

The title of this morning's sermon is, *"Trials and Testing – Part I."*

I appreciate Pastor Doug preaching for me last week. Some months back we decided he'd cover last Sunday for me b/c I'd lose a few days at Christian Heritage. I was pleasantly surprised to learn he'd be discussing trials, b/c I knew it would tie in well to this morning's sermon as we discuss God testing Abraham.

For a few weeks we've been looking at Genesis 22 w/ Abraham and Isaac. One of the struggles people have w/ this story – and perhaps it's been bothering you since we started looking at it – relates to God wanting Abraham to sacrifice his son.

We look at God's request and what do we say?

- *How could God want Abraham to sacrifice his son?*
- *How could God ask for something so evil?*

For any of you who have been troubled by this story...

- The truth is God did NOT want Abraham to sacrifice his son.
- The truth is God did NOT want something so evil.

The simple and obvious reason I can tell you this is He stopped it from happening:

- **Gen 22:11 the Angel of the Lord said, "Abraham, Abraham!"** This shows the urgency w/ which God wanted to make sure this didn't take place.
- Then in **verse 12 [the Angel said], "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him."** Not only was Abraham not to sacrifice Isaac, he wasn't even to **lay a hand on him or do anything to him.** The NLT says **"Do not hurt him in any way."**

So God didn't want Isaac sacrificed. He didn't even want Him hurt.

And this begs the question:

- If God didn't want Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, why did He ask him to do it?
- If that's not what God wanted, what did He want?

What God wanted is revealed to us – even though it wasn't revealed to Abraham – in the first verse of the chapter w/ the words: **God tested Abraham.**

- That's all this ever was: a test.
- That's all God ever wanted to do: test Abraham.
- It was never about Abraham ACTUALLY sacrificing Isaac; it was always about whether Abraham WOULD sacrifice Isaac.

A few weeks ago on the back of the bulletin I wrote about some of the blessings associated w/ the OT. 1 Cor 10:6 and 11 and Rom 15:4 says the Old Testament contains examples for us and was written for our admonition, learning, patience and comfort.

So we should be able to look at the OT and learn from it; we should be able to see examples from it for our lives. But let's be honest: we look at Gen 22 and we can't really identify w/ it:

- We can't identify w/ Abraham being asked to sacrifice his son, b/c we'll never be expected to do something like that.
- We also can't identify w/ Isaac being willing to be sacrificed, b/c we'll never be expected to be willing to be sacrificed.

This story looks completely foreign to anything we would ever expect in our lives.

But there's another way this story is completely applicable to us – there's another way that what happened to Abraham is EXACTLY what happens to us – and it's contained in the first verse in the word **tested**. God tested Abraham and God tests us.

I want to look at a few verses in the NT that explain why God tests people. These verses will tie into Genesis 22 when we turn there. For now, please look at **James 1:2...**

James 1:2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

There's a very important truth contained in these verses that I want to make sure we notice:

- James mentions trials in **verse 2**.
- Then he says what trials do in **verse 3**: they **test our faith**.

And this brings us to Lesson 1 on your inserts...

LESSON 1: (PART I) TRIALS TEST OUR FAITH...

If you write in your Bible, you can circle the words **testing of your faith** and write, "*Gen 22:1*". That's when God tested Abraham, and I'll tell you later why I think it's the most fitting picture of a test in Scripture.

The New Testament was primarily written in Greek, and I want to introduce two Greek words to you that I put on the bottom of your inserts. As I read the definition of each word, I want to ask you to do two things:

1. First, listen for the repetition of the words *try*, *trial*, *test* and *prove*.
2. Second, consider how similar the definitions are to each other.

The first Greek word is the word for **trials** in **James 1:2** when it says **count it all joy when you fall into various TRIALS**. That word is *peirasmos* (pr: pie-ross-moss), and it occurs 21 times in the NT. The definition is very long so I only put part of it on your inserts: "*a trial, proving: adversity, affliction, trouble sent by God and serving to test or prove one's character, faith, holiness.*"

The second Greek word is the word for **testing** in **James 1:3** when it says **knowing that the TESTING of your faith produces patience**. The word is *dokimion* (pr: doh-key-me-on), and it only occurs here and in 1 Pet 1:6, which we'll look at in a moment. It means, "*the proving; that by which something is tried or proved, a test.*" John MacArthur said it means, "*to put someone or something to the test with the purpose of discovering the person's nature or the thing's quality.*"

You notice the definitions are almost identical. That's why trials are tests and tests are trials. James 1:2 and 3 basically say:

- **Count it all joy when you fall into various TRIALS knowing the TRYING of your faith...**
- **Or Count it all joy when you fall into various TESTS knowing the TESTING of your faith...**

The Greek word for **testing** – *dokimion* (pr: doh-key-me-on) – only occurs in one other place in Scripture and that's **1 Peter 1:7**. If you write in your Bible you can circle the word **testing** in **James 1:3** and write **1 Peter 1:7**. And when *dokimion* (pr: doh-key-me-on) occurs in **1 Peter 1:7** it says the same thing it says in James: trials test our faith.

Please turn to **1 Peter 1:6**; it's the next book in your bibles. We won't turn back to **James**.

As I read these verses, please consider how similar they are to **James 1:2-3**. Peter describes trials almost identically to James...

1 Pet 1:6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,

The word for **trials** is *peirasmos* [pr: pie-ross-moss] the same word for **trials** in James:

- James says **count it all joy when you fall into various trials**
- Peter says **greatly rejoice [when you've] been grieved by various trials**

Then verse 7...

7 that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The word for **genuineness** is *dokimion* (pr: doh-key-me-on), the same word for **testing** in **James 1:3**. These are the two places it occurs in Scripture:

- James says **trials test our faith.**
- Peter says **trials [reveal] the genuineness of our faith.**

This word - *dokimion* (pr: doh-key-me-on) - was actually used for coins...

- To determine whether they're genuine or corrupt...
- To determine whether they're valuable or worthless...

And that is exactly what trials do: they determine – or prove – the value or worth of our faith.

And this brings us to the next Part of Lesson 1...

LESSON 1: (PART I) TRIALS TEST OUR FAITH (PART II) AND PROVE THE GENUINENESS OF IT...

In **verse 7** notice it doesn't say **the genuineness of our faith is precious [LIKE] gold**; it says **the genuineness of our faith is MUCH more precious than gold**.

Think about that for a moment:

- Why would Scripture say that about our faith?
- Why would Scripture describe our faith having this sort of value...or preciousness?

Because our faith is what allows us to be saved: we're saved by grace **THROUGH FAITH**.

- Without faith we have no salvation.
- Without faith we don't have the righteousness that allows us to be saved.
- Our faith becomes our righteous – or more specifically it becomes Christ's righteousness – b/c our faith in Christ allows His righteousness to be imputed to us.

So there's nothing more precious than our faith. Faith is everything. Like the verse says it's **MUCH more precious than gold**.

Now gold is what's known as a "*precious metal*." I don't mean it's known as a *precious metal* in Scripture, I mean it falls into the category of precious metals along w/ other materials like silver, platinum or palladium.

And what do you have to do w/ precious metals?

- You have to test them!
- You have to prove how valuable or precious they are...or aren't.
- You have to prove whether they're genuine or false:
 - Imagine someone thinks he's holding a bunch of gold, but he's really only holding pyrite or fool's gold.
 - Imagine some woman thinks her husband bought her a really expensive diamond ring, but it's only cubic zirconia. He got it at the Dollar Tree!

The only way you can be sure the material you're holding is as precious and valuable as you think it is, is by testing it.

Now w/ that in mind...

If our faith is everything – if our faith is even more precious than gold – what can we be sure of? We can be sure God is going to test it! He's going to make sure of its genuineness...

Look back to the end of **verse 6: you have been grieved by various trials 7 THAT the genuineness of your faith** then it says **MAY BE FOUND** or proved. You can even circle the words **may be found** and write, "*proved*."

And how is God going to test – or prove – our faith? **Verse 7** says it's going to be **tested by fire**.

Please listen to this verse...

Isa 48:10a Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver;

So God says He's not going to test us or refine us like some metal, but listen to what He says He is going to do...

48:10b I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.

But our faith isn't like some cold metal that can be handled and subjected to the same tests as other materials:

- You can't pour acid on faith or give it the scratch test...
- You can't heat faith up to some temperature...

But it can be subjected to trials that reveal whether it's genuine or false and that's what God does.

Tom Wells said, *"You know why men test gold, why they put it in the fire. They know that if it is gold, fire will not hurt it. Men do not seek to destroy gold with fire. They do not seek to harm it in any way. Instead, they try to prove beyond all doubt that it is gold. And that is what God is doing when He applies [trials]. He seeks to show...that they are true Christians."*

Thomas Kempis said, *"Adversities do not make a man frail. They show what sort of man he is."*

And this brings us to the next part of Lesson 2...

LESSON 1: (PART I) TRIALS TEST OUR FAITH (PART II) AND PROVE THE GENUINENESS OF IT (PART III) TO OTHERS.

In the Parable of the Soils, Jesus taught that trials prove our faith to be genuine or false. I'd like to look at a few of those verses. Please turn to **Matt 13:5**. We won't come back to Peter.

If by chance you're unfamiliar w/ this Parable:

- The Seed represents the Word of God.
- The soil represents people's hearts.

13:5 Some [of the seed] fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth.

Stony places refer to very shallow soil on top of a layer of bedrock. There isn't much **depth of earth**. That means the seed isn't going to establish deep roots, and that's exactly what Jesus says in the next verse...

6 But when the sun was up they were scorched, and BECAUSE THEY HAD NO ROOT they withered away.

So when you have soil – or hearts – that receive the seed – or God's Word – but there's no root, it's not going to last: it's going to **wither away**.

To give you an idea what this looks like, think of people who receive God's Word very enthusiastically; they're excited about their new faith - they **spring up quickly** - but guess what they don't have? They don't have **roots**. Their faith doesn't go down deep. It's not genuine, saving faith. It might look that way, but it's not.

And here's the question:

- What is going to reveal that the faith isn't genuine?
- What is going to reveal that the faith doesn't have any root or depth to it?

Trials and testing.

This isn't my opinion; this is exactly what Jesus said when He explained the Parable a few verses later. Look at **Matt 13:20**...

20 He who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy;

He's excited and enthusiastic...

21 yet HE HAS NO ROOT (there's no depth) **in himself, but endures only for a while** (now listen as Jesus says what reveals the falseness of the faith...). **For WHEN TRIBULATION** (or trials) **OR PERSECUTION ARISES because of the word, immediately he stumbles.**"

The simple point is trials prove these people's faith is false.

Sadly, we have all seen people like this...

- They seem very excited about the Lord...
- They seem very passionate about the Word...
- They seem very joyful for some period of time...

But as soon as a trial or test comes along it's all over! How many times have we said or how many times have we heard, "*Hey, what happened to so-and-so? Weren't they going to church?*" Then someone says, "*Oh, this happened and then we didn't see them anymore.*"

The reality of their faith – or the reality of their lack of faith – is exposed and they have reverted back to being the same people, living the same lives they did before the seed fell on their hearts...and this proves their faith to be false. B/c their faith doesn't have any depth or root to it, trials wipe it out; it **withers and dies**. It's tragic.

You could say: Christians will persevere and non-Christians won't. This is where we get the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. It's not that people get saved and then lose their salvation: it's that people LOOKED saved, but trials revealed their faith wasn't genuine.

Please listen to this important verse that discusses how people can LOOK like Christians – how they can LOOK like they have saving faith – but don't...

1 John 2:19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they went out* that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

Churches contain two groups of people. Everyone in every church falls into one of these two groups:

- People who are Christians: they have genuine, saving faith.
- And the other group is those who are unsaved: they don't have genuine saving faith.
 - But some of the people in this group look like people in the other group: they look like Christians.
 - In Revelation there was an entire church – Sardis – that looked like Christians – that looked spiritually alive – but was dead: **Rev 3:1 I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.**

And here's the question...

What is it that often reveals that the people who look like Christians are NOT Christians? Trials. If you tie together Jesus' words:

- In **verse 6** He says their faith withers and dies.
- And in **verse 21** He says what causes this: **when tribulation or persecution arises.**

Sometimes people supposedly get saved – maybe they do and maybe they don't – and everyone says, "*They're so on fire for God!*" and maybe they are, and maybe they aren't. The truth is...

- You've got wait and see if their faith survives trials and testing...
- Trials or tests will prove – or disprove – the genuineness of their faith to others.

But there's something else trials do – and please listen to me carefully when I say this – trials also prove – or disprove – the genuineness of faith...to us!

And this brings us to the next part of Lesson 1...

LESSON 1: (PART I) TRIALS TEST OUR FAITH (PART II) AND PROVE THE GENUINENESS OF IT:

- **(PART III) TO OTHERS.**
- **(PART IV) TO US.**

Warren Wiersbe said, "*In the 'School of Faith' we must have occasional tests, or we will never know where we are spiritually.*"

We all want to know that we're saved:

- None of us want to wonder if we're really born again...
- None of us want to wonder where we're going to spend eternity.

We all want to know we have genuine saving faith.

And there are primarily two ways to recognize genuine, saving faith:

1. One of the ways is revealed in James 2: you have works that demonstrate or prove the genuineness of your faith.
2. One of the other ways to know you have genuine faith is trials.
 - a. One of the blessings associated w/ trials is they can give us confidence in our faith.
 - b. When your faith has survived trials and testing you can be more certain of it.

George Muller said, *“The only way to learn strong faith is to endure great trials. I have learned my faith by standing firm amid severe testing.”* He meant he learned to trust his faith and have confidence in it b/c of what it had withstood!

This is one of the reasons we should welcome trials: they give us opportunities to prove the genuineness of our faith. R.C.H. Lenski said, *“If we have true faith we ought to be glad to have it tested out and proved to be genuine. If I have genuine gold coins I shall welcome any test to which they may be subjected.”*

Let me conclude this lesson by saying this...

When our faith has been tried and tested, there's a wonderful blessing associated w/ that:

- When you come through a trial and you still have faith in God...
- When you come through a trial and you still love God...
- You're able to see where you're at spiritually...
- The condition of your heart is shown...

In the language of **1 Peter 1:7** the **genuineness of your faith** can be proved.

Now I want to briefly explain two Old Testament Hebrew words that are also on the bottom of your inserts. I'll refer to these words throughout the rest of the sermon...

The first Hebrew word is the word for **tested** or **proved**; it's the word [*nacah*](#) (pr: nah-saw) and it means, *“to test, try, prove, tempt, assay, put to the proof or test.”* This word occurs 36 times throughout the OT.

The second Hebrew word is the word for **know**; it's the word *yada'* and it means, *“to know”*, but it's describing a very intimate knowledge of someone or something. For example, it's used in **Gen 4:1** when it says **Adam KNEW his wife, and she conceived and bore a son.** This word occurs 947 times throughout the OT.

Listen to these two verses from David...

- **Psa 26:2 Examine me, O LORD, and PROVE** (this is [*nacah*](#) [pr: nah-saw]), **me; Try my mind and my heart.**
- **Psa 139:23 Search me, O God, and KNOW** (this is [*yada'*](#) [pr: yuh-dah]) **my heart; Try me...24 See if there is any wicked way in me.**

David wanted God to **prove** – or test – him. David wanted to know the condition of his mind and heart, but David also said he wanted God TO KNOW his mind and heart...and this brings us to the rest of Lesson 1...

LESSON 1: (PART I) TRIALS TEST OUR FAITH (PART II) AND PROVE THE GENUINENESS OF IT:

- (PART III) TO OTHERS.
- (PART IV) TO US.
- (PART V) TO GOD.

Trials don't just prove the genuineness of our faith to others and to us. Trials also – and maybe most importantly – prove the genuineness of our faith to God.

John Fawcett said, *“Losses and disappointments are the trials of our faith, our patience, and our obedience. When we are in the midst of prosperity, it is difficult to know whether we have a love for God or only for His blessings. It is in the midst of trials that our faith is put to the test.”*

Think of what Satan said about Job; Satan himself understood trials reveal our faith, or reveal our hearts for God:

- **Job 1:9** Satan said, **“Does Job fear [You] for nothing? ¹⁰ Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. ¹¹ But stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!”**
- **Job 2:5** Satan said, **“Stretch out Your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!”**

Satan said the only reason Job didn't curse God was the absence of trials in his life. Now Satan is the Accuser - so these are the things we expect him to say - but he was right that trials can tempt us to curse God...and when we don't, we're proving the genuineness of our faith.

And this is why God tests His people w/ trials. We see Him do it throughout the Old and New Testaments: God tests His people to KNOW them.

- God's tests are related to Him knowing us...
- Very often when it mentions God testing His people, it says He does so TO KNOW them.

Let me give you four examples from the OT. Believe me when I tell you there are plenty of other examples I wanted to give you, but I controlled myself...

Before Israel went into the Promised Land, Moses spoke to the nation in the Book of Deuteronomy. Moses couldn't go w/ them and Deuteronomy contains his final words to the people he loved and led for 40 yrs.

In chapter 8 he talked to Israel about the 40 yrs in the wilderness. That was a pretty tough time for them – it was a time of real testing – and listen to WHY God tested them...

Deut 8:2 You shall remember the LORD your God who led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and TEST you (this is [nacah](#) [pr: nah-saw]), to KNOW (this is [yada'](#) [pr: yuh-dah]) what was in your heart.

That's why God tests us, b/c He wants to KNOW what's in our hearts. It doesn't really mean **know** as though God didn't "*know*" before. The word for **tested** means **prove** – and is sometimes translated as prove – and when God tests us it's to *prove* what's in our hearts.

Fast-forward a little to when Israel went in the Promised Land. What did God do w/ the enemies in Canaan? He left them! And why did He leave them? He left them so they would test Israel, and listen to WHY God wanted to test them...

Judges 3:4 [The Canaanites] were left, that He might TEST (this is [nacah](#) [pr: nah-saw]) Israel to KNOW (this is [yada'](#) [pr: yuh-dah]) whether they would obey [His] commandments. God wanted to test them to know – or prove – whether they would obey Him.

There was an interesting situation when Hezekiah – generally considered one of the greatest kings in the OT – was visited by some messengers from Babylon. Babylon was the superpower of the day, and sadly Hezekiah pridefully wanted to impress them. He showed them all the wealth of his nation, and afterward Isaiah rebuked him for it.

Listen to this verse that describes the situation...

2 Chr 32:31 Regarding the ambassadors [from] Babylon [God] withdrew from [Hezekiah], IN ORDER TO TEST HIM (this is [nacah](#) [pr: nah-saw]), that [God] might KNOW (this is [yada'](#) [pr: yuh-dah]) all that was in his heart.

God tested Israel in the wilderness b/c He wanted to know – or prove – what was in their hearts.

God tested Israel in the Promised land b/c He wanted to know – or prove – whether they would obey Him.

God tested Hezekiah, b/c He wanted to know – or prove – what was in his heart.

And God tests us, b/c He wants to know – or prove – what's in our hearts.

One of the reasons we can welcome trials is they're opportunities...

- To let God KNOW we love Him...
- To let God KNOW we're committed to Him...
- To let God KNOW what's in our hearts toward Him.

And there's one final example in the OT of God testing someone to know what's in that person's heart...

I've discussed the Principle of First Mention w/ you a number of times up to this point. It's where scholars look at the first time words are used in Scripture, b/c the idea is this reveals the truest or most accurate meaning of the word.

Earlier, I told you Gen 22 is probably the most fitting picture of a test in Scripture, and one of the reasons I said that is Gen 22:1 contains the first time the word **tested** – or *nacah* (pr: nah-saw) – is mentioned.

Please turn to **Genesis 22:1**...

Gen 22:1 Now it came to pass after these things that God tested (*nacah* [pr: nah-saw]) Abraham.

I didn't want to discuss God testing Abraham until AFTER we saw him pass the test, which we saw in my last sermon on this chapter.

We've looked at this chapter a number of times over the last few weeks, and w/ the understanding we have now of testing I hope we can look at what God did w/ Abraham a little differently.

If you write in your Bible, you can circle the word **tested** and write, "*James 1:3*", which says "**the testing of your faith.**"

There were more painful tests people faced in Scripture – like what Job experienced – but as far as having faith tested, I don't think there was a tougher test than what Abraham experienced. This is why he's the Father of Faith. He faced the premier test of faith and he passed.

I think this is the perfect place for **tested** - or *nacah* [pr: nah-saw]) - to be used for the first time, b/c of how well this **test** did exactly what we've been discussing:

- It tested Abraham's faith and proved the genuineness of it...
- It revealed what was in Abraham's heart...
- God wanted to KNOW how Abraham felt about Him and this test revealed that: look back at **verse 12: The Angel said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I KNOW that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me."**

Any idea what the word for **know** is? *Yada'* [pr: yuh-dah]). God said...

- *I KNOW you fear Me...*
- *You've shown Me what's in your heart...*
- *You've proven the genuineness of your faith...*

All along it was **a test** to see whether Abraham would let anything stand between him and God. Back in **verse 2** God said, "**Your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love**" and Abraham proved he wouldn't even let that son stand between him and God.

And there is something that stood out to me that I want to draw your attention to...

Consider most of the chapter has been a record of Abraham's obedience. As you go through the chapter you can see example after example of Abraham obeying God, working toward passing the test God had for him. I want to briefly look back through the verses to see how they're largely a record of Abraham's obedience up to the very end...

- In **verse 3**:
 - He **rose early in the morning**...
 - He **saddled his donkey**...
 - He **split the wood for the burnt offering**...
 - He **went to the place of which God told him**...which was 50 miles away.
- In **verse 5** he told the two servants to stay behind so they couldn't stop him.
- In **verse 6** he put the wood on Isaac to carry and he took the fire and the knife.
- In **verse 9**:
 - He **built [the] altar**...
 - He **placed the wood in order**...
 - He **bound Isaac**...
 - He **laid him on the wood**
- Then, in **verse 10** notice these important words: **Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.** This precise moment – when Abraham engaged in this specific action – is when he finally passed the test. Abraham had a long record of obedience, but it wasn't until this moment that he passed the test. God knew the hand that had the courage to pick up the knife would not have hesitated to perform the sacrifice. And it's at that moment Abraham was stopped.

What we see in Abraham is a very obedient man who was able to pass a very difficult test. He did everything God wanted Him to do, one-thing-after-another, until the test was passed. And Abraham was able to do this – Abraham was able to pass this test – for one very simple reason: he trusted God.

And this brings us to the next lesson...

LESSON 2: WE PASS TESTS BY TRUSTING GOD.

Abraham was able to pass the terribly difficult test God gave him for one very simple reason: he trusted God.

And we're only going to be able to pass the tests God gives us by trusting God.

Let me ask you something...

What if Abraham's faith was shaken and he stopped at any moment before he picked up the knife and held it over his son to sacrifice him?

- What if Abraham stopped after **verse 3**?
 - What if he **rose early in the morning**?
 - What if he **saddled his donkey** and **split the wood for the burnt offering**?

- What if he walked 50 miles and reached **Moriah** but then he said, *“I can’t do this. I don’t trust God.”*
- In **verse 5** what if he didn’t tell his servants to stay behind, b/c he knew if he let them go they’d stop him and then he wouldn’t have to sacrifice his son...b/c he didn’t really trust God enough to do what God wanted.
- In **verse 6** what if he put the wood on his Isaac’s shoulders, took the knife and fire in his hand, but then said, *“I don’t trust God enough to go any further than this.”*
- In **verse 9** what if Abraham built the altar, bound his son, laid him on the altar, but never picked up the knife...what if he did everything he did up to verse 9 – all that great obedience – but he stopped before verse 10?

The whole story has been an account of Abraham’s trust in God up to the very end, but if he never held up the knife, he never would have passed the test and heard the words of **verse 12: “Now I KNOW that you fear God.”**

And what allowed Abraham to do everything he did in this chapter, including – and probably most significantly – holding up the knife? His trust in God.

At the beginning of the sermon I said this was always only a test. It was never about Abraham ACTUALLY sacrificing Isaac; it was always only about whether Abraham trusted God. And when Abraham held that knife, he proved his trust in God.

Now please listen to this...

And the tests we face in our lives are really about whether we trust God...

- It’s not about some amount of strength we have...
- It’s not about how smart we are...
- It’s not about some amount of money we need...
- It’s not about whether it makes sense to us...
- It’s not about whether it seems fair to us...

It’s all about whether we trust God. And trials reveal whether we trust God or we don’t.

Please listen to this interesting verse: **Jam 2:21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he....**now let’s pause right here. When he...what?

- When he walked to Moriah?
- When he built the altar?
- When he bound Isaac?
- When he laid Isaac on the altar?

Jam 2:21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he OFFERED ISAAC HIS SON ON THE ALTAR?

Why does it say this? Are we justified – or saved – by works? No, we’re saved by grace through faith. But...

- When Abraham raised his hand it demonstrated the genuineness of his faith...
- When Abraham raised his hand it showed his great trust in God...

- When Abraham raised his hand it proved he had saving faith...

And the lesson for us is...

When our faith is put to the test through trials – it is our trust in God that allows us to go all the way to the every end and pass those tests – and when we do the genuineness of our faith is proved.

Now at the beginning of the sermon, I told you God never really wanted Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. What God wanted all along – as we've been discussing this whole time – is He wanted to test Abraham.

But that's not the only reason God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac.

The other reason – and I would say it's the more important reason – relates to what we've studied in the previous messages:

- God wanted a type or picture of what He would do w/ His Son.
- God wanted something performed in human terms that would help us understand the sacrifice He would make w/ His Son.

So God asked Abraham to do w/ his son the one thing that most resembled what God would do: He asked a human father to sacrifice his one and only son that he deeply loved. Reading this story helps us appreciate what God was willing to do and it reveals to us the great love God has for us.

But I want you to notice something: God didn't just ask Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. We say that, but what did God specifically ask? In **verse 2 [He said], "Offer him as a BURNT OFFERING."**

The test wasn't just sacrificing Isaac, it was offering him as a burnt offering.

I've told you many times God is repetitive for a reason – there are no wasted words in Scripture – so when God repeats Himself, He wants us to notice. And the words **burnt offering** occur 6 times between verses 2 and 13. That means almost every other verse we're reminded of Isaac being a burnt offering. It is stressed to make sure we notice.

So one purpose God had in this story was testing Abraham, but the other purpose God had was making Isaac look like Christ, and God wanted Isaac TO LOOK so much like Christ, He called Abraham to offer him as a **burnt offering**. And this brings us to our last lesson...

LESSON 3: JESUS IS THE TRUE AND GREATER BURNT OFFERING.

Burnt offerings were completely consumed, and Jesus was our burnt offering in that His life was completely consumed.

Please listen to these verses:

- When burnt offerings are discussed in Lev 1, three times – in verses 9, 13 and 17 it says they're **an OFFERING made by fire, A SWEET AROMA to the LORD.**

- Paul applies this imagery to Jesus: **Eph 5:2 Christ has given Himself for us, an OFFERING and a sacrifice to God for A SWEET-SMELLING AROMA.**
- **Lev 6:11** says the priest **carries the ashes [of the burnt offering] OUTSIDE THE CAMP.**
- **Heb 13:12** uses this language to discuss Christ's sacrifice: **He suffered OUTSIDE THE GATE. Therefore let us go forth to Him, OUTSIDE THE CAMP, bearing His reproach.**
- **Lev 1:4** describes what burnt offerings were supposed to accomplish: **Lev 1:4 [The priest] shall put his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf (the sinner's behalf) to make atonement for him (for the sinner – that's what it's supposed to accomplish).**
 - When the priest **put his hand on the head** of the burnt offering, it pictured the transmission of the person's sin to the animal.
 - When it says **[the burnt offering] will be accepted on [the sinner's] behalf** it's referring to the animal dying in place of the sinner: the NLT says **the LORD will accept its death in your place.**
 - Finally it says the burnt offering is supposed to **make atonement**; this means it's supposed to make the sinner right w/ God.

In most of the pictures of Abraham holding up the knife to sacrifice Isaac, his other hand is on Isaac's head. This is deliberate: it's understood that since Isaac was to be a burnt offering, Abraham would put his hand on his head.

At the beginning of the sermon I mentioned the difficulty we have w/ this story:

- *How God could ask something like this.*
- *How could God want Abraham to sacrifice his son?*

God didn't want that b/c like we've discussed it was always only a test, but the other reason God didn't want Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering is...

- No sin would've been transmitted...
- It wouldn't have made atonement...
- It wouldn't have accomplished anything...
- It wouldn't have pleased God.

But here's the question: did God want a burnt offering? Yes, He did...

- He wanted our sins transmitted to a sacrifice...
- He wanted a sacrifice that could be accepted on our behalf, or that could die in our place.
- He wanted a sacrifice that could make atonement, or that could make us right w/ Him...

But He didn't want that burnt offering to be Isaac. He wanted it to be His Son.

Picture this...

- Priests in the OT laid their hands on the heads of those animals...
- Abraham laid his hand on Isaac's head...

But on that cross **Isa 53:6** describes Jesus as our burnt offering saying **the LORD HAS LAID on Him the iniquity of us all.**

Jesus is the true and greater burnt offering that was willing to be completely consumed for our sins:

- If you've surrendered your life to Christ, your sins have been laid on Him.
- But if you haven't surrendered your life to Christ, your sins remain on you.

God loves you. He wants to forgive you through the sacrifice of His Son, His only Son, whom He loves...but He loved us enough to sacrifice that Son in our place.

If you have any question regarding whether your sins have been laid on Jesus, Pastor Doug and I will be up front after service and we would count it a privilege to be able to speak w/ you.

LET'S REVIEW THESE LESSONS:

LESSON 1: (PART I) TRIALS TEST OUR FAITH (PART II) AND PROVE THE GENUINENESS OF IT:

- (PART III) TO OTHERS.
- (PART III) TO US.
- (PART IV) TO GOD.

LESSON 2: WE PASS TESTS BY TRUSTING GOD.

LESSON 3: JESUS IS THE TRUE AND GREATER BURNT OFFERING.