

Genesis 22:1-18

Some time later God tested Abraham. He called to him, "Abraham!"

Abraham answered, "I am here."

²God said, "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."

³Abraham got up early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, along with Isaac his son. Abraham split the wood for the burnt offering. Then he set out to go to the place that God had told him about. ⁴On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance.

⁵Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go on over there. We will worship, and then we will come back to you." ⁶Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and loaded it on Isaac his son. He took the firepot and the knife in his hand. The two of them went on together.

⁷Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father?"

He said, "I am here, my son."

He said, "Here are the fire and the wood, 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 went on together. ⁹They came to the place that God had told him about. Abraham built the altar there. He arranged the wood, tied up Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. ¹⁰Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.

¹¹The Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, "Abraham, Abraham!"

Abraham said, "I am here."

¹²He 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."

¹³Abraham looked around and saw that behind him there was a ram caught in the thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴Abraham 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."

¹⁵The Angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven ¹⁶and said, "I have sworn by myself, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷I will bless you greatly, and I will multiply your descendants greatly, like the stars of the sky and like the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the city gates of their enemies. ¹⁸In your seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

Tests

I.

He was an erratic student. You know the kind. At times he seemed brilliant. Then there were the other times: sometimes average, sometimes seemingly in danger of total and epic failure. From time to time he would prevaricate—straddle the things he should have known, and in the process deviate from the truth. Multiple times he was given additional chances.

Every one of us has been a student at one time or another. As is the case in many classes, it all came down to the final exam. His grade *seemed*, at least, to be hanging in the balance. It was time to knock it out of the park.

The tests of the past, in retrospect, seemed like child's play.

There was that test in which he was told to leave his homeland. There was no map, no gps coordinates, in fact, no information given whatsoever. Just go. “I will tell you when you get there.” He went. He got there. Test passed with flying colors.

There were some unannounced pop quizzes. Like the times he tried to pass his wife off as his sister (Genesis 12 and Genesis 20). Utter failures.

There were test involving Sodom and Gomorrah. Passed with flying colors.

There were tests involving the promises of an heir so that he would have so many descendants he couldn't count them all. One of those descendants would be the Messiah, who would save all people. His test results? Mixed. At times he tried to make the promise come true his own way, rather than wait for God's good time, but eventually Isaac was born.

II.

The First Lesson in today's readings speaks of what we will call the final exam. By this time Abraham was well over 100. Isaac *was* the child of the promise. God had assured him of this. After all these years of strange promises and their fulfillment, at over 100 years old, Abraham was older and wiser. He trusted God implicitly and completely when it came to his promises. This *was* the child who would be the ancestor of the Savior. God had made it all come to pass, and it *would* continue, uninterrupted. He was absolutely positive about that.

But now came the instructions for the test packet. “God said, ‘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’” (Genesis 22:2, EHV).

Have you *ever* seen a set of instructions like that? This was much more than a pop quiz. This was a pop *test*. There was no announcement given to study in advance. The testing time was several *days* long; part of the exam was the preparation and getting there before the final question.

Our English translations simply say: “go.” The Hebrew says: “go for yourself.” There was to be no “phone a friend” option before he would give his final answer; Abraham was to come up with his responses totally on his own.

The English translation “burnt offering” is totally correct. A burnt offering was one in which the sacrifice was burned up completely on the altar. It was to be completely gone—no part reserved.

Imagine for yourself the parts of this final exam. How would you fare? What would *your* reactions be? Imagine the loneliness you would feel while you took this long test—not being able to discuss the circumstances or the instructions with anyone.

“Abraham got up early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, along with Isaac his son. Abraham split the wood for the burnt offering. Then he set out to go to the place that God had told him about” (Genesis 22:3, EHV).

Stoic. That's what he would have to be on the *outside* as the preparations were made for this sacrifice. He was to go it alone. He was not to discuss it with anyone. *Inside* his heart must have been screaming in pain. *Inside* a little piece of himself must have been dying. He was instructed to burn up completely the son of the promise as a sacrifice to the Lord.

There is lots of time for thought as one goes through the tasks of the day. You had better think about where the blade of the ax is headed as you chop wood, but I'll bet his mind wandered a bit. Perhaps the woodpile was a good place to let the tears flow down his face while no one was watching him.

Then the little group of Abraham, Isaac, and a couple of servants set off. Three full days Abraham had to think about that final question. They reached the mountain.

“Abraham said to his young men, ‘Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go on over there. We will worship, and then we will come back to you’” (Genesis 22:5, EHV).

By this time Abraham knew *exactly* what his response would be to the question. There was no question in his mind that he would do exactly what God had told him to do. There was also no question in his mind that he *and* Isaac would both return to the servants who were ordered to stay with the donkey. “We will come back to you,” he said.

No prevaricating anymore; no straddling the fence between faith and doubt. Abraham gathered his supplies and marched up that mountainside with Isaac in total confidence in God and his promises.

III.

Isaac would go through some tests in his life, too. Like his father, some he would do better on than others. This is the first one we know of. Only a few words are recorded from Isaac’s mouth: “My father?... Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” (Genesis 22:7, EHV). That’s it. That’s the only question from Isaac’s mouth.

Isaac has been called a type of Christ. In other words, he is a figure from the Old Testament that gives a preview of coming attractions in the New Testament. The types of Christ in the Old Testament never preview things exactly or completely, of course. Nothing could. But you don’t hear another word from Isaac.

“They came to the place that God had told him about. Abraham built the altar there. He arranged the wood, tied up Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood” (Genesis 22:9, EHV). There’s that type of Christ. No matter how robust a man Abraham was, I think a young lad who could carry the wood for the sacrifice would be able to get the knife out of the hands of a man over 100 years old and to resist being tied up and laid on the altar.

No objections. No resistance. Not one word from his mouth. It reminds one of the Passion History, doesn’t it? In Pontius Pilate’s court “[Jesus] did not answer him—not even one word” (Matthew 27:14, EHV). As Isaiah had prophesied: “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. Like a lamb he was led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent in front of its shearers, he did not open his mouth” (Isaiah 53:7, EHV).

Of course, Isaac was *not* Jesus.

“Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son” (Genesis 22:10, EHV). Do you think the tears were freely flowing down Abraham’s face by this point? How many words were spoken to Isaac as he completed the task of this final exam? Any? We aren’t told. In Abraham’s mind, the sacrifice was already made.

“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’” (Genesis 22:11-12, EHV). Whenever you see the phrase “The Angel of the LORD” in the Old Testament, take a close look at the context. It isn’t a created angel, but the pre-incarnate Christ himself. You can tell it is God because he says: “you have not withheld your son from *me*.”

The writer to the Hebrews gives God’s commentary on the whole scene. “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered Isaac. This man, who received the promises, was ready to offer his only son,¹⁸ about whom it was said, ‘Through Isaac your offspring will be traced.’¹⁹ He reasoned that God also had the ability to raise him from the dead, and in a

figurative sense, Abraham did receive him back from the dead” (Hebrews 11:17-19, EHV). Abraham passed his final exam with flying colors.

“Abraham looked around and saw that behind him there was a ram caught in the thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son” (Genesis 22:13, EHV). The so-called type of Christ comparison is over. There was a substitute for Isaac—the ram was offered in his place.

“In your seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice” (Genesis 22:18, EHV). Isaac carried on the line of the Savior. Jesus came. When it was time for the greatest sacrifice of all time, there was no substitute for Jesus. He *was* the substitute for us. God loved you and me so much that he actually went through with the sacrifice of his One and only Son to pay for the sins of the world. Imagine the pain and anguish the Father went through as he watched his Son die there on the cross. But he directed his anger over sin at the suffering Savior, even though it broke his heart, because he loved *you* so much.

IV.

Do you ever wonder why we go through the expense of operating a Lutheran Elementary School? Tests. That’s why.

It’s important not just to teach *about* the kinds of epic tests Abraham went through, but to instill in the young people of our next generation faith that is bold. Faith that will take action. Faith that will trust in God and his promises, no matter how difficult the circumstances in which they find themselves.

The tests of our current generation keep on coming. “There will come a time when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, because they have itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in line with their own desires” (2 Timothy 4:3, EHV). Christians consistently face pressure to change our message—to make it fit in with the times—to make it more palatable for the people of a new, enlightened generation. It is increasingly likely and increasingly obvious that those who don’t conform to the demands of society will be deplatformed or face ostracization.

Our Lutheran Elementary School injects the message of the gospel into all the teaching of the day. The faith of these students will certainly be challenged later in their lives. In high school, perhaps, or in college; certainly as they continue to live in a society who’s Christianity is lite or nonexistent. The instruction they receive here will give their faith a leg up. As they continue through our school the foundation is regularly prepared and strengthened. When they leave this school, they are encouraged to build on that foundation by continuing to study and grow in the Word of God so they may continually prepare for the tests of life that come their way.

Whether you are 9 or 99 or anywhere in between, continue to open your Bible and study it. The time of testing isn’t over until you reach your heavenly home. Study confidently, because God’s promise to Joshua of old is his promise to every one of his believers: “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid and do not be terrified before them, because the LORD your God is going with you. He will not abandon you and he will not forsake you” (Deuteronomy 31:6, EHV).

God grant you the same strength of faith as Abraham and Isaac as the tests of your life come your way. Amen.