

General Topics :: TRUE WORSHIP INVOLVES OBEDIENCE AND SACRIFICE**TRUE WORSHIP INVOLVES OBEDIENCE AND SACRIFICE - posted by shibu (), on: 2005/10/30 23:46****TRUE WORSHIP INVOLVES OBEDIENCE AND SACRIFICE by Zac Poonen**

In Genesis 22 the paragraph begins with the phrase, "After these things.... ." As we look at the circumstances that immediately precede this hour of testing, we find Abraham in a triumphant position. The heathen had come to him and said, "Abraham, we've been watching your life and we know that God is with you in all that you do" (Gen. 21:22). No doubt they had heard of the miraculous way in which Sarah conceived, and were convinced that God was with this family. Ishmael had been sent away. Isaac was now the darling of Abraham's heart. Abraham stood in grave danger, at this time, of losing his first love and devotion for God. And so God tested him again, and told him to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice. But Abraham had ears to hear, and a heart that was willing to obey anything that God commanded. He rose up early the next morning and went forth to obey God (v. 3). The record does not tell us what the old patriarch went through, during the previous night, after God had spoken to him. I am sure he did not sleep that night. He must have kept awake and gone and looked at his beloved son again and again; and the tears must have rolled down his eyes as he thought of what he had to do to him. How difficult it must have been for Abraham to offer up the son of his old age. But he was willing to obey God at any cost. Fifty years or so, earlier, he had put his hand to the plough when God called him in Ur; and he would not now look back. There was no limit to his obedience and no end to his willingness to sacrifice for his God. No wonder he became the friend of God.

There was faith in Abraham's heart as he went up to sacrifice Isaac, that God would somehow raise his son from the dead. Hebrews 11:19 tells us that. God had already given Abraham a foretaste of resurrection-power in his own body and in Sarah's, through the birth of Isaac. Surely it would be no problem for such a God to bring back to life an Isaac who was slain on the altar. And so Abraham tells his servants when leaving them at the foot of Mount Moriah, "I and the lad will go yonder and worship and (we will both) come (back) again to you" (v. 5). That was a word of faith. He believed that Isaac would come back with him. Notice too that he tells his servants, "We are going to worship God." He is not complaining that God is requiring too much from him, neither is he boasting about the marvelous sacrifice that he is about to make for God. No. Abraham did not belong to the category of those who subtly inform others about the sacrifices they make for God. Abraham said he was going to worship his God. And there we understand something of the real meaning of worship. Remember how Jesus once said, "Abraham rejoiced to see My day; and he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56). Surely it must have been here on Mount Moriah that Abraham saw the day of Christ. In prophetic vision, the aged patriarch saw in his own action, a picture (faint though it be) of that day when God the Father Himself would lead His only begotten Son up Calvary's hill and offer Him up as a sacrifice for the sins of mankind. And that day on Mount Moriah, Abraham knew something of what it would cost the heart of God to save a wayward world. He came to a place of intimate fellowship with the heart of God that morning. Yes, he worshipped God - not just with beautiful words and hymns, but through costly obedience and sacrifice.

A deep and intimate knowledge of God can come only through such obedience. We may accumulate plenty of accurate theological information in our minds; but real spiritual knowledge can come only when we give up everything to God. There is no other way. Abraham was being tested here as to whether he would love the Giver or His gifts more. Isaac was undoubtedly the gift of God, but Abraham was in danger of having an inordinate affection for his son. Isaac was becoming an idol who would cloud Abraham's spiritual vision. And so God intervened to save Abraham from such a tragedy.

God was teaching Abraham on Mount Moriah the blessedness of being emptied of everything and possessing nothing. Before that day, Abraham had held Isaac with a possessive spirit. But after he laid his son on that altar and gave him up to God, he never possessed Isaac again. Yes, it is true that, God gave Isaac back to Abraham, and Abraham had him at home. But he never possessed Isaac as his own again. Isaac, thenceforth, was God's. And Abraham held Isaac as a steward holds the property of his master. In other words, he had Isaac, but he never again possessed him.

This is to be our attitude to the things of this world. We can have them and use them. But we are never to cling to any one of them. Everything we own should have been placed on the altar and given completely to God. We must possess nothing. We can then keep only that which God gives back to us from the altar - and we are to keep even such things only as stewards. Only then can we truly worship God.

This principle does not apply to material things alone. It applies to spiritual gifts as well. It is possible for us to hold even t

he gifts of the Holy Spirit in a possessive way. Was not Isaac the gift of God? Why couldn't Abraham hold on to him then? To have to send away Ishmael was understandable, because he was not the promised seed. But Isaac's case was different. He was God's gift, produced in God's strength. Why should Abraham have to give him up as well? And so we may argue too. We can understand the need to give up our attachment to the things of the world. But surely, we feel, we can hold on to the gifts that God Himself has given us. But God says, "No. Lay even your spiritual gifts (which I have given you) on the altar and give them back to me, lest they fill your life and cloud your vision of Me, the Giver." God would have us delivered from any inordinate attachment to even the most sacred gifts of the Spirit that He has given us. He wants us to sacrifice even the "Isaacs" that we have received from Him and not cling to any one of them. Isn't it this that many believers have not seen? They have given up their Ishmaels but not their Isaacs. They have given up sinful things. But the gifts that God gave them they are now using to glorify themselves - like the prodigal son, who took his father's gifts and spent them on himself.

What is it that fills our vision - our gifts and our ministry, or the Giver Himself? This is what we need to ask ourselves constantly. We are most in danger when God has blessed us much and used us greatly. It is so easy at such times to lose the vision of God. We need to go back to the altar on Mount Moriah again and again and give our all to God repeatedly. True worship begins when the Giver Himself fills our hearts and our vision. Only then can we safely use His gifts. Otherwise we shall abuse God's gifts and prostitute them to selfish uses. Isn't this the reason why there is so much misuse of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in our day?

Re: TRUE WORSHIP INVOLVES OBEDIENCE AND SACRIFICE - posted by Smokey (), on: 2005/10/31 0:07

Shibu

The speaker at church this morning spoke about following.. He spoke about how Jesus followed His father right to the cross. Jesus has asked us to "take up our cross daily, and follow Him". The point being, how good are we at following? It was a message that has me assessing my "following" skills..

I enjoyed your comments, and it gives me more food for thought..
Greg