

## Sermon Transcript - Pastor Chad Vandervalk - Good Good Father - June 21 2020

So this Father's Day as we honor and we celebrate and remember fathers and father figures in our lives, we also recognize all of the painful emotions that come on a day like today. We recognize those men who have longed to be fathers and for whatever reason have not had the opportunity to be so. We mourn with those who have lost children, whether that be in stillbirth or losing them as they're a little bit older or lost to a broken and strained relationship in a way that is, it seems at least unable to be recovered. We mourn with those who have lost their fathers, both whose fathers have passed away and those who have lost their fathers because they're absent, sometimes absent physically, and choosing to go somewhere else or having to go somewhere else, sometimes absent emotionally and just completely disconnected. There's all kinds of emotions that come around this timeframe and to be honest, I think for a lot of us, because we as men have not been all that great on expressing our emotions in the past, a lot of our relationships with our fathers are somewhat distant and demanding. I know as I've been a pastor over the years, so many people have talked about how they feel like their fathers, well, they never really cared about them. And they felt somewhat like they were never able to measure up to what their father expected. Their father seemed very distant from them and very demanding; things had to be done a particular way. And in some ways that has been good for us. We've grown up to be independent people that know what it means to do good work, to work through our problems and our difficulties to come through on the other side, but but it still makes it difficult sometimes to have a good relationship. And sometimes it spills over into the ways we see God our Heavenly Father. We see him as distant and demanding as this being way out there somewhere that yes has everything under his control, but really isn't all that personally invested and interested in us. And then when pastors like us talk about love and all these kinds of things, it's, it's really difficult for us to grasp or to get our heads around. We see God as distant and as demanding, offering ourselves in all kinds of different ways to him so that things will go well with us and with our family. But God is not distant and demanding, the writer to the Hebrews says, He is gentle, and giving and then Jesus He has actually come near to us. Now, this is pretty radical. Actually, from a religious standpoint, if you think about the ways in which the culture of the time thought about religions they saw these gods or these forces out there, some represented war and pestilence and famine, others represented fertility and abundance and, and some were representatives of the sun and the moon, these things that seem to control our rhythms that that seemed to bring life into being and also seem to bring death as the sun becomes too hot and scorches plants or as that the rains go away as winds come. And then as, as there's fighting between nations, there just seems to be

some other powers that, that push things in certain directions. And they're very out there. And so as humans, we've developed ways in which we try to sort through those things. And so there was all kinds of gods and goddesses. I mean, when you read through Paul's visit to Athens, and he talks about how many different kinds of temples and how many different shrines were there and the ways in which they they worked to appease this God to make sure that this God was happy to get them to get the god off of their back or at least out of their way so they could do what they wanted to do see, because the gods were capricious, they weren't really easily understandable, they didn't care about humans. And all they wanted was to make sure that they got what they could from humans, and then leave them on their way. Or maybe they would just simply be angry at them for all kinds of different reasons. And so a relationship, or rather, a religion, with these gods was all about either bribing them to ensure your own success. So offering gifts to make sure that things would go well with you in the future. And maybe to stop them from being angry with you or offering gifts to thank them for the ways that they've been good to you. You know, if you had a problem, well, then someone would say, hey, well, that's that God is controlling of this problem. So you're sick with this kind of a thing. We'll go to that priest and they'll tell you exactly what to do so that that God will no longer be angry with you or will ensure something's happened with you. I mean, there's, there's so many of these in this context, and it was all about getting the gods off your back. At least out of your ways you could go on with your day just appeasing them, getting them to stay distant. This is not the story that shows up in the Bible. And we see this in the Old Testaments, as God steps into history and calls a people to himself asks Abraham to leave behind his father's household and his father's household Gods into trust in Him for His provision. God's calling them into a relationship. And even way back at the time of Abraham, there were all these other gods around that timeframe that demanded more and more and more and you can hear about Asheera or Ashura and Molek in the Old Testament scriptures and Baal, and how they demanded sacrifices of the people. And this, this would continue to cycle up right you can see how this would work. So if you had a really bad year, well then the gods must be mad at you. So you better bring more as an offering to them than you did last year so that they knew that you were really thankful and you wanted what was best for them. And then maybe they'd be good for you. But then let's say that worked. Or let's say the next year, you actually had a good a good crop Well, well, then you better bring more than you did before in order to show that you were really thankful for what that god quote unquote, god had done for you. And then let's say it happens again, things go badly, well, well, then you're offering better be bigger than the time before and then if, let's say there's another year of drought and another year of drought and another year of drought and you're left with nothing left to

give except for the very last piece of your sustenance. Well, you can see how people would be demanded more and more and more, at least they would thought they were demanded more and more. And eventually, at some point, they would come to the end of the rope, and they only think that they would have left is the firstborn of their family. And so they would sacrifice their children to these gods. There's all kinds of examples, events, all over history. And yet when God the true one, God steps into history. He says he doesn't demand human sacrifice.

And that whole weird story about Abraham offering Isaac, the main message of that story is not that God demanded the sacrifice then changed his mind at the last minute. The main message of that story is a polemic against child sacrifice. It's saying that this God this God who we follow is a God does not demand child sacrifice. He's a God who provides. He provided a ram in the bushes so that he wouldn't Abraham wouldn't have to sacrifice his child. He provides, he doesn't demand. That's why it said there on the mountain of the Lord it will be provided to his people, and God continues to do so. In often weird and surprising ways. You see, Jacob this deceiver, this guy twists things into his own advantage and yet God continues to provide for him and then you see Joseph, this dreamer who sets himself up as Why is set up because he's a favorite to be the ruler of his family. And then he's sent away by his children he thinks, or by his brothers and sisters, he thinks that he's amazing. And he has all of these dreams about how important he is and everybody else is going to bow down to him and then and then when he's finally given authority in Egypt, his things come true, but then he realizes that it was God all along, who was providing not just for him, but for the entire world at that time, not just for, even for his brothers and his family, when they come to live in Egypt, God provides after they're there, and they're oppressed in Egypt for a while God provides Moses who, who then leads them out or is used by God to lead them out of Egypt. And then they they park at Sinai, this mountain, God claims them as his own. And he gives them the gift of the law, which really are very good instructions on how to live, right? I don't I don't think there's very many people that argue about the 10 commandments and say, Well, those are not good laws. They're good laws about how to organize a society. And then there's this whole sacrificial system, which from us, sounds very barbaric. You read the first chapters of Leviticus and it's all about how many things to kill and how to kill them and where to kill them and how to make sure that they're, that it's done well, and all of these different kinds of things, but at the time, was a massive gift for these people. As if God to say look, I'm not going to continue to demand and demand demand for You. This is all this is it. This in this box this simple way, this is what I demand from you. And there's there's concessions for people being poor. There's ways in which you're supposed to have feasts within these as well. It's

not just about continuing to give, it's about providing space for community to develop for them to be balanced together. It's all about relationship, actually.

The temple, the sacrifices and the priests were there to give assurance to help them see that this is enough that God isn't angry with them, and to relieve them of their worries. It is here in Hebrews chapter 5 vs 1 and 2. The writer says that every high priest is selected from among the people and is appointed to represent the people and matters related to God. You know, remember that from last week, Dayna said that a priest does kind of both things. He represents God to the people and the people to God but watch how he does this, to offer gifts and sacrifice for sins. He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant, who are unaware of what they're doing, and those who are going astray who are willfully making wrong choices, as he himself is subject to weakness. Now the writer to the Hebrews here is in the middle of talking about why Jesus is such an amazing High Priest how he understands exactly what we have been through and that's what makes him so great as a high priest. That's what makes him so amazing and so gentle because he totally understands the difficulties that we are going through as people. But here the writer almost says that God provided even the priests as a gift to the people so that they can deal gently with the people, to help them understand that God's not angry with them, that he's not distant and demanding, but he is gentle, and giving. It's almost as though all of these things this, the sacrificial system, all of these instructions God gives about how to bring these different things, but how many festivals to have in Jerusalem about how they are all supposed to come together into the place where his name would be built, how they were supposed to come together on the mountain, and many traditions hold that the mountain in which the temple was built is a mountain in which Abraham was going to offer his son Isaac and yet it was provided a substitute was provided for him on that mountain where the temple is built later in Jerusalem on that mountain, that is where God will provide for his people. This this is a consistent theme of the prophets that this whole system the priests, the temple, and the sacrifices are not there in order to get God off of our back are to make sure that he stays out of our way so that we can get with the things that we want to do. But the prophets say all of these things are simply manners or their methods in which we can get closer to God we can connect to him. I mean, Amos and Micah and Hosea, they all talk about how you can't rely on the sacrifices. I mean, look at this chapter from Isaiah rather, this is from Isaiah chapter one. This is 11 to 17 is a chapter one verse 11, to 17. God says, the multitude of your sacrifices, what are they to me?

Says the LORD. Why do I care about how many sacrifices you're giving? I have more than enough of burnt offerings of rams, the fat of fat animals I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats so that the writer that the prophet Isaiah is saying these things were not about God, even in the beginning. It's not about what he demands from us. When you come before me that's the key. It's even in Leviticus right at the beginning it says, When you draw near to God, it was a way for us to see that we can come near to God. He's not distant and demanding, but he's close, gentle. When you come to appear before you who is asked this, have you this trampling of my courts stop bringing meaningless offerings your incense is detestable to me. New Moon and Sabbath and convocations I cannot bear your worthless assemblies and these are Assemblies of God Himself, had said they should hold but they were worthless because it was no longer about the relationship with God. It was just about getting the assembly done. It was checking something off the list so that you could get gone out of your way. Your new moon feasts your appointed festivals I hate with all my being God says they have become a burden to me. I'm weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you. And even when you offer many prayers, I am not listening. Your hands are full of blood. He's not talking about sacrifices there. Wash, and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight. Stop doing wrong learn, to do right, seek justice defend the oppressed, take up the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow to the problem was not that they weren't offering sacrifices, they still were. The problem was they were offering sacrifices over here so that they could get God out of their minds or out of their lives so that they could do the bad things they want it to do over here still. And God says that's what's wrong. Because I want to be in a relationship with you. I want all of you I want all of this together. And so often we we treat religion that way we treat God as if he's distant and demanding. As long as as we pay him off and we can do whatever we want. And God says, No, that's not what we want. That's not what this is all about. I want you

Come. God says, Come let us settle the matter says the LORD, though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow. They were red as crimson they will be like, wool. Come, God says, I know you think that I'm distant and demanding. I'm gentle and warm. Come, God says.

The writer to the Hebrews draws on this tradition of seeing the sacrifices the priests and the temple as a way to draw near to God. He draws on this tradition that God's primary goal has always been a relationship with us and he says, that is what is accomplished in Jesus.

But Hebrews chapter seven, or Hebrews chapter 5:7, . During the days of Jesus's life on earth, He offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death as our priestly representative. And he was heard because of his reverence, submission, he was rescued from death. When he rose again, Son though he was he learned obedience from what he suffered and once made perfect or complete, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him, and He was designated by God to be the high priest in the order of Melchizedek. Now, the reason the writer goes to Melchizedek here is because there's kind of a problem to see Jesus as a priest, he had to have come, or should have come from the line of Levi. He actually should have been descended from Aaron who was the original priest who was given that task way back when the people were brought out of Egypt. But he didn't. He descended from a line of David from the kingly line, and so the writer has to figure out well how then does God make him to be a priest. And then he remembers this story about Melchizedek, who was the king of Salem, or Jerusalem and was a priest of the Most High God during the time of Abraham. Now, I'm not going to get into this now. But isn't this amazing that there was a priests of the Most High God, God, the God we follow outside of this people group that God had called to be his own, in that place where there was a mountain on which the Lord would provide like this is there's so many intricacies here that are just so intriguing here, but what God sees or what the writer to the Hebrews sees in this person In Melchizedek, this king of Salem and priest have the most time God is he sees, much like many Old Testament prophets. And as you see this in the Psalms and other places, how there is a one who would come who would be a priest in the order of Melchizedek. It's not in the priest in the order of Levi, the one like Melchizedek, who had no beginning and no real end, who was a king and a priest who stood in our place as Lord of all and as the representative of all.

That is Jesus, says the writer and he became the source of eternal salvation.

So one of the things that the writer of the Hebrews says is that it's obvious that what was supposed to happen With the sacrificial system was not complete because sacrifices had to be offered again and again and again and again. And if they truly were effective, the writer says, it couldn't happen once for all, and that's it. And he says, that is what happened with Jesus, Jesus once for all sacrifice of himself. Pays for and cleanses, everything is once and for offering of himself to all of the pain, or as the one who can bear all of the pain, all of the heartache, all of the shame, all of the evil of the world, and then come through the other side, again, again, alive, shows that there is victory now over all of those things that keep us away from God. With Jesus one

sacrificing fulfills a sacrificial system with his one offering of his own life, he fulfills the priestly role, and with his acceptance of all of the pain, brutality and evil in the world, Jesus provides absolute assurance that through him God has come near to us and will always be with us. God is not some distant judge that is demanding certain things be paid to him before He allows us to go on our way. God is the God who comes to us, comes to us as one of us takes upon himself the punishment we brought upon ourselves and then erases it. He is the one that comes to cleanse us. Even though our sins are like scarlet they're made as white as snow. Because of him, and as far as the east is from the west, so far as God removed our transgressions from us, he has forgiven us and he has forgotten them. That is a promise that was there. In the past that a new covenant would come Jeremiah talks about a new covenant that would come out one where And follow certain rules but where those rules have been followed and have been obeyed and have been done even better than they could have ever been done, and they've been completed with someone who understands and knows what it's like to be human so that we then can be God's people.

God is not some distant and demanding being he is gentle, and loving and giving. We don't have to do more. We don't have to give more.

One of his books and I can't remember which one Brennon Manning tells this story about a young what an old widow I should say. An old widow who is devout and loves God, who is reported has been having dreams of Jesus visions. him to a local Bishop is tasked to go and investigate to see whether this is really the case. And so he goes and he interviews her and, and he talks to her and he doubts that this is real. Maybe she's having some other kinds of things going on in her life and until he finally says, Okay, next time that Jesus comes to you, I want you to ask him what? What I confessed my last confession. She says, Are you sure you want me to know what your sins are? Bishop? I'm not sure that that's a good idea. And he says, No, no, that's okay. Then I will know for sure that is Jesus that is coming to visit you. So he goes away in a few weeks or days later, he hears that, that she had had a visit. Sure. He goes to see her again and he says, I hear you've been having a vision of Jesus. She says yes, he came to me again and and he says So did you remember What I asked you to ask him? She said, Yes, Bishop, I did. She leaned forward towards him. She took his hand in hers. She said, Bishop, I asked Jesus what your last confession was. He said, I don't remember.

Because in Jesus, our sins are forgiven. And those Old Testament promises, that they would also be forgotten that our relationship would be absolutely made new with our

God has come true. God isn't some distant and demanding God. In Jesus He has come if you remember the Hebrew, the writers, the Hebrew says that Jesus is the exact imprint of God. He is what we should see as our Heavenly Father. our heavenly father isn't some distant, demanding God that that demands we get everything right before he comes to us. He comes to us long before we can do anything. He has come to our broken world he has humbled himself become one of us, and we see in God or we see in Jesus what it means to be God, gentle and loving, kind and compassionate.

Like a good father. He has been estranged from his children through no fault of his own, because we have chosen to go our own way. But God has been pursuing us. He has pursuing you. Like a good, good father, he longs for you to accept his love. He longs to have a close relationship where we trust that he will look after us. All of this is made possible because God came to us, Jesus gave himself for us, and reunited us with the Father.

And maybe for you. I mean, you need to spend some time with God.

Maybe you've been running from him for a long time, for various reasons, various reasons that might be really good ones, in fact, and yet maybe you need to wrestle that out with God maybe to complain to him that you haven't felt good to be the good, good father, but he claims that he claims to be. In the middle of that wrestling with him. I pray that you will be here You're is comforting words.

It's all right. I love you.

But as we reflect on this next song, it's coming up Good, Good father, I encourage you to think about the ways in which God is a Good Father. And if you need to surrender to Him to accept his love, and I would urge you. If you need to connect with either Patrick Dayna or myself to talk through some of these things, or maybe an elder, I would encourage you to do so as well because sometimes this can stir things up for us, that we need to deal with. May God bless us. May we see how much he loves us. Amen.

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