

A Faith That Holds Nothing Back

Heb. 11:17-19

Series “More”

Jarrett Stephens

I’m a sports guy...always been a sports guy. Love football, basketball, baseball – these are the sports I pay most attention to. And I really enjoy watching them when it’s playoff time. Doesn’t matter the sport – you can include soccer in this – when it’s the World Cup – which by the way Houston is one of the host cities for next year’s World Cup. You can include golf in this – like when it was the Ryder Cup a couple of weeks ago. It’s playoff baseball now – there’s just something different when everything is on the line.

The teams are hyper-focused...the players are giving it their very best on every play...at every at bat...every minute of the game – in the playoffs the games are just better and more intense because the athletes are leaving it all out on the field...or the court...or the course...

They are holding nothing back, and as a result what they produce...what they sometimes show us is absolutely remarkable.

Holding nothing back. This is what I want to talk to you about today specifically from a spiritual standpoint. I’m calling the message: **A Faith That Holds Nothing Back**

We’re in this series called, *MORE*, based out of Hebrews 11, and the entire idea is that we would live by faith more and more and more so that we could experience God more and more and more. And I don’t know of a person mentioned in Hebrews 11 that shows us this MORE kind of life than Abraham.

We have looked at various aspects of his life over the last few weeks. We spoke of his faith as it related to picking up everything at the call of God and obeying him to go where God would show him – we called it, *The Faith Adventure*.

We talked about his wife, Sarah and described how both of them, but her in particular had a *Patient Faith* and we discussed the importance of waiting on God and trusting his promises and his timing in our life.

This week, we’re going to look at what is probably the most well-known story regarding Abraham and that is his obedience to take his son, Isaac up to Mount Moriah and at the command of God, offer his son – the son of promise as a sacrifice to God.

It’s an amazing story and it is highlighted (as it SHOULD be) in Hebrews 11 – the “Hall of Faith” – let’s read it:

Hebrews 11:17-19 – “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, ¹⁸ of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” ¹⁹ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.”

Illus. The Mountains Are Calling - I first became really familiar with this story of Abraham and Isaac around 15 years ago. I think I've shared this story before. I was headed to camp to preach, and as a camp preacher I had all my sermons ready to go! (tell story)

This story...what happened on this mountain just captured me! Now, as we have done every week, I want us to keep our hand in Hebrews 11, but I want us to make our way back to Genesis 22, but do me a favor...as you are headed that way, let's take a little pit stop before we get to Genesis and let's go to John 8.

I need you to see something Jesus says about Abraham BEFORE we go back and look at this Isaac story in depth.

To set some context for you, Jesus is in a HEATED debate with some of the religious leaders. If you are familiar with the Bible, you know that these guys – the uber religious of the day did not like Jesus:

- They didn't like that the crowds came to hear him teach instead of listening to them...
- They didn't like that he would heal people on the Sabbath – that he was breaking their man-made rules and traditions...
- They didn't like that he taught with authority and would often times put them in their place...
- They didn't like that he elevated the lowly and spent the majority of his time with “tax collectors and sinners” ...

Bottom line: These religious leaders were jealous of Jesus, and they were constantly trying to trip him up and undercut his ministry.

Here in John 8, Jesus made a statement saying in (v. 36) that if the Son sets you free (speaking of himself – he's the son God) then you will be free indeed.

The religious leaders hear this language concerning sonship and fatherhood, and they say in (v. 39), “Abraham is our father” – they took great pride in being of Jewish descent...and they were indeed sons of Abraham FROM a fleshly standpoint.

But Jesus...he takes this conversation, turns it and says, “If Abraham was really your father, you wouldn't be looking for a way to kill me! And because you are trying to kill me, let me bring you in on something...Abraham may be your daddy (loose Jarrett translation) from a fleshly standpoint, but Satan is your daddy from a spiritual standpoint!”

Now, that's pretty bold right there...and that raises their temperature a little bit and the religious leaders proceed to accuse Jesus of having a demon. Let's pick up in (v. 51).

John 8:51-59 – “Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.” ⁵² The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, ‘If anyone keeps my word, he will never

taste death.’ ⁵³ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?” ⁵⁴ Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God.’ ⁵⁵ But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. ⁵⁶ Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” ⁵⁷ So the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” ⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” (Don’t ever listen to folks say that Jesus never claimed to be God – this is him taking on the eternal name of God that was revealed to Moses at the burning bush. Jesus in this sentence is saying, “I am God” – and we know this is how the religious leaders interpreted it because it says in...) ⁵⁹ So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.”

In their minds, Jesus had just committed blasphemy. He put himself on par as God, and stoning was the punishment the law dictated for those that committed blasphemy.

Here’s what I want you to see though, and what I want us to camp out on before we make our way to Genesis 22. Look again at what Jesus told this group of religious leaders in (v. 56).

John 8:56 – “Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.”

What did Jesus mean by this? Let’s go back to Genesis 22 and see if we don’t discover the answer.

Now, very briefly for those who may not have been here recently and not followed us in this story OR perhaps you are new to church and hearing about this Abraham guy for the first time...let me give some brief context.

We’ve noted that from Hebrews 11 that more time is given to Abraham than anyone else mentioned in the chapter. Out of the forty verses in the chapter, MOST people get one verse about them...even a brief sentence. Abraham has twelve or so verses dedicated to him.

We’ve said that he is the GOAT when it comes to living by faith! Paul refers to him in (Rom. 4:11) as the “father of all who believe”.

Abraham was a wealthy pagan man from a city called Ur. And God calls to him one day and says, “Abraham, I’m going to bless you and make you into a nation...but here’s the deal, I need you to leave the Ur (modern day Babylon) and make your way to a land that I’m going to show you and give to you – we call this the Promise Land.

And by faith, Abraham packs his things and at the promise of God, he begins this long journey – some think as long as 1000-1500 miles. It’s crazy when you start thinking about the distance and the grind this would have been when his family, possessions and all those that worked for him in tow.

He goes, and God brings him safely into the land and says, “this is it! I’m going to give this land to your offspring”! The only problem was Abraham was 75 – his wife Sarah was 65 and they didn’t have any offspring!

But God...he continues to relay this promise to Abraham - that he will be the father of a new nation and you will be the father of a multitude of nations, and this will happen by God blessing him through a son that he will give him – and he shows Abraham this picturesque vision – you can read all about this in (Gen. 12-17).

He says, “your offspring will be like the sand of the seashore – the dust of the earth...like the stars in the heaven – you’re not going to be able to count them all...”

And Abraham is like, “Great, but God, I’m 99 years old. Sarah is 10 years younger - I know you can do anything and you’re going to have to cause I don’t know how all this – like (literally), I don’t know how all this is going to work!”

God though...as he always does, comes through on his Word. And a year later, Sarah gives birth to the son of promise, and they name him Isaac.

Now, just put yourself in Abraham and Sarah’s sandals. Do you think they helicoptered parented Isaac? Do you think they spoiled Isaac a little bit? This is the boy they had been promised for 25 years.

One of the things about waiting on God, is that when he comes through it makes whatever you were waiting on ALL THE MORE SPECIAL. Abraham and Sarah LOVED Isaac!

Illus. Girls were little – whisper in their ear, “You’re going to change the world.”

I’ve got to believe they had whispered this a time or two into Isaac’s ear...this was their child of promise! Every time they looked at him that’s probably what they thought – God keeps his promises!

Well, fast forward ten plus years later...most scholars date this about 15 years later. Abraham would have been 115 years old and Isaac 15...and we pick up in:

Gen. 22:1 – “After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”

This word “test” here it means to “try or to prove...or to examine”. Our Hebrews 11 passage started out this same way.

Heb. 11:17a – “By faith Abraham, when he was tested...”

Both the Hebrew and Greek words carry the same idea. The word is used to describe the testing of metals that determine their purity. What God is doing in this “test” is going to refine and reveal the quality of Abraham’s faith.

Now, just a few thoughts here regarding the testing of God from Abraham’s life.

First, notice the test came when Abraham was 115 years old. You know what that means? God is never done testing you! Our life is a series of tests that God either puts us through or at a minimum allows so that what we truly love, who we truly follow, the sincerity of our faith will be revealed.

Recall the words of Peter in **1 Peter 1:6-7 – “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷so that the tested genuineness of your**

faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Listen...our FAITH – what this series is all about is what is MOST precious to God – he desires our faith...that we trust him...that we believe his promises...that we walk with him intimately, and he will test us throughout our life in big ways and in small ways to ensure that we do.

So, just buckle up...don't get mad at God when a test comes, it's a part of life. It's not meant to harm us, it's meant to develop us...to grow us...to strengthen us, and to make us MORE like Jesus – This is what were after:

- NOT our comfort...
- NOT our convenience...

What were after is conformation to Christ and tests develop and reveal this better than anything else that comes our way.

Illus. Physical – Look what's true physically is true spiritually. I went and did my annual physical a couple of weeks ago...and they hook me up and make me walk on this treadmill. They are testing me...and it's not fun, but that test reveals whether my heart is functioning properly...it's the same spiritually.

Listen, God is going to test us, and the test is going to reveal whether or not we are doing well spiritually or not!

So, just understand right here...doesn't matter how old you get, tests are a part of life. None of us have arrived and we will be tested until Jesus arrives or we arrive in his presence via our exit from this earth, so let's have a right mindset toward tests.

The second thought I have when I read about Abraham's test is that it is personal.

Gen. 22:2 – “He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”

Abraham MUST of thought he had a bad connection on that one? What? Surely, not. Notice in this test that God asked Abraham to put on the alter what was MOST precious to him.

God didn't ask for Abraham's money – he was wealthy – I'm sure he would have given God whatever amount he asked for! We know from Abraham's life whenever he journeyed somewhere he would pitch his tent (he was pilgrim, this world was not his home) and he would build an altar – make a sacrifice.

Abraham has made so many sacrifices to God in his life, but this time it wasn't a sheep from his fold God was asking for. Abraham would have been more than happy and more than willing to bring God one of his sheep, but God in testing Abraham asks him for something more costly...more precious...

God was asking for his son AND notice the emphasis there in (v. 2) your ONLY son...the son of whom you love.

The construction of the language here intensifies with each phrase. God is asking something very direct and very personal here: “Take your son – your only son – the son whom you love...go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering...”

Sometimes, the test God gives may be little – it may be something like?

- Will you be truthful in a given situation?
- Will you say something about the mistake you catch on the receipt that will end up costing you more?
- Will you keep your word when you give it?

And THEN sometimes, like Abraham the test God puts you through will be personal and painful – what we would consider as “BIG”!

Now, he’ll never ask you to sacrifice your children, but he may ask you to leave your job or the place you live or call you to go somewhere or do something that is absolutely terrifying to you!

Illus. Two big tests in my life – Dallas and Houston – each about 20 years apart! I’m terrified about what’s coming at age 65!

Look, at the core of this request, God is asking Abraham, “Abraham, will you trust me? No matter what the call...no matter what the cost...will you trust me?”

It would probably be wise to stop right here and just ask ourselves some internal questions as well?

- Are you trusting God right now in your present circumstances of life?
- Has he asked of you something that seems a bit overwhelming...seems a bit too difficult...seems like more than you can handle?
- Is he calling you to leave something familiar...to go somewhere unknown...to get out of your comfort zone in some way for His sake? Are you trusting God?

Tests have a way of showing us reality...we may SAY we’re living by faith, but a test reveals if we really ARE living by faith!

Illus. Campaign – NEXT – Are we living by faith? God, we believe you’re calling us out and putting some things on our heart, will we follow? It’s going to be a chance for us to trust the Lord as a church! It’ll be a test of our faith...it’s one of the main reasons we’re doing this series – to prepare for our faith to be stretched!

Illus. College Fall Break – pop quizzes, tests – I hated them, but they revealed whether or not I was paying attention! Same is true spiritually! God gives pop quizzes and he gives major exams and the mature believer is ready and prepared for both!

So, tests come throughout our life...we never age out! And often times those tests will be personal. Behind each test, God is wanting to grow our faith, he’s asking, “Will you trust me?”

Did Abraham trust God? Let’s keep reading:

Gen. 22:3-4 – “So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. ⁴On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar.”

BTW - you're going to see so many pictures of Jesus and the gospel in this passage – you truly can't miss them.

- Moriah is on the same mountain that Solomon would build the Temple on...the same area as what we refer to as Mount Calvary where Jesus was crucified.
- Notice the “only son” language. We'll see here in just a moment that Isaac carries the wood to the place of sacrifice just as Jesus carried the cross to the place of sacrifice.

Gen. 22:5-10 – “Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.” ⁶And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. ⁷And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” ⁸Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together. ⁹When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.”

We're calling the message, “A Faith That Holds Nothing Back” – Abraham had been following God for a long time. And as he walked with God, day by day, he learned that God could be trusted.

Listen...this is the power of intimacy...it's the power of a daily walk with Jesus.

As you grow in your relationship with the Lord, you just begin to discover that God can be trusted. He can and WILL come through on his word. He WILL bless obedience and faith. I don't know how it will work out or when it will work out, but he CAN be trusted.

As the old hymn says, he had proved him o'er and o'er!
Abraham knew God could be trusted...and so he held nothing back from God...not even that which was MOST precious!

The writer of Hebrews tells us that he “considered” ...some scripture translates the word “reasoned”. It's an accounting term...it means to calculate...to think through thoroughly.

Listen to it: **Heb. 11:17-19 – “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, ¹⁸of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” ¹⁹He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.”**

Now, I have NO WAY of knowing if this is true or not...but here is my thought but here is what I think. It was a three-day journey to Mount Moriah. Abraham knew what God had asked him to do, and I think those three days up Mount Moriah there was some MAJOR thinking and praying going on. Had to be excruciating in many ways the thoughts and internal dialogue and prayer that was going on between Abraham and God.

And I think – again, just my opinion that Abraham was “considering” ...he was “reasoning” every minute...every step up that mountain...and I think in the end, he came to the conclusion, “God made a promise...he has always kept his promise...and he’s not going to stop now.”

“God, you said, through Isaac the blessing WILL come, and now, you’re calling me to slay him on an altar. I trust you, and if he’s dead, I believe you can bring him back if it means keeping your word. And because you can bring him back, I’ll hold nothing back.”

Paul gives us some more insight into what Abraham was thinking and praying and feeling in the book of Romans. Listen to:

Rom. 4:18-21 – “In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.” ¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰ No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.”

And because of this unwavering, God can and will do what he has promised, no holding back faith, Abraham raises the knife, and look at:

Gen. 22:11-14 – “But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” ¹² He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” ¹³ And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.”

See, the gospel? A substitute – instead of Isaac, a ram. God came through.

Gen. 22:14-18 – “So Abraham called the name of that place, “The Lord will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.” (Jehovah Jireh) ¹⁵ And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven ¹⁶ and said, “By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, (Abraham, you held nothing back, therefore I will not hold back the blessing!) ¹⁷ 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, ¹⁸ and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”

Jesus said, “Abraham saw my day and he was glad...” No way of knowing this, but you can’t tell me that what happened on Moriah was not in the purview of Jesus when he spoke those words to the religious leaders that day.

Abraham saw “by faith” a day coming...he might not have been able to articulate it or even know the fullness of what it meant, but he knew AND believed the promise of God – that the nations of the world would be blessed THROUGH his son.

And he saw God come through! And somehow, somehow he saw the day of Christ – the day when the ultimate fulfillment of the promise made to him would live, and perhaps it was in seeing the substitute (btw, he saw a ram, could it have been he knew this must have meant there was a sacrificial lamb coming – lambs was what were typically sacrificed!) Did Abraham see the future substitute...the Christ – and could THIS be why he rejoiced and was glad? Maybe so!

Illus. Lanier Chapel - I spoke of this story being GOSPEL-FILLED. I spend a lot of my time at the Lanier Library studying and one of my favorite things to do is to go in the Chapel there and just worship and pray. I love showing it off to friends...and as Mark will tell you, he designed the chapel after Turkish Byzantine chapel from the 500's.

Most people back in the day were illiterate. And so, artists and builders would share the gospel through art and construction.

Well, in the Chapel there are different episodes of scripture painted on the wall, and I asked Mark to send me the Gen. 22 picture he designed and had painted. I want to show it to you as we bring this message to a close.

Notice the detail...and notice the Bethlehem Star in the top right of the picture...Abraham saw my day and was glad!

Abraham held nothing back, and God held nothing back from him. It needs to be noted that God's only son, Jesus – there was no ram in the thicket...there was no substitute for Jesus because he was our substitute.

You know what's amazing? We don't just see Christ's day coming - we've SEEN it fulfilled! We stand on the other side of the cross. If Abraham could trust God with this much faith, having seen through the mirror dimly, how much more can we trust knowing what we know, seeing as clearly as we see?

What is it that God may be asking you to put on the altar today? Whatever it is - hold nothing back. Because God held nothing back from you...not even his own son.

If we want a living faith...MORE of Christ, than let's hold nothing back.

Will you pray with me?

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.