

## Sermon Manuscript

### Foundational Elements

Title: "Faith Shown Through Faithfulness"

Text: Gen. 22:1-19

Subject: Faithfulness/Christian Obedience

ETS: God tested Abraham's faith by asking him to sacrifice his son Isaac.

ESS: God desires for extraordinary faith to be shown through radical faithfulness.

OSS: Hearers will recognize opportunities to show their faith in an extraordinary God through being radically faithful to him.

### Formal Elements:

#### Introduction

ILL: The Bible calls us to honor those who are due honor. On Memorial Day, we recognize those who are due our honor because of their sacrifice for our country. Today, it is hard not to think about the movies inspired by the true stories of faithful soldiers who have given their lives in the service of this country. Movies like *Unbroken*, *Lone Survivor*, and *Hacksaw Ridge*.

These stories of bravery and service are absolutely incredible, but they are only a small portion of the stories that U.S. families remember on a day like today. There are countless other stories of heroic and faithful soldiers which are not shown on film. However, all the stories matter. All these stories uncover the selfless securing of freedoms and rights of the country in which we live.

Similarly, the Bible contains stories of radical faithfulness that display an extraordinary faith. These stories bring a sense of awe and wonder about how God has moved through his people. Yet, there are many other stories of faithfulness that are not recorded.

Those stories are still important. In fact, the very story of your faithfulness may never be recorded or retold, but that does not mean it is insignificant or unimportant. Your faithfulness is not unimportant for those around you that need encouragement to look to Jesus, nor is it insignificant to God who is deserving of your worship.

We will look at a true story this morning from God's Word that will teach us about Extraordinary faith and answer this question: "How does God desire for our faith to be shown?"

#### Background to the Passage

Turn in your Bible to Genesis 22. In the last message of this series, we will continue to look at extraordinary faith through the life of Abraham. So far, we have seen God call Abraham, God covenant with Abraham, and God correct Abraham.

Through these activities, we have seen that God has chosen to lovingly enter into a relationship with Abraham where he promises to be his God and to make Abraham the father of his people.

To be that father, God has promised to give Abraham a son from which several descendants would come.

Andrew showed us last week that Abraham and Sarah attempted to fulfill God's promise of a son in their own time and in their own way. However, God was gracious to them and still gave them the promised son, Isaac. Isaac was the long-awaited son that Abraham and Sarah loved as their firstborn. The birth of this son was a clear demonstration of God's power and plan.

We fast-forward now to our text for today. Abraham and Sarah have been able to enjoy watching their son learn, grow, and develop. They love him with everything in their being and he loves them. Then, God seems to do the unthinkable by calling Abraham to give the promised son back to him. Let's read together, starting in verse one of chapter 22.

### **Scene 1: The Test (v. 1-2)**

**Genesis 22:1 After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."**

**2 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."**

EXP: Immediately, the story begins with a problem. God tested Abraham by asking him to sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering. Let me be clear, the problem here is not that God tested Abraham. God is not a cruel school teacher trying to fail his students. No, God tested Abraham, and still tests his people, in order to show their faith.

By contrast, God will never tempt anyone. Moses was precise with his wording God tests but he never tempts. Temptation is the activity of luring someone into sin. God does not lure anyone into sin rather he tests to provide opportunities to show faith. As James said,

**Js. 1:13-14 'Let no one say when he is tempted, I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.**

Temptation might come from you. Temptation might come from the world. Temptation might come from Satan. But, temptation never comes from God. God will not tempt you to sin. But, he will test you to provide opportunities for your faith to be revealed through faithfulness.

God's test of Abraham in this chapter seems to be the most difficult test he ever received in his life. God commanded Abraham to offer his Isaac back to him as a burnt offering. Without the spiritual significance of Isaac in God's redemptive plan for humankind, this is still a massive sacrifice. God is not blind to the difficulty of this test. Look with me at how God described Isaac in verse 2. God said,

**“Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love.”** God has seen Abraham and Sarah raise this little boy and has seen the great joy in the fulfillment of the long-anticipated child brought to them. God saw the attachment between the parents and child become strong and secure. He noticed the great love this father has for his son and the son has for his father.

While God knows, perhaps because God knows this relationship intricately, he said, “Sacrifice this son, I have provided, back to me.” Abraham knows what happens when God speaks. He has walked with God and heard from him before. He has attempted to fulfill God’s plans through other means. Surely, he knows the only appropriate response when God speaks is to obey.

However, this test seems extreme, even contradictory to God’s plan. God promised Isaac in the first place with the plan to bring a legacy through this son. Now, God wants the son he provided back? Regardless of the difficulty of the test, or the confusion of the commandment, Abraham knows Yahweh is God and he is not. Therefore, God is to be obeyed.

ILL: In 2010, Stephen Lambert produced a TV show called *Undercover Boss*, where a prominent business executive would disguise herself, or himself, and go work at the same business as an entry-level employee.

As the show plays out, the undercover boss goes through the typical day-to-day tasks with other employees and learns about the professional and personal struggles of the entry-level staff. Sometimes, the boss is extremely impressed with the hard work, contribution, and faithfulness of the staff members. In other episodes, the boss is extremely disappointed with the laziness, damage, and faithlessness of the employee. At the end of each episode, the boss returns to their actual identity as an executive and calls the staff member to headquarters for a meeting. The faithful employees are greeted by a pleased boss and usually receive some rewards. The faithless employees are greeted by a not-so-pleased boss and some remediating work—possibly, even termination. I can only imagine that as those faithless employees leave that office they are thinking to themselves, “If only I had known that I was being tested.”

My prayer for myself and for our church family is that we would never leave an encounter with God thinking, “If only I had known that I was being tested.” Instead, I hope that we are excitedly and consistently faithful children of God whether we are being tested or not.

APP: Interestingly, in our story today Moses revealed to us that God was testing Abraham, but we do not see that God told Abraham his faith was being tested. Listen closely here. God is not the type of undercover boss trying to test your every thought, action, and attitude to lure you into sin. As we discussed earlier, that would be temptation. However, God does provide tests so that we might show our faith through faithful lives in worship of him.

What would it look like if you viewed your situation right now as a test from God? What would it look like if you looked at your situation as an opportunity to glorify God through faithfulness to him despite the challenging circumstances? How would you think differently about the situation? How would you talk differently about the situation? How would you act differently in the situation? Well, on this side of eternity you may never know if your current situation is a test from God. However, I can promise you this: God desires for you to glorify him in every

situation. The Bible says, **“Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31)**. May we be a people known as faithful followers of Christ.

TS: After the problem is introduced in scene one, we see the tension rise to a climax in scene two.

### **Scene 2: The Trek (v. 3-10)**

*Text: 3 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. 4 On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. 5 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.” 6 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. 7 And Isaac said to his father 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?” 8 Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together. 9 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. 10 Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.*

EXP: In response to God’s Word, Abraham rose early in the morning to complete the task God had given him. Perhaps, that night Abraham battled thoughts like: “My son is more important than listening to God. Or, God must be mistaken because this is the son my descendants are to come through. Or, God has given me what I want, but now his guidance is rubbing me the wrong way.” Whatever his thoughts might have been, we see by his actions that he had decided to follow God rather than any disobedient thought.

Abraham makes the preparation and calls for two servants and Isaac to join him on the trek. The Bible says in verse four that the trek was a three-day journey to the land of Moriah. In three days' time, Abraham had plenty of chances to change his mind. He did not.

When the crew reached Moriah, Abraham declared that he and Isaac would go worship and both would return back to them. What an interesting thing to say. Again as they leave to go worship, Abraham said something interesting to Isaac. Isaac, knowing how sacrifices work, asked, **“Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Abraham responded, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.”**

Now, don’t miss this. Abraham had made up his mind to sacrifice his son as a burnt offering, literally a whole burnt offering, to the Lord, but he believed that they would both return. You see, Abraham believed his God. He believed that if he promised descendants through this boy then he would make it happen, even if he had no idea how.

The writer of Hebrews helps us understand Abraham's mindset, saying, **“17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act**

**of offering up his only son, 18 of whom it was said, ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’ 19 He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back” (Heb. 11:17-19).** Abraham had extraordinary faith, because he believed he served an extraordinary God. As Andrew mentioned earlier in the series, the object of our faith, the extraordinary God, is the only thing that can make faith extraordinary.

ILL: Faith is quite similar to a picture frame. If you are here today and you do not know much about faith, I would imagine you know at least something about a picture frame. I have a good friend and mentor who makes picture frames. You know making a picture frame can be a good deal of hard work. He cuts the wood, sands the wood, stains the wood, finishes the wood, aligns the frame, nails the frame, cuts the glass, then puts it all together. The frames he makes turn out looking pretty great.

However, he and I both agree that no one will plan to hang up that empty frame in their home. No matter how much work, no matter how pretty, no matter how valuable a frame is, no one wants to buy a frame just to have a frame. Furthermore, no patron has ever come out of a museum and said, “Wow, did you see the frame on that last painting we saw?” No one says that. Why? Picture frames, no matter how impressive, are inherently designed to bring attention to the object they enclose.

Likewise, faith, no matter how impressive, is inherently designed to bring attention to the object of trust. You see, faith is only as extraordinary as its object. If we gamble our future and fulfillment on faith in education, or therapy, or money, or fame, or our spouse, or our children, or ourselves, or anything else, then our faith will be revealed to be ordinary and meaningless. However, if we give our future and fulfillment to God through faith in Him, then our faith will be extraordinary. Christian faith can only truly grow as we better know the Jesus in whom we place our faith.

EXP: The story continues as the author Moses picks up the pace to a climax. With short, successive verbs declaring Abraham's actions, he said Abraham built the altar, laid the wood, bound Isaac, laid him on the altar, and took the knife to slaughter his son.

TS: We move into the final scene to see what God was trying to teach Abraham, and through this divinely inspired record of this story, what God is trying to teach us.

### **Scene 3: The Truth (v. 11-19)**

*Text: 11 But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” 12 He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” 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 instead of his son. 14 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.”*

*15 And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven 16 and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 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, 18 and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice." 19 So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba. And Abraham lived at Beersheba.*

EXP: The Lord intervenes the moment before Abraham sacrifices Isaac and tells him his faith has been shown through his faithfulness. Look with me at verse twelve. The Angel of the Lord said, **"Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."** God was pleased with how Abraham responded to the test.

Let's pause for one moment to discuss child sacrifice. If you read this story outside of the larger context of Genesis and the Bible which reveals the character of God, then you might be very concerned about the God that Abraham has chosen to serve. You might even begin to question if God can be good if he requires child sacrifice as worship. Well, let me assure you that God does not require, nor permit, child sacrifice or any other kind of murder period—for worship or any other purpose. Some scholars submit that God never commanded child sacrifice, not even in this story, because he never let Abraham go through with it. Others suggest that God only commanded this dramatic action to reveal to Abraham that he is dramatically different from the other gods at the time who required child sacrifice as a regular practice of worship. Either of these propositions might be true, but what we know for sure is that this was a specific command to Abraham at a specific time that he did not allow to be completed, but the general command to all people at all times is that God strictly forbids the murder of any human being.

The thought of child sacrifice might weigh heavy on our hearts this morning as we think about all the current issues regarding the value of human life. Right now in society, we think about the legal conversation concerning abortion and the recent shooting at an elementary school in Texas. God has not called me to use the preaching moment as an opportunity to support a political party. However, God has called me to clearly tell others what his Word says about current situations. God plainly forbids the murder of any human being from the moment of conception to their last breath. God is deeply grieved by the loss of any human being and the activities which allow for the murder of human beings. May God help us to vote and act in ways that align with his fierce protection for the value of human life.

Even during this test, you can see God's great concern for the value of human life. Look with me at verses 13-14 to discover who provided for this sacrifice. The Bible reads, **"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 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.'"** God supernaturally provided a male lamb, or ram, for the sacrifice instead of Isaac. The word translated, "provide," literally

means, “the Lord will see to it.” The word, “provide,” is an accurate translation, but I love the personalness and intimacy of God being present to see to the fulfillment of the appropriate worship.

Hundreds of years later in the vicinity of this very mountain, there was a father who had determined to sacrifice his one and only son. Like Abraham, this father loved his son very much. Like this situation, God was present to see to the fulfillment of the appropriate worship. But unlike this moment, the son was killed. This son was named Jesus. Jesus is the only begotten son of God, who came to pay for the sins of the world though he had committed no sins. With tears in his eyes due to the cost of obedience, Jesus hung on that cross. Yet, with joy in his heart due to the reward of his obedience, Jesus died the death we deserved. The reward was our salvation. You see, the only way we are able to enjoy a worshipful relationship with God is through the righteousness of Christ given freely to us through his death on the cross.

If you are here this morning and you have never trusted Christ before, I want you to contemplate this question: Is there any good reason why you should not trust this extraordinary God today? Is there any good reason why you should not trust Christ’s work on the cross, so that God can see to you being made righteous before him? Is there any good reason to reject that love?

Now, Christian, there is one last thing that I want you to notice in this passage. Starting in verse 16, God told Abraham, **“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” (Gen. 22:16-17).** Here, we see that God used Abraham’s faithfulness to carry out his plans. God could have blessed Abraham with many descendants without this test of faith. God even provided the sacrifice in this test of faith. But, God desires to use the faithfulness of his people to carry out his plans. Indeed, the very mission of God to make disciples of Jesus is called the Great Co-mission, because God has determined to use his followers to be a part of his redemptive plan for the world.

ILL: Her name was Florrie Evans. She was a 19-year-old girl that had attended a small church in Wales and was a professing Christian, but she was not living for Jesus. One night in 1904, she attended an evening service where the pastor preached a sermon from 1 John 5 about living for the Lord. The Holy Spirit convicted her of living in a way inconsistent with her faith. That night she was so distressed she went to visit the pastor. He advised her to go be alone, seek God, and do whatever the Holy Spirit told her to do. Florrie responded with fear, saying, “I don't know what He will ask me to do, something very difficult perhaps.” She left to be alone with God. She spent her free time that week seeking the face of God in prayer and his Word. God met Florrie in her time seeking him, and she submitted to do whatever he told her to do.

The next Sunday evening, the pastor was doing a Bible study with some of the youth at the church, and Florrie was in attendance. At the end of the night, he asked a question of application from the study: “What does the Lord Jesus Christ mean to you?” Some responded with answers like, “He is the savior of the world.” Or, “He is the only son of God.” Florrie felt the Spirit stirring in her heart, prompting her to give a testimony of how God moved the past week. The

pastor asked the group again, “What does the Lord Jesus Christ mean to YOU?” Florrie stood up and announced, “I love Jesus Christ with all my heart!”

And God broke loose! From that moment a revival was fanned into flame among the youth in that meeting and spread throughout the whole country of Wales. Most Christian historians mark this moment as the beginnings of what is called the Welsh Revivals, where around 100,000 people were saved. God had a plan to move in Wales, but he had determined to move through the radical faithfulness of one teenage girl.

APP: God desires for extraordinary faith to be shown through radical faithfulness. Your faithfulness to God might not be the plot of the next famous movie. Your faithfulness might not be the beginning of the next large revival. But, we know from this story that God desires to use your radical faithfulness to display an extraordinary faith in the extraordinary Jesus.

Would you pray with me?