

***The Sacrifice of Your Sleeping, Eating,  
Going-to-Work, Walking-Around, Everyday, Ordinary Life'  
Part 1 – Living Sacrifices***

Romans 11:33-12:1

Rev. Jeff Chapman ~ October 11, 2015 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church

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<sup>33</sup> **O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!**

<sup>34</sup> **“For who has known the mind of the Lord?**

**Or who has been his counselor?”**

<sup>35</sup> **“Or who has given a gift to him,  
to receive a gift in return?”**

<sup>36</sup> **For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.**

**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.** (Romans 11:33-12:1, NRSV)

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If we were gathering this morning for worship at the Temple in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jerusalem instead of gathering in this sanctuary in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Sacramento, you might have come this morning a little differently equipped. For one thing, you likely would have brought along with you a live sheep or lamb, one of the best of your flock. As you arrived you would have given your animal to me and then I would have sacrificed it right here in front and sprinkled the blood of the animal on the altar where some of its insides would also be burned as an offering. Can you picture the scene? I bet none of you would fall asleep during that part of the service!

In ancient Israel the purpose of this sort of sacrifice in the Temple was often atonement. Because you had been unfaithful to God and not kept his commandments or walked in his ways, the covenant between you and God had been broken and you had been cut off from God and the life he offers. In this world sin always leads to death. That’s a reality God has always made clear to us. But in those days God provided a way for his people to make amends and find reconciliation. That’s what atonement means. And that way was through sacrifice. Sin naturally leads to death, but God allowed his people to redirect that natural consequence towards an innocent animal instead of themselves. Basically, when the sheep was sacrificed God’s favor upon you was restored, at least until you sinned again.<sup>2</sup>

I see none of you brought sheep with you this morning to worship. Why is that? Do we no longer need God’s forgiveness?

In John 1 we find John the Baptist baptizing people down at the Jordan River. One day Jesus comes walking towards him. When John sees Jesus this is what he declares to all those within earshot, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”<sup>3</sup> Understand this is not some cute nickname John gives to Jesus. Jesus is the Lamb of God in this sense, that he came as God’s Son to offer himself as a sacrifice for human sin, and not a sacrifice for one person for one time, but for all people for all time.<sup>4</sup> You did not bring a lamb with you to church this morning, or any other sacrifice to be killed, because in Christ you are already forgiven. The price for our sin has been paid in full through the sacrifice of one great and innocent Lamb. And so there is no blood up front here, only a cross which reminds us that there will be no more need for blood to be shed.

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<sup>1</sup> I’ve shamelessly stolen this title from Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase of Romans 12:1 in *The Message*.

<sup>2</sup> *Bible Dictionary*, edited by Paul J. Achtemeier (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1985), see articles on “Atonement” and “Worship”.

<sup>3</sup> John 1:29.

<sup>4</sup> See I Peter 1:18-20: “You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake.”

Keep this in mind as we turn again to the verses we just read from Paul's letter to the Romans. If you know this letter you know that Paul spends most of the letter declaring this reality, that through Jesus Christ God's enduring mercy has been offered to inexcusable and undeserving sinners like you and me, and that if we would only place our faith in Christ we would be made forever right with God, find ourselves filled with his life-giving Spirit, and be counted as God's eternally beloved children. For the first eleven chapters of Romans Paul pounds home this message, summarized by his famous words in Roman 8:1, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." How much condemnation? None! If you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ you stand before him today forever forgiven and free.

After doing his absolute best for 11 chapters to help us understand this mercy of God shown to us through Jesus Christ, Paul shifts in the beginning of chapter 12, in the verses we just read, to show us how we now ought to respond to this priceless gift. Again, he writes, **"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."**

Did you catch it? Paul does not teach us that we no longer need to bring a sacrifice to God. No, a sacrifice is still appropriate. But now, instead of lamb or some other innocent animal, we are to bring our bodies, a word he means to signify our whole selves, our whole lives. Thankfully, of course, he inserts the word "living" in there! Right? In response to God's mercy we're not called to die for God. The dying already took place. We are instead now called to *live* for God. Our very lives, in every aspect, are to be an offering of gratitude for what God has already done for us in Christ.

One scholar put it this way, "In the New Testament religion is grace and ethics [how we live our lives] is gratitude."<sup>5</sup> That's a fancy way of saying that any efforts towards right living on our part are not a burden on us to please God, but are instead the natural response of people who have come to realize that the pleasure of God is already ours in spite of our failure to live rightly. In fact, the offering of our lives is not some sort of payback for what God has done but is instead motivated by our overwhelming gratitude.

Think of it this way. You know that feeling you get when somebody with whom you did not plan to exchange gifts with at Christmas surprises you and goes out and buys you not only a gift, but a very nice gift. What is your first and automatic response when you receive such a gift? Instead of feeling joyful over your new gift you feel the burden of debt. And to relieve that burden, the next day you're off to the mall to find an equally nice gift to present to your friend, all the while scrambling for a way to make it seem as if you planned to give it all along.

Now compare that scenario to this one. This past week a young man drowned and lost his life in the river near Discovery Park because he was trying to save a child who was in trouble in the water. Imagine that was your child. Imagine the man risking his life to save your child survived. He risked his life in order that your son or daughter could live and as he comes to shore and places your child safely in your arms what is it that you feel in that moment? I guarantee you that you do not feel the same way you felt when your friend placed that unexpected Christmas gift in your hands. You do not feel the burden of now having to pay back somebody tit-for-tat for what they have done for you. No, you simply feel gratitude, overwhelming gratitude. How can you ever pay this man back? You can't. But for the rest of your life you will live gratefully in his presence, honoring him however you can for the priceless gift he gave you by putting his life on the line for the sake of your child.

Can you see that in an even greater way this is our response when we come to realize what it is that God has done for us in Christ? In response, we offer our whole lives to God, not as payback or to relieve some burden of guilt or debt, but simply out of joyful gratitude. How can we not offer our very lives to the One who has given us life in the first place?



Paul wrote his letter of Romans to a Greek audience who would have been heavily influenced by Platonic thought which regarded the physical body as an embarrassing nuisance. A popular slogan in that day was "soma sema estin", which meant "the body is a tomb" in which the human spirit was imprisoned and wanted to escape.<sup>6</sup> This idea lingers with us

<sup>5</sup> Cited by John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Romans* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 321.

<sup>6</sup> Stott, 322.

today as many of us would still consider the most important part of a person to be their heart, or spirit, or soul and not their body. Paul would have none of this. Neither would Jesus.

You see, Christian spirituality is exceedingly earthy. The sacred is found in the most ordinary. Of course God is pleased with the thoughts of our minds and the praise of our hearts, but he is also just as pleased apparently with the everyday movements of our bodies, our ordinary, flawed, often out-of-shape, aging bodies can be beautiful offerings to God not just in worship at church but in worship wherever we find ourselves.

That is Paul's encouragement here. In light of the extraordinary mercy God has shown you, go now and make a living sacrifice of your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, walking-around, everyday, ordinary life. Wherever your feet carry you, be on the lookout for God at work in that place (because he is!). And when you get there may your lips speak words of grace and truth, may your words bring healing and encouragement. May your hands reach down to lift up those who have fallen along the way. May your energy be put to use performing all sorts of ordinary and mundane tasks, like cooking, and cleaning, and typing, and mending, and painting, and weeding. May your arms embrace those who are lonely or unloved. May you use your ears to listen carefully to the cries of those who hurt, to those to whom nobody ever listens. May your eyes notice people and things that nobody notices, and may they always be looking upward, humbly and patiently to God.<sup>7</sup> This is the offering of our lives which God most desires.



Moments ago we collected the offering as we do every Sunday in worship. I want to make certain you understand what it is that we are doing when we take some money out of our pockets and put it into that plate as it's passed up and down the rows. This small offering is merely a token, a reminder, if you will, of a much more substantial offering. You see, God doesn't need our money. It's already all his, in fact. So we're not giving money to God to help finance his underfunded mission. And we're certainly not making an offering to pay off some debt we owe God or curry his favor in some way. No, our offering this morning, both what we already put into the plate as it passed by earlier, and what we are about to put in the basket as a pledge of our gifts this coming year, are simply a joyful response of gratitude and a token, a symbol, of our entire lives.

I like to think of this this way. When you give your offering here in worship, imagine putting your whole body into the plate or the basket. The portion of your life you offer here in this place is a symbol of your entire life beyond of this place. In this offering you are extending to God a joyful willingness to give your whole life - your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, walking-around, everyday, ordinary life - as a living sacrifice this next hour and this next day and this next week. Paul puts it this way in another of his letters, **"Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."**<sup>8</sup> This is why we experience such freedom when we give, and why we're so free to give so generously, because we know that in Christ we already have everything we need forever no matter how much we give away today.

May what we have already offered, and what we are about to offer, be freely offered out of gratitude and joy, and may it represent our whole lives which, in view of God's mercy, we offer up as well.

Amen.



### The Next Step

#### A resource for Life Groups and/or personal application

1. Read Romans 11:33-12:1 again, especially focusing on Romans 12:1. What stands out to you from this verse?
2. Paul pleads with us (that's the sense of this verse) to offer our bodies as living sacrifices to God. What do you think this means?

<sup>7</sup> These words here are inspired by and reworked from a passage by John Stott, 322.

<sup>8</sup> II Corinthians 9:7.

3. In Romans 8:1, Paul tells those in the church who have placed their faith in Christ, “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Is this the reality in which you live? If so, how has this changed your life?
4. What are you planning to do this coming Tuesday morning? Whatever it is your body is doing at that time, how could you offer yourself as a living sacrifice?
5. Can we worship God as much on Tuesday morning at work or school, or in traffic or line, as genuinely as we worship God on Sunday morning in church?
6. When you have brought an offering to give in church what is it that you have imagined you are doing as you put that offering into the plate or basket? Has this message changed the way you think about this?
7. What would change for you if when you gave an offering at church you imagined stepping yourself into the offering plate and giving your whole life?



### **Table to Table Question**

*A question for kids and adults to answer together*

Why do we give money in the offering plate at church every Sunday? What happens when we do that?