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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**January 29, 2017**

**Abraham's Story**

**Genesis 15-17**

**Prayer:** Father, we just want to again thank you and praise you for your goodness and we just thank you that through you we can overcome evil with good because you are good. And Father, you have given us your word that we can look into, that we can see and sense and understand and know and grow from. And this morning, Lord, we are again examining, we're looking into just some aspects of faith and what it's all about, and we pray as we continue our examination that we would have the presence of your Holy Spirit, that you'd be coming alongside us, guiding us, opening up our eyes and ears and enabling us to make this of permanent value. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Now you see me, now you don't is not just a children's game. It really also describes a strategy that God employs in growing faith in his sheep. And we pointed out in the last two messages that God's absence is not something that's strange, it's not something that is bizarre for a believer. In fact we said God's absence is normative, that is that it is normal to encounter the absence of

God. I think many believers are under the impression that God speaks clearly to everyone in their prayer life, in their devotions, while they're worshiping. God may and he certainly can do that, but it is by far the exception and not the norm. I mean, I know that for many, many years I labored under the impression that there was something wrong with me because I frequently ran into people who left me with the impression that God walked with them and talked with them and I knew, I just knew that wasn't the case with me. Well, I now know that God's absence is far more normative than I ever imagined and there's a reason for that as well, I mean, God tells us in 2 Corinthians we are to walk by faith and not by sight. And secondly, we said that it was necessary. I mean, after the fall of Adam in the garden, God and man became so radically different that God actually said that a full exposure to him would be fatal. On the other hand, God himself became one of us and his full exposure to us was fatal as well. It was our fellow human beings who took the only perfect person who was ever born, the only one who ever lived his entire life loving God and loving others, and we butchered him for the crime of living flawlessly among us. I mean it was our sin, it was our behavior that put Jesus on the cross, so separation from God's side and from our side was necessary.

And finally, we pointed out that God's absence is natural. The

natural plan that God has put in place for growing faith in his people is to assert himself into their lives and then to pull back. And we pointed out as well that God's absence is always a perceptive absence. God has promised us in Romans 8:32 that nothing, there's nothing that will ever separate us from the love of God. However, we understand that our faith journey is going to consist of considerable periods of time when God's perceived absence will be a challenge. And now you see me, now you don't is an attempt to look at the lives of some of the great saints in scripture to see that very pattern in their lives. It's a way to see how God used his abiding presence and his perceptive absence to develop in us the ability to do exactly what he has called us to do, and that is to live by faith and not by sight.

So we've been following Abraham's journey of faith to see how God grew faith in him. And God spoke to Abraham when he was living the life of a pagan in Ur of the Chaldees and God told him to take his entire family, leave and go to Canaan, which he did, and he demonstrated tremendous faith, and that started the cycle. God's appearance to Abraham was the initial "now you see me" phase of Abraham's faith walk. Well, that was met by the next phase, the "now you don't" phase in which Abraham felt the pressure of life itself in God's apparent absence. And we follow the story. It's a famine that drives Abraham to Egypt and he gets to Egypt and he

fails in his faith spectacularly. He claims that Sarah, his half sister, is actually his wife, he's fearing for his life, he knows Sarah is beautiful, he's afraid somebody's going to see him, knock off Abraham -- see her and knock off Abraham and so he claims she's his half sister -- I mean, she's his wife. I'm sorry. She is his half sister when she is actually his wife. And so we're following this journey that Abraham has through all of its ups and downs, and we experience what he's experiencing. He's taking one step forward and two steps back. And the pattern that we see consistently develop is that God frequently asserts himself into Abraham's life and then he pulls back. I mean it would allow Abraham the freedom to make what he often times did, a very bad choice. Now Abraham claims Sarah is his sister, so Pharaoh takes Sarah as his wife. God intervenes and he rescues Abraham and Sarah but there's a great personal cost. Pharaoh essentially deports Abraham along with his whole family. And we follow Abraham's journey, noting some of the triumphs that he had where his weak faith grew steadily stronger in spite of the setbacks that he had and we see Abraham growing in his faith.

We follow the dispute that he had with his nephew Lot as each of their people begin quarreling over grazing land. And we see Abraham allowing his nephew Lot to choose the choice land, trusting that God is going to give him whatever he needed in terms of

resources. And we even saw Abraham negotiate with God over the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and we see six separate times Abraham challenging God over the number of righteous that he would find that would stop his hand from destroying Sodom. That's a triumph of faith in Abraham. Shortly after that triumph of faith, Abraham travels back into hostile territory and he winds up in the territory of King Abimelech and he repeats his half lie claiming once again that Sarah was his sister. Abraham is in his "now you see, me now you don't" phase and he is starting to fail badly. Well again, God swoops in and he rescues him, telling Abimelech in a dream that if he touches Sarah, he is a dead man. Well, this is basically where we left Abraham the last time. And if we were to finish there, we would say Abraham's journey at this point was pretty much a disaster. But we know that Abraham is the father of our faith. *Romans 4:3* says: *For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."* So we want to know how did God make that happen? Well, this morning we want to trace Abraham's journey from the disaster with Abimelech to the place where he believes God and is therefore counted as righteous. We find Abraham willing to send his only son as a sacrifice because his faith has grown to that level. And along the way we see numerous times where Abraham's faith stumbles and falls, and I want to focus on those issues, particularly those that have a connection to us, because there's one overarching

threat to Abraham's faith that reveals itself repeatedly. And it is a threat to each and every one of us when it comes to our faith journey and it's one that's worthy of some examination because I believe that it, more than anything else, causes us to conclude God is absent, causes us to conclude that God is absent when he is not. And I'm referring to the setbacks that Abraham endured that were directly the result of he and his wife Sarah's impatience with God. *Genesis 16* describes it, it says: *Now Sarai, Abraham's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Go into my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress.*

So after ten years Sarah is convinced that she's not going to be the one who will make Abraham into a great nation. She grows impatient. She decides to take matters into her own hands. She convinces Abraham to father a son through her servant Hagar. Now before you come down on Sarah and Abraham, ask yourselves how you would have responded to God's silence after receiving the promise?

You see, this was a "now you see me, now you don't" that lasted ten full years before Sarah grew desperate. And although she couldn't have anticipated, it turned out to be one of the most significant faithless acts ever committed. You see, Sarah and Abraham in a very distant but in a very significant way are responsible for Islam. In some ways they're responsible for ISIS. You see, the child that came of the union of Abraham and Hagar was a child named Ishmael. He's the father of the entire Arabic nation. And here's how it happened. After Hagar gets pregnant by Abraham, it becomes obvious that it was Sarah who was childless and not Abraham. And Hagar turns around and starts to become scornful of Sarah. Sarah responds by having her thrown out. An angel of the Lord, actually it was the angel of the Lord, another case of the pre-incarnate Christ appearing, this angel convinces Hagar to go back to Sarah by telling her that Ishmael himself is going to be the father of a great nation. This is *Genesis 16* starting at verse 9, it says: *The angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress and submit to her." The angel of the LORD also said to her, "I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude." And the angel of the LORD said to her, "Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the LORD has listened to your affliction. He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all*

*his kinsmen."* Abraham was 86 years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abraham.

Well, the long term accuracy of this prophesy is stunning. You see, the wild donkey reference is to an incredibly aggressive, untamable donkey of the desert. It's called an onager. What God is saying is, Ishmael, you are that creature. Ishmael becomes the father of the Arabic nations and his half-brother Isaac becomes a father of the Jews. And as deeply as the Jews and Arabs hate each other now, at one point they both had the same father: Abraham. And God's word is incredibly accurate and its description of what the future would bring for these two half-brothers, when it says of Ishmael, *"his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen."* So Abraham and Sarah's impatience proved to be very, very costly. It's been ten years since God told Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation and God tells Abraham once again some 15 years after that that it's not going to be Ishmael who -- but the offspring of Sarah who's going to form this new nation. This is *Genesis 17*, it says: *When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless." And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will*

*bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her." Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" And Abraham said to God, "O that Ishmael might live before you! God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bare you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year." When he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham.*

All right. Now, to kind of put this all in context, we know a few facts. We know that Abraham was 75 years old when he left Ur. We know that it was ten years later that he impregnated Hagar, and we also know according to scripture was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him and we also know that Sarah was 90. Now, this tells us something about God's timetable. See, God made a promise to Abraham and he took 25 years to fulfill it. But you have to notice something about the promise. There's no apologies for any delays. You know, there's no reminders that "Abraham, oh,

you really need to be patient here." There's simply a promise made when Abraham is 75, and its fulfillment in Abraham's hundredth year. Now that's got to tell you something about God and patience and God's promises.

You see, it's incredibly important to grasp one aspect of "now you see me, now you don't," that I think is behind the vast majority of our unhappiness with our relationship with God, and what that is is God's timetable. It's God's timetable versus our timetable. I've counseled with many, many folks in my years and I would say one of the most recurring disappointments that folks have with God is attributable to the fact that God's timetable and our timetable are not even remotely in sync. We are pathologically impatient. And I would have to say that well over fifty percent of the stress and the pain and the anguish that I discover in people is directly related to God's idea of pace. I mean, we as a people are incredibly impatient with God. There's two different ways of experiencing time and they are diametrically imposed -- opposed. One of those is God's way, and the other way is our way. And by our way, I don't mean people in general, I mean specifically people in North America, people in Western societies. We look at time the way God never, never does, and that causes an awful lot of heartache for us. We are pathologically given to impatience not only with God but with virtually everything else. And to put it

simply, God does not look at time the way Abraham and Sarah did and certainly not the way you and I do.

There was a brilliant book written in the 1980s by Robert Banks. It was entitled "*The Tyranny of Time*." It was subtitled "*When 24 Hours is Not Enough*." I'd love into a lengthy analysis of it and the reason why I can't has much to do with the problem of time itself. We just don't have enough of it. It's Bank's contention that we are enslaved by time. He says the single most oppressive invention of all time is this little thing that all of us carry on our wrists. Mine cost 12 bucks and it breaks time down into tenths of a second. That is a time frame unthinkable to the rest of history. I mean neither was for that matter even a 24-hour day. You know, we now routinely break 24 hours in a day down in order to parcel out of 60 minutes that each one of those 24 hours contains. That's 1440 minutes. And then we take those and we break those down to the 86,400 seconds they contain. And if you don't think we care about them, just try figuring up how many seconds it takes for something to load up on your computer. And if it normally takes six seconds and it actually takes ten seconds, that's four seconds longer and we freak out and we get genuinely frustrated. That's a difference of four seconds. I mean is there any time in all of man's history where four seconds mattered that much? See, we are pathologically impatient. How many seconds does it take for a

commercial to start playing on TV before you're grabbing for the remote and flicking and flicking and flicking and flicking. In my case it's about four or five seconds, you know, I mean, do you need those four seconds? Robert Banks in *The Tyranny of Time* says this, he says: "It is disturbing to find people congratulating themselves every time a speed record is broken, as if going faster were some end in itself; we fail to think about what use it is, to gain time like this. Similar congratulations are voiced every time a new remedy is invented, as if living longer were also an end in itself; we fail to work out what it is we are actually living for. People do not know what to do with their time because the spiritual foundations of their lives have been destroyed. As Ellul says: 'No one knows where we are going, the aim of life has been forgotten, the end has been left behind. Man has set out at tremendous speed to go nowhere.'" Well, I think he's on to something and he goes on to quote a number of authors who see our preoccupation with time really as a judgment from God. They say: "Most people have a deeply rooted dread of time and are afraid to look into its face. That's why they are constantly endeavoring to forget themselves, ignore the past and avoid looking too deeply into the future. The busyness in which they attempt to hide from themselves and God, and the constant fatigue that accompanies their behavior, are more than just symptoms of an inadequate sense of self and a deficient vitality. They are signs of the judgment of

God. As the Bible reminds us over and over again, those who turn away from God will find that their works are vain and that they exhaust themselves for nothing. This is what we see taking place before our eyes." Let me tell you what's so scary about that quote. The main thing that's so scary about that quote is that it was written 34 years ago. It was written in 1983. It was written for all practical purposes before the Internet even came about. You know, Abraham ran out of patience after ten years. How long do you think it would take you and me to run out of patience? You know, things have gotten much, much worse. And folks find "that their works are vain and that they exhaust themselves for nothing."

Have you ever stopped to think of the hold that time itself has on you? I seriously doubt that anyone in biblical time ever gave a second's thought to even the idea of tenths of seconds or even seconds or minutes for that matter. The day was genuinely broken down not into 1440 minute segments but into four. They had four six-hour segments. There was morning, noon, evening, and night. Consider something to the biblical mindset. In the biblical mindset, they had no idea what 10:30 meant. 11:45 was a meaningless concept. I mean it just wasn't there. And instead of a 40-hour work week, there were seasons. There were seasons of slowness and suddenness, of work and rest, of sowing and reaping. Jesus's own life was characterized by that exact pattern. There

would be intense activity followed by a drawing away into solitude. Slowness and suddenness, suddenness and slowness. Jesus would minister until he was so exhausted he would collapse and then he would rest. You know, we have one time where he remained sleeping soundly in a boat that's sinking in a storm. And again we have slowness and suddenness. See, it was a natural pattern. It was a pattern that the farmer -- it was an agrarian society. It was one that the farmer knew all too well. The farmer understood the season of early rains where the sowing take place, a time of great suddenness and it would be followed by the growing season which is obviously is time of slowness which would then be followed by harvest which is a time of great suddenness. It was a climate that was well-suited to the development of the one thing that we are all missing, and that's patience. *James 5 says: See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and late rains.* You see, our lack of patience has blinded us. I mean, our 21st century enslavement to time has changed the way that we see God's actions in our lives. Against the backdrop of scripture, against an entirely different way of looking at time, we see time frames that God is completely comfortable with that appear to us to represent to us a form of abandonment. I mean, we start tapping our feet after four or five seconds of delay. God says 25 years is a reasonable wait. God sees that as normal. We see that as abandonment. See, God's

history of dealing with us seems to bear out the fact that God's timing is so vastly different from ours. We look in scripture and we see Noah. Noah's building an ark and what happens? God sits back and he waits. For how many years, we don't know, it could have been a hundred years until the flood begins. Well, that's God understanding of patience. We have Abraham here, he's told by God that his offspring is going to number more than the stars and ten years later Sarah convinces him that's not going to happen and 15 years after that God appears him to Abraham to tell him at Sarah at 90 is going to present him with a son that he had promised. That's a 25-year wait for a child that God has promised, and God's not about to apologize. He doesn't send periodic notices to Abraham explaining there's been some kind of delay in working out the promise. He just states what he's going to do and then two and a half decades later he does it. That's God's idea of patience. Moses goes into the desert. 40 years later God says now you're ready for ministry. You know, would you go -- you can ask -- would you go into seminary knowing that you're going to get out of seminary in the year 2057? I don't think so. Jesus himself spent 30 years in training for a three-year public ministry.

My point is this: Do you think God might have a different understanding of what patience means than we do? I mean if Abraham took ten years before he started to falter, I mean, how long would

it take for us? Because we are the product of a culture that wants everything yesterday. We are a product of a culture that has no working knowledge of the biblical patterns of time, and slowness and suddenness are foreign concepts to us. And here's the problem. Inactivity on God's part equals something very different than it equaled in Abraham's day. You see, inactivity to us means something's broken, something's not right, God is not here, God's not listening, God has abandoned me. We're pathologically impatient with God. And as I've said, we have two completely different ways of looking at time: We have God's way, we have our way, and I can tell you for certain, one thing I know without a doubt, God is not about to adopt our way. He's not going to do it. And if you ever want to have the peace and the power that God promises, we have to learn to understand time according to his way. And we're a product of a culture that will not allow patience to have its work. And understanding the role that our broken concept of time plays will go a long way towards healing a broken notion that a God who doesn't respond as quickly as we'd like is a God who no longer cares. We know that God cares more than you and I will ever be able to fathom. And we know that because we have the cross. And the cross is all the proof that anyone even -- even possibly needs that God cares. But God is not going to be held hostage by our Western notions of what time is. And he's willing to bear our frustration and even our anger to work his patience

into our lives.

Now it's been 25 years since God made this promise to Abraham that he would father a great nation, and at age 100, Abraham has this son that God has promised. He's about to undergo his greatest test of faith. He's been through a great deal of "now you see me, now you don't" in the past fifty some-odd years and we've seen him take some steps forward in faith, we've also seen him take some steps back. We know that Abraham told Pharaoh that Sarah was his sister. That was a step back. We know when he repeated the lie to Abimelech, that was also a step back, and when he impregnated Hagar, that, too, was a step back. And we look at it and we see in each case Abraham makes the wrong assumption that God was absent when he wasn't. And in each case when Abraham was faithless, God was faithful. And there's a reason for that. And the reason is God is slowly and steadily growing Abraham into the man of faith that he is. And part of that, an incredibly important part of that is the experiential knowledge of having gone through life's circumstances that demonstrated that God was faithful. And we see that in Abraham's life when Abraham leaves his home in Ur of the Chaldees, when he offers up the choice land to Lot, when he pleads with God for ten righteous to preclude the destruction of Sodom, these are all steps forward. And scripture takes us from the disaster with Abimelech directly to the announcement of the birth

of Isaac, and then God once again goes silent. And we don't know how old Isaac was when God demanded of Abraham the ultimate sacrifice. It's assumed by everyone that he was anywhere from a teenager to somebody in his early 30's. And so we don't know exactly how old he was but we do know that there were many, many years of "now you see me, now you don't" before the "now you don't" was shattered. And this is what shattered it.

God says in *Genesis 22*: *After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."* People have been asking this question for thousands of years. Why in the world would God demand that of Abraham? Abraham knows that Isaac is the key to the nation that God has promised Abraham's going to become. And this demand seems to cruelly insist that Abraham sacrifice his dream. And you want to add to that agony, you have God even acknowledging the deep love that Abraham has for his son. He says: "Abraham, take the son whom you love and offer him to me as a sacrifice." Now I've read many different accounts of why God did this and some say this is perfect evidence that the Judeo-Christian God is a vicious God, is a cruel God. I mean, why else would he put Abraham through such a test of his loyalty and faith? What kind of an ego-driven God

would do that? Why would he demand such a level of loyalty? Well, that kind of view misses entirely the whole point of the test and of the testing program that God has placed Abraham through all of these years. And it misses it on two very important points. First, God has repeatedly asserted himself into Abraham's life and then pulled back, drawing out of Abraham at each step a newer and deeper expression of his faith. This test is really Abraham's final exam. And secondly, here's what the critics don't seem to understand. The test was for Abraham's sake. It wasn't for God's. I mean, our God is omniscient. That means that God knows all things including the future and in particular, Abraham's future. God saw Abraham's future one year out when he told Abraham and Sarah who were 99 and 90 that at the time that the following year they were going to have is a son and that's exactly what happened. And 25 years before that he told both Abraham and Sarah the very same thing and it happened precisely as he said it would. And so God repeatedly demonstrated his command of the future, whether it was one year or 25 years or even four years. God clearly saw the future 400 years in advance when he promised Abraham that Israel would inherit the land of Cana, but only after the Amorites had filled up their cup of judgment which would take 400 years. This is *Genesis 15*. It says: *Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted*

*for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."*

You want to talk about patience? You want to talk about God's timetable? Hear what God is saying. It took 400 years for the Amorites to finally tip the scales of justice where their wickedness required God's response. But God saw it clearly four centuries before it took place. And now a God who has such command of Abraham's future that he can see it over one year, over 25 years or 400 years in advance is suddenly supposed to not know what's going to happen when Abraham goes up that mountain with Isaac? Well, the point is God knew full well what Abraham would do. God knew that Abraham would be faithful because God knows the future. The only one who didn't truly know was who? Was Abraham. And that's who the test was for. It was to show Abraham that the fruits of his faith walk would be real. I mean afterwards Abraham could speak from experience when he said to Isaac, "God will provide." And you know, it may not be as extreme or as dramatic as in Abraham's case, the ultimate goal in Abraham's life is really no different than the goal that he has in your life and my life. It's

to grow our faith to the place where we see God himself as the source and solution to every single issue we face. And that was God's purpose in all the tests that took place in Abraham's life and that's God's purpose in the individual tests that he's going to engineer and is engineering in your life. God wants to bring us to the place where we recognize the truth of what Paul said in *Philippians 4* where he said: *I can do all things through him who strengthens me.* And so the question for each of us is do you really, do you really believe that? I mean if you do, well, it's because God has brought you through his own personal testing program to a place that is not theory but actual practice. And the first point of Abraham's test with Isaac was that it was designed specifically for Abraham. When he came back down from that mountain, Abraham was a different man than the man who had gone up, and he knew now by experience that he was faithful, that he was trustworthy, and that he would supply all that he needed through that lamb who was symbolically stuck in a thicket. I mean, that lamb represented Christ Jesus, and it pictured perfectly another sacrifice that would take place years later in the very same place.

And there's a story that R.C. Sproul tells that helps us to grasp what God is getting across to us in that story. It's a story that Sproul tells about a dog. It was a dog that he received as a gift, a German shepherd given to him by one of his early benefactors and

it was the championship German shepherd, the AKC registered number one sire and the number one female and they produced this incredible dog and he was given one of the puppies. And he became inseparable with the dog. The dog was named Hosie. He said one day Hosie came into the house and it was in obvious distress and his face was swollen three times its normal size. Turns out it had been bitten by either a copperhead or a rattlesnake. So they rushed it to the vet, and it was touch and go for almost an entire week and eventually they said, okay, he made it through and he was going to take him home and the vet said that Hosie can go home but the worst part was yet to come. And there was some bad news for RC. He said a large area of Hosie's face had been completely disfigured. You see, what this venom does, this venom necrotizes tissue, it rots it, and literally there was a large chunk of Hosie's previously gorgeous face that had now rotted and fallen off and what was there smelled to high heaven. And so he said he approached the dog and he put his gloves on, and he had this special salve that he had to put on, and it was just an awful experience, and as soon as he touched the dog, the dog recognized that the salve was a real comfort, and he said he established a bond with that dog that went for months and months as he nursed it back to health. And he said he bonded with that animal in a way he had bonded with any other animal before. So the animal went to live on with this permanent scar on its face. He said it looked

like a sneer or a smile depending on what your perspective was. But Hosie went with Sproul anywhere that he went. Even when he lectured, he would come down, sit down at the base of the podium and just sit while he lectured. In fact, RC said one day he was out hunting with the dog and he tripped and he fell and he landed on his back and got partially paralyzed while he was on the rock, he said Hosie stuck his snout under his arm and literally dragged him away to a place of comfort to be able to kind of assist him in any way that he could, and that's the kind of relationship that he had. So he said one day years and years after the snakebite, Hosie had a convulsion and that was followed the next day by another one and then another one and very soon he was having five and six convulsions a day. And so he took him to the vet and the vet said that this is probably the residual effect of the snakebite and that he said it was going to get much worse and that he couldn't guarantee that it wouldn't dangerously affect at some point the dog's personality. What he in essence said was that Hosie needed to be put down. And so they were talking about it and at one point he described the cost of it and RC thought to himself, well, maybe we'll just go out hunting and I can end it all quickly with a bullet while he's not looking. And then the more he thought about it, he said the dog meant so much to him that he couldn't possibly do something like that. In fact the more he thought about it, he realized he couldn't even drive him to the vet because he's was so

used to getting into his pickup truck and Hosie would jump in the back and he would jump in the driver's seat and they would take off, and he said I can't imagine me getting into that truck and Hosie getting into the truck thinking we're going on some trip when actually he's going to his end. Well, eventually they got a student to drive the dog to the vet and he says it was --

Dr. Sproul said when he found it was all over, he just wept and he wept and he wept. He said but then he thought of Abraham. And he said, I realized after all, Hosie was just a dog. He said imagine what was going through Abraham's head as he makes this three-day journey up the mountain, knowing that the goal of the journey is not to sacrifice a dog, it's to sacrifice your son. Imagine what is going through Abraham's mind when Isaac says, Father, we have everything that we need for the sacrifice except the sacrifice. Abraham responds, "God will provide." That's what God was doing in Abraham's life. That's what God was working into Abraham's life. And we all know the story. In fact God did provide. At the very last moment an angel stops Abraham's hand from striking Isaac and a ram caught in the thicket provides the actual sacrifice.

Well, that leads to the second point of what God was doing in this test. It was a sign and a symbol of what was going to take place again hundreds of years in the future when another sacrifice would take place. But in this sacrifice, there would be no substitute.

No avoiding the fact that the Father would have to sacrifice his only begotten son in order to pay the price of our sin. You see, Abraham's sacrifice, it paints a picture that is almost unique in scripture. It is a picture of the cross from the Father's perspective. Jesus lived the perfect life and then he offered up that life on a cross to pay the price of our sin and we know that he despised the shame of the cross for the joy set before him, that he willingly submitted himself to its humiliation, but we seldom consider the agony that Abraham represents. And that is the Father watching his deepest treasure butchered for us. It is the Father whose ongoing love for us will not stop until we get to the place where Abraham got. It is the Father who loved us enough to give up the very son he loved so that we by faith could live with him forever, and it is the Father who mirrored Abraham's agony with no one to intercede to stop the hand of judgment that his perfect justice demanded, and it's the Father who proclaims in the most quoted scripture, *John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."* He's the one behind "now you see me, now you don't." And he is growing in you and me a faith that is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Let's pray.

*Father, we just again, we marvel at what it is you have done for*

us. I just, I see in Abraham the agony of somebody going up a mountain, having a three-day journey, knowing that your purpose going up that mountain is to take the life of the son whom you love. And we see in Abraham, Lord, what happened when you had to look down from heaven and see the Son whom you loved butchered on our behalf. Father, I thank you, and I praise you for the faith that you are working into Abraham's life. I praise you and thank you for the test that he had, his ultimate final and how well he passed that test. Father, I just think of each and every one of us right now, we have our tests, God is working into our lives the very same kind of items and circumstances and situations and crises that we have and it's all for the same end goal, it's all for us to be able to say no matter what life throws at us, God will provide. I pray that you would give us the grace, and the peace and the power and the wisdom to see these tests as they are going and the understanding that God's patience is vastly different than ours and inactivity does not mean abandonment and that God still loves us and his proof is that cross. I pray you would grasp that. I pray you would understand that. I pray that would empower us as we go forward, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.