

First Sunday of 2020

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Preacher: Rev John Mackinnon

[0 : 0 0] All of us have hymns that make our top ten. Breathe on me, breath of God, makes mine. Breathe on me, breath of God.

We're going to read again those words that we read when our children were amongst us in Romans chapter 12. We're stepping out of a little series on Ephesians just for one more week.

We're back in Ephesians next Sunday when Joe will be with us. But just a message for the start of this new year and hopefully with it something of the hopes, something of the dreams, something of the desire, something of the aspiration that we have for all that 2020 might hold for Bells Hill Baptist Church.

Romans chapter 12. I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

[1 : 4 9] Amen. Amen. And we pray that God would speak to us as we look into his holy word. I don't know about yourself, but I love the season of Christmas.

I especially love the opportunity it gives for the church of Jesus Christ in a world that has largely rejected him to make use, to engage with, to seize the opportunity for declaring who he is amidst the celebrations.

Because it always staggers me that you can walk through the town centres of our nation. And there you will find not only people singing, but you will find shops playing hymns of praise, hymns of adoration to the God that we largely ignore.

It's a strange time in our society is Christmas. There you will find people exchanging gifts with one another. And still somewhere in the inner recess of their being, there's this notion that the wise men gave gifts to Jesus.

Now it's a long way from the worship of the true God in so many ways, but the reality is it's a great opportunity for the church of Jesus Christ. And so I always enjoy the opportunity and we invest a lot of our time, a lot of our energy into reaching out to the folks of our community right through the month of December.

[3 : 4 2] It's interesting that, I'm not quite sure what this is, but in between Christmas and New Year is my birthday. But between my birthday and New Year and I'm the 29th of December, and that's very close to Hug Me Rear and New Year, I always get quite flat, I always get quite depressed.

Now I'm not sure if it's just another year past, another year older. In actual fact what I think of is probably a lot of the exhaustion of the month of December, but I'm not afar of New Year. I'm certainly not afar of the way in which, for the most part, it's celebrated.

But generally just after the New Year, I always like to spend the 31st of December in my office. I'm saying that to Stephen, I've got a thing about work in the last year of the year.

It must have been my good Protestant work ethic, but I like to be in my office in the last year of the year. But generally speaking, by the time I get to the first or second, I'm beginning to really think about all that we could do for the glory of God.

In this year that lies ahead. And I preached in the past a message a number of places about a 2020 vision which talked about mobilising the church for prayer and proclaiming the good news of the gospel and building up the church in terms of nurture and pastoral care.

[5 : 06] In terms of developing young leaders and in terms of building up the church throughout our nation. And I do have a burning heart within me for all of these things to be prominent as we enter 2020.

But I've got a burning heart for them, not as dreams. And I want us to actually identify there's a huge difference between what it is to simply dream and what it is to really give your all in service.

You see, when we look at Romans chapter 12, this is not a pipe dream. Romans chapter 12 and the opening two verses, they don't tell us how to dream.

In actual fact, they tell us how to serve. And dreaming and service are very different disciplines. They're very different things.

What we find in Romans chapter 12 is that, you know, we can become consumed by the glory of God, for the glory of God, for the establishment of his church, for the building up of the body.

[6 : 11] Because Romans chapter 12 is very much about the body of Christ. We can become consumed about the building up, the establishing, the advancement of the church, the advancement of the kingdom of God.

Not on the basis of what we're dreaming. But on the basis of the way in which we surrender ourselves in service. Now, don't misunderstand that.

That's not saying it's all about works. It's not saying that at all. Because service is so much deeper even than just our works. What is our response to the wonderful salvation that is ours?

What is our response to the goodness of God? You know, the angels proclaimed, you know, announced good news of great joy.

What is our response to the good news of great joy? That you and I know was God incarnate. That you and I know was God living out Jesus Christ, ministering into the midst of our society.

[7 : 14] That you and I know is Jesus Christ without stretched arms and Calvary's cross. That you and I know is Jesus Christ raised from the dead. That you and I know is Jesus Christ ascended into heaven.

That you and I know is Jesus exalted at the right hand of God the Father interceding for us. What is our response to the good news of great joy that is declared at Christmas?

What is our response to the wonderful salvation that is ours? Well, Romans 12 tells us that in actual fact our response ought to be whole of life service to God.

Whole of life service to God. Now don't miss that whole of life service to God. Because you know there are many in our churches that serve God.

In places and in parts. But whole of life service. A complete willing surrender to all that God has in store.

[8 : 24] You know, the context for these words. As I appeal to you therefore, brothers. By the mercies of God. Is all that's gone before in the 11 chapters of Romans.

That's the context. And you and I know that Romans is an incredible book in the word of God. It's an incredible declaration of all the love and the grace and the mercy of God.

You get halfway through Romans chapter 3. And you discover that therefore because we are born in sin. And we're born in rebellion.

We are rightfully standing in the place of condemnation and of judgment. You know, all of us deserve only the judgment and condemnation of God.

But you move on. And you get in Romans chapter 5. You get another therefore. Because then he's unpacked all the wonder of the message of salvation that is in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[9 : 29] And you get the therefore of justification. By the time you get to Romans chapter 5. And then you move on again. And you get to Romans chapter 8. And you get the therefore of assurance. That God in Christ assures us that we are right with God because of him.

And that we're in a right standing with him. And then he begins to apply all of that to Jew and to Gentile alike. And by the time you get to Romans chapter 12. What he's effectively saying is.

Because of this marvelous salvation which is yours. Present the whole of your life. As a living sacrifice to God.

Now those who were the first hearers of all that Paul was writing. Were of course very familiar with the sacrificial system. They were familiar with the animals being presented.

Being slain. And being sacrificed. For the forgiveness of sins. For the restoration between man and God. They were familiar with that imagery of sacrifice.

[10 : 44] One of those conversant. In the scriptures of the Old Testament. Would have understood living sacrifice. Because some of them would have known.

Abraham and Isaac. And the living sacrifice. Where he was willing. To put his own son. On the altar.

And I do believe. But for the intervention of God. Lord. Would have sacrificed his son. But of course the times in which the letter was being written.

There would be more and more. A realization. Of the living sacrifice. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. For he personifies.

For all of us. Exactly. What living sacrifice looks like. You see. When you and I think about sacrifice.

[11 : 49] We tend initially. To think about something. Which is dead. Being offered up. But the text is very clear. To say through. As I appeal. I appeal to you. Therefore brothers.

Because of all the mercies of God. Because of all. That God and Christ. Has done for you. Present your body. As a living sacrifice. Now. You know. I've got a problem with that.

You've got a problem with that. And I think we all have a problem with that. The problem with a living sacrifice. Is if you're a living sacrifice. You can crawl off the altar. That's the problem with it. Isn't it? Dead things don't move.

But things that are alive. Can crawl off the altar. And that's the problem. With what it is. To be wholeheartedly committed. To Jesus Christ. You know. Because we. Our heart longs.

To be everything that he wants us to be. But we're a living sacrifice. And as living sacrifices. We can. We can step back. We can say one thing.

[12 : 45] And do another. We can think one thing. And do another. But of course. You and I then need to. To talk for a little while. And to meditate for a little while. And reflect for a little while.

On the personification. Of living sacrifice. That is holy. And acceptable to God. Which is an act of spiritual worship.

And of course. That. For you and I. My friends. Is personified beautifully in Jesus. For even at his trial. He said. You know. You've got no power.

No authority over me. I go to the cross. Of my own choosing. Who put Jesus on the cross?

The answer is that Jesus himself. Was willing to go to Calvary's cross. Your sin and mine. Yes. But Jesus himself. Was the one who was willing.

[13 : 44] Holy. And acceptable. In an act. Of the most profound. The most incredible. Worship. Surrenders himself.

On Calvary's cross. For the salvation. Of every repentant sinner. Living sacrifice.

And here we are. At the start of 2020. And the word. That ascends for us. Just as we. Continue to walk forward. As a church. Is what does it look like.

For you and I. To walk. In the footsteps. Of Jesus. And to present. Our bodies. As a living. Sacrifice. Holy. And acceptable. To God. As an act. Of spiritual. Worship. You know. There's.

[14 : 51] There's a. There's a tendency. At times. In. In. In. Christian circles. For us. To talk about. Give your heart. To Jesus. I want you to notice.

That Romans chapter 12. Says. Bring your whole body. Not just your heart. Because somehow.

We become good. At separating. You know. What we kind of. Hold on to. In here. And what we'll actually. Do with who we are. And what we have. And we protect it.

Just by protecting. Our heart. Earlier. In. Writing. To the church. At the. Church.

In Rome. Paul. Romans chapter 3. Talked about. What people do. With their bodies. He said.

[15 : 52] Their throats. An open grave. They use their tongues. To deceive. The venom of asps. Is under their lips. Their mouth. Is full of. Curses and bitterness. Their feet.

Are swift. To shed blood. In their paths. Are ruin. And misery. And the way of peace. They have not known. There is no fear of God. Before their eyes. In actual fact. He's talking there.

About. The bodies of lives. That are lived. In rebellion. Against God. But by the time. You get to. To Romans chapter 6. Again. You can pick it up.

At verse 13. He says. Do not present. Your members. To sin. As instruments. For unrighteousness. But present. Yourselves.

To God. As those. Who have been brought. From death. To life. And your members. To God. As instruments. For righteousness. For sin.

[16 : 45] Will have no dominion. Over you. Since you are not. Under law. But under grace. And effectively. What he's saying is. Bring the whole. Of who you are. Bring your words.

Bring your actions. Bring your deeds. Bring the whole. Of your body. As an instrument. Of righteousness. For the glory of God. Bring everything.

About you. What you say. Will be as an instrument. Of righteousness. For the glory of God. This year. The way. In which you say it. Will be as an instrument.

Of righteousness. Even if you have to bring. A word of constructive. Criticism. Or rebuke. Or change. You will do that. In a way that is God honoring.

Where will your feet go? Will they go. To places. Where God will be magnified. And glorified. What will your hands do?

[17 : 48] Will every act. That they perform. The one that is just for the praise. And glory. And the majesty of God. Present your body. As an instrument.

Of righteousness. Why? Why would we want to do this? Because it's our. True response. It's our fitting response. To all the wonder.

Of the glory of God. And the gospel. It's actually our fitting response. To Christmas. Some of us are sitting there. Teaching our children. To write thank you letters. You know.

We've got a list. Of all the people. That have given them. Beautiful gifts. And we're teaching our children. And our grandchildren. Say thank you. Because some of the parents.

Just cut across all that. Don't teach the lesson there. They get a picture of the kids. They send it off to a place. That just says. There you go. Thank you to everybody. We photograph. It's all done. Vista print.

[18 : 49] Or whoever it is. Has done it for us. Right? Friends. We don't want. Our worship of God. To be like.

A wee photograph. We quickly send. By a quick word underneath. It says thanks. You know. Right at the start of the year. As we contemplate.

We have been contemplating. All the mercies of God. To us in Christ. Christ. We want it to be in a place. Where. We're coming. As it were. Before his altar.

And. We're not going to crawl off. That altar. We're going to. We're going to say. We present who we are. As an instrument.

Of righteousness. We know that's. Not because of what we've done. We know that's because of what he's done. We're presenting who we are. As an instrument. Of righteousness.

[19 : 45] And we're. We're coming here. And. We want to be holy. And acceptable. And we want what we do. To be as a spiritual act of worship.

We don't want it to be about our programs. We want it. We don't want it to be about the things that we. You know. Like to do. We actually want to come without agenda. How many of us.

In so many of our conversations. In so many of our. Dreams and aspirations. And hopes. We come with an agenda. What does it look like.

To come before God. Without agenda. To come before God. With no agenda. When we pray for God.

To revive our nation. Even there. We've got an agenda. Because usually it means. Revive it here first. But what does it look like.

[20 : 52] To come and say. No agenda. I present myself. As an instrument. Of righteousness. For your glory. I know.

I know. I know. I know. I know. I can only be that. Instrument of righteousness. Because of the mercies of God. And so.

I present myself. I present myself. With our agenda. I present myself. As one. Who wants to be. Holy.

And pleasing to you. As one. Who wants to worship you. I don't think it's.

Inappropriate. To connect it. To that word. That was spoken. Long, long time ago. To love the Lord. Your God. With all your heart. And soul. And mind. And being. Present.

[21 : 51] Your bodies. As living. Sacrifices. Do you know.

We. Verse 2. That opening little phrase. Do not be conformed. To this world. But be transformed.

By the renewal. Of your mind. How can you and I. Truly present.

Ourselves. Without agenda. As instruments. Of righteousness. Well. There's something. To be. Avoided.

And there's something. To be embraced. Do not be conformed. To this world. You know. This world's. Value system. Is completely.

[22 : 50] At odds. With God's. Value system. This world's. This world's. Value system.

Is unrecognizable. Well. God knows it. Through and through. He knows it. For what it is. From the pit of hell. Itself. It's so.

Radically. Different. From God's. Value system. You and I. Don't need to. Think. Think. Think. Think. Much. To realize that.

When we read. Through our papers. And we see. The. Staggering. Obscenities. Of the age. At which. We'll abort. Because.

It's convenient. We realize. That this world's. Value system.

[23 : 50] Is far. From the value. That God places. Upon a human life. That's only one example. That's only one example. Of millions.

Of examples. Of the way. In which. How this world. Thinks. And what God. Declares. As his thought. Are poles apart.

And therefore. You and I. When we look. At this business. Of not being conformed. But being transformed. Need to be those. Who realize. There are many. Influences.

In our world. That ought to be avoided. Now that doesn't mean. That you become. So heavenly minded. That you're of no. Earthly use. Because in actual fact.

You'll discover. When you're shaped. And molded. By the values of God. Lord. Your earthly use. Becomes staggeringly. Important. Because you're the only one.

[24 : 47] Who can bring love. And hope. And faith. And transformation. Under Christ. For the glory of his name. You're the only one. That can truly. Transform society. That's what the church does.

She's salt. And light. She's an agent. Of change. In the heart. In the heart. Of communities. In the heart. Of nations. Why is it not the case?

Speaking of the church. In a big picture. At the moment. Because largely. The church. In the big picture. Is conformed. To the world's values. Rather than transformed. By the holy scripture.

And the spirit of God. But what does it look like. To be a living sacrifice. A surrendered. Instrument. Of righteousness.

Has no agenda. But God's agenda. That's where we need. To be transformed. Transformed. He says.

[25 : 46] By the renewal. Of your. Mind. You know. One of the wonderful things. About the holy scriptures. That while those.

Who would believe themselves. To be intelligent. Will dismiss them. They've never looked. Really. Honestly. Truly. At the authenticity. At the reliability.

At the authority. Of what holy scripture declares. God.

In Christ. By his. Holy Spirit. Calls us. To. A deeply. Intelligent. Appeal to life.

You and I. Can never understand. Anything. In a world. That speaks. About love. A great deal. You and I. Can never understand. Anything. About love. Unless it begins. And ends. With God. Love. But this world's.

[26 : 49] Value system. Of love. Is nothing like. God's value system. For love. We live in a world. Where people. Endlessly chase.

After happiness. And satisfaction. And contentment. And they do all that. Leaving God out. And what they do not. Realize. Is that in actual fact. You'll never find.

Happiness. And satisfaction. And contentment. Until you know. What it is. To be at peace. With God. And to know the peace. Of God. Indwelling your life. It's just. This staggering. Difference.

Between one value system. And other than. When you start to look at. The way in which people. Adopt. The values. That will govern. The life. What God says. Do not be conformed.

In that way. Be transformed. By the renewal. Of your mind. How is your mind renewed? Your mind is renewed. By the indwelling power. Of the spirit of God. And the application.

[27 : 43] Of the word of God. You and I. Are renewed. From the inside out. Your body.

You see why it says. Present your bodies. As a living sacrifice. Last time I checked. The scripture. It didn't say. That your heart. Was the temple. Of the Holy Spirit. It said.

That your body. Was the temple. Of the Holy Spirit. God indwells you. In entirety. By his spirit. And the spirit of God.

Takes the word of God. And seals the word. In our hearts. How do we know. How to live. Because we read God's word. And apply it. How do we know.

What to do. Because we read God's word. And we apply it. That's so contradictory. To the world. In which we live. That's what. Confirmation. And transformation.

[28 : 42] Are all about. Confirming and transforming. Shouldn't come as any surprise. To us. That Christians. Might lose their jobs. Because they take a stand. In God's word. Yet many Christians.

Have sat there. And said. Oh no. But they might lose their job. You ever read. Through the history. Of the early church. One of the reasons.

Why. Many people. Gathered in the life. Of the church. Is because they had. Lost their job. Because of their faith. In Christ. Many of the reasons. Why the early church. Were raising money. To send it to other churches. Was that they still had jobs.

And others didn't. But they were sharing. What they had. Why? Because they refused. To conform. To what their job. Demanded of them. Which was against God's word. This Christian living.

Is radical. It's not that we go out. Looking for that. It's just that sometimes. That's a fruit of it. In all things. We want to be winsome.

[29 : 38] We want to be God honoring. We want to be God glorifying. And we certainly. Want to be there. As a witness. You see.

What happens. Is the spirit of God. Seals the word of God. In our hearts. And what you and I do. With our instrument. Of righteousness. Our body. Is we go and do it.

We go and do it. God has said it. In his word. We will do it. And we will do it. With our agenda. Do not be conformed.

But be transformed. By the renewal of your mind. That by testing. I love that.

That by testing. Testing what? By testing. What the spirit of God. Is doing. As he applies the word. To your life. That's the doing.

- [30 : 49] That's the doing. That by testing. You may as it were. Be aligned. With.
 God's good. Acceptable. And perfect will. God. It's amazing. The number of people. That are. In search. For the will of God.
 For their lives. If you poke a bit. Prod a bit. Ask a bit. They're not in search.
 Of obedience. To every word. That God has spoken. In actual fact. If they were in search.
 Of obedience. To every word. That God has spoken.
 To be right. In God's good. Pleasing. And perfect will. Follows. Doesn't it? They're kind of.
 Looking for this. Kind of. This.
- [31 : 45] Dream. Somewhere. Someday. I'll be doing. Everything. God wants me to do. Well. God says.
 Want to know. My good. Pleasing. And perfect will. Present. Who you are. All of you. In your entirety. As a living.
 Sacrifice. She says. You want to. Walk in the footsteps. Of Jesus.
 Want to understand. What he means. When he says. You know. Take up your cross. And follow me. Present. All that you are.
 As an instrument. Of righteousness. A living. Sacrifice. No agenda.
- [32 : 47] But God's. And my friends. Allow. Your own mind. Renewed. By the spirit. Of God. Today.
 To take you. In your mind. Into the scriptures.
 That you know. About Jesus. The boy. In the temple. Did you not know.
 That I had to be. About my father's business. The laser. Like focus.
 On time. The time. Is not yet. My time. Has not come. This is the time. The son of man.
 Came to seek. And to save. That which is. Lost. Not my will. But thine be done.
- [33 : 49] Father. If it is possible. Take this cup from me. But not my will. But thine be done. You know. There is a prayer. In the footsteps. Of Jesus.
 That we could do. With so much. Isn't it? Not my will. But thine. Because still. Too often. We are on the altar. But we are there. With the agenda. My will.
 My will. My will. And God says. No. Not your will. But mine. But mine be done.
 That is following. In the footsteps. Of Jesus. Present. Present. Present. Your bodies. Because. Of his. Mercies.
 Present. Your bodies. As a living sacrifice. Without agenda. Allow. The spirit. Of God. To take. The word. Of God.
- [34 : 48] And to seal it. In your heart. And as it's sealed. In your heart. And you know it. Do it. Do it. You see so many of us. We want the will of God.
 But the will of God. Is to do that. Which God has called us to do in Christ. Christ. This is about the alignment.
 Of the will. This is about a will. Aligned. To God's will. How do I know.
 That I am in the good. Acceptable. The pleasing. The perfect will of God. I know that every time. My whole being. Is in step. By the spirit of God.
 To the word of God. I am in the will of God. You know.
- [35 : 46] We'll come to it in Ephesians. Keep in step. With the spirit. The spirit is in step. With the word. That's why you and I. Need not be afraid of him. But in actual fact. Be filled by him.
 Because he will align us. To the word of God. To all that God has spoken. And so we find ourselves here.

At the start. Of a new year. And I sense the call. Is that we would be.

Instruments of righteousness. Because of Christ. On the altar of sacrifice. Without agenda.

Father. Filled by the spirit. Transformed. By the word. Living out.

[36 : 46] His will. Was our Lord Jesus Christ. In perfect alignment. With the father's will.

Is the call. Of God. In Christ. Not the same. For us. It's staggering.

Isn't it. Being the footsteps. Of Jesus. Perfectly. Aligned. With the father's will.

Let's pray. Our gracious father. Would you enable us. This day. By your.

Holy spirit. To be perfectly. Aligned. To the father's will. Would you enable us.

[37 : 48] By the power. Of your spirit. To walk. In obedience. To your word. To be transformed. In our inner being.

That all. That we are. Might glorify. And magnify you. In Jesus name. Amen.

Amen.