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Sermon Notes

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## **Abraham's Faith Vindicated by Works**

**Genesis 22:1-24**

One of the Greatest Chapters in the Bible

Five messages:

The Vindication of Abraham's Faith, Two Parts:

[Focusing on the testing of Abraham's mature faith, how the testing of that faith was essential to his salvation, and how God tests our faith as part of our own salvation]

The Gospel of Christ Foreshadowed, Two Parts

[Focusing on how Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac foreshadows the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and what God the Father did in not withholding His only Son from us]

The Precision of Prophecy

[Focusing on one specific part of Genesis 22 as a proof of the incredible precision of God's prophecies concerning Christ: "On the mountain of the Lord, it will be provided"]

### I. Abraham's Greatest Test

A. We Know What Abraham Was Never Told: "This is only a test"

B. God Tests His Children

1. The Hebrew word: testing to see what is in is

Illus. To assay a metal is to subject it ( such as silver or gold) to chemical analysis, to determine the amount of alloy.

2. Why God tests us?

a. for His own glory

- b. to reveal His character
- c. to reveal OUR character
- d. to increase our faith-filled dependence on Him
- e. to build our character

C. Abraham's Test: To sacrifice his own son

Seemingly designed for pain

***Genesis 22:2 Then God said, "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."***

- D. A Mature Test for a Mature Faith
- E. Tested Right to the Uttermost

II. Abraham's Faith-Filled, Total Obedience

- A. Immediate Obedience: No Hesitation
- B. Faith-filled Obedience: Based on a Lifetime of Experience in the Word
- C. Practiced Obedience: Based on Habit... Nineteen Commands
- D. Reasoned Obedience: Based on the Promises
- E. Total Obedience: Right to the Uttermost

III. God's Commendation

***vs. 11-12 But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."***

- A. Last Minute Reprieve
  - 1. At the last possible minute, the angel of the Lord stopped Abraham
  - 2. Abraham had passed the test!!!
  - 3. Now came the rewards of obedience
- B. Astonishing Mystery: "Now I Know That You Fear God"

1. Human language... but extremely significant
2. God knows ALL things, and does not need it acted out in history to know precisely what will happen

A. W. Pink: ***"Great is our Lord, and of great power. His understanding is infinite." Psalm 147:5***

“God not only knows whatsoever has happened in the past in every part of His vast domains, and He is not only thoroughly acquainted with everything that is now transpiring throughout the entire universe, but He is also perfectly cognizant of every event, from the least to the greatest, that will ever happen in the ages to come! God's knowledge of the future is as complete as is His knowledge of the past and the present; and that because the future depends entirely upon Himself. Were it in anyway possible for something to occur apart from either the direct agency or permission of God, then that something would be independent of Him and He would at once cease to be Supreme.”

3. All of history was written in God's book before one of those days came to be

***Psalm 139:16 All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.***

4. BUT YET the Angel of the Lord says “Now I know that you fear God!!”
5. In effect, God wants to see our faith vindicated by our deeds... he wants to see it acted out, lived out, written out in the pages of our personal history books

Life MATTERS, History MATTERS, God's Record Books MATTER... God wants our faith lived out in active obedience

6. Without Abraham's total obedience, this statement would never have been made

More in a moment

#### C. The Promise Restated and Intensified

***Genesis 22:15-18 The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time <sup>16</sup> and said, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup> I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, <sup>18</sup> and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."***

1. This is the same promise that God has made to Abraham all along
2. However, there are some enhancements: such as possessing the cities of the enemies

3. SO ALSO THE CLEAR STATEMENT THAT it is through Abraham's SEED that all nations on earth would be blessed
4. This is immediately Isaac, but ultimately Christ as Paul makes clear

***Galatians 3:16*** *The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his **seed**. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your **seed**," meaning one person, who is Christ.*

E. Faith's Reward #1: Praise from God

This is the finish line of the trial... the glorious victor's crown of a triumph handed down by God Himself!!

1. No higher reward can ever be given a human being than to be praised by God
2. To have God commend you, to have Him speak well of you and your actions
3. What could ever have been better than that?
4. What kind of joy filled Abraham's heart as he came down the mountain together with his son?
5. What kind of eternal praise awaited Abraham on that final day?

***Romans 2:29*** *No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.*

***1 Corinthians 4:5*** *Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his **praise from God.***

F. Faith's Reward #2: Greater Self-Revelation from God

1. Abraham's dramatic and costly obedience opened up his heart and his eyes to an incredibly great revelation of God Himself

***John 8:56*** *Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."*

2. Abraham knew far more of God's nature and of His salvation plan when he walked down that mountain than when he walked up
3. This is a basic rule of the Christian life: the more you obey God, the better you will know God
4. God withholds self-revelation from the disobedient world... He opens Himself up more fully to those who will obey Him

***Isaiah 45:15*** *Truly, you are a God who hides yourself, O God of Israel, the Savior.*

**John 14:21 "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him."**

5. Abraham knew more of God after the trial than he did before the trial

- How much more did Hudson Taylor know of God's faithfulness after twenty years of hard ministry in the inland regions of China than he did before he went?
- How much more of God's faithfulness to widows did Elizabeth Eliot know in the years that followed Jim's death at the hands of the Auca Indians than she did before he died?
- How much more of God's power did D.L. Moody know after boldly proclaiming the gospel in one village after another than he did before he obeyed God?
- How much more of God's faithfulness in meeting every need do Ernie and Gail Mills know after running the Durham Rescue Mission for thirty years than they did before they started?

In every case it was costly obedience that led to new levels of knowing God

D. God Swears by Himself for Our Benefit: Hebrews 6

**Genesis 22:15-18** *The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time <sup>16</sup> and said, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup> I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, <sup>18</sup> and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."*

**Hebrews 6:13-19** *When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, <sup>14</sup> saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants." <sup>15</sup> And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised. <sup>16</sup> Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. <sup>17</sup> Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. <sup>18</sup> God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. <sup>19</sup> We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.*

1. Abraham's faith and hope were at all-time high as he and Isaac walked down that mountain
2. We can't imagine the suffering of walking UP the mountain about to slaughter your only son
3. Nor can we imagine the amazing joy of walking DOWN the mountain with Isaac, your heart bursting with the JOY of God's commendation and promise
4. The more we obey, the stronger our faith will become

5. Hebrews 6 makes it clear that God spoke this covenant promise to Abraham for OUR BENEFIT
6. Hope as an anchor for your soul... this come only from learning to trust totally in the promises of God

#### IV. The Vindication of Abraham's Faith

What happened on Mt. Moriah was the harvest of a lifetime of work God had done in Abraham's soul

It was also the public vindication of Abraham's faith... God tested Abraham and put the fire on the crucible to see the quality of the faith in Abraham's soul

So God does to each believer in Christ... a lifetime of small tests and perhaps one great big test from God

The central lesson of all this:

##### A. Faith and Works: Inseparable in Salvation

Luther: "Faith alone saves, but saving faith is never alone"

##### B. Paul's Clear Teaching on Justification by Faith Apart from Works

***Romans 4:6 David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works***

***Galatians 2:16 yet we know that a person is not justified by **works** of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by **works** of the law, because by **works** of the law no one will be justified.***

##### C. James's Clear Teaching on the Essential Role of Works

***James 2:21-24 Was not Abraham our father **justified** by **works** when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; <sup>23</sup> and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"- and he was called a friend of God. <sup>24</sup> You see that a person is **justified** by **works** and not by faith alone.***

The most serious problem these verses pose is the question of what James 2:24 means: "You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone." Some imagine that this contradicts Paul in Romans 3:28: "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law."

This statement was so offensive to Martin Luther, who was trying to establish the doctrine of justification by faith alone apart from works of the law, that he made two errors

1) He called James an “epistle of straw”, denigrating its divine authorship

"Saint John's gospel and St. Paul's epistles, especially that to the Romans, and St. Peter's first epistle are the true pit and marrow of all the books. They should justly be the first books, and every Christian should be advised to read them first and most, and by daily reading to make them as familiar to himself as his daily bread. In them you do not find described many works and miracles of Christ; but you do find depicted in a masterly manner how faith in Christ overcomes sin, death, and hell, and gives life, righteousness, and salvation. This is the real nature of the Gospel ... These books show you Christ and teach you all that is necessary and salutary for you to know even though you were never to see or hear any other book or doctrine. Therefore St. James epistle is really an epistle of straw compared to them, for it lacks this evangelical character."

2) He inserted a word in Romans 3:28

***Romans 3:28 For we hold that one is justified ALONE by faith apart from works of the law.***

The word is not found in the Greek original, nor was it in the Latin Vulgate

If ever there seemed to be an error in the Bible, it would be in these two seemingly contradictory statements by Paul and James

***Romans 3:28: "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law."***

***James 2:24 "You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone."***

John Calvin: It appears certain that [James] is speaking of the manifestation, not of the imputation of righteousness, as if he had said, Those who are justified by faith prove their justification by obedience and good works, not by a bare and imaginary semblance of faith. In one word, he is not discussing the mode of justification, but requiring that the justification of all believers shall be operative. And as Paul contends that men are justified without the aid of works, so James will not allow any to be regarded as Justified who are destitute of good works. . . . Let them twist the words of James as they may, they will never extract out of them more than two propositions: That an empty phantom of faith does not justify, and that the believer, not contented with such an imagination, manifests his justification by good works. [Henry Beveridge, trans., John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 3:17:12 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966 reprint), 2: 115.]

James is not at odds with Paul.

Alexander Ross: "They are not antagonists facing each other with crossed swords; they stand back to back, confronting different foes of the gospel."

**What Paul was fighting:**

Paul is combating Jewish legalism which teaches that it is by the works of the law that people are made righteous in God's sight

He highlights the perfectly inward disposition of the soul called faith which humbly receives and believes the promises of God:

***Romans 4:1-3 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about-- but not before God. <sup>3</sup> What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."***

Good works religion is the most popular religion in the world:

i.e. By my good works I will stand righteous in God's sight

Abraham was made righteous in God's sight simply by hearing the promise concerning the stars and his offspring

***Genesis 15:5-6 He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars-- if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." <sup>6</sup> Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.***

**What James was fighting:**

James is combating a different evil... one that many evangelical churches face today

"Easy-believism"... that faith is TOTALLY inward and NO WORKS WHATSOEVER are involved in the life of salvation

Some call it "Lordship salvation" and teach that it destroys free grace

But James is dealing with people who CLAIM to be Christians, but whose life shows absolutely no fruit in that way

***James 2:14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?***

The issue is "What kind of faith do you have?"

Faith that merely assents to truths of the gospel but that changes NOTHING about your active life, he calls "Dead faith, demon faith, useless faith"

Churches filled today with people who walked the aisle at crusade or church service, who prayed the written prayer at the back of the book, who raised their hand at a revival meeting... but whose lives show NOTHING of the grace of God

James combats that kind of "faith"

Abraham proved the reality of his faith by what he did when he offered Isaac us

**If Abraham had not really believed the promise about the stars and his offspring, he would never have obeyed this command!!!**

**In the end, a visible lifestyle of glad obedience to the commands of God is the surest vindication of our internal and invisible faith**

Jesus says this again and again

*John 14:15 "If you love me, you will **obey** what I command.*

*John 14:23 Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will **obey** my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.*

*John 15:10 If you **obey** my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.*

It is the lesson of Abraham and Isaac on Mt. Moriah...

***Genesis 22:18 through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.***

it is what the Lord meant when He gave His testimony about Abraham

D. The Lord's Testimony

**vs. 12 Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.**

God was ASSAYING the gold to PROVE what is really there, and to put it on display for Abraham and all the world to see

God alone could see Abraham's faith under the starry night sky, and based on that faith alone apart from works, God declared Abraham righteous

But God wanted Abraham's faith out on display for all the world to see, so He gave Abraham this command to sacrifice Isaac... based on this obedience Abraham's faith was PROVED GENUINE

## V. Timeless Lessons and Applications

1. God will test your faith... be ready to respond as Abraham did

Our primary test is daily obedience... dying to self, putting sin to death

*Matthew 16:24-25 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.*

*Romans 8:12-14 Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation-- but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. <sup>13</sup> For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you*

***put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, <sup>14</sup> because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.***

If you do not walk with Christ daily and put yourself on the cross daily and put sin to death daily, you are failing His test... your faith may be a counterfeit

2. Faith apart from obedience is dead

Many in America claim to be Christians, but there is no evidence of faith alive in their lives  
God said to Abraham, "Now I know that you fear God..."

Is your faith in Christ vindicated by a lifestyle of obedience to Him??

3. The rewards of faith-filled obedience: greater knowledge of God Himself

***Psalm 25:14 The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them.***

***John 14:21 Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."***

When Abraham walked down that mountain after obeying God's astonishing and incomprehensible command, what joy must have filled his heart... GOD WAS PLEASED WITH ME!!! MY SON IS ALIVE!!! ON THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD IT WILL BE PROVIDED!!!

Do you know the joy of victory in your faith? Have you been tested and come through?

4. Test yourself to see if you are in the faith

***2 Corinthians 13:5 Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you-- unless, of course, you fail the test?***

5. Hope as an anchor for your soul

***Hebrews 6:13-19 When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, <sup>14</sup> saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants." <sup>15</sup> And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised. <sup>16</sup> Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. <sup>17</sup> Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. <sup>18</sup> God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. <sup>19</sup> We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.***

This account of Abraham and Isaac was written for OUR benefit, so that WE MAY BE GREATLY ENCOURAGED in the middle of our hard tests

Your soul needs an anchor... so that you will not drift away

Illus. U.S.S. Theodore Roosevelt, massive aircraft carrier, has two anchors to hold it securely at anchor... each anchor weighs 30 tons!!

Your soul needs an anchor... so that you will not drift away

Let hope in God's oath, His covenant promise to you in Christ be the anchor of your soul when all earthly comforts and assurances are swept away!!!