

Chat with the Children

- Bush Tucker trials / Jonathan Ross Show last night / Bear Grylls
- What is the grossest thing you've ever had to eat?
- why did you eat it?
- Thinking about a time when Abraham was asked by God to do something really hard, really horrible:
- he was ready to do it because he knew and trusted God so much...

Introduction

- *Philippe Petit, Twin Towers, 1974...*
- **Blondin**: famous tight-rope walker, first to cross Niagara Falls (1859):
 - wire stretched out;
 - crowd gathered;
 - goes across;
 - takes a wheel-barrow across;
- Crowd impressed - cheering, applause!
 - "You have seen me cross with a wheel-barrow. Do you think I could take someone across?"
 - "Yes - of course!"
 - "OK - so which of you will be that person?"
- **Silence!**
- Those people **believed** that the tight-rope walker could do it:
 - **but they didn't trust!**
- They didn't put their belief into practise.
 - it was an empty belief, an empty faith
 - (except his manager, Harry Colcord)

Genesis 22:1-19

- **Lets recap for a minute:**
 - **God has asked Abraham to leave his home city of Ur**, his safety and prosperity behind, and come on a journey of faith;
 - **Abraham responds**, and so begins the journey marked by God's amazing promises and signs of his faithfulness;
 - **"to your offspring I will give this land"; (15:7, 18; 17:8, etc)**
 - **"Abraham believed and it was credited to him as righteousness"; (15:6)**
 - Abraham and Sarah have no children, yet **God has promised off-spring, so they take matters into their own hands with Hagar** and Ishmael is born;
 - Covenant of circumcision; **(Gen 17)**
 - The three visitors, Sarah to have a child, her mocking laughter - and the birth of Isaac! **(Gen 18, 21)**
 - Hagar and Ishmael sent away - a burning of the boats, no fall back position! **(Gen 21)**
- A journey of **faith**:
 - not simply marking Abraham's physical progress from Ur across the fertile crescent to Canaan, and then into Egypt and back again
 - marking his **growing relationship with God** - a God who spoke with him, revealed himself to Abraham, made covenants with him
- A God who was utterly unlike the silent idols of ancient Mesopotamia.
 - a God who **spoke, acted, promised, followed through on his promises**, a God who **cared for Abraham and his family**

Abraham and Isaac

- **And it was this God who had given Abraham a son**, a son he loved dearly, **the promised one**, Isaac
- Patriarchal society - everything rests on male line - object of hopes and dreams even more so than today.
 - more than that, Isaac was the focus of **God's** promises too - **he is one through whom Abraham is to have descendants, as God has promised**
- Then God comes along and says **"Offer the boy as a sacrifice"**
 - (the **"that's barbaric"** that we feel would not have been so acute - culture of child sacrifice - **surprise more when God stepped in and saved Isaac?!**)
 - (shocked to discover a colouring image of this incident, when I'd have probably done something similar when I was a child!!)
- **Has God gone back on his word?**
- Abraham didn't **understand** - **but he demonstrated faith** - he didn't just believe in God, but he put his trust in him - put all his eggs in one basket, so to speak!
- Look at his faith:
 - **v.4/5: WE** will come back to you - not I, but we!
 - **v.8: "God will provide"** in answer to Isaac's question: Faith in God, not merely placating Isaac!
 - Hebrews 11 explains how Abraham was thinking - that God could raise Isaac back to life....
- He didn't know it was a test - just that it was testing.
- He couldn't see the end from the beginning.
- But he trusted - he leant on God, not on his own understanding
 - **finally**, as far as the rest of the Genesis narrative demonstrates!!
 - after trying things his own way when he and Sarah went to Egypt and pretending Sarah was his sister....
 - after trying things his own way when he slept with Hagar...
- **Finally, he does things God's way.**
 - he has journeyed one stage further in his growing faith in God, knowing that this God is utterly reliable, that his wisdom is far greater than our human wisdom
 - he is stepping out onto the tight-rope / allowing God to take him out over the Niagara Falls!

The Way to Up is Down: Application

- Abraham's journey of faith - journey of increasing trust in God.
- That should be our experience too - a journey, progress in faith, not standing still stagnation!
 - that should be true of us whatever age we are!
- Always growing, always learning more, always seeking to put our trust more and more in the hands of the one we love - Jesus Christ.
- Always areas where we need to actively put our trust in God, and in HIS way of doing things.
- Focus on two particular qualities that Abraham demonstrated that we need to demonstrate too:

Call to Trust - to Obey

- Simple obedience - he heard God's voice, and he obeyed.
- He put it into practise.
- Not simply theory, but obedience.
- No excuses - just got on with it.
- Sounds glib to say that - "its more complicated than that in real life!"
- Not really - we are far more prone to make excuses than we care to admit...

- Journey of faith - following Abraham over past weeks - heard God's voice spotlighting an area of your life:
 - what is that area that God has been highlighting?
 - listen, and trust him that he knows best - put that trust into practise. Obey.

Call to Go Counter to Cultural Sense

- First - call to obedience.
- Second - a reminder that God's ways are topsy turvy compared to the standards of this world!
- This world says: "Put me first" - look out for number one.
- Even if we wouldn't put it so crassly ourselves, our attitudes are very often coloured in the same, selfish direction:
 - money spent on ourselves, our own homes and families, and its awfully easy to ignore the plight of those in real need;
 - devote time to our own interests or leisure at expense of relationships that would have benefited from our time - whether its in our marriages, families or friends;
- In whatever dimension of our life we care to name, the pressure from the world around us, the unspoken assumption on the way we will act and think is, "look out for yourself".
- God's ways run completely counter to that and so many other of the implicit assumptions TV, friends, neighbours, our workplaces and so on thrust on us.
- Take a long, slow look at the ten commandments and their full implications - the attitudes that lie behind those stark commands.
- Or how about the Beatitudes, Jesus' upside down manifesto for Kingdom Living?
- God's commands are the wrong way up, if you were to ask the world around us.
- "Losing to Win" - "The Way to Up is Down!" - daft - but often the way God operates as he leads us forward in our journey of faith.
- I knew a man who was growing in his faith, learning to serve. Had a family, mortgage, kids.
- Teaching in church was on tithing - setting aside a fixed proportion of his income...
- Challenged - but seemed daft, as they were tight financially as it was.
- Spoke to minister - encouraged him to try it God's way for a year.
- That man's experience was that though they had less money available each month, for the tithe came off first, they never seemed to be tight.
- Careful not to over-generalise from one man's experience of God at work; not a slot machine; not saying that if you tithe you will find God blessing you financially.
- But - try God out, despite his commands running completely counter to the wisdom of the world around us - and see if he is not faithful.
- Love your enemies!
- Give away a tenth of your income!
- Be humble and not proud!
- Forgive those who give you a hard time!

Conclusion

- So, what are we to make of this story of Abraham and the near sacrifice of his only son, Isaac?
- A strange and barbaric story? **To our ears, maybe at first.**
- But the story of a man of faith, who never stopped learning to follow his Lord more closely throughout his life.
- Who never said, "I've done all I can do", who never sat back on his laurels.
- Who kept trusting - actively, obediently placing his trust in God and not in the sensible, wise ways of this world.
- May God grant us His Spirit's power to grow in trust and obedience, and to see acted out in our lives the proof that His way is best.