



The Sermon

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Genesis 22:1-24

"A Test of Faith"

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TRANSCRIPT

So, with that text in front of us, let's begin just by reading the entire chapter and getting taken up in its drama. If at all possible, suspend prior understanding, suspend your awareness for a second and try, if you could, to read this afresh. Remember it was in chapter 21 that finally, after all these years, that promised son was born. That's what's happening. And now we get to 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 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. On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance. And Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship and return to you.'

"And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. And Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, 'My father!' And he said, 'Here I am, my son.' And he said, 'Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?' Abraham said, 'God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.' So the two of them walked on together.

"And then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' He said, 'Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you've not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.' And then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place Yahweh Will Provide, as it is said to this day, 'In the mount of Yahweh it will be provided.'

"And then the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, 'By Myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and in your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you've obeyed My voice.' So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham lived at Beersheba.

"Now it came about after these things, that it was told Abraham, saying, 'Behold, Milcah also has borne children to your brother Nahor: Uz his firstborn and Buz his brother and Kemuel the father of Aram and Chesed and Hazo and Pildash and Jidlaph and Bethuel. And Bethuel became the father of Rebekah; these eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham's brother. And his concubine, whose name was Reumah, also bore Tebah and Gaham and Tahash and Maacah.' This is the very word of the living God. May He write it on our hearts this morning.

What would you undertake if you could be absolutely guaranteed of success? Think about it. What would you do if you knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that if you were to take on this endeavor, you would be absolutely successful? Imagine it. If whatever you do was promised to not fail, if whatever it was you're determined to approach and dive into is ultimately guaranteed, how would you approach the task before you? What would you dare to accomplish?

Now that may sound like a sermon from that white-tooth fellow down in Houston, but I think it's a good question for people who understand the nature of God's will. You see, if we're going to do something that God has told us to do, that God has promised to us, if we're going to approach anything that is God's will, then there's nothing that can stop us. If we're going to undertake a call from God, a task for God, and the way we go about it, and the calling and the obedience that are involved are all God's will, then there is not one thing, even ourselves, that could possibly stop us from achieving that success, because we know that God's will is determined, that God's will is going to take place.

And I wonder if we often think about the life of faith that way, because what we have in Genesis 22 is an example of what it looks like to walk in faith, walk in faithful obedience, without any understanding of the perplexities that are being faced in the moment, without any understanding of what's going to come at the end. But we have this beautiful example of Abraham's faith, first displayed for us when he left his home country in chapter 12 verse 1, when he acts in obedience to leave Ur and to leave behind his father's household. And then every single obstacle he faces, he surmounts, not perfectly, but with faithful obedience: rescuing his kinsman Lot, even giving the most prime real estate to Lot; and then immediately receiving a promise from God, that a 360 degree look at the land will all belong to him someday. And then this relentless promise of a child for an elderly couple. But even that comes to bear in his life in chapter 21.

Everything that that Abraham touches flourishes because he's walking in obedience to God's will, not perfectly, which is one of the beautiful accents of Abraham's story. It's so human. There's deception. There's moments of even laughter from his wife when she doesn't believe God. But at the end of the day, and throughout the entire narrative these dozen chapters or so, we see Abraham walking in faithful obedience, and we see that everything that Abraham does is blessed of God because he's doing what God tells him to do.

And the response of Abraham in this chapter at large – just trying to set this up for you – I love how simple it is. It consists of things like really complicated statements of faith, like, "Here I am." Isn't that beautiful? I mean, sometimes obedience isn't complicated. It may not be clear, it may not be easy, but sometimes it's as simple as, "Here I am." And so, when God calls Abraham here at this this pinnacle of his faith, he simply says, "Here I am." And when his son asks him, "Dad, what are you doing?" He says, "Yes, son. Here I am." And as he's about to plunge that knife into the

precious heart of his boy, God's voice pierces heaven and says, "Abraham, Abraham!" And what does Abraham say in verse 11? "Here I am."

I love the simplicity of walking in obedience on display in this chapter. Living by faith, having it manifest in obedience, is to live boldly and without fear, knowing that God's success is going to be ultimate, that our commitment to obey God and to trust God, that when we do that we know that when we undertake anything for God it will not fail, because everything that God promises will ultimately be fulfilled, guaranteed even.

So, what would you endeavor if you knew you would succeed, if you had that kind of security, that kind of assurance, that kind of guarantee? Well, know that when you follow God, you have that kind of security. According to the word of God and the will of God, you are unbeatable and unstoppable when you're walking in the will of God. And though we live in an uncertain world that will surprise us and knock us down, and though we cannot forecast with any reliability what's going to happen ten years from now, we have absolute assurance that ten thousand years from now we will be sure that God works all things for good and for His glory.

So let's look at the promise fleshed out. Let's look at faith tested and faith proven in this very famous story of Abraham, and let's see what lessons we can draw from a chapter like this one, so familiar, but so important, not only to our own lives and walk with faith, but important to the whole history of redemption, as we'll see as it unfolds.

I want to think about this in four parts, four thoughts here to kind of walk us through this passage and capture what I think is most essential in Genesis 22. Let's start here, number one: "The value of having faith tested. The value of having faith tested." If you like sermon titles, if you're into that kind of thing, this is called "Faith Tested, Faith Tested," and the first point is, "The value of having your faith tested." And I get that from verse 1.

Verse 1 says that, "After these things," obviously the direct correlation that he's talking about there is the birth of Isaac, the long expected, long-awaited, longed for birth of the promised son, the covenant son, who will be the recipient of this covenant promise that God has ratified with Abraham. And in the most solemn, possible way. He's repeatedly reminded Abraham

that he will be a people, he will have a land, and he will be a blessing to the entire earth. And it's a promise that will outlive Abraham, and Abraham sees that because of the generational aspects of it. God has sworn it with a covenant that says that if it breaks, God Himself will be the one torn apart. So that's the sureness of it. And now chapter 22 comes with such surprise. If you've never read Genesis before and you come to this section, you would be flabbergasted at what's going on in these verses.

"After these things" should be the fulfillment of this promise. It should be Isaac growing up and being the recipient of the covenant. "But God" – verse 1 – "tested Abraham." Now your Bible may translate that word in different ways. It may say, "God tested Abraham," or "proved Abraham," or "tempted Abraham," and that's a really key word, that word "test." We understand it in the normal kind of sense of school.

Owen's missed a little bit of school this week, and in an unfortunate turn of events, he texted one of his buddies on the iPad who asked him, "Hey, where are you?" And he'd been sick earlier in the week, for real, not fake sick. But then we had this trip, and you know, the Lord healed Owen miraculously. Look at him, he's here. And so we come to take care of the hog.

So he texts his buddy. His buddy says, "Hey, where are you?" from school, right? And he says, "I'm in Texas hunting hog." And my wife texts me, "Hey, did Owen tell somebody where he's going?" and the issue she said is that there's a rumor going around school that Owen's not sick, but he's hunting hogs. There's rules at the school about like if you're going to take a trip you have to tell them in advance. But it's rules at this school, come on; they're not rules in here. And so maybe Owen missed a test, or two, or six; who knows.

And the purpose of a test in school isn't just to punish children, the purpose is to evaluate your knowledge, right? That's what testing is for. Like, "Do you understand what has been taught in the class?" My answer, "Usually about half, you know. I got about half of it down." And when you take a test, you're evaluated. I think that's a good concept for understanding what this word "tested" means.

Now if you want to get fancy, the Hebrew word for "tested" is the same word that we find in the David and Goliath story, 1 Samuel 17:39, where David refuses to use Saul's armor because he had not tested it yet. Now I'm sure Saul's armor was the best of the armor, I'm sure it was quality stuff; but you don't want to go into a battle unless you know that armor fits, you know how that armor works, you've tried it out in practice. He'd not used it yet, it hadn't been tested yet.

Now Abraham has obviously used his faith prior, but not on this level, not something this cataclysmic, not something this difficult. This was an opportunity to demonstrate his faith's reality. Having come this far in his life after all these years of not receiving the promise, and now having received the promise in this precious son, with all the speed bumps and pitfalls along the way that the walk of faith requires, he's now in a moment where he receives the ultimate test of his faith. And we need to learn from Abraham here. One author said this: "Abraham's trust was weighed in balance against common sense, human affection, and lifelong ambition. This acted against everything earthly in him."

You know, it comes to this, right? Our faith can be purely theoretical in some seasons of our life, until a moment like this, a moment of testing, a moment of trying, a moment of difficulty. Through the experiences of life in a fallen world there'll be times in our life when our faith is put to the test, and it's there where we see its purity, it's there where we see its trustworthiness.

I got a call yesterday from somebody at church, a precious couple who's been at our church for three decades or more. The husband suddenly, late 50s, mid 50s, suddenly dropped dead. And what that dear lady, his wife, is drawing on this morning as she wakes up for the first time without her beloved husband is the truth that's been tested in her life up to this time. And the reason she will continue to worship Jesus, the reason she will continue to hold fast to God, is because that faith that's been worked in her heart for all these years through worship in good times is ready now to display its value and power in the hardest of times.

Derek Kidner says it this way: "The test, instead of breaking Abraham, brings him to the summit of his lifelong walk with God." That's why we need trials in our lives. That's why we can trust that when the phone rings and something happens that is unpleasant, to say the least, we can know that

God's in it, that He's going to use this in our life to show us something about our faith, and to show us something about Himself. That's what's happening on the radar screen of our life. When trouble comes onto the scene, we can know that, "Here it is, here's the moment where God is examining me."

We'll talk more about this in a moment, because God knows what your faith is made of, He doesn't need more information. The trial is to help you see the quality of your faith, to see the truthfulness of it, the power of it, that you can make it through the difficult time. First Peter says to those afflicted believers, chapter 1, verse 7, "These trials have come, so that your faith of greater worth than gold which perishes, even though refined by fire, may be proved genuine, and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed." That's what trouble is for; trouble tests our faith and shows that it's real. There's real value in having our faith tested; and at the outset of this trial, Abraham is going to see that the precious faith that God has given him will last through the darkest day.

Secondly, "Faith most often shows itself as simple obedience." So, first, there's a great value in having your faith tested. The second lesson we start to get in really early in this text is that faith most often shows itself as simple obedience. Look at the test here: "Abraham!" He responds, "Here I am." The language here, "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."

I mean, this is God's clear command. And the construction in the original language is very unusual. It says *lekh-lekha* in Hebrew. It's the word for "go," but it's not put in an ordinary way. And it would be a very strange thing to have in this passage if we hadn't already seen it earlier in Genesis. It's the identical language of Genesis 12:1, when Abraham was in his father's country, when Abraham was among the Pagans worshiping the moon god of Ur, offering sacrifices on a ziggurat, before Abraham ever knew Yahweh. When he heard the voice of God in chapter 12, verse 1, it was this same exact construction that God spoke when He told Abraham to go to an undetermined place, to follow Him with faith that's unseen. And now the same language comes from heaven again. Obviously Abraham recognizes the voice of God. But beyond that, he sees this as a moment to hear from God, to obey God on the same level as when he first started walking with God.

I think we have a tendency to think about faith as what starts our Christian life. "When did you first believe?" is a good question. But our whole Christian life is sustained by faith. Every day is a day where we walk by faith. Faith isn't something that's just the starting line of the Christian life, it's not just that you believed past tense, it's that you continue to believe. And in this moment, Abraham calls on that faith that he demonstrated when he left everything behind – his gods, his people, his father's house, the land of familiarity – and he started to walk with Yahweh right at the outset. And now he does it again, same language and same response: obedience to God's command. You could call it faith. You could call it obedience. You could call it faithful obedience, or faith that obeys. But Abraham has now responded at the very outset of his walk with God by obeying God's clear command. He responded by faith, not by sight. Faith is not merely initial, it's a lifelong commitment, it's an opportunity to obey all the way along.

And I hope you see that this obedience happens in a completely unusual, a completely nonsensical request on a human level. I mean, God is not a God of the Bible; the God of the Bible is not a God of human sacrifice. This doesn't make any sense. And it's put with such heavy drama, with the unusual construction, "Take now," or "go now with your son, your only son, whom you love." I mean, this is a dagger to the heart in and of itself: the underlining of the preciousness of the boy. And this, after Abraham – remember, he doesn't just have one son, he has another son, Ishmael, who's been taken from him, as Hagar fled into the wilderness. So that son is gone. And so in one sense, this really is his only son; in another sense, this is really his only son as far as the covenant promise goes. But God underlines it by saying, "Your only son, whom you love, Isaac," – by name – "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."

Holiness is an attribute of God, right? There's things about God that we love. What are some of the attributes of God that you absolutely love? What do you love about God? You could talk in this part. It's church in Texas, people talk sometimes. God's goodness. Where would we be without God's goodness? What else? His righteousness, His absolute moral perfection. What else? His love. His love. I mean, we would be lost without the love of God. What else? His faithfulness. He always keeps His promises.

What else? His grace. Praise God for His grace, that He doesn't give us what we deserve. What else do you love about God? He's merciful, indeed! What else? He's sovereign, He's in control! This is a good church, you know

lots about God. No one gave one of the most important attributes of God that every Calvinist needs to hold on to. Steve Lawson's the lead preacher around here, you've got to know this one. Nope. Nope.

These are all true, but it's not the one I'm talking about; and you'll never guess it because I'm kind of tricking you. Ready for it? It's His perplexity. It's not really a theological word, but if you've walked with God for a minute, you know this is it. Perplexity means you have no idea what God is doing, lots of times, right? I mean, that's where Abraham's at right now. This makes no sense. This is the son of the promise. This is the one that God has brought about through all dozen chapters that He's been through here. This is the doctrine of perplexity, and every real Calvinist needs to keep this one on their list of the way God is. He's unguessable, and we don't know what He's doing, I don't know, half the time, maybe more. God's perplexity.

God is up to something, and Abraham has no idea. How could he? The reader would have no idea. How could he? And we get to this portion, and here is God saying something that is apparently on the surface of it, contrary both to His promise and to His nature, and Abraham unquestioningly obeys. Doesn't make any sense, and that's because faith most often shows itself, manifests itself, proves itself, it works itself out just with simple obedience. And that doesn't mean you have the answers about how this is going to end, it just means that you're going to obey anyway. Abraham is just told to go, and so he goes. And there's lots of times in our life where we don't know what God is doing, but it's clear what we're supposed to do: trust and obey, because there's no other way. And so we do, we just keep walking.

I remember one of the most difficult trials that my wife and I ever faced. We were outside a children's hospital. We had just received some difficult news about one of our kids, we were assigned an oncologist, and I was perplexed by the whole thing. I went for a walk, and I called my pastor on the phone, and he said, "This is happening for you." And those simple words work to remind me that God was doing something; and I didn't know what it was, but it was not against me, it was for me; and all I could do was obey. Could I fix the situation? Did I have any guaranteed outcome? Did I know where we were going to be six months from then or six years from then? I had no idea. But I knew that God was doing something, and all I could do was obey.

Notice verse 3 tells us exactly how Abraham felt: "Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey." Oh wait, there's nothing there about how Abraham felt. I mean, that's where we would lead, right? I mean, I told you how I felt; I was perplexed, I was confused, I was hurt, I was afraid. Abraham, we get no glimpse at his interior life; he just obeys, he just gets up. And I don't know if it'd be my tendency to get up early that day, but I think maybe he just wants to get this over with. "Whatever God is doing, let's get it done." He doesn't know, "But let's get up early."

I mean, Abraham's an industrious guy. He's got work ethic, he's got countless servants, he's a man of extraordinary influence and wealth, so he knows how to do a job. And God's told him what to do, and so what does he do? He doesn't wait a few days; the next morning he rises early, puts a saddle on the donkey, takes a couple servants with him, splits the wood, and then rises up and goes to the place. Unqualified, unquestioning, unhesitating obedience. And he's not in on the secret, he doesn't know what's going on.

"He sees the place from a distance," in verse 4. "And he leaves behind the servants," in verse 5. So the drama ramps up even more. But verse 5 we do get a glimpse of this faithful obedience. After going and following God, he says, "Stay here" – verse 5 – "with the donkey, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship and return to you." Is there some deception in that verse? I don't think so. He is trying to ditch the followers there. But the words "return to you, return to you" show a little glimpse of Abraham's resolve.

Does he know how this story is going to end? He does not. Does he have confidence that Isaac will come back with him? Yes. This is the faith of Abraham, a faith that has lots of ideas on how this might go, but no clue how God's perplexity will flesh out here; but he is sure of this: God will keep His promise. Isaac is God's promise, he is the covenant son that came from his union with Sarah, their ancientness. I mean, this is the boy, there's no arguing with that. And so in his logical, faithful obedience, he says, "We're going to worship and come back." That's awesome. That is an awesome glimpse into the faithful trust of Abraham.

I mean, what is what do we know about Isaac here? I mean, there's very little. This is our introduction to Isaac, and the story of Genesis is going to turn to Isaac next, and this is where we really get to meet this kid. We know he's beloved, in verse 2. In verse 12, we know that he had to see the

glimmer of the knife in his father's hands. I mean, we know, in verse 16, he would have heard his father's oath, he would have known how God did this. But he's the recipient of all of this. And the tension here is so high. All he would have seen, to be sure, was his father's faithful obedience. He would have known his father's love, and he would have known that his father had a love for God that was so true, so unyielding, that he was willing to do whatever God asked him to do, regardless of the cost.

This is probably a good point is any to say this isn't a repeatable instance in the life of God's people. God isn't going to call you to sacrifice your son, and God's not going to have this kind of moment like this in your life, but He will have moments in your life that are greatly difficult, where obedience is clear and you'll have to make a choice. And the choice of the faithful is to walk by faith right into this thing, to obey.

One of my favorite psalms in the Old Testament is Psalm 46. It's the one that Luther based "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" on. It's a manly and vigorous song, Psalm 46. I'll read you it. It says, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change and though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains quake at its swelling pride. There's a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy dwelling places of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she will not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns. The nations made an uproar; He raises His voice, the earth melts. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold. Come, behold the works of the Lord, who has wrought desolations in the earth. He makes wars to cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariots with fire. 'Cease striving; be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.' The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold."

I love that song because it has all the cataclysm of war and natural disaster. And the psalmist isn't the cause of any of it, God is the cause of all of it, and His posture is simply refuge. "I'm here in a castle, and God is my castle, my thick walls, my fortress, and I can't be touched." That's how Abraham sees himself, even as he raises the knife to kill his son. It's incredible.

Thirdly, "Faith finds God's provision. Faith finds God's provision." "They came to the place where God told him. Abraham built the altar, arranged the wood, and tied up his son and placed him on top of the wood. And as Abraham" – in verse 10 – "stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son, the angel of Yahweh called to him from heaven and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.'" What a relief there had to be in his voice when He said those words.

"And then the voice from heaven says, 'Do not stretch out your hand against the lad,' – verse 12 – 'do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you've not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.'" Now God, who knows all things, was not informing the angel of the Lord of something he did not know, but was informing Abraham of the quality of his faith, and in so doing, was showing that God always provides. And that's a great principle here in the middle of this chapter, the idea of provision.

The word "withheld" is a word that speaks of the opposite of provision, that to withhold something is what's been shown, that Abraham will withhold nothing from God. And in verse 13, "Abraham raises his eyes and looks and sees a ram caught in the brush by the horns, and Abraham goes and takes the ram and puts the ram in the offering place in place of his son." You know, this is where people get funny and they misunderstand how this applies to Jesus and the cross; and it certainly, certainly has application.

But you can't get crazy here and say Isaac is like Jesus because he's the only son, because Isaac doesn't die; I mean, a ram dies in his place. The concept here is the provision that God makes. And the provision God makes is not the only son of Abraham, the provision God makes is this ram caught in the thicket. And the idea behind it, that at least was impressive to Abraham, wasn't just the idea of a death in the place of the son, which is significant here; but of greater significance, at least according to Abraham in verse 14, is that the Lord provided, the Lord provided. It's why Abraham calls the place, in verse 14, Yahweh-Jira, which means "Yahweh will provide," the covenant name of God and the concept of Him being the provider. It's in this spot on Mount Moriah, the mountain of the Lord, that God provided this substitute in the place of Isaac. And many commentators believe this is the same mountain there outside of Jerusalem where the Lord would be offered up in our place.

But the idea behind Abraham's relief is the Lord's provision. Abraham sees what God had seen all along: a substitute. And in the end, he knew that at some point this would be provided for him, and his faith finds the provision, finds this substitute. Abraham obeys, and God provides. And the mountain is not called "Abraham provides," the mountain is called "God provides." And it's at this point in the story that now Abraham can look back at the unknown and see at least in this moment how God is keeping His promise.

And we have to keep that provision in mind as we navigate trials and temptations of our faith. Any glimpse where we see God working is an opportunity, a rest stop along the highway of trouble and tribulation where we can take a moment of reprieve and see God is in it, He's still guiding us. Maybe you're not through the weeds completely. Abraham isn't there in the full fulfillment of the promise, he never will see it in his earthly life; but at this moment he gets a glimpse of it, doesn't he. He gets a little taste of God's fulfillment of the big promise in this provision of the ram.

You know, when we faithfully obey God in moments like this, moments of great difficulty, at the end of it, I don't know if I've ever seen a believer tap himself on the back and say, "You did it. You did a good job." I mean, in those moments, you don't think, "Well, you know, I grit my teeth and I made it." You think, "God sustained me, God provided for me. He was there the whole time, He never lost throne control. He moved everything according to His perfect sovereignty, and He provided."

I mean, certainly, in those words, "You did not withhold your son," it's hard not to hear that same language in Romans 8:32, that God wouldn't withhold His Son. That's true. And in such a moment of redemptive history to think, "How will God see us through? How will God bring us?" that's certainly part of it. But faith will always find God's provision. We may not see it now, but we'll see it throughout the trial. And I love that Abraham responds in worship. I think the New Testament version of this is, "God will meet all your needs in Christ Jesus." He always does.

Fourth and finally, "God is the one who sustains our faith. God is the one who sustains our faith." After calling the mountain "God will provide," the angel of the Lord ministers to Abraham, and we hear that promise that we've heard over and over again reaffirmed, that unilateral covenant, verse 15, "By Myself I've sworn," declares the Lord, "because you've done this

thing, you've not withheld your son, your only son, indeed I'll bless you, I'll multiply your seed as the stars and heavens, as the sand on the seashore; your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you've obeyed My voice." And so Abraham returns to his young men. They rise and went together to Beersheba; Abraham lived at Beersheba.

God is the one who sustained his faith. But what I think the conclusion of this story that usually gets missed isn't the reaffirmation of God's promise. That's never moved an inch. That's the same promise that we heard in the last chapter, same promise we heard two chapters before that, same promise we saw in the ratification of the covenant in chapter 17, same exact promise that set Abraham off in his journey to start with in Genesis chapter 12. We've heard that promise half a dozen times. That's not the conclusion of this story. The conclusion of this story is that part that everybody skips in their daily Bible reading. It's a bunch of names, isn't it?

Verse 20, eight names here, eight offspring of someone named Nahor, Abraham's brother. Abraham's brother's wife, his sister-in-law Milcah, her offspring are listed there: Uz and Buz. I don't know if they're twins, but something to add to your baby name book. I don't hear that one very often. Kind of Texas-sounding names. You guys could go, "Uz and Buz." Buz for sure. Kemuel. Chesed, which is an interesting name, very interesting name. It's a name that means lovingkindness. Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, Bethuel.

Why is all this getting listed here, and what does it tell us about the sustenance of Abraham's faith, especially with this paragraph right next to that repeated covenant promise that we've heard over and over again, "You will be a great people; you will have land; you will have offspring that will be a blessing to the entire ends of the earth"; and then this little genealogical tidbit? Well, the idea behind it is here we have those who are not the covenant people of God. This is not Abraham, this is Abraham's kinsmen that he left behind. These are people that live way back off where Abraham came from; and in it, what we see – really, the only thing of interest there is this person named, "Bethuel" – verse 23 – "who became the father of Rebekah."

How interesting, right? It's a contrast. Here you have Abraham, two sons: Ishmael, who's long gone; and Isaac, who just had a blade above his head. But now Isaac's been preserved. And so Abraham has this one son, this one

tiny little son, that's it, just one son. Meanwhile, Abraham's brother has all these sons and daughters. You have this contrast of God's people just barely hanging on, and then these other people with all kinds of offspring. And on the surface of it, it appears that God's people look so weak next to the successful people of the world. But here, just as in the moment on the top of Mount Moriah, God is on the throne, and you see it in that name "Rebekah."

This is where that story starts. You see, Sarah's going to die in chapter 23 – spoiler alert – and Abraham doesn't have many more chapters left in him either. He's going to mourn for Sarah; and it's almost the end of Abraham. But what we see unfolding here is God's promise and God's provision and God's sustenance of this promise, because He is going to provide a bride for Isaac. And that love story that Mr. Kent's going to preach on in a couple weeks is going to be this beautiful covenant romance, that only God could bring these two people together, only God who could sustain Abraham's faith, and it's only God who could sustain this promise for Abraham. You see, Abraham had this unshakable confidence that God knew what He was doing; and Abraham didn't know, Abraham merely had some conjecture on what it might be. And we're told in Hebrews chapter 11 exactly what that was. Flip over there and look at it with me.

The value of Abraham's faith has been shown: the manifestation of his faith in that simple obedience, the provision of that faith in the ram in the place of Isaac, and then God being the one who continues to sustain Abraham's faith and the faith of all who will follow the God of Abraham, including young Isaac. Hebrews 11:8, this is what was going on there: "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going." That's the first faith of Abraham.

And then the high water mark of Abraham's faith in verse 9, "By faith he made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country. He lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise; for he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God." His faith just keeps growing and growing as a nomad, not receiving any land like he's promised to receive.

But he keeps following God, he keeps faithfully obeying God; and here that high water mark reached its very highest point, verse 11: "By faith

Abraham, even though he was past age, and Sarah herself was barren, was enabled to become a father, because he considered Him faithful who had made the promise." And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, and countless as the sand in the seashore. It's incredible, isn't it?

What's happening here? He goes on and on talking about the inheritance of Abraham and receiving the promise, a country that he never gets to set his feet on. He never sees the fulfillment of it all, because Abraham's longing for heaven. But then verse 17: "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice." He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." Verse 19, "Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, He did receive Isaac back from death."

How many resurrections had Abraham witnessed? None. How many resurrections up to this point in the Bible have we seen? None. There's been no resurrections in the Bible. Abraham has no information about resurrections. There's been ascensions, right? Enoch went up. But there's been no resurrections. Abraham had this faith in God's inability to break His word, that nothing could extinguish; a conviction that was rooted in God's promise, that God would fulfill and must fulfill His promise, or God would be chopped up to bits like the birds that the torch went through.

God's clear command seemed to contradict God's promise, and the logic of faith did not have a solution to this dilemma, in all its intricacies and details; the perplexity was still on the scene. But Abraham had endgame. He said, "God can do anything; and so perhaps, He'll raise my boy from the dead," never having seen a resurrection, but having every confidence that nothing can break God's word. That is where the test of faith is shown true.

Friends, simply walk with God. You don't know what's going on. His ways are above our ways, His plan is inscrutable, incomprehensible, perplexing. But walk with God, and follow God, and reason that nothing will stop His plan. This story mirrors God's still greater love, because we see a ram die in Isaac's place. But the cross is only a part of the glory of this passage, the greater part is the first glimpse of resurrection. That's what Abraham saw. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, thank You for Your word that helps us to walk by faith, by showing us that all those who have followed You faithfully will be persevered to the end. As we simply obey and walk with You, we know that You will keep Your good word and accomplish all Your purposes. Give us faith like Abraham, that when tested, we reason that You know exactly what You're doing; and so we follow, we go, we walk with You, we obey, because we know You're on Your throne. Thank You for providing and sustaining, in Jesus' name. Amen.