

NOT JUST FOR SUNDAYS

TAKEAWAY

Response

Part 8 – Culmination

May 30, 2010

Sacrifice of Self

About a year or so ago, God began quietly asking me this very uncomfortable question: “What is your life about?” Until recently, He asked the question in small ways. I was giving Him academic answers, such as: “My life is about glorifying You, God.” But in my heart, I had recently started crying out to God: “What, indeed, is my life about? Show me, please!” He started to answer my plea in a big way last week by showing me that my life is to be a living sacrifice for Him. But what does that look like? I had to ask, what does this have to do with my daily life?

When thinking about our lives as living sacrifices, it occurred to me that we can't give God a sacrifice that doesn't cost us anything. Read 1 Chronicles 21:24 and Luke 21:1-4. What did David and the widow have in common? Why is the personal cost to them so important? When we feel like we are sacrificing for God, how do we know our sacrifice is really costing us something? The answer to that lies in another question: “Where do I need to die to self so that others might live?” I first heard this question a week ago while I was in a foreign country where poverty is rampant. The question came from a friend I was traveling with. It stopped me cold in my tracks. After witnessing some of the abject poverty in that country and comparing it to my life in America, I was ready right then and there to sell everything I have and go help these people. But over the next few days, God began to reveal some things to me about my heart. He was telling me that this “dying to self” runs deeper than just selling all my possessions and giving to the poor. Of course, that is no small matter, but read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. What can we end up doing in our own power and what can be missing from the equation? If our sacrifices never engage our heart, or we just give to God each month in a rote manner, or we just do some occasional, radical outward thing, we may be missing the heart of God.

This new question has made it easier to pinpoint the places in my life that need to die so that others might live. I realized it's an act of sacrifice...it is worship. The Holy Spirit convicted me about some very specific things. I have started to listen when God shows me where I am asserting and valuing “self” above all else. Or the times in my daily interactions with people when I am elevating myself, even if it is only in my own eyes and no one else can see it. When I returned home, God gently spoke to me about a really sore spot—where in my obligations to my family and spouse am I sneaking by with half the effort because I'm just not that motivated? Where do I need to die to self so that my family might experience life? I don't know about you, but this is a sacrifice that will really cost me something. It's not easy, but when I choose God over myself, He fills me with more than a self-centered life could ever offer. Read Luke 9:22-25. What is the prerequisite for following Jesus? What do you think this looks like in your life? If you feel like you can't get there from here, but you want to, you're in a good place. Pray and ask God to show you where you need to die to self so that others might live. Become the living sacrifice that He created you to be.

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.

Romans 12:1 (NLT)

Worship and Sacrifice

Thousands had fled the burning township, clutching their children as they raced for their lives. For months racial tensions had been high between the black and Indian communities. Then the rumor spread that a black family had been attacked. The reaction was swift and terrible. Within the hour, hundreds of homes were ablaze. The Indian community fled the district, thousands making their way downriver to escape the violence and hatred. The government sent in troops to restore calm, but there hung in the air a mixture of shame and fear. Behind the sea wall, the homeless Indians started building shacks with pieces of timber, cardboard, tin and any other materials they had been able to salvage from the ruins.

Within weeks the thousands of squatters had erected a new township of squalor. When the church gathered for prayer, moved by the plight of the refugees, I suggested that we all should give what we could to help these poor people. As we worshiped and prayed, an elderly widow came forward. I knew her well. She lived alone, having never had children. Her house had none of the comforts and

conveniences that most of us take for granted. To bring brightness and color to the bare boards of her house, she had pasted pictures from old magazines on the wall.

That night she dropped a small paper bag on the table where we were placing our offerings. Later, when I gathered them up, I found that her paper bag was two-thirds full of rice. I knew that, small as it was, this offering probably represented all she had. Yet it was not given reluctantly or with murmuring. She had made her sacrifice with the peace and joy of a worshiping heart.

The first mention in the Scriptures of the word “worship” is in Abraham’s offering of Isaac upon the altar. In restraining his servants from accompanying them to Mount Moriah, he said, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you” (Genesis 22:5 NIV). Abraham never considered that he and Isaac would not return. He was not about to indulge in some misguided act of religious zealotry. Nor did he view the sacrifice of Isaac upon an altar as in some way appeasing a savage God. Abraham was confident that his sacrificing of Isaac would not be to loss but to gain, that the boy would live. “By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son...Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death” (Hebrews 11:17, 19 NIV).

The first mention of any topic in Scripture often gives a clue to its broader spiritual significance. By this principle, worship and sacrifice are forever linked. Whenever we worship, it is with a desire to give over to God something we feel we cannot keep to ourselves. Whether it is the thankfulness of the heart, the praise of the soul, or the adoration of the spirit, we long to bestow them on Him and in this sense they become our sacrifices of worship. They are not sacrifices aimed at appeasing an angry God or bribing a reluctant God, but positive acts in which we gladly give something of ours to Him. And this calls for more than mere words; there must be substance to the giving over of our lives, just as Abraham visibly and physically gave Isaac to be bound on the altar.

The final vision of ultimate worship in the Scriptures is centered on the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world, a reminder afresh that all worship is forever joined to sacrifice. In the meantime, the apostle Paul describes our worship in terms of our surrendered lives: “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 NIV). Our worship is only as rich as our life. Each day provides us with new opportunities to demonstrate our commitment to Christ by laying down our lives for Him. Paul’s idea of the surrendered life is not to live as a religious recluse, cut off from the world of need, imprisoned in religious thinking. Instead, it is to be the outward flow of the love of God to the world around us.

To touch that world will not require most of us to cross the oceans. It will mean involvement with the immediate world of our own neighborhood, our street, our office, our home. Here we are provided with a multitude of opportunities to worship God by giving ourselves to serve the needs of others. We can give Him our eyes through which to look with compassion, our mouth through which to speak, our hands through which to heal, our feet through which to go, and our hearts through which to love. This is our worship. This marks the dividing line between the religious and the spiritual, between the Pharisee and the Samaritan. Jesus was never out of touch. The Christ who daily spent time with His Father in worship was the same Christ who daily walked through crowded streets bringing God to the people.

To live this way ourselves requires the denial of our selfish wants and the giving of ourselves to serve the desires of God. Worship is more than singing songs and raising our hands in praise to the Almighty. It means giving our money, our time, our counsel, our understanding, our care—our bag of rice. God will never require us to pay a cost or make a sacrifice greater than the one He has already been willing to make Himself. Christ on the cross is the ultimate sacrifice, the ultimate example, the ultimate provocation for all worship. In light of that, we can identify with C.T. Studd when he said, “If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him.”

(excerpted from Bryn Jones’ article, “Worship and Sacrifice,” at therestorer.net, reprinted with permission)

Some Additional Study: Consider the different ideas conveyed in these passages about worship.

1. Read Deuteronomy 26:1–15. These instructions were given to the nation of Israel for the annual pilgrimage they were to make to appear before the place of the Lord’s choosing. What did their “worship” look like? Notice how they sacrificed both the present (consuming) and the future (security).
2. Compare this to David’s worship in 2 Samuel 6:12–23. What was the cost of David’s worship? What part does the opinion of others play into your expression or sacrifice of worship?

Did you know you can sign up on our website to receive the Takeaway by e-mail or download the Takeaway from our website?