

The Lord Will Provide

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[0:00] Welcome back to our series in the book of Genesis, looking at the lives of the patriarchs of Abraham and Isaac.

A few years ago. And then we return to Genesis, picking up at the end of chapter 11, the beginning of chapter 12, last May. And we have been walking through this middle part of the book of Genesis since then, with a number of interruptions and several breaks for other things, so that we can look at some other things and talk about some other issues and look at some other parts of Scripture.

But this morning we are back right here in this series on the patriarchs, and we are diving in at one of the most crucial, one of the most seminal moments in the life of Abraham. And not only in the life of Abraham, but really in the life of the people of Israel.

Because they will look back upon this moment frequently, not only in the Old Testament, but as you look at other later writings by Jewish writers, as they reflect upon who they are and who they are called to be and what it means to be a descendant of Abraham, they will frequently look back to this particular event in his life as helping them to understand their own identity, helping them to understand who this God is that they serve.

And this morning as we look to this chapter, my prayer is that by the time that we're finished looking at this event in Abraham's life, we will be encouraged because we will have seen more clearly who God is and what God is like and what he has done and continues to do on behalf of his people.

[1:52] So this morning we're going to cover the first 19 verses, which is almost the entire chapter, but not quite. The last few verses of chapter 22 really introduce us to the next section in the book of Genesis.

They look forward and so we're going to stop at verse 19 this morning as we look at this particular event in Abraham's life. So I'd invite you to stand and read with me Genesis 22 verses 1 through 19.

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.

So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, stay here with the donkey. I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.

[3:03] And 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 they went, both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, Abraham, my father.

And he said, here I am, my son. He said, behold, the fire and the wood. But where is the lamb for a burnt offering? Abraham said, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.

So they went, both of them, together. When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac, his son, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood.

Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter 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 lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him.

For now I know that you fear God, seeing that you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by his horns.

[4:09] And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, the Lord will provide. As it is said to this day, on the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.

And 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 and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore.

And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies. And in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth 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. Father, we thank you that your spirit inspired Moses to record this event in Abraham's life in such detail so that we might gain a clearer view of who you are.

And I pray that we would be both convicted and encouraged by what we see of you and your word this morning. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

[5:24] You guys take a seat. Some of you may know people who, in a sense, peaked early in life. We've all heard of those folks, and some of you may have known some, who we would say they peaked in high school.

That was it. That was the pinnacle of their success. That was where they were the happiest. That was where they felt the most fulfilled. Which is a sad thing to say, because if you live until you're 80 and you peak at 18, there are a lot of decades in between in which you are either plateaued or you are on the decline.

Well, when we look at the life of Abraham, we certainly couldn't say that Abraham peaked as a young man. He didn't reach the crescendo of his life when he was young. He wasn't called out by God until he was what we would call today middle-aged, but of course he was 70 years old by then.

When you live to be 160, 70 just turns out to be middle-aged. Abraham did not peak early. In fact, though, we could even say that Abraham's peak, the high point of his life, the point at which everything came together into a seminal moment, did not occur for Abraham when he was 70 years old.

It didn't occur for him when he was called by God to leave his family and go to another land. That's not really the high point of his life. It is somewhat difficult, though, to identify and say, this is it, this is the moment, this is the key event in Abraham's life, because what do you choose?

[6:52] Chapter 15, where God makes a covenant with Abraham, perhaps. Or do you choose chapter 17, where God enters into a covenant ceremony and confirms that covenant with Abraham?

Perhaps. But I think a strong case could be made that the high point of Abraham's life, or the point at which all of his service rendered toward God, comes to a head, and we finally see who is Abraham, what is his life, how are we to understand and summarize his life, a good case could be made that that happens here in chapter 22.

Whether or not Abraham looked back on his life as an old man and thought, that was the moment, that was the high point, that we'll never know. But as we read through the book of Genesis, and as we look back upon Genesis from the perspective of later generations, this is certainly a high point, if not the high point, in Abraham's life.

And you can sort of sense that when you read the first verse of this chapter. Notice that it begins with the phrase, after these things. Now that could be a reference simply back to the events of chapter 21, or perhaps chapters 20 and 21.

But I think most likely, because it's such a vague reference and so much has happened, I think it is almost a way of casting the rest of Abraham's life into one large sort of collection and say, now after all of that happened, after Abraham experienced everything that you've been told so far about him, after that, God did something new in Abraham's life.

[8 : 25] It says that God tested Abraham. It's the first time we come across this language in regards to the life of Abraham.

God is now laying before Abraham the test of his life. God is laying before Abraham a task that will reveal the truth about Abraham's heart.

It will show to Abraham and to all generations following who hear of Abraham, this test will reveal, this test will show what Abraham is really made of, what's really in Abraham's heart.

But if you're like me, before I could really even wrap my mind around what was happening in this chapter and its significance for Abraham, I was sort of beset with the problem of answering the question of why does God, particularly at this point, but why does God, why does God test Abraham?

Why does God in turn, why does He test us? Because as you look down through the story, the answer that seems at least on the surface level to be most obvious only creates for us more questions, I think.

[9 : 41] Glance down toward the story as the story comes sort of to a high point where Abraham actually does lay Isaac on the altar and he prepares to sacrifice him and God comes and says there in verse 11, Abraham, Abraham.

And we're told, the angel of the Lord tells him, do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him for now I know that you fear God. How do we understand that?

Is it implied here that God tests Abraham because prior to this moment, God was not quite sure whether or not Abraham genuinely feared him? Was God unaware of what was happening in Abraham's heart?

Was God unaware if the faith that God had already credited to Abraham as righteousness in chapter 15, was God unsure whether or not that was a genuine, real faith?

Well, of course not. Not only because God knows all things, but because the Scriptures tell us specifically that God knows the intentions and the thoughts of the heart of man.

[10 : 44] God knows what's going on inside of us. And then in addition to that, the very faith that is tested here is a faith granted by God. The faith that saves is a faith that God Himself by His sovereign grace gives to His people as a gift.

So God is not learning new information here. God is confirming what He already knows. But that simply leads us to ask, but why?

Then what is the point of the test? Why is God doing this? And then we can turn and broaden that question and say, why does God test us? Because He does indeed test us.

The New Testament writers tell us over and over that we will face trials and those trials will be brought into our lives by the very hand of God Himself. And He has purposes and He has reasons for doing that.

Why does God test His people? Why does God test Abraham? And what precisely is He testing? What is He looking to see? He says, now I know that you fear God.

[11:51] But that's a term that requires a little bit of thought and a little bit of explaining before we just brush past it too quickly. We've all been told and we've heard many times that when the Bible speaks of fearing God, it doesn't mean simply cowering before Him as a frightened little child or being afraid that He's going to get you or do something to you or that He's going to pour out His wrath suddenly upon you.

We've all been told that that's not quite the meaning of the word fear when we're talking about fearing God. And there is some truth in that. When the Bible tells us that we ought to fear God, when we read, for instance, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, we are not to understand that as a mere fright and terror at the sight or presence of God.

But I'm not sure that we are to understand it as less than that either. It's more than that. The fear of the Lord is more than those who simply cower before Him afraid that He's going to get them.

But it's not less than that. In fact, I would want to argue that the fear of the Lord, particularly in the Old Testament, but even the handful of times where it carries over to the New Testament, that the fear of the Lord is a sort of a full expression, a full description of what Paul means when he frequently talks about having faith in God or having faith in Christ.

That just as we would say that when Paul speaks of faith and the faith that justifies us, he does not mean merely agreeing with the truths of Scripture or saying that we believe the things that we have been taught as we have grown older.

[13:31] No, it's something much more full and complete than that. It involves a kind of trust in God in all His ways. It involves being satisfied with who God is and all that He has done for us in Christ.

Faith is a full, broad concept in Paul's writings. So also in the Old Testament, fear is a full, broad concept that includes those ideas of trusting in the Lord and of knowing and counting on His character.

But all that is in the shadow of recognizing and understanding that this is a great and powerful God. He can do anything that He pleases. No one can stay His hand or say to Him, what have you done?

This is the God to whom we are to render fear and faith. It's not less than recognizing how powerful and how frightening God can be, but it is so much more than that.

It is in the face of the reality of this great and awesome God, nevertheless, trusting in Him to fulfill His promises toward you and to do good to you and to help you.

[14:38] It is all of that wrapped up. And I would argue that fear of the Lord, while it is not synonymous with the idea of faith in God, the two overlap so significantly that they are almost, but not quite, interchangeable concepts.

Let me show you what I mean. I just want to show you a couple of places. If you'll turn over in your Bibles to the book of Psalms, I just want to show you a couple of places here and then one in Isaiah where we see a close relationship between hoping in God or trusting in God and fearing God.

So, for instance, in Psalm 33, in Psalm 33, near the end of that psalm, in verse 18, the psalmist writes, Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him.

God sees, God is watching them. His eye is on them in a caring, fatherly, loving way. He is aware of them, not simply cognitively because He knows all things, but He's aware of them in a way and He is relating His knowledge to them in a way that He doesn't toward everyone else.

The eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, and then note the parallel statement, on those who hope in His steadfast love.

[15:56] So, to fear God is synonymous here with hoping in His steadfast love. That's another reason why we have to say that the fear of God, while not being less than being afraid of God, is so much more than that because it is bound up with His steadfast love.

That is, His covenant commitment to love His people. The fear of God and hoping in His covenant love are parallel terms here. We are to recognize and notice the close relationship between hoping in God's covenant promises and then fearing God Himself.

Turn over just a few pages to Psalm 40 and we'll see something very similar here. In Psalm 40, verse 3, the psalmist is praising God and he says, He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God.

Now, note the results of that. Many will see and fear. And then the parallel statement, and put their trust in the Lord.

So you see how closely related this idea of fearing God, hoping in God's promises, and trusting in the Lord actually are. These are closely related, overlapping concepts.

[17:16] It would be, I think, impossible to fully understand what faith is without understanding the fear of the Lord. and it would be impossible to understand what it means to fear the Lord without understanding what it is to trust in this covenant God.

Now, move over to Isaiah and we'll see this one more time. In the prophet Isaiah, in chapter 29, chapter 29, we read this, verse 13.

I'm sorry, not chapter 29, chapter 50. Chapter 50, verse 10. We'll get to 29 in a moment. Who among you, who among you, we're asked, who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of His servant?

Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on His God. You notice that all the statements held together, fear the Lord, obey His voice, trust in the name of the Lord, and rely on His God.

So all of these things are closely related. They are bound up together so that when God is testing the fear of Abraham, He's testing the faith of Abraham.

[18:32] Which helps us, I think, to better understand what's unfolding as we read through Genesis chapter 22. Because God already knows cognitively, He understands, He knows, He has the information about Him that Abraham's faith is genuine.

Otherwise, He would not have credited it to him for righteousness in chapter 15. So what precisely is God doing as He tests Abraham? I think maybe the clearest place where we can find a clue to the answer to that is in another passage in the Old Testament where God has said to test someone.

Where God very clearly is going to test whether or not someone fears Him. And yet we see in that passage God is fully confident that this person does indeed fear Him.

It's found in the book of Job. So if you'll turn to Job, and I apologize for jumping around so much this morning, but we need to have fixed in our heads what's unfolding and why God's doing these things before we can understand Genesis 22.

In Job chapter 1, God brings to Satan's attention the man Job. Perhaps surprising, you might think that Satan would come to God and say, hey, I want to mess with this guy.

[19:44] But that's not exactly what happens. Job chapter 1 verse 8, the Lord said to Satan, Have you considered my servant Job that there's none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, now note, who fears God and turns away from evil?

And now Satan's question. Satan answered the Lord and said, Does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has on every side?

You've blessed the work of his hands and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has and he will curse you to your face.

So in this dialogue between Satan, the accuser, and God, God brings up Job. Have you considered Job my servant? He fears me.

And Satan says, He doesn't fear you. That's all surface level. That's not real. That's not genuine. That's not authentic. He only serves you and obeys you because you protect him because you do all of these good things to him.

[20:51] And God says, Fine. You want to test him? Test him. God is fully confident that Job fears him. And God is willing to enter into this contest with Satan for one primary purpose.

As you move through the book of Job and as you track through this story, it is a story of people failing to understand what God is doing. Failing to understand why God would allow these things. All of Job's friends accuse Job of perhaps having done some sort of sin, having done some sort of wrong to have brought this upon himself.

And Job over and over protests his own righteousness and his own innocence. It's as if Job is saying, No, but I do fear God. But that's being tested all the way through. Until finally at the end, the book of Job climaxes with God revealing himself and his glory to Job.

And showing Job that he is indeed worthy of Job's fear. And he begins to question Job and ask him all of these questions about who he is, who God himself is, so that Job at the end of the book is forced to confess before God that God is in fact who he thought he was all along.

He is a God who deserves to be feared. He is the one who speaks from the whirlwind. He is the one who has created all things and rules sovereignly and supremely over all things. The book moves from Job being securely proclaimed as a man who fears God to being tested to Job's friends questioning whether or not Job is one who genuinely fears God or whether he's a wicked person to Job finally being vindicated in the end.

[22:29] And yet in that vindication, Job doesn't stand and say, See, I'm better. In that vindication, God reveals himself to be the God worthy of Job's fear and obedience all along.

The end that God aims at in testing his people is not that God learns new information as you might think when you do a surface level reading of Genesis 22.

The end of God testing his people is so that before a watching world, their faith or their fear of him might be confirmed as genuine and therefore God's worthiness to be feared and to be trusted is confirmed not only for watching eyes like ours to see, but before even the heavenly hosts.

And even so that God himself can rejoice in the display of his own perfections. When you begin to read the Bible through God-centered eyes rather than through man-centered eyes, always questioning and wondering, Why is God doing this to this person and to that person?

Why doesn't he leave them alone? Why doesn't he just... When you begin to stop reading the Bible through a very man-centered perspective where you want to vindicate all the various human characters of the Bible and you begin to read it from a God-centered perspective, you begin to see very quickly that God is doing all things for the sake of the praise of his own name.

[23:54] And that's what he's doing here in Genesis chapter 22. That's what he's doing when he tests Abraham. He doesn't say, Now I know that you fear me because he learns anything new. He says, Now I know because I have put on display your fear of me and therefore my worthiness to be feared and to be trusted by you.

That's what God is doing throughout this chapter. He's going to help us as we walk through it and going to help us as we turn to try to understand what God is doing in our own tests and in our own trials.

So let's go back to Genesis chapter 22 and let's see if we can't get the lay of the land and the broad outline and understand the events as they're actually unfolding.

First thing that you'll see when we jump back in here is that as God begins to speak to Abraham, He speaks to Abraham in a way that reveals what the real test is.

It reveals what for Abraham must be the real, the true struggles. And some of these struggles we can readily identify with. Some of them we assume. Others may not be quite so obvious.

[25:03] So look at how He addresses him. Verse 2. God says to him, 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.

And then follows Abraham's immediate obedience to that statement. Now when we read those words, I think that Moses, as he writes this, intends for us to see Abraham's great concern and care and love for his son.

That's one of the difficulties that Abraham is facing in this challenge. He loves his son. God specifically refers to him as the son whom you love.

This is the one you love. You've set your love upon him. And we can understand that. And we can relate to that. We know what it is to love other people. If you're a parent, you know what it is to have this almost inexplainable love for your children.

We understand that. We know that. We know what that's like. Even if you don't have children, you understand what it is to have a deep abiding love for those that are closest to you. And so Abraham is addressed and Isaac is labeled as the one whom you love.

[26:17] You love him. And so we know that one of the tests that Abraham is facing here is will he cling to his love for Isaac more than he desires obedience to God himself.

This is an issue that comes up for the followers of Jesus as well. We read through the Gospels and we believe sometimes that Jesus is being harsh with people, that he's being difficult with people. So the man comes to Jesus and says, I want to follow you, but my dad has died and I'd like to go back and bury my dad and be a part of, you know, be a part of that whole process of the funeral and the mourning rituals.

It was even a bigger deal than we make out of it. It was a whole multi-day not a festival, but a multi-day event when someone died. The mourning period for them and then the laying them to rest in their tomb.

It was a big deal in their culture. And Jesus looks at him and he says, let the dead bury their own dead. He's so insensitive. He just wants to go to his dad's funeral, we think.

But Jesus is testing. Jesus is saying, your allegiance to me has to be greater than your allegiance to those whom you love most. That's why Jesus is able to say, whoever doesn't hate mother and father and sister and brother, wife, children, even his own life cannot follow me.

[27:39] And we think, that's just so harsh. But God is zealous to maintain his place of preeminence in our lives even over those whom we most love.

And here Abraham is being tested. Will he render obedience to God when it puts into jeopardy the one whom he loves? It's a question that we can at least relate to on some level.

But there's something else going on here as well. And I think there's something else that's emphasized as much, probably more, than Abraham's love for his son. Notice, take your son and then your only son, Isaac.

Now that phrase, your only son, Isaac, that phrase is meant to remind both Abraham and us that this is the son of promise.

This is the one through whom all the covenant blessings and promises will come and be fulfilled not only for Abraham but for all of Abraham's descendants and through them all the nations of the earth. God has said through Isaac, through Isaac will the promise go.

[28:50] He's been very specific so far, God has with Abraham. It will not go through Ishmael. Prior to that, it will not go through one of your servants. No. Sarah will bear a child.

She will have a son. Isaac is the one through whom all your hope, through whom all the promises made to you will come.

So that what is ultimately being tested here is Abraham's hope in the future. Not just a hope for, oh I hope my child grows up and lives a good life are the things that we hope for the future when we think of our children.

But Abraham's eternal destiny in a sense is at stake here because if Isaac is not around the promises can't be fulfilled. Everything falls apart. The covenant is broken.

What's he to do? Everything that he believes is being put to the test here by God himself. It's almost as if Abraham is being pulled between the word of God on the right hand and the word of God on the left hand.

[30:02] Not pulled between this wicked assertion and this word from God but the word of God through Isaac shall your offspring be named. The seed will come through him and now take your only son Isaac and kill him.

this is more than just you love your son dearly and now I'm calling you to sacrifice that which you love the most for my sake.

It is that but it's more than that. This is all of your hope for your eternal destiny and the hope for any other person not only in your line but all the families of the earth all of it.

I'm calling you to sacrifice it. Telling you to do this. it's almost incomprehensible. What will he do?

This is I think the key to understanding Abraham's response to God's command. This I think is the key to understanding not only not only the events as they unfold here in Genesis chapter 22 but it's also the key to understanding how the New Testament writers look back upon this particular event and how they conceive of it and how they understand what Abraham himself is thinking and feeling and doing.

[31:28] Because Abraham knows. He knows with certainty because God has told him that it is through Isaac that the promises will come. So what sense does it make for God to now say kill Isaac?

Abraham knows. He knows with certainty. And as we move through this story at no point is it suggested that Abraham is imagining that there might be another way.

At no point is it suggested that Abraham's faith in that original promise of blessings coming through Isaac that that faith isn't anywhere shaken or shattered. In fact, what we are seeing, I believe, is that his faith in the God who made those promises is now finally at this point in life, after many stumbles and many mistakes, his faith now finally is at a point to where it is almost difficult for us to relate to the power and the strength of the faith of Abraham here.

Because he never doubts the promises that it is through Isaac. And yet he's willing to take the life of Isaac. It's fascinating.

Read again, read down through further with me. I want to show you, point out some details that the New Testament writers, I believe, are picking up on as they show us how to understand this passage. Jump down to verse 5.

[32 : 49] They've already left. They've gone on their journey toward the land of Moriah as God commanded them. And in verse 5, after Abraham has seen the mountain upon which he's to make the sacrifice, says that Abraham said to his young men, stay here with the donkey.

In other words, you can't go. You can't be a part of what's about to happen. Stay here. I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.

Now it's difficult to see in our English translations. But all three of these verbs, go, worship, and come again.

all three of those verbs are what are called a first person plural. That means if you were to throw a pronoun in front of them, you throw the pronoun we. So we might translate it something like this.

I and the boy will go over there and we will worship and we will come again to you. Abraham makes the assumption that after these events take place, he and Isaac are coming back.

[33 : 54] We will come back to you. He doesn't say I will return to you. He's saying we're coming back. There is in Abraham some belief whether he understands it on a full level, there is some belief that even though he laid down the life of his son Isaac, he's not coming back without Isaac.

How does that happen? It happens because it's impossible. The promises must be fulfilled. God will be faithful to his covenant. No matter what God calls Abraham to do, Abraham can count on, even if it means God doing something beyond comprehension, Abraham can count on the fact that God is going to fulfill his promises.

Somehow Abraham and Isaac are coming back even though he's going to take the life of his son. This is extraordinary faith. It's a faith that's highlighted in Hebrews.

If you would turn to Hebrews chapter 11, the great faith chapter of the book of Hebrews where we get this roll call of Old Testament saints and we are told of the great events of their lives and how those events display their faith.

Abraham surfaces more than once, but in verse 17 a specific reference is made back to this event. By faith we are told, Abraham, when he was tested, this is the event we're looking at, when he was tested he offered up Isaac and he who had received the promises, you note the emphasis on it, he had received the promises, he knew they were coming through Isaac, he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, here's the emphasis, through Isaac shall your offspring be named.

[35 : 36] So the writer of Hebrews gets the tension, he understands. This was said, but Abraham was going to take his life because God told him to. Here's the explanation in verse 19 that I think is the writer of the book of Hebrews reflecting back upon that statement of Abraham that we're coming back, both of us.

Verse 19, he considered, that's Abraham, he considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which he says figuratively speaking, in a way, he did receive him back.

Now, from the perspective of new covenant believers, we think, well, of course God can raise the dead. I mean, that's the most important event in all of our faith.

He raised Christ from the dead. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Of course God can do that. Okay, that's how we view it. It's never happened by the point that Abraham reaches.

There's no indication that Abraham has any record of God having ever raised someone from the dead. Yet the writer of Hebrews says he was confident that if that's what's got to happen, if that's necessary, God can raise him from the dead.

[36 : 52] That's the magnitude of the faith of Abraham in Genesis chapter 22, to conceive of God doing something that at his point in time would have been inconceivable.

Why? Because he knows and he believes in God's promises. Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.

And yet God has something I think even more significant in mind than the raising of Isaac from the dead. As unbelievable as that is that Abraham could have that kind of faith, God has something even better in store for Abraham.

He's going to do something better than display his power by raising Isaac from the dead so that he might fulfill his promise. He's doing something better because he wants to teach Abraham more and he wants to teach us more as we look back upon these events in the life of Abraham.

It's hinted at as they begin to talk father and son together. Isaac says in verse 7, My father, and he said, here I am my son.

[38 : 00] Now even in these statements we're getting a sense of the closeness of Abraham and Isaac. Of just how close they were. It sounds weird to us in English to speak like this, to say my father and then my son.

It sounds strange to us, it sounds formal, but it's really exactly the opposite for them. These are expressions that show their love for one another, show their closeness.

My father, and he said, here I am, my son. He said, behold the fire and the wood, but where's the lamb for a burnt offering? It's a logical question.

And Abraham simply responds, maybe he doesn't know how to respond, but he responds with something that will turn out to be one of the most significant statements that he makes in this entire story.

Abraham said, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son. And so both of them went together. It's a foreshadowing of what's to come.

[39 : 03] Abraham doesn't know what's to come. Abraham is convinced that he's going to return with Isaac when he comes back. The writer of Hebrews says, his faith was so strong that he could even believe and conceive of the idea of God raising him from the dead, but he doesn't really know what's going to happen.

So this is a foreshadowing of what's coming. Finally, verse 9, they arrive at the moment. When they came to the place of which God had told them, Abraham built the altar there, he laid the wood in order, he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar on top of the wood.

Now we don't know, just as an aside, we don't know what Isaac's role in all of this is. Does Abraham bind Isaac because Isaac might try to get away?

Does Abraham bind Isaac because he doesn't want Isaac to move around on the altar and to merely injure him rather than actually take his life when he raises the knife? We don't know.

I know that I've heard a number of sermons from this chapter that are all about Isaac and Isaac's role. Most of them are based upon the fact that he's called a boy or a young man. And so the emphasis is put upon Isaac and his willingness to lay his life down.

[40 : 15] But that's not the focus of Moses as he writes this at all. The focus is never upon Isaac as we move through this story. We just tied him up. We don't know Isaac's reaction.

We don't know. Did he fight against it or was he a willing participant? We don't know. Moses doesn't care to tell us because it's not really important for the story. That's not the point. This is not about Isaac. This is about Abraham and God.

So he ties him up. We don't know precisely why. Verse 10, Then Abraham reached out his hand, took the knife to slaughter his son. So he's going all the way. He's going to obey God.

Even though this for him looks like on the surface, this is the end of the promises. But he believes somehow it won't be. And even though for Abraham this must have been a strange moment of God has commanded me to do something that I know that God himself doesn't approve of.

And it became clear later on in the law how much God despises child sacrifice. But now Abraham is called to do something confusing. But he's following through.

[41 : 22] He's being obedient and that's when God intervenes. Abraham, Abraham. And he said, here I am. He said, do not lay your hand on the boy. Don't do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, seeing that you have not withheld your son, your only son from me.

Verse 13. And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked and behold, behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering.

This is key. Underline this. Circle it. Whatever you want to do. Instead of his son. Abraham doesn't know the full significance of his words when he says, God will provide.

He doesn't know the full significance of those words when he says them. But later in the day it will become clear. How will God provide? God will provide a substitute sacrifice.

God will give you a lamb. He will supply a ram in the place of your son. That's what God has committed to provide. That's what God will do. And he does it.

[42 : 29] That's why as we move through the rest of the story, the emphasis on God's provision. Verse 14, Abraham called the name of that place the Lord will provide.

As it is said to this day, on the mount of the Lord, it shall be provided. This is the focus. That God provides. That God steps in.

That God intervenes. God does something. He has called Abraham to do the impossible. He has tested Abraham's faith. And now that the genuineness of Abraham's faith and his fear in God has been confirmed, now that that has happened, God now provides.

He provides a substitute sacrifice. This was God's plan all along. Because he's teaching Abraham and he's teaching us that he is a God who indeed provides.

And he provides preeminently by substituting a sacrifice in the place of Isaac and in the place of us. Because ultimately, the ultimate provision of God for his people is his very own son who stands in our place as the ram stands in the place of Isaac.

[43 : 43] In Romans chapter 8, Apostle Paul says that God has done what the law weakened by the flesh could not do by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin he condemned sin in the flesh.

Why? So that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us. Because we can't do what is necessary. We can't fulfill. We can't provide for ourselves.

We can't provide the righteousness required by God because we don't have that righteousness and so God provides it for us. He sends his own son for our sin.

He sends his own son so that he might fulfill the righteous requirement of the law so that in Christ is provided all that is necessary for our eternal redemption.

All that is necessary is provided. And he moves even beyond that because he is a great provider. When you move down through Romans chapter 8 you come across these words.

[44 : 50] Verse 31 What shall we say to these things? If God is for us who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all.

That's a reference back to that verse we just read earlier in the chapter. He gave himself he gave him up for us all. He gave his son up for us. How will he not also with him graciously!

Give us all things and the all things in context is all things necessary to sustain us in the midst of the very trials that God brings into our lives.

He goes on to catalog all the types of things that we might face and he says none of this will separate us from God's love. Why? Because in Christ God not only provides for our redemption but he provides for our perseverance through the trials that he himself sends into our lives.

Yes God tests us as he tested Abraham but God also provides for us as he provided for Abraham in the midst of Abraham's test and that's the lesson of Genesis chapter 22.

[46 : 00] He will test us. He will provide for us. He will make a way for the covenant promises to be fulfilled for us and he will make a way in the midst of our trials for us to remain faithful and sustain our fear and trust in him so that ultimately we receive the promised blessings.

And believe me you will face trials and your faith will be tested. It will be. The writers of the New Testament over and over tell us that.

They even tell us that in the middle of those trials God is not only sustaining our faith and helping us to endure to the end but it's by means of those trials that he's strengthening our faith which leads us to endure to the end.

God is a faithful good provider not only through and in the midst of trials but the trials themselves are his provision because through him he's through them he strengthens our faith and causes us to grow strong enough to persevere all the way to the end maintaining faith and fear in God that proves to be genuine and real and therefore shows to be the kind of faith by which God credits righteousness to his people just as he did for Abraham.

I'm not pulling all of that out of thin air. This is what the writer of the book this is what James tells us in his letter. Turn over a few pages from Hebrews to James and I this has been James chapter 2 we'll start in chapter 1 but James chapter 2 has been for many people a very difficult passage to reconcile with what the apostle Paul says about how we get right with God.

[48 : 00] But I think if we can understand how James looks back on Genesis 22 and how James views God is bringing trials into our lives not only is our interpretation of Genesis 22 confirmed but also our understanding of the kind of faith that justifies is sharpened.

So in James chapter 1 we're given this encouraging outlook on trials and tests. Verse 2 Count it all joy my brothers when you meet trials of various kinds for you know that the testing of your faith note that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness and let steadfastness have its full effect that you may be perfect and complete lacking in nothing.

So that's the goal. Your faith is tested so that steadfastness might be produced so that at the end of the day you're not lacking. You don't lack. Well what from James perspective counts as a lack?

For James a person who claims to be a follower of Christ is lacking when they don't show that they are rendering any sort of obedience to God's word.

They are lacking when they live sinful profligate lives. James won't have that. James can't stand that idea. He's having to counter that.

- [49 : 22] Just as Paul had to counter that idea. Paul goes from city to city telling people that it's not by works of the law that you get right with God but it's only by faith and always always Paul meets the charge.

Oh so if it's not by the works of the law then we can just do whatever we want and live sinful lives to which Paul repeatedly answers may it never be or God forbid.

In the strongest terms Paul condemns that idea. Well James is addressing that attitude and that idea head on in James chapter 2. The idea that faith can be something less than what Paul conceives of it.

It can be just agreeing and assenting to the basic facts as they've been told to you about Christ. And as long as you agree with that as long as you say you believe that you're secure no matter your life and James won't have it.

So when we turn to James chapter 2 he's going to address that by bringing up the example of Abraham and the test that Abraham endured in Genesis chapter 22.

- [50 : 23] Jump in in verse 20 James chapter 2 and then we'll close with this. Do you want to be shown he asks you foolish person that faith apart from works is useless?

That's James's point. He wants to show you that a faith that is devoid of works is a useless faith. Glance up to verse 14 where he asks a question. What good is it my brothers if someone says he has faith but does not have works?

Can that faith save him? You say you believe but your life doesn't reflect any kind of desire to obey God? Does that faith do you any good?

James's answer is no. But then he wants to prove his case by citing Abraham. Verse 20. Do you want to be shown you foolish person that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?

You see that faith was active along with his works and faith was completed by his works and the scripture was fulfilled that says Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness and he was called a friend of God.

- [51 : 29] Now this passage has caused endless headaches for those who love to read the apostle Paul because Paul clearly says we are justified by faith apart from works and James says no that's not the case if the faith plus works.

Well in what sense does works need to be added to our faith? faith in the same sense in which it had to be added to Abraham's. The testing of Abraham's fear or the testing of the genuineness of his faith was not designed to add some sort of work so that then God could credit righteousness to Abraham.

He's already credited righteousness to him on the basis of faith in Genesis 15 which James cites and James says that the crediting of faith on the of righteousness on the basis of faith that is fulfilled brought to completion in Genesis chapter 22 when Abraham obeys God.

What does he mean by that? He means that the faith of Abraham is not mere words. It's not it's not just saying you have faith. He means that the faith of Abraham is shown to be real and genuine and authentic when Abraham is willing to sacrifice his own son on the altar.

Why? Because according to the writer of Hebrews in that moment the faith of Abraham was magnanimous. The faith of Abraham was almost immeasurable.

- [52 : 53] He believed that God could even raise him from the dead if that was necessary. And now James says that event completes in a sense Genesis 15 where God credits righteousness.

All of the tests that God brings into our lives are designed at least on one level not just to strengthen our faith but to demonstrate the reality of our faith.

Because God delights to prove and show that his people genuinely believe in him and fear him.

God delights in the display of his glory through the enduring faith and fear of his people toward him. And the faith that saves and the faith that justifies is a faith that always passes the test because God provides in the midst of it.

Let's pray. God delights in the