



Sermon Transcription • Abbotsford

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The Test - (Genesis 22:1-14)

[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]

So, I don't know if you have ever watched, kind of, the "hidden camera," "gotcha" genre of T.V. but I have and love it. If you know what I mean by that, you know that they set up a trap for somebody and they punk them. I really have always enjoyed that sort of thing. A number of years ago I watched on ABC news in the U.S., they had this...it was interesting because they, it must have been a slow news day, because they decided they were going to do this particular "punked" approach to catching people who they said lack integrity, or who who say one thing and do another. So, they interviewed these people early in a week, and asked them questions about what they would do if they were given the wrong amount of change at a restaurant or a grocery store or convenience store. And all of them said, "Well, I have integrity and therefore I would give money back." So in other words, if you were given you know, if you paid with a 10 dollar bill and they gave you a 50 back, you would alert the cashier and let them know that they made an error so that they could clarify it, because, I'm not a liar, kind of thing that they said. I don't know how they did it, but as the time went on, they were able to follow a few, not all of them, but a few of the people, and set up these staged opportunities to see if they actually did the thing that they said. And so, they had, you know, the hidden camera on the security footage, and this person who had earlier in the week said, "Oh, I would give the money back," walks in, gives, you know, 10 dollars to pay for the gum that they're paying for, and the cashier inadvertently gives them a 100 dollar bill back. And the person is in the video, and you can see them look at the bill, and then look at the cashier, and then look at the bill, and be like, okay. You know? What they didn't know is that the guy who had interviewed them earlier in the week, you know, with his ABC news microphone, was behind the scenes, and would break out in this moment, when the person was walking out. "Hello, remember me? So and so from ABC news earlier this week, we talked about you having integrity and giving money back when you were given a certain amount more. Did you realize what you were given in your hand?" And some people, caught completely red-handed, would take this bill, and they'd look at it, this 100 dollar bill, look at it, "Oh! It's a 100 dollar! I didn't see the zeros on this bill. You're right." You know, pass it back. Other people, though, would respond by saying, "Oh! You got me! Oh."

"So you knew you did it."

"Yes, I know, I did it."

"You know what you said before?"

"Yes, I know what I said before."

"So what do you call that?"



“I’m a hypocrite!” They’d say. “Yes, you are a hypocrite!” I’d scream at the T.V. “Hypocrite!” That’s what you call someone whose profession doesn’t meet their practice, right? We’d call them hypocrites. That’s a mean word. It’s especially mean because at some point or another, almost all of us are that way. You might be the kind of person who would give money back to a cashier, but in other places you make great professions about things, but you don’t actually follow them through. And if we were to set up a test with hidden cameras and all, most of us would be exposed as counterfeit, in terms of our professions. They’re not quite as strong as we would like them to be. If you note our practice.

You might be surprised that God sets these tests up for his people. I mean, I’ve met people before like, “Oh God would never test his people.” No, God never tempts his people, but he certainly tests them. Just read the Old Testament, there’s lots of examples of God testing his people. That very word is used. There’s actually one occasion in the book of Deuteronomy. Just listen to the way this is set up. Deuteronomy 13:1-4,

“If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a sign or wonder, [the prophet says this one thing’s going to happen] and if the sign or wonder spoken of takes place, [and it happens] and the prophet says, [then you know it’s a real prophet because they were able to foretell the future and it came to fruition, and the the prophet says] ‘Let us follow other gods’ (gods you have not known) ‘and let us worship them,’ you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. [So even though they proved themselves to be true in the fulfillment of the vision that they had, they’re leading you astray doctrinally] The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul.”

The people of Israel claimed that all the time: “Oh yes Lord, the Lord our God, the Lord is one, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. That’s what we believe, we’re Jewish! Yes! Sign the doctrinal statement.” And God’s like, “Okay, well here’s an opportunity. I’m going to put you in the store with the cameras on, and let’s have a look. I’m going to set it up. So I allow false prophets among you,” he says. If you know the history of Israel, you know that they failed over and over again in this one, right? They were hypocrites, the highest degree. They would say one thing and do another completely. Say, “Oh, we love you Lord, yes God, we love you,” and then behind his back go running off to other gods like the Baals, or the Ashteroths, or whatever was going to work in the moment, they ran off to. Hypocrites.

Though Israel failed the test most of the time, Abraham, the father of Israel, the father of faith, did not. This is actually one of Abraham’s greatest moments, if not his greatest moment. And this story is the reason, Genesis 22 is the reason why we call him the father of faith. It’s the reason why it is in the New Testament he’s highlighted as a faithful man. You can look at this passage of Scripture, and you can learn a lot about the faith of Abraham. That’s supposed to be the model for genuine faith throughout the Bible. You want to know if your faith is real, you want to know whether or not you really believe in God, then you should take Abraham’s faith that’s described here, hold it up to one side, then put yours on the other side and say, “Does it match?” It’s a really helpful passage for determining what genuine



faith looks like. And so in it, we're going to learn four things about genuine faith. One, that genuine faith is active, two, that genuine faith is motivated by God's character, third, that genuine faith is persevering, and fourth, that genuine faith is impossible. So active, motivated by God's character, persevering and impossible.

[Genuine Faith is Active]

Here's the first, it's active. Look at Genesis 22:1-2 with me:

“Some time later God [and there's your word] tested Abraham. [Hidden cameras and all.] He said to him, 'Abraham!' 'Here I am,' he replied. Then God said, 'Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.’”

Now look, before we get into that crazy command, let's just get ourselves a run up here. I want you to put your feet in the shoes of Abraham and his wife Sarah, and the emotional challenges that they've had. So God came to them out of nowhere, said to them, “Listen, we're going to make you a great nation, lift you out of your land, Ur, if you follow me then what's going to happen is I'm going to give you descendents, in fact so many descendents,” this old couple who's been unable to have children, “so many descendents that the stars of the sky are equal to their number. Or the sand on the seashore. That's how many descendents you're going to have, you guys.” Well, no other god in those days was coming to them and saying to them, “Oh, I promise you all of these sorts of things.” And so Abraham understandably says, “Okay, we'll move and we'll follow you.” And they do, they go off and they expect, of course, initially, that God will provide that child, *tuite de suite*. But month after month after month goes by, and no child. In fact, 10 years goes by. No child. Finally, Sarah comes to Abraham and says, “Listen, maybe we're doing something wrong. Maybe it's not through the two of us that the child's going to come. Maybe we need to take you, Abraham, and I'm going to give you to my maidservant Hagar, and you guys can have a baby, but because she belongs to me, that child will belong to me, and thereby we can fulfill God's promises our way. Cool? Cool.” Well they do this, and this is a horrible mess, it ruins everything. God comes to them in the end and says, “Listen, that's not the plan, I'm going to give you a child.” Okay. <Claps> Let's get to it then, okay God?

15 years later, so 25 years from the first promise. 15 years later, God comes to Sarah and says, “All right, you ready?” And she laughed at him. <Laughing> “No! Am I ready? I was ready, but have a look, God. And look over at him! There's no way the two of us can have a baby.” And she laughs at God. And God says, “No no no no, within the year, within the year, I'm going to give you a child.” And he does. She laughs at God, and God returns the laughter to her by giving her a son named Isaac, who's name means laughter. And now she's like, <laughing> just thrilled, “Oh my goodness, I have a baby and his name's Isaac.” You ever seen new parents? Right, especially if they've had difficulty having children, the first child comes along, every morning, “Oh, little Isaac,” you can just imagine this thrill. By the way, when the third one comes along, you're like, “Get up.” [Laughter] But this is their first, and so they're thrilled with him, and the promises, and emotional toil that's gone into waiting for God to



come through, and he's come through in spades. And then one morning God comes to Abraham and says, "You know that child that you have? The one you love? And I don't mean Ishmael, I mean Isaac. The child of promise. I want you to go to a mountain that I'm going to show you, and I want you to take that child and sacrifice him as a burnt offering to me there." So that's crazy.

Sometimes when you read the Bible, there are historical background pieces that make sense of crazy things. And you're like, "Oh, actually, in our culture it's different, but in their culture this made sense," and stuff, and so you kind of expect to come to this and say, "Surely there's a reason that God does this and makes sense in the culture there." And the answer to that is, no, there's not. This is an outrageous command. Look, child sacrifice was done in the ancient world, but really it wasn't common. Most cultures, Israel, others, they just thought that was barbaric, terrible. The nations that did practice child sacrifice, even they were like, look, the only time that you would ever do anything like this is if there was a moment of either familial crisis or national crisis. By national crisis I mean, look, the enemy is at the gate of the city. And they're about to kill all of us. So the ruler of our city has to make some big plea to our god to save us. And so, what can you give to that god that really shows that you love him and want him to come through for you? Well, you give your noblest son. You offer this child to the gods so that he will save your city from the hoards about to invade. And sometimes in personal circumstances, so if you have 10 children and your family is in dire straits because there's a famine in the land and you need rain, you go to the god of the rain and you say, "Bring the rain, bring the rain, bring..." You do everything, you slice yourself up, you chant everyday, you do everything. But if there's no rain coming, you make a deal with that god, and you say, "Listen, I got 10 children, I will take one of them and I will offer that child to you, so that the rest of us can live." So only in the moment of great crisis can you do this.

In fact, we have a story in ancient texts of a family that was in just that situation, right? They were having a famine and their god Kronos wasn't answering. Kronos means "time." Their god Kronos wasn't answering and so they decide that they're going to offer their child to Kronos, but they dupe him, because Kronos is, apparently, not that smart. They go, instead of them, they're a wealthy family, instead of them offering one of their children, they go and secretly buy a poor family's child and they take that child and play it off as if it's theirs. They kill the child, and what they do is they lay this dead child into the hands of the statue of Kronos, whose hands are turned kind of upwards like this, <lifts hands upwards> and they lay the child's body into his hands, and it slips. The idea is it touches his hands and it slips through and falls into a fiery pit. Archaeologists have actually found evidence of these fiery pits filled with babies' bones. Uncommon, though, and only for big moments, but hated by most people and especially by Israel's God. Now I use the word "hated" there because God himself, in the Scriptures, uses the word "hated" for it. Deuteronomy 12:31, the Lord speaking to his people:

"You must not worship the LORD your God in their way, because in worshiping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the LORD hates. [He hates them] They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods."

"So I despise it," says the Lord, "you should not be like that." And then he comes along and says to Isaac, "By the way, I just need you to take that child of yours and sacrifice him." Now we're given a



hint here that there's going to be a good outcome here because we have that little word "test," right? We are in the position where we get to see through the camera, this is a test. But Abraham's not, he doesn't know that. And what you expect from Abraham here is the same thing that I would do. You know, "God you can get lost! There's not way I'm doing this. There's no way I'm doing this." But that's not what Abraham does. In fact, one of the most surprising phrases in the entire passage is probably the beginning of verse three. Look at it, Genesis 22:3,

"Early the next morning [Huh? Early the next morning] Abraham got up and loaded 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."

I struggle to sleep, okay, so if something big's going on the next day, I'm up in the middle of the night thinking about it, something big happened the day before. My mom had that trouble, I have that trouble. Some people look at this passage and they say, "Look, Abraham is really committed to the Lord." That might be the case. It also might be the case that he just didn't sleep, yeah? So he's up early in the morning because you might as well be, because I'm...the Lord's called me to do this particular task. What's surprising about this though, in the wider context of Abraham's life, is how silent Abraham is in response to the command of God here. Now I'm saying that because all the other times that God has given him a command, he always wants to add his own wisdom to it, you know? "Oh, okay, you're going to give us this child, okay, well, let's work that out with Hagar. You're going to keep me safe so that I can actually be the father of that child, so when I'm in a country and there's a king there who has a good look at my wife and wants to have her as part of his harem, I'm just going to say she's my sister. Yeah? Because that'll work. It makes sense. I'll add my wisdom to your wisdom, and together we'll get this awesome plan." Every time Abraham's got something to say to God in response to God's commands, but here, what does he do? Nothing. Silence. He just goes forward trusting the word of the Lord.

Now here's my question for you. Is Abraham's faith real? By that I mean, if you went and interviewed Abraham: "Abraham, do you fear God?" He would say, "Yes!" And you would have in your mind a question about, okay, do you really fear God? And then when this starts happening, what's your conclusion now? Is his faith real? And the answer's yeah, of course it is, because what's happened is, your profession now has been shown by your actions, by your practice. That's what genuine faith is, it's an active sort of faith.

My boys have been playing Fortnite recently, some of you will not know what Fortnite is, because you're hiding under a rock somewhere. [Laughter] Fortnite is a video game that is like digital laser tag. Or digital hunger games. Here's how it works: you parachute with 100 other players onto this island. You know, online you've got your little guy, or your little girl, whatever, and you parachute onto this island, and you get to harvest all sorts of things like wood so you can build stuff, and weapons and things, and yes, weapons, Mennonite church, get it. It's actually cartoon-y, so it honestly looks like Wile E. Coyote in the Road Runner, so it's, I don't know. It doesn't really bother you that much. So you're sitting there, and you try to off everybody else on the island, and you can play in teams and all sorts of things, and if you win in the end, you stand up and act like you've won the Olympic gold,



“Look what I did!” You know? You dance around the house, at least my boys do. “Hey, look, I’m amazing.” But sometimes, and they win a bit, but I love watching this game, it’s obviously like watching a sporting event. And sometimes, though, I sit behind them, frequently actually, I sit behind them, because they don’t win as much as they lose. And so when they lose, I lean forward and I whisper, sometimes not so quietly in their ear, “What happened there? [Laughter] “You know, I don’t know man, isn’t the point of the game to win? Aren’t you supposed to get that other guy, and he just got you. Look at him, he’s collecting all your stuff now, he’s running around. He’s like, standing there clapping at you. Like, look at him. <Laughs> You’re a loser.” [Laughter] And my boys are like, “Stop it, why are you doing that? Stop it, I tried.”

“Well, had you gone up here, you would have actually made it. So, what you should have done is this thing and that thing.” And I’ve got all sorts of tactics for them. “What, stop it! Why don’t you do it? I bet you couldn’t do it.”

“Listen, the reason I don’t do it is because I don’t want to embarrass all of you guys. Because the first time I get into this, I’m going to win the game, and then you’re going to cry, and you’re going to a psychiatrist later in life, you know, ‘My dad was better than me,’ and it’s going to be horrible.” They get all riled up, it’s... “Prove it Dad! Prove it, here! Here! Prove it!” It’s the only time he even ever lets go of the controller. “Prove it Dad! Here, prove it!”

“Nah, I’m busy, I’ve got something else to do.” But that’s right though, isn’t it? That the way that you test the truthfulness of a profession is you prove it. I can’t prove...I’ve tried it. I’m such a hypocrite. How you test the truthfulness of a profession is, you prove it. Genuine faith is not something you just talk about. “Oh, I believe in God. I love God.” It’s something you show. “If you love me,” Jesus said, “you will obey my commands.” James, a writer in the New Testament, in the epistle from James, he wrote about this in very stark terms. Listen to what he says in James 2:18–22,

“But someone will say, ‘You have faith; I have deeds.’ Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. [It’s an orthodox statement in the Old Testament. “We believe the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.” You believe the Lord is one, you agree with an orthodox understanding of who God is?] Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

So Look, what you could do is, you could go and interview a demon and ask them, “What is your viewpoint on who God is?” And they would give you a good doctrinal understanding of who God is and what he’s like, and he would actually sign that statement, that demon. Just like you would. So if that’s where your faith stops, just in profession, congratulations, you’ve reached the level of demon faith. But, James presses it even further. And he uses this story as an illustration:

“You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.”



It was shown to be true, his professions were shown to be true by working themselves out into his life. So in other words, if I deny my profession by my practice, then my profession is, in James' words, useless. It doesn't count. So look, I'm saying that as soberly as I can, because it occurs to me that I'm speaking to a room full of people who make great professions. And we're good at that. We love to talk about how we love God, our experiences with God, what we want to do for God. But the question is, when you walk into that store and no one else is supposedly watching, when the video camera is showing what you actually do, what then? Genuine faith is active. It's the first thing we learn from Abraham.

[Genuine Faith is Motivated by God's Character]

Here's the second: genuine faith is motivated by God's character. Look at Genesis 22:4,

“On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. [Travelling to this mountain, Moriah] He said to his servants, ‘Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.’”

So it's almost spring break, or it's the beginning of spring break for the schools around here. I have taken three day journeys with my children down to California in the past, in a car. First I was thinking to myself, this is going to be horrible. Hear a voice, you have to have all sorts of movies to watch, so you don't drive me nuts. And you do, you download the stuff, but after about somewhere in the middle of Oregon, they actually get tired of the screens. I know, I didn't think it was possible either. But they get sick of it. And one or both of them come up front and they sit next down next to you, and they're like, “Dad, let's talk.”

“What?”

“Let's talk.”

“Okay! Let's talk.” Right? And you find out things about their lives and things that they think and things that you think. I mean, when you're doing this as a father, you're thinking, I am going to drive everywhere from now on, just to have this experience of talking to my kids in a place where they cannot get away. [Laughter] Three day journey, lots of time for conversation, right? If you're Isaac and Abraham and there's no Netflix anywhere, no WiFi, what do you talk about? And if Isaac sidles up next to you and says, “Dad, let's talk. Let's talk about my dreams, and the future and all these things,” what do you do if you're Abraham here? I mean, he's got lots of opportunity here to disobey the call of God, doesn't he? I mean he's got lots of chances to prolong the trip. “Isaac, let's go see the largest ball of string. It's over here in Syria.” You know? Jonah, when he got a command from God, he got in a boat and went the other way. I mean, wouldn't you be tempted, at least, to do that? Just take a little detour? But you don't have any of that here. What you have is Abraham just going directly, laser focused, to where it is that God has called him. They arrive, then, at the mountain, and they can see it in the distance, and he says to his two servants, “Okay, you guys stay here. Isaac and I are going to go forward. We're going to go up the mountain, we're going to worship God, and then we, Isaac and me, we are coming back.” What? Do you not know the command here Abraham? Are you just hopeful or what? “No, we are coming back.” He's sure of it. You wonder what in the world does that mean, Genesis 22:6-8 kind of explains it:



“Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, ‘Father?’ ‘Yes, my son?’ Abraham replied. ‘The fire and wood are here,’ Isaac said, ‘but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?’ Abraham answered, ‘God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.’ [Hebrew there, God will see to it. He’ll take care of it.] And the two of them went on together.”

Phew, crazy scene, right? I mean, first of all, Isaac has to carry the wood. Now Jewish scholars have tried to say that Isaac, they’ve come up with a numbering system here, that he’s about 37 years old. Well, that’s a little bit much. But most people recognize, most scholars say that, no, he’s probably an early teenager. Okay, like 14 years old. His dad’s really old. So if someone’s going to carry the wood, it’s going to be the 14-year-old son, he’s got the wood on his back, Dad gets to carry the flint knife and the fire. So they’re ready to go. And they start walking away, and Isaac, who’s no stranger to this sort of act of worship, he’s looking around. “Hey Dad, I’ve got a question. Um, you’ve got a knife, you’ve got the fire, I’ve got the wood, where’s the animal?” And Abraham’s response is cryptic. It’s not, “Um, you’re it.” Abraham’s response is, “Well, the Lord’s going to sort that out.” But whatever he does, in the back of Abraham’s mind, he’s already told these guys, “We’re coming back. So I don’t know what’s going to happen up here in the future, but I do know that God’s going to deliver us somehow from this.” The writer of Hebrews actually gives you an indication as to what he thinks was going on in the mind of Abraham. Hebrews 11:17-19,

“By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced 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 even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.”

Well Abraham’s thinking, look, we’re going to go up there and somehow God is going to come through. My experience with God is so different than all of this. The command...I don’t know how this is going to play out, I’m following the word of the Lord as closely as I can, not knowing where it leads, but I do know the one who’s called me. And he’s not the kind of one who’s going to let this happen. Listen very closely, the person of faith commits to following the word of the Lord, not because all the details about where it will lead are known, but because the one who gave the word is known. I’ll say that again, it’s really key: the person of faith commits to following the word of the Lord, not because all the details about where it will lead are known, but because the one who gave the word is known. Most Christians, when they come to faith in Jesus, they expect the deal between Jesus and them to be worked out, in the same way we work out other deals. When I go buy a house, they’re going to have me sign papers at the bottom that are pages long, that have little, tiny, print on it. Buy a car, you’re responsible to pay this amount at this time and here’s your mortgage, like you have to read through these things. Usually employ a lawyer to do it. Some people read through every single page, I want to know exactly what I’m getting into here before I get into it. See, that’s just wise. So we think that when we come to faith in Christ, okay so here’s the way it’s going to be, God, I want you to fill out the forms here, and show me how my life’s going to go, and then when I see your plans for it ultimately, in detail,



you know with little footprints on the bottom that are tiny, small print, I will sign it. But what happens instead, is that the Lord comes to us and says, “Alright, so I’ve got these blank pieces of paper here and a line at the bottom, I just want you to sign, right here.”

“Well, what’s on the papers?”

“Whatever I’m going to fill it in with.”

“Well, what are you going to fill it in with?”

“All good stuff.”

“All good?”

“Well, [laughter] it’s going to lead to good. I’m committed to you, covenanted to you, I’m going to lead to your good and your flourishing, and ultimately it’s just if I showed you right now you probably wouldn’t like it very much. But, just sign.” Who would sign? If that’s the way it works, who in the world, who in their right mind would sign? The answer to that is, the one who knows that his plans are better for them than their plans are for themselves. See, you’ll sign that paper if you know that the one who’s going to fill in the blanks has plans for you that are better than you have for you. So the knowledge of his character will make you sign.

This is basically the story of Abraham up to this point, isn’t it? I mean, Abraham’s always adding his extra bit. “Oh God, I’m going to mix my wisdom with your wisdom and it’s all going to turn out awesome!” Does it? No, I mean, if Abraham were left up to this thing, the whole world is a massive mess because of Abraham’s sin, over and over again. And finally he comes to the point here where he’s like, “I give up! I don’t want to go my own way anymore, I’ll let you have your way, and I’ll just, okay. So even though you’re calling me to do something and I’m freaked out by it and I don’t know the future about it, I’m going to trust because I know you, I’ve come to know you. The more you know the character of God, the more you will trust him. You know that to be true, those of you who have been Christians for a lot of years, yeah?

Sometimes my daughter will go swimming, always wants to jump into the pool with me, I’m always late getting to the pool, right, because it’s cold. But she’s not late, she’s on the edge, “Come on Dad, I’m ready. I’m ready Dad. I’m ready. Dad?” I finally ease myself into the water, “Okay, I’m ready.” And before the words are out of my mouth, she’s in, right? Right on top of me. Just excited to jump into the pool into the arms of her father. And sometimes she’s brought her friends with her, and they’ll stand behind her, she’ll be dancing and she’ll jump when I’m not ready. “Okay,” catch her, and then I put her down, “Alright, you ready?” I say to her friends. And her friends go, “No.” They kind of are like, “No, I’m not going to jump, I’ve heard the story about how you dropped your oldest son and broke his arm, right? And so, I’m not going to do this.” Now what’s the difference between my daughter and her friends? Well my daughter’s had a good history with me, in terms of learning about my character and my desire for her good, right? Even in places when she was little or I would say no to her in places and she’d be really frustrated in the minute, but as she’s grown and she’s realized, “Oh Dad, thank you for saying no to that, because now I know that that was really horrible.” Right. Because I’m seeking your good. And so she jumps into the arms of one who’s character she knows. Even though she doesn’t know where the jumping’s going to lead. She’s just willing to jump.



My mother-in-law, she's been a pastor's wife for 40 years, something like that, maybe 50 now. When I first met her, she used to say this phrase over and over again, I didn't know her very well. Didn't know her story very well. But she used to say this phrase, whenever there would be talk in the house about all the difficulties my father-in-law was having with his pastoral ministry, she would in the middle of the conversation, she'd say, "Oh well, the Lord is good." Her sweet little voice, "Oh well, the Lord is good." What are you saying, the Lord is good? This is crazy! What do you mean, the Lord is good? And she knows the Lord is good, because the Lord took her out of a home that was dysfunctional and abusive, and he led her on a straight path that has winded and winded in the woods at points, she's a missionary not seeing the right amount of money come in the door, but every point that they needed it, God provided it over and over again. So now, what, she's close to 80 years old, the way she says the Lord is good, she knows what she's talking about. A person of faith commits to following the word of the Lord, not because all the details about where it will lead are known, but because the one who gave the word is known. So a genuine faith is motivated by God's character.

[Genuine Faith is Persevering]

Alright, here's the third one. Genuine faith is persevering, look at Genesis 22:9-10,

"When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son."

You ever watched a movie and they reached the slow-mo part of the movie, which is at the great climax, right? *Chariots of Fire*, the race is on! <Clicking> The bad guy's going to shoot the good guy! And then out of nowhere comes the hero...ssshhhh. Why do the filmmakers slow it down? Well they're slowing it down to show the tension that's in the moment. And you do realize that in this portion of this passage, the writer slows it right down <speaking slowly> and starts explaining every movement of Abraham. Notice he builds the altar, and he arranges the wood, and he binds Isaac, his teenager. <Speaking at normal speed> So Isaac's got a little faith here too, right? <Speaking slowly> He binds his teenager Isaac and he lays his son on the altar, and then he reaches out his hand and he grasps the knife, and he lifts it slowly above his head and he's ready to plunge it into the heart of his son and then...<Speaking at normal speed> Genesis 22:11-12,

"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.'"

So what's crazy about this story is that God only speaks to Abraham at the beginning and at the end. In the middle there's no talking. "I want you to go do this thing," and then he doesn't hear from God in the middle, and then at the end he hears from him. Now I make that point because in my life, I have found that hard things are made easier if you have a cheerleader with you. Right? So I used to lift weights, yeah, "used to" is the operative phrase here, okay? So I *used to* lift weights, and when you get down on the bench press, you always get a spotter. And the spotter's job is not just to make sure



you don't choke yourself with the bar. The spotter's job is to scream at you while you're lifting the weights. "You can do this, come on man!" They turn all beet red and you're looking up at their face, "Come on, come on, you can do this! Don't be a weeny! Lift! Lift! Lift!" And you're like, <groans> you lift it up, bungee jumping, they don't just attach the stuff to you and stand there, they're like, "Okay, you can do this, you can do this, yeah, you're going to plunge to your death, but I know this little elastic band is going to help you. Just, ready, one, two, three!" [Silence, laughter] "Okay, one, two, three! Okay on two, one, two...one." And they just push you. Right? Easy. Out you go. And we need help along the way. Cheerleaders, encouragers to do this stuff. It would be great if God showed up in the middle and said, "Come on! You can do this!" Nothing. He's none of that. Instead he's left on his own to persevere, to continue and continue and continue, no matter what. He's going to just keep going, this is the kind of faith that's real, is the kind that isn't just faithful in the moment, it keeps going.

It's Rudy-like. Have you seen that movie *Rudy*? The story about this kid who wants to play football for Notre Dame, he never gets there on his own, he's too small, everybody says, "You can't make it," at the end of the movie, he finally, his walk on after all of this difficulty, he gets on the edge of the defensive line, and on this meaningless play in a game at the end of their season, but it's the climax. And in slow motion, he rises from the end of his stance and he runs, you know, around the outside of the offensive player, and he dives at the quarterback, and he tackles him. And you're watching him going, "Rudy!" And, I can play for the Seahawks, you think in that moment, right? The whole movie is just screaming perseverance, just keep going! Keep going. This is a mark of true faith, you know that, right?

Jesus tells a story about how people receive the word of God. Some people receive it and it just goes away immediately, it's like the seed fell on a path, and it's just taken up and taken away. And some people receive the word of God and the commands of Jesus, they receive it and they start on it and say, "Yes, I agree with that. Oh God, okay. I believe." But you know, they're like rocky ground, and shallow where the seed falls and the root's not able to go deep enough. And so when difficulty comes, they just wither away in the hot sun. And they don't mature. And then some of the seed falls upon thorns where the thistles and thorns grow up at the same time as the wheat grows up and it just chokes it out. It doesn't mature. No harvest. Luke 8:15,

"But the seed on good soil [Jesus says] stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop."

By persevering they produce...genuine faith is a persevering faith, it's the kind of faith that's not just lasting in this moment, it's something that you just keep holding and keep holding and keep holding, Rudy-like. Abe-like, until the very end.



[Genuine Faith is Impossible]

Right. Genuine faith is impossible, the last one. Look at Genesis 22:13-14:

“Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, ‘On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.’”

Do you know where that mountain is? This is actually on the outskirts of Jerusalem. It’s where the temple was built later, you can go there today. It’s where the dome of the rock sits. So in other words, God provides a sacrifice on the outskirts of Jerusalem. The sacrifice that he provides is crowned with thorns. It’s caught in the thistles, the thicket. Isaac carries the wood on his back up the hill, who does this sound like to you? Like, this whole passage is just screaming, <whispering> “Jesus.” <In normal voice> And when you read the stories about Jesus, you realize, oh my goodness, he’s the fulfillment of all of these characters. Which is such good news. Here’s why. Because the faith of Abraham is commanded of you and me, but you and I fall short. Don’t we? I mean, any hypocrites in the room? Hmm? When the camera’s on you and you don’t know about it, would your professions and practice be the same? I mean, anyone here doing great with that? The faith of Abraham is commanded of us, but we fall short. If that’s genuine faith, then we’re all counterfeits.

But listen, Jesus didn’t fall short. Like Abraham, he silently followed God’s command. He carried the wood on his back up the mountain, but instead of God providing a sacrifice caught in a thornbush to save his life, he was the thorn-crowned sacrifice. An angel didn’t stop the knife from piercing his side. So the faithful one is sacrificed for the faithless. This is such good news, my hypocritical friends. Because I’m a hypocrite. And it is such good news to know that Jesus comes along and he says, “Listen, you know what? Here’s the thing, if you read this and you get really down and ‘that’s not my faith,’ great. Then you fail, you qualify. I was good enough. I was that sacrifice. So here’s what I want you to do,” Jesus says, “I want you to come, I want you to follow me, and I’m going to show you how to do this. I’m going to lead you, by the power of the Spirit, I’m going to make this a reality in your life. That this faith actually comes to fruition in you. You just watch. All I want from you is your willingness to follow. So are you willing?” Let me pray for us,

Lord, I’m thankful for your grace, and I pray Lord, that you would help us to love you more, serve you more. We pray, Father, that our faith would rise, through the power of the Spirit, to what’s been described here. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen