

Hebrews 11:17-22

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[0 : 00] Good morning, friends. Happy Father's Day. Our text this morning is Hebrews 11, verses 17 through 22.

So let me invite you to turn there. It's page 1008 in the Pew Bible, if you want to follow along there. Hebrews 11, looking at verses 17 through 22. We've been walking through Hebrews 11 this month, if you've been with us, and we've been considering this great biblical theme of faith.

And this morning we come back again to the figure of Abraham. Let me read this text for us, Hebrews 11, 17 through 22. By faith, Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac.

And he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, through Isaac shall your offspring be named. He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

By faith, Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. By faith, Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. By faith, Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave direction concerning his bones.

[1 : 23] Let's pray together as we consider God's word. Our Father, we do ask that this morning you would be present among us mightily by your spirit as we come to hear and to heed your word.

Lord, we thank you for this opportunity that we have to gather around your ever-living and clear word and to be addressed by you once again as we consider its message.

Lord, we pray that our faith would be strengthened as a result of what you're speaking to us here this morning. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I think you'll agree that testing can often be a good thing.

For example, when I step onto an airplane, I'm glad that there are engineers who spend countless hours testing the equipment on board before we go rocketing off the runway.

Nobody wants to hear, ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking, we've just reached a cruising altitude of 39,000 feet and no one's tested this landing gear since 2005.

[2 : 38] Have a nice flight. In that case, certainly testing is a good thing, right? I had the chance recently to see a report that a friend gave at an engineering conference about that very thing, testing the reliability and durability of aviation parts.

That's sort of what his job is. And the report just had all these sort of cool charts and abbreviations, and of course I understood at best half of what I was looking at, but I was glad that this sort of testing was taking place, because at the end of the day, people's lives are depending on it.

And because of that, I think that today we expect things to be tested, don't we? We expect everything from airplanes to lifeguards, even the foods we eat.

We expect them to be tested. And what our passage this morning is telling us is that the same thing is true of our faith.

That we can and should expect it to be tested. And that that's a good thing, because at the end of the day, our spiritual lives are depending on it.

[3 : 46] So this morning I want to look at three things in the text before us. I want to look at first, how our faith gets tested. And then second, I want us to see how our faith can be deepened as a result.

And then third, we're going to look at the legacy that such a faith produces. So testing, deepening, and the legacy of faith. And we see all this through the lens and the example of Abraham.

That God tests our faith in order to deepen our faith, which in turn produces a legacy of faith. So let's look first then at faith's testing. We see this in the first two verses of our passage, in verses 17 through 18.

By faith, Abraham, when he was tested. Offered up, Isaac. Now here, Hebrews is referring to the story that we read earlier in the service from Genesis 22.

And as you go back and look at Genesis 22, you realize that in the previous chapter of Genesis, Abraham and Sarah, as we thought about last week, in their old age, finally received the child that God had promised.

[4 : 55] That's Genesis 21. And if you look before that, we see that Abraham and Sarah both laughed in disbelief when God told them that they would have a son. A child born to a man and woman in their 90s.

Impossible. And they laughed with that bitter and sad laugh that we often laugh. But when the son was born, they named him just that.

Isaac, which literally means he laughs. And it was a sign that their disbelief had been turned into joy.

That God had taken their disbelief and turned it into laughter. A sign that God had fulfilled his promise. And I'm sure that Abraham and Sarah thought that this was the climax that they had waited for.

That Isaac's birth would be the happily ever after of their story. And as we read the narrative in Genesis, we almost think the same thing. Here is the child after so many years of waiting, after so many years of trusting and then doubting and then trusting again.

[6 : 04] Finally, Abraham and Sarah's story is coming to a close. A baby in their arms, laughter in their hearts, God's plan moving forward. But God isn't finished with Abraham.

The boy grows and God has one last test for him. Take your son, God says, 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.

Here is Abraham's faith put to the deepest test. Would he trust God and his promises, even if it meant offering up to God the thing he loved most?

The thing, the one he had waited his whole life for? His joy, his laughter, his only son. Now today we read this story and we think, how could a good God ask such a thing?

To us, this command strikes us as irrational, even contradictory. And for some, this episode in Abraham's life is proof that what we call faith simply flies in the face of reason and justice.

[7 : 27] That faith, in essence, is irrational. And yet when we look at the story in its historical context, we see something quite different.

As a number of Hebrew scholars and other writers have pointed out, what makes no sense to us would have actually made total sense to Abraham. And here's why.

Because in Abraham's culture, the firstborn son, you see, was everything. The firstborn son was the inheritor of the property.

He was the future head of the household. He was the one on whom everything rested. The fortune, the status, the future of the family. It all rode with him.

You see, in that culture, the firstborn symbolically stood for everyone. And that's why, as the story of the Bible unfolds, and God confronts Israel's sinfulness, he says that the lives of all the firstborn are his.

[8 : 35] Now, we see that God provides a way for them, for the firstborn sons, to be redeemed through sacrifice, to be ransomed by a payment. You see that in Exodus and in Numbers. But, by demanding the firstborn of the Israelites, by saying that their lives were forfeit, God was saying, God was communicating in that culture, that every family owes a total debt to eternal justice.

The debt of our sin. So, when God tells Abraham to offer Isaac, to Abraham it would have made sense.

Not only is God the sovereign creator who has complete rights over his creation, but God is also holy. And what the debt of sin demands is utterly everything.

Now, of course, this understanding doesn't minimize the gut-wrenching nature of what God was asking Abraham.

And we have to realize as well that Abraham has a unique role in redemptive history. None of us will be asked to literally offer up our firstborn sons as a sacrifice.

[9 : 53] But, indeed, there will be times when our faith is tested at what seems to us to be the root of our joy.

When the circumstances that God allows in our lives, or even when the clear commands that God has given us in Scripture, will challenge our trust in God and his promises.

Will challenge us to make God himself our joy more than any other thing. Perhaps for you it's circumstances that God has allowed.

Maybe you'd spent hours at work week after week, perhaps even years, getting the right degrees for the job in the first place. You'd been successful gaining the respect of your peers. Your career seemed like the perfect fit for your gifts.

And it had even been a platform for useful ministry. You started to see how God was using you as salt and light, not just in the workplace, but even out in the culture. And your friends at work were starting to show real interest in the gospel.

[10:57] Your career had become a great source of joy. Even a venue of honoring God. And then in a day, it's all gone. You're called into your supervisor's office.

And let go on the spot. And in this circumstance that God has allowed, your faith is being put to the test.

Like a piece of metal being thrust into the furnace. Whom will you trust? Maybe for you it's not the supervisor's office, but maybe it's the principal's office.

Your son, your daughter is in deep water. Even after all the hopes and all the prayers and all the late nights. Or if it's not the principal's office, maybe it's the doctor's office.

And the look on the nurse's face tells you that the news isn't good. And suddenly, whether it's cancer or kids or career or whatever, suddenly dreams are being stripped away.

[12:02] Plans are being dashed. Joys are being stolen. And through it all, God is beckoning you to trust him and his promises.

And to find joy in him more than in anything else. But it's not just through circumstances that our faith in God is tested, isn't it? It's often through God's commands.

Abraham was a unique example of this. Unique because the command he received wasn't meant to be repeated. But still an example because there are commands that God does intend for all of us that still challenge us in similar ways.

Aren't there? Think about God's command to be generous with our money. Especially toward the orphan and the widow and the poor and the downcast. Friends, the picture the New Testament gives us is of sacrificial giving.

A level of giving that would change the level of our lifestyle. That we would forego certain comforts. We would forego a certain size house. Or we would forego a certain brand of clothes.

[13:03] Or we would forego a certain make of car. Certain things that the world says our income should afford us. That we would actually live under, beneath our means.

In order to give more away. And if we take that command, that principle seriously. It will test our trust in God and in God's promises.

Will he be a greater joy to us than the comforts that money can buy? Or think about what God has to say about our relationships. If someone wrongs you for the 70th time and again asks for forgiveness, you must forgive them, Jesus says.

Don't seek to pay them back and do to them what they did to you. Don't cut them down and trash them in front of other people, even your most private friends. Don't even nurse a grudge in your heart and secretly dislike them in your thoughts.

Or secretly wish that they'd get what's coming to them. No, refuse all that, Jesus says. And in so doing, forgive. That's a command that will challenge your trust.

[14:18] Will you trust God and his promises more than you cherish the idea of getting back at someone?

Of nursing a grudge? Of holding it over them? Will you relinquish the control that you think you have? Or the right that you think you have?

To take hold of God more fully? So it's not just circumstances that God will use to test our faith, but his commands as well.

And both will try our trust. And the question is, how will we respond? The question isn't whether such tests will come.

Friends, they will come. God loves us too much to allow us to go unrefined. The question is, in the midst of testing, what will we do? And that leads us to our second point.

[15 : 22] Verses 17 and 18 show us faith's testing. But in verse 19, we see faith's deepening. What is it that allowed Abraham to willingly raise the knife?

The answer our text gives to that question is about as surprising to us today as the demand itself. We're told in verse 19 that Abraham considered.

That is, he reasoned. He didn't stop using his mind when his faith came under pressure. He started using it, and even harder, perhaps, than he ever had before.

You know, we often think that faith and reason are enemies, when in fact, biblically speaking, they're partners, they're friends. We're told that faith and reason are like oil and water, when in fact, they're more like the two strands of the DNA, of the double helix.

They spin together, supporting one another in beauty. So what in faith does Abraham begin to reason?

[16 : 32] Hebrews says that God was able even to raise Isaac from the dead. Hebrews is making explicit what was actually right there in the text, in Genesis 22.

Did you catch it when Susan and I were reading it for us? Genesis 22, verse 5, 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.

We will come again to you, Abraham says. He considered that God was even able to raise him from the dead, if necessary.

And I think this reasoning of Abraham must have been fed by at least two streams. And both are instructive for us in our times of testing. First, Abraham reasoned from his own experience of God's faithfulness.

I wonder if Abraham spent that sleepless night in the tent before setting out for Moriah in the morning. I wonder if Abraham was remembering the laughter that had taken place in that very tent.

[17 : 45] The laughter not just of their cynical disbelief, but also of their surprised and glad joy at what God had eventually done. And in remembering that laughter, Abraham knew.

You see, he knew from his own experience that God holds the power of life. Abraham saw God bring new life, a firstborn son, from their all but dead bodies.

Could God not bring life from death once again, even in this instance? So Abraham reasoned.

And friends, so should we. God has shown himself faithful in our lives over and over again, has he not? God has shown us.

Abraham reasoned from God's word of promise. Twice in these verses, mention is made of the promises that Abraham received.

[19 : 22] In particular, the promise that Isaac would be the one through whom his offspring would be named. Friends, can't you imagine Abraham in those moments pressing down on this promise?

Giving his whole mind to it. Running it over again and again as he considers what God has commanded him to do. Sacrifice your only son.

And yet, through Isaac shall your offspring be named. And do you see him as he pushes hard on the promise? Can you see the thoughts beginning to form?

The light beginning to shine. The logic beginning to fall into place. If Isaac will be the bearer of the promise. And if God is God. Then somehow, God will make sure he lives.

Even if it means raising him from the dead. Friends, in our time of testing. We too must press hard on God's promises.

[20 : 28] That is how testing deepens faith. Like roots of a tree that search for water in a drought. In times of testing, our hearts must sink down into the promises of God.

And find there a depth and a source of life that we never knew before. And as we press down with our minds. As we run them over.

The spirit will start to make them real to our hearts. And our faith will grow. What promises might we press hard into.

In light of some of the tests that we face. What about to those facing unemployment? Jesus says, you're anxious about what you'll eat.

And what you'll wear. Seek first the kingdom. And his righteousness. And all these things will be added unto you. To those unable to give generously for fear of losing certain comforts.

[21 : 34] The psalmist in Psalm 16 says of the Lord. You make known to me the path of life. In your presence. There's fullness of joy. At your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

To those wrestling with forgiveness. Jesus promises. Blessed are the peacemakers. Those who seek reconciliation and forgiveness.

Even at a cost. Blessed are the peacemakers. For they shall be called. The sons and daughters of God.

And to those who are facing sickness and death. Paul writes. This light and momentary affliction. Is preparing for us.

An eternal weight of glory. Beyond all comparison. And Jesus himself says. I'm the resurrection and life. Whoever believes in me.

[22 : 35] Though he die. Yet. Yet. Shall he live. Again and again. God gives us his promises in his word. The New Testament friends.

Spills over. With promises for those in Christ. And when our faith is tested. They are the deep soil. Into which we must push. Our roots. They're the propositions. Upon which we must fix our minds. And do our reasoning. Like Abraham. That is how our faith will be deepened. In the midst. Of testing. But you know.

There's even another reason. That we have today. That Abraham didn't have. There's a greater stream. Friends. That's been opened. For the fueling.

And deepening of our faith. That Abraham. Didn't enjoy. Hebrews tells us. In the second half. Of verse 19. That when. That when God stopped Abraham. In the midst of the sacrifice. And when Isaac was untied.

[23 : 33] And got down off the altar. That figuratively speaking. God did receive Isaac. Back from the dead. But friends. Don't you see. That what Abraham saw. Only figuratively. We have.

In reality. Because years later. Another firstborn son. Would climb up a hill. And be stretched out. On the wood. But unlike Isaac.

This time. The father's knife. Would fall. And this firstborn son. Would die. Not for any sins. He had committed. Not for the sins.

Of his family. But as a substitute. Bearing the penalty. We deserve. In Jesus Christ. We have. The reality.

To which Isaac. Figuratively speaks. He. Is the one and only son. The beloved. Who was sacrificed. For sins. Once and for all. And he was literally.

[24 : 28] Raised from the dead. And friends. Here is the greatest. Reason. For our trust. In God. And his promises. Here's the greatest. Reason.

Of faith. Paul says. In Romans 8.32. He who did not. Spare. His own son. But gave him up. For us all.

Will he not. Also. With him. Graciously. Give us. All things. If the father. Was willing. On that mountain.

To give up. His son. Friends. What is he not willing. To give you. That you truly need. The father. Gave his son. For you. His very joy. The source. Of the father's. Eternal. Laughter. Laughter. Given over. So that you.

[25 : 22] And I. Might come. To know him. And trust him. And treasure him. As our joy. And as our laughter. Forever. Above all else.

And friends. That brings us. To our last point. Why does God. Test our faith. After all. Ultimately. Because God. Wants us to trust him. And love him.

Supremely. For our good. And for his glory. It's for our good. He wants us. To see more clearly. The light. Of his glory. In the face.

Of Jesus Christ. He wants to clear away. Any of our competing. Trusts. And he wants us. To rest. And trust in him. Above all else. Because after all. Only he.

Cannot. And will not fail us. Even in the face. Of death. God proves faithful. But it's also. For his glory.

[26 : 20] Because the one. That we trust. In the hardest. Times. Is the one. Shown to be most. Trustworthy. The one.

That we cling to. In the hardest. Times. Is the one. That our lives. Are giving the most. Praise. And that means. That a tested faith.

Is a faith. That not only. Grows deep roots. But a tested faith. Is a faith. That leaves. A long legacy. The last point. That Hebrews. Wants us to see. Is just that.

The legacy of faith. Look at verses 20. Through 22. Of our text. Hebrews. Brings before us. In rapid succession. Isaac. And Jacob. And Joseph.

Abraham's son. And grandson. And great grandson. Three generations. Of men. Each one. Presented here. As facing death. Each one. Having. Frankly.

[27 : 14] Faced. Unfulfilled promises. But each. Still. Blessing their sons. And confident. Of God's coming. Redemption. In each of these.

Men's. We see a faith. That doesn't fold. In the face. Of disappointment. And death. But rather. A trust in God. So rich. That it confidently. And worshipfully.

Blesses. The next generation. Friends. A tested faith. A deepened faith. Leaves a legacy. Of faith. This isn't to say.

That God guarantees. The faith. Of our biological children. But it does mean. That through the testing. Of our faith. And through the hard one. Reasonings. Of our faith.

There will be spiritual children. Who benefit. Friends. What God is doing. In your life. Right now. Is not just for you. And it's not just for now.

[28 : 10] But for generations. Of believers. Who will see. In your faith. What Hebrews calls. The substance. Of things hoped for.

And the evidence. Of things not seen. You. Will make God. And his promises. Real. To them. So that when they stand.

At the end of their days. They. Will be able. To bless others. And call God faithful. Think of the exponential work.

That God can do. And does do. Through a single believer. Whose faith is tested. And who constantly. Looks to Christ. For his or her strengthening. Who presses hard.

Into the promises. And finds that. All their yes and amen. Are fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus. Will not that faith. Encourage others. Who will then in turn.

[29 : 09] Encourage others. And on. And on. And on. Friends. Only eternity. Will reveal. The extent. To which God. By his grace. Uses our.

Testing. Even in the everyday matter. Of job loss. And generosity. And forgiveness. And sickness. Only eternity. Is going to reveal. The extent. To which God. Will use that testing.

As a means. To advance his kingdom. As a means. To grow. The faith of others. So may God. Grant us. The grace. To deepen our faith. And testing. And may our legacy. Be one of faith. Let's pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Our Father.

[30 : 04] We. Are amazed this morning. That you would offer up. Your one and only son. You are beloved from all eternity.

To purchase our redemption. Lord what a wonderful sight it is. That for us you would do such a thing. And God if that is true.

Can you not be trusted. In all things. God I pray that by your spirit. You would deepen our faith. Lord help us to.

Reason with the eyes of faith. The things that you have shown us in your word. God we pray that we would leave a legacy of faith.

And that God you would be glorified much. And our faithful dependence and trust in you. We pray all this in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Well as the music team comes up for our last song this morning.

[31 : 12] For our response song. We are going to sing a song called. It is well with my soul. Which was a song that was written after actually a tragic loss. The hymn writer Horatio Spofford actually lost five of his children.

In the space of three years. And then penned this song. Which is really an expression of great faith. In the midst of testing. But this song is also a great celebration of the gospel. That our true hope.

That our true trust. Is the fact that Christ has forgiven our sins. Through the cross. Let us. Let us do it. Let us do it. Let us do it. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.