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Genesis

Chapter 22 - God's Test of Devotion

Preparing for the Test (vs. 1-3)

Genesis 22:1-3: Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.” So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

What an amazing passage this is. It's an intense moment, isn't it? I mean, if somebody asked you to sacrifice your only child, all those visceral feelings start coming in, your stomach starts churning. This is raw emotions. Would it

surprise you that none of this text makes reference to any of the emotions of Abraham or Isaac? And yet we know they're there. The passage really is about faith. And we understand, as Romans 4 tells us, that Abraham was literally a paragon of faith, an example of faith to us.

We read about him in, and no other passage says it so clearly, Hebrews 11. As it begins to list the different ones that are followers of God by faith, and doing things by faith, it makes mention specifically of Abraham, going to a foreign country, but ending with a willingness to give up his son.

We come to this passage, and it's hard for us not to make Abraham the focus. The tendency is to focus on the individuals of the Old Testament, or in the New Testament, and we gravitate towards one or the other. But the purpose of these passages is that we might turn to God. So, though, to us it might seem such an amazing feat that he would do such a thing, God has been cultivating this heart all along in Abraham. He has called him right from the start. And we know that it hasn't been the tendency of Abraham to always do the right thing.

Well, he's tried to do the right thing, but he did it in his own power. And he finds himself falling and faltering. And God continually brings him back and bails him out of the decisions that he makes. We are clear in the passage to see the weaknesses of Abraham and the difficulties that he goes through. For us to elevate Abraham at this particular juncture would be inappropriate. However, we are going to see what faith is about and more specifically what God is calling us to when He calls us to faith. We use that word pretty easily. We throw it out, to believe in God, to be a Christian. You ask people, "Are you a Christian?" "Oh yeah, I'm a Christian." It's one of the lessons that we have in the new members class, "What does it mean to be a Christian?" And the word really comes from a Latin word, not even a Greek word, but a Latin word, which makes reference to following Christ. You're a follower of Christ. Well, Jesus doesn't make that easy. In fact, His statement will be, "Take up your cross and follow Me." What does it mean to follow Christ? What does it mean to be devoted? Christ ultimately comes to that point, "Not my will, but Yours be done."

And it is the heart of Christ within us that could only say that.

We come to this passage, and we were talking last week particularly about what a test is. A test is that which really is looking for the quality of something.

If you were to read in 1 Corinthians 3, it talks about the fact that the works that we have will someday be tested, and the quality of that work. It actually uses the word “quality”. We use the term “touchstone”. We're looking for that real metal that is valuable.

Jesus will ask Peter in John 21, “Do you love Me?” That's an interesting question. I mean, it's easy for us to say stuff like that with words. “Oh, sure, yeah, we love You. We believe. We're believers.” But I don't think we've thought it through. It's passages like this and passages of the Old Testament where God is helping us get real with what faith is really about and why passages like these are so endearing to us. Because it reveals to us that we so easily lie to ourselves. Galatians will say, “Don't be deceived. God is not mocked.” You can say one thing, but the question is, what are you reaping? Is the reality of what

you're reaping genuine, real? Are lives being changed around you, or have you just been talking about it? Proverbs puts it this way, "Many a man proclaims his loyalty, but a faithful man, who can find?" Everybody's saying stuff like that. I mean, fidelity really is only a romantic thought until you throw in, "for better or for worse; in sickness or in health; richer or poorer." Those are all phrases that hopefully begin to stir the mind, "Okay, this is not always going to be easy. And there are going to be times of sacrifice. How devoted am I?" How devoted are you?

Right off the bat, God calls Abraham in Genesis 12, and when He calls him, He tells him, "I want you to separate from your family." So, you love God, right? You'll do anything for Him, right? You believe and will follow Him? If God told you to separate from your family, would you do it? It's a simple question.

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 will ask that same question. I mean, what fellowship do believers have with non-believers? There may be a time in which God will call upon you to separate from your family. "Do you love God more than

these?" As He poses that to Peter. I mean, what do you love more than God? And right off the bat, he has to make a decision. He has to make a decision, "Am I going to follow God or not?" Now, we see the compromise in his decisions because he brings Lot along. But God will even bring that out of him.

What does it mean to follow God? If in fact you were called upon and God worked within your life in such a way that He would withhold the very thing that you desired most, how would you accept that? Would you be angry, upset? Would you stop trusting in Him? Or would you believe Him in spite of that? Knowing that He is good. Knowing that His timing is perfect and His ways are perfect. Abraham will have to give up that which he values most for many years. And he will still hold to God. Well, that's what faith means, right? That's what devotion is. You're not just devoted because it's easy. You're not just devoted because it's pleasurable. You're devoted because you love Him. You have to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength. Isn't that what Deuteronomy 6 says? Is that not the depth of your love?

Well, we'll see. And God is going to test you. There are going to be areas in your life in which you're going to be tested. But this particular passage takes it to the limit. Because ultimately, this particular passage is going to ask us, "Would you sacrifice that which you value the most?" That's the question. Up to this point, there are things that God has called upon Abraham to surrender, but now he must surrender, as the song goes, "all." And we come to this moment in which there's a total abandonment of his control. God will come to him at a time in which Abraham does not choose, but God chooses.

We enter the text, and it says,

(Genesis 22:1) "Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham..."

Where did that come from? It's basically 25 years later. So, now we're 50 years from the time that he left the place of Babylon, and God just, out of the blue, visits him? It's time. I mean, it's fundamentally a 25-year gap between verse 34 and Chapter 22, verse 1. And God just visits him, and says, "Time for the test."

I have found in my life that God tests the validity of my devotion to Him. I have found that when He did that, I did not choose the time. I would have liked to. I would have liked for Him to call me up and say, “You know of a really good time that you're feeling like you're really strong?” But it usually comes at a time in which I feel the weakest; it usually comes at a time in which I feel the least prepared. But God is coming at a time. Scripture tells us as pastors, “Be ready in season, out of season.” There’s a lot of “out of season” times in our life. God is choosing the time. And in this particular passage, He'll not only choose the time, but He'll also choose the sacrifice. And ultimately, He will choose the place. I mean, there are certain places that I actually feel more comfortable dealing with things than others, but God is going to choose the place. This is going to be a total surrender of control in Abraham's life.

It begins in Genesis 22,

(Genesis 22:1) “Now it came about after these things...”

And you realize that it was the faithfulness of God that has been really revealed throughout all these years. God

has been faithful, though there have been times that Abraham has faltered and fallen. God has been faithful.

And after these times, He comes to Abraham and it says, (Genesis 22:1) “... God tested Abraham...”

Once again, the emphasis is He's testing the quality, He's testing the authenticity, He's testing the purity of devotion that Abraham has to Him. Is it real? Is it something?

There's a strange verse in Hebrews, and I'm sure that many of us have read it,

(Hebrews 5:8) “Although He (Christ) was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.”

Have you ever thought about that? That's such a strange verse. You don't teach God anything, right? And yet it says, Christ learned obedience. What does it mean by that? The term that is used in the passage is, “*manthanō*,” or to learn. It is a word that actually is the root word of “disciple”. And the reason why that particular word is used is it's making reference to the fact that Jesus understood what it meant to suffer for obedience. In

other words, “*manthanō*” makes reference to understanding something through practice. It's where the rubber meets the road. It's one thing to know something, it's another thing to go through something. And this test is going to be a going through something, a hardship, a decision that just seems so surreal, it just doesn't seem right, like this out-of-body experience. “What do You mean, my son? What do You mean take him? What are You talking about, burnt offering?” Wouldn't these be questions you would ask?

The passage reads,

(Genesis 22:1) “Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.””

And once again, this is him abandoning all control. That's what that statement's really about. And it was brought up to me last week, it's no different than Samuel as he was called by God. But Samuel was responding in innocence and in simplicity of a child. Isaiah will respond this way in Isaiah 6 by virtue of the awe of God. But Abraham will

now respond by virtue of being a friend of God and walking with Him; a sense of trust. "I can trust You."

Verse 2 reads this way,

(Genesis 22:2) "He said, "Take now your son...""

Now, at that particular juncture, I'm sure that if I were to be the one that He's talking to, I'd say, "Oh, you mean Ishmael." But God had already sent Ishmael away, hadn't He?

"... "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love...""

We don't mind giving away stuff that we don't care about. I mean, you can come into my garage, and I'll give you a lot of stuff. But when it comes to something most valuable, that's when it gets really hard. What if it was the most valuable thing? Would you be willing to surrender then?

"He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love...""

That, by the way, is in the perfect tense, which means that he loves him completely. In case the name might be misunderstood, He throws in, “Isaac”.

“... and go to the land of Moriah...”

Where is that land of Moriah? It's like the first time we ever read about that. Well, we know where the land is. But the name itself, in this particular region, “Moriah” means “the place that the Lord has chosen.” Just a very simple understanding. “Yah,” making reference to Yahweh at the end of the passage, or the end of the name itself. “Moriah,” making reference to the fact of choosing; the place that God chooses. This is going to be a significant place. In fact, it might surprise you, but Abraham's already visited this particular place before. It was a place where Melchizedek was. It was called Salem at that particular time, and Melchizedek was king of Shalom, or Salem at that juncture. It was where Abraham first made a commitment and gave a tithe of all that he had. And it was at a time in which Abraham would refuse to accept any help from man or from the world, as the king of Sodom wanted to give him something. He said,

“No, I'm not going to take from you lest you give glory to yourself. I want all the glory given to God.” This is a significant place. It's going to grow more significant as we go on. Because we're going to see that this is going to be a place in which David will be called upon to buy a threshing floor. It'll be the threshing floor of the Jebusites. And at that particular time, Ornan is the one that owned the land. It would be a time in which God would have David purchase the land because of his sins against God in numbering his men, not trusting in God. And God says, “I want you to buy this threshing floor on this hill in the land that I have chosen. And what I want you to do is offer a sacrifice at that place.” It'll be remembered as a place of sacrifice. It'll be remembered as Ornan says to David, “Look, you can just have this land for free.” Because Chronicles tells us that he looked at the land, and then he saw David, and then he saw the angels standing around him, and he goes, “Whoa, I'm not going to mess with the angels. So, you can have the land, no problem.” David says, “Nope, I'm going to pay for it. I'm not going to give God that which costs me nothing.” And so, he buys it.

In 2 Chronicles 3:1, it specifically mentions the place, Moriah, in which Solomon will build the temple, on the hills of Moriah. This will be a significant place; a place of sacrifice. It'll be a place in which God will visit. It'll be a place in which God chooses. In fact, this is mentioned over and over again.

“He said, “Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.””

The mountain, we believe, ultimately was the place of the cross. And he will take him to this place. In fact, Scripture will go on to say in this particular chapter that it'll be the place where God will provide the sacrifice.

(Genesis 22:3) “So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.”

I mean, you see the total control of God in all of this, “I've chosen a place.”

Let me remind you this, in Deuteronomy 16. Turn there with me. As the children of Israel are getting ready to go into the promised land, God is saying to them, “I'm going to choose a place, and this is where you're going to celebrate all of your feasts.”

It reads this way,

(Deuteronomy 16:1) “Observe the month of Abib and celebrate the Passover...”

Which is the same as “*Nisan*” in the Hebrew.

“... to the LORD your God, for in the month of Abib the LORD your God brought you out of Egypt by night.”

That would be around April, right around my birthday, really, in case some of you forgot. It's already passed.

(You can get me next year.)

(Deuteronomy 16:2) “You shall sacrifice the Passover to the LORD your God from the flock and the herd, in the place where the LORD chooses to establish His name.”

The Passover has to be sacrificed in the land of Moriah.

(Deuteronomy 16: 3) “... so that you may remember all the days of your life...”

(Deuteronomy 16:5) “You are not allowed to sacrifice the Passover in any of your towns which the LORD your God is giving you;

(Deuteronomy 16:6) but at the place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name, you shall sacrifice the Passover...”

And then He even tells them the time, in the evening. I mean, it's the place in which God chooses to sacrifice the Lamb of God that would take away the sins of the world. It'll be the same place in which in Acts 2 there will be the feast of the Pentecost.

And of course, it's actually made reference to in verse 9, (Deuteronomy 16:9) “You shall count seven weeks for yourself...”

(Deuteronomy 16:10) “Then you shall celebrate the Feast of Weeks...”

(Deuteronomy 16:11) “... in the place where the LORD your God chooses...”

And then verse 13,

(Deuteronomy 16:13) “You shall celebrate the Feast of Booths...”

Once again,

Deuteronomy 16:16) “...in the place which He chooses...”

All of those places are in the land of Moriah. Where is that? Jerusalem. In case you're confused about what God is doing, He names the place. And He's been naming the place all along. The feasts have always been in that place. The emphasis has always been, so Pentecost happened in Jerusalem, where the Spirit of God came upon them. And it'll be the place, the Feast of Booths, in which God will plant His feet, according to Zechariah 14, right on the Mount of Olives, right there in the land of Moriah; the place where Christ is to be crucified; the place where the Spirit of God comes upon the church at the very beginning, and the place where Christ will arrive. “This is the place that I chose.”

Now, it is interesting to note, and if you go back to all the places, one of the verses that it's mentioned, verse 6,

(Deuteronomy 16:6) “But at the place where the LORD your God chooses...”

See there, that particular word, “*bāḥar*,” in the text? It's making reference to not simply a choice, but more specifically a place of testing. That's pretty interesting, isn't it? So, it started off as a place of testing; it will end as a place of testing. And the testing fundamentally is, “Are you devoted to Me?” That's the question. I mean, how devoted are you to God? Do you love Him more than these? Is there anything that you wouldn't give up for Him?

The passage begins to demonstrate to us in a very tangible way what it means to be devoted. Look with me once again in verse 2, as God gets very specific, “Take that which you love most, your only son, go to the place that I tell you. Once again, I'm designating the time, the place, and ultimately the sacrifice.”

“... and offer him there...”

You need to underline this,

“... as a burnt offering...”

You know, up to that particular point, I'm going, "Okay, You just want me to offer my son, he's Yours." No, as a burnt offering. Burnt offering means that the total offering has to be burned, every part of it. Nothing is salvaged, which makes reference to a total dedication of that which you love most. "Will you do that on the mountain in which I tell you?" Well, Abraham responds. Why does he respond the way that he does? What we have seen through the process of his calling for the first 25 years is that he's struggled with the reality of this thing called faith. He believes God mostly, sometimes, in some situations. I mean, quite frankly, a famine comes and he goes to Egypt. Let me just say this, a place that Abraham chose. He has concern about Lot, so he moves to Hebron so he can see what's happening in Sodom and Gomorrah, a place that Abraham chose. We choose the places that we live for all sorts of strange reasons. I mean, if you look at Lot, I would say that this guy just basically is superficial in the choice of the place that he chooses to live. And I think a lot of people move to Florida for that reason. It's a nice place. The weather's nice. They make their decisions based on perhaps profit or pleasure, or perhaps even

personal gain. This is a good place to move, so to speak. Abraham will not do it superficially. He'll move to a place because he feels like it's more secure, so he'll go to Egypt. Wrong place, but he's at least trying to think, "How can I keep my family safe in a time of famine?" He moved to Hebron because of his concern for Lot. I've heard people say, "Well, we moved here because the schools are better," or whatever, and they'll do it for that particular reason. He will ultimately move into the land of the Philistines, which is really bizarre when you think about it, because it was a hostile place. He knew that with Abimelech, that it was a hostile place. Nevertheless, he'll move in that place just to get away from the destruction of the catastrophic event of the burning of Sodom and Gomorrah. He just can't imagine being next to something like that again. And I think a lot of people dodge and move to places just to get a new start. They think that maybe the grass is greener or "Maybe it's going to be a place where I can start all over again." Bad reason.

Up to this point, Abraham's made all kinds of choices, and it would seem like for good reasons, but not for the best

reason. And it will be this day that God says, "Now, I choose the place." You know, anytime you go anyplace, anytime you do anything as a believer, it should be based on, "What does God want me to do?" And sometimes that place isn't really pleasurable. Sometimes that place isn't wonderful in your own eyes, perhaps humanly speaking. Perhaps in some cases, it's not the most secure place that you could ever have, because there might be places that are more secure. But the question is, is the place that God chose? Is it what God wants you to do? Finally, God makes the choices. And all of this is God making the decisions. And what's remarkable is that at this particular juncture, Abraham goes, "Okay."

Let me say this, before we put him on too high a pedestal. Up to this point, he has seen what it means to make his own decision. I mean, God is gracious. He says, "Go ahead, go wherever you want to go." I mean, this is fundamentally John 21, right? With Jesus and Peter, He goes, "Look, there was a time where you went any place you wanted to go, but the time is now coming when you're going to be bound and you're going to be led to a

place.” I actually thought I'd have a lot more freedom when I was older. It hasn't worked out that way, but it's worked out better. Because God is not allowing me to waste my life. There are things that oftentimes we would rather do because, look, I mean, we are selfish in nature. But I have found the greatest thing to do is to surrender to God and say, “Your will be done.” That's what devotion looks like.

Look at the passage with me in verse 3. There are specific things that Abraham does that are to be noted for devotion.

The first is, if you look at the passage, it says,

(Genesis 22:3) “So Abraham rose early in the morning...”

Early in the morning, are you kidding me? It's the worst day of his life, and he rose early. The passage is making reference to devotion and what it looks like. And what it looks like is, it's something you do without hesitation. This is an amazing event, and once again, I've oftentimes made reference to Ezekiel, which God says, “Your wife's going to die, and I don't want you to grieve.” I'm going, “Really? I can't grieve?” “Nope.” Can you imagine that? “Because

your desire to obey Me has to be far stronger than the emotions that you're feeling at this moment.” When God talks to you, if in fact you're devoted to Him, there should be a sense of, “Let's go, first thing in the morning, early as I can, right away.” And you have that spirit within the passage that there's actually no hesitation on his part.

“So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering...”

Why is Scripture listing all these things? Well, Scripture is not only telling us that he does this without hesitation, but he's also unapologetic in the fact that he's bringing other people in it with him. And I think one of the things I like the most about this is that he's openly confident, and more specifically, there doesn't seem to be a need to explain what he's doing. There are going to be times that God is going to call you to do something, and quite frankly, if you try to explain it to people, they just laugh at you. Or they think you're strange, which, you know, that happens all the time anyway. But if in fact you start doing it and you start feeling like you have to explain yourself,

that's not devotion. I'm following God. I don't have to explain myself. He doesn't sit down with the young men, and go, "Now, let me tell you what I'm doing." We don't even see Sarah in the picture. He's just going to do what God tells him to do; not only without hesitation, but without explanation. And I don't know if you noticed this or not, but he's literally involving himself in this. He's comprehensively thorough in doing everything that he needs to do. I mean, I can just imagine going up to the mountain, and going, "I forgot the matches." He's not going to forget anything. I mean, he split the wood for the burnt offering. He goes to the place which God told him. It will actually go on to say that he brought the fire with him, too. He has everything that is necessary. He's comprehensively thorough in what he's doing, and he's an active participant. He's splitting the wood. Can you imagine offering your own son? One of the first things I would say is, "You do it. I can't even think about this." He's splitting the wood. But what's clear in all of this is that he's withholding nothing. And not a whim, not a whimper, not a thought is expressed. Feelings and emotions are just literally, totally taken out of the text. I

mean, we're left to conjecture. But the Scripture is saying, "What I want you to see is how much he trusts Me."

As you look with me in Hebrews 11, it's that wonderful chapter of faith. And it's probably the only insight we have into what Abraham was thinking. What are you thinking, Abraham?

It reads this way,

(Hebrews 11:17) "By faith Abraham, when he was tested..."

That's the place where God chooses.

"... offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son;

(Hebrews 11:18) it was he to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED.""

This has to come out this way, right? I mean, the promises of God was that this is the guy.

We'll get this snapshot of his thoughts,

(Hebrews 11:19) "He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead..."

Up to this point, that had never happened. Resurrection will happen at Elijah's time. It'll happen in Elisha's time. It had never happened.

“He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.”

What are you thinking, Abraham? “God told me that he's going to be the son. I'm going to believe Him. I don't understand what He's asking me to do. I don't understand how this is going to turn out. I don't understand. I mean, am I going to watch my son in pain and agony in the process? I don't know what's going to happen.”

How devoted are we? I mean, this passage is written and beckons that question. This is not just an interesting story about Abraham and something that he did, and we just walk away, and we go, “Okay, that's kind of nice.”

Scripture tells us that he is that example of faith. This is what God is looking for in us. And Jesus will clarify it to such an extent that He'll say, “Follow Me. Take up your cross, follow Me.” It is interesting that God keeps bringing us back to this same place in Jerusalem. No matter where

we wander, no matter where we go, no matter what our solutions are, He keeps bringing me back to Moriah. And He goes, "Okay, this is the place I've chosen. This is what I want you to do." I mean, I keep wanting to dodge the bullet, I have to admit. I have some interesting discussions with God, "Are You sure you want me to do that?" And quite frankly, I have a lot of confessions before Him because I hesitate. He's faithful. I don't know why I hesitate. Not one good thing would He withhold from me. Why would I hesitate? He loved me so much that He sent His only Son to die in my place. He has not withheld anything from me. He did not hesitate. Isaiah 53 tells me that it pleased Him to crush His Son, to lay His Son on that cross, that He might bring many sons to glory. He's proven His love for us. And what could separate you from the love of God? Now, the question beckons, how devoted are you to Him? There's no doubt He's devoted to you. What wouldn't you do? What wouldn't you do for God? If God said to you, "Trust Me. Don't rely on this anymore, trust Me," would you do it? Without hesitation? If you felt that your testimony was on the line, and God says, "Trust

Me,” would you do that? If it meant death, would you do that? We might be called to do that.

It's interesting, the testimony, one of the times that you came was during COVID, right? I think we were the only church open. I don't know. I told people, I said, “For this particular Sunday, I think that we're the largest church in Jacksonville.” Because look, God told us to put Him first. Why am I going to compromise because of a little bug? It's amazing what it takes to reveal, and in some cases, something insignificant can reveal to people they're not trusting at all. Why wouldn't I believe Him? Why wouldn't I? Something difficult is going to come into your life. Some hardship is going to come into your life. A loss. “I don't want to trust God anymore.” You never believed. You never believed. God's going to bring you back to this place. You're going to keep walking back to the cross.

Closing Prayer:

Father, we come before You today, and we come with, I trust, genuineness, sincerity, authenticity, as oftentimes our faith is being tested. It is Your grace that does this. But the fact of the matter is that we oftentimes deceive

ourselves. We say that we believe in a God of love. We say that we believe in a God that controls all things. We say that God will do what is right. Nevertheless, when things happen, when we're called upon to do something that cost us something, we begin to hesitate. We're not all in. Our stomach begins to turn, and our emotions begin to make our decisions for us. This we do not see in the passage.

With your heads bowed and your eyes closed, what I'm asking you to do, as Paul will ask the Corinthians, examine yourself. Or as he'll go on to say, test yourself to see if you're of the faith. Let's put it another way. Test yourself to see if you're truly devoted to Him.