

SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Paradoxology | Following Jesus into the Tensions of Life

TITLE: God Needs Nothing, Yet Demands Everything

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 22

DATE: June 3, 2018

PASTOR: Charlie Boyd

Following Jesus is not always easy. Most Christians want their faith journey to be simple and clear — either/or, black/white, yes/no. However, life with God is often found in both/and tensions or paradoxes. The essence of a paradox is bringing together two seemingly contradictory statements, and the Bible is full of them. God is one; God is three. Jesus is God; Jesus is man. To save your life, you should lose it. To be mature, you should become like a child. And following Jesus into tensions like these is where faith is meant to flourish. Embracing seeming contradictions like these leads to doxology—a life of intentional worship.

“Paradoxology” is a made-up word—a word made up of blending two words—paradox and doxology. A paradox is a statement or a proposition containing two ideas that seem contradictory, but in reality, it expresses something that’s true. For example, “the only constant is change” or “the more you know, the more you know you don’t know” or “less is more.” The Bible is full of paradoxical ideas about God and the Gospel—God is one; God is three. Jesus is God; Jesus is man. To save your life, you should lose it. To be mature, you should become like a child. Some paradoxes found in Scripture can be fairly easy to resolve, but sometimes, two opposites have to be held in tension in order to see the whole truth about God. And sometimes, holding opposites in tension can result in questions that challenge our faith—How can a God who tells us to love our enemies ordain the wiping out of a whole generation or command genocide? Often, when difficult questions about God, life, and faith arise, Christians say things like: “You think too much” or “Just have faith.” They believe hard questions can cause people to doubt God or even destroy someone’s faith. But I believe more people have their faith destroyed by simplistic answers or no answers than by telling them it’s okay to wrestle with the questions that are raised by the paradoxes found in the Bible. A faith that cannot stand up to honest questions will never be a strong faith—will never be a faith that sustains you when you wrestle with how your beliefs about God intersect with the *problems* of life. That brings us back to this idea of “paradoxology.” Very often *problems* and *praise* are found together in the Bible—especially in the Psalms. “Paradox” presents us with a problem, “doxology” calls us to praise. *Paradoxology* calls us to wrestle with the *problem* of seemingly opposing truths about God in a way that inspires us to *praise* God—hence paradoxology.

Today, we are looking at what Krish Kandiah calls, “The Abraham Paradox”—the paradox of a God who needs nothing, and yet demands everything.

Psalm 50:9-12 (NIV; see also Acts 17:25) — The Bible clearly tells us that God doesn’t need anything from us. “God is God all by himself.” He is all-sufficient and self-sufficient, and yet, he demands everything. What is that? Why does a God who is all-powerful and all-sufficient, at times, ask for costly obedience? The Bible’s story of God asking Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac to him as a sign of devotion gets right

to the heart of this disturbing paradox. Abraham's story is found in Genesis 11-25 and chapter 22 is the key text for the paradox.

Genesis 12-22 — God miraculously gave Abraham and Sarah the desire of their heart—a son—a gift beyond their wildest imagination, but then he asks for the gift back. And, as an act of faith, Abraham is willing to sacrifice Isaac to God, even though that demand made no sense to him. So, we need to stop and look at three things in this story that help us understand the true nature of faith.

First, faith is not a leap in the dark. Based on his previous experience with God, Abraham believed that God would fulfill his promises—he believed his future was safe in God's hands.

Second, faith flourishes in the context of relationship. Even though God's demand was disturbingly bizarre, Abraham knew God well enough to dare to trust him anyway.

Third, faith has its reasons (cf Heb 11:17). Abraham "considered"/"reasoned" that if he killed Isaac, God would raise him from the dead in order to keep his promise. His faith was an "informed decision," which sounds like a paradox in and of itself. Abraham reasoned that God had the power to do the impossible and therefore God has the authority to demand the impossible in order to accomplish something impossible again. He "reasoned" that God would do whatever it took to be faithful to his word.

Of course, the very nature of faith means you never have 100% certainty. There are always questions without answers and concerns without adequate explanations. And, that takes us back to the question of why God would put Abraham through something like this to begin with.

God knows that when we are prepared to lose everything, we find everything. Jesus said something similar to that in Mark 8:34-35. God knows that we trust him even when he asks us to do what doesn't make sense—that when we obey him when he asks more from us than we think we're capable of giving—God knows it can intensify our faith—transform our lives—ignite our worship. He knows trusting him and obeying him in the hard places of life is always for our highest good. But how do we know that? Because of the Cross. Whatever God hard thing God asks us to do, we can trust God in the loving character of God in the shadow of the Cross.

For Discussion ...

1. Ask someone to define "paradox"—give some secular examples, then give examples from the Bible.
2. What is the made-up word "paradoxology" getting at? What is the end result of wrestling with the paradoxes found in Scripture?
3. Have someone read Psalm 50:9-12 and another person read Acts 17:24-25. What do these passages teach us about God? What does it mean that "God is God all by himself?" What question does this naturally raise? (like, if God needs nothing, why did he create the world and people to begin with?)
4. The God who needs nothing, asks Abraham for everything. God miraculously gave Abraham and Sarah a gift beyond their wildest imagination—a son—Isaac—the desire of their hearts, but then he asks for the gift back. How does that make you feel? What questions immediately come to mind? How do you resolve that?
5. Why is faith "not a leap into the dark?" What does past evidence and past experience in relationship with God teach you about trusting God when you can't understand why God has allowed something "impossible" to come into your life?
6. What does Hebrew 11:17 tell us about the nature of faith?
7. So, why does God sometimes ask us to give back what he's so graciously given to us?
8. How does Mark 8:34-35 help us understand God's demands on us as followers of Jesus?
9. Why does trusting and obeying God in and through the most difficult times of our lives actually for our highest good?
10. How does the Cross, help resolve this issue of a God who needs nothing, and yet demands everything?