

Dear Friends in Christ,

Years ago, I had my first encounter with Alzheimer's disease. A Christian woman was severely afflicted with the disease and was getting progressively worse. I also remember the Christian husband taking care of her day and night doing whatever was needed. He faithfully cared for her for years until she passed away.

When you think of faithfulness you might also reflect on the fact that Mom's and Dad's take care babies, then children, then teenagers for years. It is a lot of work, but Christian parents know that they get strength from the Lord to faithfully do their work.

We may not have to deal with a family member having a terrible disease, we may not have to take care of children, but the Lord wants us to be faithful in living our lives to his glory.

At times we may ask, "Can I continue to do this?" We might struggle in our faithfulness to our family and others. We may struggle in our faithfulness to the Lord. We might admit we could do better.

If we are struggling with being dependable or faithful you and I would look for examples to imitate and strength to be faithful.

Today **The LORD Shows Us Faithfulness** in Genesis 22. He has examples of faithfulness he would like to show us. First, a man named Abraham serves as a model for our faithfulness. Second, we have the Lord himself as an example. His faithfulness moves Abraham and all believers to be faithful. I. Abraham started out in life as Abram who lived in Ur of the Chaldees, not too far from modern day Bagdad. He believed in the living God. God called him out of his homeland to go to a the land of Canaan which God would give to Abram's descendants. God blessed Abram and changed his name to Abraham. Abraham and his wife Sarah had everything except a child. This was especially troublesome to them in their old age. God has promised that a Savior for all people would be born from one of their descendants. Finally, when Abraham was 100 years old Sarah gave birth to a son, Isaac. God had performed a miracle. Today we see the Lord using this beloved son to put to put Abraham to a severe test. The result is a wonderful example of faithfulness.

A. God tested Abraham for his own good. God knows all things and he doesn't test us to find anything out. God does not tempt anyone to sin either, that is what the Devil does. The purpose of this test then was to strengthen Abraham's faith in the Lord.

2) The reason the Lord chooses this time in Abraham's life to run this severe test is because a danger was present. Abraham had waited and waited for a son. Now he had one and we can well imagine that Abraham must have treated him like pure gold. When we buy a new car we are ever so careful to not scratch the paint or damage it in anyway. Abraham was probably like that. The danger in this can be described as sinful love. This happens when we love something more than God. The **First Commandment** tells us that we are to "**have no other gods.**" God is to have first place in our lives. We are to love him most of all.

B. As Abraham responds to the this test we see that he loves God even more than his own son.

1. We are told that when Abraham got up the next morning he immediately began preparations, so the command of the Lord could be carried out. He didn't stand around and debate with himself whether the Lord's request was fair. Nor did he stall, taking a long time with the preparations.

2. Abraham's faith is even more evident once they arrive at the mountain where the sacrifice is to be performed. He tells his servants that he and the boy will return. When Isaac asks what will be sacrificed, he tells him the Lord will provide. Abraham's faith is most evident when he puts Isaac on the altar and raises the knife to kill him. The author of the letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament speaks of this great faith, "**By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son,...Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead.**" (11:17-19)

C. Like Abraham we are people of faith. We are to live our lives as Martin Luther describes it "*trusting in God above all things.*" At the same time we like Abraham are still sinful and imperfect. There is a danger that something in our life might become more important than God. I think Abraham's situation hits close to home for us.

We often have a person in our lives who is very dear; a spouse, a son or daughter, a grandchild, nephew or niece. We may for example love a child or grandchild so much that we let them do what they want. We may not insist that they go to church or Sunday school. We may not say much about an

unspiritual friend or object when they speak in favor of homosexuality or abortion. This may make us popular, but it is dangerous. We are loving this person more than God. We are not being faithful to God.

When such a danger is present the Lord will take steps to strengthen our faith. He will try to do that through his word. A sermon or Bible reading might be just the thing. He may use a Christian friend to point out the danger. He could also take that person out of our life for a time. He will do whatever is necessary, so we keep him first and so that our faith is strengthened.

II. What happened in this story? Everything turns out well in the end. This is so because the Lord is faithful. We can continue in our faithfulness because the Lord is faithful.

A. The faithfulness of the Lord is very evident.

1. In the story the Angel of the Lord speaks out. This not just any angel, but the second person of the Trinity, Jesus. He stops the sacrifice by calling out **“Abraham, Abraham.”** Abraham stops and Isaac's life is preserved. Isaac will carry on Abraham's family line and the promise of the Savior. In Isaac's place the Lord provides a ram. Abraham sees it in a bush nearby. He takes the ram and sacrifices it in place of Isaac. Abraham had trusted that the Lord would provide a sacrifice. He provides this animal as a substitute. Abraham's faith was not in vain.

2. We also can see the Lord's faithfulness on this same mountain many years later. It was on this same mountain that a father sacrificed his son. The heavenly Father in keeping with his promises faithfully sent his son Jesus to die on the cross as our substitute. Here the Father did not spare his son but he gave him up for us all so we could be saved. This is the greatest example of God's faithfulness.

B. Abraham had been through a traumatic and tense situation. He needed encouragement. The Lord strengthens him by repeating some of his wonderful promises that he had given him.

1. The Lord again promises Abraham that he will have many descendants. Abraham does have many physical descendants who are from his bloodline. He has even more spiritual descendants. All believers are "children of Abraham" because they have the same faith. The Lord also renews the Gospel promise that **“all the nations are going to be blessed through Abraham.”** One of his descendants will be the Savior of all people. This means forgiveness and eternal life for Abraham and all believers. This Gospel promise towers above all others.

2. In the end the, Lord tells Abraham he will do these things "**because you have done this.**" We have to be careful that we understand this just applied only to *the material and social blessings* that God was giving to Abraham. His descendants would defeat their enemies as long as they were faithful. When it came to the promise of salvation, this was not based on his performance. God had given that to Abraham before the test. It depended only on God's faithfulness. He swears on himself that he will be faithful. C. Before we saw that God's people are to be faithful to him by putting him first. **Our motivation is found in the Lord's faithfulness.** He is totally faithful.

If we want to buy a car we look at its performance record. Is it. reliable? We don't want to "sink" large amounts of money into something which is not going to be there when we need it.

The God that we worship and follow also must be faithful to us or otherwise we can't trust in him. We should, however, be overflowing with confidence when it comes to our God because he has a perfect track record. Every promise he ever gave has been kept. He promised Abraham many descendants. Abraham has many physical and spiritual descendants. He promised to send a Savior and he sent Jesus Christ. Jesus promised to die for our sins and rise again in triumph and he did. This faithfulness and love encourages us to be faithful. It moved Abraham to great faithfulness and it will move us too.

Conclusion: "**Faithful.**" Is that a word that describes you? It should. God is working with us, testing us, showering his love on us. The goal is to make us faithful like Abraham. Abraham wasn't perfect. Neither were the other great heroes of faith in the Bible. They grew in the Lord. Pray that the Lord would cause you to grow in faithfulness as you see his unswerving faithfulness. Amen.