

Guest Preacher - Mr. Gordon Macleod (Minister in training)

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Preacher: Mr. Gordon Macleod

[0 : 00] If you have your Bibles, if we can turn back to our reading in Genesis 22.! Heavenly Father, that there would be a willingness within each one of us to listen to your Word, to hear what your Word has to say to us, and to act upon it.

And we pray that, Heavenly Father, that each one of us here, speaker and hearer alike, who need know what you are saying to us.

But most of all, that we would be blessed in hearing your Word read to us, and that, Heavenly Father, that we would be blessed in knowing what it is to worship you.

So guide us at this time. In Jesus' name. Amen. So as we turn back to the passage that we read, it's a passage that many will have read time and time again.

What I want to take as our text for this evening is the text that we read in verse 5. We have the account of God speaking to Abraham and being told to go and take his son and to sacrifice him.

[1 : 54] And then we have Abraham preparing and leaving with his two servants and with his son. And then we have recorded in verse 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. This passage that we read here, this is the first time that the word worship is actually mentioned in the Bible.

And what do we learn as we look at it this evening? Many of you will be aware that the denomination of the Free Church have a vision for a healthy gospel church for every community in Scotland.

And there are a number of statements that underpin this vision. And the one that we want to just think about as we think about that verse is to have in our memories that healthy gospel churches are committed to the worship of God and obedience to the Bible.

Which might lead some to ask, what does it mean to be committed to worshipping God? And what we would like to do at the passage before us this evening is hopefully learn a bit more about what is worship, why do we do it, and what do we receive from it.

[3 : 33] As I said, this is the first time in Scripture that the word worship appears. If we were to do some research, the Cambridge Dictionary tells us that worship is the feeling or expression of reverence and adoration for a deity.

Further search on Wikipedia states that worship is an act of religious devotion usually directed towards a deity. For many, worship is not about an emotion.

It is more about a recognition of a God. An act of worship may be performed individually in an informal or formal group or by a designated leader.

Such acts may involve honouring. These definitions aren't particularly helpful. They almost skirt around the issue.

They don't want to offend. And we see in the use of the terms for a deity or a statement such as the recognition of a God. John Piper, a well-known pastor, writer, and theologian living in America states when he was asked the question, what is worship?

[4 : 53] True worship is a valuing or a treasuring of God above all things. right worship, good worship, pleasing worship depends on a right mental grasp of the way God really is.

And he goes on, true worship is based on a right understanding of God's nature and it is a right valuing of God's worth. And I would say that these statements are certainly more helpful than we have in telling us what it is to worship God, that we have a real focus on who God is and how in worshiping we see the value, the treasure, and the importance of having a right understanding of God.

And while it's helpful to look for and research, we must also ask, what does the Bible teach us about worship? worship? It's interesting to note that the first time that the word worship is recorded is in the context of a parent and a child.

We read here that Abraham says, I and the boy will go and worship. So the first occasion where we have worship mentioned is within the family setting.

The father and the son, Abraham and Isaac, going off to worship. And it's worth letting that soak in. But right away when we hear about worship, the focus is on family worship.

[6 : 41] I have to be honest when I read this, first of all, when the realization of this dawned on me, I was stopped in my tracks.

What is our family worship like? We prayed earlier on, we can say to our young ones, remember you're created in the days of your youth.

But how can they remember who their creator is if we're not teaching them? If we're not sitting down with them and explaining to them within the family who God is and what God means to each and every one of us?

I hesitate as a parent and as a grandparent now myself to ask the question of what the challenge is for each and every one of us.

that if we're not teaching our children or grandchildren how to worship God, who is? Abram told his servants to wait where they were.

[7 : 52] This was something he was going to do with Isaac on his own. He recognized that it was his responsibility and he wasn't going to abdicate the task to anybody else.

God had spoken to him. God had told him what was needing to be done and Abram recognized that it was his responsibility. Point for reflection.

As parents, are we in danger of abdicating our responsibility to teach our young ones, to Sunday school teachers, to the minister, to the youth leader, thinking that it's their responsibility and not ours?

God has blessed us as parents and as grandparents. Are we taking the responsibility of teaching our young ones seriously?

It's also interesting to note that Abram wasn't taking anybody with him, not just that they weren't going to do the task for him, but with knowing that the very nature of the task that had been set for Abram, if he had taken somebody else with him, they may have talked him out of it.

[9 : 15] Do we get distracted by other things, by other people, that we neglect our family worship? Do we allow ourselves to be influenced by others?

And in that, do we fail to fulfill our responsibility to worship God and to teach our children? And I have to be honest in saying that I preach this to myself before I preach it to others.

If we are to be assured, or we should be assured, sorry, that there are plenty waiting in the wings to sift our children, to teach our children other things, whether it be through television, radio, internet, and even books, that will fill the void that we leave if we are not teaching them how to worship God in spirit and in truth.

So what else does the Bible teach us about worship? The next time we come across the term worship in the Bible, it's in the book of Exodus.

And there are many occasions when we read in Genesis of altars being built and sacrifices being made, but it's never referred to as worship until we come to Exodus chapter 3 when God spoke to Moses through the burning bush.

[10 : 48] And here we learn a bit more about what worship is and what it entails. We read in verse 12 of chapter 3, And God said, I will be with you and this will be a sign to you that it is I who have sent you when I have brought the people out of Egypt.

You will worship God in this mountain. And then in verse 18, the elders of Israel will listen to you. Then you and the elders are to go to the king of Egypt and say to him, the Lord, the God of the Hebrews has met with us.

Let us take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the Lord, our God. We see it here in the passage in Genesis 22.

We read it again here in Exodus that within worship there is sacrifice. Abram was going out to sacrifice his son Isaac, but we know he referred to this as an act of worship.

There are many sermons that will have been preached in this particular passage, and we can all recognize the symbolism between the sacrifice Abram was prepared to make and to the sacrifice that God did make in offering up his son Jesus for our sin.

[12 : 15] But what does this teach us about sacrifice in our worship? we're not called to come and make sacrifices today the way they did in times past.

Abram was asked to sacrifice his son, his only son, whom he loved. Why did God ask him to do such a thing? James Montgomery Boyce, an American Reformed theologian who died in the year 2000, says on this point, had Isaac grown perhaps too dear to Abram?

Had he begun to take God's place in the patriarch's thinking? We cannot be sure of this, but if it was the case, this should remind us of many things that become too precious for us.

He goes on, the Chinese evangelist Watchman Nee wrote that Isaac represents many of the gifts of God's grace. Before God gives them, our hands are empty.

Afterwards, they are full. Sometimes God reaches out his hand to take ours in fellowship. Then we need an empty hand to put into his.

[13 : 32] But when we have received his gifts and are nursing them to ourselves, our hands are full. And when God puts out his hand, we have no empty hand for him.

When that happens, we need to let go of the gift and take hold of God himself. He finishes saying, Isaac can be done without, but God is eternal.

A difficult passage to read, but a reminder to us of what do we actually hold on to dearer than we hold on to God. We receive blessings from God and we fill our lives with them, but we forget that we need to still reach out to God to receive the daily blessing that he gives to us and thank him for them.

Isaac was prepared to sacrifice, Abraham was prepared to sacrifice everything to God. And the need for us to be prepared is reiterated in Moses' conversation with Pharaoh in Exodus 10 and at verse 25 and 26.

But Moses said, you must allow us to have sacrifices and burnt offerings to present to the Lord our God. Our livestock too must go with us, nor a hoof is to be left behind.

[14 : 54] We have to use some of them in worshipping the Lord our God, and until we get there, we will not know what we are to use to worship the Lord. What is it that's affecting our true worship of God?

What is it that we're holding on to that we're not prepared to give up, that may initially have come as a blessing from God, but is now an obstacle to our worship of God?

Are we making a barrier of a previous blessing? Are we demanding more of the blessing that we've received, giving more time to it, than we are giving time to God?

Exodus 20, more commonly referred to as the second commandment, tells us, you shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything, in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

You shall not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

[16 : 11] The hymn writer John Wesley wrote, the dearest idol I have known, whatever that idol be, help me to tear it from thy throne and worship only thee.

Recognition within the hymn that so often we don't realize that we're making an idol of someone or something in our lives that so easily distracts us from our true worship of God.

Augustus Toplady in the hymn Rock of Ages writes, nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling. When you come before God tonight, what is it that you're bringing and holding on to that's stopping you from being able to worship God in spirit and in truth?

It echoes the sentiment of Boyce's comment, on the need for us to come with empty hands. Empty hands seeking to worship God and receive the blessing that we have sung of so often this evening, that God pours out his blessing upon each and every one of us.

God is worthy of glory, honor and praise. And as we come and as we worship him in spirit and in truth, truly committed to him, he will indeed bless us.

[17 : 47] We see that in the way that we read, as Abram took Isaac and he bound him and he was prepared even to lift the knife to sacrifice Abram before God, sorry, sacrifice Isaac before God.

and God provided the ram in the thicket and having fulfilled what he was asked to do in coming to worship, he said, 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.

God had previously made a promise to Abram, that Abram would be blessed and he would be a blessing to others. And here we see that promise repeated and the reality is that if we come and we worship God, we will receive a blessing and in receiving that blessing we can go out and be a blessing to others but we must come and we must worship God in spirit and in truth.

And as we think of that blessing, as we think of all that God has given to each and every one of us, he has blessed us with homes, he has blessed us with a place that we can come and worship.

What is it that stops us this night from truly worshipping God? We don't need to come here and worship God.

[19 : 41] I would encourage you to come here Sunday after Sunday and even in the midweek to come and worship God. But we've already read there the importance of worshipping God within our own homes.

Worshipping God when the opportunity arises in conversation with our neighbour and sharing the blessing. When you go out into the week and somebody asks you, what were you doing at the weekend?

Will you be telling them that you came to church? Will you be telling them that you came to worship God? Will you be sharing the blessing that you had in meeting together as Christian brothers and sisters?

the importance of worshipping God at each and every opportunity. Which brings us to the point of the blessing.

We've read there of the promise that Abram was going to receive because he had been faithful in this act of worship before God.

[20 : 55] and having done what was required of him, having been prepared to sacrifice even his son, we read there that the promise that was given to him before was repeated and we know that in Abraham's life through Isaac, through Jacob, that that blessing was indeed received and fulfilled and we now through God's word are able to receive that blessing as well.

But in coming to do that, in coming to receive that blessing, we must come to worship God. I don't know the circumstances of each and every one of you as I come here tonight.

It's one of the challenges of going and preaching in different congregations. You don't really get to know the people that are in front of you and know the different trials and tribulations that they're facing.

What burdens you're carrying tonight, and I don't seek to minimize any of them, but we see here that Abram, despite the severe testing that he was under, he was prepared to sacrifice his son.

And he saw that in doing that, that he was able to see the sacrifice and see the blessing, sorry, that came from God.

[22 : 33] we sang in Psalm 103, so I get it back here, sorry, we sang in Psalm 103, we pray and we sing these words, these verses because we like the tune, sometimes we sing them because we know the words of by heart, but do we really focus on the worship that these verses bring to us?

we said earlier on that the story here that we read, we can see the similarity between the three-day journey of Abram going out to sacrifice his son, and the sacrifice that was made for us by God through his son Jesus on the cross, and the three days that he was in the grave, that he then rose victorious, all thine iniquities he doth most graciously forgive, and that is the whole point of our worship, in recognizing that God sent his son, Jesus, to die for each and every one of us.

Why? So our iniquities would indeed be forgiven, but we must come and worship, we must come and worship God, and we must come and recognize Jesus as our Lord and as our Savior.

That's why we gather here this evening, to worship God for all that he has done for us. So while we recognize, as we read here, and I don't know whether it's something that any of you thought of before, that worship involves family, as a congregation we can be a family, but it also involves sacrifice, but the sacrifice that we make isn't as great as the sacrifice that's been made for us as we come, as we worship God.

Let us pray. Dear Heavenly Father, we do indeed thank you for your word. We thank you for all that has been recorded, all that has been given to us to teach us, and how we may indeed glorify you and enjoy you forever.

[25 : 35] We don't confess to understand all that thy word has to say to us, but we thank you that as you light up the pages for us, that what we hear tonight, Heavenly Father, is that we must come and we must worship you, worship you because of your Son, Jesus, and the fact, Heavenly Father, that you sent your Son to take away our sins, that causes us to come and to worship and to cry out before you.

We pray, Heavenly Father, that as we part this night, as we sing your praises, that we indeed know your continued blessing upon us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

We'll bring our service to a close, singing in Psalm 95. Psalm 95, we'll sing the first six verses, again, teaching us how we must worship God.

Come, let us sing to the Lord. Come, let us everyone a joyful noise make to the rock of our salvation. Let us before his presence come with praise and thankful voice.

Let us sing psalms to him with grace and make a joyful noise. May we indeed make a joyful noise to sing and praise and worship our God and our great King.

[26 : 58] Let us stand to sing. O come, let us sing to the Lord.

Come, let us Come, let us everyone a joyful noise make to the walk of our salvation.

Let us let us before his presence come with praise and thankful voice.

Let us sing songs to him with grace and make a joyful noise for God the great God and great King above all God he is!

Depths of the earth are in his hands the strength of his hands to him the spacious he for he the same did make the bright land also from his hands it's for but first day O come and let us worship him let us bow down with and on our knees before the

[29 : 42] Lord and our knees before our maker let us come to him is able to him to keep stumbling to before presence fault joy the God our Savior be glory majesty and authority before ages and Amen