

## ***“An Anchor for the Soul: Faith That’s Tested”***

*Hebrews 11:17-22*

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

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For the last several weeks we have been studying together this famous chapter in the Bible on faith, Hebrews chapter 11 and in particular we have been interested in faith that pleases God. We have been impressed by the faith of Abel and Enoch. We were impressed with the way Noah and Abraham and Sarah put their faith into action, not just believing God but trusting Him and acting on that trust.

Today we come to more examples of God’s people in the Old Testament acting on their faith and again we’re talking about Abraham. Verse 17 says, “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac.” We just heard this story from Genesis 22. God called to Abraham and commanded him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, to kill his beloved son. Honestly, that is one of the hardest passages in the Bible to read. It goes against everything we think is right and good. It goes against God’s own command not to kill. Some people are so offended by this that they end up walking away from God. They say something like, “I can’t believe in a God who would do this.”

I think it’s important for us to admit that the story of God asking Abraham to kill his son is disturbing and hard to understand. So let’s look at it closely. This is the fifth time that Genesis records God appearing to Abraham. The first time was when He called Abraham to faith and told him to leave home and set out for a place that He would show him. Later, God comes and makes a covenant with Abraham, promising to give him descendants as numerous as the grains of sand, as countless as the stars.

Some time later God sends messengers to tell Abraham and Sarah that indeed they are going to have a son, even though they are in their nineties. The Bible tells us that when they heard this they laughed. The idea of them having a baby at their age seemed ridiculous. But they believed God’s Word, they trusted Him, and they acted accordingly.

Often God comes and whispers to us. He calls us to step out in faith and walk with Him. And it seems ridiculous. What He asks seems impossible. We laugh. We dismiss it. We walk the other way. Let me ask you – What is God asking you to do that you laugh at? What is that nagging idea that keeps popping up that you keep saying, “yeah, right! That’s just not practical or even possible.” Chances are that’s an area where God is testing your faith.

In the case of Abraham and Sarah, they laughed but they also obeyed. Genesis 17 says that Abraham laughed while he was bowed down to God in worship. But it was God who had the last laugh. He told Abraham and Sarah to name their baby Isaac, which in Hebrew means “laughter.” I am certain there was plenty of laughter to go around. Abraham and Sarah were happy. I can tell you that whenever I see God do something that I didn’t expect or didn’t think was possible, I often laugh. Not a scoffing laugh, but a joyful laugh, a laugh out of amazement. I’m sure Abraham and Sarah and their friends laughed with amazement and laughed with joy.

Then one day God called again. Genesis 22 begins, “After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’” Abraham had grown to trust God when He called. So this time when God called Abraham, his response was, “at your service.” But this time God told him what was expected. I imagine there was no laughter that night.

So why would God command such a thing? **WOULD** God command such a thing? It’s important to remember that the overwhelming testimony of Scripture is that God does not command us to do anything contrary to His revealed Word. This command was unique to Abraham at that particular time. But that still doesn’t answer the question why. It seems to me there are a couple of reasons.

First, the Bible is clear over and over again that God will test our faith. I would love to tell

you that by becoming a Christian all your troubles are over. Lots of people will pay good money to hear that kind of message. But it's simply not true. In fact, following Jesus is hard. God uses trials and disappointments to help mold and shape us to be like Christ. If you trust God then your faith *will* be tested. That's how you grow. God was testing Abraham in order to strengthen his faith.

Second, as you can imagine Abraham was crazy about Isaac. He would do *anything* for that boy. What God asked Abraham to do was to give up—to sacrifice—the *one thing* in his life that could get between him and God. Jesus talked about this a lot. One day a wealthy young man ran up to him and asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus told him basically to keep the Ten Commandments. The young man said, "I do all of that. Is there anything else?" Mark 10:21 says, "And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, 'You lack one thing: go, sell all you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.'" Jesus was not saying that everyone must live in poverty to follow him, but he recognized that this man's money was getting between him and God.

He says the same thing to you and to me. If you can't describe your relationship with Jesus as *exciting* or even *dangerous*, then you need to deal with whatever it is that keeps you from fully trusting God. For some of you it's probably money. Maybe it's a love of money or the comfort it provides, or maybe it's the fear of not

having enough. If that's what's getting in the way of an exciting relationship with Jesus then God may be calling you to give to him at a sacrificial level. For all of us, if our giving to God doesn't require a change in lifestyle then it's not really a sacrifice. The biblical tithe of 10% is a good place to start and then go up from there.

Your issue may not be money but instead it could be pride, or your reputation, or your desire for leisure that prevents you from trusting God and doing great things for Him. Your assignment this week is to spend some time really examining your life, asking the tough questions. What keeps me from serving in one of the church's ministries? Why don't I want to go on a mission trip? Why don't I give more? The truth is that, like Abraham, a faith that trusts God's promises is a faith that obeys God's commands.

The remainder of this passage looks at Isaac and Jacob and Joseph, three generations of Abraham's descendants. The point of each of these is that in faith they trusted God's promises of a future, which was fulfilled in Jesus. They hoped with certainty in the promise of salvation, which was accomplished in Christ. We can have that same hope today. We make the promises of God our own and can live every day in the firm confidence that our sins are forgiven and we will be with Him forever.

*Amen*