

Faith in the Lord's Promise

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Date: 20 February 2022

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[0 : 0 0] so we're going to turn to keep keeping genesis 22 and we're going to just have a quick have a look at it together and but before i sort of go into it let me pray for us father god we thank you so much for your word the bible and we just praise you that you've revealed you revealed yourself to us through it and so we pray now that you would feed us feed our souls with your word help us to listen we pray for your blessing upon us now we ask for your spirit to be at work in our hearts to transform us to change us that we would we would not leave here the same people but would be living here transformed ready to live and work for your praise and glory so we ask for this in the name of jesus amen we have a great passage uh this evening it's a i suppose you could say it's it's a famous uh passage known perhaps uh by lots of us um but there is so much going on here there's so much uh going on that really in the time that we've got we can we can only really scratch the surface if you look through history there's been uh bucket loads of ink that has been spilt wrestling uh debating and understanding uh what's going on because there's so many different issues theological doctrinal issues that weave together uh throughout throughout the chapter so from the offer i just want to i just want to encourage you uh before we get going don't let this uh be the only time this week when you think about this passage because if you dig deep there is sparkling treasure in god's word to be unearthed in this passage having said all that for my money if we to cut through all the big questions that will be raised and don't worry we'll address some some of them as we as we look through it together one of the i suppose you could say one of the driving arcs that that seems to bridge everything that goes through is is one something particular that i want us to draw upon and that's abraham's response to the voice of the lord abraham's response uh to the voice of the lord and and what we see is that it is it is a response of radical faith and obedience radical faith and obedience faith in the lord's covenant promises and obedience to his commands i'll say that again faith in the lord's covenant promises and obedience uh to his commands now what i've just outlined it's actually nothing new is it it's nothing revolutionary because it is the christian walk it is the christian life faith in the promises of god and obedience uh to his commands what i want us to understand before we jump into all that is that faith it's not actually an exclusively christian concept everyone has faith in something and subconsciously we demonstrate we execute uh faith all the time actually now i just want to start uh by telling me telling you a story about something that happened to me it's not too long ago it was a back in the summer myself uh annabelle and my three wee ones uh we were taking a summer trip uh down to see my family it's quite uh it's quite a longest journey you go it's all the way down to west yorkshire so you go down the m74 then you're down the m6 and as you do when you take uh long journeys as you'll know you often have to stop especially with wee ones you stop a couple of times at service stations often uh shell out for a mcdonald's uh and there's a particular uh service

station that we often uh stop at it's called killington lake um and if you're ever down that way i'd recommend it because uh right around the back they've got a beautiful lake um it's lovely you can sit on benches and look the lake whilst you're eating your mcdonald's or your greg's or whatever it is and so we we went there as normally around the back and they've got some lovely wooden seats wooden benches to sit on that overlook this uh beautiful beautiful lake and i was following annabelle she was ahead of me and she went to sit on on her bench and as you would expect no problem i followed her and i and i went to sit on the bench that sort of uh faced hers unbeknownst to me um the left-hand side of the bench um the leg uh was rotten maybe you can tell where this is going and so as i uh sat myself down as i normally would uh the left hand side of the bench completely gave way under my weight and the bench collapsed and i was left on my back with my legs uh flailing in the air and as you can only imagine annabelle and the kids were in absolute hysterics uh with me at me at the situation uh now why am i telling you that because surprisingly it demonstrates faith i'd sat

on a bench before and so rightly i believed that it would support my weight i'd ex and i and then i executed the faith that i had by taking the action of sitting on it now if i'd have noticed the the rotten leg my actions would have been uh very different you see the bench failed to deliver on what it promised and that's i suppose that's the lesson i've learned i can't put uh my faith in a bench to support my weight uh because it failed me now i i know it's a bit of a it's a bit of a funny story but it does help us to think about the world that we live in it does help us to think about the world we live in because we put things we put faith in things all the time and um the problem is is that we constantly get let down we constantly get let down people promise and don't come through we perhaps we've we've expressed that feeling with what we've seen in leadership um in our country maybe we're feeling that kind of thing that many things have been promised and things have not come through maybe you can remember times in families or friends and perhaps if we'd be being honest with ourselves we've been guilty of that too now that's just human nature but that's not the real issue that i want to touch on the real issue is that we can drag that way of thinking is into how we think about the living god we've been let so down so many times that it affects us spiritually and it leads us into a sort of spiritual inertia where we we know the promises of god but we kind of we almost start to think will he let me down like other people have we struggle to take hold of his promises and really believe and act upon them abraham is a model for us of what christian living looks like in this passage that we've got the life of faith and obedience as he responds to god's voice his promises and his commands and so that's what we're going to consider as we look through it we're going to consider abraham's response and my hope and prayer for all of us actually is that it should help us reflect upon how do we respond when god speaks in his word how do we respond when god speaks in his word and and then we'll spend a little bit of time after that looking at how god responds to abraham so it's just two things really we're going to be looking at abraham's response to the lord and then the lord's response to abraham so firstly we're going to look at abraham's response to the lord and in a sense um you could say that this is uh it's really the climax of abraham's life everything has led up to this point there is a difference a huge difference between him and us because as the readers of this account we are privy to something that he's not the narrator's commentary just look just if you look with me uh in verse one after these things we read god tested abraham god tested abraham but before anything happens um we we as the reader know uh that it's a test and so we get perhaps we get a little inclination a suggestion perhaps that there is something else at play there's something else going on as we as we read it together that's a really important thing that we need to remember because perhaps as we're reading as you as we were reading it earlier on as you read heard it read it or heard it being read straight off the bat we are left with a little bit of a conundrum and i think we'd be right to ask and perhaps maybe some of us were asking or have asked it in the past don't god's commands here don't they doesn't his commands at abraham doesn't seem like somewhat illogical perhaps even morally questionable we all know uh the ten commandments don't we don't kill what's going on perhaps it may even seem to teach on the the very edge of morality and i think it should it should shock us i think it's meant to shock us because really what god asks of abraham abraham i mean it is quite horrific he's asking him to kill his own son his own son and so for the sake of clarity i just want to be clear about what what's going on here this is not a test of god's moral character it's not a test of god's moral character this is not a will he or won't he kill the child that's why we're told from the beginning it's a test for abraham how will he respond from the off we know that god is not going to contradict who he is this is testing abraham now the debate or perhaps the wrestling that we we have we have or we still might have now it doesn't say anything but about this in the passage but i think you could be on a safe bet to suggest that abraham would would have been or was wrestling with the same issues himself of course if we know anything about abraham's history he would have remembered the covenant promises given to him in genesis in in all the times he'd spoken with god in genesis 12 and 15 and 17 you remember what he said in genesis 17 god said he said sarah your wife shall bear you a son you shall call his name isaac and he said i will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant and this is the important bit as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him now abraham must have must have been thinking of that and said his offspring after him surely this can't be the way can it how can my my son the only son the one whom i love how can his offspring come after him if he has to be sacrificed surely this can't be right isn't this isaac our son the one we waited so long for the one who the angel of the lord came to visit him and told them when sarah laughed that they were going to have surely there must be another way surely those questions were on abraham's mind does this really fit with the

lord that we know and love and has made promises yet he goes through with it yet he goes through with it verse three he rises early in the morning prepares what he needs the donkey the young lads to help him the wood the fire and his boy but let's just pause there for a minute i just want to take a step back in one sense this this is not new territory for abraham god has been telling him to get up and go his whole life genesis 12 when we first meet him what does the lord say he tells abraham go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that i will show you right at the very off he has to sacrifice the life that he has he has to put away that life and get up and get up and go and he does his obedience to the lord's commands verse four of that chapter so abraham went as the lord had told him abraham has heard the voice of the lord before he's met the angel of the lord before if anything you could say it's it's not new for abraham to hear the lord speaking to him it's not new it's not new it instantly recognized his voice obedience is not a new idea and i think don't you think he may i mean he's a ripe old age at this point he may have been looking back at the lord's past faithfulness to him the lord had prepared abraham for this his whole life he's journeyed with the lord before and so when we read in our account that that he's traveled it's it's a quite a long journey that he goes it's i think it's about uh 50 miles is journey when they journey and they arrive at the place and we know as we read it's been they travel it's on the third day that they arrive it says they arrive at mariah so he's he's actually have three days to choose choose this over like i said he's over a hundred now right a ripe age and as he has a lifetime to look back on all that reminds him of the lord's faithfulness to him and what we see is by this point his mind is made up his mind is made up he trusts him he trusts that the lord will provide let's just look together verse five then abraham said to his yule men stay here with the donkey i and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you come again to you he said abraham expects the pair of them to be coming down and isaac's puzzled end of verse seven behold the wood and the fire but where's the lamb for a burnt offering of course he would have seen his dad perform sacrifices before he knew exactly what's going on but there's something missing where's the lamb verse eight abraham said god will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering my son whatever happens abraham believes has faith that isaac will be coming back down the mountain he doesn't know how but he trusts has faith and is obedient to the command this is the test for abraham this is the test for abraham and it goes all the way to the altar he binds isaac and there's him on the wood even it gets to the point where he lifts the knife to slaughter his son can you imagine that moment can you imagine the horror and the anguish that's going on in his heart at that moment i can't i can't i can't i'm going to be honest i can't imagine what that's that what that must have been like for him the angel of the lord speaks the angel of the lord speaks abraham abraham there's urgency verse 12 do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him but now i know that you fear god seeing you've not withheld your son your son your only son for me now i know now i know that you fear god abraham was willing to go through with it he's going to kill his own son now again i just want to take a step back i just want to take a step back pause and there's a few things that we need to to say here so i want to remind ourselves that first and foremost this is a unique test to abraham it's a unique because it's it's unique in the history of redemption and the reason i want to stress that is because before i just said imagine in the in that position but i want to stress that we look at abraham we we see this amazing faith demonstrated no doubt about that but as i said my i don't know what your response is to that but my first response is i don't know if i could do what he did i don't know if i could and for many of us is that not what we're all thinking i i don't know what if i've got what it takes to do that it's way beyond me it's way beyond me it's my first thought and there's a few things that i want to say into those thoughts the first thing is that faith is a gift ephesians chapter 2 for by grace you've been saved through faith and this is not your own doing it's the gift of god abraham could not be proud of himself what he's done because it's a gift his only boast would have been in the lord the second thing is going back to this point this is a unique moment in history and abraham was prepared for it by the lord the lord doesn't need to prepare any of us for that he will prepare us for the faith we need for the situation we're in he will prepare us for the faith that we need for the situation we're in it's a little bit like when we look at persecuted christians today around the world or we read about them and you think oh man those in north korea or wherever you think i could never do that i'd cave in well the lord isn't asking you to do that today it's virtually impossible that we're going to be carted out into that situation tonight the lord isn't asking us to do that he'll prepare you and give you faith for the situation that you need today he's preparing each of us each day for the day for what you'll need tomorrow for what lies in store the day after that and the day after that and the day after that and lastly

[20 : 20] on this point and i think perhaps most importantly actually when we're thinking about what faith is because some many of us will feel differently about the faith that we have some of us tonight will feel zealous strong in faith many of us may have come here feeling disheartened downtrodden and weak in faith but here's the important point it is not the size or the strength of your faith that matters you do know that right i'll say that again it is not the size or the strength of your faith that matters and don't we often beat ourselves up about that oh i just wish i had more faith remember what the lord jesus said you needed a mustard seed it's the tiniest seed the tiniest seed if i had a mustard seed in my hands now and went you'd never find it it's pathetic it's a rubbish seed if i were you read that and you think really jesus are you choosing a mustard seed if that was up to me i mean i'd have gone for the brazil it's massive the brazil why would you why did you go for the mustard seed because the point is you only need the tiny amount it's the tiny amount of faith that you need it's not the size of your strength of your faith that matters but it's the size and strength of what your faith is in the object of your faith that really counts and it's the object of your faith we have it in the lord jesus christ who surpasses all things you can have a big faith in a rotten wooden bench and you end up on your back but have a small faith in the triune god now that's a different story he's our rock and refuge that will never give way the reality is for obedience and when we think about it of course there's those big demonstrations but the reality is the important things it's actually what comes at us in the everyday it's what comes at us in the everyday it's loving your difficult boss praying for him being patient with your kids sacrificing time and energy to meet up and encourage a weak believer witnessing about jesus in the office which might be costly turning off netflix to pray when you've messed up repenting of your sins confessing to another to someone else when you really don't want to admit what you've done these are the little day to day demonstrations of obedience that we we demonstrate all the time these are the altars of our life that we need to lay down because we have mustard seed faith and we act in obedience we act in obedience so we've thought a little bit about abraham's response to the lord and so i want to move on to what to what comes afterwards which is the lord's response to abraham actually the lord's response to abraham and there's two things that that we see in this we see the lord's provision and the lord's promise the lord's provision and the lord's promise and we touched on it earlier it's right at the right at the very moment abraham holds the knife above his son when the angel of the lord calls out stops him and then we come to verse 13

what a brilliant verse just read with me verse 13 and abraham looked up looked up and 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 in the passage when he lifted up his eyes the first time abraham saw the place from afar where he was going to sacrifice his son that's verse 4 now he lifts his eyes and sees the substitute for his son the ram when he'd lifted up his eyes before he'd reached the place known as moriah now moriah means the place to see and now of course god has seen abraham which is why abraham names the place verse 14 the lord will provide yahweh the air the lord sees and of course if you were to look throughout the history of the bible this is the place where solomon built the temple and the place where the lord would be seen the lord saw the lord will provide and we know what it's pointing forward to don't we we know it points forward to the lord's provision for each one of us the provision of a substitute one who would die in our place the lord jesus god's only son the one whom he loved his only son we even saw we saw a line from psalm 2 at the beginning that points forward to the lord jesus you are my son today i have begotten you and then that that verse there we see it crop up in the new testament at jesus baptism we hear god the the heavens part and we hear god's god's voice is audible what does he say you are my beloved son with you i am well pleased on the mount of transfiguration this is my son my chosen one now in my own thinking this is just just me maybe this is true of you when i consider god's love my attention is often drawn to the lord jesus and there's nothing wrong with that it's great to think about that this is how we know what love is jesus christ laid down his life for us 1 john chapter 3 but here we get a unique picture of how the father loves you that our lack of faith our unbelief our disobedience our sin would be placed on the son whom he loves and that his anger his punishment for our sin would land on his son not on ours the picture we have earlier which i said it is it is almost a horrific thing that abraham has to sack the command to kill his own son and then we read here it points forward to actually the fact that isaac was spared for the ram but jesus actually did die jesus actually did die romans 8 he who

did not spare his son but gave him up for his all god the father really loves us he really loves us you might remember the words famous him how deep the father's love for us how rich beyond all measure but he should give his only son to make a wretch his treasure the last thing i want us to think on is the lord's promise his covenant promise and what we notice is the lord's response to abraham's faith his obedience and what we notice is there is a there is a strange a surprising perhaps intensifying and amplifying of his covenant promises if you just look from verse 16 the angel of the lord by myself i have sworn declares the lord because a very important word because you have done this and have not withheld your only son because you have done this because of abraham and now notice the intensification in verse 17 it doesn't say just i will bless you but i will surely bless you and this amplifying this ramping up carries on we might we should we need to cast our minds back to the promise in genesis 16 you might remember part of the promise was that abraham's descendants would number the stars in the heavens now in verse 17 here verse 17 here we read i will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven but it's not only that what comes next and as the sand that is on the seashore he's ramping them up and there's more your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed why end of verse 18 because you have obeyed my voice you see what the lord is saying because of what you've done abraham because of your obedience to the commands i'm ramping up the blessings to the whole of the world will be blessed the promises of god are reaffirmed and amplified previously god's covenant promises were grounded solely in his own good will and purpose but now they take on a new dimension now they're not only in the will of god but in abraham's active obedience and once again who is it pointing to it's pointing once again to the lord jesus it's all pointing to him that word offspring zera it means seed a thing that runs throughout the whole of the old testament abraham's seed and there's two ways in how that's fulfilled the church is the fulfillment of that we are descendants of abraham by faith we are the sand and the stars from many nations but we only become that through jesus christ the true seed we're all blessed through him and just like abraham we're all blessed through christ's active obedience it is his humble obedience and submission to the father's will to go to calvary to humble himself to death on a cross that secures the blessings for us in the new covenant abraham's obedience prefigures christ it is christ that defeats sin that defeats death that possesses the gate of his enemies it is christ that all the nations of the earth are blessed that we are blessed in him we have a sure and certain hope in the promises of god they have a sure and certain hope in the promises of god and so as we come in for landing this evening we've looked at a few things abraham's response of faith and obedience to the lord's voice and perhaps surprisingly the lord's response to abraham we began by talking about faith and what does that mean for us what does all this mean for us today i think it's we need to remember when we think about god's promises that from the time of christ we have seen many of the promises fulfilled we live in what's often called a now and not yet time of fulfillment we live in the now time of fulfillment jesus is reigning on the throne right now his kingdom has come it has started it has been inaugurated it's at hand but we also live in a time where we're waiting for it to come to its fruition to be completed we live in an in-between moment and now and in not yet period of fulfillment in the same way that abraham took hold of the covenant promises by faith we must do the same for the promises we await at the completion when jesus returns we must take hold of them in the difficulties of life when we're tempted to doubt and sometimes it doesn't feel like jesus is reigning whether it's illness or just stuff that's going on in our lives when we see corruption and sickness when we're weary and weak and feel the pressures of life we look back to what god has done in christ in order to look forward with the eyes of faith god did keep his promises to abraham jesus did suffer on the cross for you and has been raised in your life you can look at that and also remind of yourself of his past faithfulness to you in your own life as you look forward at what lies ahead he'll never leave you or forsake you he is your shepherd he is your refuge and strength your high tower he approves of you isn't that marvellous the king the whole world approves of you he'll never turn you away he'll never be snatched out of his hand he will share in his glory i could go on all night there is an abundance of promises that we await beyond our comprehension we look false there is no small print in the covenant promises of god there's no small print god really does love you and nothing will ever separate you from him that is a promise that you can depend on something that you can have faith in you can put full weight on it won't be like my bench that was rotten it will always hold up let's pray almighty god we praise you for what you've done in our lives and we thank you for the gift of faith we thank you that you've worked in our hearts and helped us to trust you believe in you and

there's nothing in you that we can boast we can only there's nothing in ourselves that we can boast of we can only boast in you and so we thank you for giving us faith and we pray that you would remind us each and every day of the things that you've done in history the ways that you've fulfilled your covenant promises and we are waiting for the completion of that we pray that you'd keep us from doubt and discouragement and that you'd encourage us each day in the word in the scriptures that you'd put good brothers and sisters in Christ around us who can be there to remind us of the truth of the gospel and encourage us in the things that we find trouble in so bless as we pray keep this word close to our hearts and help us to live and work for you this week so we ask for all this thank you