

Sacrifice Part 2: Sacrifice is an Act of Faith

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Date: 01 May 2022

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[0 : 00] Well, if you want to know, probably my least favorite time of the month is when I have to do banking. When I've got to go to the internet banking and I've got to make sure that the credit card is paid off.

And I've got to make sure that we have enough income to pay our bills. And I've got to pay our bills and dispose of my disposable income once again. You know how it is.

As soon as it comes into the bank account, it seems to go out. I try to put it off for as long as possible so I don't have to do it. But it's normally when I'm standing at the checkout at spa and the lady says to me, sir, it says insufficient funds, that I've got to go, okay, I suppose I've got to pay off the credit card, go do the banking.

Now, I don't look forward to it because it's always quite a pressure, isn't it? When you open up and you look at your bank account, for most people, it's a pressure of making sure that ends meet, that our outflows don't exceed our income.

And always having to tighten the belt a little bit more every month to make sure that there are no unnecessary outflows to limit the luxuries. And now, especially with rising costs, with what's happening in Europe and the soaring cost of petrol and how that affects consumer goods and inflation, I think all of us, one way or another, are feeling the squeeze.

[1 : 25] Am I right? Financially. Financially. And we're all feeling that pressure of, can I make ends meet to a certain extent.

But then the worst thing is we have to come to church and hear about sacrifice. Really? Come on, Nick, now's just not the time to tell us about the sacrifices we need to make, right?

Why don't you wait until things are better? Why don't you wait until, you know, the petrol price stabilizes? Then we can talk about the sacrifices we need to make as Christians.

The truth is, though, it's never the time, is it? It's never the time to talk about sacrifice because we always feel the squeeze one way or another.

Even if your situation is better next month, sacrifice is never actually a welcome topic for us to hear. Because the truth is that none of us are eager to let go of the stuff we have.

[2 : 33] Naturally. Especially in a world that puts pressure on us and that keeps demanding more of us. Doesn't the world do that? Our jobs, our responsibilities out there, they seem to just, every month, keep demanding more and more time.

More and more money. More and more of our energy. And so this idea that we looked at last week, this idea of joyfully giving up those things.

Our money, our time, and our energy. Joyfully giving them up to God as an act of sacrifice. That idea seems very remote. We might do it as Christians because we know it's the right thing.

But to do it joyfully, to do it willingly, to do it naturally seems very idealistic. And that's why, before I talk about what the Bible teaches about the specific sacrifices that are called by Christians.

We'll look at that next week. I want to talk about something this week that needs to happen in our heads. Before we are actually in a place where we can joyfully sacrifice things in our life for God.

[3 : 39] Before we can get sacrifice right, there needs to be a fundamental change in the way we think about things. The way we think about our stuff. The way we think about our bank accounts.

The way we think about our resources needs to change. Before we can actually start to sacrifice them the way we should. With the right attitude. And so, I want you to turn to Romans 12.

If you don't turn there, then it will be up on the screen behind me. But these are some vital verses. They're the verses that inspired this series of sacrifice.

Listen again to what Paul says 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. This is your true worship. So, Paul is saying, just as Old Testament Israelites would reflect on their salvation from Egyptian slavery and all that God has given them. [4 : 47] And they would give back to God as an act of worship. So, Christians today are called to live lives of sacrifice. Especially in view of God's mercies. We looked at some of that last week, remember?

If you were here. But ultimately, the biggest mercy is the giving of His Son. To die for our sins. To bring us to a state of forgiveness.

To bring us to a state of right relationship with God. That is a huge mercy because we don't deserve it. There's nothing we can do to earn it. Jesus took our sins on the cross and took the penalty of our sin.

So, to break the power of sin over our lives and to give us the hope of eternal life, which we just celebrated at Easter. That is such a mercy of God. The fact that we can have that future, that hope. Resurrection from the dead. Forgiveness of our sins. And in view of those mercies, the natural response should be to give back to God of all that He has given us. To sacrifice.

[5 : 43] But it's not natural for most of us. And so, Paul goes on. And he tells you what needs to happen before sacrifice becomes a joyful, willing, natural act for us.

And it's in verse 2. Look what he says. Romans 12 verse 2. Do not be conformed to this age. But be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

That's the key, you see. That's the key. He says, before you can live the way that you're called to as a Christian in light of God's mercy. A sacrificial life.

A joyfully sacrificial life. You need something to change up here. Something needs to change in the way we think. If we're to live the right way.

It needs to start here. It needs to start here. Before we can live sacrificially. We need to break out of how the world thinks. Especially how it thinks about money.

[6 : 47] Money. And stuff. And possessions. And resources. We need to identify those patterns of thinking. And then actually break out of them.

And start thinking about our money and our resources. And our time and our energy in new ways. So how does the world think about resources? How does the world think about money? Well I'll tell you.

The world thinks about and has programmed us to think about our money in terms of cost versus benefit. What's this going to cost me? Versus what am I going to get out of it?

Whether it's our money that we're spending. Whether it's our time. Whether it's our energy that we're spending on something. Whether we do it consciously or not. We're always asking ourselves the question.

What benefit is this going to accrue? When I put out. And so we always. We naturally live in this way. Where we only will put out our time and our energy and our effort and our money.

[7 : 45] If we can get something back from it. Some calculable benefit. That's the way we naturally think. That's the way the world thinks about money. Now that idea of cost versus benefit.

It's an important idea. It's not fair if you're an accountant or if you're running a business. But it's a terrible way to live the Christian life. Because we'll never be able to make the sacrifices we're called to if we always think cost versus benefit.

Think again. Think back to when we were doing Mark. Mark. We were reading Mark 14. And we came across that woman who poured perfume on Jesus' feet. Remember her? And she broke this alabaster jar of pure nard.

Now that was expensive stuff. In today's terms it would be about 100,000 rands worth of the substance. She just poured all over Jesus' feet. And you'll remember that from when we did Mark. But I want to ask you a question. Do you think she did a cost benefit analysis before she did that? Do you think she sat down and calculated the price and what she would get out of it when she didn't know? It's not how she was thinking.

[8 : 56] You know who did do a cost benefit analysis? The disciples. What a waste. That could have benefited the poor. What a waste of resources. But Jesus rebuked them for that.

Because they were still thinking in worldly terms. And he commended the woman. Or two chapters before that. Think about the woman who Jesus pointed out. Who went to the temple and gave two coins into the temple treasury.

Remember her? And Jesus pointed her out and said, You know what? Even though she's given so little, she's given more than all those Pharisees. Because she gave all that she had. Now let me ask you.

Do you think she sat down with her budget beforehand? And calculated what she could afford? Do you think she did a cost benefit analysis? No. And yet Jesus holds these women up as examples of how Christians should think about money.

Very different to the way the world thinks about money, isn't it? And so how do we do that? How do we start thinking about our stuff? Our resources. The stuff that we own.

[10:01] Our money. Our time. The things that are under our control. How do we start thinking about these things in this new way that Jesus calls for. So that we can actually joyfully sacrifice.

Well I'll tell you how. Strangely. It's through sacrificing them that you learn to think about them in a different way. It's actually through the discipline of sacrifice itself that you start thinking in these new ways.

So it's a bit of a chicken and egg scenario. You know which comes first? Well it's actually sometimes it's just through especially disciplines in Christian life. Often I like this.

It's just through starting them even when you don't feel like it that you start to realize how much you need to do them. Prayer. Reading the Bible. Sacrifice. All Christian disciplines are the same.

In that you don't feel like them. But when you start them. When you just step forward and do them. You start to become fit for them. And realize how much you need to do these disciplines. It's like running. I don't know if you're into running.

[11:03] But if you want to get fit for running. What do you need to do? You need to start running. Exactly. Even when you don't feel like it. Even when you're not fit for it. It's the same with Christian discipline.

It's the same especially with sacrifice. To program our minds to think the right way so that we can let go of what we have for a greater purpose.

We need to actually just start doing it. And when we get into the discipline of sacrifice what you'll realize is it starts to change the way you think. Slowly but surely. And you start to discover that sacrifice is an act of faith itself.

The discipline of sacrifice is an act of faith. That's the first thing I want us to consider about sacrifice. Sacrifice as an act of faith. What's going on inside when we step out and do these sacrifices that God is calling us to.

Well it'll be helpful if you put yourself in the shoes of an Old Testament Israelite. Okay. When they made their sacrifices. Put yourself in the mind of an Old Testament Israelite coming to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices.

[12:22] The sacrifices that they would offer. I'm not talking about the atonement sacrifices. Remember last week we saw there were various different types of sacrifices in the Old Testament. And some of them weren't for atonement.

Some of them were for thank offerings, free will offerings, worship of God. Now think of coming as an Old Testament Israelite and coming and taking your liter of wine, which is really expensive. Giving it to the priest. Stepping back and seeing him just pour it out on the altar. Wasted. Or think of bringing your grain that you worked hard in the fields to get and then handing it over and seeing it burnt up.

What would go through your mind in that moment when you're giving that stuff up? Because that's a lot of money right there. Now we think sheep or grain or, I mean sheep are still expensive aren't they?

Wine is also. But for an Old Testament Israelite, this was the stuff of life. This was the stuff they needed day to day. Kind of be giving up our broadband internet. Or our TVs or whatever it is.

[13:26] Practical things in life that they were giving up. They must have been fighting the temptation to stand there and think. What a waste. I could have used this.

I could have enjoyed this and yet it's just being poured out on that altar. What a waste. And so I think the act of sacrifice itself was meant to challenge God's people every time they did it.

To consider their attitude towards the stuff that they owned. That was the point. And to consider whether they really believed God was worth it.

Every time they went and offered up that grain and those sheep and that wine. They must have been challenged to consider, is God worth all the stuff that I'm giving up? Because the truth is, that

attitude that they had in their hearts, that's what God was looking for.

All along with the sacrifices. The whole sacrificial system, besides the atonement sacrifices, the point of them was really to change how Israelites thought about their things. Because God didn't need the stuff.

[14 : 33] Newsflash, God doesn't need more sheep. He owns them all anyway. He doesn't need grain. God doesn't need wine. So why did he still ask the Israelites to give up those things?

Because he wanted to program their minds to think a certain way about their stuff. He wanted them to develop the right attitude. And we see that actually in Hebrews.

So you can turn with me to Hebrews 11. The writer to the Hebrews here is reflecting on the sacrifices that Cain and Abel made. That we read about in Genesis 4.

These are the first recorded sacrifices in the Bible. Offerings. And Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve, both made an offering.

But God rejected Cain's offering. And he accepted Abel's offering. Why? What was the difference? There were differences between them.

[15 : 29] Was it because of what they offered? Was it because of the way they offered it? Well, no. It was what was going on inside when they offered it. And we learn that in Hebrews 11 verse 4. Listen to what it says.

By faith, Abel offered a better sacrifice to God than Cain did. By faith. Why did God reject Cain's offering and not Abel's?

Well, because of the attitude that it was brought. God was looking for a sacrifice done in faith. And ever since then, He always has. Every time His people were called to sacrifice things in the altar, God has been looking for a particular attitude to accompany that sacrifice.

And that is a sacrifice done in faith. That's what God wants. Sacrifice is done in faith. In other words, in a real belief in who God is.

That this God who I'm giving this to is the one who provides everything that I have. And therefore, this can't be a waste. Right? Because God is the one who gave it to me in the first place.

[16 : 34] And not only is this thing that I'm giving up His anyway, but if I'm in relationship with the God who created the cosmos, I don't need this little thing. I don't need this time that I'm giving up for God.

I don't need it for myself because He will ensure that I have all that I need. Because He's my provider. He will ensure that I have the time that I need if I give up this little time.

Or the money that I need if I give up this money. Or the energy that I need if I focus my energy into doing something for Him. He will ensure that I have what I need. So I don't have to hoard it all for myself because of who God is.

That is faith. That is what God is looking for. That is what God is seeking for us to develop as we develop this attitude of sacrifice. And it's the discipline of sacrifice that actually develops that faith and proves that we have it at all.

It's through the discipline of sacrifice that proves that we actually believe God is our provider of everything we need. And we strengthen that faith.

[17 : 39] That's what it was all about. And so I want to ask you this morning. Not just do you make sacrifices for God, which is an important question in itself.

But if you do, which you should if you're a Christian, obviously. Romans 12 verse 1. Living sacrifices. If you do make sacrifices for God.

If you do give money towards the church. If you do give time towards ministry. I think we still need to ask ourselves the question. Are they Cain sacrifices?

Or are they able sacrifices? Are they Cain sacrifices? Are we just doing them because we have to? Because it's our duty? I think often that is the case, isn't it?

Just like Cain. Maybe the attitude's still not right. Or are they able sacrifices? A joyful act of faith in a God who provides everything I have. Ask yourself. I think we all need to ask ourselves whether the sacrifices we're making for God and His kingdom are Cain sacrifices or able sacrifices.

[18 : 42] Are they done in faith that I can happily let go of this thing because I'm giving it to the God who provides everything I have. And will make sure I have everything I need. And it's when we learn to sacrifice with that attitude that we experience something amazing.

We experience true freedom. Perhaps for the first time in our lives. And that's why sacrifice not only is it an act of faith but it's an act of freedom.

It's an exercise of freedom. God wants His children to be free. He wants His children to be free of guilt and sin and death.

And that's why He sent Jesus. So that Jesus can take the punishment and the penalty of our sin and rise to give us the assurance of eternal life. So that we can be free of the penalty and the dread of death.

And the guilt of our sin. But God doesn't only want you to be free of sin. You know what? He wants you to be free from the anxiety of having to cling to the things you have as well.

[19 : 54] He wants you to be free in a multitude of ways. Including this way. He wants you to be free of this world's pressure and anxiety to hoard stuff. And cling to the things we have. And the truth is we'll never actually be effective for God in His kingdom unless we know that freedom.

It's like a bird learning to fly. I don't know if you've ever watched a bird leaving the nest for the first time and learning how to fly.

Or we've watched a YouTube video or a documentary or something. But that bird, before it actually experiences flight, all it's ever known is the nest.

And it just clings to that nest. It doesn't want to leave the nest. It looks over the edge and it's going, no, no ways. I'm not going there. Just because the nest is all it's known. But if it's ever going to fly, if it's ever going to be what God designed it to be, it needs to give up clinging to the nest.

Doesn't it? It needs to give up clinging to the only thing it's known. And in the same way, if you want to live the life God is calling you, if you want to be the person God has saved you to be, you need to learn to let go of the stuff that this world tells you is necessary for your happiness and your security.

[21 : 06] And you need to have faith that in your relationship with God, you already have everything you need. And that's when you'll start to experience true freedom.

And so you shouldn't wait for things to get better before you start making real sacrifices for God. You shouldn't calculate whether you can afford it. Can I afford this money?

Can I afford this time? Can I afford this energy that I'm going to be putting out now if I do this thing for God, for His kingdom? Can I afford it? You shouldn't wait for things to get better until you have enough.

Because it's sacrifices that are done when you don't think you can afford it that God honors the most and God is pleased with the most. Like the Macedonians.

Remember the Macedonians? Do you know the Macedonians? Let's learn about the Macedonians, shall we? 2 Corinthians 8. Turn there in your Bibles. 2 Corinthians 8. 2 Corinthians 8. Paul is writing this letter to the Corinthian church.

[22 : 12] And it's during a time of famine in the Judean churches. And he's trying to encourage these Corinthian Christians, who are still very immature relatively, to make sacrifices for these practical needs.

And so what Paul does, very sneaky, is that he, in his letter to them, he mentions the Macedonians. He says, oh, did you hear about the Macedonians, guys? And this is what he writes. 2 Corinthians. Where am I now?

2 Corinthians 8. Verse 1 to 4. We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that was given to the churches of Macedonia.

During a severe trial brought about by affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

I can testify that according to their ability and even beyond their ability, of their own accord, they begged us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in the ministry to the saints.

[23 : 15] So there was this group of churches who were in severe trial, great affliction and great poverty. And beyond their ability, they saw it as a privilege to be able to sacrifice things for the work of the kingdom.

They begged Paul and the others whether they could do it. And Paul calls that a grace of God. Did you notice that in verse 1? I want to tell you about the grace of God. This willingness to sacrifice joyfully was a grace of God because, you know what?

These Macedonians, they may not have had lots of money, but they had something that most Christians today don't have and that is freedom. They were free. They were free from this having to cling to their stuff.

They were free from the anxiety of, oh, I need to accumulate. I need to have it to myself. And they could willingly sacrifice, and Paul calls that a grace of God. It was a gift of God given to the

Macedonians, this attitude of sacrifice.

They were free. God could have given the Macedonian churches more. He could give each of us more. You look at your bank account this month. God could double that in a day, in an instant, if He wanted.

[24 : 23] He could make it ten times as much if He wanted. He could give more than enough to each and every one of us, but He doesn't. Even though we're His children, why? Why does God still cause us to have to struggle at the end of the month to make ends meet?

Why doesn't He just give us enough if we're His children? Well, because if we sacrifice when we only ever have enough, well, then we'll never learn to truly let go of what we have and leave the nest and fly.

We'll never actually experience this freedom from stuff if we only ever have enough. But it's the sacrifice that we feel. It's the sacrifice that we think we can't afford.

That's when we really start to fly. That's when we really start to experience a freedom that the world does not have. A freedom from stuff. And that's when we start to become effective for God's kingdom.

And it's risky. It's risky looking over the nest and considering letting go of the stuff we have. But it's exciting. And it's how God wants His people to live in that freedom.

[25 : 36] And it's how He's going to make His kingdom grow. It's how He's going to make His kingdom grow in Muesenberg. It's when His people let go and are willing to sacrifice for a greater purpose for His kingdom.

It's how He's going to build His church here in Plumstead. It's how He's going to make St. Mark's more effective. It's when His people here learn the joy and the freedom of true sacrifice.

And so we need to get to that point. We need to learn how to do it better. But more on that next week. Why don't you come back and we can encourage each other to learn this joy of and this freedom of sacrifice together.

But let's pray in the meantime. Lord, we do. We thank You for the sacrifice You made. That in Your heart from the beginning of time was sacrifice. You yourself are sacrificial in Your very nature and that caused You to come in the person of Jesus and give everything for us so that we could be free. But not just free from sin. You want us to be free from worry. You want us to be free from what the world is a slave to. Money. And Lord Jesus, You say that a person cannot serve two masters.

[26 : 48] We can't serve God and money. And so we pray. Change the way we think about our stuff. Change the way we think about our money, our time, our energy, our resources so that we could get, each of us, get to the point of willing, joyful sacrifice.

And that You would use that for the furtherance and the growth of Your kingdom and the glory of Your name. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.