

SERMON FOR FEBRUARY 21, 2021

TEXT: GENESIS 22: 1-19 (SELECTED VERSES)

THEME: WHAT IS YOUR ISAAC?

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." **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. **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

In the name of Jesus:

One day a person came to a fellow Christian to seek guidance in life. The seeker asked: ""Tell me, wise one, how did you become holy?" "Three words," the Christian advised, ""Make right choices." The seeker was fascinated. "How does one learn to choose correctly?""One word., the Christian replied, "Growth." The seeker was thrilled. "How does one grow?""Three words."

"What are they," the seeker asked." The Christian replied, "Make wrong choices. "

The times of testing and temptation provide all of us with opportunities to strengthen our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. While the Lord allows testing to come into our lives to strengthen our faith, Satan has his own purposes, to turn those being tested by God to tempt them to sin.

Every spring the baseball players prepare for the season with spring training; every spring ordinary people prepare for summer by doing "spring cleaning." So as begin this holy season of Lent, we prepare our hearts and our lives for what Jesus did for us on the cross and in the empty tomb, kind of like a Christian spring training and a spring cleaning, if you will, so that we will grow in the faith and live our lives to the glory of God.

The Old Testament is filled with examples of believers living out their faith by putting their trust in the Lord. Today's text, Genesis 22, is one such example where Abraham, placing his trust in the Lord, seeks to follow the Lord by doing what He commands.

This passage is loved by Christians and revered by Jewish people. Abraham is told to go and sacrifice his son, his only son, to the Lord. For

Abraham to do this would put the promise of God to bless Abraham as the father of many nations in great peril. The covenant God made with Abraham was that through his descendants all the world would be blessed. God promised to send the Messiah through Abraham's lineage. But to sacrifice Isaac would put that covenant in grave danger.

God was putting Abraham to the test. God abhorred child sacrifice, in fact you can see that later in the Old Testament. Yet here, God was telling Abraham to sacrifice his son as a living sacrifice. In Hebrew culture and according to God's commands, the sacrificial animal would be first killed, drained of its blood, then placed on the altar for the sacrifice. But here, Isaac would bound, placed on the wood, to be sacrificed alive. Abraham followed God's instructions to the letter, to the tee, and when he was about to do what God commanded, Jesus, the Angel of the Lord intervened.

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Isaac would have been the only living sacrifice in the Old Testament. But God provided another living sacrifice, Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Mark records in his Gospel that Jesus was tested in the wilderness. The One who knew no sin was tempted by the devil, just as all are tempted. But Jesus never gave into temptation. Jesus' whole purpose in His life was to do the will of the One who sent Him. He was tempted as we all are, yet He never sinned. And then, at the right time, Jesus was nailed to the cross, the only living Sacrifice, for the forgiveness of your sins.

Dear friend, you are a child of God, in Baptism you have put on Christ, you are a new creation, set apart by God to live for Him. Jesus says that if anyone wants to follow Him, let him deny himself, take up His cross, and follow Him. You and I are called by the Lord to present our bodies as living sacrifices holy and acceptable to God which is our spiritual worship. We are not to conform ourselves to the world, but we are called to be transformed. Changed, from a person who lives for oneself and conformed to the world, to one who lives your life to the glory of God.

That means that we will be tempted by the devil to sin, to deny our Lord, to live for ourselves and in conformity with the world. But it also means that the Lord will allow us to be tested to grow our faith so that we more firmly rely on the Lord.

Why should the Lord test our faith? Think of any engineering project. Engineers put things to the test in order to make certain that whatever is tested can stand up to the test and can withstand even greater trials.

As the Union Pacific Railroad was being constructed, an elaborate trestle bridge was built across a large canyon in the West. Wanting to test the bridge, the builder loaded a train with enough extra cars and equipment to double its normal payload. The train was then driven to the middle of the bridge, where it stayed an entire day. One worker asked, "Are you trying to break this bridge?" "No," the builder replied, "I'm trying to prove that the bridge won't break." In the same way, the temptations Jesus faced weren't designed to see if He would sin, but to prove that He couldn't. Similarly, when we are faced with trials and tests and temptations, these are opportunities for us to place our trust in Jesus. Isn't this exactly what Abraham did?

God told Abraham to go offer Isaac as a sacrifice, but God didn't tell him where to make the sacrifice. The Lord only told him to go. And so he did. He walked in faith, trusting in the Lord for He knew the Lord to be good and

gracious and faithful, always keeping His promises. When Isaac asked where the sacrifice was, Abraham replied in faith that God would provide. And when it came time to show his faith, with knife in hand ready to thrust it into his only son, the Lord intervened, and the Lord Himself provided the sacrifice. Abraham passed the test, he showed the Lord that he not only believed in Him, he trusted in Him and loved Him and was willing to do whatever the Lord commanded. Abraham was willing to surrender his most valuable possession, his only son, to the Lord, out of love for the Lord.

What are you willing to surrender to the Lord? The rich young man in the New Testament asked Jesus what he must do to have eternal life? Jesus told him to obey the commandments. I have done that, the young man replied. Jesus then told him to sell his possessions and give them to the poor. But the young man walked away from Jesus, for his possessions were more important to him than his relationship with Jesus.

There comes a time in our lives, in each of our lives, a moment where push comes to shove, where we have to put our money where our mouth is. A time when we are tested by the Lord to show our faith, or tempted by the devil to deny ourselves and follow Jesus. And when those times come, and they most certainly will, my prayer for you is that you turn to Jesus. Jesus was tempted as you are tempted but He did not sin. He offered Himself up on the

cross for your forgiveness. He is there for you in times of trial and temptation. Trust in Him.

The title of this sermon is “What is your Isaac?” What is your most valuable possession or possessions in this world? Your family? Your spouse? Your children? Your job? Your house? Your pleasures? What is your most valuable possession? What has become the center of your life so that you no longer fear love or trust in God above all things? Whatever it is, use this season of Lent for a spiritual spring cleaning. Repent of your sins, trust in Christ for forgiveness. For if we confess our sins, Christ is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

To the glory of God and in Jesus’ name

Amen