

Abraham Part 8

A Tested Faith

Genesis 22:1-19, Hebrews 11:17-19

Memory Verses: Hebrews 11:19

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

We all must be tested in life in a variety of ways. As I was preparing for this message Canaan was taking a Math assessment test to determine what level of math he needs to start with when he goes to college. He didn't want to take it of course. He has just graduated from 14 years of school and taking tests on a regular basis. But even though he has his diploma he still has to take more tests to determine his level of knowledge in Math. Then for the next four years he will be tested and evaluated on whether or not he is retaining what he is learning for his degree. We all must be tested intellectually.

I'm sure you have been tested too. Whatever job you have, I'm sure at times you have to be tested or evaluated as to whether you are doing well at your job. Are you still able to do what is required of you. Or you go to the doctor and he runs tests on your body to make sure your heart, lungs, and other organs are all functionally correctly. Though we may not like to be tested in this world, it is essential if we are to function well and be effective. We must be tested physically.

But even more so, we must be tested spiritually. If our greatest purpose for living is to glorify God, and the greatest way we can glorify God is through faith, then it would make sense if, at times, our faith was tested and evaluated. In fact, I would say that most of the things we encounter on a daily basis, the Lord allows, to test our faith. And as we are tested in our faith we are strengthened in our faith. Are you struggling with anger due to a lack of faith in God? I promise you that God will send you an opportunity to test your anger. If you are an impatient person, unwilling to wait on God in faith, then he will test your impatience. If you are struggling with a certain sin, which is an indicator of a fleeting faith in God's goodness, God will allow you to be tempted with that sin in order to test your faith.

So, just hear me out. If God wants to use a specific man to be the father of his chosen people, and this man has a track record of struggling with his faith and making messes out of his mistakes, wouldn't we expect God to continue to test his faith until he feels that it has been strengthened to the point where it is the most real, most true faith possible? I think we would. If we expect heart surgeons, rocket scientists, and astronauts to be fully trained to the point we can trust them in the most difficult of circumstances, then we should expect that God

would do the same with Abraham. And He did. He gave him one of the most brutal tests any man could ever be faced with. Look with me at

Genesis 22:1-2.

Yes, God had to test Abraham's faith, but God also wants to test our faith. Abraham's test is not unique in the grand scheme of things. We should expect that God would do the same with any of us. Yes, we know guys like Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David are considered the top of the echelon when it comes to heroes of the faith, but as we've said before, they are just men. Men who God chose, not because of who they were but because of who God is and because of his power to change them and make them righteous in a wicked world.

I would contend that... **God wants each and everyone of us to be men and women of faith just like Abraham.** And so, we will all face tests of faith. Today we will see how Abraham managed his test of faith. Hopefully it can show us how we are to manage the daily tests of faith we will encounter as followers of God. The bottom line is this... **A true faith is a tested faith!**

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

The first thing we need to see is that... **A Tested Faith Reveals Our Idols.** Look with me again at **22:1-2.** What do you notice about what God says about Abraham's relationship to Isaac? He says three things. First he calls him his son. Secondly he calls him his only son. Third he reminds him of his love for him. When he calls him son this shows that Abraham is depending on Isaac for a legacy and heir. How can Abraham be a father of many nations without an heir. When he calls him his only son this shows that Abraham has no other heir to leave his legacy to. Ishmael has been exiled and is gone. As far as Abraham is concerned Isaac is not just his best option, but his only option. When he calls him the one whom he loves. this points to the deep a longing attachment that Abraham has to Isaac. Isaac isn't just an heir. Isaac is the object of Abraham's affection. He loves him dearly. Of course this love is a natural response for a father toward his children. We know this isn't always the case, but it should be. Since Abraham loves his son the way a father should, you can understand that connection. This is an unconditional affection that cannot be broken by everyday angst. There is no amount of money that Abraham would give for his son, there is no length he would go to rescue his son. Add this to the fact that Isaac was the son of promise that Abraham had waited on for 25 years. For 25 years Abraham and Sarah toiled, waiting for Isaac to be born and then eventually he was. He is the prize and the blessing of 25 years of ministry in the wilderness.

And that may be the very reason that God chose this test for Abraham. God had already tested Abraham with Sarah. God had already tested Abraham with Lot. God had already tested Abraham with his fortune.

But none of these things meant as much to Abraham as Isaac did. Isaac was Abraham's greatest treasure. Therefore God had to test whether or not he loved Isaac more than Him. God's question was, has Isaac become an idol to Abraham. Does Abraham love me first or Isaac first? **And that's the test... will you lay down all other things in your life for God? Especially the things you love the most? God must test us to find out if there are any other gods before him. So, if God were to ask you to sacrifice the one thing you love most in this world what would it be? And would you be willing to lay it down? If not, that is a problem. You, say but my children? My wife? My job? That's right. If you love any of them more than God then they have become an idol. But God would never ask me to kill them or leave them? True, he wouldn't. Isaac was a one time deal. But he also says your love for them must look like hatred in comparison to our love for God. And here's the kicker. We don't even need to use such extreme examples. From my perspective, many Christians, myself, and many in this room, often put Jesus aside for much lesser things. Cars, houses, jobs, vacations, sports, hobbies, television, entertainment... on and on and on! And so, when God puts any of these on the chopping block, it should be a reminder to us that he has found an idol in our lives and it needs to be cut out! **God will not compete for your love with anything or anyone else!****

For example. One of the girls in one of my youth ministries loved softball. She missed church all the time to play this game. And she was good. She probably had a chance at the next level. And after some talks I could tell that she was wrestling with the fact that softball had become an idol in her life. She wanted to love God more, but softball was more important to her. So she kept ignoring God and playing. Not long after she slid into second base and broke her ankle and she was out of softball for the entire year. After that year she was ready to go back to softball but she didn't. I asked her, why not go back? She said, "I know that God took it away from me because if he hadn't, I wouldn't have ever given it to him. But now that it's been gone for so long, I think I love him more and I see no reason to return to something second rate." **God will test you to reveal your idols. When he does, lay them down before he has to take them from you. **A true faith is a tested faith.****

The second thing we need to see here is that **A Tested Faith Recognizes God's True Nature**. Look with me at **22:3-10**. But doesn't this whole thing create a paradox. In short the paradox is this. God promised Isaac to Abraham for an heir through whom the whole world would be blessed. Now God wants Abraham to kill Isaac. If Abraham obeys God's command to kill Isaac then that means that God is a liar and Isaac won't be his heir. In order for God to keep his promise, Abraham must disobey God. It doesn't make sense. Why would God ask this of

Abraham? I'm sure that Abraham didn't sleep at all that night. I'm sure he was awake the whole time praying and contemplating this exact problem. But come the morning, Abraham rose up early and eager. What? What are we missing? Here's what we are missing. Look with me at **Hebrews 11:17-19**. Do you get it? Abraham realized that in order for God to fulfill his promise while still being obedient to sacrifice Isaac, that God must raise Him from the dead. Abraham was like. If I kill Isaac that doesn't make God a liar because after I kill Isaac, God will have to raise him from the dead to keep his promise. And God keeps his promises. His true nature is that He is a promise keeper. You, see **God is unchanging! If he says he's going to do something he will do it. If he asks us to do something that doesn't make sense, he will make it work.** Sometimes God tests us not to give us all the answers up front! No, sometimes he tests us to make us delve deeper into who he really is, to seek him further and see if we can trust him even when we don't understand his plan! In the end, if we stay true, if we stay faithful through the test, we will see that God is true to his nature. He is always true, he is always faithful, he is always right and good and loving. Abraham recognized this and set out to sacrifice Isaac expecting to see a miracle.

So, are you willing to do the unthinkable for God if he asks you to, not knowing the outcome or how it makes sense? Are you willing to trust him sight unseen? Do you believe that he will do a miracle? Do you believe he will raise the dead? That's the test! Do you trust God? **A true faith is a tested faith.**

The third thing we need to see is that **A Tested Faith Realizes God's Provision**. Look with me at **22:11-14**. Of course you know this part of the story. Abraham stepped out in faith and brought the knife down on Isaac and the Lord stopped his hand! Abraham's faith was true. He had passed the test. And God's promise was sure, he had spared Isaac to be Abraham's heir! Let's look back at **verse 7**. Isaac asks, where is the lamb for the sacrifice? Abraham replies, God will provide the lamb. After the angel catches Abraham's arm, Abe lifts up his eyes and sees a ram caught in some brush! The Lord provides! But you are aware that this story means so much more right? Think about this. Mt. Moriah is the mountain of Jerusalem. The same mountain where the hill of calvary is. 2000 years before Christ was crucified, on the same mountain, Abraham was sacrificing Isaac. 2000 years before Christ gave his life for humanity, a lamb gave his life in place of Isaac. It makes sense then, that when Isaac was asking where is the lamb, and Abraham replied God will provide... that Abraham unknowingly meant... the lamb of God, Jesus Christ! Isaac, the heir through whom Jesus would come... was spared so Jesus could one day be born to die for our sins. Isaac wasn't the lamb, but one day his heir would be! And his sacrifice would be enough for the sins of all mankind. Enough to bless the whole world. This should blow our minds! God was showing us that

through faith in the sacrifice of Abraham's heir the whole world would be saved! 2000 years before it happened! And you're like... that's not what's happening here. Bet! Look at **John 8:56**. Jesus is telling the pharisees that he is God. That before Abraham was I am and they are really struggling with this. They say how can you say you are before Abraham. And in this verse he says, "Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad." **What day did Abraham see Jesus and rejoice? I think he is referring to the entire story of Abraham. Look at this; In Chapter 12 & 15 Abraham is promised that through him the world will be blessed. He is looking forward to the blessing which is Christ. In Chapter 14 Abraham meets Melchizedek who appears to be a Christophany. A preincarnate christ in the flesh. Abraham worships him and gives tithe to him. In Chapter 18 Abraham meets the trinity of God in the flesh, one of which is Christ in the flesh again. And in Chapter 22 Abraham is tested and sees a picture of God providing a lamb in place of humanity! Abraham longed to see Christ in his day and did and he was glad!**

The whole point is this... **Jesus is our lamb provided by God to take our place and save us from the death we all deserve!** Through the testing of our faith we find salvation in the provided lamb of God! No matter what you need, God can provide it! When you are tested keep your faith in his provision. **A true faith is a tested faith.**

Lastly, **A Tested Faith Receives God's Blessing**. Finally look at **22:15-19**. After Abraham passes this test God again reiterates his covenant with Abraham! Abraham, know that everything I have promised you will come true! After all that Abraham had gone through. After all of his tests, Abraham was proven faithful and it was attributed to him as righteousness. You will notice, from this moment forward, for the next 60 years, we don't hear of Abraham having any more lapses in his faith! There are no more stories of Abraham almost selling his wife to Pharaoh or Abimelech. No more stories of leaving Israel for Egypt. From this moment Abraham's life is only defined by faith. The fear is gone! The faithlessness is gone! Get this... after the picture of the cross which Abraham put his faith in, he is a brand new man, changed forever!

Application

The application is simple! God is testing you right now! Do you have anything in your life that you love more than God? Anything that is vying for that top spot? Put it on the altar of your heart and give it to God! God wants you to trust in him more than anything. Even when you can't see the outcome or understand his ways, just trust him! Step out in faith and witness a miracle.

Conclusion

Let him provide for your salvation! Let him take away your sin. Let him be your Lord! See what he has done for you and be glad! Every test God puts us through is for us to draw closer to him! Would you draw closer to him today? **A true faith is a tested faith.**