

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Twelfth Sunday After Trinity, August 30, 2020

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 402, 422:1, 406, 398, 421.

Lessons: Genesis 21:1-6, Hebrews 11:11-19, Matthew 7:13-23.

Sermon Text: Genesis 22:1-19.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

How hard is it to follow God? Is it ever difficult to do what God wants from us as we go about our daily lives?

Last week you heard about Abraham and faith. By faith Abraham received the justification from God which was given to him because of what Jesus Christ did. We briefly talked about fruits of faith, doing things that show our faith in God to be real.

Today we find an example of a man who was really put to the test by God, far more than we could ever expect to be tested by God.

Today we look deeper into the life of Abraham and see how

GOD TESTS ABRAHAM

- 1. Abraham had a hard time believing God before his promised son Isaac was born.**
- 2. God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, his only-begotten son as a burnt offering!**
- 3. In Isaac we see parallels to Jesus Christ who was sacrificed.**

The Old Testament tells us the promise of God to Abraham that *“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”* So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.” Genesis 12:2-5 (NIV) Notice that Abraham was 75 years old at this time, and many events happened in the next 25 years.

There was a famine and Abraham and all those with him moved to Egypt for a time.

Lot chose to live among the cities along the Jordan River, near Sodom, despite the fact that *“the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD.”* Genesis 13:13 (NIV)

God repeated his promise to Abraham when Abraham followed God’s directive to live in Canaan. *“Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you.”* Genesis 13:14-17 (NIV)

Later Abraham had to rescue Lot from a war among the kings of the Sodom area.

Sarah and Abraham didn’t trust the Lord to provide them a child, so she encouraged Abraham to have a child with her maid-servant Hagar, who was then named Ishmael. In this way they took matters into their own hands, not believing God.

Later, *“When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, ‘I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.’”* Genesis 17:1-2 (NIV)

God changed Abraham's name from Abram, which means "exalted father" to Abraham, which means "father of many". God also changed Sarai's name to Sarah. At that time God also repeated the promise of a child to be born to them. But Abraham ***"laughed and said to himself, 'Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?'"*** Genesis 17:17 (NIV) Sarah, too, thought it ridiculous that a hundred-year-old man and a ninety-year old woman would have a child.

Miraculously, the LORD saw to it that Sarah and Abraham did have a child. After a normal pregnancy she gave birth, exactly as the LORD had promised them, to the "one-and-only" son to bear the covenant-promise: The covenant was to be established with Isaac, not with Ishmael.

And finally, despite many lapses in their faith, the child who was to be named Isaac was born of Abraham and Sarah.

But God had yet another test of Abraham's faith, the greatest he would face.

God told Abraham to take his son to Jerusalem and ***"Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."*** Muslims think they have found the very place and the very stone Abraham was to use, and that is now their sacred place in Jerusalem, under the Dome of the Rock.

Can you imagine what was going through Abraham's mind? He knew what "sacrifice" meant. It meant to kill and then burn the dead body. And he was to do this to his son, whom God had promised would be the first of countless descendants!

"Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance." They traveled for three days – three days for Abraham to think about what God had commanded him to do – and he no doubt took time to pray. None of us has faced such a terrible command from God that would appear to change our very lives – or have we?

We are told to avoid every kind of evil and even every appearance of evil. We are told to beware of false teachers and to avoid those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the teachings of Scripture.

Compared to Abraham's test, these are insignificant choices. But in our lives, these kinds of things are major tests. God's will and what he expects of his children sometimes demand earthly sacrifices, the need to stand up for Jesus and our confession and roadblocks to what we want to do in our lives.

But look at how Abraham faced this test and knew that God would take care of him and lead him through this test.

What a trial of his faith! Listen again to the words we read in the New Testament about this trial: ***"By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death."*** Hebrews 11:17-19 (NIV)

There can be no doubt as to God's intent, because he spelled it out in detail. When Abraham told his servants that the boy would return, he was fully convinced that after he killed Isaac, God could raise him back to life.

Abraham moved forward with faith in the LORD. Isaac submitted out of confidence in his father. He saw his father build the altar, and then felt his father bind him on the altar, and raise the knife for a fatal stab.

Abraham's faith was shown in his deeds. Deeds are the product of motives, which begin in the heart; and such deeds are fruits of faith.

We see here that our LORD was giving a challenge to Abraham to strengthen his faith and to depend on God's judgment and direction in all situations.

How often don't we want to depend on ourselves, and do what we want to do and do what we think is best and not regard and obey what God tells us in his word?

Abraham, at the age of 100, had received the promised son. And now God commanded him to kill that son.

But the New Testament makes it clear that it was the faith of Abraham which reasoned, which reckoned, which considered and concluded that if he were to kill Isaac, God could bring him back from the dead.

What faith! What confidence in believing that if he followed the command of the Lord all would be well!

Do we have that kind of faith? When God tells us something in his Word do we believe it unquestioningly and trust that all things will work together for our good?

There are many tests facing believers today. Just one of the tests facing believers today is the total disregard people around us have for God and his Word. We might also think of all the ways in which people twist and pervert the Bible. Humans conclude that God must be wrong when he calls something a sin. We could think of the rejection of verbal inspiration as a starting point for changing what the Bible says into what humans want it to say. And we think of the ways in which people change what the Bible says about sexual sins and how churches feel they have the right to approve of what God plainly calls sin. We dare not approve of, we dare not “like” sin in any form! God is clear when he tells us to avoid, and to flee from sin. But we often think we know better. We want to do what we want to do. And so we justify all sorts of behavior which is contrary to the plain will of God in the Bible.

Before we close our discussion of this test of Abraham to sacrifice his only-begotten son, we would be remiss if we didn't mention some of the parallels between Isaac and Jesus.

- Each was the "one-and-only" son of the father. The Greek word in John 3:16 for “only-begotten”, “one and only” is used exclusively for Jesus and for Isaac.

- Each was long-promised and long-awaited. Abraham and Sarah had to wait only 25 years for God's promise to be fulfilled. Believers had to wait centuries for the Savior, God's only-begotten Son to come to earth.

- Each carried the promise of bringing blessings to all nations. A descendant of Isaac, Jesus Christ, would be the Savior who would bring and fulfill the blessing of eternal life. All nations are to hear of Jesus – and who will tell them the whole truth if you don't?

- No human substitute dared take his place. Ishmael could not take the place of Isaac. No one else born of woman could take the place of Jesus, because only the sinless Son of God and son of Mary could pay the price for the sins of all mankind.

- Each submitted obediently to the father's will, like a lamb being led to the slaughter.

- Each was to be sacrificed at Jerusalem.

- Isaac was as good as dead until the third day because it took them three days to reach the place of the sacrifice and Abraham knew that his son must die. Jesus was physically, actually, dead until the third day, when he came back to life, proving that God can give life after death.

- Each returned to his father to carry out his life's purpose. Isaac was to be the ancestor of many, many people, including the Savior himself. Jesus ascended into heaven to sit at God's right hand and rule over us, coming again to give life to all who believe in him after they are dead and in the grave.

In these ways Isaac is a type, a symbol, of Jesus.

We must be reminded that each step of the way the Lord assisted, nurtured, and assured Abraham that he would take care of the whole situation, even in the details, so that by the time of the sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham had been strengthened enough in relying on the LORD to be able to give up his one-and-only son, if God so requested it.

So in this test of Abraham we see Abraham's faith, and find an example to strengthen us to do everything that the Lord commands us to do. We dare not let our human reason or our own wishes, hopes and desires overtake what God wants us to do. For God has good reasons for telling us what he commands and wants from us.

May we in every matter seek and follow the will of the Lord! Amen.