

A Living Sacrifice

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[0:00] Romans 12. I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, it's telling us here about a living sacrifice.

It's saying present your bodies a living sacrifice. So what does a sacrifice look like? Sacrifice means the giving of something, a giving of an offering. It's surrendering something of value.

It costs something, a sacrifice, by the virtue of the name of it. There's a cost. And we are to live a life of sacrifice, to be a living sacrifice.

What does that mean? How can we unpack what that actually speaks of? It tells us sacrificing. We could consider our time, our money, our self, our life.

Sacrifice. What does it mean when you think of something that is laid on the altar to be sacrificed? I would say it speaks of a bit of discomfort, a lot of discomfort, when we think of something laid upon the altar, ready to be taken, to be slain.

[1:28] There's a discomfort there. And friends, in the Christian life, there's a degree of discomfort at times. There's some discomfort in living the Christian life. When we live it, truly live it, there's a certain discomfort.

But we're living in days where there's relative comfort. People are relatively comfortable. Let's face it. Us Aussies, we've got it pretty easy. We're living in a comfortable place, in easy, comfortable kind of Christianity, sitting in comfy seats, relatively so, in a cosy, air-conditioned, comfortable building.

But in some countries, think of it, our brothers and sisters, they're living in places where those comforts are not there. They might come for a service that takes several hours.

It goes several hours long. And they might take several hours to even get there, walking on foot through harsh terrain. This is the reality for our brothers and sisters. And the building that they meet in might be a tin shed, a grass hut, if that.

And the heat might be sweltering, the insects buzzing, annoying, people sitting potentially on hard, uncomfortable benches or on a dirt floor.

[2:40] We have not much discomfort, let's face it. I think of the discomfort, as I took this morning, in full of that discomfort of the cross, the sacrifice of our Lord for our sin, which we think about the discomfort of Calvary, the stripes on his back, the nails in his hands, the sacrifice that cost his very life, his comforts, his position, his privileges.

Are we willing to give up on our rights? I know I've quoted David Livingstone before. It's a great quote about sacrifice. He said, I never made a sacrifice. We ought not to talk of sacrifice when we remember the great sacrifice that he made who left his father's throne on high to give himself for us. Now that's sacrifice. What we might know as sacrifice, in our language, is nothing. Some say they are willing to die for Christ, but they aren't prepared to even sacrifice a car park, so that maybe an older person can park a bit closer to the door.

They're not willing to sacrifice their favourite seat. People get offended about the least little thing, and we can get too much in that comfort zone, can't we? Where we shy away from any discomfort, any torture, any pain, any difficulty.

Sacrifice, it can mean doing what hurts, doing what goes against the grain. The best opportunity to sacrifice is when it is a burden, when it is inconvenient and uncomfortable.

[4:06] So sacrifice, it means discomfort. And sacrifice means dedication as well. When you give something as a sacrifice, it's given and it's relinquished, isn't it?

It's the dedication there. As someone put it, too often the problem with living sacrifices is that they have a habit of crawling off the altar at the last second just when they are needed.

Now living sacrifice, it's easy to say, I want to be a living sacrifice, but when it comes down to it, often we shy away from really being a living sacrifice. And when we think about what are we to sacrifice in the Christian walk, to defeat temptations of all kinds, to fight our flesh, our sinful nature, when it might be we want instant gratification, be it for drink or something illicit, materialism, maybe too much food, gossip, whatever it be, it's easy to revert to that and to not be a living sacrifice. But Paul says, that familiar one in Galatians 2 verse 20, I have been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live, but Christ liveth in me.

And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. Paul knew what he was talking about in 2 Corinthians 11.

[5:26] There's a whole list of things that he went through in labours more abundant, stripes above measure, so being flogged, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. He says that I was beaten with rods, I was stoned, I was suffered shipwrecked, a night and a day I spent in the deep.

He says of journeys often, of perils, perils of waters, so potential drowning, perils of robbers, perils of my own countrymen, perils by the heathen, perils in the city, perils in the wilderness, perils in the sea, perils amongst false brethren.

He talks of weariness, of painfulness, of watchings often, so he could consider sleepless nights, of cold, of nakedness, of fastings. And then he says, the care of all the churches.

Now Paul knew what sacrifice meant, he lived it. And what about you and me? Friends, let's take heart to consider, how can I really capture that thought, that principle of sacrifice in my life?

Am I willing to sacrifice my comforts? Am I willing to sacrifice things for others, for the things of God? Years ago it was dangerous to claim to be a Christian, for example in the time of Nero, the followers of Christ were crucified, alive, and their bodies used as human torches.

[6:47] Nero had these garden parties, where he'd light Christians up, alive, and burn them to death. Historians tell us how lions had torn Christians apart, before a jeering crowd, and they would calmly sing hymns of praise, as the lions charged in.

There's many things we could say, of such atrocities. The Bible speaks of how that many wandered about, in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute.

That means penniless. They were in poverty. They were afflicted, tormented. Hebrews 11, 37. So being a sacrifice, if you could just unpack that, and think of that for a time, what do we have, as far as sacrifice goes, in Australia?

Let's be honest tonight. Being a sacrifice speaks of that wonderful sense of devotion, of dedication, of discomfort, that dedication of being set apart.

Dedication. Think of that word. Dedication costs something. Here's a quote. For anything worth having, one must pay the price. And the price is always work, patience, love, self-sacrifice.

[8:00] No paper currency, no promises to pay, but the gold of real service. Pay the price. That's the sense of that dedication, of a sacrifice.

It's a giving over, of consecration. And we think of our lives. We should be living sacrifices. So our purpose is ultimately, and absolutely, and above all, to exalt and honour, and bless our Lord.

The purpose of our church, of this church, of every church, is to praise and lift him up. The purpose of the music, is to glorify and worship him. The purpose of every day we live, as we live each day, as we walk and live, let it be in a way that is pleasing unto him.

That we are that living sacrifice, every step that we take. That God helping us, will be that sold out, faithful, resolved people. A sacrifice is given over completely.

When you give a sacrifice, it's given. And that's the sense of, our life should be as such, that we would give ourselves. When we come to the end of life, the question will be, how much have you given?

[9:15] Not, how much have you gotten? How much have you given? Have you been that living sacrifice, where really you're laying your all on the altar, into the hands of the crucified one, who has made the ultimate sacrifice for you?

So sacrifice, another thought is that sacrifice means devotion. As Christians, we're called to give our lives over to God, that our lives are a worship unto him.

The average Christian finds it hard to sacrifice a Sunday morning sleeping, or to sacrifice the TV program, or whatever it be, to give more than a token amount of time or effort.

But the Bible says, we are offerings unto God. Think of what he's given for us. What little we give in comparison. Here's another quote.

We are that offering presented before the altar, to be a blessing to God. There's nothing glamorous or eye-catching about a sacrifice. The focus is not on the sacrifice, but to the one who the sacrifice is for.

[10:23] It's not about you and me. It's not about us. Our life is not about me, me, me. It's about him, him, him, him. And there's that sense of the sacrifice that we give.

It's not to big note ourselves. It's to glorify the one we sacrifice unto. It's for him. We are offerings unto God, that our lives would be well-pleasing, like an aroma of a sacrifice, that he can receive a sweet-smelling sacrifice, not the aroma of a rotten stench of sinful disobedience, that our life wouldn't be smelly, but that it would be a sweet-smelling offering, a sweet-smelling sacrifice.

The odour, the aroma of that, as they, in the old covenant days, they had the incense, there was that offering. It was a powerful, wonderful smell.

You can imagine as that, I'd imagine as that lamb was burning, there would have been a sweet smell, a smell that was a blessed thing.

And so too, our lives can be as sacrifices on the altar. It's an amazing thought, really, isn't it? And God calls us here in this verse, it talks about a holy sacrifice, well-pleasing unto him.

[11:41] We exist by him and for him, unto him, his pleasure. We've been created for someone else. Our life is not for us, really. It's for him, that he might manifest through us that which blesses him and honours him.

In John 17, 2, it says that we ourselves are a gift from God the Father to God the Son. He says that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.

There's a sense where we are the gift of the Father to the Son. And we have chosen, we are chosen as the bride, as it were, for Christ.

There's a wonderful sense where it's all to him, to his praise. And our lives exist for him when we think from womb to tomb, really. Our life is as a vapour, isn't it?

It's just poof! A little bit of steam and smoke and it's gone. It's blown away. That's what the Bible talks about. Our life is as a vapour.

[12:43] But that life that we have, let's make an impact, our world for his glory. And there's a sense of commitment here. A sacrifice is a commitment. It's a costly giving.

It's taking that intent of giving. And a sacrifice too, it means death. Let's face it. When that animal is offered upon the altar, it's dead and it will be burnt up.

And living for the saviour means dying to self. Now that's really hard to fathom too, isn't it? How do we die to self? Which is a theme in the Word of God.

As we read, Paul says, I die daily. Think of it. How can we die daily? That's 1 Corinthians 15, 31.

But we can die daily. Die daily. Day by day, we die. We die to criticism. We die to praise even. We die to man's attacks. We die to carnality.

[13:47] There's a sense where we're put to death the things of the flesh. We do what is hard for the flesh to do. As C.T. Studd said, another famous quote you've probably heard me refer to before.

C.T. Studd, that famous cricketer who left all of that to take the gospel to another land. He says, if Jesus Christ is God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him.

So we call it to be living sacrifices, daily sacrifices, daily living, such a life. And again, you've heard me refer to this one. There was a time where there was an appeal to help the poor and you can imagine, figuratively, a pig and a chicken walked past and saw this sign, help the poor, and the chicken said, brother hog, why don't we help some poor people and give them some nice breakfast of ham and eggs?

And the hog thought for a moment, that's alright for you to say because for you it's only a contribution, but for me it's a total commitment. It's the sense where that is true for us as believers.

There is a total commitment. There is a total sacrifice, a laying on the altar, not just an involvement, but a total commitment. It's been said there was a Gallup poll where they polled some American church members and they discovered only 10% of American church members were active in any kind of ministry, in serving in any way at all.

[15:22] And about 50% were just content to remain spectators, but there was 40% that said that they had an interest but no one ever asked them or they didn't know what to do and that this was an untapped gold mine just waiting to be mined.

So if you're here tonight and you're saying, I'm going to wait for the pastor to ask me to do something, please make it the other way around. Say, pastor, I want to do something. You know, that would be better, wouldn't it? Because I don't always catch on who is able or willing and if you're saying, I don't know if someone said to me this morning they want to be more, serve God more.

Thank you for that. But you might say to yourself, I'll just wait till I'm asked. It's not really the way to do it. Volunteer, volunteer, please. Because sometimes I don't always catch on that, hey, I'd like to do more but you don't make that, I don't always catch on.

So sometimes I'm a bit slow. So be willing to be a sacrifice. It's acceptable to God. What is a sacrifice for you? Are you willing to die for Christ?

[16:32] Even better, are you willing to live for Christ and die for Christ if it be? Think of it, even in these days we live, it's reckoned in these days that we live, this very moment in time that we live, every day over 200 million Christ followers in dozens of countries risk being beaten, raped, imprisoned, even killed because they dare to follow Christ.

I get some news reports from countries like Myanmar. It's happening right now. It's shocking. The people being killed on the streets, there's Christians fleeing for their lives, there's mayhem and disorder and disaster.

And Myanmar is just one nation. But friends, persecution is actually quite strong and it's at its worst in history in some places. It's been reckoned that more Christians were martyred for their faith in the 20th century than in the 19 prior centuries combined.

So Christians all around the world, these are our brothers and sisters in Christ. They're suffering brutal torture, arrest, imprisonment, even death. Their homes and communities laid waste. For no other reason than that, they are Christian. In China, more Christians are imprisoned in China than any other country in the world. In North Korea, beginning in the early 1960s, all church buildings were closed.

[17:59] All Bibles were burnt. Clergy were either executed or sent to the concentration camps. That's North Korea. Very severe persecution there. In Sudan, over 1 million people have died as a result of Sudan's Islamic government.

And 3 million displaced from their villages. Their properties burnt or confiscated. Women and children are kidnapped and sold into slavery for as little as \$15.

And Christian children are sent to brainwashing in Islamic re-education camps. Christians in over 60 countries around the world face massacre, torture, assaults, harassment, imprisonment, slavery, discrimination in education and employment.

And we talk about sacrifice. In this Western world, oh, the sacrifice I made. I went to an extra meeting. I gave up a little bit of my TV.

I spared some time to give out some tracts. I went to the Bible study. How good am I? What a sacrifice. It's nothing. Honestly, people, it's nothing.

[19:12] Our brothers and sisters would give so much to be here tonight. In other countries where it's illegal to fellowship. So God's will is here. It's that sense of, as Romans 12 verse 2 goes on, to not be conformed to this world.

But to rather, to ultimately aim to see that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. That giving over to God. To give your whole.

Give your whole to Christ. Give your all. Give your life, your body, your whole being. It tells how our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

In 1 Corinthians 6. It tells how we should be living such that we are bought with a price. You belong to him. You're under new ownership. You're in his possession. You are bought with a price.

Therefore glorify God with your body and in your spirit. Which are God's. So the body you've got temporary use of, it's just a container for the glory of God. For him to use you for his purposes.

[20:16] God's will is that we surrender. That we present our bodies. That we yield our bodies. Also that we give ourselves in that reasonable service. That reasonable service. It's the reasonable thing to do.

It's interesting this word reasonable is literally logical. It's in the Greek. It's the word that we get our word logical from. It's the logical thing to do. This one who's made you.

He's created you. He's given you a purpose for life. It's the logical thing. It's the rational thing. It's the reasonable thing. It's the right. It's the godly thing for you to do. To be that living sacrifice.

It's your reasonable service. And so it's literally logical to serve God. And the Lord Jesus said, I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day.

It's imperative, not optional. It's not if we feel like it. You're living sacrifices, right? It's not dependent on how you feel. You're a living sacrifice. It's that simple laying yourself on the altar.

[21:19] I must be about my father's business, says our Lord. And so there's a wonderful truth to that. As we know, as we travel these days, there's different classes of travel.

There's first class, second class, and third class. And this stems back to the stagecoach days, where they had these three classes. And you couldn't really tell the difference in the stagecoach, because you all really rode in the same stagecoach.

People were seated without really any distinction. But when that stagecoach came to a steep hill, that's when you noticed the difference. The first class passengers remained in the coach.

The second class passengers had to get out and walk. The third class passengers had to get out and push. Push that stagecoach up that steep hill. And you could use that to illustrate that we all need to be third class passengers, right?

We need to get out and push. We need to get out and push. Do your part in that sense of that service we called to. And also, it speaks there in the text that we referred to, that we should not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our mind, that we may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

[22:38] Be not conformed. It's got that sense of separation. I know I've talked at length on that subject. The subject, the truth of separation.

Don't be conformed to this world. You're a living sacrifice. You don't belong. You're called to be transformed, not conformed, that your mind be renewed, to live out the will of God.

The Bible says this is the will of God. Even your sanctification, in other words, your holiness, present your bodies a living sacrifice. It says holy, acceptable unto God.

To think that we can be holy this side of heaven, the Bible says we are. By faith, by his grace, we're made holy. He is our sanctification.

We know the reality is, and I know some can struggle with this, that they think that they've got to make themselves perfectly holy to be fit for heaven.

[23:33] It's not about you making yourself holy. It's about him making you holy. It's about his grace, his work, his working. As you are that living sacrifice, he will make you that holy sacrifice that is acceptable unto God.

And it's a decision you make. Separation is a choice. It's a deliberate step that you make to be separate from the world. As the saying goes, garbage in, garbage out.

It's what you partake of, it comes out, doesn't it? The more you partake of the word, the more the word will come out, that his will would be enacted.

As you take his word in, he'll help you to live the life that he's called you to live. And to illustrate this concept of separation, now this sounds a bit of a crass example and I think I might have referred to this before too, but that sense of consecration, it's alike to the concept of copyright or patent or trademark, that we are under his ownership.

You know, as we read earlier, we're bought with a price, that we are God's possession, we're under his ownership, that he has ownership, he's got rights of control, he's got the say-so about how we are to live, if we listen to him.

[25:03] And something that is separated is set apart, it's got a special mark as to it belongs. It's under that ownership. And again, it's a bit of a crass example, but consider it this way.

As with McDonald's, the McDonald's Enterprise, or any fast food chain we could contemplate, that fast food restaurant has the ownership of the name, of every word, of the pictures, of the colours, of the characters.

No one else can use the golden arches and the clown and all of that. It's distinct and set apart for the McDonald's corporation.

And the staff too, they must look a certain way, they must dress a certain way, they've got to say what they're told to say, that they're forbidden to associate any of the McDonald's products with anybody else's.

So you won't see a Hungry Jack's Whopper served at the McDonald's restaurant. It is a place apart from Hungry Jack's. It's sanctified and holy. It's set apart to the McDonald's company.

[26:16] Now, just a funny remark on that, like, Julie and I visited Murray Bridge Friends and went to the Murraylands Church and after the service at Murraylands Bible Baptist Church, the folk went to a McDonald's and some of the lads preferred KFC so they went to KFC and brought the KFC into the McDonald's so they were not into separation as such.

The KFC, they were eating KFC in the McDonald's, some of the company that were there. But of course, normally, you don't have any KFC in the McDonald's or Hungry Jack's in the McDonald's. It's separated. It's set apart. It's set apart for McDonald's. And McDonald's can require a person to wear certain clothes, a certain dress, whereas when a church starts to talk that way they're seen as legalistic or pharisaical, it's bondage, but yet there's a sense where there's the right thing to do. And McDonald's have certain expectations about punctuality, about behaviour and the world sees that as a reasonable thing. But if the church talks about our behaviour and some take offence at that and think oh, it's treading on toes you're being too controlling, that's cultish, that's fanatical. But really, as a Christian, we should have a certain standard that ideally in good conscience we individually come to by reading the word of God and coming to that conviction before God.

[27:46] What is honouring to him? How can I be separated unto God? Because God's ways are higher than man's ways. I mean, even the pub has got a dresser standard as such.

And I'm not saying necessarily we have a dresser standard to walk in the door. But our men and women should look like we're ambassadors for the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. Another thought about this term holy is the English word holy.

It comes from the Anglo-Saxon halig or howl which means hail or well or whole. So in a way you can say holiness is healthy. Holiness is good for us because it's the right thing that our holy God wants us to live and that's the healthy, wholesome way to live.

Sin is unwholesome. Sin is a moral and spiritual sickness. The heart is deceitful, desperately wicked. It needs healing.

It's sin. The fall of man has left us in this state of wickedness in our nature. And this illness that is sin, this virus that is sin is so bad that sometimes we're oblivious to it.

[28:51] it just becomes routine human nature we call it. But for we that are saved we should have a different context that we are as we are immersed in unholiness that we need to guard ourselves to not look on that as the natural and normal thing because we can be like that proverbial frog in the kettle.

The frog in that pot of water as the heat slowly turns up they won't jump out because the change is gradual and incremental the frog doesn't realise that they're being cooked.

And it's like that too. The world the whole world is cooking in this pot of moral and spiritual iniquity but most people don't realise it. They're in the pot and the devil's turning up the heat gradually gradually Christians we need to be alert to that don't get in the don't get in the kettle keep out of it.

And so we may be in the world but we're not of the world. Realise that God separated us and we're separated unto God and we really we serve another God from what the run of the mill world does our allegiance is to another king another kingdom the world's got its own philosophies its lifestyles and practices but we're called to something higher this is the will of God even your sanctification this is the will of God even your holiness of life we're called to that to be a separated people unto him and so let us be such that our separation isn't something that's enforced upon us it's something we gladly do because we're willing to be a living sacrifice we're willing to take heart that our God has caught us to this separated from the world not conformed to it but transformed by the renewing of our mind so friends again I beseech you therefore brethren by the mercies of God present your bodies a living sacrifice holy acceptable unto God which is your reasonable service and be not conformed to this world this world this current system of evil led by Satan there's many verses that speak about Satan's domination of this current world system this world is organised by Satan against God and against

God's will we're called to a higher plane it says be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God it's good for you to live in the light of these truths it's good for you to be a holy people God helping you to be by his grace making you such that you'll live acceptable unto him that you'll be that living sacrifice dying daily friends it takes a surrender where you present your bodies a living sacrifice it takes a sacrifice where you're willing to lay it on the altar lay it on the altar to have that service that says it's the reasonable service it's the reasonable it's the rational it's the logical thing for me to do to want him to be my lord for me to be his servant it's a reasonable service and there's a separation we're in a world that wants to conform us to the devil's plan to his philosophies but our lord wants his will to come to effect in our lives such that we'll be transformed the renewing of our mind that we'll let our mind be saturated with the things of

[32:30] God that will God helping us receive his word the washing of water by the word will receive the impact of the word how shall a young man cleanse his way by taking heed thereto according to the word of God there's this cleansing here there's refreshing here there's a fulfilling here and it's good it's acceptable it's perfect that we know and do his will so be encouraged tonight as we take these truths to heart and think how can I be that sacrifice in my life ahead let us pray Lord we thank you that you are the ultimate sacrifice as a Calvary's hill you laid down your all for us and you took most of all our sin and shame paid the guilt price the penalty for our iniquity Lord that we can be cleansed forgiven saved Lord we thank you for that great gift help us likewise to have that mindset that

Lord as we take these verses to heart you'll help us to be that living sacrifice that day by day in our lives that we live we'll live with that heart that mind to be a sacrifice that intent that we'll be willing to put aside our own will our own wishes our own plans even that we'll find and do your will that is good and perfect and acceptable Lord that we'll find and be that holy people give us to crucify the flesh with affections and lust to have that willingness to take the difficult road at times of life Lord not to shy away from any sense of discomfort to not avoid that call to devotion to be such a people that will be willing to seek and find your will for our lives

Lord we pray for our brothers and sisters in other lands Lord such as Myanmar friends and missionaries folk in nations where it's very dangerous to be a Christian help us Lord to learn from their example and to have a bit of their gumption and grace Lord to learn from the men and women of God of history the martyrs and missionaries of old the ones who have taken their lives even to death's door that we can march in their tread Lord God and let us not big note ourselves for any little sacrifice we might make of our own comforts here in the context of all of this Lord we thank you for your mercies and we pray Lord for every family every home each heart to know that grace of God in Jesus name we pray
Amen