

Sermon – July 11, 2021

“Living Sacrifice”

Crown of Life Lutheran Church, Rigby, ID

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Grace, mercy, and peace be to each of you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

As we begin, I invite you to pray with me:

"O Lord, speak in this place, in our minds, in our hearts, by the words of my mouth, and in the thoughts we form. Speak, O Lord, we, your servants, are listening. Amen."

Today, as we end our series, I believe we are going to explore one of the greatest principles Paul discusses in the book of Romans and that is us becoming a “living sacrifice”.

This is an important topic because as we learn about sin, redemption, and righteousness, we often ask ourselves and God, “Okay, so now what?” I have all this academic knowledge, now what?

Well, today we are going to look at an answer to this question. We will get started with part of our text for this morning from Romans 12...

“...I urge you ... to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice ... holy and pleasing to God - this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is ...”

Romans 12:1-2

As you probably noticed, here Paul mentions the concept of a “living sacrifice”. Now, in the Old Testament there were many sacrificial offerings made for lots of different reasons.

And they all had one thing in common ... ALL of these sacrifices were obviously DEAD.

But God decides to change the game a bit by calling ALL believers to become, “living sacrifices.”

Think about the impact of Paul’s statement for a moment ... being a “living sacrifice” will always require us to be WILLING ... to crawl back ONTO the altar for sacrifice.

Or, as Jesus says in Luke 9...

"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." Luke 9:23

I think you already know that it won’t ever be comfortable and easy, and it will almost certainly mean some suffering, but at the end of the day, it IS what God desires.

Still, how do we DO THIS effectively? I believe Paul lays out a very simple guide for us in this short passage in Romans 12.

He talks about the importance of saying NO to the things of this world that require crawling off the altar to experience, while INSTEAD, sacrificially saying YES to the things of God.

Ultimately, when we do, we will begin to understand more of our role to play in God's will as He carries out His purposes. So first, we need to say...

No to the World.

In fact, the first thing Paul invites us to do is to simply say "no" to the temptations and patterns of this world. I am a firm believer that in everyone's life, there are habits of one form or another.

Some of them will be healthy habits, of course. For instance, perhaps you wake up early each morning, drink your cup of coffee, spend some time in God's Word and in prayer, and then complete a morning workout before heading to work or school.

Others of us, however, may find ourselves caught up in some type of unhealthy habits ... habits of sin and temptation that you just can't seem to stop or change.

At the end of the day, I think we all have to finally conclude that what God needs from us is nothing, but a willingness to simply SAY "no" ... to choose NO.

And in your life right now, maybe the first step towards this transformation is some internal dialogue between you and your sinful habits or temptations.

For example, "Sin, you have been creeping back into my life every time I convince myself you are gone. And even if you continue to present yourself to me as a temptation, I am telling you the answer in advance is "no. I choose NO!"

You may remember a few weeks ago when we dealt with the problem of sin, I shared Genesis 4:7 with you.

As a refresher, here is what it says...

"If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it." Genesis 4:7

Sin wants you - but you must choose to say NO.

Many of us may have unhealthy habits in our lives right now because we have been, as Paul says, trying to copy the behavior and customs of the world.

When we have an unhealthy habit in our life, we will be, in some form or fashion, mirroring something. Either we mirror the world and its values, or we mirror our God and His values.

So, saying NO to the world is the initial subtraction in our lives that must take place. What then do we add in its place? We must learn to say...

Yes to the Way

Once you are able to identify the worldly habits and patterns you have been following, space is then created in your life for God's transforming work to take place. Jesus certainly modeled a life of humble sacrifice in pursuit of restoration and the redemption of mankind.

In our text from Romans 12:2, Paul seems to be concerned with how we think. Our thought process is important when it comes to growth potential in the Kingdom of God. Often, the temptation to follow worldly habits and values begins with a thought. But the same can be said of the habits and values Christ wants in our lives.

Spending time reading and studying the Word of God will give us the right type of thought process, and help us respond appropriately when we are confronted with worldly things.

And it's not something we can turn to every now and again, or only on our bad days. It must be a healthy routine and habit we enter into often.

You'll be glad to know the Bible talks about this very concept in Psalm 1...

"Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take ... but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night." Psalm 1:2

King David is a famous example of the importance of meditating on God's Word day and night. God desires us to have the Word near us, but more importantly, He wants it in us. In our minds, in our hearts, and throughout our lives. The work of becoming a living sacrifice will truly require commitment like this.

Maybe there is something you need to change in your morning or evening routine to allow God to transform you from the inside out by spending more time with Him.

First, you may need to move worldly distractions out of the way, and allow God to come and do transforming work in your mind.

Paul closes out our text in Romans 12:2 with an OUTCOME once we take these first steps toward sacrificial living. Here is the outcome Paul cites, after we do these first two steps, "Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect."

What Paul is saying is that we can discern our purpose in life and know God's will for our life...

Discern Our Purpose

Even though Paul wrote this letter many years ago, it's amazing how God knew what we would need even now. Perhaps there are some here today who have tried to find God's will in the things of the world, and figured out you couldn't.

Or you tried to find God's will in a particular relationship, and figured out you couldn't.

Maybe you tried to find it by achieving a certain social media status, and finally figured out you couldn't.

Christ is the only one who can give us meaning and purpose in our lives. He's called us to do great things for His Kingdom here on earth.

I wonder how many of us have yet to sense a calling from God because we have allowed our unhealthy habits to act as a distraction, calling us off the altar, away from being a living sacrifice.

We have not been able to sense God's leading because we haven't spent time with Him. The good news is this ... there is still time, right now, to rewire your life. The Bible is full of instances where God makes it clear there is still time to surrender.

Actually, the story that immediately comes to mind is the one of the thief hanging on a cross next to Jesus. It is our Gospel lesson today from Luke 23. The thief makes a last-minute confession of faith, and Jesus ACCEPTS it.

If this story doesn't convince you there is still time to believe, still time to turn from sin and live a righteous life, then I'm not sure what will.

With God, every moment matters. He can use every moment of your life from the present to the end.

But if you want to know Christ, and you want to understand your call, you need to choose Him above everything else every single day. And THEN, as Paul says, "...you will learn to know God's will for you."

In our first lesson this morning, we heard from Joel, "Even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart." Joel 2:12

This seems to be going all the way back to the book of Genesis, and the Lord's heart for His creation. That humankind would willingly choose to return to Him...

- To forsake all the idols,
- To turn from all the sin,
- To eliminate all the distractions, and
- Simply return to a relationship with Him.

And so, we have Jesus.

Christ came to this very earth, was tempted by the same worldly things you are tempted by, yet He did not sin.

Ultimately, He was nailed to a cross for our sins so we could in fact be TRANSFORMED into walking, talking, reflections of Jesus.

And this is as good a day as any to respond in earnest to the specific outpouring of God's grace...

- Identify the areas of sin and distraction in your life.
- Pursue righteousness, redemption, reconciliation, and
- Offer yourself as a living sacrifice day in and day out.

There is no one too far gone, and there is no offering too small or large. Give God a minute, an hour, or a lifetime, and He will use it to the fullest extent to His glory.

Paul closes his letter to the Romans 16 with these words (let's read these words together)

...

“Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with the gospel ... in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known ... so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith— to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.” Romans 16:25-27