Lent 1B 2021 Jesus passed every test and resisted every temptation willingly

Genesis 22: 1-18 James 1: 12 – 18 Mark 1: 9 – 15

Abraham and Sarah waited a long time for their son. Their weathered bodies were dried up as an old tree. When God gave them a son, not only was their joy over the top, their faith in all of God’s promises was confirmed and blossomed.

Then God commanded the unspeakable. Abraham was to sacrifice his son. The shock of it grates against our moral sense of etiquette and goodness. Why would God ask such a horrible thing when he decried the immoral child sacrifices of the unbelieving nations? Can God be loving or kind or even right in asking for this sacrifice?

Let’s rule out the obvious wrong answers that God needed to know what was in Abraham’s heart as if every heart is not open to him already. This would exclude him from being omniscient and everlasting.

If God wanted Abraham to go through with the bloody event to its gruesome end, why would he send an angel to stop the knife from slitting Isaac’s throat? Only a sadistic fickle god would play with people like toys. The Greek gods in mythology played with people for fun like we play video games.

**Why does God test us if He loves us?**

The reading in James (1:12-18) teaches us the important distinction between testing and tempting. “*Let no one say when he is tempted, ”I am being tempted by God”, for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.”* Then it goes on to say that our sinful desire entices us to sin and when sin is fully grown, brings forth death.

But God does not delight in the death of anyone. Instead, God tests us so that when we have stood the test, we can look forward to receive the crown of life. God’s testing is to strengthen our trust in his grace and not in ourselves so that we do not lose eternal life but rejoice in Christ our Lord, who gives us eternal life.

You can see the difference between tempting and testing by looking at their fruit or goals. Tempting wants to produce sin leading to death. Testing wants a reliance on God to receive the crown of eternal life.

When God tested Abraham, the goal was to confirm Abraham’s faith. Would he still trust in God while carrying out the sacrifice of his son? But God demands more than faith. He wants us to fear Him above all.

Abraham feared God more than losing his one and only son. Can we say the same? When we ask why God puts us through the ringer if he loves us, then we are fearing that God is not living up to our standards, our sense of moral correctness and what we would do if we were God.

**Why would we put God to the test?**

Naturally, we love ourselves more than God. We are inclined to put ourselves ahead of everyone else. We want others to sacrifice for us or to be sacrificed for us so that we can keep on keeping on. This is a love of sensual pleasure and wants nothing to do with self-sacrifice but self-survival. It leads to death and eternal separation from God who is life and love.

God’s love is different than ours. God’s love is not about sentimental passions of well-being and pleasure. God’s love is an act of his will to save us. God’s love comes to us by way of the cross. The cross is the altar where his one and only son was sacrificed. For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only son, in the way of the cross, so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Fear, love and trust in God above all things. That’s the explanation for the first commandment to have no other gods, including our own sense of what is right, fair and loving. Every time we put God to the test, we fall to the enticement of proclaiming ourselves as gods. Our sin has grown up and produces death. There is no one else to blame. We have failed God’s test!

**Jesus passed every test**

We are aware of Jesus being tempted by the devil in the wilderness for forty days. Every year Lent begins with a reminder of our Lord’s faithfulness against the devil’s lies. Jesus never broke with his father and firmly trusted him, feared him and loved him. Sin never conceived death in him because Jesus resisted every temptation.

The gospel reading in Mark does not go into great detail of the nature of our Lord’s temptations but adds this after his baptism: *the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness*. The temptation of Jesus was the Holy Spirit’s doing. Yet we know that God cannot tempt but only test. So while the devil was tempting Jesus, his father was testing him.

His father knew from eternity what was in his son’s heart: love. The testing of Jesus is seen in his willingness to face Satan and the cross as his father wanted. Jesus willingly was tested, Jesus willingly died.

**Willingly**

We see a picture of this in Isaac’s willingness to be sacrificed by his father. Isaac was a mature strong adult by the time God commanded him to be sacrificed. What could old Abraham do if Isaac resisted to be bound and killed on that altar? But as Isaac willingly carried the wood and allowed himself to be placed on the altar, Jesus willingly carried his cross and died there.

His love for us is seen in his willingness to be driven to face Satan and to carry his cross for us. This is our joy! See how much you are loved by him!

The devil tempted him to break with his father. At the same time, God was testing his son as Abraham was tested. Jesus had to go through it. He had to pass this test when Adam failed by listening to the devil. Where Adam failed, Jesus did not waver but perfectly feared, loved and trusted his father.

See how the lamb of God was perfect! Jesus had no stain or blemish. He passed every test and fulfilled God’s law in perfect love.

So when Abraham was tested by God, it was pointing to Jesus being tested in the wilderness. It was pointing to the one sacrifice of God’s one and only Son, to be sacrificed for the sin of the world. For on Good Friday, there was no angel sent from heaven to stop the killing. God provided the Lamb. The Lamb of God was struck down so that we can stand upright, holy and cleansed and forgiven.

Jesus did face the devil in the wilderness for us, so that we could return to God’s eternal paradise. This is God’s good and perfect gift from above. It came to us a small package in the wood of Bethlehem’s manger which led to the wood of the cross. See how God always provides! And how Jesus willingly obeyed his father to save us!