

## Genesis 22:1-18

### Lent 1

### God's Test

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**1** Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. **2** Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you."

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"Experience is the best teacher." Always true? Certainly debatable. However, this idea that the best way to learn something is through experiencing it yourself is a discovery that humanity seems to agree on. After all, the quotable phrase is attributed to Julius Caesar of Rome in the 1st Century BC.

Experience also has a way of shaping the way that we listen to God's Word and also apply that Word to our lives as well. Our text of Genesis 22, goes through a fascinating scenario, a strange account in Biblical history.

This is one that you've heard about for many years: the sacrifice of Isaac. But we first have to do a little background on Father Abraham to understand the weight of this account. You see, Abraham had been through the wringer. When he was 75 years old and childless, God spoke to him and said, leave your country, your relatives, and family, and go to a place I will show you. I will make your name great. I will bless you with descendants. You will have a land that is all your own, and I will be with you to protect you all along the way.

And Abram, as he was called then, had great moments of faith and then very scathing mistakes on this road. He trusts and leaves, then he's scared and passes his wife off as his sister. He charges into battle outgunned and outnumbered, and then he is convinced to have his own with a servant girl to hurry God's promise along. Eventually, at 100 years old, God's promise comes true when his wife bears him a son. Along his journey, in successes and failures, God was there to reaffirm or to re-inform Abraham of the trustworthiness of promises.

And then there comes this: **"Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, 'Abraham!' 'Here I am,' he replied. Then God said, 'Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.'** Seriously? After decades of waiting for a son, and now kill him? Not have him taken, but by my own hand slay him, and burn the corpse on a pile of wood?

This is the nature of the word: “Test”. As God tests Abraham, the Hebrew word means to put something through some difficulty to determine its quality. This same word is used when the Queen of Sheba comes to Solomon to ask him difficult questions to see if he is really as wise as promised. The Israelites improperly tested God in the desert to see if he really could care for them the way he said he could. And here, God tests Abraham's faith.

“Experience is the best teacher.” My experiences have certainly taught me something. As a younger man, this account was not so concrete, but now I have a child. I have only one son, whom I love. And if God would come to me and ask me to do this, I don't know what I would say. Let alone if God had previously given me so many promises attached to my child. If God would test my faith in this way, I am almost positive I would be found lacking.

But I don't think that it has to be something so drastic as this for us to imagine failing a test of our faith. There are many promises that God gives to us that have far more palatable consequences that are pretty easy to fail. Just perusing my own life, God has promised that he will be with me in strength as I witness to him, but “will they look at me like I'm a weirdo.” God has said, “Look at the birds; they do not worry, and God feeds them,” but then I look at the bank account, and maybe I can't afford to give God anything. God has said that even with the hard things in my life, he will work out for my good, but boy, I really can't see how that will pan out.

In a sinful world, our faith is constantly tested. And it seems that more often than not, even in the smallest of trials, our faith is found to fail. How is it that Abraham was able to proceed through this test with such great confidence? Not just the event itself but the whole time? As he talks to his servants: **“Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. WE will worship, and then WE will come back to you.”** As his son questions him where the sacrifice is: **“Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.”**

Abraham's faith stands the test, not because of him, but because of God's faithfulness to him. Abraham's faith has not grown because of his own strength, but his faith was grown by the experience of God's faithfulness given to him. In his doubts, God continued to remind him he would bring his promises to fulfillment. In his failures, God did not revoke his grace. God continuously grew his faith through his faithfulness. Abraham's experience with God's grace, through the Holy Spirit, was the best teacher.

How do we stand the tests of this world when they collide with our faith? Well, it comes to us in the same way. It comes to us with experience with the grace of God. It comes to us through the test of God. It was a test that was passed on our behalf. It was a test of a Father, a son, and a sacrifice.

God the Father promised that he would send his own Son to be perfect in our place. His only Son, Jesus Christ, was sent into the world born of a virgin. Every temptation was presented to him, and he never once faltered. Even when Jesus was led out into the wilderness and tempted face to face with Satan himself, he did not break.

God promised that his perfect Son would suffer and die to pay for the sins of the world. In the Garden of Eden, as Jesus meditated on the prospect of this suffering and death, sweating and praying, he did not run but stood and willingly went to this suffering.

God has made promises to you, and he has been faithful to his promises. Even in those times when we fall and falter, God is always there to restore and strengthen you. When we are weak, he is still strong. When we fail, he is still there to offer his forgiveness as he has promised. Every single time that you have confessed your sins in repentance, God has forgiven them. Every single time that you have come to his table and there taken bread and wine, you have received his body and blood and the remission of your sins. Every single time that you have offered up a prayer in confidence or in weakness, he has heard that prayer, and he has answered it.

What if this seems hard to believe? What if I am struggling with a test of my faith? How do I gain the strength to pass it? Experience is the best teacher. Not your own experience, but experiencing the grace and faithfulness of God. When you feel weak, run back to where you will be strengthened. Flee to the Word of God, where God's faithfulness to you and for you is recorded. God promises that through that Word, your faith will be strengthened, and you can be sure that it will be. When plagued by sin, flee to the fortress of the font, where in your Baptism, God promises you that you are his child, redeemed and forgiven. When on your last legs, trudge to the table, where your sins are forgiven and faith strengthened.

Brothers and sisters, you will probably never face a test like Abraham's, where he asks you to sacrifice your child. But you will meet all kinds of tests of your faith in this sinful world that will be difficult. In these, look not with your eyes of your experience but look with the eyes of faith. The eyes of faith that have been formed by experience of God's grace. In every and in all trials, your God is faithful. Amen