

Text: Romans 12:1-2

*Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may approve what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*

## **Introduction** –

Have you ever given a gift that did not go over as well as you had expected? After spending days, or even weeks, searching for just the right present that would express your love and affection, you were convinced that you had found the perfect gift. You wrapped it up in a beautiful package, and waited eagerly for the other person to open it. In your mind, you pictured a happy expression on their face, with a few tears of joy. But when the moment came, things didn't turn out as you had expected. In fact, it was almost the opposite response. There were lots of tears, but they weren't tears of joy.

That was the experience of a businessman who wanted to send a token of appreciation to his associates. He worked with people in offices around the world, and wanted to let them know that he cherished their partnership. So, he picked out a beautiful desk clock, and had the name of his company etched on the side, in gold lettering. It was very fancy, and he was sure his colleagues would enjoy it. He had the clocks shipped to each office, and waited eagerly for their reply. One by one, they trickled in, and most of the responses were positive, but there was one office that sent it back with an angry note. His colleague in China had been deeply offended and wrote: "I thought we were friends, why would you send me such a terrible thing?" It turns out that in that culture, a clock is not a very good present. The Chinese word for clock is very similar to the word for "death," and it symbolizes the ending of a relationship. It's like saying "your time has run out," or "I'm not going to spend another minute thinking about you." The businessman learned a valuable lesson: find out what is an acceptable and pleasing gift before present it.

Our passage this morning describes the type of gift that is acceptable and well-pleasing to the Lord. We are called to offer our very lives as a living sacrifice. This is the essence of worship. True worship is not focused on the benefits that we stand to gain, as we praise our Savior. It is about surrendering our will to His, voluntarily placing ourselves at His feet, inviting Him to use us for His glory.

When we began our series, several weeks ago, we looked at a number of definitions for worship, and we saw that it encompasses much more than singing song and lifting our voice in prayer. As one author puts it, worship is "a lifestyle in which God is honored and we serve Him daily, moment by moment... it is the complete consecration of our lives to God. It is the attitude we walk in, speak from, and meditate in at all times. Our life is completely and totally His" (*Mark Sooy, "The Life of Worship," p.22*)

The apostle Paul describes the life of worship in Romans 12:1-2. This is a pivotal passage in the letter, coming after the apostle has unfolded the doctrine of salvation throughout the first 11

chapters. He has demonstrated the tremendous mercy of God, reaching out to lost sinners, making us children of God. He has shown us how we are brought into a right relationship with God: not on the basis of our own good works, but through faith in Jesus Christ. And now in this final section of the book, the apostle goes on to show us how the gospel should affect our everyday lives.

He wanted believers not just to understand salvation, but to be moved by God's mercy in such a way that we would respond by offering ourselves to God in worship. There is no way that we could ever repay the Lord for what He has done for us, and He doesn't ask us to try, but He does delight in our worship.

**If Christ has shown such greater mercy to us, we should count it our privilege to give our very lives as a sacrifice to Him.**

What kind of sacrifice is pleasing to God?

## **1. First of all, He desires a living sacrifice.**

We should continuously give our lives to Him, unceasingly, each and every day. In verse 1, the apostle writes, "*Therefore I urge you brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice...*"

That word takes us back to the Old Testament, where the people of Israel were instructed to bring all kinds of offerings to the temple. There were sin offerings, and guilt offerings, and fellowship offerings. In each case, the worshipper would select an animal from his flock, and take it to the priest. The priest would slaughter the animal, and place it on the altar, where it would be consumed in the fire. Needless to say, these sacrifices were all dead. Once they were given, that was it. The offering was gone, and the worshipper would walk away and go back to his daily routine, until next time when the ritual would be repeated all over again.

Personally, I am grateful that God no longer requires this type of sacrifice today. All of the rituals in the OT pointed to Christ, who became the Lamb of God, to take away our sin. And so there is no longer any need for burnt offerings to be made, because Jesus Christ gave Himself once for all. But that doesn't mean there is nothing left for us to bring, as an expression our devotion to God.

In contrast to the dead sacrifices of the past, Christians are called to offer our lives to the Lord each and every day. This is not a one-time gift, but an ongoing endeavor. God has given us this gift of life, and He has given us eternal life, and so we should strive to use our every breath for His glory.

This requires a daily decision and constant commitment, because we will be tempted along the way to change our mind. Someone has said that the trouble with a living sacrifice is that it wants to climb down from the altar and crawl away. And we know from experience that this is often true. One moment we are ready to devote our lives to God, but the next moment we

are pulled back to our old ways of living. We pray, “Lord, use me in whatever way you see fit. I will go to the deepest, darkest jungles of Africa if that’s what you would have me do.” The Lord responds: How about you start by showing love to that co-worker who is difficult to get along with; you can honor me by being a witness to him. And we reply: “No! Please! Anything but that! I just can’t do it!”

On Sunday morning we sing “I surrender all,” but then Monday morning rolls around and we forget to lay our lives at His feet. Anyone can proclaim their allegiance to Christ, but God wants us to follow through and surrender our lives to Him each day. He is not looking for those who worship part-time, but He seeks worshippers who constant desire to exalt the name of Jesus.

When I was in Bible College I had a part time job, one semester, sweeping and mopping the floor in the cafeteria. I was supposed to do it every night, and I was pretty faithful. It was a pretty easy job, and there wasn’t a specific time that I had to do it. Any time after supper, once everyone cleared out, was fine. When I had some free time, after studying, or before heading out with friends, whenever I could squeeze it in, I would go the janitor’s closet and punch in. The clock stamped the time in a little box on my card, and I started stacking chairs, and pushing the broom, and scrubbing the floor. It didn’t take too long, maybe an hour. And when I was finished, I punched out, and went on with my life. While I was on the clock I was expected to work, but when I was off the clock I could go back to goofing around, and could use my time however I pleased. And sometimes, I’m afraid, that’s how we approach the Christian life. We punch in Sunday morning, and punch out during the week. But we are called to over ourselves to God as a living sacrifice; that is the kind of worship that pleases God. Every moment of every day our lives are meant to bring glory to our Savior. As long as we are here on this earth, we are called to glorify the Lord.

Scripture tells us to spend our lives wisely: *“Therefore, consider carefully how you live, not as unwise but as wise, making the most of the time because the days are evil.” (Eph. 5:15-16 LEB)* I don’t know how many days the Lord has given me on this earth. He could call me home, to heaven, this afternoon. Or I might have sixty more years. It doesn’t matter. My objective as a follower of Christ should be to use the time God has given me to serve Christ, and to praise Him continuously with my life.

## **2. Our passage also tells us that God desires a complete sacrifice.**

We should lay before Him all that we are, every part of our being. Again, our passage urges, *“to present your bodies...”* to God. That is another way of saying, your entire lives: our heart, and our mind, and our body (the sum of our existence).

When the people of Israel brought a sacrifice to the temple, they placed the whole thing on the altar, not just a part of the animal. They didn’t say, “Here’s the fur, but I’m keeping all the meat.” It wouldn’t have been much of a sacrifice if they had. They placed the whole thing on the altar. And that’s what the Lord desires from us, as well. He wants us lay our entire lives at His feet, holding nothing back.

In the culture of Paul's day, Greek religion emphasized the spirit more than the body. The Greeks felt that the body was just a container for the soul, that didn't have much value, and what you did with it really didn't matter. As long as you worshipped with your spirit, or your inner person, you were okay. Who cares (they told themselves) if your life on the outside is a mess, as long as everything on the inside is squared away? But Paul pointed out that it doesn't work that way. We are not individual pieces, we are a whole person. And we can't really honor God with our spirit if we are not also honoring Him in our body. He is concerned with every part of our being and we are to honor Him with all that we are:

- Not just our songs, but also the attitude that we carry with us into the workplace.
- Not just our prayers, but also the words that we speak to our friends.
- Not just our inner thoughts but our outward actions.
- Every part of our being is to exalt the name of our Savior.

It wasn't just pagans who struggled with this concept. There were times when believers had a hard time with it as well. Paul needed to remind the Corinthians: *"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body."* (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

If the Spirit of God dwells within us, that makes this sacred space, and I must take care in what I do. I will either honor God or dishonor Him with my voice. I will either honor God or dishonor Him with my thoughts. I will either honor God or dishonor Him with my hands. I have to decide which it will be. And I cannot reason, "Well, I gave Him my words and my thoughts this morning, so now it doesn't matter what I do with my strength." God wants all of me.

There are things people wouldn't dream of saying inside a church, but when they are outside, somewhere else, they no longer have a problem blurting it from their lips. (I've got a joke to tell you, but I we have to wait until we get out in the parking lot...) Why does it matter where you are? Aren't we the temple of God, and doesn't His presence fill us no matter where we go?

Someone has written, "And how is the body, it may be said, to become a sacrifice? Let the eye look on no evil thing, and it hath become a sacrifice; let thy tongue speak nothing filthy, and it hath become an offering; let thine hand do no lawless deed, and it hath become a whole burnt offering." (Moo, D. J. *The Epistle to the Romans* 1996, p. 754)

If we told God that He could only have certain aspects of our life, but not others, it wouldn't be much of a sacrifice. That would be sort of like the time when one of my kids offered to share their cupcake with me. They had already licked all of the frosting off of the top, the good stuff, and they weren't as interested in eating the rest of it, so they thought they I might enjoy it. And I said, "no thanks, it's not that I don't appreciate the thought, but I think I'll decline." God wants more than a little slice of our lives. He wants us to lay our entire being on the altar, that we might devote honor Him no matter where we are or what we do.

One author writes, "True worship is the offering to God of one's body and all that one does with it. [not merely] something carried out in a church, but something which sees the whole

world as the temple of the living God... Paul says, ‘take your body; take all the tasks that you have to do every day; take the ordinary work of the shop, the office, the factory, the shipyard; and offer all that as an act of worship to God.’” (Barclay, W. *The Letter to the Romans*, 2002, p. 184)

### **3. Romans 12 tell us that God desires a holy sacrifice.**

Again, in Romans 12:1, the apostle urges us, “*to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship...*”

The children of Israel were called to bring an unblemished lamb, as their sacrifice on the Passover. It was to be an animal without any blemish or defect, the coat of wool was to be pure white. They didn’t know it at the time, but it symbolized Christ and His sinless perfection.

We are not sinless or perfect people, but we have found cleansing through the blood of Christ and now our lives are to reflect His pure and holy character. Our thoughts, words, and actions should honor the Savior.

God has not only forgiven us, taking away our guilt and shame, but He also empowers us to live godly lives. The Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts, and He is molding us more and more each day into the person that God has called us to be. No longer are we to go back to our old patterns, following along with the rest of the world, living to please ourselves. Now we are called to be holy, because God is holy.

That doesn't mean are no longer susceptible to the temptations of this world. We will continue to face temptation, and there will even be times when we stumble along the way, but When we do, however, we can return to God with a broken and contrite heart, seeking His power that we might overcome the influence of sin in our lives.

The word “holy” essentially means to be set apart for sacred use. In our cupboards, at home, we have a several dishes: there are plates, saucers, soup bowls, cereal bowls. If they are put away, they are clean and ready to use. But there is also another bowl, sitting on the floor of the kitchen. It is filled with dog food, for Bentley.

If I were to invite you over for dinner, and made a special meal, how would you feel if I served it to you in that bowl? Here is a wonderful pot roast, it smells so good, but I scoop into the dog’s dish and place it on the table in front of you. Yuck! You’re not going to want to eat from something that has been slobbered on by a dog. That’s not very appetizing. You want a clean dish. And in the same way, God desires a clean life, and is not pleased when we allow ourselves to be controlled by our old, sinful nature. You are not the same person that you used to be. If you know Christ as your Savior, then you are a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come. So how can we go back to our old ways?

Verse 2 tells us, “*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*” We have an important decision to make. We allow the world to influence us, and

follow along with everyone else, doing as they do, thinking what they think. Or we can choose to follow Christ, and allow Him to transform our thoughts and desires.

It's easy to follow the world. Nothing is required. We won't have to give anything up, or let anything go. But following the world never satisfied the deepest longing of our heart, and it never will. If we want to be transformed, we need to fix our mind on Christ and fill our thoughts with His truth.

Scripture says, *“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”* (Romans 6:12–14, NASB95)

That used to be the path we were on, but now things have changed... our identity has changed, our allegiance has changed, our heart has changed, or future has changed... and so it only makes sense that our lives would change as well.

## **Conclusion** –

As we come here this morning, we consider what kind offering is most pleasing to God. In the OT, there is a passage where the temple had just been completed in Jerusalem, and King Solomon had assembled all the people of Israel for the dedication. Scripture says that they offered so many sheep and oxen that they could not be counted. We might think to ourselves, “if only there was some way that I could worship God like Solomon, and bring the Lord something as great...” But our passage reminds us that as impressive as that offer may seem, when God's people today honor Him with our lives, it brings more pleasure to God than Solomon's gift.

- (1) We must devote our lives to God each and every day to God, that we might become a living sacrifice.
- (2) We must honor God with all that we are and all that we do, that we might give him our bodies as complete sacrifice.
- (3) We must turn away from worldliness, allowing God to transform us according to His will, that we might become a holy sacrifice.

All of the sheep and oxen in the land of Israel would not be offering as great, in the eyes of God, as this.