



Kindness is the Best Offering
By Bill Lawson

Kindness is the Best Offering

By Bill Lawson

Here again, we are confronted with the kindness of the New Testament juxtaposed with the harshness of the Old Testament. Through the dichotomy between the two, we recognize the many vast differences between how people *think* of God and how Jesus *reveals* God. One of the greatest differences is what people *think* God expects of us *versus* what God *actually* expects of us. This dichotomy is not only *between* the Testaments but also *within* the Old Testament, as prophets and psalmists highlight the goodness, gentleness, and mercy of God in stark contrast with some of the other writers of the Hebrew text.

Jesus taught us to interpret all the Scriptures through God's perspective of love instead of through the perspective of fear. Faithfulness to the Biblical text includes attention to the *voice* of God as revealed through the love of Christ. Even through the most troublesome passages, the Bible speaks to us of God's loving presence and providence.

Christ teaches us to emulate the goodness and kindness of God. That's what we are invited to focus on, even though there are plenty of distractions in the world, and even in the Bible. John wrote, "Perfect love casteth out fear."¹ The eternal life of God's heavenly realm is bestowed on us as a free gift. By following Christ in kindness and trusting the kindness of our Creator, we are participants in the emerging kingdom of God "on earth, as it is in heaven."²

God Sees and Provides.

And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen. (*Genesis 22:14 KJV*)

Abraham named that place "The Lord provides. And even today people say, "On the Lord's mountain [God] provides." (*Genesis 22:14 GNT*)

This verse is translated in some versions to indicate that God *sees* and in others that God *provides*. The context suggests that God not only saw Abraham in his sacrificial dilemma but also provided a substitutionary sacrifice. Through this legend, God communicates that God not only sees us in our various predicaments but also provides for our well-being. The Bible promises, "God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."³

Judaism celebrates the event described in today's Hebrew Text annually as the *Akedah*, meaning the *Binding*, in reference to Isaac being bound on an altar. In his article, "The Akedah in Jewish Tradition," Joel Kaminsky wrote:

The Jewish liturgy, drawing upon earlier midrashic sources, makes a close connection between the Akedah and Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish new year. It links the ram's horn (shofar) blown on Rosh Hashanah to the ram that Abraham offered in place of Isaac and sees the sounding of the shofar as a way to remind God of Abraham's total obedience and to pardon Abraham's descendants on the basis of his great merit.⁴

There are many variations to the story of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, along with different interpretations for each, that have been handed down in the thousands of years since it was committed to writing, and perhaps many others in the centuries before that. According to

Judaism, the location of the event was Mt. Moriah, later the site of Solomon's Temple and today the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. According to Islam, the mount was Marwa in Mecca, and the son who was offered was Ishmael rather than Isaac. And then, according to the Samaritan version of the Torah, the location was Mount Gerizim. This is the location referred to by the Woman at the Well in John 4 when she said to Jesus,

Our [ancestors] worshipped in this mountain [Mount Gerizim]; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where [people] ought to worship," [to which Jesus replied,] "believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father... the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.⁵

Abraham gave whatever place where he almost sacrificed one of his sons the name Jehovahjira, expressing that God saw Abraham in his situation and provided for him.⁶ This is one of the great through-lines of the Bible that God knows and cares for and provides for us. Jesus pointed out allegorically that this providence of God is unconditional, sending sunshine "on the evil and good" and sending "rain on the just and unjust."⁷

Fortunately, we know the outcome of the story was good for Isaac even though it was not so good for the poor ram caught in the thicket. God was just teasing Abraham, testing his loyalty, according to tradition. Or, perhaps Abraham completely misunderstood what God intended.

The moral of the story is that Abraham was willing to withhold nothing from God, even Abraham's own son, and so neither should we. God also withheld nothing from humanity, even God's only begotten son, as we often affirm from John 3:16. Then there is the part in last week's Bible reading where Jesus said that whoever loves their family and friends more than him is not worthy of him,⁸ so there is that.

But what does that mean? For Abraham, it apparently meant being willing to sacrifice one's own children as burnt offerings, albeit trusting that God would make something good come of it. But for Jesus, it meant giving someone a cold drink of water.

The smallest acts of kindness initiate the greatest outcomes.

And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward. (*Matthew 10:42 KJV*)

Give a cool cup of water to someone who is thirsty, for instance. The smallest act of giving or receiving makes you a true apprentice. You won't lose out on a thing." (*Matthew 10:42 MSG*)

Jesus was talking to his followers back then and through them to us today. He is telling us first, in the preceding verses of this passage, that whoever engages us with hospitality when we are sharing God's love with them is effectively engaging God with hospitality. The word translated *receive* in the King James Version is also translated *accept* in The Message and *welcome* in several other translations – receive, accept, welcome. Jesus concludes that the smallest act of

kindness, such as giving water to someone who is thirsty, will have a positive result. This goes both ways, whether the water is given *to* or *from* the follower of Jesus. The text itself seems ambiguous as to which was which, depending on the translation. Either way, it's good karma, like the Golden Rule. The smallest acts of kindness create open connections that enable good relationships to ensue. In fact, it is often the small things that make or break relationships. That is how discipleship works.

Contrast this kind of sacrifice with the sacrifice of Abraham – the cool drink of water *versus* human sacrifice. Even the smallest acts of kindness *versus* even the greatest of burnt offerings. The concept was not new with Jesus. It just *seemed* new because of the traditional orthodox way most people were *interpreting* the Hebrew Scriptures. The Old Testament prophet Hosea represented God by saying, "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."⁹ That verse in the Good News Translation reads,

What I want from you is plain and clear: I want your constant love, not your animal sacrifices. I would rather have my people know me than burn offerings to me.¹⁰

Jesus referenced this passage from Hosea in his conversations with his opponents.¹¹ Paul wrote, "I beseech you therefore... by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."¹² The New Testament, as Jesus pointed out, does not *invalidate* the Old Testament, but it does *reinterpret* it from the perspective of our Creator.

Trust God's kindness to prevail.

But I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation. (*Psalms 13:5 KJV*)

We can count on God's mercy. Contrary to the notion that God is out to get us, contrary to the widespread theologies of wrath and condemnation, Jesus preached salvation and love. The way God gets vengeance is not by *punishment* but by *correction*. God is not out to take anything away from us but to give us true happiness and wholeness – in this life and in the life of the world to come. With the Psalmist, we rejoice in God's salvation because we are included, our families are included, our friends are included, our frenemies are included, and our enemies are included. Even our fellow creatures are included. No one is excluded from God's infinite, unconditional, unwavering mercy.

Life is a gift from God, and it is everlasting, "without end."¹³

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (*Romans 6:23 KJV*)

Eternal life is a gift - a *free* gift, as many other translations phrase it.¹⁴ Paul elaborated on the same thought in his letter to the Ephesians, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any[one] should boast."¹⁵ To the Philippians, he further promised that eventually,

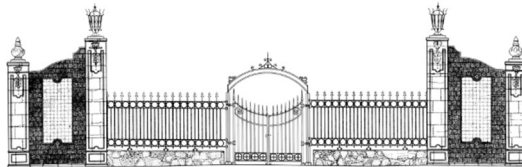
At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to

the glory of God the Father.¹⁶

Conclusion

God doesn't expect us to destroy anyone or anything to prove ourselves to God. Instead, God expects us to reflect God's mercy and love in all our encounters with all our fellow creatures. I love the scene in the movie *Evan Almighty* where Morgan Freeman playing the role of God, cleans a plant saucer and places it on the ground, miraculously filling it with water. While a thirsty dog comes over to get a drink, Freeman says to Steve Carell, whose part was Evan Baxter, the modern-day Noah, "You want to know how to change the world, son? One act of random kindness at a time."¹⁷

In the Name of Jesus, Amen.



Kindness is the Best Offering

Manuscript of the sermon preached by Rev. Bill Lawson on July 2, 2023, at Briensburg UMC
Bible Readings for the 5th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 8), Revised Common Lectionary
Genesis 22:1-14, Psalm 13, Romans 6:12-23, Matthew 10:40-42

Acknowledgments

Johnson, Gordon. "Entrance Gate," 2023. *Pixabay*. <https://pixabay.com/vectors/gate-entrance-line-art-exit-door-7933582> 12 May 2023. Drawing.

Odell, Colleen. "Woman Reading," 2019. *Pixabay*. <https://pixabay.com/vectors/women-reading-writing-transpose-410921311> May 2023. Drawing.

Revised Common Lectionary. Copyright © 1992 *Consultation on Common Texts*.
<http://www.commontexts.org/> 4 May 2023.

The Revised Common Lectionary. *Vanderbilt Divinity Library*. 2008.
<https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/> 4 May 2023.

Wersch, Jana. "Give Water," 2015. *Pixabay*. <https://pixabay.com/photos/water-water-bottle-drink-sports-830374/> 30 June 2023. Cover Image Photo.

Bible Quotations

Bible quotations are from the King James Version and are in the Public Domain, except as otherwise indicated.

Scripture quotations marked (GNT) are from the Good News Translation in Today's English Version - Second Edition, Copyright © 1992 by American Bible Society. Used by Permission.

Scriptures marked (MSG) are taken from the THE MESSAGE: THE BIBLE IN CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH (TM): Scripture taken from THE MESSAGE: THE BIBLE IN CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH, copyright©1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group

Scripture quotations marked (NRSV) are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scriptures marked TLB are taken from the THE LIVING BIBLE (TLB): Scripture taken from THE LIVING BIBLE copyright© 1971. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Bibliography

Brown, Driver, Briggs, and Gesenius. "Hebrew Lexicon entry for 'Aionios'." *The KJV Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon*.

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/aionios.html> 1 July 2023.

---. "Hebrew Lexicon entry for 'Jehovah-jireh'." *The KJV Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon*

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/kjv/yehovah-yireh.html> 29 June 2023.

Encyclopaedia Judaica Editors. "Judaism: Akedah," 2008. *Jewish Virtual Library*.

<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/akedah> 14 July 2023.

Kaminsky, Joel S. "The Akedah in Jewish Tradition." *Bible Odyssey*.

<https://www.bibleodyssey.org/passages/related-articles/the-akedah-in-jewish-tradition/>
1 July 2023.

Kogan, Barry. "Rereading the Akeidah: Three Perspectives," 1998. Union for Reform Judaism.

<https://reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/torah-commentary/rereading-akeidah-three-perspectives> 14 June 2023.

Oedekerck, Steve. "Evan Almighty" 2007. Universal Pictures. Movie clip posted on YouTube by Rotten Tomatoes Movie Clips. *YouTube*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=80x9FmKsyg4> 30 June 2023. Video.

Wikipedia Contributors. "Binding of Isaac," 18 May 2023. *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Binding_of_Isaac 14 Jun 2023.

---. "Karma," 26 June 2023. *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karma> 30 June 2023.

---. "Moriah," 9 June 2023. *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_Gerizim 1 July 2023.

---. "Mount Gerizim," 17 June 2023. *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_Gerizim 1 July 2023.

---. "Samaritan Pentateuch," 27 June 2023. *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samaritan_Pentateuch 1 July 2023.

---. "Evan Almighty," 29 June 2023. *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evan_Almighty 30 June 2023.

Notes

¹ 1 John 4:18 (KJV).

² Matthew 6:10 (KJV).

³ Philippians 4:19 (KJV).

⁴ Kaminsky, Joel S. "The Akedah in Jewish Tradition." *Bible Odyssey*.

<https://www.bibleodyssey.org/passages/related-articles/the-akedah-in-jewish-tradition/> 1 July 2023.

⁵ John 4:20-24 (KJV).

⁶ Brown, Driver, Briggs, and Gesenius. "Hebrew Lexicon entry for 'Jehovah-jireh'." *The KJV Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon*. <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/kjv/yehovah-yireh.html> 29 June 2023.

⁷ Matthew 5:45.

⁸ Matthew 10:24-39.

⁹ Hosea 6:6 (KJV).

¹⁰ Hosea 6:5-6 (GNT).

¹¹ Matthew 9:9-13.

¹² Romans 12:1 (KJV).

¹³ Brown, Driver, Briggs, and Gesenius. "Hebrew Lexicon entry for 'Aionios'." *The KJV Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon*. <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/aionios.html> 1 July 2023.

¹⁴ Romans 6:23 (KJV, NRSV, TLB, GNT).

¹⁵ Ephesians 2:8-9 (KJV).

¹⁶ Philippians 2:10-11 (KJV).

¹⁷ Oedekerker, Steve. "Evan Almighty" 2007. Universal Pictures. Movie clip posted on YouTube by Rotten Tomatoes Movie Clips. *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=80x9FmKsyg4> 30 June 2023. Video.

Copyright

© 2023, William H. Lawson, Jr. All rights reserved. Unaltered copies may be freely circulated in electronic and print media. Quotations of 100 words or less are permitted with acknowledgment. For other uses, please email bill@livingweb.com. Published on Internet Archive: <https://tinyurl.com/williamlawson> Author's Profile: <https://tinyurl.com/lawsonprofile>.

