

30 Days Together
“Immanuel - God With Us”
#30daystogether

Day #26 – Dec. 21

Text: Romans 12:1-2

Therefore, I appeal to you brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Devotion: Pastor Mark Bowditch

We Christ-followers are called to be living sacrifices. But let's think about sacrifice and let's ask ourselves: how many of us are willing to make a real sacrifice? That is a tough question and Romans 12:1 is a huge challenge to me. As we begin a new church year in this Advent/Christmas season, let's think back to how we ended the last church year. We had a stewardship series and considered how we would sacrificially give our time, talent, and treasure to serve Jesus.

So how much do we actually sacrifice? Maybe we are willing to sacrifice eating a certain food or drink to lose some weight ... or perhaps we're willing to sacrifice time with friends to spend more time with our wife or children ... or possibly we would sacrifice a career to follow our spouse down their career path. These are a few examples of sacrifices that people have made, but is that what Paul is writing about here in Romans 12?

What is a sacrifice? It's all about giving something up important for something or someone else that we believe in. It's about commitment and selflessness and self-discipline. God's call for us to be living sacrifices is about "service before self" and being "all in" for a greater cause. It's being completely sold out for Jesus. God Himself has called us to make ourselves a sacrifice for Him. Perhaps you remember that final confirmation question that goes: "Do you intend to continue steadfast in this Christian faith and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?"

Every day, we are all tempted to not sacrifice, to not go the way of suffering, but instead, to take the wide, easy road -- not the narrow hard road. Will we choose to be selfish or to be selfless ... will we choose our flesh or sacrifice it for Jesus?

Here's a few statistics I heard about the average American Christian and the average American church. Someone figured that the average regular churchgoer has heard 2500 sermons and 10,000 hymns, but has brought zero people to Jesus. Now, while the following numbers are a bit exaggerated for the sake of illustration, this is an example of one way the problem can be understood: in a typical church with 200 members ... 20 are too old to work, so that leaves 180 left to work, but of the rest, 18 are too timid to accept much responsibility that leaves 162 left to work, but 12 are out of town or away for school, so that leaves 150 left to work, but 25 of those work long hours six or seven days a week, so that leaves 125 left to work, but 20 of those are tied down with children that leaves 105 left to work, but 20 of those are unable to work because of poor health, that leaves 85 left to work, but 55 do not attend

regularly, are delinquent, or don't care ... so that leaves 30 left to work, but 20 of those have decided that although they will attend church but they refuse to work ... that leaves 10 left to work, 8 of those are very tired of doing all the work and have asked to be relieved. That leaves only 2 people, but one recently got engaged and is planning a wedding ... so that leaves you to do all the work.

When you hear this what do you think? Do you feel like you are always the one person who is relied upon to do everything? Do you feel like you're being singled out? Are you one of the 8 who are tired of doing all the work?

Well, here's the truth: no statistics (positive or negative) are going to lead you or me to become a living sacrifice! There is nothing that can be done to force you or me to do it. Even Romans 12 makes this clear. Paul is writing and urging people to become sacrifices, but NOT because they "should" or because they "need" to, but rather ... "in view of God's mercy!" Mercy is not getting something bad (i.e., both temporal and eternal punishment) that we deserve and should receive!

In view of God's mercy means that God was all-merciful to us and sent His Son Jesus who came down to earth and took the punishment for our sins upon Himself on the cross. The punishment for our sins is death ... but the GOOD NEWS is that we have not and will not die and receive the temporal and eternal punishment that we really do deserve! That's all because Jesus died for us, by becoming our sacrifice and our substitute. [Wow! Let that sink in! Take a good hard view of your sin and His mercy! We can never appreciate and "view His mercy" IF we don't first view our sin and what we deserve for it.] He became the ultimate and final sacrifice, so that we could live! So, in response and "in view of God's mercy" we get to live fully and be living sacrifices – for Him! We get to serve God gratefully for giving us Jesus! Therefore, rather than feeling bad about what you HAVE NOT done, VIEW what God HAS DONE for you and be encouraged and strengthened!

Here is a final closing picture and question for you to ponder this Christmas season and as we begin a new year. At the very end of the incredible movie called "The Nativity Story" we see the three Magi presents their treasures to Jesus as they fall down before Him. The last line of the movie spoken by the third Magi is: "A gift of myrrh to honor the sacrifice." I was most impressed – even blown away – that this version of the Christmas story accurately ends by pointing us forward to the CROSS and the sacrifice that Jesus would one day make on Mt. Calvary! There, Jesus reconciled us poor, lowly sinners to God through His blood sacrifice. This is the ultimate reason that Jesus came to earth. The Magi brought costly gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. So, how will you be a living sacrifice to "honor the sacrifice" Jesus made for you?

Closing Prayer: "Dear Father God, thank you for giving Your one and only Son to be my Savior! Lord Jesus, thank you for willingly sacrificing Your life so that I could receive mercy, both now and forevermore! Holy Spirit, strengthen my faith and my resolve to live generously and show me how I can better give away and utilize my time, talent, and treasure for Your Kingdom purposes. Make me a pleasing "living sacrifice" all my earthly days! In Your Holy Name, I pray. Amen.

For your inspiration and viewing pleasure, here is a link to final 5-minute scene of "The Nativity Story"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10G0LLEbVQI>