

God Passes the Test

King of Glory Lutheran Church

Genesis sermon series: Week 3 Gen 22:1-14

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God passes God's own test of Abraham when God sees Abraham's unwavering faith, God provides and the blessing through Isaac continues.

Genesis 22:1-14 ¹God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ²He 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 that I shall show you." ³So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. ⁴On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. ⁵Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you." ⁶Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. ⁷Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" ⁸Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together.

⁹When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. ¹¹But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ¹²[The angel] said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy 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." ¹³And

Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴So Abraham called that place "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

God whom we know and the God whom we don't know - offers to us life, grace and peace this day! Amen.

Alright, let's be honest. The story of God asking Abraham to sacrifice his own son Isaac, is a challenging text to say the least. Probably since the day this story came into being people were debating, arguing and wondering what it all means. If ever there were a text that is problematic, here it is!

The most obvious is child abuse! Our own indignation rises up at such a horrific story. How can God ask a devoted man like Abraham to sacrifice the only and beloved son, Isaac. With Ishmael pushed aside, now only the beloved Isaac remains. How can God ask such a thing?

Hundreds of thousands of children are maltreated every year through neglect, or physical and sexual abuse. If you are listening and you were abused, this text may raise emotions for you. Know in advance the sermon will not focus on Isaac's treatment.

Another challenge: it appears that God doesn't quite trust Abraham now to be the father of many nations and this is a test of Abraham's faith. After the long awaited son is given, if Abraham kills Isaac, then the narrative leads back to the destruction of the promises God has already granted: land, descendants and a family which blesses other families and nations.

Biblical texts offer us opportunities to stretch our faith, or reinforce what we think we already know about the character of God. The hypothesis put forward in this sermon is that: *God passes God's own test of Abraham... when God sees Abraham's unwavering faith. God provides and the blessing through Isaac continues.* God passes the test. Not Abraham.

God passes the test. For God induces the crisis and then God resolves it.

“Abraham! Go to the mountains and sacrifice your only beloved Son Isaac!” God is testing Abraham. Without question, without delay, Abraham responds to God’s command the very next day. What’s the problem, God? Why test Abraham’s faith at this point? He waited for you to deliver on your promise of a son to you and Sarah for over 90 years. He’s done what you’ve asked him to do. What’s the problem? Are you God, just playing games?

Perhaps God is not yet convinced for some reason that Abraham is the man to carry forward the title of “Father of all nations.” It appears that God does not know and wants to find out; hence a test. Will Abraham obey? Will he lead God’s people in the way God desires? If God asks of Abraham the impossible, perhaps God will see what is possible with Abraham. The card has been played, the test is given.

But how can God not know what Abraham will do? Isn’t God all-knowing? Doesn’t God know what decisions we’ll make before we do in matters of faith? Psalm 139 asserts God knows when we rise up and when we sit, what we think and the words we speak! God’s thoughts are more than every grain of sand on a beach! 1 John 3:20: “(God) he knows everything.”

In our story for today, it appears God does not know if Abraham will follow through until Isaac is on the altar. Then the Lord says, “Now I know you fear God, since you have not withheld your only son from me.” At that moment, it appears God has the answer God was looking for.

Hmmm. Think about that. God doesn’t know what God’s children will do? God who responds to what God’s children do? “Now I know!” God says. Now I know.

How did God’s mind get changed? God saw Abraham’s faith. Abraham is trusting God whom he knows to be reliable. A promise was given and Isaac was born. Is there a reason Abraham should not trust God? He does trust God. Unflinchingly. Unfailingly. Radically. Enough to give Isaac as the sacrifice.

Now we cannot make this story into a morality lesson that we must simply trust God more or have faith like Abraham. Where is the Good News in that? We cannot reduce the text to speak only about testing or make it a substitutionary story of animal for human sacrifice.

To do that is an injustice to the story. It's not the point of the text. There is much more going on underneath in Genesis 22. Are we willing to allow ourselves to stretch our image of the Almighty?

Does God not know some things? Does God wait to see how we will react when tests come our way? Does God offer challenges to deepen our faith and trust God? Does God listen to our prayers and respond to them? Does God wait and watch?

I've heard it said that God is testing America for her sins and that's why we have a pandemic. Well then did God know that 120,000 Americans would die in the first four months? Did God know that people would take scientific precautions seriously and people would just as quickly tire of taking those precautions? Does God wait to see and protect or not? Is God just playing games?

God always acts within God's character of loving mercy and justice. God is consistent within God's character, but we simply cannot pretend to know the mind of God! We read what is on the page.

When Job is asking God why he is suffering and his faith is tested, God responds in Chapters 38 and following, "Were you there when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me if you have understanding. Have you commanded each morning's dawn? Have you seen the storehouses of hail? Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Is it by your wisdom the hawk soars?"

None of can ever fully know the mind of God! What we have is texts in the Bible to stretch our understanding or reinforce what we think we already know.

Before we come to God's change of heart about Isaac, we first hear Isaac's question. "Where is the lamb for the burnt offering, Dad?" It is difficult to even imagine Abraham's heart clinch at hearing those words. Yet he trusts in God's character. His reply? "God will provide. God will provide."

God does provide the moment God changes God's mind about Abraham. When God saw Abraham's trust, then God resolves the issue. "Wait, wait, Abraham! Don't do it!" With a word the test was given, with a word, the test is stopped. "Now I know that you fear God." Remember 'fear' in the Old Testament is another word for reverence, or be in awe of, or trust. God reveals that God now sees Abraham is trustworthy. "Now I know you fear God for you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."

When God sees Abrahams' faith, God provides the ram. So often we focus on what Abraham does in this text. But there are two in the relationship! There are two that will carry the covenant forth or not. Abraham is one and God is the other.

On this Holy Communion weekend, we would do well to remember God knows exactly what it is like to watch one's very own Son die. Even Jesus in what surely was a testing of Jesus' faith – begged His own father to take away His upcoming death. In the garden of Gethsemane, three times Jesus cries out to God, "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want." (Matthew 26:36-46)

God's own Son dies to bring new life and resurrection. When God stopped Abraham from killing Isaac, there is an echo of Jesus' own resurrection which brings new life for all. God passed the test on that Golgotha cross – death is overcome!

Remember those verses in 1 Corinthians 10:13? "No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it."

In fact every weekend, we pray in the prayer our Lord taught us, "lead us not into a time of trial." We ask that we might not be put into a situation where our very confession of faith in God is put to the test like Abraham.

Does God know if we will always react with faith and trust? Did God change God's mind about Abraham or had God already planned for the ram to be in the thicket? Did God pass the test or did Abraham?

Let's not allow a Biblical text to help us see what we want to see. Let's put it to the test! God did! Amen.