shown in how we treat others.

This connects strongly with Matthew 25: “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink...”

Matthew's Gospel keeps pressing the same point: receiving Christ often looks like receiving the vulnerable person in front of us.

HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

In the ancient world, hospitality was not just being polite. It was often a matter of survival.

Travelers did not have hotels, restaurants, gas stations, or reliable public safety. A wandering teacher or messenger depended on local people for food, water, shelter, and protection.

To welcome someone could also be socially risky. If a disciple of Jesus was controversial, helping that disciple might identify you with their message.

So, offering hospitality was not always sentimental. It could be a public act of courage.

In the Roman world, honor and status mattered greatly. Important people received honor. Low-status people were often ignored. Jesus reverses that system by saying that even “little ones” matter deeply to God.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

Jesus' earthly ministry likely took place around **A.D. 27–30**.

Matthew's Gospel was likely written later in the first century, often dated around **A.D. 70–90**, after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in A.D. 70.

That timing matters because Matthew's community may have known what it felt like to be a vulnerable minority — Jewish followers of Jesus trying to understand their identity after major religious and political upheaval.

So, this passage would have encouraged early Christians to care for traveling teachers, prophets, disciples, and ordinary believers who were carrying the message of Jesus.



BIBLE TRANSLATION UNDERSTANDING

Matthew was written in **Greek**, though Jesus likely taught primarily in **Aramaic**.

The key word here is often translated “**welcome**” or “**receive**.” The Greek word can mean more than saying hello. It can mean accepting, receiving into one’s care, showing hospitality, or recognizing someone’s significance.

That matters because Jesus is not saying, “Be friendly when someone walks in.” He is saying, “Receive them as someone who bears sacred worth.”

The phrase “**little ones**” may refer to vulnerable disciples, humble believers, or those considered insignificant by society. It does not only mean children, though children are certainly included in Matthew’s broader concern for the lowly.

The “cup of cold water” is simple. It is not expensive. It is not dramatic. It is basic human kindness.

Theologically, that is the point.

God notices what the world overlooks.

SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY & GRANT COUNTY CONTEXT

Metaphorically, this passage asks: ***Who carries Christ to us in forms we do not expect?***

We might expect Christ in the pastor, the choir, the sanctuary, the sermon, or the sacraments. But Jesus says Christ may also come through the tired visitor, the needy neighbor, the unpopular messenger, the struggling family, the substitute teacher, the Meals on Wheels volunteer, the person who needs a ride, or the person we find politically irritating.

In Grant County terms, this could look very ordinary:

- A cup of cold water might be a meal delivered to an elderly person.
- It might be listening calmly to someone at church who sees the world differently.
- It might be helping a neighbor after a storm.
- It might be welcoming someone into worship who does not know the “right” way to act.
- It might be treating a struggling person in Marion or a lonely person in rural farmland as someone beloved by God.

The metaphor is powerful because the act is small. Jesus does not say, “Whoever builds a cathedral.” He says, “Whoever gives a cup of cold water.”

That is good news for small churches. Small churches may not have huge budgets, large staffs, or flashy programs. But they can offer welcome. They can offer water. They can offer kindness. And Jesus says that matters.

HOW SHOULD WE ACT AND REACT TO THIS SCRIPTURE TODAY?

We should take small acts of kindness more seriously.

This passage invites us to ask: ***Do we welcome people only when they are familiar, respectable, useful, or agreeable?***

Or do we welcome people because they belong to God?



We should also be careful not to reduce hospitality to friendliness. Christian welcome is deeper than a smile. It means making room for people. It means seeing dignity in people. It means honoring those whom society overlooks.

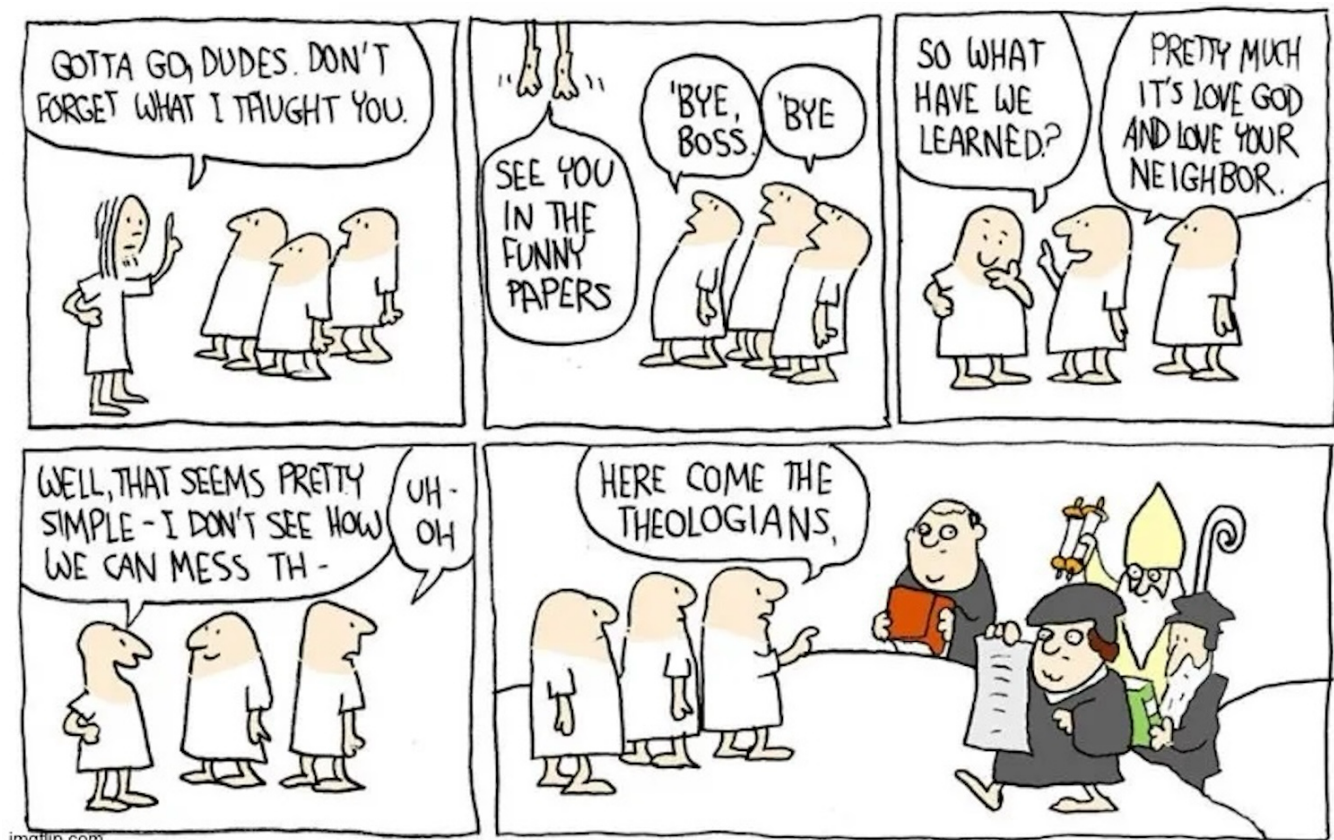
And maybe most importantly, we should remember that no faithful act is too small.

- A phone call matters.
- A ride matters.
- A meal matters.
- A calm response matters.
- A cup of water matters.

In God's kingdom, nothing loving is wasted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between being friendly and truly welcoming someone?
2. Why do you think Jesus ends this difficult missionary speech with something as simple as giving a cup of cold water?
3. Who are the "little ones" in our community today?
4. Have you ever felt truly welcomed by someone? What made it feel different?
5. Why might welcoming certain people feel risky or uncomfortable?
6. How does this passage challenge the way churches treat visitors, outsiders, or people who seem different?
7. What is one "cup of cold water" act our church could offer this week?





Addendum

More Abrahamic Family Insight

Recap from last week: Before Isaac was born, Abraham and Sarah had a problem: God had promised descendants, but Sarah was unable to conceive. Following a common practice of the time, Sarah gave her Egyptian servant Hagar to Abraham as a surrogate. Hagar conceived and gave birth to Ishmael (Genesis 16).

- Ishmael is Abraham's **firstborn son**.
- Isaac is born later, after God's promise to Sarah is fulfilled.
- Ishmael is likely around 13–17 years older than Isaac, depending on how the chronology is calculated.

God chooses Isaac for the covenant line

But God blesses Ishmael too. Those are not the same thing. Genesis never says: "God loves Isaac and hates Ishmael." Instead, it says: God has different roles for them.

Have you ever noticed that God's promise to Isaac doesn't require God to abandon Ishmael? We often assume that if God blesses one group, another group must lose. Genesis suggests a more complicated reality: **God can work through a particular covenant while still caring for those outside that covenant.**

When Genesis 25 records Abraham's death, **Isaac and Ishmael bury him together.** Genesis 25:9 states: "His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah..."

After all the family drama, rivalry, fear, jealousy, separation, and pain, the two brothers stand side by side at their father's grave. The Bible doesn't tell us whether they reconciled completely. But it does leave us with that image. For a book filled with family dysfunction, it's a surprisingly hopeful ending to their story. The text places **Isaac and Ishmael side by side** at Abraham's burial. The Bible doesn't tell us exactly what happened between Genesis 21 (when Ishmael is sent away) and Genesis 25 (when Abraham dies).

We don't know: How often they saw each other. Whether they reconciled. Whether Abraham maintained contact with Ishmael. Whether Isaac and Ishmael were close.

But we do know they came together for their father's funeral.

Descendants traditionally associated with Isaac and the descendants traditionally associated with Ishmael are often portrayed as eternal rivals. Yet in Genesis itself, the last image we get of the brothers is not conflict ... it's cooperation. And perhaps that's one of the quiet lessons buried in these Abraham stories.

Can we understand each other a little better?

That's often where unity begins ... not with everyone thinking the same thing, but with everyone seeing each other as fellow travelers.

The image of Isaac and Ishmael burying Abraham together is a good one for our time. They didn't suddenly become the same person. They didn't erase their history. They simply stood together long enough to honor what they shared.

That's not a bad model for families, churches, communities, or nations.