

Act 6: The God You Thought You Knew

By Pastor *Jake Wilkinson*

My mother is watching right now, and I just want to take this moment to say hello to everybody that's watching online, including her.

My mother is the nicest person I've ever met in my life—the sweetest person I know. I've actually learned more about unconditional love from my mom than from any other person. And I don't mean just toward me. I think she loves everyone, and she doesn't know a stranger.

And I'm glad it's unconditional love, because I didn't ask her to tell this story.

One day I was walking down the street, and I saw my mom on the opposite side of the street. I said—out loud, loud enough so she could hear me—“Mom.” And she started walking faster in the opposite direction.

So I said, “Mom,” and the speed increased again.

And finally, I said her name. I said, “Lori.”

And she started running.

My mom—she's over 70, sorry Mom—she's over 70, and I've only seen her run one other time. That was when my sister surprised her by showing up for her birthday, and she ran out to meet her.

That's it. Two times I've seen her run.

And now she's running away from me.

I'm the favorite child. This is backwards. I'm going to send this to my sister later.

(Laughter)

She speeds up, and as she's running, I know something is off about this whole thing. I can see it. And as she's running down the street, I start kind of running behind her.

She's headed directly for this decrepit old man in a wheelchair.

And I thought, *Well, something must be wrong.*

As she sped toward him, she slowed down just before she got to him, into a normal walk. She slowly approached him and said something like, “Oh, you know, hi, how's it going?”

And then she abruptly changed.

She tackled him out of the wheelchair, grabbed both of his hands, and put him in a chokehold.

(Laughter)

I know.

(Laughter)

And I'm like, "What is happening?"

My mother has only ever hit me with a wooden spoon once, and it was kind of a joke.

(Audience laughing)

I was being mean to my sister.

(Audience laughing)

Kindest person I know—and yet here she is, holding this man who was in a wheelchair, in a chokehold.

What is happening?

Apparently, this guy lived in the same complex where she lived. She lives in senior housing. Apparently, he had done not just some messed-up stuff—he had a bomb.

She had developed a friendship with him. She was someone he trusted. She was the only person who could get close to him.

And apparently, my mom was contacted by the FBI, and she was the only person who could approach him.

I know.

They said he was extremely skittish, and that he was willing to do something crazy, and they told her, "You have to act now. You have to tackle him."

And that's why she did it.

And apparently—she's watching right now—she's more surprised than any of you, because I made that story up.

(Audience laughing)

I made it up for this purpose: when you see someone acting in a way that is completely contrary to their character, you *have* to ask the question—*something else is going on here*.

That's what we're going to talk about today.

When we look at the Old Testament—anybody ever struggled with some Old Testament passages and connecting them to Jesus?

Sometimes we have to stop, take a deep breath, and recognize that there's some crazy stuff in there. There's a reason we push people to start with John, to start with the Gospels.

Why?

Because the character of God is revealed in Jesus.

Colossians tells us that Jesus is the full revelation of God.

And sometimes we read the Gospels, we look at Jesus, and then we look back at the Old Testament and say, *I don't see how these line up.*

You ever struggled with that?

You guys are great.

Could you imagine instead of pointing new believers to Jesus, we just set them loose in the book of Judges?

(Audience laughing)

Where a spy stabs an overweight king until his bowels spill out—and *that* is the picture of God they get.

Here's what I want to say.

I believe—yes, even in today's world—that the entire Bible is inspired by God.

But not all of Scripture carries the same weight.

And we've made a mistake when we've said that Judges holds the same weight as the Gospels.

I'm sorry—it doesn't.

Jesus changed everything.

The Old Testament matters, but we read it *through the lens of Jesus.*

And that lens shapes:

- how we see God
- how we treat others
- how we view ourselves
- how we understand the world

Jesus is the greatest revelation of God.

So when something in the Old Testament seems contrary to the character of Jesus, the right question isn't "How do I defend this?"

The right question is: What else is going on here?

We're in Genesis 22 today, continuing our journey with Abraham.

Abraham is called the father of our faith—not because he got it all right.

God tells him, “Leave your home, leave your security,” and Abraham actually goes.

And then... he messes up.

He lies in Egypt. He endangers his wife. He creates a mess.

And yet, God renews His promise.

David reminded us a few weeks ago that God enters into a covenant knowing Abraham is going to mess up again.

Then—echoing the Eden story—Abraham and Sarah stop trusting. They take matters into their own hands. Hagar is used, exploited, and hurt.

And God sees her suffering.

Last week, Jim shared about waiting—how painful it is, how long it takes—and how God renews His promise again.

And that leads us here.

The binding of Isaac.

This is one of the most troubling passages in Scripture. People have left the faith over it.

Why would a good God ask something this immoral, this unthinkable?

And that’s the question we *must* ask:

Is there something else going on here?

Let’s look at the first few verses.

“After all this, God tested Abraham.”

“Abraham.”

“Yes—I’m listening.”

“Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love... and sacrifice him.”

What is happening?

I’ve heard pastors say, “If God asked you to kill your child, would you do it?”

And if you say no, they say, “Well, you’re not faithful.”

That’s unsatisfying—and it’s wrong.

Child sacrifice is condemned throughout Scripture. This is what pagans do. Wicked people do this.

And yet, here God is asking Abraham to do it.

And not just any child—the child of the promise.

So what's going on?

A book that deeply helped me here is *Cross Vision* by Greg Boyd. That's actually where I got the opening story. Sorry, Mom—you can yell at me later.

Boyd points out something crucial.

Just a few chapters earlier, Abraham argues with God about Sodom and Gomorrah.

He stands his ground.

He says, "This isn't who You are."

He argues God down from 50 righteous people... to 10.

He knows God's character.

So why, when it comes to his own beloved son, does he simply say, "Okay"?

Because in the ancient Near East, child sacrifice was the ultimate act of devotion.

Abraham likely believed—somewhere deep down—that this was the kind of God he was dealing with.

So God meets him *there*.

It's a three-day journey. Isaac asks, "Where's the sacrifice?"

And Abraham says, "Yahweh Yireh"—God will see to it.

And then, at the last moment, the angel stops him.

"Don't lay a hand on the boy."

As if God is saying, *You think I'm like the other gods. I am nothing like them.*

This was never about Isaac.

It was about Abraham's view of God being shattered.

So maybe the real question isn't:

"What kind of God would ask me to sacrifice my child?"

Maybe it's:

"What kind of God would sacrifice His child for me?"

That's the gospel.

And it shatters our assumptions.

The disciples experienced this too. Jesus calms the storm, and they ask, “Who *is* this?”

C.S. Lewis said it this way:

“My idea of God is not a divine idea.
It has to be shattered time after time.
He shatters it Himself.
He is the great iconoclast.”

If your view of God has never been shattered, you may be worshiping your idea of God—not God Himself.

We live in a time of deconstruction.

Some of it is healthy. Some of it is dangerous.

Deconstruction is not the same as deconversion.

It depends on *what* you’re tearing down.

Abraham never let go of God—even when he misunderstood Him.

And that humility matters.

Truth is progressive. We have much to learn—and much to unlearn.

God is infinite.

And this story invites us into surrender.

Every time we come into this sanctuary, it’s like climbing the mountain with Abraham.

We come and say, “God, everything I have—even the thing I’m afraid to give You—it’s Yours.”

And maybe—just maybe—God will see to it.

I’ll end with this.

I lost my keys this morning.

I spent over an hour convinced they were in my jacket pocket.

Full meltdown. Called my wife. She reminded me about the tracker she bought me for Christmas.

(Laughter)

And finally, I asked myself, *What if I let go of the belief that they’re in the jacket pocket?*

I checked the pants I was wearing that morning.

There they were.

And I laughed the whole way here.

Sometimes surrender is simply letting go of the assumption we're clinging to.

Let's pray.

Jesus, thank You for being the true revelation of God to us.

Thank You that You shatter our false views when they are wrong.

Give us humility.

Give us courage to surrender what we're holding back.

And help us trust that You are better than we imagined.

We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.