

“Radical Life Part 1 – Presenting Yourself”

Scripture: Romans 12:1-8

Graphic: sacrifices, bodies, gifts

Key Verses: 12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Theme: Sacrifices in the OT were killed and offered. Jesus calls us to live and offer ourselves as sacrifices to God, holy and acceptable. That is our act of worship. Worship every day using your spiritual gifts.

1) Introduction

- a) Turn with me to the book of Leviticus...(Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus)
- b) The title of the book of Leviticus actually means: “He Called” Basically, it’s a book about the calling of God on the lives of the Israelite people. Now, you may not think the book of Leviticus has ANY bearing on being a Christian, but think again...
- c) Here’s how it went down...Moses was called into the Tent of Meeting and God laid out the patterns of worship and of daily behavior for the Levites (the priests called by God) and for the all the tribes of Israel. God said, “Moses, here is EXACTLY how I want you to worship, offer sacrifices, and live for me.”
- d) And this should not be a surprise because prior to this in Exodus 19:6, God said to Moses and the people, “You shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.”
- e) So God handed Moses these patterns of worship and daily living...this is what I expect. Here’s the instruction book...follow it. And the calling and the character of God’s people was established because they had a manual. It was their way of BEING a priestly kingdom...a holy nation.
- f) Now, the problem with instruction books and manuals is that we read them and follow them for a while and then once we get used to doing what it says, we just do it. But because we know better, we might start to do things the way WE think they should be done...not follow the instructions.
- g) And primarily what was put in place in the manual was a sacrificial system of six offerings: a burnt offering, a grain offering, a peace offering, a sin offering, a guilt offering, and an ordination offering. Each one had a

different purpose...each one required a different animal or product...some were offered by the priest and others were offered by the people. Most of it was burned or cooked on the altar...some was kept by the priest and his family to eat...some was burned up to ash.

- h) This was the way God instructed them to worship. Now, God didn't say, get a slick praise team, put a screen on the wall, buy lots of equipment and hire talented people to lead in worship...
- i) God said, with your sacrifices, offer me the best you have, give thanks, ask for forgiveness, praise me, be in relationship with me, and THAT is worship.
- j) And it comes from the heart...by faith, through doing what God said.
- k) But, see, the people forgot...they got so used to the manual that they forgot why they needed instructions...their worship got hijacked...they started to turn the worship into rituals that didn't have any meaning. They lost sight of the purpose, which was to be a priestly kingdom and a holy nation...they made it more about the music than the one the music was about. They made it an obligation and not a burning desire.
- l) And so at just the right time, God sent Jesus to earth to live and die as the final and ultimate sacrifice for the world...no longer would the people have to bring animals and grain...
- m) The world was given new life in Christ...a new way...a new command...a new hope.
- n) And this new life is radically different from the life that our culture offers. For two weeks, in worship, we will be studying Romans chapter 12, where Paul lays out the radical life of being a Christian. The first part, the radical idea of presenting ourselves as living sacrifices. The second part, the radical life of a marked person for Jesus.
- o) So turn with me to Romans 12...let's dive in...
- p) Let's pray...

2) Scripture

- a) **Read verse 1-2**

- i) There it is! There's the conclusion to the entire first 11 chapters of the book of Romans. Paul has gone on and on about the fact that Israel is still God's chosen people...that there is still a remnant – God's gifts and calling are irrevocable...that through their unbelief and their failure to keep the Law because it was hijacked by sin, we Gentiles can have a relationship with God because of Jesus...
- ii) Because of ALL THAT, therefore, do THIS.
- iii) He writes, "I appeal to you, by the mercies of God..." Anyone read that and ask, "What are the mercies of God?" I did!
- iv) It's always helpful for us, when we are reading our Bibles, to stop and try to figure out what phrases like that mean. Paul wouldn't have written it if it wasn't important to the argument – paper and ink were expensive and rare...
- v) So what does it mean? Paul uses the term mercy in Romans in reference to God doing what God knows to be best for His people. God is showing mercy and forgiveness and understanding and wisdom to the faithful...because God is bigger than we are...He KNOWS what is best. He's had to use a lot of mercy on me and you, AMEN?
- vi) I appeal to you, therefore, by the fact that God knows us and knows what He wants and knows what we should be doing...get it?
- vii) And here it is...**present your bodies as a living sacrifice**...yield your bodies to be made holy and acceptable to God...
- viii) This language could be straight out of Leviticus, couldn't it? Sacrifice...holy...acceptable to God?
- ix) When God gave the people the commands to sacrifice animals and grain on the holy altar...it had to be given EXACTLY like God told them or it wasn't holy and wasn't acceptable.
- x) Paul is saying, the game has changed. You don't have to bring a goat or a pigeon or a container of flour to the temple in order to please God...but now, you have to bring YOURSELVES! In a way, we are still offering an animal sacrifice...the only difference is that the animal is human and it doesn't die, but lives!

- xi) And don't for one second think that God changed his mind or anything when it comes to sacrifices. Listen...this is important...the motivation and obedience with which God wanted the people of Israel to come to the Temple in Jerusalem to offer those animal sacrifices is exactly the same as the motivation and obedience that we are to come to worship God with our lives.
- xii) N.T. Wright wrote, "The foundation of all Christian obedience to God is that those who are in Christ, with the Holy Spirit in them, are to offer to God the true sacrificial worship to which the cult of the Jerusalem Temple had all along pointed. (repeat)"
- xiii) And the key element that was missing in the sacrificial system and can be in our Christian lives too often is active faith...hearts that are burning to please God with our lives. That's what Paul means when he talks about offering our bodies...it's not just about our minds and spirits...it's our whole lives. And the opportunity to offer that kind of WORSHIP is for ALL Christians, Jews and Gentiles alike.
- xiv) That's the only holy and acceptable worship there is...and it doesn't matter what form it takes...
- xv) So many churches are dead because they think that worship is about ritual religion. So many church-goers have been turned-off because what they thought they were coming to church to experience is nothing more than sitting and going through the motions.
- xvi) I'm not saying that ritual is always bad, but if that ritual is done simply for the sake of the ritual and we call it worship, without the desire to experience the presence of God, then it's ineffective.
- xvii) It's my desire that not one person would leave your seat today without truly experiencing the living presence of God. When we physically come to worship with THAT expectation, then our lives become the sacrifice that Paul is talking about. That's the worship of which we become a part for the glory of God. And it pleases God!
- xviii) Someone may have told you at some point in your life that what you do can't please God. That's bogus...when we worship God with our lives, giving glory and praise to Him, God is pleased. That's not WHY we worship or are obedient, but it's an outcome when we are.

- xix) Don't miss it...be transformed BY it...
- xx) Paul goes on in verse 2 to further appeal to the Roman Christians to NOT BE conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.
- xxi) J.B. Phillips translates that as, "Don't let the world squeeze you into its own mold."
- xxii) This is by far the most difficult problem facing the body of Christ. We face pressures and temptations and opportunities to sin every single day of our lives. When we are at our worst, we give in to those temptations and present our bodies to the things that serve ourselves and not God. We are called to be mindful of what the world tells us to be like and NOT DO IT. It's the ultimate rebellion against the world.
- xxiii) All those in favor of rebelling against the world for the sake of Jesus? (raise hands)
- xxiv) But we can't understand how to NOT be conformed to the world until we allow the Holy Spirit to renew our minds and inform us of the ways of God...what God wants...what God expects.
- xxv) The goal that God wants us to reach as a church and as individuals is to be proficient at discerning the will of God in our lives.
- xxvi) When we present our bodies to God and our minds to God as an act of worship, then we are ready to be used BY God for the kingdom...
- xxvii) That is the radical life that Jesus calls us to when we say Yes to be his followers.
- xxviii) But how do we do that? What are the keys to present our bodies and minds – our whole person – to God? Look at verse 3...

b) Read verses 3

- i) The number one root cause of a significant portion of the sin in this world and in the church is pride. Pride!
- ii) It causes us to be individualistic...to think that we don't need anyone else...that we need to advance in position and power...and, according to Paul, leads us to have an inflated view of who we are.

- iii) Now, I'm not saying there aren't successful and skilled people in the church and in the world who shouldn't be in leadership positions. However, each one of us should only be serving where we are gifted to serve. When we start vying for position either because we've always done it that way or because no one else will do it, then God will have a hard time using that for His glory.
- iv) And knowing where we are gifted to serve comes out of a time of sober judgment...of honest assessment.
- v) The Natural Church Development Team right now is going through the process of assessment...of identifying our gifts, passions, and ministry outlets.
- vi) This Fall, the church will be engaging in that experience as a congregation.
- vii) There is no greater pursuit for us to be able to make a kingdom impact than to think of ourselves with sober judgment, identifying and using the spiritual gift God has given to us.
- viii) When we do...WHOA! Watch out! It may mean giving up a position that you've had for decades. It may mean stepping up into a role that you KNOW God has equipped you to do. It will probably mean that new ministries will emerge because we have more gifts and servants than ministries.
- ix) And the goal of it all is to build up the body of Christ, to love God and love others...as we are gifted...

c) Read verses 4-8

- i) I'm not going to spend time today talking about spiritual gifts because we will spend significant time on this starting in a month or so.
- ii) But here's the truth: In order for us to honestly present our lives to God, as living sacrifices that are holy and acceptable, we must be willing to understand our spiritual gifts and the spiritual gifts of those around us in the church, and work together in ministry.

- iii) Paul wrote in verse 1 that we are to present OUR BODIES (plural) as a living sacrifice (SINGULAR). The offering that WE make, as a church, working together as spiritually-gifted Christians, is as one body.
- iv) We can do some good things individually, but God uses it all together for His glory, as one sacrifice, and we have to treat each other as gifted and called brothers and sisters in Christ.
- v) When we do that, then we are truly beginning to live the radical life, set apart from the world, holy and acceptable to God.

3) Application

- i) When the people of Israel made sacrifices to God, every time, something had to die. There was dead stuff and blood and ashes everywhere.
- ii) The burnt offering and peace offering = male livestock. The sin offering = a bull. The guilt offering = a ram or a dove. The grain was dead when it was offered.
- iii) The rituals were based on something unblemished and perfect dying in order for God to forgive, relieve guilt, be thanked, be in relationship, or ordain those He calls into ministry.
- iv) Death was the only way to life. And it had to be done over and over and over.
- v) Nothing has changed. Death is still the only way to life because death is the only ultimate given in our mortal lives. Something still has to die in order for us to live because we are hard-headed and slow.
- vi) But we don't have to kill animals and birds anymore. Because of Jesus, the death that saves us has died once and for all.
- vii) That is truly radical! That God would allow His own Son to be sacrificed as the perfect sinless One...for us to have life! Forgiveness! Freedom! A relationship with God! A calling!
- viii) So what does it look like to present your bodies as living sacrifices?
 - (1)#1 – Show up and participate. 90% of the Christian life is showing up and paying attention. Maybe it's Sunday morning worship, but more importantly, show up wherever God has placed you at any given

moment. It's easy to tune out when we don't think anyone is watching or God can't use us. Presenting our bodies as living sacrifices means active participation with God wherever we are.

- ix) #2 – Reject the world and emulate Jesus. Whatever the world tells us to do, we should either flat out reject it or use it for the glory of God. We have freedom in Christ to do whatever we want, but it better give glory to God and not cause someone weaker in their faith to stumble. Paul gives us all permission to be non-conformists. Do it.
- x) #3 – Assess your current life – put your life against God's Word and be willing to humbly make changes. You are the only one that can make changes in your life, even though there are lots of people who are telling you to change. The only measure we have is the Word of God working in us through the Holy Spirit. In order to be a living sacrifice, we have to know what we've got.
- xi) #4 – Serve as you have been spiritually gifted - and not any other motivation. Not prestige, not wanting more people to notice you, not for the accolades...simply because God has gifted you in that way. And, if you're serving in an area in which you aren't gifted...stop serving in that area and get into the area God has gifted you. Create ways to use your gifts in the body of Christ.
- xii) #5 – Work together – work together in harmony with other Christians who are using their gifts. Even if you don't like people, find ways to work together for the glory of God.

4) Conclusion

- a) As we close today, I would like us to pray together a special prayer that John Wesley's wrote and prayed every day.
- b) As we think about the radical life that we being asked to live by presenting our bodies to God for use, this prayer is our ratification...it's the thing that puts the seal on our promise to be radical for Jesus.
- c) Let's pray this together (on the screen)
- d)

e) **I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed for thee or laid aside for thee,
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
thou art mine, and I am thine.
So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on Earth,
let it be ratified in heaven.
Amen.**