

Message Summary

Most of us don't enjoy the tests administered at school, with #2 pencils and fill-in bubbles. We enjoy still less the tests in life God gives. But the school of being a Christ follower is a series of tests, designed to reveal our knowledge and character towards the one true God. Abraham, the focus of today's text, had his own sleuth of tests. Abraham began his faith journey called by God out of Ur to an unknown place that God would show him. By the time he reached Haran, his brother and father had both died. When his wife was barren, God promised and delivered a miraculous child after teaching Abraham the all-important lesson of faith. Even the most faithful are not beyond the pain and suffering involved in such tests.

Abraham's final exam (Gn. 22) was an exceptional test of faith. Though Sarah was barren, God promised offspring through her. But lacking patience and faith, Sarah and Abraham sought alternative means by getting ahead of God's plan and having a child with Hagar (Gn. 16). Despite their lack of faith, Sarah conceived and bore Isaac, the child of promise. God commanded Abraham to take this Isaac and offer him as a burnt offering (Gn. 22:2).

Abraham rose early the morning of the commanded offering, with fire and flint in hand. Isaac, an adolescent by now, did not see an animal for an offering and may have started to realize what was happening. As an example youth, however, he trusted his father and followed. Abraham had taught Isaac from childhood that the Lord would provide. Abraham prepared the fire, tied Isaac, laid him on the altar, and raised his knife. God rejoiced at Abraham's faith and provided another sacrifice. At the last minute, Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught in the thicket, a substitution for his son Isaac. In turn, Abraham named the mountain, "The Lord will provide."

Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac was a picture of the resurrection (Hb. 11:17-19). The story is all about how God would later send a Baby, His own only begotten Son. Jesus was tested, like Abraham, and was the only one to pass with 100%. None of us, however, pass God's test of obedience. When we trust in our own score, we will never pass. We obtain a positional 100% on our tests only by trusting in Christ. Those with faith for a 100% through Christ's obedience then grow into more functional obedience, as we look past this earthly land to the heavenly Promised Land through faith.

WHY IT MATTERS

Digging Deeper

Why is it easy to subtly believe that if we are faithful and obedient to God, He will spare us the pain and suffering involved in tests? How does this text teach otherwise?

Why is Abraham's story exceptional and unique? Who has taken Isaac's place, that we are sure we don't repeat this same test of faith?

Why does God often wait until the last minute to provide exactly what we need?

NOW WHAT DO WE DO?

Group Discussion & Application

Use the following questions to examine what the sermon and its text mean, to apply the Word to your life, and to guide how you pray. Please note that you don't have to use all of the questions. These are just options (along with the digging deeper section) to help you frame the family/small group discussion.

1. Do you subtly believe that if you follow God faithfully and truly, He will spare you the pain and suffering of tests?

2. What tests of faith are you facing now? How has the Lord grown your faith through them?
3. Do you struggle to have the patience necessary to wait on God's promises? Do you tend to want to go too fast and too soon?
4. How can you be part of raising another generation of faithful youth like Isaac?
5. Do you tend to trust in your own score rather than in Christ's work for you?
6. Do you embrace the tests of this life as an opportunity to grow in faith, or do you dread them and just want to get past them?
7. Are you content with this earthly land, or is your gaze and hope set on the next?
8. How would you fill in the blank: "God, you can have everything but _____"? How can you offer to the Lord whatever you are clinging to?

Prayer

- Pray for Our Church:
 - Thank God for providing Christ, our sacrificial substitute, to take our place. Thank Him for giving us his perfect score on the test so we don't have to rely on our own.
 - Pray that our church would have the courage to face and embrace the tests of faith. Pray that we would have patience to wait for God's provision, even that type of provision that comes at the last minute.
- Pray for Our Community:
 - Pray that the children and youth of Christ Fellowship would be a model of obedience and faith to the surrounding community. Pray that people would see the light of our youth and give glory to our Father in heaven (Mt. 5:16)
- Pray for Our World:
 - Pray for the Fairchilds as they continue language-training efforts in Mexico. Pray for grace to learn effectively as they grow spiritually, and pray for many outreach opportunities in their current context.
 - Pray for the IMB, as they expand efforts to reach the nations. Pray that many short-term, mid-term, and long-term missions would be advanced through their efforts to reach the nations with the gospel.