

**Testing Our Faith**  
**#9 in a Series on The Story: From Creation to Christ**  
**Genesis 22:1-19**  
**Faith Community Church – March 2, 2008**

---

### **Introduction**

1. Read Genesis 22:1-19.
2. Down the street a church has the following words in its sign: “What defines you?” it’s a good question. What defines you? We can be defined by marital status, occupation, number of children, behavior of our children, talents, etc.
3. There are often events in peoples’ lives that tend to define them – at least in the eyes of the public. Athletes are defined by accomplishments so that a name brings the recollection of some event or achievement. Actors are defined by the roles that they made famous.
4. This morning we’re going to look at the defining moment in the life of Abraham. It is probably that for which he is most well-known.
5. I don’t know what you think about the story we just read. On one level it seems somewhat disturbing – like a cruel prank to play on an old man. And yet on another level it is a deeply moving story of two dear friends – God and Abraham.
6. While the command of God to sacrifice Isaac seems far-removed from our lives, it is not, as I hope we will see this morning.

### **Setting the Stage**

Genesis 22:1 begins with “after these things . . . .” Since we last saw Abraham, the cycle of promise – trouble – promise – trouble continues. After seeing God reaffirm the promises regarding Abram’s descendents and the land in chapter 15:

1. Genesis 16 tells us about the impatience of both Abram and Sarah, the giving of Sarah’s servant to Abram, and the birth of Ishmael.
2. Genesis 17 is a reaffirmation of the promise to Abram, not called Abraham. Abram means “exalted father,” and Abraham means “father of a multitude.”<sup>1</sup> God institutes the practice of circumcision as a sign of the covenant and promises that God would give Abraham a son through Sarah.
3. Genesis 18 and 19 tell a story of a divine visit to Abraham that has two purposes: to promise the birth of a son to Sarah in a year’s time, and to tell Abraham about the pending destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Chapter nineteen tells about the destruction of these two cities that had been given over to sexual perversion and also concludes the story of Lot’s downward spiral. The last words we read about Lot in Genesis are, “*Thus both the daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father.*” (19:36)
4. In Genesis 20 Abraham repeats his deception over the true identity of Sarah.
5. But in Genesis 21 the long-awaited promise of a son is fulfilled as Isaac is born. Their unrestrained joy is captured in Genesis 21:5-7.

---

<sup>1</sup> As per the ESV notes.

## Telling the Story

And so we come to Genesis 22. The details of the passage are such that the author wants us as readers to be drawn into the drama. We are to:

1. Be shocked by the seeming incongruity of the command God gives Abraham.
2. Feel the pain with Abraham in the words God uses to describe Isaac.
3. Sense the deliberate obedience of Abraham as he rises early, leaves nothing to chance and never hesitates. We are to experience the rising tension as Abraham cuts the wood before leaving, and as the small party walks for three days to the site where the sacrifice will take place.
4. Hear genuine faith in the words of Abraham, when he tells his servants that they both will return, and tells Isaac that God will provide a lamb for the sacrifice.
5. Experience the relief when God speaks again from heaven and stops Abraham just as he is ready to plunge the knife into his son.
6. Wonder as the all-knowing God says, “*now I know that you fear God . . .*” and once more reaffirms the promise that he has made with Abraham.

It’s a great story, but it does raise some questions – questions that are worth answering this morning:

## Asking Questions and Finding Answers

1. How much does God know?
  - a. This is not just a philosophical discussion. Didn’t God already know what Abraham would do? Doesn’t he know what is happening – and what is going to happen in your life? We’ve been taught that, but is there reason to believe it?
  - b. In our day some people who claim to be Christians have advanced an idea that is called *Openness Theology*. Among the different beliefs of Openness Theology is the belief that God does not have knowledge of the future. Passages like this, which seem to indicate a lack of knowledge on God’s part, fuel this thinking.
  - c. But the overwhelming teaching of Scripture says otherwise, and the authors of Scripture are not schizophrenic. The portrait that God has given of himself in Scripture shows a God who is all-knowing, before and after the fact, and that he is working out history toward a pre-determined conclusion, not frantically reacting to the billions of decisions made each moment by people who supposedly have free will.
  - d. So then, what does it mean when God says, “Now I know . . .?”
  - e. The best answer is that passages like this describe God’s experiential knowledge. God transcends history – he knows all that has happened and will happen. Yet God, like us, experiences history. God knows Abraham’s heart, but he knows it experientially when he witnesses Abraham’s obedience. One writer says it this way: “We can agree that God knew ahead of time what

Abraham was going to do. But there is ample evidence throughout Scripture that God desires us to act out our faith and worship regardless of the fact that he knows our hearts. God wants us to pray even though he knows what we are going to say and already has the answer in motion. He wants us to praise him even though he knows how we feel. God asks us to express our faith and love. It is honoring to him for us to demonstrate those things that he knows exist because it pleases him . . . We all know that as much as our parents, spouses and children know that we love them, it is important that it be demonstrated.”<sup>2</sup> That is true with Abraham’s faith and with our faith.

- f. So we can be confident that God knows our today and our tomorrow.
2. So what is the point of this test? There are actually two reasons:
    - a. Reason one why God tested Abraham:
      - i. First, notice that the word is *test*. A test is not just for the purpose of proving or establishing something. Biblically, tests also come to strengthen.
      - ii. If you have ever seen someone working in a blacksmith shop you will understand the purpose of a test. The metal is heated, pounded, shaped, heated, pounded, shaped until it is both finished and strong.
      - iii. We should note Romans 5:1-5 in this regard.
      - iv. Now look at Hebrews 11:17-19. From this passage, and from what Abraham did, we can see that Abraham believed God’s promise. How much was the faith that already existed in Abraham strengthened when he heard God call out, “Abraham – do not lay your hand on the boy!”
      - v. God tested Abraham to refine and strengthen his faith, and the various difficulties God takes us through are intended to do for us what this did for Abraham. So when you go through difficulty, your faith in God’s goodness will be strengthened as you see the solution unfold.
      - vi. Do we need it? Yes we do. See 1 Peter 1:3-7.
      - vii. By the way – we can only surmise the impact that this had on Isaac. It is worth noting that he was old enough to carry a significant amount of wood up a mountain, and could easily have outmaneuvered his old father. He has no doubt learned something from Abraham. And your kids and grandkids can learn from you too when they see you hold on when the money is tight, when they see your marriage having trouble and watch as you don’t let it go but fight for it, when they see you act faithfully when times are hard. Don’t think that your example doesn’t leave a mark.
    - b. But there is a second reason God tested Abraham.
      - i. God chooses this moment to clearly introduce something that would be intimately connected to what the promise that he made to Abraham was all about. And we see that in Genesis 22:13.
      - ii. When that ram died, he died in Isaac’s place. Abraham’s words to his questioning son were that God would provide a lamb (22:8). Those words foreshadowed the real fulfillment of the promise – that Jesus,

---

<sup>2</sup> Walton, page 514.

the seed of Abraham, the Lamb of God, would die in the place of who would, like Abraham, believe the promise and in so-believing would be made righteous – right with God, having their sin’s power and penalty washed away once and for all in that moment when God did not stay his hand and his Son, his only Son, Jesus who he loved, cried out, “It is finished!”

### **Connecting With This Passage**

God is saying something to us this morning. If we are listening God is saying that no matter how difficult your circumstances are, that he is worth trusting in, and that your trust will strengthen you and grow you up as a Christian. So hold on.

And he is saying that no matter how great your sin, the Lamb of God has died in your place if you will only believe. So believe.