

Introduction:

We had a great Easter weekend last week - For those who participated in the Easter dessert fundraiser - we were able raise over \$3,000 for the Usukbahyers so thank you for that... and we had a record attendance of 1,697 people gather to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus and worship together.

I am reminded that every time we gather - we gather to worship a resurrected Savior and ascribe worth to God because of His greatness and goodness toward us.

But if we are honest this morning - I think we could agree that there are times when we gather not because we are desiring to worship and ascribe that worth to God but maybe more out of habit - where we are here because its Sunday and that is just what we do...

And really that could be for a variety of reasons... Maybe you find it hard to worship because your worship preferences are not being met or we don't feel like worshipping because you are in the midst of undesirable circumstances of life.

You know where you are here this morning your heart absolutely aches and your mind is consumed with the difficulties or pressures of life. Maybe you are thinking, "How can I possibly worship when I just found out I am unemployed", or you are distraught over the bad news of a health report or grieving over a struggling child.

I can say this morning - the Bible speaks to this tension. Today we are going to look at an account in Scripture where someone had every excuse not to worship because of the difficult circumstances of his life, and we will learn why and how he was able to worship despite his circumstances.

Story: So we are going to look at Genesis 22 but just for a little context - In Genesis 15, God promised to give Abraham— who at the time was a very old man whose wife was barren—not just a son (which would be nothing short of a miracle at his age) but offspring as numerous as the stars in the sky. That is a really big promise.

And just like God always does - God keeps His promise and eventually Abraham and his wife Sarah - though very old - give birth to the promised son Isaac after years of waiting. Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born.

So God's promise to provide Abraham with endless offspring had begun to come into fruition, and things were heading in the right direction.

But in Genesis 22 we read:

After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 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."

What an incredible command! I mean put yourself in Abraham's shoes for a moment. I know how I would react if I had been in Abraham's shoes. "Um, God? Excuse me, but can we talk about this? I think there has been a misunderstanding because you know, the whole 'I will make you into a great nation thing,' that's supposed to happen through Isaac. He's the plan. He's the future. You must be making a mistake. You seem to be breaking your promise."

But what is interesting is that is not at all Abraham's response.

³ 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.

⁴ On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar.

*⁵ 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."*

Why in the world does he use the word worship?

I mean - let's consider the situation...

*Life is not going His way. His circumstances are terrible.
His worship preferences are not exactly being met.*

These are hardly the ideal conditions for worship.

But Abraham doesn't say "I and the boy will go over there and obey out of duty begrudgingly. No - he says we are going to go over there and worship.

So the question is how can his heart still want to worship in the midst of such horrible circumstances?

We see in the Scriptures the answer - and I really think it is imperative that we get this.

First we see: Abraham was able to worship because his faith was in a God who provides a Substitute.

⁶ And 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. ⁷ And 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?"

Isaac is like "Can we hold up for a minute... because there are some things that are not adding up here dad.... Like... I see the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the sacrifice?" But get this...

*⁸ Abraham said, "**God will provide for himself the lamb** for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.*

We see here that Abraham believed that God would provide for Himself the lamb.

Abraham recognized that in the midst of these hopeless circumstances His God was a provider and Abraham's hope was trusting in God providing a Substitution for Isaac - and that is exactly what God did!

⁹ When 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. ¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. ¹¹ 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.¹⁴ 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.”

God gloriously steps in and provides a ram as a substitute offering for Isaac.

And it is impossible not to see God’s provision of the ram in place of Isaac pointing us to a greater substitute sacrifice that God provided for us. This clearly points us to the Father who would ultimately give His only Son Jesus for us!

Just like Abraham and Isaac found themselves in hopeless circumstances - we were in even greater hopelessness. Because of our sin against a Holy God we deserved to be eternally punished in hell for our sin and were separated from God. We were unable to earn our way to heaven.. God had to provide for us a substitute because we were absolutely in need of rescue and that is exactly what He did!

Romans 5:6 - *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.*

1 Peter 3:18 - *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit...*

Please don’t lose sight of this. We can’t take this for granted. We did not deserve this... we did not have this coming. God provided a substitute for us completely by His grace and paid the cost that we should have paid out of His perfect unearned love and compassion. The debt has been completely paid in full because Christ stepped in - and that should cause us to rejoice! The debt has been paid for us!

Illustration: I remember when I got married we had student loans for days. Just stacks on stacks of student loans that I thought would never end / but we got tired of those hanging over us so I picked up additional work and at one point worked three jobs to get them paid off / Remember the day and

the unforgettable feeling I had when I sent that last payment in and that massive debt was completely paid off.

For the Christian - a far greater debt has been paid - and not through our efforts of working three jobs - but through the perfect effort of Jesus our substitutionary Savior. Keller says...

God saw Abraham's sacrifice and said, "Now I know that you love me, because you did not withhold your only son from me." But how much more can we look at His sacrifice on the cross and say to God, "Now we know that you love us. For you did not withhold your son, your only son, whom you love, from us." (Tim Keller, Counterfeit Gods, p. 18).

So why can we worship? - because despite our desperate need of forgiveness and the punishment that is rightly ours (Rom. 6:23) out of great love for us God provided a perfect substitute sacrifice in His Son, Jesus to die on our behalf.

That good news of the gospel should provoke our hearts to wonder and awe. It humbles us and fills us with joy that we the guilty can go free. Christ has paid the sinner's debt by standing in our place and taking on the punishment meant for us.

Review: So Abraham was able to worship in difficult circumstances because he trusted in God providing a substitution to rescue him (and all the more so should we), but that is not all.

We also learn from the book of Hebrews there was something else Abraham believed in during these circumstances that allowed him to worship. In Hebrews 11 the author references our passage and states...

Hebrews 11:17 - 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, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

Second we see: Abraham was able to worship because his faith was in a God with Resurrecting power.

The Hebrews passage teaches us that Abraham believed that even if he sacrificed Isaac, God could raise Isaac from the dead. And because He believed that - his faith in that truth allowed him to walk up that hill with a heart full of worship, knowing he was worshipping One who can even resurrect the dead.

The truth of God's resurrecting power gave him the ability to worship.

Again - it is hard to miss how this is pointing us to a God who proved His resurrection power when He gloriously rose after dying on a cross - for our sin proving that He was an all powerful God.

And not only did He raise Christ from the dead - there is coming a day when He will raise all of us to eternal life.

Keller speaks of this day and says:

“On the Day of the Lord—the day that God makes everything right, the day that everything sad comes untrue—on that day the same thing will happen to your own hurts and sadness. You will find that the worst things that have ever happened to you will in the end only enhance your eternal delight. On that day, all of it will be turned inside out and you will know joy beyond the walls of the world. The joy of your glory will be that much greater for every scar you bear. So live in the light of the resurrection and renewal of this world, and of yourself, in a glorious, never-ending, joyful dance of grace.” - Tim Keller - Kings Cross

The truth of the resurrection means that no matter how terrible our struggles, troubles and disappointments are, they are only temporary. No matter what happens to you, no matter the pain we face, the Resurrection promises you an eternal future of only joy and good.

And that truth also has the power to stir our affections for Christ and cause us to worship Him.

Why is this so important...?

Application: I think when we embrace what He has done...that despite our sin and rebellion, God stood in our place and took on the punishment that should have been ours - and then gloriously resurrected conquering the

grave.... and will ultimately resurrect His people for a perfect eternity... when we embrace these truths a couple of things will happen...

1. We will worship Him regardless of the circumstances

Lets remember, things were not going Abraham's way. Offering up your child as burnt offering is unimaginable.

This was not what Abraham was hoping for or desiring for his life. This is not the script he would write for his life. His circumstances were terrible - He was about to lose something he loved.

And yet... Abraham said he was going to worship.

This is important to understand because you and I tend to praise God when everything we want we have and everything is going our way. Then we are get our praise on. But often when he puts something in our life we don't like - we quickly shift to questioning God's goodness and struggle to worship.

We lose a job and say if "God is so good why would this happen?"
We have a struggling child and question validity of God's word.
We don't have what others have and we think God must not love us.

Abraham worshipped when things were not going his way - because he was worshipping the One who gave it all for Him. He was worshipping the One who took on the punishment He justly deserved not just worshipping when God provided him his wishes and personal comfort.

And please don't get me wrong - Abraham didn't go to sacrifice Isaac skipping and dancing. What he was carrying was heavy. Abraham didn't go to worship God without being reminded every single step what was happening. Coming into worship doesn't mean we're in denial of our circumstances or we just put on our happy face pretend everything is ok. I imagine that was a long, awkward, maybe quiet walk with the two of them.

But despite Abraham's imperfect circumstances ...his heart was still set on worshipping even when it might cost him his son. So our imperfect circumstances probably pale in comparison, and we've already seen the ram in the bushes, so even more so than Abraham, we should worship.

So I think these truths help us worship in difficult circumstances - but not only that... when we embrace what He has done... and we worship the One who gave His only Son...

2. We will worship even when our preferences are not met

Abraham was being asked to sacrifice his son... probably not his ideal worship preferences.

Now we should always worship in Spirit and truth - but should be able to ascribe worth to God even when in a worship service not all my preferences are met. The volume should not determine our worship. Musicality should not determine our worship.

For example, as a church we are working through the challenges to pursue diversity in our worship. There could be times when songs are played differently than you are used to or most comfortable with. Those things should not keep you from worshipping. Musicality styles and instrumentation should not determine our heart and ability to worship.

I am sure Abraham loved to worship God on days that were easy and things were ideal. But He was still able to worship God when his ideal preferences were not met and he had to carry fire and a knife because his heart overflowed in awe of the goodness of God.

And we can do this because our worship is not about ourselves - but the one who has the power to resurrect the dead.

Conclusion:

Because Abraham believed deeply in God's substitutionary work and resurrection power - that caused his heart to overflow with worship... and when we draw deeply from those truths - we will worship our great God in the same way.