

## The Test of Faith ▪ Genesis 22:1-19

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Living in the Midlands of SC we have the best of both worlds.

It's a 2.5 hour drive to either the beach or the mountains. Some of you are beach people, others are mountains. I gravitate towards the mountains.

- The view from the mountains are breathtaking.

This text is a mountain peak; literally but also symbolically.

Now mountain tops are usually the place where you can rest, kick back, eat a sandwich and take some pictures.

Yet this mountaintop is no place of rest—at least initially.

It's not a place of *rest*, but a place of a *test*.

We test stuff to find the quality. If you are buying a car, you test drive it.

The SAT or MCATs are tests to see the academic quality of students applying.

You see some new gadget or something you want to buy? You check reviews.

We test all the time.

- There are times when God tests the faith quality of his servants— and we should not be surprised.

### **1 Peter 4:12 ESV**

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

Question in the test: What is God doing?

\*We get our answers as we walk with Abraham and learn from his faith.

First, we see....

## **Faith follows through (1-6)**

I remember as a child riding in the car with my parents and listening to the radio.

Occasionally a song would be interrupted by a pause, a few beeps and a squelching noise...then a dry man's voice that would say, "This is a test. This is only a test..."

- Our text begins by saying this is a test—but not like that announcement. This is a real test for a real man of faith.

But what is a "person of faith?" What comes to your mind?

—Is it a person who prays well, knows a lot of the Bible, always seems to say something spiritual and act happy?

\*Those could be marks of faith, but there is one key.

*Faith follows through on what God says.*

### **James 2:14 ESV**

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?

### **James 2:21 ESV**

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?

- What stands out about Abraham in this chapter is that he follows through when God comes "to test". His active faith was at work through his obedience.

Notice how Abraham meets the test: *simple and clear obedience* (v3)...swift obedience; immediate obedience; non-delayed obedience.

Try and use your imagination here. A man who is over 100 years old, chopping wood. Sweating; aching joints. This is work.

Ironically...the last work we say Abraham doing was also woodwork—planting a tree...work that gives life (21:33).

Now...his woodwork is in the opposite direction—chopping dead wood that will bring death.

*Faith follows through.*

*Faith follows through with effort.*

*Faith does not sit back, make excuses, and say “this just doesn’t make sense”.*

- No “Why?”; no waiting around, just simple obedience.
- V4 a time reference of 3 days—similar to Israel that would be called to a 3 day journey to sacrifice to God (Ex. 3:18; 5:3).

Now it’s not our job to try and get into the psychology of Abraham—

The text does not tell us what is going through his mind; how torn he was. He does not hone in on his emotions.

*Instead, the swift and willing obedience of the man is presented.*

Two parts of God’s Command (v2):

The place—Mt Moriah: the place where the temple is eventually built (1 Chron. 3:1)

The purpose—Offer your son Isaac as a burnt offering.

God is calling for a *complete surrender of all things*—in other words, there would be no competing loves!

It’s really no different than what Jesus calls disciples to if they have faith: deny self, take up cross and follow him!

(Mt. 16:24-25)

\*That sounds a bit “outside of the box”.

God called Abraham to do something “outside the box” — something he could not have imagined.

What if he calls you to some “outside the box” thing?

Maybe you are the timid-type and need to confront someone in sin.

Maybe you are in a conflict and you need to initiate reconciliation.

Maybe you’ve felt the nudge to missions, but think—“retired people don’t uproot and go overseas”.

- Before moving on, v5 is key: Abraham follows his obedience with worship. Not merely discharging a duty, following orders—but worship.

*Following through needs to be done from a heart of worship!*

*-What is God doing? calling people to follow through with heart of worship*

### **Faith trusts God’s provision (v7-12)**

- The first time we hear Isaac’s voice is in v7.
- We don’t know exactly how old, but old enough to be strong to carry the load of wood (v5); ....and old enough to oversee something is off (v7).

Where is the lamb?

- Now a good answer when we don’t know is...“I don’t know”
- But Abraham has a faith confidence; God will provide. As Abraham continues, this is clear....no mere lip service: *He strongly believes that God will indeed provide!*

I don’t think it does any justice to read v9 casually. Isaac is tied up and placed on the wood; there is a real blade in his Father’s hand that will slice his tender flesh.

The closest picture we can imagine is a father loading his pistol, putting a round in the chamber, with his finger in the trigger, starting to apply the pressure.

› This is intense!

But this is crucial to pass the faith test. How much does this man really trust God?

- The test = Did Abraham fear God most...or fear losing his son?

*One way to get to the heart of faith is to ask: "what do I fear the most....Is that surrendered to God?"*

There is also something here to learn from Isaac. Something the "lads" can learn.

How did Isaac act toward his father? Loved, honored, obeyed, trusted...even when things did not make sense.

It's a blessing to have parents who sees obeying God as the most important.

The high point is in v11-12—the peak of the mountain—just when you think the Son's flesh will be pierced through.

It's high point for a few reasons:

1) Abraham's obedience is steadfast (v12— resolution "Now I know you fear God—that's the quality of faith....complete surrender ...nothing held back!)

- It's a good thing that Abraham was in a habit of obeying God's voice! It's hard to not be in a habit of obedience, then in the moment of testing say: "Now is a good time to obey!"

2) Isaac—The Chosen Offspring surrenders to the Father's will. Surely a young boy or man son could fight for his life.

\*V6&8b is vital: Father and Son are unified. Twice so we don't miss!

This foreshadows God the Father and Son united in redemption.

A father willing to sacrifice his best...and son willing to be led to the slaughter...

**Isaiah 53:7 ESV**

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,  
yet he opened not his mouth;  
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,  
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,  
so he opened not his mouth.

**Isaiah 53:10 (ESV)**

Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him;  
he has put him to grief;  
when his soul makes an offering for guilt,  
he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days;  
the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

What is God doing friends?

Proving he provides everything for our redemption.

**Faith trusts the sacrifice (v13-14)**

- A major surprise in v13— a ram. God's provision.

V13—God saw this the whole time...now Abraham does

(V13) The ram has a specific purpose: to be offered "instead of his son" —the ram is Isaac's substitute.

—Just like the lambs slaughtered at Passover.

—Sacrificial system in Israel was built on this.

**Leviticus 1:4 ESV**

He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.

V14—the naming of the place also stands out: The LORD will provide: (Jehovah Jirah).

Abraham did not name the place “my testing”. Instead he focuses on the *character of God* who provides.

*He provides the sacrifice!*

- › *The message of the Bible can be narrowed down to this truth: The Lord provides the sacrifice for us to trust—a sacrifice that is perfect,*

### **2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV**

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

*What is God doing?*

*Shining the spotlight on the perfect sacrifice.*

The most important question is: do you have Christ? Do you trust the sacrifice for your soul?

There is only one way of faith: Trust the perfect sacrifice of God.

### **Faith believes the extraordinary (15-19)**

- The resolution is described as the Angel calls back out to Abraham and tells him to believe the extraordinary.
- (v17) —images used reinforced that God’s blessings on Abraham are extraordinary.
- The fact that God swears the oath by his name...extraordinary blessing.

Through Christ, we are a fulfillment of this. You are a grain of sand.

- › But even a grain of sand...backed by the promise of God shows extraordinary grace!
- The NT shows us that Abraham was a man who believed the extraordinary.

| Hebrews 11:17–19 (ESV)

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.

- Abraham knew that God was powerful enough to bring life from death. He saw that happen in the womb of Sarah—her womb was dead; God commanded life...He could do it again!
- › From Hebrews, we also see the nature of faith: It receives.
- If we think that the foundation of faith is *our* giving—we miss it; the foundation of faith is God’s giving....and us receiving.

The faith of every believer is one that believes the extraordinary—that there is a future hope of resurrection.

Our final hope through Christ is this hope.

#### Conclusion:

What is God doing in the test of faith?

What does he do when testing your faith?

Maybe you’ve been challenged in your own faith.

Maybe it’s a strong call to your own surrender, some ambition, plan, security.

Let it go. By faith.

But this story is more than that.

Much more.

What is God doing?

*Proving his faithfulness.*

*Demonstrating his character.*

*Displaying his Love.*



*When all is said and done....*

We see our God who has an intense, deep love for this people.

He holds nothing back out of his love.

This is the mountain peak of the Christian faith.

“God does not ask Abraham to do what He Himself is not willing to do for the salvation of His people: give up His only Son as a substitute sacrifice for their salvation”.

(Richard Belcher Jr)

**Romans 8:32 ESV**

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Gen. 22 reminds you & I that God has such an intense love for us.

He calls us to ascend the mountain and behold the beauty.

It has its own name—Calvary.

It has a Son who through his sacrifice declares: It is finished.