In our last few lectures we’ve been looking at Soren Kierkegaard and in particular I’ve been looking with you at his concept of the different stages of life or lifestyle. Last lecture in particular we were looking at this idea through his work *Fear and Trembling*, and I want to pick up with that again in this lecture and complete my discussion of *Fear and Trembling*, but before we do that, let’s bow for a moment of prayer.

*Father, we thank You again for the privilege of study. We pray that as we study this work by Soren Kierkegaard that You would help us to come to a better understanding of what biblically-based saving faith involves. Help us now then as we study, for it’s in Christ’s name we pray it. Amen.*

Well, last time we were looking at Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*, and I had just begun my description of this work. I left it right in the midst of the section that is entitled “Panegyric Upon Abraham,” and I was noting with you that in this section we have several passages that help us to understand a little bit better what Kierkegaard means by faith. We’re going to see more of that in this section as well as in the book as a whole. Let me remind you again as I cite from this work that I am using the third printing of the Princeton edition of Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*, and that particular edition came out in 1970.

Well let me go back again to the “Panegyric Upon Abraham.” On pages 34 and 35 in the Princeton edition we have a comment that gives us a further idea of what faith is from Kierkegaard’s perspective. Kierkegaard is talking about Abraham and his faith, and he says, “Yet Abraham believed and believed for this life,” and Kierkegaard’s thought is that Abraham not only believed that things would work out eternally, but Abraham actually believed that he would see God’s blessing in this life, that Isaac would be the son of promise. So that’s what he means when he says, “Yet Abraham believed and believed for this life.”
Yeah, if his faith had been only for a future life, he surely would have cast everything away in order to hasten out of this world to which he did not belong. But Abraham’s faith was not of this sort, if there be such a faith, for really this is not faith but the furthest possibility of faith which has a presentiment of its object at the extremist limit of the horizon yet is separated from it by a yawning abyss within which to spare carries on its gain.

But Abraham believed precisely for this life, that he was to grow old in the land, honored by the people, blessed in his generation, remembered forever in Isaac his dearest thing in life whom he embraced with a love for which it would be a poor expression to say that he loyally fulfilled the Father's duty of loving the son as indeed is evinced in the words of the summons, “The son whom thou lovest.” Well that gives you somewhat of an idea of Kierkegaard's notion of faith, but we’re going to see his idea even laid out more fully as we proceed to the next sections.

In fact, I want to move now to the next section of the book. It’s entitled “Problemata: Preliminary Expectoration.” Now this particular section begins with comments on what it is that made Abraham great and according to Kierkegaard it’s not just that Abraham gave God his best. What made Abraham so great is that in doing this, in giving God his best, there was the element of dread. Now we’re going to come back to this shortly, but it’s a very, very key item we’ll see in regard to Kierkegaard’s concept of faith, that is, that genuine faith involves a sense of dread.

On page 41 of the Princeton Edition, we have here a section in which Kierkegaard explains the difference between living at the ethical and the religious level, and he does it from the perspective of what Abraham was doing. Let me just read to you a couple of sentences from that passage, and you’ll see the point. Kierkegaard says, “The ethical expression for what Abraham did is that he would murder Isaac. The religious expression is that he would sacrifice Isaac. But precisely in this contradiction consists the dread which can well make a man sleepless and yet Abraham is not what he is without this dread.” Kierkegaard is saying here that viewed from the universal moral law—from that perspective what Abraham was doing was murder but from the standpoint of the religious it was faith, but it was a faith that was such a faith that it involved dread. There was dread in part because Abraham knew that what he was doing broke the universal law, but there was also dread for another reason that we’re going to see in just a few moments.
Well now on pages 45 through 46 there’s another key passage, and the reason that I say that this is such an important passage is that we have in these pages a comparison between what Kierkegaard calls the tragic hero on the one hand and the knight of faith on the other hand. The tragic hero is the person that Kierkegaard describes as the knight of resignation. Now he is the person, that is, this knight of resignation who is the tragic hero. He’s the person who sees what his duty is and he’s resigned to it and he’s willing to give up whatever he has to do. On the other hand the knight of faith makes the first movement to resignation. He’s resigned to give up the thing that’s the most dear to him, but then he becomes the knight of faith by making a second movement to faith in which he believes that in spite of it all; in spite of everything that’s going to happen, in spite of the loss that he will undergo, he still is going to get back that which he has resigned himself to lose.

Though it is absurd to believe this way, he trusts God anyway, and it’s this kind of faith which is the faith that Kierkegaard presents. That is, it’s a faith that involves believing God anyway for that which is impossible to get and it’s something that you’ve already, as a matter of fact, resigned yourself not to have or to understand anyway.

On pages 45 through 46, let me just read to you this section, and you’ll see this difference between the knight of resignation on the one hand who is the tragic hero and on the other hand the knight of faith. Kierkegaard says, “But really is everyone in my generation capable of making the movements of faith I wonder? Unless I am very much mistaken, this generation is rather inclined to be proud of making what they do not even believe I am capable of making, namely incomplete movements. It is repugnant to me to do as so often is done, namely, to speak inhumanly about a great deed as though some thousands of years were an immense distance; I would rather speak humanly about it as though it had occurred yesterday, letting only the greatness be the distance, which either exults or condemns.”

Then he says, “I would not have been cowardly enough to stay at home, neither would I have laid down or sauntered along the way nor have forgotten the knife so that there might be a little delay. I am pretty well convinced that I would have been there on the stroke of the clock and would have had everything in order. Perhaps, I would have arrived too early in order to get through with it sooner.” He’s describing here how he would have handled
the situation on Mount Moriah. Then he says, “But I also know what else I would have done. The very instant I’m out of the horse I would have said to myself, ‘Now all is lost. God requires Isaac. I sacrifice him and with him my joy, yet God is love and continues to be that, for me for in the temporal world God and I cannot talk together. We have no language in common.’”

Then he moves on and he talks further about the tragic hero and he says, “And yet this is the greatest falsehood. For my prodigious resignation was the surrogate for faith, nor could I do more than make the infinite movement in order to find myself and again repose in myself. In that case I would not have loved Isaac as Abraham loved.” He says further in this paragraph,“What Abraham found easiest, I would have found hard, namely to be joyful again with Isaac for he who with all the infinity of his soul by his own power and on his own responsibility has performed the infinite movement of resignation and cannot do more only retains Isaac with pain, but what did Abraham do? He arrived neither too soon nor too late, he mounted the ass, he rode slowly along the way. All that time he believed. He believed that God would not require Isaac of him whereas he was willing nevertheless to sacrifice him if it was required. He believed by virtue of the absurd for there could be no question of human calculation, and it was indeed the absurd that God who required it of him should the next instant recall the requirement.”

You see here in this passage then, I think, the distinction between the tragic hero, the knight of resignation, as opposed to the knight of faith. Kierkegaard says, “If it had been I, I would have gone ahead and done it, but I would have said, ‘It’s all lost. I’ll never get it back.’” That’s the knight of resignation. But Abraham says all of that but then beyond that he says, “I’m going to get it back anyway. God is not going to let me go through with this or if He lets me go through with this, He’s going to somehow or other bring Isaac back to me.” That’s the movement from resignation to faith, believing in the absurd.

On page 57 in this edition, Kierkegaard gives us a crucial comparison of resignation on the one hand as opposed to faith on the other, and he talks about the relationship of the two of those to one another. It also shows to some extent the role of the understanding in this movement to resignation first and then ultimately to faith. Let me, if I can, read this section to you, and you’ll see something of what Kierkegaard is saying here.
He says, “The infinite resignation is the last stage prior to faith so that one who has not made this movement has not faith; for only in the infinite resignation do I become clear to myself with respect to my eternal validity and only then can there be any question of grasping existence by virtue of faith.” This makes it very, very clear that you cannot immediately jump to faith; you must go through resignation ultimately to faith. Well, Kierkegaard then says,

Now we will let the knight of faith appear in the role just described. He makes exactly the same movements as the other knight, infinitely renounces claim to the love which is the content of his life, he is reconciled in pain, but then occurs the prodigy. He makes still another movement more wonderful than all for he says, “I believe nevertheless that I shall get her, in virtue, that is, of the absurd, in virtue of the fact that with God all things are possible.” The absurd is not one of the factors which can be discriminated within the proper compass of the understanding. It is not identical with the improbable, the unexpected, the unforeseen. At the moment when the knight made the active resignation, he was convinced humanly speaking of the impossibility. This was the result reached by the understanding, and he had sufficient energy to think it.

On the other hand in an infinite sense it was possible, namely, by renouncing it, but this sort of possessing is at the same time a relinquishing, and yet there is no absurdity in this for the understanding, for the understanding continued to be in the right in affirming that in the world of the finite where it holds sway, this was and remained an impossibility. This is quite as clear to the knight of faith, so the only thing that can save him is the absurd, and this he grasps by faith.

According to this passage, reason shows the understanding that it must be resigned to lose that which it wants to hold on to. It shows the understanding that to hope to get it back is to hope in the absurd, hence getting back what one has resigned oneself to lose is impossible and is absurd and reason is able to show us that that is so, but then Kierkegaard says, “Just at that point reason and the understanding have made room for faith; for the understanding of the impossibility and the absurdity of the situation allows the
individual to exercise faith anyway.”

Now this faith is not based on reason but reason shows the understanding the point from which the leap of faith must be made. So Kierkegaard is saying that there is a role for reason in exercising faith, but it is to get the person to the point where he realizes that what he will exercise faith for is utterly absurd for him to think he can ever get it.

Well then on page 58, we have a section in which we have very nicely laid out Kierkegaard’s idea of faith. Let me just read that to you. It’s really a very brief section, but you have it stated here nicely. He says, “If without recognizing the impossibility with all the passion of his soul and with all his heart, he should wish to imagine that he has faith, he deceives himself, and his testimony has no bearing, since he has not even reached the infinite resignation.” And then here comes the definition. “Faith therefore is not an aesthetic emotion, but something far higher precisely because it has resignation as its presupposition; it is not an immediate instinct of the heart but is the paradox of life and existence.”

At the bottom of this same page he indicates that faith very definitely involves as well the notion of dread and the emotion of dread. He says, “Whenever I essay to make this movement (that is whenever I try to make this movement to faith), I turn giddy, the very instant I am admiring it absolutely a prodigious dread grips my soul—for what is it to tempt God? And yet this movement is the movement of faith and remains such, even though philosophy, in order to confuse the concepts would make us believe that it has faith, and even though theology would sell out faith at a bargain price.”

Faith is something Kierkegaard is saying that involves passion; you cannot be disinterestedly involved in the matter about which you have faith. It also involves a belief in that which is absurd, and it involves a certain amount of dread. Kierkegaard then says that, “Not only does faith involve dread because we may have to break the moral universal rule in order to exercise faith, but faith is also dreadful because what you and I are believing in is the something that’s absurd is going to happen anyway.”

But of course if it’s absurd, logic and reason say that it can’t happen and as a result if you and I believe it anyway there has to be fear that maybe we are wrong in believing that this thing is
going to happen. After all, just because somebody believes God for the absurd doesn’t mean that everything absurd that we might believe in is what God wants us to believe Him for. And even those things which He does want us to trust Him for are still in a certain sense beyond reason. They are absurd in that sense, and it’s in that respect that one’s timidity, one’s fear to pursue these things enters in.

Since it really doesn’t make sense, we can always ask ourselves, “Now have I properly discerned where I must place my faith? And we may have some doubts about that, and it all becomes very, very dreadful, very fearful. It especially becomes dreadful in a case like Abraham’s when you are placing your faith in that which is absurd and beyond that you’re ready to do something which has very, very significant consequences, namely Abraham was ready to go out and sacrifice Isaac. For Abraham, he had to be willing to go through with this sacrifice, while all the time believing the absurd thing that somehow or other he would get Isaac back, but Abraham must have asked himself, What if I’m wrong? What if God really hasn’t told me that I’m supposed to do this? What if God really hasn’t given me assurance that I’ll get Isaac back?

Well, you can see that there must have been some doubts in Abraham’s mind as he did this. The consequence of what he was doing was incredibly significant, and if he was wrong in his judgment of the situation, the consequences would be absolutely devastating. Now Kierkegaard is saying that genuine faith, believing in the absurd, must for us have this dread because sometimes we’re going to have to go ahead and disobey a universal rule, but sometimes as well, in fact all the time I think we would have to say, when we are ready to believe in that which is absurd, it makes so little sense that there has to be certain dread that maybe we’ve misunderstood what God actually wants us to do.

Well, this completes my discussion of this section of the work. Now I want to move to really the heart of Fear and Trembling. The heart of the book is involved in answering three basic questions that Kierkegaard poses, and he answers them from the standpoint of the story of Abraham offering up Isaac, and he puts these questions in terms of three problems.

Problem number one he poses as follows: “Is there such a thing as a teleological suspension of the ethical?” Now the meaning of teleological in that question is “purposeful” so Kierkegaard is asking, “Is there such a thing as a purposeful suspension of the
ethical?” What that means very simply is Kierkegaard is asking, “Is there ever an occasion where the ethical rule, the universal norm can ever be suspended in order for a person to do something which accomplishes a purpose that God wants him to accomplish?”

Now Kierkegaard answers this question, but in his discussion he says a whole lot more. His answer is that there is a purposeful suspension of the ethical law. This is allowable when the ethical rule is suspended, he says, in favor of one’s religious relationship with God, that is, the suspension of the ethical rule is allowable in order for the individual to exercise faith.

Now on page 65, we see Kierkegaard’s implicit answer to this question, but he also gives a fuller explanation of his idea of faith and exactly how it’s supposed to work. This is in his section where he is discussing this first problem of whether there can be a purposeful suspension of the ethical. He says here, “For faith is this paradox that the particular is higher than the universal.” The universal would be the universal rule that says, ‘Thou shalt not kill.’ The particular in this case is the individual Abraham in his personal relationship to God, so that’s what he’s talking about.

“For faith,” he says then, “is this paradox that the particular is higher than the universal, yet in such a way, be it observed that the movement repeats itself and that consequently the individual after having been in the universal, now as the particular isolates himself as higher than the universal.” So what Kierkegaard is saying is that first of all you have to recognize that you are under the universal norm but then when God asks you to do something that goes directly against the universal norm, even though it sounds absolutely absurd, if you’re going to exercise faith you’re required to do it, and in doing it, you assert that the individual is higher than the universal, that you as a person in your relationship to God are higher than the universal rule.

On page 66 toward the bottom, we have a further elaboration of Kierkegaard’s point about the nature of faith. He says, “Faith is precisely the paradox that the individual as the particular is higher than the universal, is justified over against it, is not subordinate but superior, yet in such a way, be it observed that it is the particular individual who, after he has been subordinated as the particular to the universal, now through the universal becomes the individual who as the particular is superior to the universal, for the fact that the individual as the particular stands in an absolute relation to the absolute.” God Himself, of course
being the absolute.

Well, as you can see this sounds much like his point on page 65, on the preceding page, but it says again that you put yourself under the general rule but then in a situation like this you go above that and beyond it to obey God.

On page 70 again in the same section we have a passage where Kierkegaard talks about the relationship of Abraham to the ethical, and he says this, he says, “Why then did Abraham do it? For God’s sake and (in complete identity with this) for his own sake. He did it for God’s sake because God required this proof of his faith; for his own sake he did it in order that he might furnish the proof.” The unity of these two points of view is perfectly expressed by the word which has always been used to characterize the situation. It is a trial, a temptation. A temptation—but what does that mean? What ordinarily tempts a man is that which would keep him from doing his duty, but in this case the temptation is itself the ethical which would keep him from doing God’s will, but what then is duty? Duty is precisely the expression for God’s will.”

You see what’s happening here? Normally Kierkegaard says, “The ethical is what we’re supposed to do and what we’re tempted to do is to disobey the ethical, but in this case where Abraham is directly asked to disobey the ethical, the ethical rule that says, ‘Thou shalt not kill.’” That’s a rule that societies are based on. Kierkegaard finds that in the Abraham story that rule served as a temptation for Abraham to disobey what God was telling him to do.

You see this is the difference between being someone who lives at the ethical level and someone who lives at the religious level. There’s a certain dread, there’s a certain fear and trembling. When you decide that you’re going to put yourself in relation to God higher than your relationship to the ethical law and in all of this if there’s an ethical rule that covers the situation that you’re involved in, that rule says, “Don’t do it. Don’t step out on your own. Follow the true and tried rule.” But in this case, Kierkegaard says, “You’ve got to follow your relationship to God.”

Well, on pages 72 and following in the same section Kierkegaard shows how one is to know that he’s justified in doing what he does. And he answers very clearly that “one does not know it by means of the results.” You can’t tell whether the thing you’re doing when you step out in faith, you can’t tell whether it’s the right thing to
do just by looking at the way things turned out. That would be a kind of pragmatism and that's not the answer to it. I think this is a very important point. A lot of times we have the feeling that if we step out on faith and the results seem to be positive then that means that God really wanted us to step out on faith.

Well Kierkegaard says, “You can’t tell whether you did the right thing by looking at the results. Instead you have to know that you’re justified in doing what you’re doing in a different way. You know it and you become a hero by exercising faith at the outset, not at the end.” You see sometimes people say, “Well I’ll go down a certain path and if things begin to look pretty good—the results look pretty good—then I will trust God for the rest of it.” Kierkegaard says, “No, the true hero, the true knight of faith is someone who exercises that faith at the very outset and trusts God in spite of the absurdity.” He doesn’t wait to see that things are going to turn out okay. He just completely throws himself upon God.

Well that’s the first problem that Kierkegaard deals with. Problem two he states this way, “Is there such a thing as an absolute duty toward God?” And Kierkegaard answers this question affirmatively, but he says that the absolute duty that we have toward God is the religious duty, it’s not the ethical duty. As he’s already shown in this work, the ethical can be suspended for a specific purpose. As a result of that you can’t say that the ethical rule is absolute. By absolute he means that it’s always binding. Instead what’s absolute is one’s relationship to God and his duty to always obey God no matter what God says.

On page 80 Kierkegaard makes this point, and I think he makes it rather clearly. He says, “The paradox of faith is this: that the individual is higher than the universal, that the individual (to recall a dogmatic distinction now rather seldom heard) determines his relation to the universal by his relation to the absolute, not his relation to the absolute by his relation to the universal.”

Let me just explain what that means. Kierkegaard is saying that God is the absolute, and you don’t determine your relation to God by figuring out what the general universal rules, ethical rules, are. Instead you determine how you should respond to the rules of ethics by first of all seeing what God says to you in His relationship to you. What’s absolute is God and your relationship to God. What is somewhat relative, though not entirely, is your relationship to the ethical law.
Kierkegaard then goes on to say, “The paradox can also be expressed by saying that there is an absolute duty toward God; for in this relationship of duty the individual as an individual stands related absolutely to the absolute.” Very, very important point. Kierkegaard, I think, can be misunderstood on this point. Someone might read this as saying, “Ethical rules are unimportant. You can ignore them.” He’s not saying that at all. After all, what God may ask you to do in His relationship to you is simply to follow the ethical law. But what Kierkegaard is emphasizing is that if you follow the ethical law in that circumstance, you have to do it because God commands you to do it not because this is the ethical law. But what you can see here is that Kierkegaard is not throwing out ethics and he’s not saying that we can just poo-poo the moral law, he is saying that it’s important, but there’s something that’s even more important than that, namely our relationship to God.

Well then problem three. Kierkegaard poses the third problem as follows: He asks, “Was Abraham ethically defensible in keeping silent about his purpose before Sara, before Eleazar, before Isaac?” Kierkegaard’s answer here, I think, is very interesting. He says, “From an ethical standpoint, Abraham was not defensible for keeping silent. He should’ve explained what was going on. This surely had to seem extremely mysterious to Eleazar and to Isaac, and from that standpoint he should have told them what was going on so that they would realize that he wasn’t some sort of maniac out to break the ethical law.

But of course if he had done that, if he had verbalized what was going on, then Kierkegaard says he would’ve turned this from a personal trial of faith into a universal ethical principle and the principle would have been, “Whenever God tells you to do something directly you do it even if it breaks some other stated rule,” but if Abraham had clarified that, then everybody would know this was a rule that everybody should follow and then the whole issue would no longer have been a religious matter of faith for Abraham, he would’ve turned it into a universal rule.

So from an ethical standpoint, yes, he should’ve told them what was happening, but from a religious standpoint not only was Abraham justified in keeping silent about what he was doing, he had to keep silent. Otherwise, it no longer would have been a matter of a test of his personal faith, but he would have turned this into a universal rule. So ethically he wasn’t justified in keeping silent but religiously he was justified, in fact, he had to.
One pages 91 and 92, there’s an important section, and I want to just read this to you. It has to do with this whole matter of problem three. He says, “If there is not a concealment which has its ground in the fact that the individual as the individual is higher than the universal, then Abraham’s conduct is indefensible for he paid no heed to the intermediate ethical determinates. If, on the other hand, there is such a concealment, we are in the presence of the paradox which cannot be mediated in as much as it rests upon the consideration that the individual as the individual is higher than the universal, but it is the universal precisely which is mediation.”

Well, that’s Kierkegaard’s basic message then in *Fear and Trembling*, but all of it does raise a question that I want to address at the end of this lecture, right now, as we close out our thinking on *Fear and Trembling*. Kierkegaard in this work has given us a particular understanding and perspective on faith, and I want to ask the question and just discuss with you for a moment whether Kierkegaard’s understanding of faith is correct, is it incorrect, or is it partially correct and partially incorrect? I would suggest to you that there are some elements in what he says that are very, very helpful to us and we need to take heed to what he is saying. On the other hand I think there are also some problems with what he is saying. Let me share with you my thinking.

It seems, for example, that Kierkegaard is surely right that faith is not what the Hegelians had made it out to be. It’s not just a part in an overall rational system that one disinterestedly spins out. It does, in fact, involve personal passion and involvement. Probably here whereas the Hegelians wanted to over-intellectualize faith, Kierkegaard may be going too far in the other direction by throwing out the intellectual almost entirely, but surely he is right that faith does have to involve passion.

Now a second point: Is it true that genuine faith involves dread? Well yes and no, although I think Kierkegaard is probably on to something here that oftentimes we overlook. In a case like that of Abraham’s, there is certainly a sense of dread in the two respects that he’s mentioned: that is, on the one hand you have to disobey a general principle of ethics and you also have to wonder, “Am I reading God right as to what He wants me to do?”

In a case where God asks us to obey the ethical law, I think that we tend to over-intellectualize this and we remove passion, we remove fear and trembling. While there may be no fear of breaking the universal law, there still should seem to us that it all involves
something of a paradox and that we are taking a certain risk. Now my point here is that even though we believe God has revealed the ethical law and He has told us in a specific case to obey it, there still should be a certain sense that we’re taking a risk.

What I mean here is that it should seem at least a bit odd to us to believe that there is a God who can and who has revealed the law when we’ve never seen this being. The point is that regardless of how much of this we say is revealed, how much of it we think is our orders from God, it’s still possible that our whole set of beliefs about a God and about a moral law that He’s revealed are just wrong.

In this naturalistic world, it’s a bit of a paradox to believe in things such as the supernatural, things that are unseen. That means that there really is a reason for fear though probably we rest so comfortably in our rational assumptions about Revelation and the like that we seldom think of this as containing any kind of risk or any kind of dread, and I think it’s at this point that Kierkegaard is helpful in reminding us that no matter how good our intellectual case for Christianity is, it is not a lock-sure deductive proof that leaves no room for faith whatsoever, and if keeping the moral law can still contain dread and risk, how much more the matter of following God’s command to accept Christ in terms of hoping in Him for our eternal destiny?

I mean, after all, the idea of someone who is a God-man is not something that we normally think of in terms of the people that we meet. All of this should suggest that there should be a certain element of dread and a certain amount of fear when we’re exercising faith. Now on the other hand though, I don’t think we should take any of this to say that we should be absolutely terrified when we exercise faith because our faith is based on nothing.

I believe that our faith is based on something very, very solid: the Word of God. And I think here is where Kierkegaard errs, and I believe that he errs even in regard to his understanding of the story of Abraham. Though it is true that there is no rule that allows Abraham to kill Isaac and though it is also true that the whole thing was a risk for Abraham, the fact of the matter is that Abraham did not make the leap of faith totally in the dark on the basis of nothing.

What Kierkegaard seems to forget or overlook about the case of Abraham is that in spite of God’s dreadful request, Abraham did
have God’s promise in Genesis 12: 1-3 and God’s promise that it would begin to be fulfilled in Isaac, but now we might ask what good would that information do when confronted with such a request? Well for one thing Hebrews 11 says that it caused Abraham to believe that God would resurrect Isaac if Abraham slew him, but beyond that Abraham had more than just those promises, he had a lifetime of seeing God promise and work to fulfill those promises in his life. In other words, intellectually he came to the situation with his awareness both of God’s promises and of God’s past performances.

This trial did not confront Abraham early in life before God had proven Himself to be true, but later on in life after many evidences of God’s existence and God’s care for him. Likewise, when you and I exercise faith in the midst of a trial, it is not a leap on the basis of nothing. We have God’s promises in His Word even if we don’t have a specific promise for our situation like Abraham did and we also have (usually) a track record of God’s past dealings and His faithfulness in our life. Our leap of faith does contain risk, but it is not a leap based on nothing as Kierkegaard suggests even if God’s new requirement may seem to be absurd.

Now what probably would have been a more accurate example of the kind of faith that Kierkegaard presents would be a case of God demanding someone to do something like what God asked Abraham to do but demanding it without any previous faithful dealings with that person or any promises previously made to him at all, but of course the real question is whether in fact God does ask such a thing of an individual at that point in his life.

Indeed God called Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees without any prior interaction with Abraham and his forefathers. If you’re not sure of that just take a look at Joshua 24:2 and it says that Abraham’s forefathers had no awareness, no contact with the God who called Abraham out of Ur. So God did call Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees without any prior interaction with him or his family and maybe that’s a near example to what Kierkegaard is talking about, but even that doesn’t seem quite like it’s in the exact same category as being asked to sacrifice your only son. It’s maybe not even in the same category as what Mary was asked to do, namely, to be the mother of the Messiah.

But what I’m suggesting here then is that to ask someone to give up his son and at the same time expect to get the son back when there have been no promises made about that son and there has
been no previous track record of faithfulness that would indeed be to ask somebody to believe in the absurd.

My point here and my challenge to Kierkegaard or to anyone else who would define faith in the way that he does in *Fear and Trembling*, my challenge is whether in fact God requires faith so totally devoid of fact as a basis as is true in the case that Kierkegaard presents.

Well one final item: is it really true that if Abraham had verbalized what was going on, it would have eliminated faith and turned him into a tragic hero? I think the answer is both yes and no, but probably more on the no side. In the sense set up by Kierkegaard that a tragic hero relates himself to the universal, a universal that other people know well, yes it would in fact have ruined the possibility of faith, but still from the standpoint of what Abraham is being asked to do, I don’t know why faith is eliminated. Why would verbalizing what was going on have necessitated that for Abraham to go through with this, he wouldn’t have needed faith? Couldn’t he still believe that in spite of the absurdity of everything that was going on he would get Isaac back? And if he did believe that, then wouldn’t he make the moves both to resignation and to faith that Kierkegaard is talking about?

In other words, why would verbalizing what was going on have to make this any less a matter of faith? It’s true that verbalizing might remove the dread caused by people seeing what he was doing and wondering if he was crazy, but still verbalizing it would not remove any of the dread of wondering if he had really understood God correctly and if he was going to get Isaac back.

Well, enough on *Fear and Trembling*. In the next lecture, we’re going to look at some of Kierkegaard’s other ideas and we’ll pick it up at that point.