

God Tests, Your Vindication

From Genesis

By Dennis Prutow

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Bible Text: Genesis 22:1-19
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Westminster Evangelistic Ministries
Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary
7418 Penn Avenue
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15208

Website: www.wordfortheweek.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/rptsprof

Genesis chapter 22 and beginning with verse one.

Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.” So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance. Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you.” 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. 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.

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 have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.” 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. Abraham called the name of that place The LORD Will Provide, as it is said to this day, “In the mount of the LORD it will be provided.”

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 your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.” So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham lived at Beersheba.¹

May God be pleased to bless to us the reading of his Word and as we have opportunity this evening to look into it.

My good friend Harry is a quadriplegic. He sustained an injury in tumbling when he was a freshman in college. He does not have the use of his legs and only limited use of his arms. He is confined to a wheelchair and to his bed. When I encountered Harry early on in my ministry in central Kansas, Harry was suffering from what is called a clinical depression. He explained his depression to me by sending me a cartoon. The cartoon was a picture of a table around which stood three men. One of the men was pointing to the middle of the table and to a glass in the middle of the table. He was saying, “The glass is half empty.” A man on the other side of the table was saying, “No, the glass is half full.” And the third man stood there a little befuddled and asked the question, “What glass?” Harry said, “This is what it feels like to be in the midst of a clinical depression.”

Harry’s test was to come out of this clinical depression by trusting Jesus Christ not by trusting medication. Harry’s test was tailored to him in order to validate his faith in Jesus Christ the One who passed every test for Harry. And this is the lesson that emerges from this text in Genesis 22. God tailors your tests to validate your faith in Jesus Christ who sustained every test on your behalf. God tailors your tests to validate your faith in Jesus Christ who sustained every test on your behalf. I would like you to see how this point emerges from Genesis 22.

As we get into the text we see, first of all, that God did tailor this test for Abraham. Look at Genesis 22, verses one and two with me once again.

Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.”²

Here was Abraham’s son Isaac, the son of promise. In Genesis chapter 12 when Abraham first heard the gospel of Jesus Christ, Abraham was 75 years old. And then in

¹ Genesis 22:1-19.

² Genesis 22:1-2.

chapter 21 and verse five it reads, “Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.”³ Abraham waited 25 long years for this son to come. And the test given to Abraham was tailored for him because it involved this son, this son of promise for whom Abraham had waited for so many years. Abraham knew that it was through this son that God had said, “All the nations of the earth will be blessed.”⁴

Now you know as well as I do that nothing happens by chance, nothing comes about by so-called chance. Everything works in accordance with the will of God. “All things work together for good to those that love God and are called according to his purpose.”⁵ Every molecule in the universe is working together for the good of God’s people. And this was the case for Abraham. Everything was working together for Abraham’s good including this test which was tailored specifically for Abraham. And every test, because everything is worked out in accordance with God’s will—every test that comes your way is tailored specifically for you and tailored specifically for me.

And these tests, when they come along, require faith in action. Again, this is what we see in the life of Abraham. Look again at the text, verses three and following.

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. Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you.” 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.⁶

Abraham split the wood. You can see him in your mind’s eye. There he is whacking each of those pieces of wood and splitting them. He is thinking about what the wood was for and how Isaac was to be placed on that wood on an altar. And he took that wood and the young men and Isaac and then he saw the place, after three days, at a distance. Fools rush in where angels fear to tread, but Abraham was no fool. Abraham was a man who did trust God and so he said to the young men, “We are going over there and we are going to worship and we are going to come back to you.”

With these words, he put the wood on Isaac’s back and the two of them went to the place that God had chosen, Mount Moriah. Do you know the place? It is the very mount where the temple was built. It is the very mount where the cross was raised and Jesus Christ cried out, “MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?”⁷ It is

³ Genesis 21:5.

⁴ See Genesis 12:3.

⁵ See Romans 8:28.

⁶ Genesis 22:3-6.

⁷ Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34.

the very place of the crucifixion. And it was this place to which Abraham and Isaac repaired.

It was by faith that Abraham took this action. He took his son by the hand and went up to this place trusting that God would take them there and then God bring both of them back again. He said to the young men, “We will go there and worship and we will return to you.”⁸

And what was Abraham’s faith as he took those steps? Turn with me, if you would—keep your finger there in Genesis—and turn to Hebrews 11, just a few verses there in Hebrews 11 describing this circumstance and the faith of Abraham. Hebrews 11 verses 17 and following.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, “IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED.” He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.⁹

Abraham believed that God was going to send a Savior through his Son Isaac. Abraham also believed that if he did slay his son Isaac, God would raise him from the dead. He trusted God. He believed in the resurrection from the dead. He knew that God would be faithful to him. And so he went forward with this faith in his heart knowing that his God is faithful and that all would be well for him.

And as he went, Abraham had to make his profession of faith more specific. Not only so, God calls us not only to believe in our hearts and to make a profession of faith, but to attach actions with our professions. Notice how this comes about in our text this evening. Look at our text again, verse seven. Isaac now speaks to Abraham.

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?”¹⁰

And as they go forward to Mount Moriah Abraham says to his son, his only son, the son whom he loves, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.”¹¹ And, “so the two of them walked on together.”¹² God didn’t require just a profession. God required actions. In the same way, it is not the profession of faith which is enough for you or for me. God requires explicit action.

Verse nine.

⁸ See Genesis 22:5.

⁹ Hebrews 11:17-19.

¹⁰ Genesis 22:7.

¹¹ Genesis 22:8.

¹² Ibid.

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.¹³

There was Abraham about to sacrifice his son, his only son, the son whom he loved. All of this reminds us of our great God who “loved the world [so much] that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”¹⁴ And the wood placed on the back of Isaac, the son, reminds you of the burden of the cross laid upon the Savior. He bore the instrument of his own sacrifice on his back.

When they went to the place, Mount Moriah, it was ultimately the place of the temple and of that cross where Jesus Christ was obedient to the point of death, even death on that cross. This was the place where Jesus Christ gave himself up in obedience for the likes of you and me so that you could have new freedom from sin.

And because Jesus Christ ultimately went to the cross and because Jesus Christ ultimately was the sacrifice to which all of this activity was pointing, the test, in the case of Abraham, comes to an end. Because of Jesus Christ every test into which God is pleased to lead you and me also comes to an end. Again, please look at our text, verses 11 and following.

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 have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.” Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked.¹⁵

He raised his eyes at a distance once before and looked and he saw the place of the sacrifice. Now a second time he raised his eyes. And what does the text tell us?

[He] 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. Abraham called the name of that place The LORD Will Provide, as it is said to this day, “In the mount of the LORD it will be provided.”¹⁶

And so Abraham took that lamb, that ram, and he offered that ram on the altar after the angel stayed his hand. He offered it, the text says explicitly, “in the place of his son.”¹⁷ And, of course, that ram, once again, points to whom? Are we not glad that this ram, this

¹³ Genesis 22:9-10.

¹⁴ John 3:16.

¹⁵ Genesis 22:11-13.

¹⁶ Genesis 22:13-14.

¹⁷ Genesis 22:13.

blessed ram, this blessed ram sacrificed in the place of Isaac the Son, points to Jesus Christ. It points to Jesus Christ who was sacrificed in the place of you and me for your freedom and for my freedom.

Abraham, in his test, did not prove he was worthy of God. The object of his test was not to prove he somehow merited God's favor. No, it was not this kind of a test at all. Abraham was already a believer. In Genesis chapter 12 Abraham heard the gospel. In Genesis chapter 15 it is recorded for you and me that "Abraham believed God and it was accounted to as righteousness."¹⁸ He received the righteousness of God which is by faith. Abraham was a believer. So this test, as the tests that come your way, was not designed to validate the fact that Abraham was something special. Nor are your tests designed to show that you are somehow worthy of God. No, not at all. There is no merit within you or me. We are not worthy. It is only Jesus Christ who is the worthy one, the one to whom all of these sacrifices in the Old Testament point, and more specifically, that ram in the thicket sacrificed in the place of Isaac, the son.

And so, Abraham's test and the tests coming your way are designed to vindicate the faith that is already within you. Praise be unto God that that is the case.

Look at the end of the text now with me if you would, verses 15 and following.

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 your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham lived at Beersheba.¹⁹

You might stumble just a little over verse 18. "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."²⁰ But the way you should understand this text. Like conversion, the Christian life is a two sided coin. Conversion is a two sided coin. It consists of faith and repentance. If you really trust Christ, you repent of your sins. If you really repent of your sins and turn away from your sins, you also turn to Christ in faith. Real conversion is a two sided coin. And so it is with the Christian life. It is a two sided coin. Sometimes, in the Bible, you see the side of the coin, faith. And other times you see the side of the coin, obedience.

Do you remember what we read in the book of Acts? Repent therefore and return and your sins will be wiped away."²¹ You see, this is one side of a coin. The other side is

¹⁸ See Genesis 15:6.

¹⁹ Genesis 22:15-19.

²⁰ Genesis 22:18.

²¹ See Acts 3:19.

faith. Repentance and faith are the two sides of conversion. Here, in verse 18, there is also a two sided coin. All you have to do is flip over this coin. On the other side you see faith. You know, since Abraham was already a believer, it was not on the basis of his obedience that he received right standing with God. It is as simple as that. And you can read the text, “Because you have believed my voice and expressed that belief in your walk before me, in your obedience.”²² This is what the text teaches you and me. And so this act of the obedience of Abraham in offering up his son Isaac expressed, in a marvelous way, the faith in the resurrection which Abraham already had.

And so it is with you and me, my friends. Your tests, tailored by God, vindicate your faith in Jesus Christ who is the one who went to the cross and passed every test of obedience on your behalf.

My friend Harry, after a period of time, came out of clinical depression as it was called. The cloud over his life lifted. This came about as my friend Harry learned that everything in this world comes about by the hand of God, even the test into which God had led him. And as he came to better understand who the sovereign God actually is, he began to rejoice in the faith that God had been pleased to give him in Jesus Christ. Then the cloud lifted.

God tailors your tests to vindicate your faith in Jesus Christ who sustained every test on your behalf.

My dear friend Harry—God bless him—my friend Harry learned this is the case. And I trust, friends, that as God leads you through times of testing you, too, will learn that this is the case. God tailors your tests to validate your faith in Jesus Christ, the one who sustained every test on your behalf.

Let’s pray together.

Father, thank you for your Word. Thank you for Jesus Christ. Thank you that you do test us, that you have good purposes and you will not leave us or forsake us, that you will vindicate and validate the faith you have given to us in Jesus Christ the Savior. Thank you that this is the case and grant that your people here may grasp this your Word. We pray in the good and gracious name of Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.

²² See Genesis 22:18.