

Abraham's Ultimate Test

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Date: 05 November 2017

Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[0 : 00] Let's turn again for a little to the chapter we read in Genesis chapter 22. And while we're looking at this section, if we could home in on verses 7 and 8.

And Isaac said to his father Abraham, My father, and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for 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. Now without a shadow of doubt, this is one of the most awesome chapters in the Bible.

And actually it's a chapter that I've never preached from before. Without an understanding of just what it is that God is doing, without the faith to really grasp and without a Bible knowledge, it would seem a really, really, you would almost say bizarre, a horrific request that God is asking of Abraham.

Abraham. He's asking him to take his son, and it says only son in the sense that, remember, Ishmael had been cast out. So there is only Isaac in the family, or left at home.

[1 : 29] Take the son, the son of your promise, the son of promise, and take him and sacrifice him. But as I say, without our understanding of Bible knowledge, and what it is that God is actually doing, because God is not just testing Abraham's faith, yet that was a very powerful and vital part of it.

But God was teaching Abraham, and teaching future generations, and teaching us what he, God himself, the Father, has done with his son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And if we take Jesus out of this, we don't understand this chapter. As has been wisely said, the Old Testament is God's picture book, where in very powerful narratives and experiences, God is showing us so much of what he is doing and has done in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So it's absolutely essential that we hold Christ with us as we look at this particular chapter. You see, Abraham would have understood all about child sacrifice, because that happened.

That was part of, and sadly, it was part of culture. And it was one of the things that God counted an absolute abomination. So that is why we have to understand, actually, what is happening.

[2 : 57] It was one of the reasons that judgment was being brought upon these nations roundabout, because they practiced child sacrifice. And in fact, when Israel turned their back upon God and began to go follow the ways of the nations roundabout, one of the things that, unbelievably, became introduced into the worship in Israel, where they mingled the worship of God with all the worship of all the other idols roundabout, they began sacrificing their own children.

And God said that was one of the reasons that he said, I'm going to expel you out of your own land. You're going to be taken into captivity. And one of the reasons was for doing that, because it's abhorrent to God, that very idea of child sacrifice.

So we have to understand that. And at the end of the day, as we know, Abraham didn't actually, although God counted it as if he had done. But God is teaching the church right down through the generations what he did with his own son Jesus for us.

So as I say, that's why we always have to hold that picture with us, or else we don't understand what Genesis 22 is about. Now it tells us, at the beginning of the chapter, it says this, after these things God tested Abraham.

So we say, after what things? Well, basically, everything that went beforehand. All that happened in Abraham's life. And we've got to remember that if we go back to chapter 12, God came to Abraham and he said to Abraham, get up out of your land.

[4 : 43] It was a very stark command. Get up. Leave everything. Leave your ways. Leave your culture. Leave your idolatry. Leave your family.

Leave everything. And get up. And go out and follow me. And I will take you to our land. And I'll show you where you're going. I'll show you when you get there.

It's quite extraordinary. That's why it says in Hebrews that Abraham went out not knowing where he was going. It's quite an extraordinary. That is faith. You imagine if the flitting van was outside your house and people said, Oh, you're moving, guys.

Where are you going? I don't know. People would be scratching their head and they'd say, You mean you're flitting and you don't know where you're going? Well, that's what Abraham would have had to say as he was gathering up his tents and gathering up everything and heading off.

And people would say, Where are you going, Abraham? I don't know. But God is going to show me. Because that's all that the Lord had promised. He said, I will show you. So that is really, when you think about it, it's quite extraordinary faith.

[5 : 52] And when it tells us here that after these things God tested Abraham, to a certain extent, the whole of Abraham's life was a test. It was one. We've been going through his life.

It's been one test after another. Chapter 12. He moves out and he lands in, ends up with a famine. And then there comes a family dispute.

Remember with Lot. Not that Abraham was disputing with Lot, but the herdsmen were disputing.

And we saw how gracious Abraham was in that. And he didn't want a family feud.

And he was the one who took the initiative. And he was the one who put himself out in order that there wouldn't be a family feud. You just see what a great man of grace he was.

And of course, he gave Lot the choice of where to go. Abraham had to fight. Abraham had to struggle. There were a lot of tests along the way. And all the time hanging over it was this promise of a son.

[6 : 51] And year after year after year it came. And as we saw last time, yes, he had a son that he had bore with a servant girl, Hagar. But that's Hagar and the son had to go.

And it broke Abraham's heart. But then, of course, Isaac, the son, the son of the spirit, the son of promise, the son of faith, had come.

And so, we find that God tests Abraham. Now, testing is absolutely essential in life. It's one of the things when you go through school, you have tests.

Or college or university or an apprenticeship. Or whatever you're doing, there are always tests.

Tests are to discover how you're getting on. What you've learned. What you know.

What you don't know. It's an essential part of life. And so it is in the Christian faith. God tests us to discover a lot about ourselves.

[7 : 47] And to discover a lot about himself. That is the purpose of God's testing. In order that we will grow and develop and come to a greater knowledge of him. And a greater trust in him.

But also a greater discovery of ourselves. Just who we really are. And so testing is an essential part of life and indeed of Christian life.

If you have some translations, they will say that God tempted Abraham. But that word tempt is, it's the correct translation, is tested.

God doesn't tempt anybody to evil. Satan does. Satan tempts us towards evil in order to destroy us. God tests us in order that we will discover, as we said, more about ourselves and more about himself.

So God had come to Abraham and he told him what he had to do. Verse 2. Take your son, your only son. That is because the only son that's there.

[8 : 54] 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 will tell you. It really is quite an extraordinary command.

And when, I can't even begin to imagine what Abraham felt at that particular moment. Because here is, Abraham had waited and waited and waited and Sarah had waited and waited and waited for this son.

To the point where Sarah had become too old, naturally, to become a mother. Abraham had become too old to father a child. They had reached that stage so that God had to re-empower them.

And of course, as we saw that, as we've seen that, it's a picture of the whole work of salvation. And of how, when you spiritualize the whole thing, of being born again and such like.

But here is this amazing moment. And the language that the Lord uses here is really the same as he said, as he had back in chapter 12.

[10:01] Here am I. And he said, take your son, your only son whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. Same thing as he said back in chapter 12.

Go to. Leave here and go to. And when God had come to Abraham first in chapter 12. God was saying to Abraham, I'm calling you out and you have to relinquish all your past.

Now that is a huge, huge ask. Can you imagine what it is if you had to just get up and relinquish everything that all your comfort zones and everything that you're used to, everything you're familiar with, everything that you do in your normal day life, and a complete change just like that.

That's tough. But that's what God asked Abraham to do. But now he's coming using the same language, and he's really saying to Abraham, I'm asking you to relinquish your future.

Because Abraham's future was all caught up in his son Isaac, the son of the promise. The son that God had said he was going to bless and eventually bless all the nations of this world through that son.

[11:19] And he's saying, take him and sacrifice him. And he's saying, take him and sacrifice him. And he's saying, take him and sacrifice him. So it's here that really you see Abraham's faith is quite astonishing. We've looked at Abraham and, yes, he had his blips and he had his failures.

But he had the most extraordinary faith in God. No wonder he's called the father of the faithful. This deep lying trust in God. And so we find that Abraham does just exactly as what God commanded.

And that really is what faith is. Faith is taking God at his word. Faith is laying hold upon the promises of God. Or we should actually say the God of the promises.

Because, you know, so often when things come into our lives and when God's testings and when the providence of God is hard against us, very often we say, oh, come on, what's happening here? Why me? What's going on? And, you know, if you're a Christian, I believe it's one of the things, you see, we go through a process. Sometimes we question our faith.

[12:34] Sometimes we even question God. And we're saying, God, do you know what's happening here? As if God didn't. But sometimes, particularly if it's really traumatic and really painful, and sometimes we're just in this cloud of total uncertainty, pain, grief, emotions running all over.

We question everything. And we question God. But the Lord will often allow us through a process. God is patient with us. He just becomes saying, what are you doing?

How dare you question? Because he knows we're human. He knows we're frail. Frail man, God often says that. He understands we are human.

But he takes us through a process of working. So that we begin to come to a place where we discover, oh, yeah, God is in control. God knows exactly what he's doing.

I might not know the whys and the whiffers and what on earth is going on. I'm bewildered by all this. But I've come to a place and a point where I know, even when I don't know, that God knows.

[13:48] And that's where Abraham was here. He couldn't work out the whys and the whiffers and what he was being asked to do. But he knew that God knew. And his trust is implicit in God.

And so, as we follow this narrative, and as I say, we have to follow this with our eyes upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because we've got to remember, the New Testament tells us that Abraham saw the day of Christ and rejoiced. Jesus said that. Jesus tells us that in John's Gospel.

Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day. He saw it and he was glad. So, Abraham, by faith, was brought to see the Messiah, brought to see the day of Jesus.

So, if we keep the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in our thinking, in our minds here, we find that Abraham and Isaac here, that Isaac really is a type of Christ.

[14:54] And you say, well, what's a type? Well, a type, the dictionary says a type, is a person or a thing exemplifying the ideal. The ideal, of course, is Jesus Christ.

The type is the one who is pointing to or by what is happening, showing. So, it's a person or a thing. An example of that is the Passover.

The Passover that Israel had to keep every year where the lamb was slain and the blood was put upon the door and the angel of death passed over.

Remember that? They celebrated that every year. And it was pointing to Jesus as the lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. So, that is a type. Well, here we have again what is a type.

And there are lots of types in the Old Testament like Joseph and David, certain aspects of their life and things that they haven't. Anyway, we're told here that Abraham went right away.

[15:57] But he didn't arrive until it was the third day. So, you can imagine, here they are, they're traveling. It's taking time. Abraham responds immediately.

But the sacrifice isn't immediate because there's a good bit of traveling. Three days later. Can you imagine the Father's heart all that way?

So that there's this determined proposition. There is this determined action that this is what's going to take place.

And all the time, this is in the mind. Just like the Passover, the lamb was chosen. Remember, it was a lamb without blemish. Ten days before.

It was on the, sorry, not the ten days, but four days before. On the tenth day, the lamb was chosen. On the fourteenth day, it was slain. And so it was with the Lord Jesus Christ.

[16:53] What happened to Jesus on Calvary wasn't something random. It wasn't just the matter that some of the Jewish leaders and some of the religious leaders and some of the people that they so turned against Jesus and out of envy and hatred of him, they put him to death.

Yes, from a human point, that is exactly what happened. But Jesus knew what was happening. He went deliberately to Jerusalem.

On the way to Jerusalem to die, he told the disciples what's going to happen. And it tells us, actually, in one of the Gospels, that he set his face like a flint. Now, if you set your face like a flint, and if you looked at somebody whose face was set like a flint, you would see an absolute determination written all over their face.

And that's how it was with Jesus. Because what he was going to do was horrific. And he knew it was awful. But there was this determination, and it was all keeping to a timetable.

Because we're told that Jesus came in the fullness of time. And when was he put to death? He was put to death at the Passover. The type which had been right throughout the generations pointing to what he would do.

[18:11] And when he came, he was put to death at the Passover. And then again, we find that Abraham and Isaac separate themselves from the two young men.

We find that the men saw Abraham put the wood of the sacrifice on Isaac's back. And again, you cannot but see the Lord Jesus Christ carrying the cross.

This is the wood that Isaac was going to be tied to on top of the altar, on top of the mountain. And he was the one carrying the wood up the mountain, just in the very same way as Jesus was to carry the wood that he was to be put to death and sacrificed on up the mountain.

But Isaac and Abraham were separated from the two men, the two men that were there to help them. So these two men saw everything going on until there was a cut-off point.

And they weren't permitted to see what was happening with Abraham and Isaac. That was something that was between themselves. And it was exactly the same with the Lord Jesus Christ.

[19:24] Everything was so public with regard to his death. Everybody saw it. Everybody saw him being crucified. But what they didn't see was the private transaction that was taking place between father and son.

Because on that cross, there was a transaction taking place as Jesus was being sacrificed. All the horror of the cross, the deepest horror, wasn't seen by any other eye.

Because on the cross, Jesus was plunged into all the wrath and the anger of God for sin. God's righteous indignation and anger against sin was poured upon Jesus.

And Jesus on the cross was presenting his own obedience, his own merit to the father. And the father was accepting it.

This is what was going on in these hours of darkness on the cross. Where Jesus had cried out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Nobody could see what was actually taking place.

[20:37] No eye could see it. It was like at the Day of Atonement. Remember how that one day in the year, the high priest went in with the blood of the sacrifice into the most holy place. And he sprinkled the blood on the altar.

On the Ark of the Covenant, I should say. Nobody saw that. Nobody was permitted in there except the high priest and that on that great day. And the congregation waited outside to see if God would accept that sacrifice.

And the return of the high priest meant that God had accepted it. And that's exactly what is happening here as Jesus, he is making, at that particular point, this is where he is dealing with our sin and where he is presenting his own blood before the father.

So again, we've always got to remember this part of it. And then when we find that Abraham and Isaac reached the top, we find that Isaac is asking, he's saying, look, where's the lamb for the burnt offering?

And Abraham said, God will provide. And when they come to the place where God had told him, Abraham built the altar there, laid the wood on order, and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar on top of the wood.

[21 : 52] Now we've got to remember that Isaac wasn't just a little child at this point. He would have possibly been a teenager or so on. So there is no doubt whatever, that it wasn't by brute force that Abraham overpowered and wrestled and maybe knocked his son out and then tied him.

It wasn't that. There is no question whatever, but that Isaac acquiesced, that Isaac agreed to the will of the father. And that there must have been great faith on the part of Isaac as well.

Although it would have been incredibly difficult. And here again is a picture of father and son, of God the father and God the son. Because however horrific what Jesus had to go through, and let us remember that in the garden of Gethsemane, at the prospect of what lay before him in a wee while, he was sweating, as it were, drops of blood.

The ferocity of the anxiety, of the pain, the terror that was building up, brewing up in his heart. He was saying, Oh, father, if it's possible, let this cup pass from me.

But then he would say, But not my will, but your will be done. And that's why in the psalm it says, To do your will, I take delight. The overriding part of Jesus, all the time, was to do the will of the father.

[23 : 18] However difficult that was, and it was. And so we find that Isaac becomes the sacrifice.

And again, what we see here is that only God the father can choose what the sacrifice will be.

God alone, we've got to remember this, as God is going to deal with us, because remember, when God made us, he made us perfect. He made us so that we'd be, we're sinless.

We're with him all the time. We're enjoying his company. There's no barriers. There's no wrongdoing. Everything in the, as we use the expression, everything in the garden is rosy. And it was in Eden until the fall.

Then it all went wrong. And from that moment, we were on the run from God. And we didn't want God. Because all of a sudden, everything's become distorted. And what, there's a twistedness within us.

There's a rebellion. God says, I'm going to take people back to myself. And there's only one way. There's only, somebody has to come and stand for them, represent them.

[24 : 38] Now, there is nobody who has sufficient worth or merit to go to God and say, well, I'll stand in the place of others. Because our own sin disqualifies us from doing that for anybody.

And the bottom line is that only God could stand in our place. but God cannot stand in our place as God because we are men and women and boys and girls.

So that is why God took the Son of God, the second person of the Godhead, took human nature. And that's what the incarnation is all about.

The whole mystery of it where Jesus took human nature with his divine nature in the one person. It's a mystery.

that's what he did. God became man to stand in our room and in our stead. It's quite extraordinary. And so we find now Isaac is laid on the altar and the time has come and Abraham lifts the knife to kill his son.

[25 : 45] And let us remember this. This is where Abraham's faith is so amazing. Abraham, we're told if we go to the New Testament, believed believed so powerfully in the promise of God, he believed that God was going to raise Isaac from the dead because he believed that God's promise was in Isaac.

And it tells us that. That was Abraham's faith. But it was going to be a burnt offering which means that he wasn't just going to kill his son but burn it up. The burnt offering was a complete holocaust, a complete burning of everything.

He believed that God would raise his son from that. That was the most astonishing faith. And that's why Abraham is so commended in the Bible. So he took the knife and he was ready to kill his son believing God would raise him up again.

The voice came from heaven. Abraham, Abraham, don't do it. Now I know. I know that you truly fear me. That you didn't withhold even your own son.

And you see that so many people highlight this and it's so true. When we follow through with Jesus, God the Father had, there were occasions from heaven when God acknowledged his son, this is my beloved son.

[27 : 13] They would hear the voice from heaven. But when the knife was held above Jesus on the cross or just before he was nailed to the cross, all that came from heaven was silence.

No voice saying, hold back the knife. The son was slain and all the fires consumed his soul.

And he did that for you and for me. That is why God's love is so great. You know, people sometimes question, what did God really do?

That's what he did. He didn't withhold his own son but he gave him up for us. And you know, if we were to follow this maybe minutely, we see what God is doing.

Because it tells us if we move further on that this mountain or this range of mountains or hills as they were in Moriah, it tells us if we go to verse 14, you see what it says here and it's beautiful.

[28 : 21] So Abraham called the name of that place and time is going. We saw if we'd followed through when Abraham had to sacrifice but he sacrificed this ram that was caught by the horns in the thicket.

Read about that in verse 13. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. There's just so much more we could look at here. But verse 14, 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. If we go to 2 Chronicles chapter 3, this is what it says.

Then Solomon began to build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah. On Mount Moriah. God said to Abraham take your son take him to Mount Moriah and offer him up.

Then we move on down the generations and here's the place where God's presence and where the temple is to be built and where the sacrifice is to be made all pointing to Jesus Christ.

[29 : 36] But if you move on hurtling down through the generations and we come to the time of Christ again it was into Jerusalem Jesus had to come Mount Moriah and there's a range of hills all around there part of this range of Moriah and there's no doubt that one of these little hills was Calvary and where Jesus was put to death where he carried the wood up where he himself was put to death.

So that's why I said at the beginning it's only as we look and focus upon Jesus that we can understand what God was doing way way way back teaching people and that's how Old Testament believers were saved but they were saved by trusting in the Jesus in the Messiah in the Son of God who was to come we are saved by trusting in the Jesus who has come God has done everything for us no wonder the hymn writer calls it love so amazing love divine because that's what it is and you ask today that that love will be made personally real into your own heart and into your own soul so that you will know yourself personally just what it is that Jesus did he did everything as the old man said he die me no die and that's exactly how it is you ask that his death and all that that involved will be made over to you let us pray oh lord we pray that as we have sat under your word today in its solemnity and also in its great hope speaking to us of the wonderful provision that you have made for us in Jesus

Christ we pray that our hearts may truly rejoice and that we may be glad in what you have done for us in the way of salvation lord may these things not be lost upon us but may they go in deep may they affect our lives and may we turn to yourself lord bless us and take us all home safely bless a cup of tea coffee in the hall after and we pray that you will be with us be with Reverend James at the evening service tonight and with the fellowship we pray to bless Sally in the YM in the bay head tonight as he speaks and that you will be with all your people watch over us and take away your sin in Jesus name amen we're going to conclude singing in psalm 68 this is from the Scottish Psalter psalm number 68 page 303 psalm psalm 68 21 homo verseelle overe■

Packed vimos v verale Ye mountains high. This is a hill where God desires to dwell. Yea, God in it, for he will make abode.

God's chariots, 20,000 are, thousands of angels strong. Its holy place God is, as in Mount Sinai, them among. Thou hast, O Lord, most glorious, ascended up on high, and in triumph victorious led, captive, captivity, and so on.

[33 : 19] 16 to 18, to God's praise. Why do ye lilly mountains high?

This is a hill where God. It's a good well-being garden, for he will make abode.

For he will make abode. For he will make abode.

These are to dwell, yea, God in it, for he will make abode. God's chariots, 20,000 are, thousands of angels strong.

And holy place God is, as in Mount Sinai, them among. And holy place God is, as in Mount Sinai, them among.

[34 : 39] And holy place God is, as in Mount Sinai, them among.

God is, as in Mount Sinai, them among. God is, as in Mount Sinai, them among.

God is, as in Mount Sinai, them among. God is, as in Mount Sinai, them among.

God is, as in Mount Sinai, them among. God did not do the teeth.

Though God's received the gifts for men, for such as to prevail, yea, if more than the God the Lord in midst of them I dwell.

[35 : 52] In midst of them I dwell. In midst of them I dwell. Yea, if more than the God the Lord in midst of them I dwell.

Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you no one forevermore. Amen.