

The Test and the Type

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Preacher: Cory Brock

[0 : 0 0] So we continue our series on the great stories of the Bible this morning and really the idea for the series comes from the logic of Deuteronomy chapter 6 where God tells the Israelites to teach your kids the commandments and tell your kids the great stories of the mighty works of God. And so we do that we have storybook Bibles that we used to do that. The Israelites did that at nighttime around the campfires. We do that in the modern world at bedtime. And this series is really an adults look at the stories that have made it into the storybook Bibles. But Genesis 22 it's not actually one of them because few have been so bold as to translate this story to a children's storybook Bible. Sally Lloyd Jones did do it in Jesus storybook Bible so that's commendable. Because it's difficult for kids to come to terms with what's happening in this passage and it's even harder for adults. Because what looks like is on the line here is that

God seems to be commanding something that is contrary to his law. The death of a child, a child's sacrifice, something that only is done in pagan worship in the ancient Near East. But this is truly a great story. And some Old Testament scholars say it's the greatest story of the Old Testament. Gordon Winnum one commentator he says this, no other story in the Old Testament can match the sacrifice of Isaac for its haunting beauty and its theological depth. And so that means that it's hard in 30 minutes for me to unpack the importance of this text really and how important it's been for the church throughout history, for theologians throughout history, and even for philosophers both religious and non-religious. Emmanuel Kant maybe the most famous philosopher in a thousand years. This was one of the texts that drove him away from traditional Christianity. He said that Genesis 22 could not be spoken by God. And on the flip side, Sorin Kikrgar, who some of you have heard of the Danish philosopher in the 1900s, he wrote an entire book about this passage responding to Emmanuel Kant called Fear and Trimming, a very famous book. And so it's been immensely important this passage through all of history. And thankfully for us the New Testament interprets the Old Testament on this passage. We don't have to guess what's going on here. Hebrews 11, the passage that we read earlier, our New Testament reading tells us exactly how we are supposed to understand Genesis 22.

And it says really two things. In verse 17 of that passage it says by faith Abraham was tested and he offered up Isaac by faith. He passed the test by faith. So the first thing is that this is a test and God is intending that we see this test of Abraham and we see his faith. We see the power of his faith in this test. And then secondly in verse 19 it says that Abraham considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead from which he also received Isaac back as a type. In other words the second thing that that we're supposed to see is that Isaac was intended as a type or a symbol for something greater than himself in Genesis 22. And so those are the two main ideas, the test and the type. And in order to see it I want to just want to ask three questions this morning for a few minutes with you. What is the test? What's the... sorry what is a test in general? What's the nature of this test of Abraham's test? And then how do you pass it? How do you pass the test? Okay so first what's a test? Genesis 22 verse 1 says God tested Abraham and it's important from the outset to know that the Bible teaches the fact of the test. The fact that God tests his people. So what does that mean? Well what's a test? What is a test? What is a test in general? I mean every one of us knows what a test is. We've all been tested.

Tests when they are at their best, they're meant to do two things. They're meant to reveal what you are and what you aren't. Right so if you want to learn a foreign language for instance and become fluent let's say French you will go take a course in French to become fluent in French but the first thing that they're gonna do when you come to study French is they're gonna give you a placement test. And that placement test is meant to do two things. It's meant to tell you where you are or who you are, what you know. It's meant to show you what you know and then secondly it's meant to

show you what you don't know, what you aren't, what you don't have in order that you would grow. You see it's a test when they're at their very best they're meant to grow you. To test you and what you don't have so that you can know how to grow. But there are also tests that come at their very worst and we have all had test givers in our lives that don't give tests like that. They give test in order to destroy you, in order to kill you, in order to make you bleed, in order to show you that you're terrible. There are test givers that give tests like that. I remember when

[5 : 56] I was living in Jackson, Mississippi before moving here that all the people who would start medical school at the University Medical Center there in Mississippi they would say that they would go in to the class first week and all the professors would say the same thing and they would say the only reason that this semester exists, this first semester, is for us to get rid of half of you. Half of you aren't gonna be sitting in these chairs about come December.

Right? And the point was that their test that was gonna be so terrible that they were gonna kill you, that they were gonna get rid of you, that they were gonna strain, strain the people that couldn't cut it. And so tests at their best are meant to grow you. And tests at their worst are meant to kill you, destroy you.

And that's exactly the two types of tests that are present in the Bible and in the Christian life. God does the first, tests that grow you, and Satan does the second, tests that are meant to destroy you. It's important to know that the very same word that is most often translated test in the Bible is also the same word for temptation. And God, you could say in Genesis 22, tempts Abraham. And the problem with that, that might come to your mind, is that in James 1, chapter, James chapter 1 verse 14, it says don't ever say that God tempts or tests anybody. But Genesis 22 here clearly says that God does tempt, that God does test and that's supported throughout the whole Bible. And the point is made in

Genesis 1, James 1, 14 and 15, exactly the distinction between these two types of tests. It says never say that God tempts, God tests in order to entice you to sin. You see, in other words, God doesn't test anybody in order to destroy them, he tests them in order to grow them. And Satan does the exact opposite. He tempts, he tests in order to kill, in order to destroy. And the most famous example of that is Job, the life of Job, Job chapter 1. Job, in the same context, in the same moment, is being tested in both ways. Satan comes to Job in order to kill him, in order to destroy him, to test him so that he'll curse God and die. And God comes to him in the exact same circumstance, in order that he might prove Job blameless, that he might grow him, that he might show him how to get more virtue, to become holier. And in the very same context, you can be tested by your evil desires, by Satan to be destroyed to sin and by God to grow. And so in

Genesis 22, God tests Abraham, he tempts him. And we know that because the Bible tells us that Abraham knew that because God told him that. But the question is, how do you know, how do I know when we're being tested, when we're coming under the test, under the temptation of God? How do you know? And I think the only answer we can give is that you don't, absolutely. But there is a measure, and that measure is something like this, when you are under the test, you're not under the test until it's so much easier in some circumstance to disobey than to obey. When you know what's right, but you want so much more of what's wrong, and when that circumstance comes, you're under the test, you're under the knife, you're under temptation. Let me give you some examples of what I mean. You're under the test when honesty in the workplace means major financial and job security consequences. You're under the test when speaking the truth in love may mean losing a relationship. You're under the test when believing in the
[10 : 13] Bible makes you look like a fool in the public square. You're under the test when obeying makes you deny your innermost desires and suppress your feelings because you know what's right. That's when you're under the test. In other words, the test of God means obedience is going to cost you something.

It's some figurative metaphorical temporary death to a perceived blessing. Some of us avoid all contexts that we think might bring the context in which we might have to obey to the point of great cost. We avoided it all cost.

This is why God tests. He tests that we will be unshaken on the inside no matter what the circumstance is on the outside. He tests you so that you might be strong, that you might grow, that you might become great. That's why in the Bible the idea of the test, the test of God, Hebrews 12 calls it the trial of discipline is often metaphorically presented as the process of smelting.

Smelting, it's when you put metal, I don't know that much about it, but it's when you put metals into fire and burn away the dross and the impurities and purify the metals, right? You see it all over the Bible. You've heard it a million times if you go to church from preachers, but the thing is is that for an ancient person that metaphor was alive. I mean they would see the black Smith in the marketplace smelting all the time. We never see it unless you are the 1% that works at a factory or something that does this. But the test, it's going into the fire, it's burning away the impurity, it's for your growth, it's for your good. When I think about my children, especially my oldest son Ethan, and think about what I want him to become, I know that at least I want him to become a man of godly character, right? And if you have a son, you probably want him to become a man of godly character. And right now, Ethan suffers a little bit in life, but on the whole life it's pretty easy for him. Suffering at our house is when the ice cream runs out. That's a big deal for us, for him. I mean that's the main trial he's working through right now. But look, what I know is this, if he's ever going to become a man of godly character, he's going to have to go through the fire. He's going to have to be tested.

[12:57] Obedience is going to cost him. Because human beings grow through trials. Human beings grow through trials and God often grows his people through trials and tests. And that's the truth of Scripture. Okay, so that's a test in general. Secondly, what about this test specifically? What about the nature of this test? This is the test of all tests. And you will never be tested like this.

This is unique. This is a once in a life, once in history moment. And in Abraham's test, the first thing that Hebrews 11 wants us to see is that his faith was astounding. That it's an example. And as Protestants, we often don't think enough maybe about the characters of the Bible and their faith. But Hebrews 11, that's exactly what it's trying to get us to see. This is what John Calvin, the Protestant reformer, says about Abraham. We ought to esteem Abraham as a man equal to a hundred thousand if we consider his faith, which is set before us in the Bible as the best model of believing. Why is Abraham's faith so significant in this passage? And in order to understand why it says significant, you have to look at the little phrase in verse 1 before it says God tested Abraham. It says, after these things, after these things, God tested Abraham. And that's a marker to tell you that what has happened in Abraham's life already is incredibly important for understanding what's happening in Genesis 22. This is the man who was called out of Babylon to be the people of God, to be a blessing to the nations, to be the father of God's people. And every single thing that God said to him in Genesis chapter 12 was all about the blessing.

You're going to be blessed in so many different ways. And that was going to come through a son. Now, Calvin, when he's looking at this passage, he chronicles Abraham's life and asks this question, is this the man of blessing? Is this the man of blessing that God had promised? And just listen to this. Genesis 12, he's called by God, taken away from his father, from his home, from his family and friends, from his land, from his security. And Calvin says, it's as if God deliberately intended to strip him of all the delights of life. Then when he gets to the land that was promised, it's in famine and his family is starving. And so he leaves the land and he goes south to a place where he feels that he is forced to prostitute his wife for the sake of his safety. And Calvin says, this is an act probably more bitter than the many deaths. Then when he gets back to the land, he's driven out of the land again because of a famine, because once again there's no water, there's no food. And again, he goes to a bimilex land and he feels like he's forced to prostitute his wife for their safety. And in all of this, he has no children and his wife is barren. And the whole point of the promise was that he would have a child who would be the beginning of the nations. And there's no kids. And when he does finally get a kid, a child, a son, through Hagar, his wife's servant, his name is Ishmael, the boy, Sarah hates Ishmael so much that she commands Abraham to dismiss his son and send him into the desert with bread and water forever. This is his son. And it might not be his wife's son, but it was his son. And in the grand understatement of the Old Testament in Genesis 21, it says, this much displeased Abraham. It crushed him. And in the very next paragraph, we get Genesis 22. And now he has another son, Isaac. And this is the son of hope. This is the son of the blessing. This is the son of the promise.

This will be the father of the nations. And as soon as he gets him as a boy, God says, now you go take him to the hill and you slaughter him. And for all of us who have children, and for all of you who are members here and have vowed to have covenant children in this congregation, just listen to what Calvin says about this. What more frightful thing can the human mind imagine than for a father to become the executioner of his own son? If Isaac had died of sickness, who among us would not

say Abraham, the most miserable man of the world? As if God had given him a son for a short time as a joke. And if he, if Isaac had been killed by some stranger or some criminal, who among us would not say this tragedy is even worse than if Isaac had died by sickness. But for a son to be slaughtered by his own father, by his own father's hand, this surpasses every sort of tragedy imaginable to the human mind. And so he sums up Abraham's life like this. Abraham was so tossed in trouble that if anyone wished to paint a picture of a tragic life that was supposed to be a blessing, he could find no model more appropriate than

[18 : 43] Abraham. And the shock of the command here to take Isaac to the mount is even more apparent in the Hebrew text that sits behind this English. Because in Hebrew there is a verb that's used in this passage only one other time in the whole Bible. A very peculiar verb appears nowhere else. It's as if it was just made up and it's translated here go. Go to Mount Mariah and take your son and offer him his sacrifice. But it's more literally translated it's more Shakespearean. It's like go and go thyself up from here would be something the way you could translate it. And it only appears in one other place in the whole Bible and that's in Genesis 12 verse 1 when the first word that Abraham ever hears from God is go thyself up from here to the land of blessing. I will give you a son. And the next time that verb is used in Genesis 22 go thyself up from here and take the son of blessing that I promised in Genesis 12 and kill him. And one commentator puts it this way in Genesis 12 in the most unique verb in the book of Genesis Abraham is asked to relinquish the past in the hope of a blessing. In Genesis 22 Abraham by the very same word is asked to relinquish all hope in any happiness. Why is this the ultimate test in the Old Testament?

Because the command of God in this passage seems to contradict the promise of God. How could God ask this? And the point behind it the point of every test the point of this test the point of Abraham's test and your test and my test is this God is asking Abraham am I your ultimate treasure? Am I your ultimate hope? What's being asked of Abraham is can you lose your precious only the apple of your eye the flower of your heart in the days of his youth and still hope in God? And the answer for Abraham was yes and that's why his faith is commendable.

In verse 10 he builds the altar and he takes his son up the mountain and he prepares to do the deed. The question is can you lose what is most precious in your life? Your ring to put it in Tolkien's terms and still hope in God.

Let me be make a more direct relationship a more direct application. How could some of us survive the death of a child and still hope in God? How could we see them leave before us and have hope? How? And so that brings us to the final point how do you survive the test? How do you hope in God at the expense of the most precious thing in life? And there are two answers to that in the passage briefly. The first answer is to think and just very briefly in Hebrews chapter 11 it says that Abraham reasoned that he reasoned. In verse 19 he reasoned in the face of losing his son that God could raise his son Isaac from the dead. It was no blind faith. He didn't just take a leap. Hebrews 11 said he thought he processed through logic and probably what he did was he thought about this. Abraham knew God already to be the giver of life. Not a God who takes life away but gives life. The Creator, the one who opens old women's wombs who shouldn't have children to give children. The one who called him out of a land that practiced child sacrifice and said get away from there. And he reasoned that that this God could raise his son from the dead and that's what gave him hope.

[23 : 03] And it says in Hebrews 11 that he didn't say that God would raise Isaac from the dead but Abraham thought he could. He didn't know. He stepped forward in the faith and the logic of the doctrine of God that this God is the life-giving God.

He could raise Isaac from the dead. And so the first thing is he he it was a not a blind faith but secondly and more importantly and finally how did Abraham survive? And the answer in this passage is that he looked for the Lamb. He looked for the Lamb. Now in verse 8 Isaac is no dummy. He's old enough to understand what's happening and he's old enough to carry the wood on his back up the mountain at least. And the King James is even better than this because it's he says this Father. Behold Father the altar. Behold the wood. But Father behold where is the Lamb? And Abraham says God will provide for himself the Lamb. He hoped and at the point of death as Abraham binds his own son to the altar bearing the knife putting it to his throat hoping beyond hope that there might be a Lamb that there might be a Lamb called in the thicket. God comes down in the form of the angel of the Lord and says do not lay a hand on the boy.

The Hebrew text is in fact it is literally don't touch the boy for the Lord sees. And the substitute was in the thicket waiting there. Now to understand very briefly what's happening here you have to see

just just quickly three details in the text to make sense of it. And the first is this what is happening here? What has specifically been commanded? And what has specifically been commanded is that Abraham give Isaac as a burnt offering not simply murder him not simply kill him but this is a burnt offering and that's very specific. What that means is a burnt offering is a ceremonial sacrifice that has a specific intention and we know what that intention is from Leviticus chapter 1.

Leviticus chapter 1 tells us exactly what a burnt offering is for. A burnt offering in the Old Testament is for the purification of the pollution that sin has caused. And Leviticus 1 even calls it an atonement for sin. In other words what's been commanded here is that Isaac's death is meant to be an atonement for the sin of the people. He's being offered up here to God as an atonement for the pollution of sin. And so that that's the first thing for forgiveness.

The second thing you have to know is where? Where did this take place? And he told God tells Abraham take your son to Mount Moriah to sacrifice him. Now Mount Moriah, it doesn't say Mount Moriah. Moriah is a hill country in Palestine and Israel and it's a series of small hills and the only other place that appears in the Old Testament is in 1 Chronicles 3. I know all of you read 1 Chronicles 3 this morning and are up on this but Moriah is the place where the temple of Solomon will be built. It's a series of hills. It's the place where Jerusalem will one day land. Even more on one of the hills of Moriah there will be a spot. One day the people will call it Golgotha. One day on one of the hills of Moriah we call it Calvary. You see? 1500 years from now.

[27 : 10] Isaac is meant to be a burn-off, an atonement for sin given up on the future site of Golgotha to God. And then thirdly and finally who? And the text says that Isaac is Abraham's only son, the one whom he loves. And Hebrews makes even more of this. Hebrews says that he's his only begotten son and the reason that Hebrews says that is because in the Greek translation of the Old Testament of Genesis the translator uses the word for begotten or beloved for Isaac. And this is the Bible that most of the New Testament authors were working from, a Greek translation of the Old Testament. In other words in the Greek translation of the Old Testament it says Abraham was to give up his only begotten son. The point is that in John 3.16 John is working with Genesis 22 and he's saying God so loved the world that just like Abraham he gave up his only begotten son that whoever would believe in him would have eternal life. And so you're getting the picture. You're getting the picture. What's happening here is that God is commanding Abraham to do this in order to dramatize to illustrate the relationship between God the Father and God the Son and how God is going to secure the blessing for the entire world. This is an illustration. God is commanding this so that Abraham and Isaac would dramatize what's going to happen on the hill of Moriah, Golgotha on the cross some 1500 years later. That's the point. This was never about child sacrifice. The point the whole time was never that Isaac was going to be given up. It was never that this was a drama so that the people of God 1500 years before it would ever happen would know that God the Father the true and better Abraham would give the true and better

Isaac. He would put the knife to his throat. Why? John 3.16, for God so loved you that he would give up his only Isaac, his only begotten. It's no coincidence in Genesis 22.6 and we'll just close with this that Abraham laid the wood on Isaac the sacrifice back to be carried up Golgotha's hill. A true and better Isaac would do the exact same thing 1500 years later. What does this mean? I'll just close with an illustration. Stephen Curtis Chapman, famous CCM musician, contemporary Christian music. Yeah anybody in the CCM crowd. DC Talk, Newsboys, yeah some of you. No matter what you think about CCM this matters not. Stephen Curtis Chapman is a very famous singer in the 90s in that scene. He adopted a little girl from China. Her name was Maria. His sons were older and many of you know this about him and Will the teenage son one day backed over Maria in their driveway. It's a terrible story and so

Stephen Curtis Chapman comes out of the house. He picks Maria up, he puts her in the car, she's dying and he's trying to save her life and they are going to drive away to the hospital and she doesn't make it. She dies in the car. This little five-year-old girl that he had adopted and months later in an interview in 2008 on Good Morning America in the States with Robin Roberts. They were talking about you know what their families like after this and how things were going and they especially focused on Will and how he was coping with what he had done. He had killed his sister and Stephen Curtis Chapman was talking about his relationship with Will and as Stephen Curtis Chapman was driving away from the scene he rolled down the window and looked out to his son and said I love you as he was driving away. Sorry I don't usually do like this. Derek's the one that does this stuff not me. He looked out at his son and he pointed at him and said son I love you. The

son that had just killed his daughter and the cross. The cross is the pronouncement of the father pointing at you, at us, at your worst, at your very worst. It's him pointing at you and saying son daughter I love you. At your very worst and he's saying I love you so much that I will put the knife to my to my better Isaac. My better than Isaac for you so that you know the hope of a resurrection life and that's the gospel and it's good news. Let's pray. Father thank you for the gospel thank you that you did not spare your own son for us but gave him up freely so that we might know resurrection hope. We thank you in Christ's name. Amen.