

## "Passing the Test" Genesis 22:1-18 Judica 2024

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

What is the most difficult thing you've ever had to do so far in your life? The hardest test? I recall doing my first chapel at Concordia University. I was extremely nervous for that. I remember vividly having to call family members to tell them that their brother or sister or child had died. I remember doing CPR on someone and then realizing that they weren't going to make it. If you've ever tried to ask someone out on a date, or had to tell someone some bad news, maybe you've felt similar anxiety over tests like these.

Abraham had plenty of tests, very difficult ones. From the very beginning he was told to leave his homeland and move hundreds of miles away to a land he had never even seen before. He had to go into territories with his beautiful wife, being fearful for his own life, that someone might murder him. He had to wait 25 years, from age 75 to 100, before the Lord gave him a son. Some of those tests he passed. Some of them he failed, and quite miserably at that. He committed adultery with Hagar, and also told people that his wife was actually just his sister, putting Sarah in terrible danger.

Yet he learned from his sins. He repented. He received mercy. He understood that when God promised something, he needed to just trust that God would keep His Word. Abraham didn't need to try to cheat in order to get what he wanted. He didn't need to help God along by lying or committing adultery. God would grant it in His own time and in His own miraculous way.

All of this happened prior to the hardest test of all. "Now take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah. Offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains there, the one to which I direct you." Notice how God seems to drive the emotional knife deep with His command. Your son. Your ONLY

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son. Whom you LOVE. ISAAC. Offer him there as a BURNT OFFERING. A burnt offering was a complete sacrifice, where the victim would be burned up. There's no coming back from that! No simple mouth to mouth or chest compressions. That's it. Isaac would be dead as dead could be.

None of us would ever be asked to do something like that by God. But sometimes temptations come from those we love the most. A boyfriend tells a pregnant girlfriend to get an abortion. Sacrifice their child on the altar of convenience. A woman asks to move in with a man prior to marriage so they can both save money. Sacrifice your morals on the altar of money. In a fit of anger a spouse says, "Why don't you just divorce me?" Sacrifice your marriage because of an argument? Give your children a hundred excuses as to why you can't make it to worship, while you are supposed to be their example. Forget about the Third Commandment or the Fifth Commandment or the Sixth Commandment. Forget about what God wants. Forget about making any type of sacrifice. "This is what I want!" And yet we have the gall to sing, "Jesus, I my cross have taken, all to come and follow you."

Abraham gives a great example of faith. Not only does he do the right thing, the sacrificial thing, but he does it quickly. He gets up EARLY in the morning. I wonder if perhaps he was trying to avoid a conversation with Sarah. He spared her the agony of knowing what he was going to do, from trying to talk him out of it. Sometimes there are people who you can't talk faith with. They'll try to talk you out of giving so much. They'll try to talk you into compromising your morals. They won't know or understand WHY you do what you do. You don't always owe them an explanation, especially if you know they'll just try to talk you out of what you're supposed to do.

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Abraham doesn't talk to Sarah, and he doesn't tell Isaac exactly what is going on either. But he does talk to HIMSELF, with words of FAITH. First of all, listen to his words to his servant. "We will worship, and then we will come back to you." Notice the WE, meaning him and Isaac. We WILL come back to you. Not might. And then when Isaac asks about where the offering would come from? "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." More words of faith. God himself will provide.

And that's not all! When God didn't initially provide a lamb, Abraham also used Godly reasoning in talking to himself. Hebrews 11:19 says, "Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead." Yes, if God could create the world, and if God could make a baby grow in Sarah's womb at the age of 90, then God could also raise Isaac from the dead EVEN AFTER he had been burned to a crisp! He went back to the power of God. But WHY did he reason God WOULD do this? Because God had promised that through THIS SON he would have offspring as numerous as the stars in the sky and that all nations would be blessed through Isaac. (Genesis 15:5) The only way that could happen would be if God then raised him from the dead. Abraham would not allow himself to be talked out of this. He talked himself into it and through it with words of faith that supported what God told him to do, even if it was irrational.

You know what was especially irrational? If Isaac was supposed to be one through whom the MESSIAH would come, then in killing Isaac, Abraham would have been basically sending himself and the world to hell, had Isaac stayed dead! Yet even though it didn't make sense, Abraham made the best sense of it he could. God would either provide a different lamb or he would raise Isaac from the dead. What faith! God grant us such a faith, that throws

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aside our own reason and desire, and says, "This is what God's Word says!"

Abraham ties up Isaac and binds him tightly. He grips the knife. Raises his hand. Maybe even starts to swing. And God intervenes. The Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, "Abraham, Abraham!" Abraham said, "I am here." 12 He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy. Do not do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." Wow. What a test. And Abraham passed this one with flying colors. The voice of the Angel, saying his name, must have sounded like heaven to him. What a relief!

And how did Abraham respond? He sacrifices the ram. And then he says something else, MORE words of faith. Abraham called the name of that place "The LORD Will Provide." So it is said to this day, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided." Not only had God provided a ram for THAT DAY, He would also provide one in the future.

Think, then about the ramifications of those words to the Angel of the LORD. In the Old Testament, when it specifically mentions the Angel of the LORD, this actually seems to be referring to Jesus prior to coming into our world with flesh through the Virgin Mary. (He was the Angel - meaning Messenger in this case, not a created angel.) Jesus was also otherwise known as the ONLY BEGOTTEN SON of the Father. So when JESUS stops Abraham from sacrificing Isaac, He was also keeping the line of the Savior alive, through which HE would be born into this world. So think about the ramifications of this for JESUS. You could say that in SAVING ISAAC He was also DAMNING HIMSELF. How? Jesus was then born into this world to DIE to provide forgiveness and salvation for the world. That's WHY

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He came here. God the Father would not stop His hand from coming down on Jesus on the cross. He would undergo a much more painful sacrifice, not only being nailed to a cross but also abandoned by the Father, His own personal and universal hell. In saving Isaac, He damned Himself, in order to save us!

And here's another interesting thing. Jerusalem is said to have been built ON Mt. Moriah, right where Jesus was crucified. So in this very place where Isaac was spared, Jesus was not! Talk about premonitions! This was also seen in the providing of a ram for Abraham to sacrifice. A ram is a male lamb, and Jesus was also referred to as the Lamb of God. God provided a sacrifice not only in this ram, but ultimately in Jesus, who would come to take away the sins of the world. He would pass the ultimate test, by allowing Himself to be sacrificed. And as Abraham was going to go through the sacrifice through faith that God COULD resurrect Isaac, so Jesus also went to the cross in faith that God the Father would accept His sacrifice and RAISE Him from the dead. Jesus fought the ultimate battle and won, with His own life on the line.

And so, as Christians, as we head into Lent, we are blessed. We are blessed to know that sacrifice was made. Jesus passed the test. God's promise was kept. Sin has been paid for. Death and Satan have been conquered.

Thank God that we will never have to be subjected to such a test. However, there are plenty of other difficult sacrifices that God calls on us to make, tests that God gives, circumstances that are far beyond what you can handle physically or maybe even emotionally, much more difficult than giving up meat. Yet spiritually, God promises that He won't let you be tested to the point that you have no choice but to disown God and lose your faith. Instead, these

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tests will be given as an opportunity for you to SHOW and PROVE your faith to God and the world. Instead of looking forward to a sacrifice that God WILL provide, as Abraham did, you can look back to the sacrifice God DID provide in Jesus on the cross. You will have the opportunity to pray to God all the more, seek Him all the more in His word, receive Him all the more in His sacrament. These tests will give God the opportunity to work in you a deeper faith than you'd ever imagine you could have.

When you point others to Jesus and His promises, those words will affect them as well. They will hear God's promises through you, of how God works all things out for good. They will hear God's promise of the resurrection through you, and they will find hope as well. They will see the sacrifices you make, if you pass the test. And even if you fail some of these tests as Abraham also did, know this. Jesus didn't fail His test. Your sins are forgiven. In spite of your failure, hope is yours, through faith in Jesus. And then God willing, you will have more opportunities, more tests, in a sinful and trying world, to point people to Jesus, the victorious King who conquered Satan FOR US. Amen.