



Building God's People

Sacrifice

Sunday 28th May – Friday 2nd June

Daily Devotions



Building God's People

Learning to Sacrifice

Read 2 Corinthians 9

But remember this--if you give little, you will get little. A farmer who plants just a few seeds will get only a small crop, but if he plants much, he will reap much. (2 Cor 9:6)

"You get out of it what you put in."

That's a pretty common expression, isn't it? And it seems to be true for much of the world. If I attend the gym often, I'll see big results. If I only attend occasionally, I won't see much difference at all. It's the same with our job, our relationships, our study - all sorts of things. Our level of sacrifice will determine the how much benefit we receive.

And, according to Paul, it is the same with our giving. If we only give a little, we will only get a little. If we give a lot, we will get a lot. We will reap according to how much we sow. These are not man's words - these are the God's words.

What will we reap? More money? Some people believe that. Put in a dollar, get two back. That thinking can easily become a mask for greed and idolatry. And it is a lousy return anyway. God spends a lot of time telling us that there are much better things in life than money. It would be strange for Him to "reward" us with money then.

Material blessings are the least of God's rewards. We know in our own hearts that possessions can't bring happiness. It is a sickness that we lust after them so much. Rather, we should aspire to the higher, spiritual, treasures of peace, joy and a good conscience before God. These are far more to be treasured, and God delights to grant them in abundance.

Go ahead - be bold and give sacrificially. I guarantee you will get a good return on your investment.



Giving it All

As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. "I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on." (Luke 21:1-4)

How much is enough?

How much do I have to give? How much do I have to sacrifice? \$10? \$50? \$100? I mean, \$100 is a lot of money - there is no doubt about it. There are not many things you spend \$100 on. But it's all relative. For some people, \$100 isn't all that much. For others, they could not even dream of having a "spare" \$100. For the first group, it wouldn't be much of a sacrifice at all. For the second, it would be generosity well beyond their means.

So what do we do? Christ is calling us to equal sacrifice, not equal giving. We all have different means. We can all afford different amounts. You cannot give as much as your rich next door neighbour, but you can probably give more than the poor man down the road.

The widow only had 2 small coins - that was all the money she had in the world. Yet she gladly gave it to God, then went home and trusted Him to supply her bread. The rich men about her, who were giving far more generously, were all giving out of their excess. Their sacrifice was much less.

Who do you identify with? The rich men, or the widow? We want to identify with the widow, but can we really claim this? Is our faith such as hers? Are we willing to stretch ourselves, give ourselves right to the limit, then throw ourselves on God's provision?

Why not try? Why not dare to imitate the widows faith? God will not let you down.



Human Sacrifices

Read Romans 12

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. (Romans 12:1)

What are you going to do with your life?

Maybe someone asked you that question when you were a teen. But it's still relevant in your 20s. Really, it's still relevant in your 50s. The old cliché is true - "Today is the first day of the rest of your life." How are you going to spend it?

Paul says we should offer our bodies as "living sacrifices". This is pretty shocking imagery, really. Paul is calling us to become human sacrifices. Feeling worried?

Now, animal sacrifices were usually killed. Their lives were given to God. That's the thing about a sacrifice - it is something totally given up to God. Now, Paul calls on us to be "living sacrifices".

Can you see what that means now? A sacrifice gives up everything to God. If you are a "living" sacrifice, you are living your whole life for God. You keep nothing for yourself. All your things belong to God. All your actions belong to God. All your words belong to God. Even your thoughts belong to God. There is nothing left of you for you - it's all His.

This is the calling of a Christian. This is how lives are to be lived. This is how they should be lived. So I ask again - what are you going to do with your life?



Sharing

Read Hebrews 13

And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. (Hebrews 13:16)

"You have to share."

If you are a parent, you are familiar with these words. Our children are pretty selfish by nature. If they have some new toy or game, they will want to keep it to themselves. Only through a lot of training can they be taught to share. As a parent, it can be upsetting to see their lack of concern for their friends and siblings.

But how do we, the children of God, do in this regard? Scarcely any better - actually, probably much worse! Look at all the gifts God has given you - now look at your neighbour who does not have nearly as much. Is your inclination to share your good fortune? Or do you grip your goods tighter to your chest, saying "mine!"

We get angry when children don't share because everything they have was given to them. They are not "entitled" to their toys, except through our generosity. But it is the same with us. If you are materially well-off, it is ultimately through God's gifts to you. Yes, you may have worked hard - but who gave you your mind? Who gave you your hands? Who created this earth that is so full of abundance?

All good gifts come from God. He is grieved and also angered when we do not share what we have. But to share our good things with others - this is a sacrifice that is truly pleasing to Him.



Is God Cruel?

Read Genesis 22:1-19

Take with you your only son yes, Isaac whom you love so much and go to the land of Moriah and sacrifice him there (Gen 22:2)

Sometimes God seems cruel.

You have thought that in your heart sometimes - be honest. I mean, sometimes the cost of following God seems high. Very high. Obscenely high. And you think - how can God be so cruel? Why is He asking so much of me?

I imagine Abraham felt that way, commanded by God to sacrifice his son, Isaac. We cannot imagine the agony he went through, the grief. Perhaps he railed against God in his heart, thinking - how could You be so cruel?

We know how it turned out - Abraham received Isaac back again, unharmed. But for many, to follow Christ has cost them family, through rejection. They have had to "sacrifice" a parent, a spouse, or even a child in order to follow Him.

There are no easy words here to remove the sting from this. All things belong to the Lord, we are just borrowing them for a time. He may ask for their return at any moment. The life of a Christian is a life of sacrifice. And our response must be that of Job "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away; blessed be the name of the Lord."



Pleasing God

Read Philippians 4

I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. (Philippians 4:18)

Can we make a sacrifice to God?

Our gut instinct is to say "no". After all, we know that Christ is our only sacrifice. To talk about us making a sacrifice to God - why, that almost undercuts the gospel. We feel very uncomfortable talking in this way.

But we shouldn't. The Bible is very clear that we are able to make sacrifices to God - and furthermore, that those sacrifices are pleasing to God! How can this be so, when all our "good works" are like filthy rags in the sight of God?

The key is Christ. Without Christ, all our works are nothing. But after we have been joined to Christ, our good works have value in God's sight - indeed, are very pleasing to Him. After we have been saved, we are able to sacrifice to God.

Paul speaks about several sorts of sacrifices that Christians can make. In the passage above, he is speaking about a financial gift the Philippians gave to him. The purpose of this gift was to enable Paul to preach the gospel.

Paul describes the gifts as "a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God." Amazing language! When we give to gospel ministry, we are actually making a "sacrifice" that pleases God. What a delightful thought - to think that we can delight God!

And that is why we give - because it is pleasing, very pleasing, to our Heavenly Father...

