

A Tested Faith

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Date: 20 June 2021

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[0 : 00] Great, thanks for the readings this morning. Thank you, Danny, for getting us thinking far wider than just here where we are, and just being able to gather together with people from different countries and different lands and different languages.

I know that I have one. It's great this morning. So really good to be with you. Really good to just be able to spend a little bit of time this morning just reflecting. I know it's horrible not being able to sing. Horrible, horrible, horrible.

That's one of the hardest things for me just now on Sundays, not being able to sing, but we'll get there. But at least being able to reflect on some great truth already in the songs that we've been presented with has been really, really good.

Keep your Bibles open to Genesis 22. So if you haven't opened them there yet, keep them open to Genesis 22. So that's where we're going to be most of our time this morning.

Just so good to be able to spend some time now in God's word. I want to try to do two things this morning in a relatively short period of time that we have.

[1 : 18] One is just to dive a little bit into this amazing, amazing, amazing story. You'll know this story. I know you'll know this story.

It's a very, very, very familiar story. And that's great. And that's dangerous. It's always a little dangerous knowing a story really well because you just kind of maybe rest a little bit on the laurels and reflect back on maybe what you've heard before.

But maybe just a little bit of a different look, I hope, perhaps, as we look into this story in Genesis 22 with Abraham and Isaac.

And then the second thing I want to try and do is just to try to apply this really to the crazy times that we find ourselves in. It's always difficult just going to another church and not really fitting into a series.

It's a lot easier to fit into a series. There's the there's the passage. You just do it when that's not the case. Where do you go? And so I was praying about that.

[2 : 24] And I just thought maybe maybe this would be a good passage to look at because of where we've all been. This has been an absolutely crazy time. One of the most one of the most frequently used words to describe where we've been in the last 18 months is unprecedented.

It's what an unprecedented time we're in just now. And that's probably fairly to but fairly true. But I hope we can try to apply it for our encouragement this morning and for our growth this morning.

OK, but let me start with a question first before we get into the text. Let me ask you a question. The question is, have you ever felt that your faith was being tested?

You ever felt that your faith was being tested? Have you felt over these last 18 months? That your faith was being tested?

I don't think that's a bad question to ask. I think it's probably a fairly good question to ask. I hope it's a really appropriate question to ask. Not just because of COVID, not just because of where we've been, just right the way through the Christian life.

- [3 : 40] Part of the reading from Hebrews 11 was how we're just strangers. We're aliens. It's like the idea is we kind of don't belong here.
- Is that not right? I mean, strangers, aliens. We've been thinking about strangers and aliens and internationals and people that aren't really at home. They're not from here.
- So it's kind of all coming together a little bit this morning. Just the fact that that's who we are as followers of God. And sometimes we look for promises from afar.
- All has a bearing on how we feel, doesn't it? It all has a bearing on how we live and how we feel and what the Christian life looks like for us. And many, many, many times it's hard.
- It's hard. And the faith that we have in someone that we don't see is sometimes tested. The Bible definitely talks about this, doesn't it?
- [4 : 40] The Bible definitely talks about faith tests. I can think of three passages in particular that immediately come to mind for me. James chapter 1 verse 2. Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.
- And perhaps this is not the kind of thing that we want to think about this morning, but this is where we're going because this is a reality for us. Second passage I often think of is 1 Peter chapter 1 verse 7.
- In this you greatly rejoice, meaning our inheritance, the inheritance that we have in Christ. It's imperishable and undefiled and unfading and reserved in heaven. You rejoice in this, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you've been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith being more precious than gold which perishes, though tested by fire may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.
- And in the final passage that I often think of is 1 Peter 4 verse 12. It says, beloved, don't be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing.
- As though some strange thing were happening to you, as though experiencing trials, as though feeling like a stranger in this world, as though getting your faith put to the test is some strange thing.
- [6 : 18] And we ask the big question we often look up and we ask is what? Why? Why? Why? And I think the Bible is the writers of the Bible are trying to get us, trying to get us.
- I've got a very thick head trying to get us to get to the point where we'll welcome these things. We'll accept these things. We'll look for God's work in these things, even though they're difficult, difficult times.
- There's loads more passages, but those ought to be enough to just get us thinking here this morning. Now, none of those passages are the text for this morning. They do form a bit of a background for the text. The text is Genesis 22 and Hebrews 11.
- And both of these passages remind us that what's happening here in Genesis 22 is a test. Did you see that? Both of the passages remind us of that.
- Genesis 22 verse 1 and Hebrews 11 verse 17 both tell us that this is a test. So something's going on here, right? Something's going on here.
- [7 : 18] And this morning we're going to look at it maybe from a different angle. Maybe this is an angle you've looked at it from before. But Abraham's faith. Here is a faithful man who's having his faith being put to the test.
- It's almost as if it's, well, you believe. Okay. I see what that looks like. Right? Okay.
- You believe. I see what that looks like. And often our first response might be, you know, and I'm not quite sure I want to go there. But I hope that by the time we get to the end here this morning, we'll see that this actually is a very good thing.

It's actually a really, really, really good thing. So the idea is here. The concept of a faith test is here. And I think Genesis 22 is a really, really good example. And I just want to suggest to you three different things.

There are loads and loads of different things. I think they come in a faith test. But I don't have time for that. And I'm going to look at a particular way at Genesis 22 here this morning. The three things come out here that a test of faith often involves.

[8 : 20] And I just want to be clear as we jump into this that when God tests our faith, he's not trying to find out what it looks like. So when God tests our faith, it's not as though God is wondering what our faith looks like.

You understand that, right? So a faith test really isn't for God. When our faith is tested, it's really not for God's benefit. So there's only one person left for whose benefit it is, right?

It's us. God doesn't need to find out what our faith is like. He knows exactly what our faith looks like. He obviously knows what everything looks like in our lives. But we need the test.

We need the test. We need the insight. We need the refining and the trial and the knowledge and the understanding of our own hearts. We need that.

It helps us to get a better look at where we're at. So that we can just come to the throne of grace. So we can cast ourselves before the Lord. Whatever it is. We need these things.

[9 : 17] Not God. We need to learn and we need to grow and we need to be encouraged. Okay? So that's where we're going to go. So three things that I want to suggest to you anyway.

That I think according to Genesis 22, a test of faith involves. And maybe these three things shock you. Maybe they don't. But here are the three things.

Perplexity of mind. Turmoil of heart. And confidence of faith. And I'm going to suggest to you here that I think the author gives us a really good hint of where to look in Genesis 22 to see what he really wants us to see.

And the hint that he gives us is a repetition of the same phrase three times. There are some commentators that I know talk about the Bible as being written.

Particularly the Old Testament is being written by what I know one guy calls this Bible ninjas. Bible ninjas. So there's a lot of creativity that goes into the Old Testament.

[10 : 23] And you'll know this if you've ever looked into Greek and Hebrew languages. Greek is a very, very technical language. Hebrew is just a very, very, very descriptive language. I'm an engineer.

I've got a mathematical mind. I liked Greek far more than Hebrew. I loved Greek because you put this ending on this word and that's what it means. Hebrew is not like that. It could be a whole bunch of different things.

Very, very descriptive. Very creative. And often you'll see the writers write that way. They write very poetically. They write very descriptively. They almost write to challenge you to look deeper.

To find what they're really getting at. And I think that's going on here in Genesis 22. The same phrase is repeated three times. Did you see it? Did you see it?

In verse 1, God calls Abraham and Abraham responds. Well, you're not supposed to talk behind your masks, right? So I'll tell you. Here I am. Here I am.

[11 : 23] And then in verse 7, Isaac calls Abraham. Right? Dad, my father. And Abraham responds. Here I am. And then in verse 11, the angel calls Abraham.

And Abraham responds. Here I am. I think there's something in that. I think there's... I'm speculating a little bit because I haven't spoken personally to the author here.

But I think this is a lot of how the Old Testament writers write. They draw us in this way. And they point things out to us this way.

And I think he's given us a little insight here into what's going on and what a faith test might involve. And here are the three things. Number one, I think it almost always involves a perplexity of mind.

Is that not fair? Is that not fair? A faith test always involves some perplexity. It always involves some kind of confusion or some kind of lack of understanding of some way.

[12 : 21] Right? Your faith is being tested, guys. So this isn't easy this morning, is it? And some of us are here. Some of us are in the midst of real big faith tests. If we're not, we know people who are.

You're praying for people in your congregation. I heard their names. And I imagine if they're believers, their faith is being tested. Their faith is being tested. God does this.

He does this. Not because he wants to know what your faith is like, because he's going to teach us new things and bring growth into our lives. And one of the things, the first things, is a perplexity of mind. Listen, can you even begin to imagine what Abraham must have thought?

Put yourself in his place. Can you even begin to imagine what he must have thought when God came to him and told him to take the miracle baby? That he and Sarah had finally received.

The son that they'd waited for all their lives, the son of their old age, the son of their dreams. Better yet, the son of God's covenant promise. And God says, I want you to take him up to the mountain and kill him.

[13 : 30] I mean, are you kidding me? Put yourself in his place. Put yourself in his place. Abraham wasn't expecting that. He finally received the son.

We know his faith wavered along the way, don't we? Because he tried plan B when God had plan A. We know his faith wasn't like all of us. These guys are just like us. We know his faith wavered a little bit.

It wasn't as strong as maybe he'd like it to be. But the son was finally given to him and he arrived. He wasn't expecting. I can assure you, Abraham wasn't expecting this. Paul David Tripp.

He's got a great daily devotional entitled New Morning Mercies. I love it. I absolutely love his thinking. I love where he goes with grace. And anyway, Paul David Tripp, Christian Counseling Educational Foundation.

On May 2060, comments on this text. And he says that after all God had done to miraculously deliver this covenant baby to Abraham and Sarah, God then comes to him and tells him to sacrifice the promised son.

[14 : 34] It made no sense whatsoever. All God's promises of faithfulness and all the hopes of his covenant rested on this boy. If Abraham killed him, it would all be over.

If Isaac died, nothing that had happened for decades would make any sense. You can imagine Abraham saying, God, ask anything of me, but not this.

Please not this. You promised me a son. I waited in faith. And now you want me to kill him? God, I just don't understand.

Listen, ever been there? Ever been there? Are you there now? There's people you're praying for in your church. I guarantee you. They're here. If you've been here, you're in good company, right?

Abraham, Noah, David, Jehoshaphat. You're going to be starting a series next week in what? Well, you're starting a series next week in what? In Job.

[15 : 38] Are you kidding me? You don't think he was there? You don't think he was there? Unbelievable. Unbelievable. Right? Peter, Paul, just the list is endless.

Probably every child of God who's ever lived at some point in their lives has been here. Why? Why? Why? Why is that? I'll tell you why. Because God is an expert at testing, trying, refining, growing, developing, building, strengthening, encouraging faith.

He is an expert at that. And our faith is precious, folks, isn't it? Our faith is everything. Isn't it? Saved by grace through faith.

Our faith is so precious. And it's not just precious to us. It's precious to God. And so he builds it. He wants it to become stronger. He wants it to become more beautiful. He wants it to become more deep-rooted.

He's promised to do that. And that's what he does. Remember Paul in 2 Corinthians 4, verse 7. Paul says, we have this treasure in jars of clay.

[16 : 44] Why? Why? Why this treasure? Why not treasure in jars of iron? Right? We have this treasure. Put it somewhere. Right? Put it somewhere strong.

Treasure in jars of clay. Why? To show that this all-surpassing power is from God, not from us. We're hard-pressed on every side, but not crushed. Listen, Paul says, perplexed.

Perplexed. Perplexed. It's okay, guys. It's okay. Did you know it's okay to be perplexed? Do you know it's going to happen? Sometimes we beat ourselves over the head because we're perplexed.

We think we should be better than that. God doesn't expect you to be better than that. He knows what you like. It's okay to be perplexed. Paul says we're perplexed. We don't despair because we know something that maybe a lot of other people don't know.

So we don't despair, but we are perplexed. There were times when the apostle Paul was perplexed, not having a clue what God was doing. And yet he hangs on because he knows that whatever God's doing, he's doing it well.

[17 : 51] Right? And isn't that exactly what builds faith? We sing. All the way what my Savior leads me.

What have I to ask beside? Can I doubt his tender mercy? Who through life has been my guide? Heavenly peace, divinest comfort.

Here by faith in him to dwell. For I know what e'er before me. Perplexed. I know what e'er before me.

What? Jesus does. Do with all things. Well, so listen. Have the last 18 months perplexed you?

Have the last 18 months perplexed you? Hasn't it been more than just the politicians and the scientists that have been perplexed? It has been. I wonder if any of us here are crying out Psalm 13.

[18 : 54] How long? Oh, Lord. Right? Will you forget me forever? It's okay. It's all right. Cry it out. Pray it. Sing it. Whatever.

Cry it. How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts day and night and have sorrow in my heart?

But listen, he says, but I trust in your unfailing love. My heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the Lord's praise. He's like his confidence. I don't care.

I'm just going to keep singing. I will sing the Lord's praise for he has been good to me. Listen, that's where a faith test takes us. Okay? So that's the perplexity of mind.

I think when our faith is being tested, that's what it's going to feel like. Then number two, and here in Genesis 22, turmoil of heart, perplexity of mind. Number two, turmoil of heart.

[19 : 51] Did you see the second question here that comes to Abraham? Second question. I think the author here is setting us up.

I think he's pointing us to something here. Second question comes to Abraham, this time from his son. Okay? And I'm just going to warn you here, if you're a sappy type like I am with your kids, right?

If you're a sappy type, then I don't know, you might want to leave the room now or something. When Isaac comes to his father, right? And he's got the wood on his back.

And Abraham has the fire and he's got the knife in his hand. And Isaac's looking around, right? And obviously Isaac is no dummy.

He's looking around and he's putting, right? Sacrifice, mountain, wood, fire, knife. What? What?

[20 : 53] What? You know, animals. Who's what? We're missing something here, right? He's putting two and together and he's not getting five. He's getting the right answer. Verse seven. So he asks his father, he says, dad.

Father's Day today, isn't it? He says, dad. And then the second time, Abraham answers, here I am. And Isaac says, dad.

He says, I see we've got everything we need here for the sacrifice other than the sacrifice. Right? Observant young fella. We've got everything we need here for the sacrifice other than the sacrifice.

And then this incredible statement in verse eight. Okay, look at this. Verse eight. And Abraham said, my son, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering.

So the two of them went together. Now, I'm going to suggest to you that probably most of us read that and we think Abraham knew that there was going to be a substitute provided. Fair?

[21 : 51] I guarantee most of us read that and we think Abraham knew he had some kind of, I don't know, he was a, his faith was strong. He knew that there was going to be a substitute provided. Now, remember, Hebrews 11 doesn't say that.

Hebrews 11 tells us something different. And I want to suggest to you the whole text tells us something different. Abraham says here, God will provide the lamb for the sacrifice. Can you even begin to get your head around what on earth?

Let's, for a minute here, let's just think what Isaac was thinking. Can you get your head around what Isaac was thinking here when he says this?

Maybe he just took his father's word and he didn't think anything of it. Maybe not. I don't know. But what was Isaac beginning to think here? Because he's thinking something. He asked the question. I don't know that Isaac was thinking what was going to happen.

All right. I don't know that Isaac was thinking what was going to happen. We do now because we've read the story so many times. But try not to do that. Don't run ahead of yourself here. But listen, far more to the point. What on earth must Abraham have been thinking?

[22 : 55] Because he knew what God had asked him to do. He knew what God had asked him to do. And up to this point here, I don't think there's any indication whatsoever that Abraham was expecting anything.

Other than to tie up his son and sacrifice him on a mountain. We read that, oh, son, the Lord will provide a sacrifice.

We think, oh, Abraham knew. He just kind of, you know, he skipped his way up the mountain, knew that there was going to be a ram in the thicket. No, he didn't. No, he didn't. This guy's heart was broken.

This guy, see, I mean, God asked him, take your son up the mountain and kill him. His heart is broken. Even begin to imagine the turmoil of Abraham's heart here.

Any parents, guy, any parents here this morning? My goodness, this one gets me going. I'm a basket case even at the thought of my children experiencing any pain whatsoever.

[23 : 57] Is that fair? I want to keep my children from any pain whatsoever. It does not delight me to see my kids in pain. I want to keep them from any pain whatsoever. Never mind killing them myself.

Are you with me? What an incredible passage this is. What a phenomenal test of this man's faith. And yet this is 100% true. God took this man on this journey. God, Abraham didn't mess up.

He wasn't, you know, not following God and said, well, I'll show you. I'll teach you. And I'll take you into a really hard time. No, it's not what he does. God takes him on his journey. We're told to test his faith.

Genesis tells us that. Hebrews tells us that. So we can be sure that's what's going on here. He takes him on this journey. And he was going to see him through to a deeper, a stronger, a more mature faith.

But not an easy road. Not an easy road. And I'm sure there have been loads of us that have not been on easy roads this year.

[25 : 06] We're not been on easy roads. It's still not easy, is it? It's still not easy. I don't know. I was talking to somebody who went out for a meal with some folks from our congregation. We were just saying, isn't it how great it is to be back in church now?

And the guy, him and his wife have come to church a few times. And I was expecting him to say, yeah, it's so good to see everybody. He said, no, it's horrible. He said, I don't like being in church behind a mask. You know, you keep telling us for years to take our masks off when we go to church, right?

Now you're telling us to put our masks on when we go to church. Now I don't like singing, but it's horrible. We do it because it's the best that we got, right? It's the best that we got, but it's horrible. Just think about where we've been.

Tough road. Hebrews, 1 Peter, again, 1 verse 6. Even though now for a little while, if necessary, you've been distressed by various trials. And then he talks about the proof of our faith.

Be more precious than gold and found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. That's what God is about. That's what God is about.

[26 : 10] No matter how hard it might be. Okay, time's almost up. In fact, it probably is up. But let me just get this last point out here. What does a faith test involve? It involves perplexity of mind. It involves turmoil of heart.

But I suggest to you that in God's great purposes, it always involves a confidence of faith. This is the end goal that the Bible tells us God has in mind.

Not to crush us. Not to crush us. Not to crush us, but to lift us. Isn't it? This is the end goal. Now Satan may have another end in mind, right?

In fact, I don't have time to go into all of this. But if you do a word study in the New Testament, if you do a word study on the word test, you'll find that the same word is used for test, trial, and temptation. Perosmos.

It's the same word that's used for all of these. And you have to just look really curious. And it's a great study. Look at the contexts. Because sometimes it's a temptation. But we're told in James, God doesn't tempt anybody.

[27 : 08] So it depends on what perspective you're looking at here. What is going on when we face these circumstances of life? I'll tell you what God is doing. God is up to lift us up, to strengthen our faith, to deepen our roots.

Always, always, always. His aim is that our faith grows. Or in the words of Psalm 66, that we become refined. Remember that?

Psalm 66, verse 10. For you, God tested us. You refined us. Like silver. That's what God's about. And we hear that.

Refined is a good word, isn't it? Refined is a word like endurance. It's kind of just when you hear the word, it kind of just makes you feel really good, doesn't it? Endurance.

Or, I don't know, encouragement. Or refined. It's just a good sounding way. They have great connotations. But you start digging deep into what the Bible says about being refined.

[28 : 07] And real quick, you get to some hard stuff, don't you? But that's what God is doing. He's refining us like silver. You brought us into prison. You laid burdens on our backs. What? You let the people ride over our heads, the psalmist says.

We went through fire and water. Some of us would probably say that over the last couple of years. We went through fire and water.

But you brought us to a place of abundance. Listen, guys, that is just so sweet, isn't it? That is so sweet.

Because this is reality. This is life. This is the Christian life. Don't sell people at CE a different life. Don't sell them a bed of roses, right?

And tell them this is the Christian because it's not. But this is our God. Are we not singing that this morning? Or am I thinking of another song? Did we sing Behold Our God?

[29 : 06] I don't know. That was all right. We sang that this morning, Behold Our God. So this is life. But this is our God. And so Abraham does what God asks him to do, doesn't he? Abraham does what God asks him to do, right up to the raising of the knife.

So he wasn't expecting a ram in the bush. He was expecting to kill his son. Right up to the moment of raising the knife, Abraham does what God asked him to do, with every intention of plunging that knife into the beating heart of his promised son.

Until the angel calls his name, right? And Abraham says for the final time in this passage, here I am. I'm all yours, God.

And God knows he's, right? Because the angel responds, put the knife down. Easy, boy. Right? Put the knife down. Stop. Stop. Put the knife down.

Put it down. Don't lay a hand on him, boy. He says, don't do anything to him. Because now I know that you fear God.

[30 : 17] That is beautiful, isn't it? That is, now I know you believe. Your faith has been tested. Now I know you believe. He says. Listen, just as we close, what do you really think about this last year?

What do you really think about this last year? When you're talking to other people? Because people ask me all the time, right? And they ask you all the time, how you doing? How you doing? How you holding up?

How you holding up through all this stuff? What's your answer? I don't know. I don't know if I'm holding up. And it has been hard. I'm not saying it hasn't been hard.

But what's our answer? What could our answer be? What should our answer be? Does anybody believe this past year that Aslan's been on the move? You know what I mean when I say that?

Anybody read the Narnia Chronicles? Anybody believe Aslan's been on the move? Anybody believe God's been doing something? Anybody believe that this has all been not for naught? That God hasn't forgotten about us?

[31 : 16] That in actual fact, he's been using all this frustration and all this heartache? That he's been using all that? He's not been put on the back foot? Anybody believe that?

I do. I do. And I think you do too. Tested. Having our faith tested. And it's interesting because in actual fact, I've made a huge deal of a faith test here.

And that's actually not really the point, the main point of the passage. I've just been talking about a faith test. What is the main point of the passage? The main point of the passage is to point us where?

To Christ, isn't it? Isn't that what this was all about? Isn't this just a picture of something far greater than even a faith test? It's not about how big our faith is.

It's about who our faith is in, isn't it? It's about who our... That's what this passage is really... It's who is the object of our faith is this passage. It's the object of our faith. This is just a huge picture of another father, isn't it?

[32 : 19] And another son. Same mountain. Same mountain. But another day, another father, another son. And this time the night falls and the son dies.

And we're freed. What a beautiful, beautiful, beautiful passage this is. I hope you feel like praising God. We've got a lifetime ahead of us.

As much breath as God gives us to continue to praise him. But when our faith is tested, which it will be, I think the Bible has a lot to say about that. But the goal is growth and the eyes are always on the Lord.

For God so loved the world. Let me just quick prayer and then finish. Father, thank you for being able to just dip into your word today. Thank you for your faithfulness to every generation and in every circumstance of our lives.

Thank you, Lord, that you're about creating things in us that we could never, ever imagine for ourselves. Help us to trust you and to lean heavy on you in faith.

[33 : 26] Because we thank you for Jesus and for all that he's done to set us free. And I pray that as we go from here today, we would go with a message that is abundantly plain and clear.

That the nations of the world might hear the love of God and the freedom as well that's in Christ Jesus. We pray in his name. Amen. Amen.