

# Through Trials Still Trusting in His Faithfulness

Rm 8:31-32; Gn 22:1-19 (text)

25 April 2021, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:30 am  
(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

## Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Our text shows us how a *believer* got tested!

Well, still today, believers are tested – their faith trialled; sometimes even severely and heart-wrenchingly so!

And, in our human frailty, we may ask questions like:

- “Is this real?
- I thought I was God’s loved-one!?
- Am I still God’s child?
- Does God’s salvation plan for me still stand?
- If it does, will He still continue with it – even for me?
- I mean, gauging by my current situation, I’m wondering...”

Well, how can the believer make sense amidst times of immense hardship?

Our text gives us a very clear and encouraging answer.

And here are three points by which our text does it...

- Testing
- Trusting
- The LORD will Provide

## Testing (v 1-2)

Verse 1 tells us that **God tested Abraham!**<sup>1</sup>

*God* tested him!

My brother & sister, do you see that this is different to when *Job* suffered hardship? You see, in *Job*’s case the Bible tells us that it was *satan*’s job! Yes, *satan* wanted, not to *test*, but to *tempt* Job, i.e., to make Job fall away from the faith; yes, to destroy Job!<sup>2</sup>

But here, in *Abraham*’s case, it’s *God* who tests!

Yes, *God* sets out, not to *tempt* Abraham, but to test him – to see whether he would stay faithful to God; obedient to God; trusting God!

*God* tested Abraham!

And what does testing *do*?

Well, does testing *not show what someone is really like*? And does testing not usually *involve difficulty and hardship*?<sup>3</sup>

So, indeed, also in Abraham’s case, the test did involve difficulty and hardship!

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<sup>1</sup> וְיָהוָה יָסָא אֶת-אַבְרָהָם (יָסָא is a Pi`el Perfect 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular of יָסָא “test, try”).

<sup>2</sup> cf. Job 1:6-12; 2:1ff. but cf. especially Jb 2:3 “**And the Lord said to Satan, ‘Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason.’**” The devil does not test; no, he tempts with a view to destroy!

<sup>3</sup> Words borrowed from Wenham (apud GREIDANUS, Sidney. 2007. Preaching Christ from Genesis: foundations for expository sermons. Grand Rapids, MI : William B Eerdmans. p. 206).

You see, God commanded Abraham to go *sacrifice* Isaac; yes, to offer him to God by way of slaughtering!

Now, just look at the degree of Abraham's hardship! Verse 2 says, "**Take your son...**" yes, not someone else's son; not the son of your enemy, but *your* son!

And not *one* of your sons (You see, Ishmael is now gone), but "...**your only son Isaac...**"

And not your son whom you don't like so much, but your son **whom you love**!

What a test!

What hardship!

I mean, was Isaac not the son Abraham & Sarah had waited for, for decades?

And now they have him!

In fact, they have had him for *several years* already – years through which their love for him had grown and deepened!

After all, Isaac is not a baby anymore. You see, this boy is now old enough to carry (as v. 6 says) the firewood, and that even while going up a mountain!

How could a father kill this, his darling son!?

What's even more: was Isaac not their son *promised by God*?<sup>4</sup>

And, was not a *whole nation* to be born out of this God-given, miracle son?

And were not *all nations of the earth* going to be blessed through this very same son of Abraham?

Should this son now be slaughtered as a sacrifice to God?

But God *did* command it!

Wow!

What a trial!

What a test!

Would Abraham not have gone, "God, I don't understand this command"? "God, how could I do what You now command? "God, please make sense for me out of this hard riddle!"?

My brother & sister, sometimes in our lives, you & I also go through tests – even great tests; tests that we never even dreamed would come our way; tests that don't make sense for us and cause us to think, say or cry out, "Why should I, a child of God – yes, as one who's supposed to be an example of God's grace, power & love in this world – why should *I* be in this position?" "Why should *I* give up my sister/brother/child to cancer?" "Why is one of my children delinquent?" "Why is he or she living with mates that we don't approve of?"

"Why, why why!?"

Well so far with point 1 – testing; yes, trails, hardships through which even the believer has to suffer; indeed, tests allowed – even at times *sent* – by God!

God!?

My brother & sister, does hearing His almighty & sovereign Name not lead us to point 2...?

### **Trusting (v.3-8)**

Just imagine how all these thoughts milled through Abraham's head – how God's *command* clashed with Abraham's *head & heart*!

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<sup>4</sup> Gen 17:18-21 **And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before you!"** <sup>19</sup> **God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.** <sup>20</sup> **As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation.** <sup>21</sup> **But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year.**"

What a test!?

And Abraham would most certainly have gone through all the thoughts you & I have just heard under point 1.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, by God's grace, Abraham trusted!

He trusted that the One who promised, is also the One who will find (and *make*) a way.

My brother & sister, is it not under similar heart-wrenching circumstances that the much-loved words of an old German/Dutch hymn were composed?<sup>6</sup>

I'll give you the English version...

*Commit whatever grieves you  
into the gracious hands,  
of Him who never leaves you,  
who heaven and earth commands.  
Who points the clouds their courses,  
whom winds and waves obey,  
He will direct your footsteps  
and find for you a way.<sup>7</sup>*

“...and find for you a way...”

What encouraging/comforting words: God will make a way where I, now in my cancer – or in my loss – can't see a way!

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<sup>5</sup> “The long-promised child;

- The one I have been waiting for so long;
- a whole nation should have been born from him;
- all the nations of the world were going to be blessed through him;
- My God, he is just now developing so beautifully!
- Look how he has grown!
- Sarah & I love him!
- He is our only son!”
- “What are You saying, Lord?”

<sup>6</sup> *Beveel gerust uw wegen, al wat u 't harte deert,  
der trouwe hoed' en zegen van Hem, die 't al regeert.  
Die wolken, lucht en winden, wijst spoor en loop en baan,  
zal ook wel wegen vinden waarlangs uw voet kan gaan.*

‘Beveel gerust uw wegen’ is een 19de-eeuwse Nederlandse vertaling van het 17de-eeuwse Duitse ‘Befiehl du deine Wege’. De dichter is Paul Gerhardt (1607-1676). Gerhardt, predikant en dichter, schreef ca. 130 liederen die werden uitgegeven door Johann Crüger - in de bundel *Praxis pietatis melica*, 1647 en later - en Johann Ebeling. Gerhardt is een van de belangrijkste Duitse kerklieddichters en algemeen wordt gewezen op de relatie tussen zijn werk en de maatschappij-ontwrichtende gevolgen van de Dertigjarige Oorlog. Ook Gerhardts eigen levensgang wordt in dit verband genoemd - o.a. drie jong overleden kinderen en een pestende collega. Duidelijk is in ieder geval dat er in Gerhardts werk veel ruimte is voor Godsvertrouwen in moeilijke omstandigheden.

Vervolgbundel:

‘Befiehl du deine Wege’ kreeg in Nederland bekendheid in de vertaling van Bernard ter Haar (hoewel vooral de Nederlandse lutheranen het lied daarvoor ook al zongen). Bernard ter Haar (1806-1866) was predikant en vervolgens hoogleraar (Utrecht), gespecialiseerd in kerkgeschiedenis. Hij publiceerde zijn vertaling in *Geschiedenis der Christelijke kerk* uit 1859, een bundel waarbij hij als redacteur was betrokken

[http://kerkliederwiki.nl/index.php/Beveel\\_gerust\\_uw\\_wegen](http://kerkliederwiki.nl/index.php/Beveel_gerust_uw_wegen)

<sup>7</sup> cf. Australian Book of Worship, no.472

My brother & sister, although Abraham would certainly have struggled with God's command, we don't read a word about it.

You see, we don't read that the same thing happened here as which happened when God wanted to punish Sodom.

Yes, here in our text, Abraham is not arguing with God – Abraham is not into trying to change God's mind (if that were even possible).

Remember how, re Sodom, Abraham pleaded with God, "God will you not spare the city if there were fifty God-fearing people in it; forty God-fearing souls; thirty; twenty; ten..."<sup>8</sup>

No, this time, we don't see Abraham wrestling with God. He does not argue!

From v. 3 we only hear that, early in the morning – and in great obedience – Abraham rose, saddled his donkey, took two of his servants, and his precious son, Isaac; that he trustingly cut the wood for the burnt offering and obediently headed in the direction God had commanded him!

By God's grace, Abraham carried the burden alone!

The Bible does not tell us that he shared his struggles with his wife, Sarah; neither that he shared his burden with his two servants; least of all that he dared to share it with his beloved son, Isaac!

Then, we read (v.4) that they walked on a three-day journey.

And you might ask, "But why did God make it so hard for him – *three days* of struggling with his immense burden!!" "Having to struggle sleeping at night – and lots of physical activity (walking & walking for an old man) during the day?!"

Well, an easy answer could be that God wanted Isaac to be sacrificed in the same mountain range where God's own Son would, years later, be sacrificed!

Another answer is the one suggested by John Calvin, i.e., that God allowed three long days for Abraham so that this should "make him persevere, so that he should not obey God by a merely sudden impulse..." but "that his love to God was confirmed by such constancy, that it could not be affected by any change in circumstances."<sup>9</sup>

Abraham trusted!

And, indeed, we see some more instances of his trusting.

You see, when Abraham, Isaac and the servants stopped at the foot of the mountain range which God had appointed, then Abraham, speaking to the two servants, said something quite revealing!

Yes, v.5 tells us he said, "***Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you.***"<sup>10</sup>

The Hebrew literally says, "***And we will worship and we will return to you!***"<sup>11</sup>

Did you hear that: "...**we will return to you**"!?

Was Abraham telling a white lie to his servants and to Isaac?

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<sup>8</sup> cf. Gn 18:22-33

<sup>9</sup> "Secondly, this tended also to make him persevere, so that he should not obey God by a merely sudden impulse. For, as he does not turn back in his journey, nor revolve conflicting counsels; it hence appears, that his love to God was confirmed by such constancy, that it could not be affected by any change of circumstances" (Calvin, J., & King, J. (2010). *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis* (Vol. 1, pp. 559–574). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software).

Also cf. Greidanus (ibid:208)

<sup>10</sup> Gen 22:5 (NASB)

<sup>11</sup> וְנִשְׁבַּחְתֶּם אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְנִשְׁבַּחְתֶּם אֱלֹהֵיכֶם (וְנִשְׁבַּחְתֶּם) is a Qal Imperfect Cohortative (with emphatic meaning?) Waw Copulative 1<sup>st</sup> person plural of שׁוּב "return; come back [to]".

Did he tell them a lie to hide from them what gruesome task was awaiting him up the mountain?

No, like many Bible scholars, I don't think Abraham told a white lie!

You see, I agree with the commentator who says, "*Although he (Abraham) does not know how God will work it out, his faith harmonises God's earlier promises<sup>12</sup> with God's command to sacrifice Isaac.*"<sup>13</sup>

My brother & sister, is Abraham's trusting not a live picture of the words of that Dutch hymn, "He will direct your footsteps and find for you a way"?

Well, look! Verse 8 gives us another picture of the same truth. You see, hear what Abraham answers to Isaac's heart-piercing question – that question inquiring about the whereabouts of the lamb to be sacrificed. This is how Abraham answered: "**God will provide for Himself** (i.e., ***God Himself will provide***) ***the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.***"<sup>14</sup>

"God Himself will provide..."

Again, we ask: Is Abraham telling a white lie to spare Isaac the bad news?

I love the answer given by another commentator: "*Abraham points Isaac to God as the one who will answer Isaac's question. Abraham does not deceive Isaac. No, Abraham simply opens up to Isaac as a possibility what for Abraham himself is a fact.*"<sup>15</sup>

My brother & sister, remember Heb 11:1?

***"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see!"***

Well, perhaps you are facing some severe hardship/trial – yes, a testing from God – at the moment!

Perhaps you, too, cannot make sense of it!

Perhaps you, too, ask some/all of the following questions: "But how is this possible?" "Where will my situation lead to?" "Has God forgotten me?" "Was I then never His child?" "Does He see me?"

I remember a brother in a previous congregation who, amidst the most trialing circumstances – yet with tears of joy – found great comfort in the fact that ***God will provide***; yes, that *God will direct your footsteps and find for you a way!*

So, time & time again – and by grace through faith – this brother came back to Christ's words that say, "***I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand***" (Jn 10:28).

My brother & sister, if, in and through Jesus Christ, you are God's child, I'm not saying you will never suffer hardship. That's clearly not what the Bible teaches!

But what I'm saying to you – on the strength of Christ's promise – "No one can ever snatch you out of His hand!"<sup>16</sup> "He will raise you up on the last day!" (Four times repeated in Jn 6).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> That in Isaac his offspring will be reckoned [21:1-13].

<sup>13</sup> My stylistically easier version of Waltke (apud Greidanus, *ibid*:209).

Also cf. Heb 11:19 ***Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.***

<sup>14</sup> ESV for אֱלֹהִים יִרְאֶה-לִּן הַעֲשֶׂה לְעֵלְיָהּ בְּנֵי

<sup>15</sup> My smoother version of, "*Abraham refers Isaac to God as the one who will answer the question. He does not deceive him, but simply opens up to him as possibility what for himself (since God gave his command) is a fact. He throws the ball back into God's court, so to speak: 'God will provide'*" (cf. Westerman [apud Greidanus, *ibid*:209]).

And as for your current hardship: “He will direct your footsteps and find for you a way!”<sup>18</sup> Yes, ***God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it*** (1 Cor 10:13).

God will work all things for your eternal good (cf. Rm 8:28)!

Said in another way – the Gen 22 way – “***God will provide!***”

Which brings us to the last point in the sermon...

### **God will Provide (v.9-18)**

My brother & sister, perhaps you have seen how a GPS doesn’t show you much detail when you travel on the open road, between cities. But, just enter a city, and the GPS zooms in and shows you all the streets that are criss-crossing your street – yes, then it shows you lots of place names & detail.

Well, the author of our text does the same.

You see, he did not show us much detail during Abraham’s three-day travel, but now, here where the story/account reaches fever-pitch stage, the author shows us every action of Abraham:

- Abraham builds an altar
- Lays the wood on it
- Binds his beloved son – yes, ties him up (hands & feet)
- Then lays him on the wood on the altar
- Abraham reaches out his hand
- Takes the knife
- Ready to slaughter Isaac!

And you ask: Will God step in? Will He stop Abraham? Will He prevent Isaac from being slaughtered?

Will God remember all the promises He had made to Abraham, i.e.,

- that a whole nation would be born through Isaac
- that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through this boy

Will God be faithful?

Of course, He will!

You see, God is always faithful to His promises.

So, just in time, ***the angel of God called out from heaven..., “Abraham, Abraham... Do not lay your hand on the boy..., for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.”***

Then God caused Abraham to see that ram behind him, caught by his horns in the thicket.

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<sup>16</sup> See again Jn 10:28

<sup>17</sup> Jn 6:39 ***And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.***

Jn 6:40 ***“For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”***

Jn 6:44 ***No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.***

Jn 6:54 ***Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.***

<sup>18</sup> Again, the words in that Dutch Hymn: “Beveel gerust Uw wegen...”

Verse 13 tells how *Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of (instead of!!!) his son!*<sup>19</sup>

What do we then hear?

Well, we hear Abraham repeat the words he had earlier, in great faith, voiced to Isaac when Isaac had asked that heart-wrenching question!

Yes, Abraham now repeats those same words! In fact, by those very same words he now gives that mountain-place a name – the name, “The LORD will provide!” In Hebrew *Jehovah Jireh!*<sup>20</sup>

My brother & sister, just imagine what Isaac’s salvation, there on Mt Moriah, later on, meant to/for Ancient Israel every time they suffered hardship; yes, when they were battling hard against the Canaanites; when they faced animosity and were languishing in exile in Babylon!

Then they remembered: if Isaac had died that day, then we, the nation of Israel (God’s people who all stem from Isaac) would not have existed.

But God made Isaac live, so that we (nation of Israel) could live!

Well, is it now a wonder that every year, even up to this day, the Jews still remember and commemorate the tying-up of Isaac during their New-Year’s celebrations?<sup>21</sup>

You see, “The ram instead of *Isaac*” means, “The ram instead of *Israel!*”<sup>22</sup>

So, from Isaac’s *living*, the Jews took courage that, as God was faithful to His promises regarding Isaac, so will He be faithful to His promises regarding Israel!

My brother & sister, the Christian knows more, because he has seen the fulfilment of the Old Testament!

Yes, the Christian has seen...

- how not just that ram from the thicket died instead of Isaac;
- how not just the Passover lambs died instead of Israel’s firstborn sons;
- how not just all Old Testament sacrifices happened so that Israel could live before the sin-hating, holy, God...
- but how all these Old Testament sacrifices found their only fulfilment and *power* in the sacrificial death of God’s own beloved Son, Jesus Christ!

You see, just as *Abraham did not withhold*<sup>23</sup> his only son whom he loved, so too – just with so many more consequences – did God (as Rm 8:32 says) not withhold/spare His only Son whom He loved!

Indeed, on the same mountain range which Abraham so appropriately named, “The LORD will provide,” our *heavenly Father* did provide so that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life!

Indeed, Christ is, as John the Baptist said, the “*Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world*” (Jn 1:29).

My brother & sister, did *Abraham* in his testing have reason to believe that the LORD would provide?

Yes, he did, because God always keeps His promises.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> תָּחַת בְּנֹו

<sup>20</sup> Better still: “Yahweh Yir’eh” (יְהוָה יִרְאֶה)

<sup>21</sup> cf. e.g. <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/genesis-221-24-the-binding-of-isaac/>

Also, cf. Greidanus (ibid:200)

<sup>22</sup> cf. Greidanus (ibid:210)

<sup>23</sup> cf. v.12

Well, if *Abraham* had reason to believe that God would provide, then so too you and I!

Are you suffering trials – testing?

Certainly, I don't want to deny that you have it hard! However, based upon our text (& our Lord's fulfilment of it), I encourage you to keep on trusting Jehovah Jireh (Yahweh Yir'eh), the Lord who will provide!

How do you/I know He will provide also for us, His loved ones?

Firstly, because He who has a proven track-record of being faithful to His promises, has pledged: ***I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand*** (Jn 10:28).

Secondly: Because God has invested His precious Son in you, why will He now leave you?

Look, is that not why Phil 1:6 says, "(I am) ***confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.***"<sup>25</sup>

AMEN (2,727 words excluding footnotes)

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<sup>24</sup> Yes, promises which God, taking an oath by Himself, re-affirmed for Abraham in Gen 22:15-18 ***And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven <sup>16</sup> and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup> I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, <sup>18</sup> and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."***

<sup>25</sup> Also, remember all the John 6 verses mentioned before (Jn 6:39, 40, 44, 54).