

Faith put to the test

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: 21 June 2026

Preacher: Dave Bott

[0 : 00] After these things, God tested Abraham and said to him, Abraham.

And he said, here I am. He said, take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.

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 for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

On the third day, 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 boy 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. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife.

[1 : 14] So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father, Abraham, my father. And he said, here I am, my son. He said, behold, the fire and the wood.

But where is the lamb of 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. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, Abraham, Abraham.

And he said, here I am. He said, do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God.

[2 : 17] 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 is said to this day, on the mount of the Lord, it shall be provided. And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of the heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemy. And in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.

So Abraham returned to his young men and they arose and went together to Bathsheba. And Abraham lived at Bathsheba. Now after these things, it was told to Abraham, Behold, Milcah has also born children to your brother Nahor.

[3 : 44] Uz, his firstborn. Buzz, his brother. Camuel, the father of Aram. Kesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaf and Bethuel.

Bethuel fathered Rebekah. These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham's brother. Moreover, his concubine, whose name was Rumah, bore Teba, Gaham, Tehash and Mecca.

Good morning, everyone. Will you pray with me as you come to God's word? Amen. Father, we all come this morning desperate.

Our life, we need your word. We need your promises. We need to see who you are, your character. We need to understand what you've done for us, the hope you've given us.

I pray that you'll give us, by your spirit, minds that understand your word and hearts that believe and trust. I pray this in Jesus' name.

[5 : 06] Amen. Well, we are coming to, I'm going to call it the mountaintop of Abraham's growth in faith.

This is the climax of the story of Abraham. How can Yahweh command such a terrible thing? Some atheists find this passage absolutely repugnant. Like Richard Dawkins, he says it pretty powerfully.

This disgraceful story is an example simultaneously of child abuse, bullying in two asymmetrical power relationships, and the first recorded use of the Nuremberg defence.

I was only obeying orders. Pretty strong words. Let's get a broader perspective before we pronounce a guilty verdict on God's character.

[6 : 21] Child sacrifice was part of the worship to the god Molech in the land of Canaan, in Abraham's time. And so we find in Leviticus 18.21, Yahweh prohibits Israel from practising the abominations of the people of the land.

You shall not give any of your children to offer them to Molech. They offered their children to their god to get further prosperity, further fruitfulness from the gods.

That is not what's happening in this passage. Abraham and his descendants were to be totally different from the nations around them.

Now it's not just the Canaanites. In Roman times there was a letter recovered of a man writing to his wife, and the letter talks about lots of common things you might expect, and then at the end it's like, when you give birth to our child, if it's a boy, keep him.

If it's a girl, leave it to die of exposure. As if it was like, go do the shopping, and by the way, just throw our kid out to die.

[7 : 42] Infanticide was very common in the ancient world. Now whether it's part of religious ritual or not, however far back you go, it's legal in New South Wales to end a child's life up to 22 weeks in the womb.

Now Dawkins himself defends abortion, and he was controversial in 2014 when he tweeted, it would be immoral to bring a disabled child into the world.

Now I'm hesitant to bring up abortion, because I know it probably brings up some shame or regret, but please know, if that's you, the blood of Jesus covers that.

I'm just trying to give perspective here on what we're looking at. How can Yahweh ask this of Abraham? I'm not trying to sidestep how troubling this command is.

It is troubling. But it's the wholehearted trust in the biblical God of Abraham, those who see the wonder in this passage, in this event, that actually saves children, both in ancient times and today.

[9 : 11] That's why this passage is actually troubling, because it's so at odds with the character of Yahweh.

What God asks of Abraham here, it's unique. It is one of a kind. And the fact that it is unique, I think is what unlocks the wonder of its message to us today.

So as we come into this passage, here's what we're going to see. We're going to see what God asks of Abraham in verses 1 and 2, offer up your all to me in worship of me.

In verses 3 to 8, I think we see his obedience is empowered by faith. We see the Lord will provide the lamb, and that the Lord swears to bless the world because of this one man's obedience.

So that's where we're headed. Have your Bibles open. Well, verse 1, After these things, we saw last week, the covenant blessings are starting to come in.

[10 : 23] The nations of the earth, with Abimelech, is coming to Abraham for blessing. He's at Bathsheba, the southern border of the promised land, and he's worshipping. The promised land is just a matter of time before he possesses it.

And most of all, all the promises hinge on the giving of Isaac. Isaac has arrived. All God's plans to save the world will come through Isaac's line.

And we would expect the story to just go from strength to strength, more blessings just pouring in, but no, that is the context for this greatest test of Abraham's faith and obedience.

Now, one of my deepest fears is when Emma and the kids go for a long drive without me. Not... I've got every confidence as in Emma's driving.

I just realised... I've got every confidence. I'm afraid because it feels like my whole world is in that car.

[11 : 34] And Emma reminds me, Christ is my world. Now, if tragedy was to happen, that would be... I do not want that test of faith, okay?

But I don't think that even comes close to what Abraham has commanded here. It's even more than that that God is asking of Abraham.

Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.

It's his whole world and it's all God's promises are bound up in his son. We've seen in Abraham the man of faith.

He's the model of faith. He's a mixed picture. The language here reminds us of his original call in chapter 12. Go to a land and I'll tell you later where you're going.

[12:43] And he obeyed that call. He is a man of faith. But then we've also seen him full of cowardly fear where he puts Sarah and the promises of God in harm's way.

I think sometimes today we talk about faith, some people talk about faith as if they've, I've always believed in Jesus. There's nothing further to develop. It's this static thing.

I've always had faith. What are you talking about? Others speak of their lack of faith as if it's too weak, it's too fixed. I'm never going to change.

But we see in the life of Abraham growth in faith. One commentator says, the test, instead of breaking him, brings him to the summit of his lifelong walk with God.

here we see Abraham's growth in faith. And each phrase of the command must have made the command harder.

[13:56] Take your son, your only son, whom you love. It must have gone against all his human affection.

the son whom you love. Now, some parents who struggle to have children and then God gives them a child late in life.

Have you ever noticed they can be super, super protective of that child. Abraham had to wait 25 years. The son whom you love, you've just given him.

Now, give him back. It seemed to go against the character of God. How could he make sense of this command? It went against the revealed plans of God to save the world.

Remember Abraham's name. He's the father of many nations. All the covenant promises of God are bound up in Isaac. Isaac. Isaac. In that time, all your identity and purpose and future is bound up as a family unit.

[15:11] We think individualistically today. But for Abraham, the firstborn was the head of the family, representing the family. What's God asking him to do? Abraham, your entire life, your identity, your meaning, your safety, your security, your hope, your significance in the world.

Give it all up. Give it all your life up to me. Now, Abraham's test is very unique.

The specifics of what God is asking. But the fact that God tests faith to the point where his people find it troubling, perplexing, even feeling like God is an enemy.

How can God be asking this of me? that's par for the course. Elizabeth Elliot, whose husband died trying to share the gospel as a missionary, she was once visiting friends on a sheep farm in northern Wales and sheep are vulnerable to disease, even death by insects and parasites.

So once a year the sheep were submerged in a big vat of antiseptic and Elizabeth said this, one by one John sees the animals as their Lord and Master was pushing their head under, drowning them at least as far as they could tell.

[16:54] And she reflected later, there are times I couldn't figure out any reason for the treatment I was getting from my great shepherd whom I trusted. And like these sheep, I didn't have a hint of explanation.

All God's sheep have our faith tested. It can feel like God is trying to kill you, not bless you. He's asking you to lose your meaning while you get up in the morning.

He's asking you to lose your future, your sense of safety, your purpose. To trust that God himself and not what he gives us is to be all our life.

God does that to all his children. He tests our faith. He is to be our whole world. God is more interested in our happiness.

We have to come to terms with the fact that God is more interested in our holiness than in our happiness right now. He's more interested in our faithfulness than in our financial resources.

[18:21] He's more interested in our purity than in our power. He's more interested in our eternal life than in our external wealth.

He's more interested in our endurance than in our reputation. God is asking Abraham to offer up all to him.

Now, what's more amazing than what God asks of Abraham is Abraham's response in verses 3 to 10. We're not told Abraham's thoughts. Our attention is drawn to his incredible obedience.

Verse 3, he rose up early. He didn't hesitate. He cut the wood. I just wonder, what is going through his head knowing what this wood is going to be used for?

It's a three-day journey, 70 kilometres, people think. This wasn't just a quick, okay, I'm just going to get this obedience over and done with.

[19 : 35] This requires sustained obedience. And the closer he got, the harder the obedience. obedience. How hard would it have been when his son says, Daddy, where's the lamb?

That must have been hard to keep going. What was motivating Abraham to obey?

Was it unquestioning obedience despite how crazy it seemed? I think that would be a dangerous lesson for us to take away. If you feel like God is telling you to do something, regardless of what he has revealed, that can't be the lesson for us to take away.

I think there's more hints to what's motivating him here. By the time we get to the Passover at Exodus, God's judgment of the firstborn, remember?

The identity and the future of every family was in the firstborn. It would have hit Israel's families too. God would have been just to call in a debt of sin except for the provision of the blood of the lamb.

[21 : 00] In Micah 6 verse 7 the prophet asks, shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

It could be, I'm not sure if, I might be inappropriately reading back into Genesis, okay, but it could be that Abraham knows God has every right to call in his debt of sin.

But I think we're given more hints, more clear hints here of what's going through Abraham's mind. I don't think we're shown the willpower to obey, I'm just going to obey no matter, it seems to go against God's revealed will.

We're not shown that it seems a sense of guilt. His obedience is empowered by faith in his promise. I think we get that hint in verse 5.

Then Abraham said to his young man, stay here with the donkey, I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you. Now that's in the plural, we will come again to you.

[22 : 17] I don't think he was lying, lying. I think that would detract from the picture of obedience if he's lying here. As the command of God and the promise of God seem to be in conflict, I think he's drawing deeply on God's promise.

Through Isaac shall your offspring be named. And Hebrews 11 confirms this for us. Hebrews 11 says, he considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead.

He's already seen God raised from the dead, a kind of raised from the dead. Remember that he and Sarah were as good as dead. Now that's not my wording, that's scripture's wording.

He was as good as dead when Isaac was born. His faith grew strong in the promise. He knows nothing is too impossible for God.

The logic is sound. He's telling me to offer up my only son my whole life, but he's promised my only son will inherit all God's everlasting promise.

[23 : 33] He must be able to raise him from the dead. He's drawing deeply on God's promise. That's what's empowering his faith. That's what's sending him up the mountain, the promise.

Isaac asks, where is the lamb?

Again, I don't think he's lying when he says, the Lord will provide. I can't see the lamb. The word provide is see.

God will see to it. I can't see the lamb, my son. I can't see it. I have no idea how God's going to provide here. I know God has every right to call in my debt of sin, but he's promised you will inherit all.

I don't know, I don't know how, I don't know when, but I know God will provide for himself so that you will live. He's drawing on the promise.

[24 : 46] In verses 9 and 10, the narrative slows right down. He builds the altar. He binds Isaac. We're not told, we're not told, did Isaac resist or did he obey as well in trust?

We're not told. He takes the knife in his hand. And the Lord intervenes. Abraham, Abraham.

And he said, here I am. And he said, do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him. For now I know, I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son from me.

He showed he loved God, God for God's sake. He trusted God's promise despite not knowing how God would provide. But he provided in a better way than he anticipated. He thought, oh well, he can raise Isaac from the dead. He provided in an even more wonderful way. A substitute to die in Isaac's place.

[26 : 03] This is the mountain which became the site for the temple. That would be a constant reminder. The Lord provides for himself the sacrifice. The Lord provides.

It was Abraham's faith that the Lord would graciously provide, even doing the impossible, that empowered him to sacrifice without reservation. whatever trials the Lord brings your way, it may feel like your shepherd is trying to drown you.

But nothing demonstrates that God himself is worthy of your trust, God himself is to be valued and is more precious than the gifts he gives.

Nothing demonstrates that God's word is absolutely trustworthy, despite you have no idea what he is doing. You can't see how he will provide.

How is this doing any good? God, and yet you rejoice in hope. You love him still.

[27 : 28] You draw on his promises. The obedience that comes from faith, it glorifies God. It shows that God is trustworthy and precious to you.

Well, all believers can relate to some degree we can relate to the testing of our faith, but I think the primary purpose of this passage isn't about our faith at all.

We see the primary purpose in verses 15 to 18, when the angel speaks, this angel of the Lord speaks for a second time. The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, 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 as the stars of heaven and as the sand is on a seashore.

And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies. And in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed because you have obeyed my voice. The only addition to the promises that we see here from previous passages is that your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies. His here is singular. It may be what the Apostle Paul saw as evidence that the blessing of Abraham was promised not to many seeds but to one, one seed he says in Galatians.

[29 : 21] He promises victory for God's chosen seed. Now certainly that is providing the land, the conquest of the land.

He will provide victory there but maybe that promise gets expanded. Psalm 2, God's chosen one is going to possess the whole earth and by the time we get to the New Testament that victory is over spiritual enemies.

It's over every single enemy that goes against the promises of God to bless. What we have in these verses is Yahweh swearing the oath of the covenant.

covenant. The covenant in chapter 15, God promises descendants and land but what of the promises to bless the whole earth?

It is at this pivotal moment in human history, of salvation history, that God's blessing to the nations is locked in. Yahweh has sworn.

[30 : 35] He is sworn by the highest authority which nothing can alter himself. Hebrews 6 says this, so when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath.

He's locking in on blessing the whole world. Because you have done this.

Because you have not withheld your son, your only son, because you obeyed my voice. Now, we get uncomfortable. Oh, does that mean the blessing is dependent on our obedience?

It's not about us. I don't think this passage is about us. Remember who Abraham is. He's a representative man. He's the head of all the people he represents.

It's because of this one man's obedience that the blessing of Yahweh will extend far, far, far beyond this one man.

[31 : 48] I think he's like Adam, the head of humanity. He was tested. Obey me and you will live.

And he disobeyed and he plunged us all into sin and curse. Abraham's test was greater. Obey me and you will die.

All your life bound up with Isaac, you will die. This one man's great obedience and the Lord swears to bless all the earth.

death. So I want to come back to that original question.

Why does Yahweh ask such a troubling test of Abraham's obedience? The only way I can make sense of why Yahweh would make this disturbing command is if Abraham's testing is like the first pencil sketch of a great artist.

[33 : 15] Abraham's faith is incredible in his own right but it was never meant to be just a sketch. You can't fully understand it as a sketch. The finished painting far surpasses it.

It's here at this pivotal moment in God's salvation plan for the world where God is binding himself with an oath and what are we finding? We're finding a father doing the unthinkable, not withholding his son.

We find a lamb provided by heaven as a substitute. We find one man who was tested, obey me and you will die and by his one obedience he's bringing blessing to the entire world.

It's Jesus at the cross who is the finished painting. He's the true and greater Abraham, he's the true and greater lamb, he's the true and greater son.

God only asked this of Abraham because he knew only Yahweh himself would ever be asked to follow through with this.

[34 : 31] It's not child abuse. It's not bullying. Abraham taking the wood and placing it on Isaac to carry it up that mountain.

It's a sketch so that when we see God's only son carrying the cross, we marvel. As Abraham and Isaac walked up together, the Godhead is absolutely united.

The Father did not compel Jesus. He wasn't an unwilling victim. Nor was Jesus offering up himself, trying to get from God, the Father, some blessing because God is unwilling to forgive.

They are totally united in this. From the very beginning of human history, this was always God's plan to restore blessing to the entire world.

God's plan to be able to be able to be able to be able to We all sometimes feel like our shepherd is trying to drown us. How can God be asking this of me?

[35 : 48] But the true child of God also knows a different experience. And it's the same faith of Abraham. We find God worthy of our trust.

We stop objecting. How can you ask this of me? Because when we see the God of Abraham offering up his only son, with no one in heaven or on earth ready to intervene, to stop it, we can look at the cross and we go, now I know.

Now I know you love me. Now I know you love us because you did not give, withhold your son, your only son, whom you love.

Will you pray with me? Let's pray. Father, I pray that you would press into each of our hearts and minds just the wonder of your love for us in sending your son.

We can't imagine how hard it was for Abraham to not withhold his only son. Please help us to grasp how great your love is for us.

[37 : 26] Nothing else, nothing else is strong enough to help us trust you and obey you and love you still when times are tough.

Help us feel that love. It's not enough for us just to think it. Please help us feel it so that we would show this world and hope that we have that your love is better than life.

Lord, I pray this because I know it glorifies you. So in Jesus' name I ask. Amen. Amen. Thank you.