

When Time Stands Still

Genesis 22

Introduction

- Commercial- "It seems like time is standing still"
 - No movement
 - No rhythm
 - No routine
 - Forget what day it is- What am I suppose to do?
 - I forgot to shave before I recorded the sermon last week!
 - Significant for those of us who are accustomed to going to church on Sunday
- It may feel as though God is absent
 - Sermon Series: Where is God?
 - Find God in the absence
 - 3 Points from last week that will guide our journey
 - We may *feel* forsaken, but God has not abandoned us
 - Find God through Obedience
 - Find God by cultivating our relationship with him
 - Today's passage: **Genesis 22**
 - Abraham and Isaac
 - Abraham is tested by God
 - In the moment that it appeared as though God's promise in Abraham's life would be absent, God to Abraham's faith.
 - A lesson for us to consider when time seems to stand still

Absence is an opportunity for us to acknowledge that God is in control

- **Genesis 22:1-3**
 - God tested Abraham
 - Testing is different than Tempting
 - God does not tempt us. Sin is what tempts us
 - However, God does allow us to be tested.
 - When we are tested, God always has a purpose. The purpose is always for our benefit and his glory even if it may seem uncomfortable.
 - You may feel as though you are being tested right now through the restrictions of the coronavirus
 - Although the restrictions that are being placed on us right now may not *feel* uncomfortable, I want to encourage you to see this time as an opportunity

- Abraham's test
 - Take your *only* son
 - The one you love
 - Offer him as a sacrifice
 - This test may seem unfair and we may be tempted to question the very nature of God! The truth is this test is much more than the sacrifice of a child. The test is really about whether Abraham has faith that God is in control.
- Abraham's walk with God had been a test from the beginning
 - "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." (Genesis 12:1, ESV)
 - Abraham tried to disguise his wife, Sarah, as his sister to Pharaoh (Genesis 12:10-20)
 - Childless; a son shall be your heir and give birth to a nation (Genesis 15)
 - Hagar- maidservant to serve as a surrogate to heir (Genesis 16)
 - Both Sarah and Abraham laughed at God's promise of a son due to their advanced age (Genesis 17:17; Genesis 18:12)
- The gruesome thought that God would request a child sacrifice is not the point. The test is whether Abraham would trust God's promise even if it cost Abraham his son.
 - Time seemed to stand still as Abraham awaited in his advanced age for a son and now God was asking Abraham to sacrifice what Abraham had waited so long to be fulfilled.
 - What do we make of us and what does it say for us?
 - This is about Abraham coming to terms with God being in complete control
 - So many times before Abraham tried to take control when God seemed distant or absent.
 - He acted too quickly and at times it cost him
 - The lesson that Abraham had learned in what *felt* like God's absence was to trust that God was in complete control.
- We have all been tested in some way through this coronavirus experience.
 - Time may seem like it is standing still
 - It may *feel* as though God is absent
 - BUT, this is an opportunity for us to acknowledge that God is in control!
 - It is our faith in God that will get us through these uncertain times.

Here I Am; In God's absence be present

- Genesis 22:3
 - When Abraham was tested he went to the place of which God told him
 - Before Abraham had tried to find a compromise, but not this time. He does exactly as God instructs him.

- This is a major step in the “test.” Abraham has come to the place of submission to God. There is a trust and obedience on Abraham’s behalf even if it costs him his son.
- Retreat in the woods
 - Stonewall Lake
 - Bike into the woods
 - Find a spot that is secluded, but yet I can still overlook the lake
 - I like it because everything is quiet except for the sound of waves hitting the shore, the wind blowing through the trees and the rustling of a deer or squirrel running through the woods.
 - Time is not a concern. It is as if it doesn’t exist. I just take in the moment that is.
 - Often times I have been reminded of **Psalm 46:10 (ESV), “Be still, and know that I am God.”**
- In this moment in Abraham’s walk with God, there’s no arguing with God, no compromise, no discussion. Abraham simply responds with, **“Here I am.” (Genesis 22:1b, ESV)**
 - Abraham is present in what appears to be the absence of God
 - Abraham doesn’t run away from God, but instead he goes to the place of which God told him.
- Takes us back to the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden (Genesis 3:8-10)
 - Adam and Eve hid from God when they ate the forbidden fruit
 - This is the opposite of what happened with Abraham
 - Abraham did not hide from God, instead he chose to be present even when he was being tested!
- We may *feel* as though God is absent, that time is standing still
 - I want to encourage you to be present
 - To be still and know that God is in control and to respond with “Here I am” in the place where God has directed you.

Opportunity to see God’s redemptive purposes

- **Genesis 22:4-8**
 - Story points into the future of God’s greater plan of salvation
 - Image of Jesus and the cross
 - Vs 2 reminds us that Isaac was Abraham’s only son, the one whom he loved
 - Vs 7 (ESV) echos the words that Jesus would later yield as he hung from the cross, “My Father!”
 - Vs. 8 (ESV) “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering.”
 - John the Baptist, **John 1:29** Jesus is the lamb provided for our sins. **“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”**

- Abraham offered Isaac as directed with the faith that God would return Isaac and fulfill his covenant promise.
 - There was something redemptive about God's request
 - Hebrews 11:17-19 (ESV), "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offer 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."
 - When time stood still it was an opportunity to see God's redemptive purposes
- Think of the good things that have come as a result of the Coronavirus
 - "We are in this together"
 - People helping others
 - Online opportunities that are connecting people to the message of salvation
 - Time with our loved ones- cherished moments
 - I think we won't see the full impact of God's redemptive purposes through this test until months after we return to our routines.
 - It gives us a greater appreciation for what we have, when we stop and consider God's redemptive work at hand!

Become a witness to God's presence in the absence

- Genesis 22:9-18
 - Abraham's obedience was not based on feeling or personal benefit. It was based on trust. As he had walked with God, cultivating his relationship with God, Abraham was able to embrace this final test as an opportunity.
 - He became a witness to God's presence even when God seemed absent
- Story of Bentley
 - 6 months ago we decided to adopt a Labrador Retriever that we eventually named Bentley
 - If you are aware of the characteristics of a Labrador, they are known to be a very loyal dog.
 - Bentley and I take walks every morning through our neighborhood. These walks have provided moments for us to cultivate a relationship of trust.
 - As I watched Bentley obey basic commands, I decided to trust his loyalty
 - Behind the houses in our neighborhood we have an open field.
 - I took Bentley off his leash to give him some freedom and to see if he would remain close to me.
 - Bentley loves the freedom, he can choose where he wants to walk and where he wants to sniff. At times he will get a few yards ahead of me, but I've noticed that as he goes ahead of me he will often stop and look back, and wait for me to catch up or he will even at times walk back to me.

- Bentley and I share a relationship of trust that has been cultivated through those morning walks. And when tested, Bentley knows his place.
- The test that I put Bentley through is not much different from how God trusts us
 - I didn't test Bentley to hurt him
 - I tested Bentley too see if I could trust him and if he could trust me
 - Through the test came a liberating experience, a deeper relationship
 - I believe that is the kind of relationship that God wants to have with us
- It may be difficult to see God's active presence in our lives at times, but we bear witness to God's presence as we place our trust in God's faithfulness and live by obedience.
- Think about the opportunity we have right now to be a witness to God's presence
 - The faith we display: Trusting God is in control, Being present, a believing in God's redemptive purposes are all a witness to God's presence in what seems like God's absence.
 - The world needs to see that right now!
 - Warren Wiersbe, "Seek to glorify the Lord, and He will do the rest."¹
- Abraham's faith became a testimony to the world of God's enduring presence.
 - A nation born
 - God's redemptive plan set in motion
 - Pointing ahead to the salvation through Jesus Christ
 - This is how God wishes to work through us during this period of time.

Conclusion

- Prayer
 - Moment of Silence
 - **Psalm 46**
 - Our response: "Here I am, Lord"
 - Remember those sick, workers, administrators, first-responders, families, and church

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Study Bible, NKJV*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2018; pg. 39.