

Sacrifices

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[0 : 00] I want to ask you this morning, what sacrifices have you made in this past week? Think about it. What sacrifices have you made in this past week?

A sacrifice is defined as to give up or to forego something for the sake of something else, basically, or someone else. And sacrifice is really not a very popular concept in our comfort-driven culture. And so I bet you haven't been asked what sacrifices have you made this week for quite a while. But nonetheless, it's something we all do, don't we? I'm sure you can think of sacrifices that you have made.

If not in the past week, then maybe in the past month or year. We make certain sacrifices in the course of our lives. It's part of life. Parents make sacrifices of time and energy for their children. Friends make compromises and sacrifices for one another all the time. Friendships require that to work. Husbands and wives make sacrifices of preferences and comforts for one another.

[1 : 00] I bet you, if you're married, you have, at one point at least, given up your preference for what you want to watch on TV or what movie you want to watch for your spouse who wants to watch something different.

You see, we make sacrifices, small and big. Stories are told of soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice of throwing themselves on a grenade to save their unit. Sacrifice is part of life.

We must get that straight, especially in our culture that tells us to pursue comfort. We must get straight that sacrifice is a very important part of our lives. In fact, it's a vital part of any real relationship, isn't it?

Sacrifice is really part of what it means to love. You can't have love without some measure of willing sacrifice. And that's nowhere more true than in our relationship with God.

Throughout history, God's relationship with his people has been based on this idea of sacrifice. Right from the beginning of our Bibles, back in the book of Leviticus that was read for us earlier, we see how sacrifice is a vital part of real relationship with God.

[2 : 04] His people expressed their love for him in their willingness to make sacrifices. Throughout the Bible. But also, what we find out in the Bible, when we read on, is that God himself is revealed to us to be a God who makes sacrifices for his people.

Which you don't see in any other religion's perception of God at all. But the God revealed in the Bible, the true God, is unique. In that he is a God who has always planned, had always planned from the beginning of time, to sacrifice himself.

To make the ultimate sacrifice. Before he made any of this that we see, before he made us, he knew that for a sinful human, for sinful humans to be in any kind of real relationship with him, a sacrifice would be needed from him.

He knew that. Now we know, we've just come from Easter, we know what happened, don't we? We know what the entire Old Testament was pointing towards. It was pointing towards the sacrifice that took place on the cross of Jesus.

Where God had, he fulfilled his plans from the beginning of time, came to culmination on that cross. Where he showed the world that he is willing to sacrifice himself for us.

[3 : 22] And that is the only way that our sin could ever be forgiven. Your sin can ever be forgiven. Is only through that. Because that's the only way it can justly be forgiven. Where your sin can be dealt with.

But you can be forgiven. Because God himself took his own punishment for your sin on your behalf. And that is the gospel in a nutshell. That's what we as a church exist to proclaim.

And it's right there on that cross that God shows you just how much he loves you. If you ever wondered if God loves you, look at the cross. You won't see it any more clearly than there.

God loves you enough to sacrifice himself for you so that you can come into his family for eternity. And so let me ask you. How much have you sacrificed this past week for him? Because if sacrifice is an indicator of the depth and intensity of love. And God's ultimate sacrifice tells you just how deeply and intensely he loves you. It's worth asking what sacrifices do you make in your life to show that you love him in response?

[4 : 29] Well that's exactly what the Apostle Paul wants us to consider here in Romans at the beginning of chapter 12. After 11 chapters of explaining what God did for us in Jesus. And if you have not read those chapters, please do yourself a favor and read those chapters.

You can find our sermons on the internet where we study those chapters together. Paul just is at pains to outline the glories and the depths of this amazing thing that happened when Jesus came to earth.

And what it means for you today, 2,000 years later. But after 11 chapters of doing that, right at the beginning here of chapter 12, he writes, Therefore, therefore, in light of everything that's gone before, therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice.

Holy and pleasing to God. This is your true and proper worship. And so the right response to God's sacrifice for us is to sacrifice for him. That's what he's saying.

That's the right response. And if you're not willing to make any significant sacrifice for God in your life, then you probably haven't yet understood what God did for you in Jesus.

[5 : 35] Because if you truly get that, if you really get the gospel, if you truly grasp it, your response, says Paul, will be sacrifice. But what does this mean?

What kind of sacrifice is Paul talking about? What does he mean when he talks about a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God? Well, you see, in the Old Testament, sacrifices were made, if you look back in the book of Leviticus, for example, sacrifices were made for many reasons. Some were for the atonement of sin, which Paul can't be talking about because Jesus has already fulfilled those requirements in his ultimate sacrifice, so that we don't anymore need to sacrifice for the atonement of sins.

We just trust in Jesus who's done it for us. But you see, there were other types of sacrifices in the Old Testament as well that often people miss, such as sacrifices which were made to express thanks to God for his blessings.

If it was a particularly good harvest, if people felt really that God had blessed them, they would take some of what they had and they would offer it up at the temple, just as an expression of thanks.

[6 : 42] There were also sacrifices called fellowship offerings, where the sacrifice would be eaten as a meal together with the community. And people's sacrifices that they brought to the temple would promote that fellowship.

They wouldn't destroy the animal then that came. They would eat it. They would have a great, like, spit bra at the temple. To promote fellowship with each other.

So it was all about loving God and loving each other that these sacrifices were made. And so Paul is saying in the same way, we must be willing to make those kind of sacrifices for God to express our gratitude to him as we recount every day just what we have because of his love.

The fact that every breath we breathe is a gift from him. How often do we express our thanks to God? And normally, when we really want to express our thanks, we feel like we want to give something back.

We feel like we want to sacrifice. But also, not just to express our gratitude to God, but for the benefit of our church fellowship. That's also why we're called to make sacrifices. Sacrifices of time and money to promote and grow that fellowship.

[7 : 47] Even if that starts just with the sacrifice of your Sunday morning lion to come to church. Not just so that you can grow, but so that others can be encouraged through you coming to church.

And that's where it starts. If you're not willing to sacrifice a lion on Sunday morning, then let me tell you, you haven't grasped the gospel yet. You haven't realized just what God has done for you. Just how much he gave for you. So that's the kind of sacrifice that Paul is calling us to. But then he uses three adjectives I just want us to notice to describe these sacrifices.

Firstly, he calls them living. They're to be living sacrifices. Now, in the Old Testament, sacrifices generally ended up dead, right? You slit a lamb's throat and it's not going to survive for much longer.

And the person bringing the sacrifice would come to the temple. The priest in front of everyone would kill it or burn it and it would be gone. And then the person would leave and go home until the next time comes to bring another sacrifice to the temple.

[8 : 56] And those are sacrifices that died. But when we're told to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, it means rather than approaching God with a sacrifice and then going back to ordinary life, it means we are the sacrifices while we go about our ordinary lives.

You see the difference? It means sacrifice is no longer something we give on a Sunday to God and his people, but it's who we are throughout the week. We are the sacrifice for God in how we live. The second adjective we use is holy. A living sacrifice, holy. Now, holy essentially means to be set apart for special use.

And that's what the people did with their sacrificial lamb. They would set it apart from all their ordinary lambs and it would be the best and the most unblemished one that they had. And they set that one apart so that it could be used for God.

And so for us to be called holy sacrifices means that we ourselves, when we become Christians, must now be set apart for God's use.

[9 : 59] Which means sacrificing time and energy and money towards God's purposes rather than our own. For kingdom rather than career is where our energies and resources should be focused.

And then the third adjective is pleasing to God. We're to be living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. And here we're told that what should be at the heart of a Christian sacrifice is that she does it to please God, her father.

Not to earn brownie points. Not to please her pastor. Not to be seen as a good Christian in the eyes of others. You know, just going back to that please your pastor thing.

When we as a church leadership call you to be involved in service and ministry, I don't want you to do it to make me happy. I don't want you to do it to impress me or please me.

You shouldn't care what I think. You should care what God thinks. You should do it to make God happy. And that's essentially what Paul is saying here. Pleasing to God, that should be our motivation.

[11 : 03] You know, a Christian sacrifices because fundamentally she has a relationship of love with God and she wants nothing more than to please Him.

And so she joyfully makes whatever sacrifices she knows will do that. You know, just like a husband and a wife in a marriage. Sacrifice for one another, not because they have to, but because they love each other.

And they want to please each other. And so that, in summary, is what it means to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice. To respond to the sacrifice of God through giving ourselves.

To be at God's disposal in everyday life and making whatever sacrifices best please Him. But then, Paul does something interesting in this verse.

He says, this is your true and proper worship. Notice that? Now, worship, the word worship is an interesting one. It literally means worth-ship. It literally means to how much you, how much worth you attach to something, how much value you put on something.

[12 : 05] Is your worship of it. That's what the word means. And so Paul's saying how much you worship God isn't seen in how loud you sing on Sunday. But it's really seen in how much you're willing to sacrifice from Monday to Saturday.

That is where worship takes place. And so let me ask you. What is God worth to you? What is God worth to you?

The God who created you. The God who preserves you. And not only that, the God who has given Himself to save you and restore you and bring you to eternal life one day.

What is He worth to you? A few rands in the collection bag? 20 minutes of praise on Sunday? Is that all God is worth to you? No.

As David Secombe says in reflecting on this verse, God is worth nothing less than the total surrender of our whole life in service. And so are you ready to do that?

[13 : 06] Are you ready to be a living sacrifice this morning as you go out into the week ahead? Be honest. Are you? Because if you're not, if you're not willing to be a living sacrifice, then maybe you haven't quite realized just what God has done for you to save you from your sins.

In which case, please come speak to me. I can give you some resources to find out, to understand just what Jesus did for you. But if you are ready, if you are ready to make sacrifices this morning,

then let me make you some suggestions.

Along with your notices we've provided, you'll see two guides. If you don't have them, then you can pick them up at the back afterwards. But you should have received them when you came in. A couple of guides, and these guides just outline just two areas that God specifically calls us in His Word to make sacrifices.

Things that please Him and things that grow His church. And there's more, but these are just two to start. And those are firstly giving financially to the work of this church. And secondly, in giving your time to a Bible study where you can grow and help others to grow.

Now don't go home and throw these away, please. We've taken money from your tithes to print them, so it would be a waste. But also, take them home. Read through them carefully and prayerfully.

[14 : 23] Pray over what you read. And consider what sacrifices you're going to make this term in response to the ultimate sacrifice God has made for you.