

Sermon Notes:

The Faith Honours List

Hebrews 11v17-22

We are going to focus on the verses about Abraham's faith when he was tested (so it would be good to read Genesis 22:1-19 as well).

- Hebrews has already said that all Christians should expect to be tested (see Hebrews 3:15 – 'tempted' is the same word translated in Heb 11 as 'tested') so we need to learn from Abraham how to face tests with faith.
- We will ask 4 questions:

1. Why does God test us?

- There are different kinds of tests. Covid tests just tell you whether you have Covid or not.
 - A test like 'Total Wipeout', an almost impossible obstacle course, throw horrible challenges at you to see if you have what it takes.
- What about God's tests, are they like either of those?
 - Have a look at Psalm 66:10 – the second half of the verse explains the first half.
 - How is silver refined? It goes through heat, which gets rid of the rubbish and so purifies the silver.
 - This is how God tests – he is not meanly throwing impossible obstacles in our way, but purifying faith through the heat.

2. What makes a test?

- See Abraham's test in Heb 11:17-18
- Abraham was told by God to sacrifice his son – but the verses emphasise the promise that God had made before that command.
- God had promised that Abraham would have many children and in Genesis 21 (the chapter just before this test) God says specifically it will be Isaac through whom the promise will be fulfilled.
- So the test comes when God's commands seem to be going in the opposite direction to His promise.

This is true for our tests as well.

- We are promised that those who come to Jesus will have life to the full (John 10:10).
- But sometimes God's commands feel like they go in the opposite direction, it feels as if obedience will bring a reduced life.
 - For example God's commands about sex
 - The command to speak the truth
 - The command not to be greedy
- The test comes when God's commands don't seem to go with God's promise
- Will we obey anyway?

3. How do we pass the test?

How did Abraham pass?

- Heb 11:19 he **reasoned** that God could raise the dead.
- How does the writer know this is what Abraham was thinking? Notice in Genesis 22:5 Abraham says '**we** will come back'.
- He doesn't know exactly how God will keep his promise but he reasons that God could raise the dead so he obeys.

This obedience had to be learnt.

- There are several times before Genesis 22 when Abraham doesn't trust God's promises
- See, for example Gen 12:10-20 – Abraham doesn't trust God's promise about protection (see Gen 12:1-3) so tells Sarah to say she is his sister.

- Or Gen 16:1-16 – Abraham and Sarah don't trust God will keep his promise about them having a son.
- Abraham had many tests and God was helping him learn to trust.

So for us, we need to learn to trust God to keep promises and so obey God's commands.

- It is the reasonable thing to do given who God is and what God can do.
- We should also be aware that we often go through tests to prepare us for future tests. We too need to learn to trust God.

4. Which test will we never have to take?

There are many ways that the testing of Abraham should remind us of Jesus' sacrifice

- The mountain on which Abraham was to sacrifice Isaac was where the temple was built – close to where Jesus was crucified.
- Isaac is called Abraham's 'only son whom he loved' – how Jesus is described in the gospels.
- Isaac carries the wood up the hill, Jesus too carried the wood up to where he was crucified.

But there is a big difference – when Abraham was about to kill his son a voice came from heaven to stop him and a ram was provided to take Isaac's place.

- But when the soldiers were nailing Jesus to the cross, no voice from heaven came.
- And no ram was provided. Why not? Because Jesus is the ram! He is the 'lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.' (John 1:29)
- Jesus was the substitute for us, taking what we deserve and dying in our place.

Jesus' sacrifice is the great test which determines whether we are children of God or not.

- Jesus passed the test we could not.
- Through faith in him we can have what he won.

Which, importantly, means that the tests we face are not that test!

- We have a danger of thinking that our past failures must mean the doors of heaven are closed and bolted to us.
- But Jesus passed the test for us – and so we go into the tests in this life, if we trust in Christ, already knowing we are children of God.
- The tests don't get us into God's family, they refine our faith in Him.
- So we are to bring our failures to the cross for forgiveness and ask our Father to strengthen us, by His Spirit, to face future tests with faith.