

Sacrifice Part 1: Why Sacrifice?

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Date: 24 April 2022

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[0 : 0 0] In Psalm 27 verse 6, David writes these words, I will offer sacrifices in his tent with shouts of joy.

Sacrifices with joy. In 2022, I think we've lost sight of how those two words can go together, haven't we? Sacrifices and joy.

We live in a consumer age, a consumer age where gaining things, not giving things up, is the order of the day. It's the way society is arranged. You're meant to gain a job that you can gain a salary, and with that salary, buy things that are going to make your life more comfortable, and perhaps, if you have enough of a salary, save up so you can have some things when you're older.

That is the organizing principle of society. And so this idea that sacrifice, giving things up, can actually be a source of joy, is a very foreign concept to modern ears.

But not to an ancient Israelite. Because sacrifice for an ancient Israelite was part of life. That was the organizing principle of their society.

[1 : 1 7] Very different today. So that when we read about sacrifice in the Bible, it is actually naturally a foreign concept for us. And that's why over the next three Sundays, I want us to think about and consider and study in the Bible what this idea of sacrifice really means.

And I want us to see how it's not only central in humans' relationship with God throughout the ages, but it's one of the secrets to living life well.

And it's actually a source of great joy. That's what I hope we'll discover over the next three weeks. This morning we're going to start by looking at the concept of sacrifice in the Bible.

Now sacrifice has always been part of humans' relationship with God. Right as far back as Genesis, Cain and Abel, people who encountered God saw it, naturally saw it as proper and normal to offer sacrifices of things they valued to God.

No one told them to do it. You know, it was only later with the Mosaic Covenant that God actually specified particular sacrifices. Before then, no one specified that they must sacrifice, and yet it was a natural response to God for humans right from the beginning.

[2 : 3 6] Both as an act of worship, to demonstrate to God and to oneself that God is valuable, more valuable than the things I have. But also, secondly, it was done out of a sense that we don't approach God cheaply.

We can't, this God is too big and too amazing and too glorious to just think we can approach cheaply. And so, as you look at the advancement of the biblical story, you constantly see people in relationship with God offering up sacrifices.

First thing that Noah did when he left the ark was to build an altar and to make sacrifices. First thing that Abraham did when God promised him the land, his descendants, the land of Israel, the first thing he did in response was to build an altar and make sacrifices.

And we're told God really, really liked that. He was pleased with these sacrifices. So, after Noah's sacrifice, for example, in Genesis 8 verse 21, we read, When the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, he said to himself, I will never again curse the ground because of human beings.

It was a pleasing aroma to God, these sacrifices. When people, humans made sacrifices of things they possessed, to God it was a pleasant aroma, a pleasing smell.

[4 : 04] I don't know if you have scented candles at home. Anyone got scented candles? Who likes scented candles? A few people do. I mean, it is very nice when there's a scented candle and you put it on and you dim the lights.

It creates a nice atmosphere, doesn't it? Maybe some incense if you're into that. It creates a pleasant atmosphere in your home to have a pleasing smell around.

Well, God also likes a pleasant atmosphere, but the pleasant atmosphere in his world is made by sacrifice. As humans make sacrifice, that creates a pleasant atmosphere in God's world and he enjoys it.

That's what the Bible tells us. Later on, as I said, when we get to Moses and onwards, we learn further that God specified different types of sacrifices that he enjoys.

And they weren't all the same. And he made this system in Israel that humans were meant to offer these sacrifices through the priests. Their job, their main job, was to facilitate the giving of these sacrifices, and it would happen in the temple in Jerusalem.

[5 : 15] Now, the different types of sacrifices you got. The first and major one was called an atoning sacrifice. And Christians are familiar with the idea of an atoning sacrifice. And essentially what an atoning sacrifice did was that it covered over the muck of sin in the Israelite community.

I guess you could think of it like a toilet spray. You know, you have a toilet spray which is a nice smell to cover over, a not so nice smell in the toilet. And so in the same way, in the community of God, these sacrifices offering up pleasing aromas to God would cover over the stench of sin in their community that they would otherwise have.

And God would be pleased with them. So it created this pleasant atmosphere in Israel. And these atoning sacrifices also had a very special purpose in that they could actually earn the forgiveness of sin for sinners.

But there were rules that came with them. They had to include blood. Atoning sacrifices always in Scripture had to include blood. And the reason is because the price of sin was death.

And blood represented life. And the spilling of blood represented the giving of life. And so that was a constant reminder. And it was very bloody, these sacrifices, these atoning sacrifices, which reminded Israel constantly that when we sin, blood is the price every single time.

[6 : 49] And that is a rule that is knitted into the creation. And it always has been and always will. Sin against the Creator requires life in payment. Sin against the Spirit. But God made a way through the sacrificial system in Israel that a substitute could be made.

You sacrifice an animal. And somehow, the people didn't know how it worked. We only find that out later in Scripture. But somehow, this blood of the substitute would forgive me of my sin, would cover over my sin.

And that was the place of atoning sacrifices. And those are the most familiar, the sacrifices people are most familiar with. But when we read the Old Testament in more detail, we discover that there were a whole lot of other types of sacrifices that God wanted and was pleased with that weren't all atoning sacrifices.

So you get fellowship sacrifices, fellowship offerings, for example, that were eaten. They weren't all burned up like the burnt offerings or the atoning sacrifices were. They were eaten in community and it brought people together.

Even people who couldn't afford much, they would all join together and have fellowship together, eating these sacrifices that were made by the community. Fellowship offerings. You would get drink offerings and grain offerings.

[8 : 03] And these were sacrifices recognizing that everything the Israelites had from their harvests came from God. They were all God's gifts. And these offerings, giving these offerings, had no practical purpose.

They were actually a waste. So, if you were listening carefully to the reading from Numbers earlier, one of the drink offerings that was required by God was a liter of wine.

And so you would take this liter of wine and you would just pour it out, gluck, gluck, gluck, gluck, gluck, on the altar until it's all gone. And that wine wouldn't be used. It wouldn't be useful. It would be essentially a waste.

But that waste, from the human perspective, pleased God. And so some of these sacrifices had no practical use other than just the spiritual benefit and what it does inside you when you give up something for God.

And so, as we read in the Old Testament, we discover that God desired different types of sacrifices, various sacrifices for various different reasons.

[9 : 10] Some of which were atoning sacrifices, but not all of them. And that's important. Because as Christians, we know that the atoning sacrifices of the Old Testament are no longer needed.

Why? Because of Jesus, right? Because Jesus is the one and His sacrifice on the cross that we remembered in Easter, that was what all those atoning sacrifices were pointing towards.

He was the ultimate atoning sacrifice. So, for example, I mean, this is all over the New Testament, but in Hebrews 10 verse 12, it summarizes it like this, saying, But this man, after offering one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God.

Job done. After his resurrection, sat down at the right hand of God, because his sacrifice had now atoned for the sins of his people forever. And so no more atonement sacrifices are ever necessary for those who trust in Christ.

And any atonement sacrifices made by those who don't, it has no effect anyway. Okay, so that's the atoning sacrifices fulfilled in Christ, right? But what about the other ones?

[10 : 20] Have you ever wondered that? What about all the other sacrifices? Did they just pass away? Did they just disappear? Well, according to the New Testament, not at all.

God still wants his people to make the other types of sacrifices. The fellowship offerings, the drink offerings, the grain offerings.

They are still and always will be a pleasing aroma to God when his people make those sacrifices in faith. The New Testament describes when Christians give things up as a continuation of these Old Testament sacrifices.

So, for example, Paul talks about himself being poured out as a drink offering. When he talks about his mission and the trials that he's going through and what he gives up for the proclamation of the gospel, he talks about that as a drink offering, one of the Old Testament sacrifices.

In Philippians 4, verse 8, the money that is given to ministry, to make ministry happen, is spoken of in sacrificial terms.

[11 : 29] So, Philippians 4, verse 18, not verse 8, verse 18, he says, but I've received, Paul's talking about, to the Philippians in his letter, he says, I've received everything in full and I have an abundance.

I'm fully supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you provided. He's talking about actual money they provided to him. And he says, it is a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

You see, this idea that Christians are called to make sacrifices is as much in the New Testament as it was in the Old Testament. God still is pleased with these sacrifices as much as he always has been.

Another type, Hebrews 13, verse 16, says, don't neglect to do what is good and to share, for God is pleased with such sacrifices.

Old Testament words, sacrifices. And so you see, these sacrifices are as much a part of the lives of New Testament Christians as they were a part of the lives of Old Testament Israelites.

[12 : 44] 1 Peter 2, verse 5, this is quite something, it says these words. 1 Peter 2, verse 5, listen to this, or have a look in your Bibles.

You yourselves, as living stones, a spiritual house, are being built to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

He's talking to the church, he's talking to the New Testament church, after Jesus, and he's saying, you are now the priests. And your job is now to offer sacrifices, just as the priests of the Old Testament, it was their job to do that.

Now it is the church, is the place where these pleasing sacrifices to God take place in this age. Not the temple anymore in Jerusalem, but the church, wherever it is in the world, when people in the church make regular offerings, sacrifices of what they have to God, he is pleased, because the church is the location in the world, where sacrifices are now to take place, and you and I are the priests, whose job it is to offer those sacrifices.

And sometimes, not just for practical purposes, when there is a need in the church, or you know, we give some money towards it, but on a regular basis, even when there is no practical need.

[14 : 11] Some of these sacrifices are just made for the sake of making sacrifices. And sometimes it is more meaningful when there is no practical need, actually, if you think about it.

I mean, husbands, when you buy flowers for your wife, I hope you buy flowers for your wife from time to time, or guys for your girlfriends. What's more meaningful?

If you knock on the door and come home, and you say, I bought some flowers because I think the dining room needs some more color, or, I bought some flowers because I love you, and just because.

What's more meaningful? See, sometimes it's more meaningful when there is no practical purpose. Same with giving up things to God, as an act of worship. Sometimes there is no practical purpose for it, but it's just for the sake of sacrificing itself.

But also, in the same way, as when we get gifts for those we love, your heart needs to be in it. It can't just be done as a religious act. The motivation needs to be there.

[15 : 18] The motivation needs to be right. And so, as I said, for the next three weeks, we're going to look deeper into this idea of sacrifice. But, for the rest of our time this morning, I just want us to consider one thing, and that is the motivation.

What should our motivation be? To give things up in our lives, in praise of God. And for that, we need to turn to Romans 12, verse 1. Romans 12, verse 1.

Paul, writing to Christians, after explaining the depths of the gospel, and what Jesus has achieved for us for 11 chapters, he writes this in Romans 12, verse 1.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.

to present your bodies, your whole lives, Christians, need to be lives which are now characterized with sacrifice. Now again, it totally goes against what we like to hear and what we're used to hearing.

[16 : 32] It's not what our culture tells us, and yet the Bible says a Christian's life is to be marked by willing and joyful sacrifice.

but in order for it to be willing and joyful, we need to get our motivation right and Paul says our motivation is this, the mercies of God. The mercies of God.

You see that? In view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a sacrifice. Now, interesting, depending on your translation, you might have mercies or mercy.

The original Greek is a plural, mercies, and so the correct translation is mercies. If I think the NIV just has mercy, you might want to just take a pen or a pencil and correct that to mercies.

No English translation is a perfect translation of the Greek, and so we need to understand this is a plural which means it's not just one mercy or not just the generic character of mercy, but it's the specific mercies that God has given us in our lives.

[17 : 41] What are the mercies that God has given us? Well, basically anything you have that you didn't earn. Anything you have that you didn't earn is a mercy, undeserved, favor.

Look what Paul says just a few verses before, the very two verses before, from chapter 11, verse 35. He says, who has ever given to God that he should be repaid?

Anyone? Anyone? Does God owe anyone anything? No. And then he goes on in verse 36, for from him and through him and to him are all things, all things come from God.

It's a reminder that we didn't pay God for anything he gives us, which means actually everything we have is a mercy from God, isn't it? I don't think we stop and appreciate that enough.

I don't think we stop and appreciate just how many mercies God has given us that we didn't do anything to earn. Like for example, your lungs.

[18 : 50] Have you ever considered what a mercy it is that you have lungs? And did you pay for them? Did you do any work to get them? No? No, you got them for free as a mercy.

It was only during COVID that I actually appreciated how human lungs work because I looked up kind of what COVID does and affects the lungs and then it was then that I really started to appreciate just how amazing our lungs are.

Let me give you some facts. Since I started this sermon, you've taken about 300 breaths. Now, for each one of those breaths, it was only possible because your brain sent an electrical signal to your muscles in your chest to expand and contract your lungs about roughly 20 times every minute.

When you breathed in, when that happened, the first thing was that membranes in your nose and your mouth filtered out any unwanted particles and then that filtered air went down into your lungs and was distributed to about 300 million balloon-shaped alveoli specifically designed to chemically extract the oxygen as you breathe in to extract the oxygen out of the air, the oxygen that you need to transfer it into your bloodstream and then to send that oxygen to your brain that your brain needs every minute to keep on sending the signals to your lungs to keep breathing.

and then all within those same few seconds as you breathed in that toxic carbon dioxide that is in your body which is a byproduct of your cellular processes which would kill you if it stayed in your body was carried from all over your body by special hemoglobins in your bloodstream and sent to your alveoli just in time to catch your breath out.

[20 : 44] And this happens multiple times every minute and if it didn't you'd die. Now I don't think we just randomly evolved like that did we?

That is one of God's many mercies and there are so many more I could talk about that we did nothing to earn. But everything we have is a mercy from God not just the breaths we breathe but the energy it creates the signals that allow our brains to function so that we can work the muscles that have blood in them so that we can do things with our hands the work we can do to earn our salaries the money with which we buy the things we have all of it is a mercy of God isn't it?

And so to take some of that stuff and give some of it back to God who gave it all to us as a mercy as something that pleases Him it should be a no brainer right?

To take some of the stuff that is just from God's mercy anyway and give it back to Him because we know it pleases Him it should be natural it should be something we obviously do but we don't naturally do that because we live in this lie that we have earned what we have and it all belongs to us and so we can use it how we see fit all for our own purposes that's what our society wants to tell us but that is why this discipline of Christian sacrifice is so vital in our lives to get right and to start doing if we're not doing it because one thing it's a recognition and it's a declaration to ourselves and to our families and to the society around us that everything we have is actually a mercy of God and when you make sacrifices of things you have to declare that it pleases God but there's another motivation for making sacrifices and that is because

God Himself is sacrificial in His very nature think about it His greatest mercy to us was the giving of Himself in the person of Jesus Christ God chose to sacrifice Himself for our sins as a substitute so that even though we don't deserve any of it we can have forgiveness we can know the surety of God's forgiveness and we can have hope and we can have a future in God's new creation after death all because God is sacrificial if God was not sacrificial that would not be possible but God is sacrificial and that giving Himself as a sacrifice was always part of His plan from eternity past this willingness to sacrifice Himself wasn't something He came up with on the fly it was always there in His mind even before He made any of this this idea this concept of willing sacrifice was never not in God's mind and so what that means is that sacrifice has always been part of God's nature and so if you and I are made in His image which the Bible says we are it should be part of our nature too it should be part of our very nature it should be integral to being human is a willingness happiness and a joy in sacrifice and yet our society is not wired that way and so we need to break away from the habits of our society and realize that sacrifice should be part of not just being

[24 : 48] Christian but being human it's what God wants to make a pleasing aroma in His world and in a world that has lost touch with that in a society that has lost touch with the place and the joy of sacrifice it's up to us the church to show the world around us the people around us just what joyful willing sacrifice really looks like as we consider all of God's mercies and respond to that and so will you learn to say with David I offer sacrifices with shouts of joy and will you come back next week to find out how let's pray yes Lord we praise you because you are a God of great mercies everything we have is from your hand you don't owe us anything and Lord we are bowled over when we consider your greatest mercy in sacrificing yourself and the person of

Jesus Christ for us and Lord we pray that that would motivate us not just to make reluctant sacrifices when needed but to seek joyfully look for opportunities to sacrifice so that we may show you in the world around us how much we value you and that you would be glorified and that we would find a new joy that perhaps we've never known before in recklessly offering up what we have for your glory we pray that you would preserve us and bring us back next week so that we can find out more about that in Jesus name Amen Amen