

Living Sacrifices

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Date: 08 September 2019

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[0 : 00] Well, turn back with me to Romans chapter 12, as you find on page 947 of your church Bibles.

And I want to read again the first two verses of Romans 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 we discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Well, in our three communion services, we've been trying to centre on the whole aspect of the theme of sacrifice. We've been considering in our Saturday evening service or Sunday morning service, because we have to do the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus in his death for us.

That has to be at the forefront of any communion season, of any service. In fact, the Lord Jesus has to be there at the forefront, surely, of every service. But in particular, when we come to a time of communion, when we remember the Lord's death till he comes, we have to think and focus on the Lord Jesus and his giving of himself for us.

[1 : 24] As we saw last night and even this morning, thinking of the priestly offering up of his life by the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus being the once for all sacrifice for sin.

And in seeing Jesus in that capacity as the once for all sacrifice for sin, we've noticed the self-giving love of Jesus. Giving of himself. Giving himself as an offering.

Yes, as an offering to God the Father on our behalf. For us, as we noticed this morning, as our substitute in our place.

In our place. Taking our place on our behalf. But remember us, we said also, giving himself voluntarily by all the authority that he has as the Son of God, as the author of life.

He alone has that authority to lay down his life. And he did so in that great act of sacrifice. But what about the response that believers have to show?

[2 : 30] That response towards the sacrifice of Jesus. Because if you are seeking to be Christ-like in your life, in all that you are, in your mind, in your heart, how does that show itself in conduct?

How does it show itself that you are following the Lord Jesus? How does it show itself in your demeanour, in your actions, in everything that you are? Because if you love the Lord Jesus, you will seek to serve him.

And you will seek to be like him in service. We've read here in Romans 12, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.

And it's this whole aspect of being a living sacrifice. That's what we want to look at this evening.

And if you believe that, you know, we have a communion service in the morning, at least we should have a follow-up service, if you like, a service of thanksgiving.

When we come together to thank God for the blessing of the Lord's Supper. And yes, to meditate on his truth, the truth that Jesus has come to give his life for us.

[3 : 39] And to have that response that we need to show that we truly do love the Saviour and want to be like him in service, in commitment. And so, what I pray will do this evening is, yes, we're going to have to re-examine some of the aspects that we looked at on Saturday evening, and particularly Saturday evening regarding the animal sacrifices we find in the Old Testament.

We're going to look again at what was mentioned this morning concerning the Lord Jesus, particularly as our substitute. And if you like, we're going to combine what we've seen on Saturday night, Sunday morning, really just to grasp the whole necessity of what it means to do the will of God, what it means to be living sacrifices.

Because, you know, if you're to follow the Lord Jesus, sacrifice has to be at the root of your life.

It has to be at the root of your faith in the Saviour. It has to be central to your life. Sacrifice has to be there as the basis of your faith. And yes, it's a living reality of how you live your life in response to the great sacrifice that Jesus offered when He offered Himself for our sins on the cross.

And so, we are to be followers of Jesus. We're going to be Christ-like. And we're going to have to show it in the way that we live our lives to the glory of God and live a life of thankfulness.

[5 : 12] Thankfulness to God for all that God has done for us in sending His one and only Son for us. And particularly as we think of the blessings that we have as believers, as Paul tells us here at the start of chapter 12, by the mercies of God.

So, in response to the mercies, the great mercies of God and the blessings of salvation and all that God gives to you in life, then by these mercies, in reaction to these mercies, then to respond to these mercies by following the Lord Jesus, by living as these living sacrifices, as a living sacrifice that Paul commands here in Romans 12.

And therefore, if we're going to understand what it means to be a living sacrifice, we really have to get back to basics, really have to get back, if you like, to the foundations, going back to thinking of what the sacrificial system was like in the Old Testament, that the Lord Jesus was the fulfilment of, and then for you and for me to ground our lives in sacrifice and response to the Lord Jesus and His sacrifice for us.

Think of it like building a house. You've got to get the foundations there. And the foundations have got to be strong, otherwise the edifice will crumble. So, in our practice, your practice as a Christian, if it's not secure in the Word of God, then we're going to be ineffective in our witness and our testimony as Christians.

So, let's get our foundation secure. And that's why we go back to the book of Leviticus. That's why we're going to consider, you know, the practice of sacrifice. We'll look at the burnt offering again.

[6 : 58] It might seem fairly remote to our 21st century minds, but it's absolutely crucial if we're going to build our lives on Christ and live our lives sacrificially.

So, let's look again at what we might call the foundation of a living sacrifice. As we say, that's why we go back to Leviticus. And we read again, as we read last night, the first nine verses in Leviticus. We read of God's instructions, God's very specific instructions to the people of Israel, that Israelites had left Egypt. They were journeying towards the promised land. And God was giving instructions to Moses, Moses who were leading the people out of Egypt.

God was giving instructions to Moses to tell the people how they should live, how they should show that they're different, how they should show that they're separate people, how they should show that they're holy people, distinct from all the pagan peoples around them.

And of course, when we read the book of Leviticus, you see so many particular instructions that God gave to the people through Moses about all the various practical ways, how they're going to maintain holiness.

[8 : 10] But all these practical instructions began with worship. How the people should have fellowship with God through worship. And the basis, as we saw, the basis of that worship was sacrifice, animal sacrifice.

And you might say, well, why sacrifice? I mean, why would God seek to, you know, base fellowship, fellowship with him? How would he base that fellowship through the slaughter of animals and sacrifice?

You might think, well, what's the connection between sacrifice and fellowship? But then when we see what the answer is, we see it all so clearly. The connection between sacrifice and fellowship with God, the answer concerns sin.

Sin. The whole purpose of animal sacrifice concerns punishment of sin. And it was God's perfect justice to demand punishment for sin.

But at the same time, God's willingness was seen to have fellowship with sinful man. Let's explain that a wee bit more. Remember, Adam sinned.

[9 : 25] Man's representative sinned when he took of the forbidden fruit. Through one man's disobedience, mankind was condemned, guilty before a holy God.

And that perfection of relationship between God and man in Eden, that was broken. Fellowship with God was destroyed, was broken through sin. What? Because sin is utterly offensive to God.

And the only penalty for sin, as we're told in Scripture, is death. And that's what God declared to Adam there in Eden. Even before Adam fell. You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of

good and evil, for when you eat of it, you shall surely die.

Adam disobeys God. He does eat of the tree, and the punishment is death. He must forfeit his life because of the guilt of sin. He's going to die physically.

He's going to die under God's punishment. But of course, God in His mercy, God desired fellowship with His people. And God in His mercy provided the means for that fellowship through a substitute.

[10 : 34] And that substitute, the animal sacrifice, the substitute that would take the place, the guilty sinner. And that substitute, of course, was the animal. It was the animal offered by the sinner.

The animal suffering death in place of the person who offered the sacrifice. So, let's take this together then. Let's bring this to a head. I mean, yes, sin has entered the human race through Adam.

Man's broken that purity of the relationship that he had with God. But God provides a means of restoring that fellowship. And that means is by sacrifice.

Animal sacrifice. And through the sacrifices, God's people could know a restored fellowship, a renewed relationship with God, what God gave out of His mercy to the people.

Of course, that system of sacrifice, the animal sacrifices, was only temporary. Day after day after day, year after year. Because in itself, an animal sacrifice was never the permanent solution to the problem of sin.

[11 : 40] Jesus came to be that once for all sacrifice for sin. Jesus came to appease God's wrath against sin. Jesus came to restore God's people to Himself once and for all.

And so Jesus, as we noticed last night, Jesus fulfilled that sacrificial system. No longer were there to be animal sacrifices.

But we still live as followers of the Lord Jesus. We still have to show thankfulness to God for all His many mercies towards us. And we show that thankfulness surely by offering up of ourselves in service.

By offering up ourselves in worship. Offering up ourselves in praise and in self-giving love and denying ourselves and seeking to follow the Lord Jesus. He, of course, would deny themselves utterly when He took up that cross of sacrifice for us.

So you see the link. You know, we can't even begin to understand what it means to be a living sacrifice unless we understand Christ's sacrifice for ourselves on the cross.

[12 : 56] And we can't understand Christ's sacrifice of Himself unless we understand what He came to fulfill. He came to fulfill the Old Testament system of sacrifices. So that's why we have to go back to the Old Testament.

That's why we see how they connect directly with the Lord Jesus and in turn connect with ourselves. You can't even think of what it means to live sacrificially in our living unless we link that living to the Lord Jesus and see what Jesus came to fulfill in being that once for all sacrifice.

sacrifice. That's why we do have to turn to Leviticus and why we do have to take note of the very detailed system of sacrifice that God provided for the people.

And when you see the details as we're going to explore in a minute, the details, the sacrifice for sin, the burnt offering, then we can see more fully all that Christ suffered for us as our sacrifice and what you and I have to do in offering up of ourselves as a living sacrifice.

So, I do think we need to explore in more detail than we did certainly last night, explore the burnt offering in Leviticus 1. Let's look back at that.

[14 : 16] As we say, we're looking at the link between animal sacrifice, the Lord Jesus' sacrifice and our own being, a living sacrifice. Look at the nature of the offering.

Leviticus 1, the animal taken from the herd or the flock. The one who's offering the sacrifice takes from his herd or from his flock this animal without defect.

It's a costly sacrifice. It's an animal that certainly wasn't cheap. It was the best. From the best of the herd, it was the best of the flock.

It was an animal that certainly the one who was offering it couldn't easily afford. It was an animal that would cost much in terms of its value. It was a male animal.

Giving would be costly. You might even say it was a perfect specimen from the herd, from the flock. And of course, all that pointing forward to the Lord Jesus.

[15 : 13] Jesus, of course, was the perfect sacrifice. He was that sacrifice without blemish, without sin. There was no defect in his being. He was the costly sacrifice.

He was the very son of God who offered up himself. He offered himself in our place. He committed no wrong. He deserved no punishment. He was, I think we have to say that with all reverence, he was the best of the herd, the best of the flock.

And that offering up of himself, it cost the sinless son of God, yes, his life on the cross. He died for us.

He who had known no sin was crucified for us. And so when we think, yes, if we take from the animal sacrifice the costliness of that, point forward to the costliness of Jesus giving of himself on the cross, then bring that to yourself.

Sure, there can be nothing too costly for you and for me to offer in service to God. You know, we think of the costly, the cost that was paid for your salvation, the cost of the very life of the Son of God.

[16:26] Jesus denied himself. Jesus took up his cross. He was that sacrifice for sins. And so surely then it's for you, for me, to take up our crosses, to deny ourselves and to serve our Lord.

And if it's service, it's sacrificial service. We're to be followers of the Lord Jesus. You follow him on the way of the cross. You follow him in sacrifice.

So, the question, of course, we all have to ask ourselves, I have to ask myself, is your sacrifice for the Lord sacrificial? Are you living lives sacrificially in terms of, yes, in terms of the cost?

I mean, you know, even in all that you give, I'm not just talking about financially, but you know, even your resources, your gifts, your time, is that being given sacrificially?

Are you going the second mile in the Saviour's work? Or is it just a half-hearted, less than a full commitment to the work, to the work of the kingdom?

[17:34] I mean, as we said, I mean, the sacrifices in the Old Testament were costly to the person who gave them. But remember, there, they were given freely. They were given voluntarily.

As we saw this morning, Jesus giving of Himself was voluntarily, freely. How much more in your service for the Lord? Well, not how much more, but truly, how much you and I have to give freely of ourselves, voluntarily, giving of ourselves in thankfulness for all that Jesus has done for us.

And what else do we find here in Leviticus is one that helps us when we think of our being living sacrifices? Well, there's that recognition of sin in the sacrifice.

If you go to Leviticus 1, verse 4, you feel the procedure that was carried out and even before the sacrifice took place, the person offering the sacrifice putting his hand in the head of the animal, the animal that was about to be sacrificed.

And of course, that was a symbolic act that spoke of the transference of sin from the one who was offering the sacrifice to the sacrifice itself. And the animal becomes the substitute for the human sinner.

[18:50] That human, that man, he deserved punishment, punishment of death for his sins, but by this act of transference, it's the animal whose blood would be shed, not the human beings.

And of course, when blood was shed, the human that was offering the sacrifice could now be seen to be presentable to God as sin forgiven through the death of the substitute.

As we saw this morning, when Christ came, he came as our substitute, the once for all substitute. He took upon himself on the cross our sins.

He died at death on the cross for us. And we might even say, there was our hand in Christ and the head of Christ on the cross.

The hand of a sinner and the perfect head of Jesus. Our sins transferred to the Lord Jesus so that he might take the punishment that sin deserved in ourselves.

[19:53] The Lord Jesus on the cross bearing our sin so that he might take that punishment that you and I deserve. so that you and I might have access to our God on the throne of grace so that you and I might have forgiveness for our sins.

Jesus, the sacrifice who bore the burden of our sin. And of course, none of us can ever do as the Lord Jesus did in bearing the sins of others.

None of us are a substitute in that sense. So, what's our response then? Well, surely this, surely this, as Peter said in his epistle, 1 Peter 2, 24, he himself, Jesus himself, bore our sins in his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

And surely that summarizes, doesn't it, what it means to be a living sacrifice. Dying, dying to sin, living for righteousness.

Because when you think of it, a sacrifice, well, by definition, it involves, if you think of animal sacrifice, it involves death. The death of the animal as we saw in the Old Testament. And think of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, the death of the Lord Jesus.

[21 : 16] So, how does death come into our being, living sacrifices? Well, surely this, by dying each day to sin, by dying each day to anything that would hinder a true and full communion with God, a true and full following our Saviour, dying each day in our heart to, dying to sin, dying and living for righteousness, resisting the devil's temptations, dying to sin.

that somebody once wrote, almost a hundred years ago, I suppose, but someone once wrote, when Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.

And that's been a living sacrifice. As you live your life fully committed to him, as you die each day to sin, that's being a living sacrifice.

And that's living for righteousness. You know, there has to be this sacrificial living in response to what Jesus has done for you and therefore sacrificial living means thanksgiving.

Thanking the Lord Jesus for being our substitute. And, you know, thankfulness has to be deep within the heart. It's not a sort of a very kind of casual thanks, you know, insincere thanks.

[22 : 42] No. Your thanksgiving to God surely has to be sincere and full and continuous and never stopping to thank God for Jesus.

Never ceasing to thank Jesus for his willingness to take your sins upon himself. And therefore, in thankfulness, in being a living sacrifice, to be willing to be used by God for whatever God asks you to do, whatever God sends you, whatever capacity he's given you to serve him, do so as a living sacrifice in full thankfulness to him.

And you will do that when your eyes are fixed on the Saviour, using the very gifts that God has given you to serve him rather than serve ourselves.

But there is more, I think, even in Leviticus, one that helps us to see what being a living sacrifice is. We read in Leviticus one about the wholeness, everything burned in the sacrifice.

Now we know, we saw last night, there were different kinds of sacrifices. But this one, the burnt offering, is a sacrifice that was burned completely. Everything of the animal consumed by fire.

[23 : 58] I'm not going to repeat everything we read there. But this burnt offering was just that, everything, everything complete. in Leviticus 1.9, the priest was to burn all of the animal in the altar.

And of course, Jesus, in his offering up of himself, was that whole burnt offering. He offered himself, his whole self, on the altar, the altar of the cross.

In other words, his sacrifice was complete. His sacrifice accomplished everything that God had asked him. Everything that God had asked him to do as the once for all sacrifice for sin.

And all that Christ did there on the cross was for all of his people. His obedience was total. His love for sinners was total love.

His sacrifice that God had set on the cross was up, was complete and full and sufficient for salvation. salvation. And again, bring that to yourself.

[25 : 05] Surely, in being a living sacrifice, it's for you, it's for me, to give ourselves wholly to the Lord, to be wholehearted in our love for God, wholehearted in our devotion to God.

You know, not holding back, but yes, loving God, loving our neighbour with all our heart. Offering God your whole self, all that you are. That's what Paul has said here, to present, well, as you notice here, present our bodies, your bodies as a living sacrifice to offer to God all, all that you are, everything about you.

But it's interesting when Paul here speaks of offering your bodies, offering your body to the Lord. You go to another part of Romans, Romans chapter 6.

Again, here we see that emphasis in the wholeness of offering ourselves to the Lord. Don't present your members, the parts of your body to sin as instruments for righteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

What are we seeing here? Well, even think of the way that, you know, we use our bodies as living sacrifices. Think of them out of tongues or mouths.

[26 : 28] Use them to speak of God. Use them to show love one for another. Use your lips to speak the truth of salvation. Use your eyes to look to the Word of God and look to Him for help and strength in time of trouble.

About your hands, use them in healing, use them even in that pure touch one to another. Use your ears to listen to the Word of Truth rather than listening to the devil's eyes.

Use your feet to go where God sends you to go to serve Him wherever He sends you to serve Him. And do it all in response as we see here in Romans 12 to God's mercies, God's mercies in Christ. And surely that's the sacrificial element in presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice. That we use what God has given us for His glory as a living sacrifice.

Because as we read there in Romans 12 that offering up of ourselves as a living sacrifice as Paul tells us here it's got to be holy and acceptable or literally holy and well pleasing which is as we're told here your spiritual worship.

[27 : 52] Back to the animal sacrifices. When they were carried out according to God's instructions we read at the end of Leviticus in fact the end of the passage we read they were an aroma pleasing to the Lord.

When Jesus offered Himself as that sacrifice for sins God was well pleased the Father was well pleased with the Son. God was satisfied with Christ's sacrifice.

And when you consider yourself to be a living sacrifice then surely it's to live a life that's an aroma that's well pleasing and acceptable to God. Is that not your desire to honour God to glorify God to please God to show Him that truly yes we do love Him with all that we are.

And notice also here in Romans 12 towards the end of verse 1 this is your spiritual worship. In other words this is a logical response to the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus.

Yes we worship Him through sacrifice. Sacrificial service. Dying as we said to sin with that act of life changing life transformation that God has blessed us with.

[29 : 08] Giving off ourselves for Him. and think of how you respond then to Him. Think thoughts of the Lord Jesus.

Live not for self but for Jesus. Not to have our own will satisfied but do the will of God. May that be your motive in your living.

In Jesus sacrificial giving of Himself Jesus followed the will of His Father absolutely not my will but Your will be done. May that be your response to the sacrifice of Jesus and to God's love towards you not my will but Your will be done.

And of course we come I suppose we come to the end of another communion time. I believe it is good tradition to return thanks to God for His many mercies towards us when we give thanks for the finished work of the Lord Jesus.

Well I pray that yes this has been a service of thanksgiving because surely we've been reminded of the love of the Lord Jesus and His giving of Himself for us and therefore to respond in thankful obedience and to have that desire the more to serve Him as a living sacrifice dying to sin living for the Lord because of what He's done in love for you and for me.

[30 : 40] In Paul's letter to the Ephesians Paul instructs the church to walk in love as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Isn't that it? To live as a living sacrifice. You know living sacrificially without love I think that's a contradiction but to live in love as a living sacrifice that's what Christlike imitation is.

And I guess that life will take discipline it will involve faith much faith much courage much dependence in the Lord as you rest in Him as you've done with lesser things as you walk in Christ and walk with Him as you offer up new bodies as living sacrifices doing it to the glory of God doing it in conformity with all that is good and well pleasing to God but yes be motivated be enthused to be that living sacrifice to do as God has given you to do for the glory of His name for the furtherance of His kingdom and so may God bless His word to us Amen let us pray Lord we have to confess so often that we fail to live as you have asked us to do as a living sacrifice and so often we have sought to please sell rather than to give and devote our lives to you but we pray

Lord that through these times of worship that we will be the more energized the more enthused to live for you to serve you to give to you all that we are for the glory of your name so bless we pray all that has been focused on this evening all that has been proclaimed and Lord forgive anything and everything that has been contrary to your word and your will hear us Lord as we continue to wait upon you now as we praise again your name and we ask all these things in Jesus name Amen well let's close in Psalm 85 on page 113 Psalm 85 we'll sing from verse 8 to verse 13 the tune is blind well I will hear what God the Lord says to his saints he offers peace but his people must not wander and return to foolishness surely for all those who fear him his salvation is at hand so that once again his glory may be seen within our land 8 to 13 to God's praise

Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen