

23.4.23 pm

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Date: 23 April 2023

Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[0 : 00] Good evening and a warm welcome to the service this evening. We're going to begin by singing to God's praise from Psalm 25 and the first two stanzas of the Psalm in Gaelic.

Psalm 25 verses 1 to 3 as they're marked. To thee I lift my soul, O Lord, I trust in thee. My God, let me not be ashamed, nor foes triumph over me. Let none that wait on thee be put to shame at all, but those that without cause transgress, let shame upon them fall.

These two stanzas, in fact, yeah, just these two stanzas, and we'll remain seated to sing in Gaelic to God's praise. And after we've sung, Dom McSween will lead us in prayer in Gaelic, please.

I call you our family. Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

[1 : 57] Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

[4 : 27] Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

[6 : 57] Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

[9 : 27] Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

[11 : 57] Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

[14 : 27] Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

[16 : 57] Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

[19 : 27] Yes, yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

[21 : 57] Yes, yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

[24 : 27] Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

[26 : 57] Yes, yes.

Yes, yes, yes.

Yes, yes. Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

[29 : 57] Yes, yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

Yes, yes, yes.

Yes, yes.

[32 : 27] Yes, yes, yes.

Yes, yes, yes.

Yes, yes, yes.

Yes, yes, yes. Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.

[35 : 28] on the road of faith. We don't want that. We don't like to be tested. We don't like the idea of having to make sacrifices.

It seems so costly sometimes to follow Jesus the way that he's guiding us. And yet think about Abraham and Sarah.

They'd waited for so long for this boy. They'd been through so much as they held on to God's promise of this family, of this boy, of the blessing that would come through him.

And now the Lord is asking them to sacrifice their only son. And it just seems to us, as we try and process this, it seems unreasonable it seems too much.

But remember, this was a test for Abraham. He won't be taken to the point of actual sacrifice. sacrifice. But we know, as we think about the broader picture of the Bible, that this was not just a test for Abraham, this was a trailer, a preview of what was to come.

[36 : 59] Abraham's son, Isaac, would not have to be sacrificed. But Jesus, God's only begotten son, whom he so loved, would have to be sacrificed for us.

The Lord knew more about sacrifice than Abraham would ever know. So, if we're at this point in the life of Abraham, tempted to question the character of God, as we think about what God asked Abraham to do, and how traumatic that must have been within the family, rather than question the demands and the character of God, let us be amazed at the character and the love of God when we think about what he has done for us in Christ.

1 John 4 and at verse 9, this is how God showed his love among us. He sent his one and only son into the world that we might live through him.

This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

So, the first thing we see here is sacrifice. And the second thing we see as we move on is obedience in the life and in the response of Abraham.

[39 : 01] Verse 3, we've got this amazing searching demand from God in verses 1 and 2. And in verse 3, we see just this straightforward obedience.

Early the next morning, Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. And I think this is a remarkable thing when we think about this man.

You know, when we're asked to do something that's difficult and costly, we want to delay it. We want to put it off for as long as we possibly can. And then on the day when we actually have to do something and we have to face the demand of whatever it is we don't want to do, we don't tend to wake up bright and early and jump out of our beds.

We wake up and we realise the day and we pull the doofy over our heads. We don't want to face the day. And yet Abraham, we don't see that.

He comes to the day when obedience was required. And he doesn't delay. He doesn't phone up ten friends to discuss the pros and cons of acting in obedience to God's word.

[40 : 20] He doesn't have a discussion on the subject. He doesn't set up a theological commission and call ten scholars in to give their views. He just obeys.

God has spoken clearly. It's a word that was a hard word. And Abraham, he just obeys. He's up first thing and he does what's required.

And there's a lesson there for us. We're to follow his example on this. God has given us his word. We have the word much more cruelly than Abraham had.

We have the full canon of the word of God and it's very clear. And sometimes, especially in our culture, what the word of God says is unpopular and it's demanding and it's searching and it can be costly to follow.

But we're just to obey. We're to do what Abraham did. We're not to debate. We're not to delay.

We're just to obey the Lord. That's what it means to be a disciple.

[41 : 43] Trust and obey. There's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.

Abraham, he obeys God. He, verse 3, took two, who took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac.

When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day, Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance.

He said to his servants, stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you. And I think that's significant when we think about these words.

Abraham, as he sets off to do this awful thing that he can't understand in all likelihood, he says to the servants, we will worship and then we will return, we'll come back to you.

So Abraham here understands that obedience is part of worship. We can't worship God and be disobedient. We can't worship God and yet have areas of our lives where we know we're in defiance.

[43 : 05] worship of God must go together with obedience and Isaac and Abraham as they set off, Abraham believes that God will spare Isaac because he says we will come back to you and we don't know what was in Abraham's mind.

We don't know what he was thinking. We don't know if he imagined that he would get to the point of sacrifice and that God would spare his son. We don't know if Abraham was perhaps thinking that Isaac would have to be sacrificed but then he would be resurrected.

That's what's suggested in Hebrews. In Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 17 it says by faith Abraham when God tested him offered Isaac as a sacrifice.

He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son even though God had said to him it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. Abraham reasoned says the letter writer to the Hebrews that God could raise even raise the dead and so a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.

Abraham had faith in the character and the nature and in the work of God. he couldn't see clearly what it was that God would do but he believed that what God would do was good.

[44 : 45] Thomas Watson said God is to be trusted when his providences seem to run contrary to his promises.

That's what Abraham was doing. He was trusting God even though this providence seemed to be so much at odds with the promises that he had received.

Continuing verse 6 Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac and he himself carried the fire and the knife as the two of them went on together Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham father yes my son Abraham replied the fire and the wood are here Isaac said but where is the lamb for the burnt offering Abraham answered God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering my son and the two of them went on together so we have this picture of father and son going in the direction of God's will as they head to the place of sacrifice and we're not told much about the journey we're not told much about the conversation or perhaps the awkward silences we don't have any insight into what the mood was between them we can imagine Abraham being distressed he couldn't be anything but that we can imagine Isaac being perplexed as he he's trying to think about the sacrifice and where the sacrifice actually was and there's so much time for Abraham to turn these things over in his mind on this journey the journey was about 45 miles it was three days at full speed so there was plenty of time for Abraham to back track but he resolves to be obedient and he keeps on going it's not flash in the pan obedience it's long steady obedience and that's another lesson for us as we see Abraham we're given an example of the kind of obedience that should mark our lives that long steady obedience verse 9 when he reached the place

God had told him about Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it he bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar on top of the wood then he reached out his hand and took the knife it's as if everything here goes into slow motion in this moment we've not had much detail about these three days but now they've come to the moment and Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son but the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven Abraham Abraham here I am he replied do not lay a hand on the boy he said do not do anything to him now I know that you fear God because you have not withheld from me your son your only son and we can only imagine the the joy that Abraham must have experienced in that moment as he heard the voice from heaven as his outstretched hand is held back we can only imagine what it must have felt like in Abraham's heart as he experiences the blessing of God in obedience as his son is spared and yet again as we think about this scene our minds surely fast forward from the

[49 : 09] Old Testament to the New Testament our minds surely fast forward to Romans 8 and at verse 32 where we are told that God did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all so we have this contrast the knife is raised but the son of Abraham is spared but at Calvary God's son Jesus he is not spared but he willingly lays down his life for us all what Abraham did not have to experience as a father God our father experienced for us and think about the journey even from the perspective of

Christ the God man imagine in his humanity as Jesus made his way through life we think about this difficult journey for Abraham and Isaac as they follow the will of God even though it didn't lead to death but think about Jesus journeying from heaven to earth think about what Jesus experienced as through the years he grew wisdom and understood more and more of the scriptures and more and more of the reality of the cross that he was headed for think about Jesus when he he's in Gethsemane with the prospect of this suffering weighing down so heavier on him think about the cost that Jesus was having to measure and the cost for

God the father in advance of the altar of the cross all these things I think are connecting with this chapter and so we see Isaac who was bound on the altar and yet he is loosed he's untied but years later possibly on that same on that same site that same hill Jesus was fixed to the cross with nails so that we could be loosed from our sin Hale the commentator says Moriah the place where the sacrifice was to be carried out was a mountain top much later it would become the site of the Jewish temple in

Jerusalem thus Isaac was to be the first sacrifice offered at that site where later so many other sacrifices would be offered up culminating in the final and supreme sacrifice of another offspring of Abraham God's one and only son Jesus Christ so here everything is pointing us forward to Jesus we see the sacrifice that Abraham is asked to make we see the obedience that is so readily shown in the life of Abraham and very briefly we see in verse 13 and 14 substitution Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns he went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son so Abraham called that place the Lord will provide and to this day it is said on the mountain of the

Lord it will be provided and very very clearly here we see that sacrifice we can again just imagine Abraham on that hill he looks around and he sees the ram and the ram takes the place of his son

Isaac God provided a way for Isaac and for Abraham not to suffer God provided a way of life the ram died as the substitute because a sacrifice had to be made but instead of Isaac this ram dies there's substitution and again we're pointing forward to Jesus he's the one who lived the sinless life that we have not and we cannot live he did it as our substitute

[54 : 38] Jesus is the one who died the sinner's death the death that we deserve in our place as our substitute and we'll sing it in just a moment bearing shame and scoffing rude in my place condemned he stood sealed my pardon with his blood hallelujah what a saviour so Jesus is the substitute and if you just glance back for a second to verse seven there's this question that must have been so difficult for Abraham to hear as they travel towards the mountain Isaac asks the question where is the lamb we've got the wood we've got the fire where is the lamb and that's a question that hangs in the air and it's a question that you could say is suspended for years and decades and centuries and yet it's a question that is answered eventually in John chapter 1 and verse 29 where John sees Jesus and remember what he says he says behold look the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world now he is our substitute to how we how we look to him are we beholding him tonight we sang it but are we are we doing it my faith looks up to thee thy lamb of Calvary saviour divine is he our saviour is he our substitute and the final thing we see here in my time is gone is blessing and you can scan from verses 15 down through to the end but what we read in these verses is that

God promises what he has been promising from Genesis chapter 12 that there will be blessing blessing and notice the pattern here the obedience precedes the blessing Abraham's obedience leads to God's word of clear and amazing blessing that's the pattern that's the way it was and that's still the way it is blessing comes through obedience now the blessing of our salvation came from Jesus' obedience not ours it's because Jesus was obedient to the father's will it was because of what Jesus did that the salvation that we need is given to us as we believe in him but if you and I want to know the blessing of God's smile on our lives day by day if we want to know the blessing of intimacy with

God then it comes through obedience and we see that in the life of Abraham there's one little point to finish with if you see from verses 15 to verse 18 that the promise of blessing is given to Abraham again and the volume is turned up but then from verses 19 to 24 we've got this strange kind of section which on first reading we think what's all this about it's kind of unusual we are seeing names that we don't recognize we're seeing a closing section that we can't really see how it fits and I think the point of this section from 19 to 24 is that it shows that God's promise of blessing was firm even though even though the odds of the blessing looked slim because what we have here in verses 19 to 24 is a picture of all those who are being born and Abraham and Sarah the promised line they have one child and yet in the non-promise line there's an abundance of children there's great fertility that there's more and more people and we would think from a human perspective that if God's going to work he's going to work through the many but the truth is God is going to work but he isn't going to work through the many and the strong he's going to work through the few and the weak his ways are not our ways his paths are not our paths he works through the weak not the strong he works even when we can't see how he could possibly work and so as the chapter finishes again the application for us is that we are to trust him trust him more than our eyes can see so let's pray Lord we thank you that you are trustworthy we thank you that we see that in the life of Abraham we thank you that we see that as we fast forward from the episode in Abraham's life where we see almost sacrifice to the cross of Calvary where we see Jesus as the atoning sacrifice for our sin we thank you that even as we think about the cross we see what was considered to be an instrument of weakness and torture used to bring life and strength and eternal blessing so help us we pray to trust you as we go into a week that we don't know what lies ahead of us when we have struggles when we have fears when we are tempted to throw up our hands in panic help us we pray rather to look to you and to trust you and we pray this in Jesus name amen we'll sing to finish four five eight and mission praise man of sorrows we'll stand to sing man of sorrows what a savior being shame and scoffing root in my place condemn he stood seal my pardon with his blood hallelujah what a savior guilty violent and helpless we spotless lamb of god was he full atonement can it be hallelujah what a savior what a savior what a savior lifted up was he to die it is finished was his cry now in heaven exhorted high hallelujah what a savior what a savior lifted up was he to die what a savior what a savior when he comes a glorious king on his ransom

home to bring them

[64 : 17] I knew this song we'll sing hallelujah what a savior what a savior what a savior the grace of our lord jesus christ the love of god the father and the fellowship of god the holy spirit be with us all now and forever more amen amen