

Sermon: Got Faith?
Text: Genesis 22:1-14 NLT
God's Word: Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-12, 17-19 NLT
Date: Sunday, June 16, 2024
Preacher: Rev. Becky Stephens

Genesis 22:1-14 NLT

22 Some time later, God tested Abraham's faith. "Abraham!" God called. "Yes," he replied. "Here I am."² "Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you love so much—and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you."³ The next morning Abraham got up early. He saddled his donkey and took two of his servants with him, along with his son, Isaac. Then he chopped wood for a fire for a burnt offering and set out for the place God had told him about.⁴ On the third day of their journey, Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance.⁵ "Stay here with the donkey," Abraham told the servants. "The boy and I will travel a little farther. We will worship there, and then we will come right back."⁶ So Abraham placed the wood for the burnt offering on Isaac's shoulders, while he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them walked on together,⁷ Isaac turned to Abraham and said, "Father?" "Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "We have the fire and the wood," the boy said, "but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?"⁸ "God will provide a sheep for the burnt offering, my son," Abraham answered. And they both walked on together.⁹ When they arrived at the place where God had told him to go, Abraham built an altar and arranged the wood on it. Then he tied his son, Isaac, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood.¹⁰ And Abraham picked up the knife to kill his son as a sacrifice.¹¹ At that moment the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Yes," Abraham replied. "Here I am!"¹² "Don't lay a hand on the boy!" the angel said. "Do not hurt him in any way, for now I know that you truly fear God. You have not withheld from me even your son, your only son."¹³ Then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in a thicket. So he took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering in place of his son.¹⁴ Abraham named the place Yahweh-Yireh (which means "the LORD will provide"). To this day, people still use that name as a proverb: "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."

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Hebrews chapter 11 verses 1 and 2 read like this: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were

commended for.” And this act of Abraham is the supreme act of faith! There can be no doubt about it!

Abraham had waited 100 years for Isaac to be born. Sarah had waited 90. Isaac’s name means “He laughs”. Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.” Isaac certainly brought a lot of laughter and joy into Abraham and Sarah’s lives. But “Sometime later God tested Abraham.” By this time Isaac had probably grown into adolescence or young manhood....and Abraham and Isaac must have grown very close.

As Olivia grows older, I find that our relationship is growing stronger. We have a lot in common, and although I play the mother role...we sure do have a fun time playing together...especially UNO Attack...Olivia beats me most of the time...She sure is growing up to be a fine young woman! And I look forward to finding out what God has in store for her life.

Now in verse 12 of Genesis Chapter 21, God told Abraham that “it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” ...so, I would imagine that Abraham was looking forward to seeing what kind of man Isaac was going to grow up to be! ... but “God tested Abraham.”

It’s interesting to note that God does not tempt Abraham...not that this would be a temptation. God tested Abraham. If we look through the Bible, we will find that God does not tempt anyone.... this is just not in God’s nature. Satan tempts us in order to make us fall...God tests us in order to confirm our faith or prove our commitment.

But does not God already know our commitment? I would think so.... I believe that God tests us so that we can prove our faith to ourselves....and this makes our faith stronger....and through this we grow in our knowledge and in our walk with God. We learn how much we really need Him, and how much we must rely upon Him....and this is grace...this is a gift! And when we come through a time of testing.... having relied wholly on God....we see that God can be trusted.... that our faith in God is a very, very good thing!

Now the question arises...Why would God test Abraham in this way? Is the aim of God’s testing to extol obedience to God as a general principle? Well, that doesn’t really work here because Abraham had already proven his obedience to God 25 years earlier when God told Him: “Leave your country, your people and your

father's household and go to the land I will show you." Therefore, the meaning of God's testing Abraham in this situation must have been more specific than that of mere obedience.

So, what was the meaning of Abraham's supreme trial? Because supreme it was! As a matter of fact, this situation may very well be the most profound personal test in all the recorded history of the patriarchs. God was asking Abraham to sacrifice his very own son! And this was the son through whom God had promised Abraham.... "I will make you into a great nation"! Isaac was the sole heir to the spiritual heritage which would eventually lead us to the birth of Israel, and then of Jesus Christ, and our very own spiritual births.

As the Bible says in Hebrews: "He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.'" The process that has brought about our salvation as the chosen people of God through faith in Jesus Christ was set in motion through Abraham's obedience.... but it was not going to be accomplished in a single generation.

It sprang from the call of God in Abraham's life to leave Mesopotamia and make a fresh start in an unknown land.... but obedience to that call would have to be tested and validated over an incalculable span of time.... because it could only be accomplished by a singleness of mind and absolute faith!

So, how firm was Abraham's faith? That's what it's all about. It is one thing to confidently start out for the Promised Land....but it is quite another thing to keep that confidence in the promise when everything appears lost!

Remember, "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." Hebrews goes on to say: "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice.... Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death."

Anything short of Abraham's unswerving faith could not have survived the many trials that lay ahead. God said to Abraham, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied." Abraham answered God with the response of a servant.... just like Moses and Samual would when God called them by name.

"Then God said, 'Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the

mountains I will tell you about.” And even under such trying circumstances, Abraham’s response to God was one of prompt obedience.

How often do we respond so promptly when God calls us to do tasks that He requires of us? And the tasks that God requires from us pale in comparison to what God was commanding Abraham to do...Abraham’s only son, whom he loved....

Why was Abraham willing to do this? How was Abraham able to do this? The key is faith! Abraham believed God....Abraham held on to the promise that God had made to him....to the covenant that God made with him.... “I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.”

God knew what He was doing when He chose Abraham to be the father of the faith! John Wayne would say that “Courage is being scared to death but saddling up anyway.” Not knowing where he was going---or why--Abraham saddled up his donkey early the next morning and took with him his son--Isaac.

Now who in the world would be able to do this? The answer is.... nobody.... nobody without the gift of immeasurable faith from God! Jesus said: “I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move.” It’s all about faith!

Now do we think that Abraham really believed that God was going to allow him to sacrifice his own son? We know from at least ten passages in the Old Testament alone that God detests child sacrifice....and just look how many of us are engaging in some form of child sacrifice today...through neglect...through abuse...by not bringing our children up in the faith...by not bringing them to church! No child is expendable....no life is without extreme sacred worth!

Did not Jesus say: “It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin.”?

I don’t think Abraham knew exactly what God was going to do, but Abraham knew that God was the One in whom one can put their absolute and complete faith!!!

So, Isaac asked Abraham, “where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” Abraham answered, ‘God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering my son.’ Now, Abraham, the man of faith and “father of all who believe” ... “reasoned that God could raise the dead” ...if that were necessary to fulfill God’s promise. That’s how much faith Abraham had!!!

And God’s immediate response to Abraham’s trusting response that God would provide the lamb came not at that moment in the form of a lamb.... but of a ram! “Do not lay a hand on the boy,” the angel of the Lord called out...

I heard on the news that child pornography is on the rise at alarming rates.... “Do not do anything to him.” The angel of the Lord called out to Abraham: “Abraham! Abraham!” The repetition of Abraham’s name indicates extreme urgency! God did not want Abraham to harm as much as a single hair on the boy’s head!

“Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by his horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So, Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide.”

It was by faith that Abraham had answered, “God will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And God has....

How prophetic those words of faith have become! When John the Baptist first saw Christ coming toward him, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” I ask, “What kind of God do we have?”

The same God who urgently stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son... ... offered up His own beloved Son--Jesus the Christ-- on the cross---for us...for us.... That’s the kind of God we have.... that is in whom we are to place our faith!

Because when it comes to God, faith is what it’s all about! When God stopped Abraham who had “reached out his hand to slay his son,” .... well, this was Abraham’s highest hour! God had tried his heart and was satisfied.

Isaac again stood by his father’s side--a witness to the great mercy, grace, and provision of the Lord. It is not strange that Jesus would later say in John chapter 8: “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it and was glad.”

Abraham returned to Beer-Sheba aglow with the sense of the presence of God. He would never be the same again. The great promises had been renewed, and he was

more sure than ever that the covenant blessings would come upon him and his descendants.

When trials come, and we rely upon God in order to make it through.... our faith is indeed strengthened, and our walk with God is more sure.... because faith in God is a very, very, good thing indeed!