

Sermon for the First Sunday after Christmas

'The Lord said to Moses, "Consecrate unto me all the firstborn."'

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It may be a surprise to some, and a stumbling block to others, that the Lord commands human sacrifice.

It is plainly written, *'Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and beast, is mine.'*

No differentiation here is made between man and beast. All that are of the first to see life are God's.

'All the firstborn of your flocks that are males shall be the Lord's.' Thus it is written.

This should not surprise us, for such commands were given to the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Abraham, a heathen, who knew no truth, was called in the darkness of the wilderness to go to a land of which he knew not.

When he arrived, he dwelt there; he married, had a child; a child named Isaac; born of his old age. A child of promise, for the Lord had told Abraham that he would have a child, even though his wife was barren. This was a great joy the patriarch, for he had longed for a son to continue his line. Yet, when the child was born, and when he had grown to an age of strength, it was commanded of Abraham that *he should take his son, his only son, whom he had loved*, and sacrifice him unto the Lord.

Even as he had left his homeland upon hearing the voice of

God without question, counting this *faith as righteousness*, so again Abraham took his son early in the morn and went out to *a place appointed to him*. And upon arriving at Mount Horeb, the old man laid upon his young son wood, that he may carry it. Up the mountain they went, and while journeying, the young Isaac asked *'Father, here is the wood and the fire, but where is the sacrifice?'* His father responded, *'the Lord shall provide the sacrifice: my son.'* For indeed, the son would be the sacrifice that the Lord would provide, even as he had provided a son for Abraham and Sarah. Abraham is not trying to deceive his son, saying that miraculously an offering shall be given. He is, to speak regularly, being straight with him. He says *'the Lord will provide the sacrifice, that is, you, my son.'* This Isaac understood, that he would be the one slain and burnt upon the altar, for this the Lord commanded, and for this reason, he did not struggle, but was tied by his aged father willingly.

Isaac is bound. Down he is laid. Abraham raises his knife, and an angel of the Lord stops his hand. He stops it not merely because the sacrifice is not necessary, as if it was only and ever just a test. No, it was necessary. A son of man has always been required as an offering for the sins of man. But Isaac would not do, for, as a sinful man, he is not a sacrifice *'blameless and without spot.'*

For this reason, Abraham named this mountain *'the Lord will provide a sacrifice,'* for a sacrifice was still commanded, just not this one. It would come, offered on this mount, the mount that would one day be called Zion.

'All the firstborn are the Lord's.'

Yet the firstborn of men and women are not exempted. Rather, they are simply given a substitute, a lamb, pure and unharmed. The substitute is just that, it is a place-holder for the real thing; a lamb for God in place for a son of man; for no son born of the will of man would do, *conceived in sin* as he is; so a lamb must do for a time; but now, the real thing has come, the first born Son of Man, blameless and without fault.

Now the Son of Man and the Lamb of God have become one. Is this not what we have awaited? *'Render yourself a living sacrifice before God.'* This is the command given. This is the Law and its summation, given in ancient times to Isaac, given again to Moses and Israel, and repeated by the prophets; and only one is given to complete it. Therefore it is written that Christ *'came not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it.'* His blood shall fulfill it, *a living sacrifice, the first to open the womb, the son of man, the, firstborn of all creation.*

'Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many.'

The child is presented at the Temple, and the proper offerings are made. The hopes and fears of all our years are revealed in the revelation of the Son; the Lamb; Him who is to be offered, in blood, in suffering, and in glory.

We do not like to look upon the baby Jesus, and see in Him the nails in His hands, but why was He born, if not to be pierced? We hate to look upon Mary holding in love her child as only a mother could, and see in His eye the thorn born of our fall from Eden; but why was He held, if not to bleed? This the Lord has deemed good, whether we can see the goodness in it or not. Many weep before the image of the Lord that shall be scourged. Many revile it as celestial child abuse. But was this not the question of faith asked all along? Asked of Abraham, and then of Moses?

'Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many; so that the thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Exodus

13:1-3, 11-15; Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 2:22-40.