

Genesis Ch22v1-19

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 10 July 2022

Preacher: Conor O'Neil

[0:00] Genesis chapter 22 and we're going to read the first 19 verses and then Sam will be up. That's the preacher's son.

Genesis chapter 22 verse 1. Sometime later God tested Abraham. He said to him, Abraham, here I am, he replied.

Then God said, take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain that I will show you.

Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about.

On the third day, Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.

[1:18] Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, Father, yes, my son, Abraham replied, the fire and wood are here, Isaac said.

But where is the lamb for the burnt offering? Abraham answered, God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son. And the two of them went on together.

When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar on top of the wood.

Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, Abraham, Abraham, here I am, he replied.

Do not lay a hand on the boy, he said. Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.

[2:30] Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.

So Abraham called that place the Lord will provide. And to this day it is said on the mountain of the Lord it will be provided. The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore.

Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies and through your offspring, all nations on earth will be blessed because you have obeyed me.

Then Abraham returned to his servants and they set off together for Beersheba and Abraham stayed in Beersheba. Thanks, Sam. Thanks, Connor.

Good morning, everybody. Why don't we just pray before we start and ask for God's help. Lord, we come to this passage this morning, which in many ways is difficult to understand and get our heads around.

[3:58] Lord, I just pray for your help for all of us now to hear what you want us to hear from this passage. And anything that is not from you, Lord, that we forget that.

But all the truth that you want us to hear, Lord, that you would drill it deep down into our hearts and that you would encourage us this morning to persevere in faith, looking to Jesus.

And it's in his name we pray. Amen. Amen. Well, in verse 1, it says that God tested Abraham.

And as much as we don't like to admit that God does this, it is true. And this is no spellings test or driving test or even IQ test.

Now, this is an everything-on-the-line kind of test. God had promised Abraham descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and that through him all nations would be blessed.

[5 : 03] Only when Abraham was laid on in years did God finally give the son on whom all of the promises would rest. And now that Isaac is here, God turns around and asks Abraham to sacrifice the son that he waited 100 years to love.

It's jarring. It's shocking. There's nothing safe or secure or happy about this test. Rather, it's painful and confusing, with God offering no reasons why at the outset.

If Isaac dies, so does the promise of salvation. It throws Abraham's life into crisis. And it offends those of us, on the one hand, who suppose that God wants us to have lives of wealth, security and happiness free from any trouble.

And on the other hand, it offends those of us who suppose that God is not in any way in control of our suffering. And the two main questions that arise out of this test are this.

Why does God allow us to be tested like this? And number two, how on earth can we persevere in our faith amid pain and confusion when God seems to be against us?

[6 : 27] Well, by walking with Abraham through this trial, we're going to see that number one, God tests us to grow our faith in him, in his promises and in his son's work on the cross.

And that number two, we can persevere through times of suffering and testing by putting our faith in Jesus, who trusted and obeyed perfectly amid the ultimate test of his faith.

And I pray that God's word today would challenge your perspective and mine on testing as I've been doing all week, and that you would place your faith on the rock, solid truth of what Jesus has already done for you and what he's promised to do for you in the future.

So we're going to look, just walk through this narrative by looking at three simple things. God's purpose in our testing, God's promises in our testing, and God's presence in our testing. First, God's purpose in our testing.

And the first thing that we need to establish in verse one, that it's clearly God who ordains Abraham's testing. Let's not try and make any excuses for God here.

[7 : 38] He is sovereign and in control of Abraham's trouble. And that's a tough pill to swallow. I've wrestled with this.

How could God willingly throw Abraham's life into chaos and allow him to experience the most excruciating pain while still being loving?

And this is not a once-off in the Bible, by the way, if you just think it's just this instance. No, it's all over the Bible. We look at the example of Job. In his case, Satan brings terrible affliction upon his life.

But Satan has to ask God's permission to do so first. And he can only do as much as God allows him to do in order for God to achieve his purposes in Job's life through the calamity.

In support of this, Romans 8.28 says this, And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

[8 : 50] So, if that is true, if God is ultimately in control over all things, then that has to mean our suffering and pain also. And that is incredibly hard to accept.

Stay with me, though. This narrative is going to show us that Abraham's suffering is not meaningless, and neither is yours or mine.

But what is that purpose, according to today's text? Well, later we'll see that God is definitely not testing Abraham to punish him for the mistakes that he'd previously made in his life.

And believe me, he'd made some big ones. Nor is God trying to catch him out or setting him up for some sort of failure. No.

No. In this text, we learn that God tests us because he wants to grow our faith. How could that be so? Well, on any of the rare times in my life that I have strayed into a gym, the trainers there have explained to me that by testing my muscle, by putting it under strain, and feeling the burn, that pain, that is how I can build stronger muscle, if only I did that more.

[10 : 12] And it's a picture of how God tests our faith. He puts it under strain through trials and suffering, and it's painful.

But if we keep trusting him, it will build stronger faith in him. We can't even imagine the depths of despair Abraham felt walking that road, knowing he would have to somehow kill his son.

Every fiber in his being would have fought against it. But because of this testing experience, Abraham throws all his faith and all his hope on the promises of God.

Look at verse 8, where he tells his son that God will provide the lamb, even though Abraham doesn't have a clue how. He becomes more and more dependent on God and less and less dependent on himself.

God uses testing and suffering to make us realize our utter need for him. I don't know about you, but when everything's going great in my life, my sinful heart slips into self-dependency.

[11:25] And we quickly lose our focus on God, and we trust more and more on ourselves, and not on him. You see, in doing the very thing that brings Abraham to his knees, God is saving him.

He's for Abraham when it seems that he's against him. He wants Abraham to pass the test. He's not trying to catch him out. He's trying to grow his faith.

Listen to James 1, verses 2-4. You can read it on the board as well. Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. You know, like the song says, who holds our faith when fears arise?

Who stands above the stormy trial? Who sends the waves that bring us nigh unto the shore, the rock of Christ? I think that's true. I love that.

[12:41] Friends, in your times of testing, don't let your first prayer be that God would remove the trouble from you. Pray first that God would save you from trusting in yourself and use whatever means necessary to grow your faith, even if that means continuing in this hardship and testing.

He tests us because he loves us. So we know God's purpose in our testing is to grow our faith. But what is that faith resting in?

Here's a second point. It's about God's promises in our testing. So in verses 3 to 9, we follow Abraham on the road to the mountain where he's going to sacrifice his son.

And what keeps Abraham walking forward in obedience here through this excruciatingly painful testing? Why doesn't he just give up amidst the anguish and all the unanswered questions of the situation?

I think we can see Abraham does two simple things which we can also use to persevere through our times of deepest suffering and testing. Number one, he remembers the promises.

[13:55] And two, he walks forward in the promises. Look at verse 5, where Abraham tells his servants, Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there.

We will worship and then we will come back to you. How can Abraham have that confidence of bringing Isaac back down that mountain alive?

Well, simply, Abraham remembered God's promise that Isaac would be the father of many nations. So the first step in our times of testing and suffering is to just remember the promises that God has already spoken to us.

These promises are enough for you to navigate any trial that you will ever face in your life. So are you giving God the chance to speak his promises to you in his word?

I can hear plenty of empty promises of things the world will give me. Yet so often I can't find time to listen to what my soul really needs.

[15:00] God's true promises. Simply put, we are missing out on real life, on real hope, when we leave out his word. So make it a priority.

Listen to it on your walk in the evening. Hear it explained on a good Christian podcast. Write out your favorite promises. Stick them on the walls of your home. Fill your life with God's promises to you.

And secondly, walk forward in those promises. It wasn't enough for Abraham to simply know in his head what God had promised.

In verses 3 to 9, he showed his faith in the promise by living like he believed it was true. Here's another way of saying it. Obedience flows out of faith in God's promises.

Now the writer of the book of Hebrews kind of fills us in on what Abraham was actually thinking as he walked up the mountain. So it's pretty cool to actually read this 2,000 years later as this writer is speaking. And this is what he says.

[16:02] You can read it on the board as well. Abraham reasoned that God could even raise Isaac from the dead. That's what he was thinking. Here's a paraphrase of Abraham's thoughts.

God has asked me to sacrifice my son. But God has also promised that my son will be the father of many nations. Because God cannot break his promise, the only logical conclusion is that after I

have killed him, God's going to raise Isaac from the dead and we'll walk down the mountain together.

Now that's Abraham walking forward in the promise. It's nothing spectacular. It's not some massive faith that only biblical heroes can have.

No. Only a small, simple faith is required to cling to a massive promise. To say, Okay God, I'm taking you at your word.

And I'm going to live my life in the light of it. It's faith and obedience. They're like two sides of the same coin. You can't have one without the other.

[17 : 22] Obeying God means knowing God's promises and living in the light of them. It's asking yourself, if God's promises are true, then how does that impact how I live this day?

A couple examples. When I'm tempted to hold my money too tightly and worry about not having enough, I can choose to believe God's promise to me in Matthew 6, which says, Don't worry about what you will eat or drink or wear, but seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.

Believing this promise means that I can walk forward in generosity, trusting His provision for all my needs. How about when I'm sick and God isn't giving me the healing that I've asked Him for?

Well, I can believe in God's promise in Romans 8, 28, which says, God will make all things work together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

And believing in that promise, I can walk forward, trusting that He will make this illness turn out for my good and His glory. When I've been badly hurt by a brother or sister, and I'm tempted to show revenge to those who have wronged me, I can believe God's promise in 1 Peter 4 that says, They will have to give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

[19 : 05] And believing this promise enables me to walk forward in love, even if I never receive an apology from that person. When I'm being tempted by sexual sin, and all the world is telling me to just do whatever makes me happy, I can choose to believe God's greater promise that says, Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst.

By believing in that promise, I can walk forward in purity, quenching my thirst to God's fountain of life.

Because God always keeps His promises, we can keep walking forward in them, even when our situation seems like madness to us.

It's blind faith. It's a road marked with pain. But it saves us if it grows our faith in Christ. So we've established, number one, God's purpose in our testing to grow our faith.

And we've heard about God's promises in our testing to help us through. And now, lastly, we come to God's presence in our testing. And you might be saying to yourself at this point, Okay, I guess that God tests me to grow my faith in Him and that He's given me His promises to hold on to.

[20 : 38] But what about when I'm in the middle of that test and I'm suffering badly? I'm angry, I'm hurting, and I'm struggling to even talk to God about the situation I'm in right now.

The situation that He's allowing in my life. My faith is weak and I can't even say I'm consistently trusting in Him or in His promises.

Never mind walking in obedience. What about those times? You see, Abraham might have been a shiny example in this particular story of faith and obedience, but he wasn't many times in the past. And neither will we trust perfectly. Read with me from verse 10. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.

But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, Abraham, Abraham, Here I am, he replied. Do not lay a hand on the boy, he said.

[21 : 47] Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.

Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.

So Abraham called that place the Lord will provide. And to this day it is said on the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.

All of a sudden God's request of Abraham which was once so confusing and so painful now begins to make sense. God never wanted Abraham to sacrifice his son.

He wanted to show Abraham that he the Lord of the universe would one day sacrifice his one and only son. Two thousand years after Isaac Jesus would walk up a hill carrying wood on his back. [22 : 57] Like Isaac he would be silent as a lamb led to the slaughter trusting perfectly in his father. he would not resist but would willingly allow the soldiers to nail him to the cross obeying his father perfectly.

But where Isaac was spared on the altar Jesus would not be spared on the cross. The full weight of the wrath of God for our sin would crush him.

He would die for all of our faithlessness our self dependency and idolatry of lesser things. Jesus passed the ultimate test of faith for us.

And then crucially he rose again from the grave to be our risen king conquering death and guaranteeing our future resurrection to eternal life.

He is seated at the right hand of the father right now interceding for us just like he prayed for Simon Peter that his faith would not fail through testing so Jesus is also praying for those who belong to him.

[24 : 12] we are all going to turn away from God's promises and trust in ourselves just like Abraham on previous occasions just like Peter did when he denied Jesus we are often going to live like we don't believe God's promises are true and that's why we needed a perfect sinless savior who passed the test for us and now is interceding for us he's speaking praying that we would persevere and like the song says when I fear my faith will fail Christ will hold me fast when the tempter would prevail he will hold me fast that's truth from God's word Jesus wants us to pass the test and he is praying to the father that our faith will not fail even though we lose our focus on him so it's simple place your entire faith in Jesus work on the cross for you know the forgiveness of all your sin and your relationship with him restored and he will give you the gift of his holy spirit

God living inside you present with you through all of your suffering and testing and not only that through faith in Christ you are adopted into God's family you're counted as sons and daughters of Abraham meaning that all the promises that we read about in verses 17 and 18 they're yours as well they're mine just as Abraham was promised blessing by God so we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ just as Abraham was promised a family as numerous as the stars so we have been brought into a family of believers from all nationalities and backgrounds spanning history just as Abraham was promised a heavenly city so we are heirs of eternity in heaven as well these are promises that you and I can build our lives on remember them believe them show you believe them by walking forward in them and whenever you fail to trust and obey keep coming back to the one who trusted and obeyed perfectly for you he is present in your testing he is keeping you from falling though you struggle his grace is enough for all your mistakes parameters just want to finish with jude verses 24 and 25 just listen to it now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord before all ages, now and forevermore.

Let's pray. Lord, we just ask that you would not save us from all trouble but first of all, God, that you would use the trouble and the testing and the suffering to save us from ourselves.

And Lord, whenever you do test our faith, give us grace to believe in your promises. Give us grace to live like we believe them.

Thank you for your finished work on the cross for us. Lord, we simply rest in that work today.

[28 : 50] And we place our entire faith in what you have achieved for us. Lord, grow our faith through times of testing.

thank you that you are keeping us till the end. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thanks very much, Sam.

tough passage, but absolutely superb. A couple of things that I took from it.

We're going to sing a couple of songs to finish. But Sam said, in doing the very thing that brings Abraham to his knees, God is saving him. I hope we can remember that throughout the week, that while we're going through these tough times, God is using that to save us, to strengthen our faith. And if we can remember the promises while we're going through these times. The two songs we're going to sing now are speaking about that last point that Sam was making about God's presence in our testing, in our struggles.

[30 : 17] The first one is He will hold me fast. You might have heard Sam quote it in the sermon.

And the second one is before the throne of God above where it says that God ever lives and pleads

for me.

So like Sam was speaking about, when you are going through those hard times, yes, it is awful, but God is there with you. If you hold on to His promises, He is there with you in it. Please feel free to stand.