

Abraham's supreme test

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[0 : 00] We now turn to Genesis chapter 22. Let's read again the opening verses of this chapter. It came to pass after these things that God did test, tempt or test Abraham and said unto him, Abraham, and he said, Behold, here I am.

And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains that I will tell thee of. And so on. This story of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah. Take your son Isaac and offer him. On a mountain that I will tell thee of. Now anyone who is a stranger to this incident will have a problem to solve. A moral problem about God.

And anyone who reads this incident without reading the corresponding reference to it as we have done in Hebrews 11 will continue to have a problem about God.

[1 : 18] And the problem obviously is this. That if there's a God in heaven who is loving and gracious, how could he ask any human father to do what he asked Abraham to do?

He commanded Abraham to embroe his hands in the death of his own son. And how could such a knack even be suggested, let alone commanded?

And it was commanded. God did not say to Abraham, it would be nice, it would be good if you could offer your son Isaac on the altar. It is an imperative. Take your son. Take your son and offer him. Well now I think we need to remember two things about this. And one is that this was a test of Abraham's faith. Verse 1 says God tested Abraham.

And God had the right to test Abraham. And not only did God have that right, but God still has that right to test any of his children as he sees fit, when, and how, and where.

[2 : 33] That is his right, for he is the sovereign God. None can stay thy hand or say to thee, what are you doing? But in Abraham's case, God did this.

Verse 1 says, after these things, and we're following the A.V. verse in here, A.V. here. After these things, what things? Well after, I believe, numerous other testings.

In fact nine testings in all. Nine testings, all of them previous to this one in chapter 22, the severest test of all. And this reminds us, doesn't it, that God does not lay heavy burdens on shoulders not ready to bear them.

And God knew that Abraham was ready for this other test in chapter 22 here, because of his successful coping with the previous tests.

And God knew that Abraham was now ready for this, the severest test of all. That's one thing. And another thing to keep in mind is this, that the whole incident was done, as Hebrews 11.19 says, was done in a figure, figuratively speaking.

[3 : 59] For Isaac did not die. And God knew that Isaac would not die, though neither Abraham nor Isaac did. Well now, the great value of this Old Testament piece of history lies in two directions closely linked.

And one is, that it provides us with a record of the enormous, enormous, and marvellous faith of Abraham, under very great and grave testing.

That's one thing. But it also provides us, on the other hand, with a Old Testament visual aid about the fundamental doctrine of the church.

And it provides the church with instruction about this doctrine to the end of time. And the fundamental doctrine of the church, I believe, and I'm sure you believe too, is the doctrine of the atonement.

So that in the very first book of the Bible, atonement is taught, not of course as clearly as in the epistles, but nevertheless, it is introduced here early on in God's revelation of his will to mankind.

[5 : 16] And Abraham witnessed that indication of atonement on Mount Moriah. And I believe that for that reason, the Lord Jesus could say, as he did say in John 8 and verse 56, that Abraham rejoiced to see my day and saw it and was glad.

The transaction that so severely tried and tested Abraham, and severely tested his faith, showed Abraham what only faith could see, and what only faith can embrace, the marvel of God's atoning grace.

And we have this indication of it early on in the book, in the Bible, and here in the book of Genesis. Now I want us to notice one or two things about this incident that is so well known.

And first of all, let us notice this. Notice the preparation that was made for the Mount. The preparation that was made for the Mount. And made really by God himself.

And God gave to Abraham a threefold commission. And the first part was this. There was the choice of Abraham's son. That was the first instruction Abraham got.

[6 : 44] The choice of Abraham's son. Take your son. This was God's command. This was God's choice. And therefore it was Abraham's choice.

He wasn't told to take your nephew, or take your servant, but take your son. And not only take your son, but take your only son, Isaac.

Not Ishmael, the son of the bondwoman Hagar. At this point, according to chapter 21, Hagar and Ishmael had been cast out. Cast out the bondwoman and our son.

This had taken place. So God didn't say, take Ishmael. But he said, take your son, Isaac, the son of the three women. Sarah, Abraham's wife.

Not only take your son, but take your only son. And not only take your only son, but take your only son, whom you love.

[7 : 49] Abraham. Now, Isaac was very precious to Abraham. He waited long for him. He was born when Abraham and Sarah were well advanced in years.

But Isaac was a child of promise. But Isaac was a child of promise. And God fulfilled his promise. So Isaac was the heir of promise. He was Abraham's heir.

And he was the son whom Abraham loved. Take your son, Isaac, whom you love. Now, it's not difficult, is it, at this point, to think of another father, infinitely greater than Abraham, who did the same thing, but to an infinitely greater degree.

God took his son, and delivered him up for us all. Yes, but God took his only son, his only begotten son, that is the only son he ever had, by eternal generation.

God has a great multitude of sons and daughters, by regeneration and adoption, but only one son, by eternal generation, the son who proceeded from the father, and of whom he said, this is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.

[9 : 10] Hear ye him. And Jesus, our Savior, was and is God's beloved son. God said through his prophet Isaiah, he is my elect.

He is my elect, in whom my soul delights. And the whole history of redemption centers in the one in whom God's soul delights.

And redemption means, that all who are in Christ, and are redeemed by Christ, are heirs of God, and co-heirs with Christ, with the one the Father loves.

what a momentous occasion that was. When before the world was, or as the Old Testament puts it, before the foundations of the earth were laid, when out of his mere good pleasure, God made choice of his son, and took his son, and prepared for his son, a human body, as Hebrews 10, 5 tells us.

And in that body, sent him to die, the just, for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. So God did not ask Abraham, to do anything, that he didn't do for himself, that he didn't do himself.

[10 : 29] Only what he did, was on another scale, and entered into another dimension. He offered his only begotten son, the Lord Jesus, for there was no other good enough, to pay the price of sin.

There was, first of all, the choice, of Abraham's son. And the next thing is this, that there was the place, of Abraham's trial. He was being tested here, and tried, and we notice now, the place, of Abraham's trial.

Abraham had to go, to a specified place, to Moriah, to the land of Moriah. No other place was mentioned, no option was given, nothing was left untouched, clear, the choice, of the place, was God's.

He chose the person, Isaac, and he chose the place, Moriah. Now it has long, been established, that this, mountain top, was the site, of the temple, in Jerusalem.

Known as the, Temple Mount. And on the Temple Mount, on the top of Moriah, the temple of Jerusalem, was built, at Jerusalem was built, the temple, which Jesus entered, where Jesus worshipped, where Jesus taught, where he overthrew, the tables of the money changers, and so on.

[11 : 56] this was where the temple was built, on the top of Moriah. That site, sadly and tragically today, is in the hands of Muslims, and has been for a very long time, indeed from the year 650 AD.

It has been there in Muslim hands, and there the Dome of the Rock stands today. Yet how significant, that to that same, tiny part of the world, where Moriah stands, to that same place, our Lord Jesus came, and to the very city, within which Moriah stands.

And in that city, Jesus ministered, there he was tried, by Herod, and by Pilate, and by the Sanhedrin, and outside the walls, of that city, he was crucified, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.

There was, the choice of Abraham's son, and there was the place of Abraham's trial, and this leads us, to the purpose of Abraham's journey. Take your son, and offer him, offer him.

Now who would want to be, in Abraham's shoes at that time? Who could really know, how Abraham felt? What a traumatic, and heart-breaking reason, for going to the land of Moriah, and to that particular mountain, called Mount Moriah.

[13 : 24] He was going there, to slay his son, for whom he had so long waited. And as Abraham went, he must have wondered, as he made his sorrowful way, to the mountain, he must have wondered, what was going on?

What was God thinking, or what was God doing? Yet he went on in faith, and perhaps Abraham wondered, what on earth, he was going to say, to say to his wife, Sarah, when he went home, without Isaac.

She would say to him, where is Isaac, he left with you, three days ago, and Abraham would have to say, I slew him, your son and mine, I slew him, at the command of our God.

How was he going to say that, to his wife? Yet he went on in faith. And perhaps he wondered too, how the rest of the world, and his own other relations, and other people in Israel, how they would think, what would they think of him, when it was known, that he slew his own son?

Yet he went on in faith. But even more devastating, was the fact, that in Isaac's death, God's promise to Abraham, would become null and void.

[14 : 40] For in the previous chapter, and in verse 12, God made this promise to Abraham, he said, in Isaac, shall your seed be called. That is, through Isaac, Abraham, was to have many descendants, as many as the stars, and as the sun by the seashore, the sand by the seashore, for multitude.

But how could that possibly be, if Abraham was to die, even before he married, and he wasn't married at this time? If Isaac was to die, before he was married, how could he be, give to Abraham, such a vast number, of descendants?

And so Abraham, may well have thought, well, was God deceiving me? Did he deceive me, when he made that promise? Yet he went on in faith.

But the most devastating part, of the incident, of course, was the fact, that he had to slay, his own son, with his own hand. No option was given, no servant was appointed, Abraham knew, he had to take the knife.

There was no one there, no one else to do it, he had to take the knife, and slay his own son. Yet, he went on in faith. What an enormous faith, what a man of faith, what greatness, and magnificence, and magnitude.

[16 : 02] And also, what a preview, we have here, of Calvary. a preview of a greater than Abraham, and a greater than Isaac, by far.

You see, if it was in faith, that Abraham, made all these preparations, for the mount, it was in grace, marvelous grace, that God, that God, made preparations, to save lost mankind, and prepared, for his son, a body, and prepared, the plan, of redemption, through which, God became, manifest in the flesh, in the flesh, of his own son, the son, whom he so dearly loved.

the preparations, that were made, for the mount, but now we go on, with Abraham, and we see this, truth more clearly.

Let's have a clearer view, of Calvary, and we notice, in the second place, the provision, that was seen, on the mount. The provision, that was seen, on the mount.

And now we go, to verse 7, of Genesis 22, and we have, for the first time, the first, recorded words, of Isaac. For three days, as they journeyed, there's nothing said, about what Isaac said, but here we have, the first recorded words, of Isaac, and his words were, my father, we have the fire, and the wood, but where is the lamb?

[17 : 31] We have the fire, and the wood, but where is the lamb? And Abraham's famous words, my son, God will provide himself, a lamb. I want us to notice, one or two things, about that. First, here we have, a divine provision.

Here we have, a divine provision. God will provide himself, God will provide a lamb, and God has provided a lamb. In the fullness of time, God sent forth his son, born of a woman, woman made under the law, to redeem those, who were under the law.

In the fullness of time, the father, sent the son, to be the saviour of the world. And John, in his gospel, says, behold, the lamb of God, who takes away, the sin of the world.

There is no other lamb, as there is no other name, under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved. The Lord Jesus, is the lamb, portrayed here, in this Genesis incident.

And he is the lamb, prophesied, and predicted, by the prophets, and by Isaiah, in particular, and by, in Isaiah 53. Even more particularly.

[18 : 40] And he is the lamb, who was crucified, according to the records, of the full gospel. And he is the lamb, who is now, in the midst of the throne, and who received, all honour, and power, and might, and dominion.

He is worthy. It's a divine provision. But what I want to point out here, about the divine provision, is this. That it's not only, that God, provided a lamb, but that God, provided himself, a lamb.

It's not just, that God himself, provided a lamb, but that God, provided himself, a lamb. That is, that God, provided himself, with a lamb.

I think it's a pity, that this is missed out, in the modern versions. That this is, a very important aspect, of what is brought, before us here. God, will provide, himself, a lamb.

He will provide, a lamb for himself, and he has, a lamb for us, and a lamb for himself, but the same lamb. Now, in the divine provision, of the atonement, there are two sides, as you well know, and I'm sure you've heard, so very often.

[19 : 54] There's the Godward, and the manward side, and we must not forget, either side. And it is the Godward side, that is emphasized here. The Godward side, what the atonement, does for God.

Well, we know, what the atonement, does for us. Through the atonement, our sins, are blotted out, and we are reconciled, to God, by the death of his son. And that means, that the estrangement, between ourselves, and God, no more exists, and has been ended, once and for all.

And all who believe, in Jesus, from the many times, they believe, are no longer estranged, but reconciled to God, by the death of his son. That's what the atonement, does for us.

But what does the atonement, do for God? For God, didn't need an atonement. He has provided, a perfect atonement, and a perfect redemption. Why then, did he provide, himself, a lamb, or a lamb for himself?

Because, he had to be reconciled, to us. His own justice, had to be satisfied, and his own wrath, had to be propitiated.

[21 : 07] And it has, for God's wrath, terminated, on the lamb, that he provided, for himself. Which is the lamb, that he provided, also for us. We must not think, of propitiation, in some strain, that in some strange way, God's wrath, turned into love.

That's not propitiation. That's not what the Bible says. It's rather, that God's wrath, terminated upon Christ. And Jesus, bore the sin, of a, the wrath, of a sin-hating God.

And so, the Christian believer, can now say, and we can say it, even if we don't sing it, in our churches, we can say this, the wrath, of a sin-hating God, with me, can have nothing to do.

My saviour's, obedience and blood, hide all my transgression, from you. There's depth there, there's divine truth there, that is brought, before us here.

God provided, himself a lamb, and that lamb, bore the wrath, of a sin-hating God. We can put it this way, from Romans 3, verse 26.

[22 : 20] Why did God provide, himself a lamb? Paul says, to declare, his righteousness. That he might be just, and the justifier, of those who believe, in Jesus.

In other words, the lamb was provided, not first and foremost, to secure our salvation, but first and foremost, to declare God's righteousness. God first, always, to declare, his righteousness. And to this end, the words of Abraham, long before the event, are predicted. God, will provide himself, a lamb.

Now what a glorious truth, we have here. And the truth is this, that what God has provided, both satisfies himself, and saves us.

In the Lord Jesus, God has met, his own requirements, and at the same time, has secured, our own salvation. What a foolproof provision. What a wonderful provision, was seen on the mountain.

[23 : 29] But what a tragedy. What a tragedy, that to such a plan, and to such a provision, so many, so many, want to add.

They want to add, their human works, and their human righteousness. Isn't that tragic? God has given us, a foolproof plan, has made a foolproof provision, and you get people, in our own congregations, who still want to add, to what God has provided.

And you see, when that happens, this happens, that to add, is to subtract. It's to take away, from God's glory, and to dishonor him.

So that's the first thing, a divine provision. The second thing, very briefly, this was a willing provision, on the mount. It was a willing provision. Not only did Abraham, show willingness, in the obedience of faith, but so did Isaac, in this sense, that when he was placed, on the altar, and bound to the altar, he showed no resistance, no aggressiveness, he acquiesced.

And in a much fuller, and deeper way, than anything, that happened on Moriah, Christ's death, was voluntary, and willing. He was brought, as a lamb, to the slaughter, and as a sheep, before a shearer's dam, so he opened, not his mouth.

[24 : 58] When he was reviled, he reviled, not again. And when he spoke, of his own death, he says, I lay my life down, of myself, of my own will.

I lay down, of my own will, and no man, takes it from me. And let's remember this, that when the Lord Jesus, as a boy, in childhood days, worshipped, he would have sung, in his worship, the words we were singing, in Psalm 40.

Although not, of course, in the metrical version, that he would be singing, the same thing. To do thy will, I take delight, O thou my God that art. Let's remember, that when we sing these Psalms, we are singing, what Jesus sang.

And how more, New Testament, can we get? He delighted, to do his Father's will.

And to do his Father's will, he was sent, into the world. And on one occasion, Jesus said, regarding that very thing, other sheep I have, which are not of this fold, them also I must bring.

[26 : 05] His work, was a willing work, and a willing provision. And the third thing, is that it was a, substitutionary one. Now, this brings us, to the very heart of the matter.

Abraham was on the point, of plunging the knife, into the body of his son, when, his hand, fell nerveless, to its side. He heard a voice, from heaven saying, don't lay your hand, on the land, don't touch him.

And when Abraham, heard that, he didn't know again, he didn't know, what was happening, what was going on. One moment he said, he was told to take the knife, and slay him, and the next moment, he was told not to. But then, he knew, what he had to do, when he looked up.

For when he looked up, he saw a ram, in the thicket. And he knew, instinctively, he knew through God's, grace and instruction, that, that, the ram, in the thicket, was to go, in the place of his son, on the altar.

And so, at this point, the action moves away, from Isaac on the altar, for a moment, to the ram, in the thicket, and then back, to the substitution, that was made.

[27 : 10] And this leads us, to the heart, of the whole incident, as I said. It gives us, another preview, of Calvary, a close up, of Calvary, of what took place, on the altar, of the cross, where the supreme, offering was made.

There, a substitution, was made, the righteous, for the unrighteous, the lamb, on behalf of the sinner, and in the place, of the sinner. And it means, that suspended, above us, was the sword, of God's justice, justice, that had to be satisfied, if God was to be, considered righteous, and just.

And that suspended, sword, fell, but not on us. It fell on Christ. And notice this, that it, I notice this, it fell precisely, according to the prophecy, of Zechariah, in chapter 13, verse 7, Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man, who is my equal.

Smite the shepherd, and the sheep, shall be scattered. And the Lord, smote him, smote his own son, with the sword, of his justice, not for Christ's sake, but for ours.

Why? Oh, for this, most blessed, of all reasons, that God, mercifully, doesn't require, a personal atonement, from us.

[28 : 31] If he did, it could never be made, and every one of us, would be lost. But the only one, who could make the atonement, made the atonement, and made it for us, in our place, condemned his students.

And when the Lord Jesus, was handed over, to be crucified, it wasn't because of, Judas, for money, or because of the, of Pilate, for fear, or because of the Jews, for envy, it was because of the Father, for love.

God, God, so loved the world, that he gave, his only begotten son. Here we have the provision, on the mount.

And what a provision. God, will provide himself, a lamb. That's the second thing.

And now finally, and quite briefly, we notice this. Not only the preparation, that was made for the mount, the provision, that was seen on the mount, but the victory, that was proclaimed, from the mount.

[29 : 39] Now the story, doesn't end, with the death of the ram, in the place of Isaac. We interpret, the rest of the story, in the light of Genesis 11, and particularly, of Hebrews 11, and particularly, Hebrews 11, and verses 19 and 20.

Three things, I want to say, quite quickly. First, Isaac was raised, from the dead. Isaac was raised, from the dead. Isaac who was, next door to death, he was at the very, point of death.

Isaac was, virtually, was virtually dead. And he was raised, Hebrews says, in a figure. He who was, virtually dead, was raised, figuratively.

But if Isaac, who was virtually dead, was raised, figuratively, Jesus who was, truly dead, was raised, actually, and physically.

He died, for our sins, and was raised, again, for our justification. And notice this, that Christ's resurrection, wasn't only personal, but representative.

[30 : 43] For Jesus says, because I live, you shall live also. That's our great hope. That's why this means, so much to us. Christ's death, and resurrection. Jesus says, because I live, you shall live also.

So Christ's resurrection, was the divine receipt, written as it were, in God's handwriting, that what was given, Christ to do, was accomplished, and the death, was met, and paid.

Isaac was raised, from the dead. The second thing is this, that Isaac, was received, received by Abraham. Abraham, we are told in verse 19, received him, in a figure.

So no longer, was Abraham afraid, to meet Sarah. Abraham knew, that he would go back, to Sarah, with Isaac. Isaac went back home. Isaac went back home, after his resurrection.

And when the Lord, Jesus was raised, he soon returned home, at his ascension, home to the glory, which he had with the Father, before the world was.

[31 : 53] He who by the grace of God, tasted death for every man, was crowned, with glory and honour. He went back home, and there he is, at the right hand, of the majesty, in the heavens.

That's the second thing. And the last thing is this, Isaac was made a blessing. Verse 20 of Hebrews 11. Isaac was made a blessing. He blessed, Isaac blessed, Jacob and Esau, concerning things to come.

Isaac blessed, Jacob and Esau, with regard to their future. And what a blessing, Christ is in glory, for all who believe in him.

He was raised, and ascended, and went home, to be a blessing to us, while we still remain here on earth. Acts 3 says this, that God raised up, his son Jesus, and sent him, to bless you, in turning away, every one of you, from his iniquities.

He ascended on high, to give gifts, and to load us, daily with his benefits, and the greatest benefit, of all, from the crucified, and risen, and reigning, son of God.

[33 : 08] The God, whom the father loves, the greatest benefit, is redemption. Redemption, accomplished, by Christ, on the cross, and applied to us, by the work, of the spirit, in our hearts.

And we say, with the psalmist, in Psalm 116, which we were singing, what shall I render, to the Lord, for all his benefits, toward me, I will take the cup, of salvation.

And my dear friends, whatever else, that may mean, it means a lot of things, I think. It certainly means this, that, we identify, ourselves, with Christ.

In his righteousness, as he identified himself, with us, in our sin. I will take the cup, of salvation, I will call upon, the name of the Lord, I will declare my vows.

Now, in the presence, of all his people, I'll identify, myself with Christ. Is that where, we all stand today, because of Christ's, finished work?

[34 : 15] Is that where we stand? Are we prepared, to identify ourselves, and to be seen, as identifying, ourselves, with Christ? An opportunity, is coming at the end, of this month, at the Lord's Supper, for you to do that, any who have not done so, so far, to take your stand, and identify yourself, and do so, for one reason, among many others, in answer to your question, what shall I render, unto the Lord, for all his benefits, toward me, I'll identify, myself with him, till travelling days, are done.

So may it be. Let us pray. Amen. Our God, and our Father, we give thee thanks, for thy word, and for its instruction.

We pray, that whatever has not been, in line with thy will, thou will cause us, to forget, and forgive us. Whatever has been, pleasing to thee, we ask thee to bless.

Lord, look upon us, each one, we pray, and may these, great truths, of thy word, come home to us. May we not dismiss them, lightly from our minds. May we consider them, and may the Holy Spirit, apply them to our hearts, in a saving way, and in a sanctifying way, and with such power, that we would have no difficulty, in identifying ourselves, with such a saviour.

We ask it in his name, and for his sake. Amen.