

The Church Unleashed as a People of Sacrifice (Remembrance Sunday)

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[0 : 00] Good morning, my name is Adam Wingrove. I am one of the three Trinity students based at Christchurch. It is really great to be with you this morning, virtually anyway.

We're continuing the sermon series from the book, The Church Unleashed, focusing today, Unleashed as a people of sacrifice. Today we remember and pay our respect to those who have fought in the war and the innocent lives who were caught up in the battles. Shall we pray?

Heavenly Father, we just give you thanks for those who are listening right now, who are watching. We give thanks, although we are in our separate homes watching, that we are connected together as the body of Christ. Father, we give thanks for those who have gone before us and sacrificed their lives in wars and battles in past and recent years.

May we always remember them. And Father, now today, may we be a people who will be called by name to live as a living sacrifice for you.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Just to set the scene, Stephen had been accused of speaking against the temple in Acts 6, verse 13.

[1 : 35] Although Stephen had recognised the importance of the temple, he knew that it was not more important than God. God is not limited. He lives not only in a house of worship, but also in those who are open to receive him.

He lives in you and me. Stephen went on to call them stubborn people. You heathen! Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit?

He goes on to say, name one prophet your ancestors didn't kill. You disobeyed God's law. You crucified the Messiah.

Bringing us on to today's reading in verse 54, the Jewish leaders, the Sanhedrin, were infuriated at Stephen for rebuking them. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed up into heaven and saw the glory of God and saw Jesus standing at God's right hand.

Jesus said he would be standing on the right hand of God to the Sanhedrin back in Luke 20, verses 9 to 19.

[2 : 49] Stephen, seeing this prophecy unfold before him, angered the Jewish leaders even more. They put their hands over their ears and condemned him to death by stoning.

Soon as Stephen's life was near end, not knowing who was in the audience watching, he said, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

He fell to his knees shouting, Lord, don't charge them with this sin. And then he died. Now, there was one who was in the audience.

He was used to executions of Christians, as it was his primary job to find the believers and put them to death. Yet this particular scene was different.

This capturing scene, which was unfolding before him, had such a profound impact, it would have been a lasting impact on the conversion from Saul to Paul, who would soon be the greatest missionary our church has known.

[3 : 58] After Stephen's death, persecution began that day sweeping the whole of Jerusalem. Such an act of selflessness from Stephen had such a significant knock-on effect that the church expanded.

You and I also know another act of selflessness, the sacrifice generations before us had paid with their lives.

Fighting for peace by defeating evil in our wars and battles. And may we always remember them. And now for us, here now in lockdown, how can we sacrifice something so that we can bless others?

It means we give something up, which might be a little bit uncomfortable for us. Maybe it would be that you spend some time with a lonely neighbor.

It could be that you share a Christian book with someone. You could buy a gift for someone who is not expecting it. The purpose is because we are called to live a sacrificial life, which is worship to God.

[5 : 15] Stephen demonstrated this quite clearly in this passage. So as Christians, as fellow believers, how can we love our neighbors and those who are in need of this love, especially during lockdown?

As I end, I pray you will be inspired by the Holy Spirit, how you can be inspired to sacrifice something to bless others.

Amen.