

The Test of Faith

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[0 : 00] I'd like you to open your Bibles to Genesis chapter 22. It's found on page 17 in the Old Testament section of your pure Bibles, the left section of the Bible, page 17.

And we spend our time looking at verses 1 to 19 of Genesis 22. Now I need to confess this morning that I'm still feeling a little bit sleepy.

It's because when you have lots of babies in your house and it's flu season, they do get sick and we spent all of last night awake and partly in the hospital.

So if I sound boring, it's not because of the Bible. The Bible is never boring. Now I know many of us here have been Christians for a good number of years.

And it is a good thing to be a Christian for a long time. It is a lovely thing. It is a godly thing. And we must strive to belong in our Christian faith.

[1 : 17] But one of the perils, one of the dangers of being a Christian for a long time is the possibility of becoming too familiar with the Bible.

We can become too familiar with the Bible to the point that some of the stories in the Bible begin to lose their edge for us.

I spent some time in seminary where most of us believed we knew the Bible. And we got to the point sometimes when we became bored with the Bible.

We became restless with it. And we begin to desire for new and fanciful stories. You have the sense of being there, done that, give me something new.

And I need to say this morning that the story of Genesis chapter 22 is one of those stories in the Bible that we must not allow ourselves to become too familiar.

[2 : 24] This is a story that we must not allow ourselves to be too much at ease or too much comfortable with it. To the point that we lose the point of this story.

It is a story that highlights for us and for every generation of believers who will be in covenant relationship with God. The seriousness of being in covenant with the Lord God of Israel.

There is nothing trivial about being in covenant relationship with God. It is a very serious matter. God as God of the covenant keeps his covenant.

And he expects us to follow along with the covenant obligations. God is a God who in accordance with his covenant. God is a God who in accordance with his covenant blesses us.

Gives us wonderful blessings in accordance with his divine plan. In regard to his covenant. But as part of his covenant relationship. God exercises absolute claim and authority over those with whom he is in covenant.

[3 : 37] And we in response to this covenant. God is expected to live in obedience and faith toward him.

As well to receive the blessings that he gives to us out of his own initiative. And so Abraham is a case in point.

Here is Abraham. Acknowledged by the scriptures as a friend of God. We have seen from the earlier part of Genesis.

That Abraham was a man of faith. He was a man who has demonstrated great obedience to God. Great sacrifice in following the Lord God of Israel.

And of course God in accordance with his own covenant. God has blessed him with almost everything that belongs to the divine blessing. God has given him life and health.

[4 : 37] God has given him power and protection. God has given him victory and wealth. And a great future full of extraordinary promises.

And of course God in fulfillment of his promise for his son. God has given him his son Isaac. The son of his own heart. And it is through Isaac that the blessings, the promises that God has made for

the future will come to pass.

And so Isaac was very important in the plan and the covenant that God had for Israel and for all of us. And so in a sense we could say that Abraham has made it to the top of the ladder.

He is sitting pretty well. And if you want to contextualize that, Abraham lives in Shonopi. He has club membership. He is now well connected.

And life is looking good. And every winter he has enough money to go to Palm Springs or Palm Desert in the U.S. And spend some good time.

[5 : 52] And so in a sense all of this has happened because God has been faithful to his own covenant obligations. To Abraham and to you and to me. And so the critical question that fetes Abraham is this.

Will Abraham be faithful to his own covenant obligations to God as God has been? Will he fear God, love God, worship and honor Him above everything else?

Will Abraham be faithful to God, listen to the voice of God and obey God's words? Will he treat God as reliable? As trusting and trustworthy, does Abraham really believe that God will be faithful to his promises?

Will Abraham put his hope and trust in the things that God gave him rather than on God the giver? Does he truly know that above all else, the Lord is his inheritance?

Not the land, not his son Isaac and nothing else. God is his inheritance. Full final stop. What is the quality of Abraham's faith?

[7 : 10] What is the quality of his obedience? That must be tested. And God saw it necessary. And so we begin the story.

Could you read with me verses 1 and 2 of Genesis 22? After this thing, God tested Abraham and said to him, Abraham, and he said, Here am I.

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

God's command to Abraham is personal. It is sent to Abraham. It is a lonely command. It is to Abraham alone, not to Abraham and Sarah.

It is emphatic and rules out any possibility of misunderstanding. Abraham, Abraham, take your son, your only son, whom you love, go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering.

[8 : 30] It was very, very clear. Abraham, I want your son, your only son, your well-beloved son. Take him with you, go, and offer him.

And so you have the three imparities. Take him, go, and offer him as a burnt offering. No explanations given.

You and I have the benefit of knowing that this is a test. Abraham did not know. And so how did he feel about this?

The storyteller doesn't tell us. Because it is unnecessary. It is not hard for you and I to imagine how he felt.

He was distressed because of this. Because in a sense, all the promises of the future depended on Isaac for its fulfillment.

[9 : 33] And so Abraham probably was deeply distraught about this. He said, what happens is this. God is going to test you and I in our area of strength.

The thing that you love most. The thing that is most important to you. The thing that is likely going to take the place of God in your life.

The little idols and the big idols in our lives. That's where the test is going to come. Whatever thing that you think defines you and gives you your identity and your hope and your future.

May be the place that God's test will come. To determine whether God is most important to you. Or whether that is more important to you.

God will test you and I in our areas of strength and hope. And so what does Abraham do with this command? He is turned between obedience and love of God and love for his child.

[10 : 44] He was faced with the choices. Is he going to walk by faith or by sight? Is he going to walk by faith or by his feelings? Is he going to listen to the voices of people speaking in his head?

What is he going to listen to? Is he going to listen to the voice of God? Whose voice is going to win? And this reminds me, during the week I was with Dan and some other people in Europe.

And we were having our breakfast. And as we were just having our breakfast, I started hearing the voice of my spouse in my head. And I said to them, Did you guys hear your spouse's voice in your

head?

What I was actually hearing was, Felix, there is no fruit in your breakfast. Go get a bowl of fruit. So I think it's helpful, you know, Keep talking to your husband.

They will hear your voice at those moments. Just keep talking to them. It gets through. Well, I got up and got a bowl of fruit, And the voice stopped talking. So I'm sure Abraham was hearing all kinds of voices in his head.

[11 : 58] You know, Abraham, this is stupid. This is silly. Is this God really speaking to you? What is happening to you? Abraham, you're losing it. Just think of what's going to happen if you did this. The voices kept coming.

And yet, Abraham, though he was fearful, Yet was hopeful. He was trusting in God, the Lord God of Israel.

And he made the right choice. He took his son and his servant and went. We pick it up in verse 7. So as they walked, Isaac said to his father, Abraham, my father. And he said, here am I, my son. And Isaac said, Behold the fire and the wood.

But where is the lamb for a bond offering? Abraham said, God will provide himself the lamb for a bond offering, my son. So they went, both of them, together.

[13 : 00] And so what we see here is the first glimpse of Abraham's faith. Abraham has confidence in God.

He believed in God's power to fulfill his promise. If it was necessary, God will raise Isaac from the dead in order to fulfill his promise. Abraham trusted in God's character as a God who would never lie or fail to fulfill his promise.

And I think this is what faith is about. Faith is trusting in the power of God. Faith is trusting in the character of God.

As a God who would never lie. Faith is trusting in the word of God. Faith is trusting in the power of God. And of course, the other dimension of faith is acknowledging that everything that you and I have, we hold in trust for God.

God is still the owner of what he has given to you. You and I are not the owners of them. We are the stewards of God. And God has absolute right to make claims on us, on the things he has given to us, because they belong to him.

[14 : 14] And when God comes for them, we must be willing to remember that we are creatures in the sight of God. And we and all we have belong to him.

And so faith is acknowledging the power of God, the character of God, the word of God, and our own creatureliness. That our possessions finally belong to God alone.

And so far, Abraham has obeyed the first two imperatives. Take your son and go. Now he is on the mountain. And he has to face the final and fundamental imperative.

Offer your son as a sacrifice. It is easy to take and go. It is not easy to offer your son as a burnt offering.

And I think this is what Canadians mean when they say, when the rubber hits the road. At this point, the rubber has hit the road. And this is what happens to us.

[15 : 21] It is easy for us to step forward. But when the crunch comes, we are pulled backward. But Abraham will not go back.

He was not trusting in himself or anybody else. He was trusting in the Lord God of Israel. The God who never fails. He bound his son and raised his knife to slaughter his son before God.

And the angel of the Lord stopped him. You see, and so what we see here is that step by step, faith and hope triumphed over fear and doubt. Abraham, by doing what he has done, has demonstrated his willingness to put God's call and God's command above every other commitment.

And above every emotional attachment. And at that moment, the test ended. That was all God was looking for. Is Abraham going to consider God more important than all his emotional attachments to whatever sin that God has given to him?

Who is Lord, who is God in the life of Abraham. And Abraham proved that God was indeed the Lord. And so the Bible says that Abraham fears God.

[16 : 50] And to fear God in the Bible, especially in this chapter, is to believe the word of God. Is to totally and fully and absolutely believe God's word.

And to be loyal to God. Abraham passed the test. And so God is now about to demonstrate his own faithfulness.

And he does it in two ways. The first thing he does is that God provides a substitute for Isaac. Isaac was to be killed on the altar.

But God gave a substitute for him. He was released. And so what we see here is the principle of substitutionary salvation.

The principle of substitutionary salvation. And what God is saying here to us in this symbolism. Is that the time will come when somebody is going to be sacrificed on that altar.

[18:00] We see a foreshadowing of the supreme lamb of God. The one who will be our substitute. Jesus Christ of Nazareth. God is Jehovah Jireh.

He will provide. And he did indeed provide for Abraham. And secondly God blesses Abraham. Verses 16 and 18.

The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said. By myself I have sworn says the Lord. Because you have done this.

I have not withheld your son. Your only son. I will indeed bless you. I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven. And as the sand which is on the seashore.

And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. And by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves. Because you have obeyed my voice.

[19:00] These are the last words spoken by God to Abraham in the book of Genesis. And what God is saying here to Abraham is this.

As a result of your faithful obedience. The obedience of faith. The status of the promises are now changed. See God has already made these promises in the past.

But now there is a change at this point in time. God swears. God turns the promises into sworn guarantees.

They are not just simply promises anymore. God has now sworn by himself that these promises must surely come to pass. And so God's plan of salvation is set.

Nothing will stop it. Because of Abraham's faithful obedience. Let me conclude by making two applications this morning.

[20:02] First of all, God will test your faith. God will test your faith. If you are a believer.

If you are a believer and in covenant relationship with God. God will test the genuineness of your faith and your commitment to him. Peter the apostle was tested.

Jesus the son of God was tested. Paul the apostle was tested. You will be tested. I will be tested. I will be tested. And we as a congregation will also be tested as a congregation.

What is the quality of our faith as a congregation? And when the test comes, the test is going to be around the things that we think define our identity.

Around the things that we are emotionally attached to. Around the things that we have legitimate claims over. Those are the areas the test will come.

[21:07] And I need to say to us as a congregation. And as individuals. We are being tested. We will be tested.

And the test is not over yet. And our faith is going to be seen as genuine or not.

And the question will be, what is most important to us as a congregation? Is it our commitment to Christ? Or is it our commitment to our buildings?

What is most important for us and to us? Is it our facilities? Is that the most important thing? Is that more important than faithfulness to God?

Is it our attachment to the things around here? Are those things more important than our commitment to faithful obedience to Jesus Christ? God will test us in the areas of things that we think define our identity and our position in modern society.

[22:15] And so true faith will not be empty words or decisions. True faith will cost us something. True faith does not shift allegiance from God to the gifts and promises of God.

Rather, it surrenders everything to the God who knows all things and who is all-powerful and all-loving. Like Abraham, true faith is willing to give everything to God, even if it's your child or your promises, your future.

Everything will be given to God by true faith. It clings to nothing else except to God alone. When we have everything except God, we have nothing.

But when we have nothing except God, we have everything. That is true faith. And for the sake of Jesus Christ and his kingdom and his gospel, we too will be made to make sacrifices.

We'll be called. It will involve our money and our time and our status and reputation. It will involve our family and our plans and desires for the present and for the future.

[23 : 33] And it may even involve our own very lives and pleasures. God may want your life for the sake of his kingdom. He has done that many times.

And we must be willing to give up everything for him. Is your faith like the faith of Abraham? It is a faith that calls for conscious, non-passive bending of my human will to the will of God.

And God will give us grace when the test comes, even as the test continues. Finally, God has provided a sacrificial lamb, the substitute.

So this story is not just about great faith. But this story presents to us a prophetic foreshadowing of God's sacrificial gift of his own son.

It is a prophetic picture of what God was going to do in the future. And so we find here that Abraham was willing to sacrifice his own son, his only son, his only beloved son.

[24 : 48] And he did not. And now for some of us who may be scandalized by this story, I need to say to us this morning, that what God commanded Abraham to do, which he did not do eventually, God himself did.

God was not only willing to give his own son as a substitute, but God indeed gave his one and only beloved son to die on the cross as our substitute.

That through him the blessing of Abraham will come to all of us. Jesus himself, just like Isaac, submitted himself to the will of the Father.

And through him, God has provided a substitute. You and I do not need to die for our sins anymore. Jesus has taken your place. Jesus has taken my place. In order for you and I to be freed from the punishment and penalty of our sins.

[25 : 58] And through Jesus Christ, the fullness of the blessings of Abraham, the fullness of the blessings of the covenant, are for us. And we can have access to them.

Jesus is your substitute. He has died for you. You do not need to die for your sin. It is finished. It is done.

Amen. I invite you this morning to receive God's substitute, Jesus of Nazareth. And receive the fullness of God's blessings. Forgiveness of sin.

Eternal life. And friendship with God forever. Amen.