

Title: Discussing the Faith of Abraham [II]

Scripture: Hebrews 11:17-19

Preacher: Pastor Caleb Lee

Greetings in the name of the Lord for your peace. Today's scripture is Hebrews 11:17-19.

17 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,

18 even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned."

19 Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.

Amen.

Today's sermon is the second part of "Discussing the Faith of Abraham." Hebrews 11:17 says, "By faith Abraham ... offered Isaac as a sacrifice." Due to this verse, some people tend to view Abraham as someone who always revered God and had unwavering faith in Him. They proudly refer to him as the "Father of Faith," considering him a paragon of unwavering belief. However, the Bible tells us that Abraham's faith was not always steadfast before God. Prior to the event of offering Isaac as a burnt offering, there were instances where Abraham's faith was far from exemplary. In the previous series, we meticulously examined these instances where Abraham lacked faith.

Even today's scripture, Hebrews 11:17, does not suggest that Abraham's faith was always perfect. Carefully read verse 17, "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice," and notice the clause "when God tested him." The event of offering Isaac is connected with the clause "when God tested him." This implies that Abraham was being tested at the time he offered Isaac. What does the clause "when God tested him" tell us? It indicates that even after God

called Abraham and up until He asked Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering, God was not fully certain of Abraham's faith. God couldn't determine if Abraham truly believed in Him, if his actions and words were out of reverence or irreverence. Therefore, God tested Abraham to understand him better.

That is right. The very fact that God "tested" Abraham suggests that Abraham's faith was not strong at that time. Most people tend to overlook the part about Abraham being tested by God because they focus only on the positive aspects of his character.

There is something even more evident of God being uncertain of Abraham's faith—the words of God as a result of this test. In Genesis 22:12, God says, "Now I know." Specifically, He says, "Now I know that you fear God." This means that before Abraham passed this test, God was uncertain about Abraham's faith. It implies that God could not be sure if Abraham believed in and revered Him. Isn't this a clear indication that Abraham did not fully trust God? Is there any stronger evidence of Abraham's lack of faith in God than this?

Before Abraham succeeded in the test he received at the end of his life, what he demonstrated before God could not be called faith or reverence. The Bible states this, and even Hebrews records it as such. Why, then, do so many people think of Abraham as if he were like Enoch or Noah, who walked righteously with God throughout their lives? Why do they place more emphasis on Abraham than on Enoch or Noah?

Genesis 22:12 and Hebrews 11:17 reveal that it was only near the end of his life, after passing the test of offering his son Isaac as a burnt offering, that Abraham was acknowledged by God as fearing Him. It was at that moment that God recognized Abraham's reverence. But why do many people tend to overlook Abraham's earlier lack of faith and regard him as entirely commendable? The examples of Abraham's faith and reverence recorded in the Bible are there because God wants us to emulate them. However, there are also instances where Abraham did not show faith. God has meticulously recorded Abraham's actions and words that did not align with His will in the Bible, possibly to

caution us against such behavior. Yet, some of us tend to uncritically and blindly view Abraham in a positive light without thorough examination.

Abraham's reaction to God's announcement of the impending destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah due to the sins of their inhabitants was not commendable. However, people have romanticized his words and actions at that time, and even today, some enjoy emulating them. Is this truly the right approach?

Let's examine the words Abraham said to God upon hearing His plan for Sodom and Gomorrah. In Genesis 18:23, Abraham says to God, "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" In verse 24, he continues, "What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it?" These are Abraham's words to God. Again, in verse 28, Abraham says, "What if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five people?" Each time Abraham speaks, God responds very kindly, respecting his questions and providing thoughtful answers. This encourages Abraham to keep asking. In verse 29, he asks, "What if only forty are found there?"

Is it appropriate for Abraham to bargain with God like this, especially when God has made a judgment and is about to act? Is God someone who can be negotiated with in this manner? Did God have any fault that would allow Abraham to negotiate with Him like this?

It seems that Abraham felt some remorse about negotiating with God in this manner. So in Genesis 18:30, Abraham says, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?" Again, in verse 32, he says, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?" Abraham's bargaining attitude and tone might make it seem as though he thinks God could make a mistake and be negotiated with. It appears as if God is being reproved by Abraham for some fault. Yet, many people still view Abraham's manner of speaking and his attitude as acts of reverence towards God. Consequently, there are many who believe

that we should pray like Abraham did.

Friends, Abraham even said the following to God, which again sounds like he is reproaching and criticizing God. Let's listen to what he said to God and consider whether it was appropriate. In Genesis 18:25, Abraham says, "Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" What is he saying here? Abraham is essentially arguing, "You, who claim to be the Judge of all the earth, should be just. But what you are about to do is not just at all. Shouldn't you be doing the right thing?" Abraham is challenging God in this way.

Then, for how much of that long period during which Abraham walked with God did he truly fear and believe in Him? According to Hebrews, apart from the event at the end of his life when he offered Isaac without protest, nothing Abraham did could be considered true reverence or faith. Yet, many people ignore this biblical assessment.

How did Abraham react when God came close to him and announced the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah? From a logical and objective standpoint, his attitude cannot be considered genuine reverence towards God. It was disrespectful. It was an enormous act of irreverence. But why do we fail to recognize this irreverence in Abraham's actions as irreverence and instead consider it praiseworthy and attempt to emulate it?

This is a serious misunderstanding and act of prejudice. Such misunderstandings and prejudices disregard the truth of the Bible, misleading people in a very dangerous way.

Abraham's disregard for God did not end there. Let's look at the record in Genesis 15:17-18: "When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, 'To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates.'" God

made this incredible promise to Abraham while passing through the pieces of the sacrifice as a blazing torch. It was a significant blessing and event. However, if we examine this event closely without bias, there was a problem even then. Abraham made a significant mistake before God.

That is right. The passage just introduced is preceded by Genesis 15:10, which states: "Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half." Abraham followed God's command to take the animals, cut them in two, and lay them opposite each other, but he did not cut the birds in half. This shows that Abraham disregarded God's specific instructions. Why did Abraham do this? Perhaps he thought that small birds were insignificant. He might have assumed that God, like himself, would not care about such small birds. Abraham seemed to believe that God was only interested in significant matters.

Don't we sometimes think the same way? We often focus only on large donations, significant offerings, and major tasks, neglecting the small and seemingly insignificant things. However, God commanded that even the birds be cut in two without exception. God's command to cut the birds in half is worthy of reverence. While small birds might seem insignificant, the God who commanded that the birds be cut is truly to be revered. Despite this, Abraham regarded the birds lightly and placed them whole beside the larger animals. He likely thought that God would receive the birds along with the animals when He accepted the sacrifice. Abraham intended for God to accept the small birds together with the cut animals as He passed through the pieces as a torch. But Abraham did not cut the birds. He did not obey God's command. How can we say that Abraham, who disregarded God's command, truly revered God from the depths of his heart?

God passed through the pieces of the animals, but He avoided the birds that was left whole beside them. Although God did not say anything, He must have had many thoughts when He saw the birds that had not been cut. The fire that hurriedly passed by avoided the birds. Have you ever considered God's feelings at that moment?

The Book of Hebrews states that Abraham's questioning about the number of righteous people in Sodom did not demonstrate faith or reverence toward God. Despite Abraham's reputation, God only acknowledged Abraham's reverence toward God when he offered Isaac, saying, "Now I know that you fear God." This suggests that God's intention in recounting Abraham's story was to show that, apart from offering Isaac, Abraham's other actions were not to be emulated.

Abraham's failure to cut the birds despite God's command was not an act of reverence. Similarly, taking Lot with him when he left his homeland, failing to protect his wife Sarai when she was taken to Pharaoh, and having Ishmael through Hagar at Sarai's suggestion were also actions that the Bible indicates did not demonstrate reverence for God.

That is not all. About a year before Isaac was born, both Abraham and Sarah had laughed when God had visited Abraham and told him he would have a son. Their laughter indicates that even at that time, Abraham and Sarah's faith and reverence for God were weak. This suggests that God included these actions in the Bible to show us not to emulate Abraham's behavior in those instances.

The Bible records these events to teach us that not everything Abraham did is to be followed unconditionally. Rather, it highlights that only the faith Abraham demonstrated when he finally offered Isaac is the model of faith we should strive to emulate.

The Bible clearly tells us what kind of faith and reverence we should emulate from Abraham. Hebrews 11:17 says, "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son." This indicates that Abraham's faith reached a level recognized by God only when he offered Isaac as a burnt offering near the end of his life. Genesis 22:12 records, "Now I know that you fear God."

God acknowledged Abraham's faith when he offered Isaac, and through the

Bible, He continues to meet us today, urging us to have the same faith as Abraham had in that moment.

Hebrews 11:18 says, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." Isaac was the son upon whom such a promise was laid. Abraham received the command to offer this very son as a burnt offering. The Abraham from before would have questioned God, just as he had when God announced the destruction of Sodom. This time, the situation was even more severe. The Abraham from before might have said, "How could you now ask me to offer as a burnt offering the son through whom you promised to make a great nation?"

Despite having every reason to question God, Abraham asked nothing this time. He, who previously insisted on confirming everything, now remained silent before God. This change occurred because, over the years, Abraham came to understand God deeply. Abraham had come to firmly believe that God could raise his son even from the dead.

This faith of Abraham should be our model, making him our "Father of Faith." This is what the Bible teaches us. Amen.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father,

Through the life of Abraham, we have discovered new insights. While it seemed challenging to relate to figures like Enoch or Noah, who always walked with You, we found a sense of closeness in Abraham because of his similarities to us. Through the detailed actions and words of Abraham, we have learned what to avoid and how we ought to revere You.

Even though Abraham's faith was so weak, and he spoke to You, God, in a manner that seemed to question and reproach You, You responded kindly and patiently each time.

Heavenly Father, You led Abraham over many years until he could firmly believe in and revere You. As a result, we see that Abraham ultimately came to have a mature and reverent faith in You.

Oh, Lord!

Just as You did with Abraham, guide us in our weakness, so that in the end, we may be found as faithful believers who are pleasing to Your heart. Abraham truly is a model for our faith journey. The God of Abraham is our God.

We earnestly pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.