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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

June 27, 2021

Abraham's Test

Selected Scriptures

Prayer: *Father, we just want to come before you this morning. We want to thank you for gathering us together. We thank you for your word. We thank you for the incredible gift of your Son. And we pray this morning, Lord, as we are again opening up your word and your gift, we pray for the presence of your Holy Spirit, we pray you would accompany us, we pray that it would be of permanent value. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

We've been talking about now you see me, now you don't. And "now you see me, now you don't" is not just a children's game, it is also a strategy that God employs in growing faith in his sheep. And we pointed out in the last two messages that God's absence, it's not something strange, it's not something bizarre for a believer. First we said that God's absence is normative, that is it's normal to encounter the absence of God. I think many believers, they suffer under the impression that God speaks clearly to everyone in their prayer life, in their devotions while they're worshiping. Well, God may and certainly can do that but it is by

far the exception and not the rule. I mean I know for many years that I labored under the impression that there was something wrong with me because I frequently ran into people who left me with the impression that God walked with them and talked with them and I knew that wasn't the case with me. Well I now know that God's absence is far more normative than I ever imagined and there is a reason for that and it's found in *2 Corinthians 5:7*. God says: *We walk by faith, not by sight.*

And secondly, we said that it's necessary. After the fall of Adam in the garden God and man became so radically different that God actually said that full exposure to who he actually was would be fatal. And on the other hand God himself became one of us and his exposure to us became fatal as well. It was our fellow human beings who took the only perfect person who was ever born, the only one who lived his entire life loving God and loving others and butchered him for the crime of living flawlessly among us. It is our sin and our behavior that put Jesus on the cross. So separation from God's side and from our side is necessary.

And finally we pointed out that God's absence is natural. The natural plan that God has put into place for growing faith in his people is to assert himself into their lives and then to pull back. We pointed out as well that God's absence, it's always a perceptive

absence, that is we perceive God as absent when he is not because God's promised us in Romans 8:32 that nothing will separate us from his love. However our faith journey will contain considerable periods of time when God's perceived absence will be an ever present challenge. So "now you see me, now you don't" is really an attempt to look at the lives of some of the great saints in scripture to see the very pattern that that evolved to in their lives, to see how God used his abiding presence and his perceptive absence to develop in us the ability to do exactly what he's called on us to do and that is to live by faith and not by sight.

So we started out by following Abraham. We've been following this journey of faith to see how God grew faith in him. So we find first God speaks to Abraham when he's living the life of a pagan in Ur of the Chaldees and he tells him to take his family, to leave and go to Canaan, which he did, demonstrating tremendous faith and that starts the cycle. God's appearance to Abraham was the initial "now you see me" phase of Abraham's faith walk. That was met by the next phase, the "now you don't" phase in which Abraham felt the pressure of life itself in God's apparent absence. It was a famine that drove Abraham to Egypt and the pattern that we see consistently developed was that God would frequently assert himself into Abraham's life and then he would pull back. He would allow Abraham the freedom to make what was oftentimes a very bad choice.

We saw Abraham in Egypt forgetting that God had called him and so he claims that Sarah is his sister. So Pharaoh sees that Sarah is beautiful and he takes Sarah as his wife. God intervenes and rescues Abraham and Sarah but at great personal cost and Pharaoh essentially deports him and his family from Egypt.

So we follow Abraham's journey. We noted some of the triumphs that he had where his weak faith grew steadily longer in spite of the setbacks that he had, we followed his dispute that he had with the nephew Lot as each of their people start quarreling over grazing land and we see Abraham's growth as he allows his nephew Lot to choose the choice land, trusting that God would give him whatever he needed in terms of resources. And we even saw Abraham negotiating with God over the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham challenges God over the number of righteous that he would find that would stop his hand from destroying Sodom. It's a great triumph. And shortly after that triumph of faith Abraham travels back into hostile territory and he winds up in the territory of king Abimelech where he repeats his initial half-lie and he claims once again that Sarah is his half-sister. Abraham is in his "now you don't" phase of "now you see me, now you don't" and he's failing badly. He's forgotten God again. And so again God swoops in and rescues him, telling Abimelech in a dream that if he touches Sarah, he's a dead man. Well this is basically where we left

Abraham last week. And you know if we were to finish up right then and there, we'd say that Abraham's journey at this point, it looks like a disaster. But we know Abraham is the father of our faith. I mean *Romans 4:3* says: *For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."*

So we want to know, we want to know how did God make that happen? So this morning we want to trace Abraham's journey from the disaster with Abimelech to the place where he now fully believes God and is therefore counted as righteous, even farther to the place where Abraham stands willing to sacrifice his only son Isaac because his faith has grown to that level. And along the way we've seen numerous times where Abraham's faith has stumbled and fallen and I want to focus on those issues, particularly those that have a connection to us because there's one overarching threat to Abraham's faith that reveals itself repeatedly. It's a threat to each and every one of us when it comes to our faith journey and it's one that is worthy of an examination because it more than anything else I believe causes us to conclude that God is absent when he's not. I'm referring to the setbacks that Abraham endured that were directly the result of his and his wife Sarah's impatience with God. *Genesis 16* describes it. It says this: *Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram,*

"Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children -- just a side, not so, that's her conclusion -- the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress.

So after ten years, Sarah is convinced she's not going to be the one who will make Abraham into a great nation. She grows impatient. She decides to take matters into her own hand. She convinces Abraham to father a son through her servant Hagar. Now before we come down on Sarah and Abraham, ask yourselves how you would have responded to God's silence after receiving that promise. I mean this was a "now you see me, now you don't" that lasted a full ten years before Sarai grew desperate. And although she couldn't have possibly anticipated it, it turned out to be one of the most significant faithless acts that was ever committed. You see, Sarah and Abraham in a very distant but significant way, they are responsible for Islam. The child that came of the union of Abraham and Hagar was a child named Ishmael. Well he's the father of the entire Arab nation. Here's how it happened: After Hagar

gets pregnant by Abraham, it becomes obvious that it's Sarah is the one who is actually childless and not Abraham and Hagar begins to become scornful of Sarah. Sarah is not about to put up with that, and Sarah has her thrown out. An angel of the Lord -- actually it was the angel of the Lord, probably a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ himself, he meets Hagar and he convinces her to go back to Sarah telling her that Ishmael himself is going to be the father of a great nation. This is *Genesis 16:9*. It says: *The angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress and submit to her." The angel of the LORD also said to her, "I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude." And the angel of the LORD said to her, "Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the LORD has listened to your affliction. He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen." Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.*

This alone, just this prophesy, the accuracy of this prophesy is stunning. I mean the wild donkey reference to an incredibly aggressive, untamable wild donkey in the desert is perfect, and that Ishmael is that beast. I mean he becomes the father of the Arab nations, and his half-brother Isaac becomes the father of the Jews. And as deeply as Arabs and Jews hate each other now, at one

point they both had the same father, Abraham. God's word is incredibly accurate in his description of what the future would bring to these two half-brothers when it says of Ishmael: *"His hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen."*

You see, Abraham and Sarah's impatience proved very costly. I mean it had been ten years since God told Abraham he would be the father of a great nation and then God tells Abraham once again that it's not going to Ishmael but the offspring of Sarah who would become this nation. We pick up on Genesis 17. It says: *When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless." And God said to Abram, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her." Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before you!" God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you;*

behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year." When he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham.

Well that gives us a lot of information. I mean we know Abraham was seventy-five when he left Ur, we know that it was ten years later that he impregnated Hagar and we also know that Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him and that Sarah was ninety. This tells us a lot about God's timetable. God made a promise to Abraham that he has taken twenty-five years to fulfill. But notice something about the promise. There's no apology for any delays, there's no reminders that, oh, Abraham you really need to be patient here. There's simply a promise made when Abraham is seventy-five that is fulfilled in Abraham's hundredth year. That kind of tells you something about God and patience and promises. See, it's incredibly important to grasp one aspect of "now you see me, now you don't" that I think is behind the vast majority of unhappiness with our relationship with God, and it's God's timetable versus ours. I've counseled quite a few folks in my years and I would say that one of the most recurring themes that I would define as disappointment that folks have with God is attributable to the fact that God's timetable and our timetable are

not even remotely in sync. We are pathologically impatient. I would have to say that well over fifty percent of the stress and pain and anguish that I see in people is directly related to God's idea of pace. Like I said we as a people are incredibly impatient with God. There are two ways of experiencing time that are almost diametrically opposed. One way is God's way and the other way is ours. And by "ours" I'm not talking about people in general, I mean specifically people in North America, people in the West. We look at time in a way that God never does and that causes a lot of heartache for us. We are pathologically given to impatience not only with God and with virtually everything else. To put it simply, God does not look at time the way Abraham and Sarah did back then and absolutely not as the way we do today.

There was a brilliant book written in the 1980s by Robert Banks entitled *"The Tyranny of Time"*, subtitled *"When 24 Hours is Not Enough."* It's well worth going into a lengthy analysis of it and the reason why I won't and can't, has much to do with the nature of the book, we just don't have enough time. It's Banks' contention that we are enslaved by time. It's been said the single most oppressive invention of all time is this little thing that we have strapped to our wrists. Mine cost 12 bucks. It breaks down time into tenths of a second. That's a time frame that was unthinkable to the rest of history. I mean they didn't even think of a 24-hour

day. I mean we now routinely break down the 24 hours in a day in order to parcel out the 60 minutes that every one of those contains and that's 1440 minutes and those contain 86,400 seconds. And if you think we don't care about them, just trying adding up how many seconds it takes for something to load on your computer. If it normally takes six seconds to load and now it's taking ten seconds, what happens? We get frustrated. What is it with this thing? How come it's so slow? That's a difference of four seconds. I mean is there any time in all of man's history when four seconds was that critical? Like I said, we are pathologically impatient. How many seconds does it take for a commercial to start playing on television before you grab the remote and start flipping around the channels? I mean for me it's four or five seconds. I mean do I really need those seconds? Robert Banks says this in *The Tyranny of Time*, he says: It is disturbing to find people congratulating themselves every time a speed record is broken, as if going faster were some end in itself; we fail to think about what use it is, to gain time like this. Similar congratulations are voiced every time a new remedy is invented, as if living longer were also an end in itself; we fail to work out what it is we are actually living for. People do not know what to do with their time because the spiritual foundations of their lives have been destroyed. As Ellul says: "No one knows where we are going, the aim of life has been forgotten, the end has been left behind. Man has set out at

tremendous speed to go nowhere."

Well Banks is on to something. Banks goes on to quote a number of other authors who see our preoccupation with time as a judgment of God. He says this: "Most people have a deeply rooted dread of time and are afraid to look into its face. That is why they are constantly endeavoring to forget themselves, ignore the past and avoid looking too deeply into the future. The busyness in which they attempt to hide from themselves and God, and the constant fatigue that accompanies their behavior, are more than just symptoms of an inadequate sense of self and a deficient vitality. They are signs of the judgment of God. As the Bible reminds us over and over again, those who turn away from God will find that their works are vain and that they exhaust themselves for nothing. This is what we see taking place before our eyes."

I tell you what's really scary about these quotes is that these quotes, this was written 38 years ago. This was written in 1983. For all practical purposes the Internet didn't even exist when he wrote this. Abraham ran out of patience after ten years. How long do you think it would take for us to run out of patience? Clearly things have gotten much worse than we have found -- quote -- "that their works are vain and that they exhaust themselves for nothing."

I mean have you ever considered what hold time itself has on you? I mean I seriously doubt that anyone in biblical times ever gave a second's thought to the idea of a second or a tenth of a second or a minute or any other subdivision like that. I mean their day was genuinely broken down not into 1,440-minute segments but into four six-hour segments: There was morning, noon, evening, and night. Just think about it, they had no idea what 10:45 meant or 9:30. That was meaningless to them. Instead of a 40-hour week there were seasons of slowness and suddenness, of work and rest, of sowing and reaping. Jesus's own life was characterized by that exact pattern. There would be intense activity followed by drawing away into solitude, suddenness then slowness. Jesus would minister until he was so exhausted he would collapse and then he would rest. And one time he remained soundly sleeping while the boat he was in was sinking in a storm. That's slowness then suddenness. There was a natural pattern that the farmer knew all too well. He dealt with the season of early rains when sowing took place and it's great suddenness and that was followed by a growing season which was obviously a time of slowness which was then followed by a time of harvest, a time of great suddenness. It was a climate well-suited to the development of the one thing that we seem to be missing and that's the one of the fruit of the spirits known as patience. James 5 even says: *See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early*

and the late rains.

So our lack of patience has blinded us but here's where this has cost us spiritually. Our 21st century enslavement to time has changed the way that we see God in our lives. See, against the backdrop of scripture of an entirely different way of looking at time, we see time frames that God is completely comfortable with that appear to us to represent a form of abandonment. We start tapping our feet at delays of four or five seconds. God sees twenty-five years as a reasonable wait. God sees that as normal; we see that as abandonment. God says in *2 Peter*: *But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.* We say, "You're joking, right, God?"

See, God's history of dealing with us seems to bear out the fact that his timing is vastly different than ours. I mean just look at scripture. Noah builds an ark, God just sits back and waits, although he could have made that ark in a nanosecond and he waits for hundreds of years until the floods come. That's God's idea of patience. You know Abraham was told by God that his offspring is going to number more than the stars. Ten years later Sarah convinces him that's not going to happen and thirteen years after that God appears to Abraham to tell him that Sarah at age ninety is

going to present him with a son that he's promised, in a year. That's a 25-year wait for a child that God has promised. God's not apologizing at all. He didn't send periodic notices to Abram explaining there's been a delay in working out the promise. He simply stated what he would do and two and a half decades later he did it. Again, that's God's idea of patience. You know, Moses goes into the desert and forty years later God considers him ready for ministry. Would you ever consider going to seminary knowing you're not getting out until 2061? Jesus himself spent thirty years in training for three years of public ministry. Do you think God might have a different understanding of what patience means than we do? Abraham waited ten years before faltering in his faith in God's promises. My question is how long would it take you and me? We're the product of a culture that wants everything yesterday. We're the product of a culture that has no working knowledge of the biblical patterns of time. Slowness and suddenness are foreign concepts to us. And so inactivity for us equals something very different than it equaled in Abraham's day. Inactivity to us is a neon light flashing something's broken, God's not here, God doesn't care, he's no longer listening, he's abandoned me.

We are pathologically impatient with God. And as I've said, we have two completely different ways of looking at time: We have

God's way and we have our way, and I can tell you for certain that God is not going to adopt our way. And if we ever want to have the peace and power that God promises, we have to learn to understand time according to his way. And our problem is we're the product of a culture that will not allow patience to have that work. And understanding the role that our broken concept of time plays will go a long way towards healing our broken notion that the God who doesn't respond as quickly as we'd like is a God who no longer cares. See, God cares more than you and I will ever be able to fathom, and the cross is all the proof you're going to ever need for that. But understand something, God will not be held hostage by our western notions of time. And he's willing to bear our frustration and even our anger to work his patience into our lives.

It's been 25 years since God made his promise to Abraham that he would father a great nation. At age 100 Abraham has the son that God has promised him and now he's about to undergo his greatest test of faith and even that's going to take more years to unfold. Abraham has been through a great deal of "now you see me, now you don't" in the last fifty-some-odd years. We've seen him take many steps forward in faith but we've also seen many steps backwards. When Abraham tells Pharaoh that Sarah is his sister, that was a step back. When he repeated that lie to Abimelech, that too was a step back. When he impregnated Hagar, another step back. But in

each case Abraham made the wrong assumption that God was absent when he wasn't. He became impatient. And in each case when Abraham was faithless, God was faithful. What God is doing here is he's slowly and steadily growing Abraham into the man of faith that he is. And part of that, an incredibly important part of that is the experiential knowledge of having gone through life circumstances that demonstrated that God was faithful even though it doesn't come close to fitting our Western idea of being timely. When Abraham left his home in Ur of the Chaldees, when he offered that choice land to Lot, when he pleaded with God for ten righteous to be found in Sodom, those were all steps forward but they all took years to develop.

Well scripture now takes us from the disaster with Abimelech directly to the announcement of the birth of Isaac and then what do you know, God seems to go silent once again. Nobody knows how old Isaac was when God demanded of Abraham this absolute sacrifice. It's assumed that he was anywhere from a teenager to perhaps someone in his thirties. But understand again, many more years have proceeded after Isaac is born. Those are years where God is absent. And we know there's many, many years of "now you see me, now you don't" and suddenly "now you don't" is shattered by God's demand. This is *Genesis 22*. It says: *After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I*

am." He said, "Take your son, 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." Any thinking person's got to look at that, say why would you do that, God? Why would you make that kind of a demand of Abraham? I mean Abraham knows that Isaac is the key to the nation that God has promised that Abraham will become. This demand seems to cruelly insist that Abraham sacrifice his dream. And then to add to his agony God even acknowledges the deep love that Abraham has for his son. I mean, Abraham, take the son whom you love and offer him up to me as a sacrifice. I've read many different accounts of why God did this, and some say you need any more evidence that this Judeo-Christian God is vicious and cruel? It's right here. And look at him putting Abraham through such a test of loyalty and faith, I mean, what kind of an ego-driven God, they say, would demand such test? Well, that kind of view misses entirely the whole point of the test and the testing program that God has put Abraham through for all of these years, and it misses it on two very critically important points. First of all God has repeatedly asserted himself into Abraham's life and then pulled back, drawing out of Abraham at each step a newer and deeper expression of his faith. This test is going to be considered Abraham's final exam.

And secondly here's what the critics don't seem to understand. The

test was for Abraham's sake; it wasn't for God's. I mean our God is omniscient. That means that God knows all things including the future and in particular Abraham's future. Just think about it. God saw Abraham's future one year out and he told Abraham and Sarah who were 99 and 89 at that time that the following year they were going to bear a son. And twenty-five years before that he told both Abraham and Sarah the very same thing and it happened exactly as he said it would. So God has repeatedly demonstrated his complete command of the future, whether it's one year or twenty-five years or even four hundred years. God clearly saw the future four hundred years in advance when he promised Abraham that Israel would inherit the land of Canaan only after the Amorites had filled up their cup of judgment which took four hundred years. *Genesis 15* says: *Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."*

Well you want to talk about God's patience, God's timetable, it took more than four hundred years for the Amorites to finally tip

the scales of justice where their wickedness required God's response. God saw it four centuries before it took place, and now a God who has such command of Abraham's future that he can see it one year or twenty-five years or four hundred years in advance, is suddenly supposed to not know what's going to take place when Abraham takes Isaac up to the mountain to sacrifice him? The point is God knew full well what Abraham would do in those circumstances. God knew that Abraham would be faithful because God knows the future. There was one very important person who did not know, and he knew experientially the truth of that and that was Abraham, because that's who the test was for. It was to show Abraham what the fruits of his faith walk would produce. And after the test Abraham could speak from experience when he said to Isaac, "God will provide."

Now it may not be as extreme or dramatic as it was in Abraham's case but the ultimate goal of God in Abraham's life is no different than his goal in your life and mine. It is to grow our faith to the place where we see God himself as the source and solution to every issue we face in life, to have us rest in the certainty that God is going to work through us even through areas of his perceived absence. That was God's purpose in all of the tests that took place in Abraham's life, and that's God's purpose in the test that you and I face in this life. God wants to bring us to a place

where we recognize the truth of what Paul said in *Philippians 4:13*:
I can do all things through him who strengthens me. The question is do you really believe that? And if you do it's because God has brought you through his own personal testing program to a place where this is not theory to a place where it's actually practice.

The first point of Abraham's test with Isaac is that it was designed specifically for Abraham. When he came back down from that mountain, Abraham was a different man than the man who had gone up. He knew now by experience that God was faithful, that he was trustworthy, that he would supply all of his needs through the lamb who was symbolically caught in a thicket. And that lamb represented Christ Jesus. And it pictured perfectly another sacrifice that would take place years later in that very same area. I mean just imagine what's going through Abraham's head as he makes this three-day journey up the mountain knowing that the goal of the journey is to sacrifice his own son. Imagine what's going through Abraham's mind when Isaac said to him, "Father, we've got everything that we need for the sacrifice except the sacrifice." Abraham responds, "God will provide." We all know the end of the story. We know that God in fact did provide. At that last moment the angel stopped Abraham's hand from striking Isaac and a ram caught in the thicket provided the actual sacrifice. But that leads to the second point of what God was doing in this test. You

see, God was not only growing Abraham's faith, he was also using this circumstance to give us a glimpse of the Father's pain at the Son's sacrifice. It was a sign and a symbol of what was going to take place again hundreds of years in the future where another sacrifice would take place, but there there would be no substitute. No avoiding the fact that the Father would have to sacrifice his only begotten Son in order to pay the price of our sin.

See, Abraham's sacrifice painted a picture that's almost unique in scripture. It's a picture of the cross from the Father's perspective. Jesus lived the perfect life and then he offered that life up on a cross to pay the price of our sin. And we know that he despised the shame of the cross and that for the joy set before him, he willingly subjected himself to its humiliation, but we seldom consider the Father's agony that Abraham represents. When Jesus was being arrested, you remember the incident in the garden. The soldiers come and Peter takes out his sword and he cuts off Malchus's ear. Jesus told Peter that there were 72,000 angels just waiting for his word to come rescue him. This is *Matthew 26: But Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?* Just so you know there's 6,000 in a legion. Twelve legions, that's 72,000 angels. And we know that one of

those angels destroyed Senacharib's army of 185,000 in one night. One angel can destroy 185,000 in one night, there's 72,000 of these angels that are waiting, hands on their sword, itching for the opportunity to avenge Jesus, and Jesus says no. *How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?"*

So Jesus refuses to avail himself of those angels and the father had to honor the trinity's commitment that the scripture be fulfilled by watching his deepest treasure get arrested then stripped, mocked, flogged and crucified on our behalf. See, it is the Father who's sovereign will held back those angels, it is the Father who loved us enough to give up the very Son that he loved. It is the Father whose ongoing love for us is not going to stop until we get to the place that Abraham got to so that we by faith can live forever with him. It is the Father who mirrored Abraham's agony with no one to intercede and stop the hand of judgment that his perfect justice demanded, and it is the Father who proclaims: *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."* You see he's the one behind "now you see me, now you don't." And the faith that he grew in Abraham he's not going to stop growing in you and me. It's a faith that is *the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* And what we don't see because we're not humanly capable of seeing is what God has for

each of us: *That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height -- to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.* Let's pray.

Father, I just thank you for the tests that you put Abraham through. I thank you for the example that he is to us. I thank you that I can look back on my life and see the exact same type of circumstances of going forward one step and back two, forward one and back one, and I recognize, Lord, that you're doing this exact same thing in my life that you did in Abraham's. You're doing it in the lives of every single one of your people. And frequently it's a matter of asserting yourself and then pulling back. Now we see you, now we don't. And so I pray if we're in the "now we don't" phase which we've seen in Abraham's life is 25 years, it can be a long time. I pray that we would develop the patience and the trust and the faith that says, God, you are faithful and you don't go on Western timetables but you are faithful. I pray we would understand that and buy into it one hundred percent, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.