

## Last Class in the School of Faith

Genesis 22

September 15, 2009

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### Video Clip: “Stranger Than Fiction”

*[The video opens on Harold as he goes about his daily life.]*

NARRATOR: Every week day for 12 years Harold would brush each of his 32 teeth 76 times. Thirty-eight times back and forth, 38 times up and down, and every week day for 12 years Harold would review 7.134 tax files as a senior agent for the Internal Revenue Service. Beyond that Harold lived a life of solitude. He would walk home alone. He would eat alone. If one had asked Harold he would have said that this particular Wednesday was exactly like all Wednesdays prior. And he began it the same way he. . .

*[Harold looks up into the sky, as if he hears the narrator]*

and he began it the same way he always did.

HAROLD: Hello

NARRATOR: He began it the same way he always did. When other’s minds would ....

HAROLD: Hello, someone there?

NARRATOR: When other’s minds would fanaticize about their upcoming day or even try to grip onto the final moments of their dreams, Harold just counted brush strokes.

HAROLD: All right, who just said, “Harold just counted brush strokes?”

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I love that movie. That is “**Stranger Than Fiction**” and if you’ve been around awhile you may remember a couple years ago, we looked at that clip at the start of our time preaching through Genesis and tonight I want to wrap up Genesis, even though we are not through with the life story of Abraham and then go onto other things next week and next month.

But I love that clip because it raises such wonderful questions:

Is there someone writing our story, speaking our story?

And if there’s somebody writing our story, can they write it better than us?

And what would we do if there is someone that’s speaking our story or writing our story if all of a sudden that person began speaking to us?

The author of your story, what if he began speaking to you just when you thought you had everything under control?

Let's pray:

Father you are the one that spoke all things into existence through your Word. And You are the One that's speaking me into existence right now through your word even as I speak these words. And Lord God, we are the people that at least say that we want to hear your word. We confess that it freaks us out sometimes and that if you would begin speaking to us like Harold Crick was just spoken to, we probably would freak out. But we want to hear your word and so Lord God would you help us to preach. In Jesus' Name.

And now keep your eyes closed. I want you to picture a person that you love greatly. Maybe it's a friend. Maybe it's your husband or your wife. It's best if it's your child. I picture Jonathon. Jonathon is my oldest son. For a long time we tried to have kids and it just wasn't working. And we prayed and prayed and Susan cried and cried. Then Jonathon was born, our blessing, our miracle, our gift from God.

Just imagine that person. Now thank God for that person.

And now imagine that God speaks to you. I mean imagine that you're brushing your teeth or whatever and He speaks to you and he says your name. And he says, "I love you."

Can you imagine that?  
And then you hear him say, "I will bless you."

And then you hear him say the name of that person that you love. He says, "I want you to take that person and bind them. I want you to tie them up and then I want you to lay them on an altar of wood, slit their throat, and burn them. Burn them to cinders as an offering unto me."

Would you do it?

Now there are demons that try to say that kind of stuff, but imagine that you take authority in the Name of Jesus, you plead the blood and you say In the Name of Jesus I rebuke you, and the voice comes back the same. It's God.

Would you do it?

You say, "But that's ugly, that's wrong!"

Yeah, but would you do it?

Maybe you'd say, "My God would never ever, ever ask such a thing."

[You can open your eyes]

**Genesis 22:1** "After these things God tested Abraham and (God) said to him, "Abraham!" and he said, "Here am I." He said, "Abraham take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and

go the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you."

"After these things God tested Abraham" -- after what things? After a promise of a blessing and a crazy outrageous journey full of trials and trauma and struggles and then after 25 years a miraculous birth of Isaac. Isaac through whom all the families, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Isaac, the promised seed, the salvation of the world.

"Sacrifice Isaac, Abraham. Sacrifice all that we've been working for, Abraham. Your hopes, your dreams, your world. The hopes and dreams of the world. Sacrifice your sanity, your control. Sacrifice the son you love, Abraham. The one I gave you who calls you Abba, Father. Daddy. Sacrifice him on Moriah!"

Moriah. Scholars think Moriah means "a vision of Yahweh."

What a vision!

Next verse:

**Genesis 22:3-6** "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 [the "Ates" in Hebrew, which can also be translated *tree* or *timber* or even *gallows*]. He cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day [that's interesting] Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the lad will go over there and worship and come again to you. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son."

He laid it on Isaac, Isaac is definitely old enough to carry the wood, and definitely old enough to say "Dad, what's going on?" Most of the ancient rabbis argue that Isaac was probably in his 30's at this time. Imagine that. Abraham loading the timber on Isaac his son and telling him to climb up Mount Moriah. Walk up Moriah, walk up the mountain.

**Genesis 22:6-10** "And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here am I, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together. When 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. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son."

I mean he's not waiting for another lamb, is he? He took the knife to slaughter his son.

That's crazy! That's just mad!

And this isn't like an obscure passage in scripture, you know what mean, one that I pulled out of 2 Chronicles somewhere. St. Paul wrote that Abraham is the father of all who believe and that this is the faith that is reckoned as righteousness. This is why Abraham is called the "Friend of God." From here on out, when God identifies himself to folks he says "I am the God of Abraham." That guy!

Is God crazy, mad?

Perhaps no modern thinker has paid as much respect to Abraham as the young Danish philosopher of the last century, Søren Kierkegaard, and people thought he was mad. Kierkegaard taught that every person lives in one of three spheres or stages. Abraham on Mount Moriah is the paradigm of the third stage. Kierkegaard argued that the fundamental question for all people is "How can I be saved? How can I be completed? How can I be fully human in the image of God?" And he said the question is answered differently in each of the three stages.

The first stage is the aesthetic stage. At that stage, a person seeks salvation through pleasure. And that pleasure can be very refined: beauty, the arts, Beethoven, philosophy, nature, culture, religion. The God of the aesthetic is beautiful and intriguing, attractive. The aesthetic man is a connoisseur and therefore a spectator, not a participant. He tastes other peoples' passions but they're not his own. He makes brilliant observations, makes brilliant criticisms. He tastes other peoples' passions, you see, but they are not his own. He never commits. Commitment is too risky, you lose control. Bono sings "Every artist is a cannibal, every poet is a thief, they all kill their inspiration, and sing about the grief."

That's how they admire something and maintain control, the aesthetic. The aesthetic comes to church and remains detached. He says, "What a lovely service, what intriguing thoughts, worships music appreciation and poetry, but the aesthetic never beats his chest and cries out "God have mercy on me cause I'm a sinner." He wants to know about God but not be known by God. He admires God. Like Judas admired God. . . just before he took control of Jesus.

Remember how the serpent tempted Eve with fruit from a tree (the "ates" in Hebrew). She saw the fruit of the "Ate" was good for food and a delight to the eyes and so she took. She took what was appetizing.

Moriah was not appetizing to Abraham. Nothing could be more ugly to him. So Abraham must have forsaken the fruit of that tree in order to climb that mountain and offer his son. You see he surrendered his knowledge of beauty and he was committed entirely to God.

Well the next stage or sphere according to Kierkegaard is the ethical sphere. The ethical man seeks salvation through his will rather than his desires. So the ethical person sacrifices his desires to his will. So if salvation comes through stuff like you know formulas and regulations and rules, laws, be they the moral laws, social law, tax code at the IRS, or the 10 commandments: thou shalt not covet, thou shalt not murder. . . thy son.

The ethical man has got his universe all figured out, under control. Thirty-eight times back and forth, 38 times up and down. The ethical man has faith in himself and his ability to make life work and so he spends a lot of time justifying himself. He takes the radical demands of Jesus like "forsake all, take up your cross, and come follow me" and reduces them to things like tithing, you know, give 10 percent of your income and you'll be okay.

Kierkegaard writes:

"Let others complain the age is wicked; my complaint is that it's wretched; for it lacks passion [...] The thoughts of their hearts are too paltry to be sinful. For a worm it might be regarded as

sin to harbor such thoughts, but not for beings made in the image of God [...] They do their duty, these shop-keeping souls, but they clip the coin a trifle [...] They think that even if the Lord keeps ever so careful a set of books, they may still cheat him a little. Out with them.”  
He’s saying, “Would that they were cold or hot,” “not lukewarm.”

The ethical man comes to church to sing the songs the way he recites the pledge of allegiance or says the scout oath. He listens to the sermon and asks “What can I learn from this? What principles can I take from this message and apply to my life?” To the ethical man, faith is the conclusion of an intellectual argument. God is this thing to be analyzed, dissected, and applied. You know business-like, Rotary Club sort of god. Salvation comes through ethics, laws, our knowledge of good and evil.

Remember how the serpent tempted Eve? She saw the fruit was good for food, a delight to the eyes, and to be desired to make one wise. So she chose to take the fruit in order to make herself wise. She took from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Imagine Abraham. What God asked must have seemed entirely unreasonable and unethical. He had to surrender his knowledge of good and evil. He had to drop the fruit of that tree, even as he strapped the tree across his son’s back. He believed God will fulfill his promise even as he sacrificed the promise. He believed God is good even as he lifted the knife.

Abraham was out of his mind, “*ekstasis*” is how you would say that in Greek: “out of normal” -- *ekstasis*.

You see Abraham wasn’t just sacrificing Isaac, he was sacrificing himself. His desires, his will, his pleasure, his reason, his aesthetics and ethics, his heart and mind, his knowledge of beauty and his knowledge of the good. He was sacrificing his ability to save himself or anyone else for that matter. He was sacrificing all and yet receiving it all back by grace through faith. If what the New Testament tells us is true, Hebrews 11 says this: “Abraham considered that God could raise Isaac from the dead and thus even then he received Isaac back.” That is even losing his life, he was receiving it back as a gift for even as he lifted the knife to slaughter Isaac he still believed the promise, “through Isaac your descendants, your seed will be named.”

Is that crazy? Isn’t that madness, stupidity? Isn’t it at least irresponsibility?

Well the Bible calls it faith.

And Kierkegaard says it’s the third stage, the religious stage. It’s not human religion. Human religion is all about a way to not have faith in God, but have faith in yourself, your appetites, desires, wills. But true religion is faith in God. It seems that God wants more than to be admired by aesthetically minded people, and God wants more than to be explained and understood by ethical people.

Admiration is not reckoned as righteousness. Understanding is not reckoned as righteousness, but faith like Abraham’s, is righteousness—perfection. Abraham trusted the author of pleasure more than pleasure. He trusted the reason more than his own reason. He trusted God more than his knowledge of God. He had faith.

Do you? What have you done today that you, yourself, did not enjoy? I mean it was not aesthetically pleasing to you. And that you did not understand, it wasn’t rationally ethically sensible to you, but that

you did simply because God told you to do it. Perhaps he told you through scripture. Perhaps he whispered it in your heart, but you did it. Have you ever done anything like that?  
Or must it be explained to you, mapped out to you: “this is why it’s good.”  
Or must it be attractive to you: “this is what you will get from it.

Do you ever exercise real faith? You know I’m not really sure that you can even know til you get to Moriah. God tests faith.

Next verse:

**Genesis 22:10** “Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here am I” [Here I am—help] He 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.” And 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. So Abraham called the name of that place, “The Lord will provide.” (As it said until this day on the mount of the Lord It shall be provided...”

“on the mount of the Lord it shall be provided,” but does God provide faith? What is faith? Where do we get faith? Do we push it out?

“On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.” Or can we translate it this way?

“On the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.” What’s seen? What’s provided?

Answer: a ram, a grown lamb, caught by its horns.

To the Hebrew mind that meant, caught by its strength. God’s strength is love and He is love and He became flesh in Jesus, the lamb slain from the foundation of the world for the sins of the world.

Next verse

**Genesis 22:15-18** “And the angel of Yahweh—[the Angel of the Lord, the Messenger of the Lord, the Word of the Lord; it’s this weird God-man guy that keeps showing up in Abraham’s story. He’s there on the mountain.] – And the angel of Yahweh called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, “By myself [now this is an impressive angel] I have sworn declares the Lord [this is a Lord angel, a Lord-man] because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring [your seed] as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring [your seed] shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”

“By myself, I have sworn because you’ve done this.” I’ve sworn because you’ve done this, but he just did this, right? And God swore this the promise and the covenant, when? Remember it’s like 30, 60 years before this back when Abraham was still pimping his wife in Babylon. Remember that? The pagan pimp from Babylon, Abram. Because you’ve done this, so I swear. Because you’ve done this.

And so for us, first, I guess God knew what Abraham would decide long before he decided. Yet second, Abraham still must decide; it's a test. But third, Abraham could only decide because God provides faith. And what is faith. Scripture says faith is the *hupostasis*, the substance of things hoped for. Abraham hoped for the Promised Seed, so faith is the substance of the Promised Seed. That's Christ. The substance of Christ. Scripture says we are justified by faith. But read it closely in the Greek, and you'll see it's not really our faith, it's the faith of somebody else in us, the faith of Jesus. Romans 3, Galatians 2. And faith is the fruit of His Spirit. Faith is the seed in me, the promise seed in me. Jesus in me. Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God and Jesus is the word of God, the messenger of God, messenger of the Lord.

Well okay, but where is faith seen?

Where is faith provided?

On the mountain of the Lord it shall be seen and provided: Mount Moriah.

Isn't that wild? But as we've seen, God has been building faith in Abraham for decades. He's taken him on this outrageous journey full of thousands and thousands of little Moriahs where Abraham had to surrender control. Surrender control of the promise yet believe the promise in order to receive the promise and the promise, the blessing came somehow from the mountain. On the mountain of the Lord it shall be provided.

You know, if you have any faith, you've been to Moriah or it's been to you a bit. Maybe a lot. Maybe you lost a child. Maybe you never had a child. Maybe you killed a child, your child, accidentally or perhaps even intentionally, but now you see it, and you cry out to God for mercy saying, "Have mercy on me, Lord God." And now you see you must surrender your passion, your understanding, your knowledge and believe the promise: "I forgive, I raise the dead, I make all things new and I am the one that gives you a name: Abram."

See, God takes us to Moriah to show us his heart and speak his word. And when we see and when we listen, it's called faith. And we must all go to Moriah in the end. When we refuse to go and refuse to see, Moriah burns like hell, but when we surrender in faith, that's the first step into the kingdom of heaven. And we all must go to Moriah in the end.

### Film Clip "Stranger Than Fiction"

[Harold and others are standing at a bus-stop]

MAN: So does anyone have the time?

HAROLD: I got 6:18

NARRATOR: Thus Harold's watch thrust him into the immitigable path of faith. Little did he know that this simple, seemingly innocuous act would result in his imminent death.

HAROLD: What? What? Hey, Hello, What? Why?

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You see, Harold lacks faith in the author of his story. Faith that the author is good and that the story is good. But when Harold finally decides to trust the author, it turns out that he literally loses his life and finds it full of meaning and love and is no longer alone.

We lose our life and see the author of life on Mount Moriah. We lose our life and see our Father's heart on Mount Moriah. There it is provided.

One night long ago when my daughter, Elizabeth, was two, she split her head on the fireplace real bad, and I rushed her to the emergency room at the nearby hospital. The doctors had to tie her down on this papoose board, where they bound her and they tied her and they laid her down and people with green masks started sticking needles and things like that in the back of her head. And Elizabeth began to shake and then she began to scream. I mean for a 2 year old it was madness, it was ugly, and it made no sense at all and to top it off, Daddy drove her to this place and now he was just standing there not stopping them. She felt forsaken. I couldn't touch her. I couldn't hold her in that papoose board. But I remember I was able to do this. I got my face right down in front of her panicking, frightened terrified, little face and I just looked in her eyes and I said, "Elizabeth, Elizabeth, it's okay. Trust me." And she stopped crying. I remember her eyes. Her eyes like locked on my eyes and then it was like they were digging deep down into my soul through my eyes, and just grabbing hold of my heart.

You know when I give my children a gift, their eyes are on the gift, the pleasure. When I give my children the law, their eyes just shoot all over the place and they don't look at me. When Elizabeth suffered in what seemed to be madness, her eyes drilled into my heart and I suffered there with her. Elizabeth stopped crying and put her faith in me. Or more accurately I put my faith in Elizabeth. I mean I was the one that believed the situation was good, right? And I knew her and she knew me and we had a communion of faith. My faith, my heart was transplanted into her at Moriah, the hospital.

And what is the Father's heart? "From the bosom of the Father," says John—it's Jesus. On the mountain, it shall be provided, transplanted into us.

Isaac's eyes must've drilled into Abraham's, like Elizabeth's just drilled into mine. "Abba, Daddy, why have you forsaken me." Isaac looks to Abraham and who does Abraham look to? He looks to God. And what does he see? What does he hear? What does he see? His heart. From the foundation of the world, I mean think about it, who went to Moriah first? Who sacrificed first? You know we hope that God knows our sufferings, right? And we really hope that God knows Abraham's sufferings, but you see, that day I think Abraham was just beginning to know God's sufferings. Abraham was called the Friend of God. On Mount Moriah he knew God's heart. Jesus said "Abraham saw my day and was glad. Before Abraham was, I am."

Now if you are still asking yourself "Why would God ever make Abraham do such a thing?" Well let me remind you Abraham had already made God do such a thing. You have already made God do such a thing. And actually he choose to do such a thing from the foundation of time, he choose to sacrifice his heart. His name is Jesus for you. He chose to be caught by you, caught by his strength. His strength is love, so like a ram caught by his horns, God was caught on the wood by his love for you.

Legend has it (and many in Israel still believe it I found out when we went there a few years ago) that the land of Moriah is also the land of Eden. And in Eden was the "Ate" the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Knowledge of the good is what? It's knowledge of love. Love fulfills the law. Knowledge



of good and evil is knowledge of love and God is love and God is good and so when Eve and Adam took knowledge, they took love and they took life. They took God's life for he is love. They took life and chose death. You see, every time we sin, we take the life of love for sin is a violation of love. To sin is to sacrifice love and God is love.

Well, a 1,000 years after Abraham and Isaac, a man named David met the angel of the Lord on the same mountain, Mount Moriah, and there he made a sacrifice and there his son, Solomon, built the temple of sacrifice, the sanctuary on Mount Moriah. One thousand years after that, the Seed of Abraham, the Seed of David rode into Moriah—Jerusalem—on a donkey. He was following his father. He was 30 some years old at the time. And “ates” wood, timber was loaded on his back and he climbed the mountain: the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

You know the angel of Yahweh stopped Abraham's knife, but the angel of Yahweh did not stop the knife, the judgment of God for the angel of Yahweh is Jesus. He cried to his Father “My God, My God why have you forsaken me?” He cried to his father “Why have you forsaken me?” Because our sins were loaded on him and He surrendered our sins to God and so he cried “Why?” You see He didn't know why? He sacrificed knowledge for faith. He is faith in the Father. He died on the tree in our place and for our good for now he has become the fruit of the tree given to us. His cross is a tree of knowledge and life and it bears the fruit of faith. His body broken, his blood shed that we might be saved, might be made in God's image, the image of Jesus, on the mountain of God.

On the mountain of God there are unspeakable wonders that we can barely even begin to explain, but on the mountain of God, the heart of God is seen and provided.

You see, God the Father was in Christ the Son, God the Son, reconciling the world to himself. The ram is the father of the lamb. You understand that it wasn't only Jesus that suffered on Mount Moriah, on Mount Calvary. Abraham that day, I believe he saw the heart of the Father, the heart of God given to us. That God so loved the world he gave his only begotten son, his heart.

You see we take and God gives, He forgives that we might also forgive. We sin and grace abounds that grace might abound in us. We're faithless and God remains faithful that he might fill us with faith. We take Jesus but God gives Jesus, the way, the truth, and the life. Salvation.

The kingdom of hell, the kingdom of this world, are all about taking and raping. But the kingdom of heaven is constant giving, the faithfulness of love. The kingdom of heaven touches our world and breaks the power of hell on Mount Moriah, Mount Zion, Mount Calvary. In this world, it looks like pain and madness “*ekstasis*” because it is “*hupostasis*” the substance of another world. So “*ekstatis*” in this world becomes “ecstasy” in the next world where everybody gives, everybody loves, everybody dances. You see in this world the great dance touches the earth first on Mount Moriah. Jesus dies and rises in you. You die, surrender, and rise in Him.

On the mountain we receive the gift of faith.  
On the mountain we're saved by grace through faith.  
On the mountain we are completed in God's image.  
On the mountain it shall be seen, it shall be provided.  
On the mountain Jesus cried out “It is finished.”

And earlier that morning on the mountain, he took bread and he broke saying, "This is my body given to you. Take and eat."

And in the same manner after supper he took the cup, and he said, "this is my blood of the covenant poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it. All of you. Do it in remembrance of me." On the mountain.

A while ago I read a little story about a pastor that was teaching a class at his church on Genesis 22 on this particular story. After the group had read the passage, the pastor offered some historical background on this particular period in salvation history including the prevalence of child sacrifice. You know among the Canaanites there was a little textual criticism to make God more aesthetically appealing and ethically acceptable.

The group listened for a time in awkward silence.

Then the pastor asked, "But what does this story mean to us. How can we apply this story to our lives? What does it mean?"

At that, a middle-aged man spoke up. He said, "Well, I'll tell you what it means for me and my family. It means we're looking for another church."

The pastor was astonished and he said "What? Why?"

"Because," the man said, "when I look at that God, the God of Abraham, I feel like I'm near a real God not the sort of dignified, business like, Rotary Club God we chatter about here on Sunday mornings. Abraham's God could blow a man to bits, give and then take a child, ask for everything from a person, and then want more. I want to know that God, the real God."

Do you want to know that God, cause he's crazy. He's crazy with love for you. He's out of control. He's out of our control. He's wild but he's good. Do you want to know that God? Then come to the mountain.

Let's pray.

You know, some of you feel like you're there. This week was Moriah. Some of you are scared to death that you may go there. That one day you will die. And that's true. But God takes us to Moriah that he might show us his heart and give us his life. So don't be afraid. Be filled with faith. Say this to the Lord right now. "I surrender my life to you, and Lord God I trust that you will fill my life with yourself, your life. Jesus. Amen.

Dark cups are wine. Light cups are juice. We invite you to come forward, tear off a piece of the bread, dip it into the cup. And as you are coming forward you're surrendering your control and asking God to take control and that's life.

In Jesus Name, Amen.

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## Communion

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## Benediction

And so the seed of Abraham, Jesus, rode a donkey into the ancient land of Moriah. And he cried out to the religious leaders “Destroy this temple.” Destroy thousands of years of work and struggle. Destroy this sanctuary. It was the sanctuary that David had built on Mount Moriah. Maybe you’re thinking to yourself tonight “God, what’s wrong. I mean I worked and I worked and I worked and I built this thing and it’s being destroyed.” Well maybe it’s not wrong. Maybe it’s right. For Jesus said, “Destroy this temple and in 3 days I will raise it up.” And that’s his sanctuary. And you see his sanctuary is not built with the affections of men. His sanctuary is not built with the will of men and women. His sanctuary is built with the faithfulness of God that has become resident in us, his living sanctuary.