

Since lockdown we've been hearing a lot about testing haven't we.

So, for example you've probably seen the Health Secretary Matt Hancock promoting this test, for track and trace.

We've also seen a lot of drive through testing like this haven't we.

Well in that reading from Genesis 22 we're told that Abraham goes through a test.

Verse 1 says: "After these things... God tested Abraham."

"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 tell you."

Or to put it another way God says to Abraham I want you to kill your only son; and offer him up as a sacrifice to me.

Well that's a shocking request isn't it.

And I'm sure that as you've read that, you've struggled to understand why a loving God would test Abraham in such a way; because it seems such cruel and terrible thing to ask of anyone doesn't it.

You see it's not like he's just being asked to download a test and trace app on his iPhone is it.

Well thankfully nothing in the Bible's ever written in isolation; there's always a context.

And the context here is that after receiving some incredible promises Abraham's to trust God.

So, for example God tells Abraham that his descendants will outnumber the stars in the sky and sand on the beach, and that through them, every nation on earth will be blessed.

Then at the age of 75 Abraham's leaves home to inherit a land to live in; without knowing where it is or where he's going.

And then to cut a very long story short, God tells Abraham's wife Sarah that she's going to have a son called Isaac; and that all of God's promises will be fulfilled through him.

Unfortunately, though there's a problem; because Sarah can't have children; and besides that, she's now reached the ripe old age of 90; and Abraham's just received his letter from the queen after reaching a hundred.

But Abraham knows that God always keeps his promises.

And although he has some slip ups along the way, Abraham continues to trust God through some very trying and difficult circumstances, and Sarah eventually gives birth to a Son.

Or to put it another way through all the trials and challenges that Abraham experiences, God is building him up, piece by piece, year by year into a man of faith.

Which brings us back to our verse:
“After these things... God tested Abraham.”

And you know it's through the difficult seasons in own lives that God wants us to trust him

In fact, the Apostle Paul says in Romans 5:

We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope doesn't put us to shame.

Well that's what it was like for Abraham as God's forms his character like a master craftsman and strengthens his faith.

As a result, without any explanation; God simply tells Abraham *to kill* Isaac and then offer him up as a sacrifice.

You see obedience always follows faith, or as James says in his letter, using Abraham as an example, Faith without works is dead.

And so God puts him to the ultimate test.

Well can you imagine being Abraham and the shock you feel being asked to do such a terrible thing; the question's and doubts that would torment you; and the emotional turmoil you'd go through.

You see Isaac's the apple of his eye, the fulfilment of God's promise to him, and the son he deeply loves.

But it now seems that God's simply changed his mind; and in a cruel twist tells Abraham to do the unthinkable.

Well what kind of mean god is that.

Now I don't know about you, but faced with such an awful predicament, if I was Abraham I'd be desperately trying and convince God that he's making a mistake.

But Abraham doesn't do that does he, simply obeys.

Verse 3 says:

“So, Abraham rose early in the morning, and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.”

In other words, there’s no delay, no arguing, questioning, and no making excuses.

Abraham simply obeys God’s instruction to kill his son without any complaint.

You see after everything that’s happened in Abraham’s life up to this point, he knows that God can be trusted; even though he can’t make any sense of it.

So, for example in verse 5 he says to his servants:

“Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship; and come again to you.”

It’s almost as though he knows they’ll both return.

And then as he gets his knife, lays the wood on Isaac’s shoulders, and climbs mount Moriah to prepare the altar for sacrifice; even then he believes that God will somehow provide a way out.

So, as they trudge up the mountain together Isaac says in verse 7:

My Father! Behold, the fire and the wood but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?

Abraham said: God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering my son.

So, they went both of them together.

You see even now Abraham believes that God will provide, or somehow salvage the situation.

But you can still imagine the doubt and anguish, Abraham must be feeling, knowing what he’s been asked to do; the strain must’ve been unimaginable.

But God never breaks his promises; and if Isaac’s been chosen to carry on the family line and be blessing to all nations, God will do exactly what he says he’ll do.

And so, in spite of the emotional turmoil Abraham binds Isaac and lays him on the altar; and then in verse 10 it says:

“Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his Son.”

Well I wonder how obedient I’d would be in a situation like that; or how willing I’d be to sacrifice something that meant so much to me.

But you know that's the level of trust God wants us to have, even when things don't make sense to us.

But then in a collective sigh of relief as he's about to plunge the knife; in a voice from heaven calls and says:

Abraham! Abraham! Do not lay your hands 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.

Well then as Abraham looks around, he sees a ram, caught by its horns in a thicket and sacrifices that instead of Isaac.

Now at this point I think it'd be fair to say that Abraham has passed the test of faith with flying colours wouldn't you.

But I wonder if you're starting to see the parallel's yet, between another Father and Son, and the real point of this chapter.

You see why would God ask Abraham to offer up his innocent son as a sacrifice.

Is it simply to teach us to have more faith; and be willing to sacrifice what's most precious to us? Well No!

The whole point of this account is to lead us to Jesus; by showing us that it's actually God who will eventually sacrifice what's most precious to him.

And the parallels are amazing aren't they.

So, for example although Abraham had another son called Ishmael; Isaac's described as Abraham and Sarah's special only son who was miraculously conceived.

And all of God's promises would be fulfilled in him.

So, in verse 12 God says to Abraham: You have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.

In other words, Abraham displays his love for God by being willing to give up his only son.

Well God displays His love for us through Jesus: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son."

So, both sons are sons of promise who are miraculously conceived.

Then in Verse 6 it says as Isaac climbs mount Moriah, Abraham lays wood on his shoulders for a burnt offering; well Jesus climbed Golgotha carrying the wood of a cross.

And you know at the time Isaac would've been a healthy young man who could've easily overpowered his elderly father, but he willingly allows Abraham to bind him and lay him on the altar.

And Jesus willingly gave himself as a sacrifice for us on the cross.

Then in verse 13 it says that God provides a ram to be sacrificed in Isaac's place, who metaphorically speaking is raised from the dead.

Well in Jesus, God provides our substitute:

“The lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

Who after dying on a cross really did rise from the dead.

Well you know I said at the beginning we can often struggle to understand how a loving God could've caused Abraham so much sorrow by asking him to give up his only son; but how much more anguish, pain, and incredible sorrow did it cause God, to provide his only son; who unlike Isaac was sacrificed for us.

And so, when we see this passage the way God intends us to see it, our horror and outrage should give way to adoration, worship, and praise, towards our loving heavenly father who paid the ultimate price for us; by sending his own Son into the world to be both saviour and sacrifice. Amen