

Living Sacrifices – Romans 12:-2

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *The Emerald City*

1. In the *Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy was trying to get back to her home in Kansas.
2. She was told to make her way to the *Emerald City* where she'd find out how to return.
3. Along the way she picked up some companions who also had needs that could be met at the Emerald City, so they joined her.
4. They passed thru many perils & challenges as they followed the *Yellow Brick Road* thru a forest.
5. Then, when they came to the forest edge, they saw the Emerald City for the first time, off in the distance.
6. Stretching before them was a vast field of beautiful poppies.
7. They'd been warned to stay on the path & not wander among the flowers.
8. So with the end of their journey in sight, they set out with light hearts along the YBR.
9. But the poppies smelled so good & were so pretty they couldn't help but stop to admire them.
10. What harm could there be in walking among them for a while.
11. As they left the path, they realized how tired they were so they sat down to rest.
12. Then, *lying* down seemed such a good idea. Soon they were fast asleep.
13. It all seemed so natural & harmless.
14. But the poppies weren't just pretty flowers; they were a trap meant to keep people from getting to the Emerald City.

B. *On Our Way Home*

1. We're on *our* way home in Heaven.
2. We've come thru a 2000 year old forest & can see the end just ahead.
3. But between here & there lies a poppy-field called "the world."
4. Our path, the golden road of grace & faith lies right thru it.
5. How important we stay on the path & not be distracted by the *enticements* of the world.
6. Like flowers they look & smell good. They sound great, taste delicious & feel marvelous.
7. But they're a trap meant to slow our pace, side-track our journey & sideline our lives.
8. Now is not the time to lie down among the pleasures of this world.
9. Heaven is our home, not this! And the end is right there on the horizon.

C. *Paul's Urging*

1. This is what Paul urges us to in our text today.
2. We find a similar pattern in most of his letters.
 - a. He begins by explaining *what we believe*, then moves to *application*.
 - b. With Paul it's always *doctrine first, then deeds*.
 - c. *Belief then behavior*.
3. It's what we find here in Romans.
 - a. Chs. 1-11 are nearly entirely doctrine.
 - b. The few exhortations he gives are passing remarks on the great truths he expounds about the Gospel of Grace.
 - c. But with the first verse of ch. 12, he turns the corner *from doctrine to application*.

II. TEXT

A. V. 1

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is your reasonable service.*

1. We need first to catch the *intensity* of Paul's appeal.
 - a. He's not a *professor* standing in front of a theology class, summing up a lecture.
 - b. Nor is he a *counselor* sitting behind a desk writing out a prescription.
 - c. He's *intensely engaged* with his audience, *earnestly pleading* with them, *to the point of begging*.
 - d. And there's a note of *urgency* in his words.
2. He says, "In light of all I've previously shared, all the many mercies God has bestowed on us in Christ, the only reasonable response is to offer ourselves completely & w/o reservation to Him."
3. Let's break this down.
4. Notice first how he *appeals to their will*.
 - a. He's just explained the Gospel of Grace in the most amazing detail.
 - b. But that explanation hasn't been aimed at making theologians out of them.
 - c. The *effect* of truth ought to be *change*.
 - d. Just as grace changed their eternity, it must change *them* in the here & now.
 - e. Paul calls on them to make this connection & just as they had *put their faith in Christ*, they must now follow thru & *put Christ into their faith & daily lives*.
 - f. This required them to make a clear, conscious choice about Who & what they were going to live for.
5. Many years ago when the railroad was a major force, a crew of men were repairing a rail bed when they were interrupted by a slow moving executive train.
 - a. When it pulled even with them, it ground to a stop & a window in the fancy executive car was raised.
 - b. A booming, friendly voice called out to the foreman of the crew, "*Dave*, is that you?"
 - c. Dave Anderson called back, "Sure is, Jim. It's good to see you."
 - d. Dave was then invited to join Jim Murphy, the president of the *Erie Railroad*, in his personal coach.
 - e. They talked for over an hour & enjoyed a nice meal. Then the 2 stepped out of the luxurious car onto the tracks where they exchanged a final hand shake, Murphy returned to his car & the train pulled out.
 - f. The work crew surrounded their foreman & all expressed astonishment that he knew the president of the railroad so well.
 - g. Dave explained that 23 years earlier he & Murphy had started to work for the *Erie* on the same day, doing the same job – loading freight.
 - h. One of the men jokingly asked Dave why he was still working out in the hot sun while Murphy had gotten to be president.
 - i. Embarrassed, Anderson explained, "23 years ago I went to work for \$1.75 an hour. Jim Murphy went to work for the railroad."
6. Both men started side by side on the same day doing the same job.
 - a. The difference between them was their *perspective* on what they were doing & why.
 - b. Dave's goal was a paycheck. Jim's was a career.
 - c. Different goals meant different ends.
 - d. What are you working for? More importantly, what are you *living* for?
7. Barring an accident or illness, we're all going to live about the same amount of time.

8. And when you boil it down, we really are all pretty much the same.
 9. What makes the greatest difference between us is what decide to do with the life & time given us.
 - a. If we live for self, in the end we're just like most everyone else & our potential is wasted.
 - b. If we live for God, we fulfill what we were created for & our lives will make a difference, an *eternal* difference.
 10. That's why Paul makes this passionate appeal.
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11. He bases it on all the mercy God's heaped on us described in the previous chs.
 - o We've been *justified* in Christ & declared righteous.
 - o God has *adopted* us & made us His sons & daughters.
 - o We've been *set free* from the Law & live under the God's amazing grace.
 - o The *Holy Spirit* has come to live permanently within us.
 - o Because of Him, there's help in all trouble.
 - o We're the elect of God & stand forever in His favor.
 - o Our destiny is unbounded glory.
 - o AND - Nothing can separate us from the love of God.
 12. In light of all that, what other response could there be but **Total Surrender to Him?**
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13. Before we look at what it means to be a living sacrifice, note Paul says this is our *reasonable service*.
 - a. It's *reasonable* because of the mercies of God.
 - b. The word *service* was a technical word; it spoke of the religious practice of a priest in the service of his god.
 - c. It was the forms he used when making sacrifices.
 14. What Paul means is that the essence of our *religion as believers* isn't what was seen at a temple when a priest went thru the motions of worship.
 15. Our religion doesn't involve bringing a sacrifice or offering, putting it into *someone else's hands* & then watching while *they* go to God with it.
 16. No – the proper, reasonable religious practice of the follower of Christ is to bring & offer **HIM/HERSELF** to God.
 17. So Paul writes,

Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God.

 - a. Sacrifices was something the people of Paul's day were familiar with because both Jews & Gentiles offered animal sacrifices.
 - b. Where Paul's image differed was in the *outcome* of the sacrifice.
 - c. When an animal was offered, it died. No animal ever made it off the altar except as smoke & ash.
 18. But the death of Christ brought an end to the need of such sacrifices.
 - a. They all looked *forward* to what He completed & fulfilled.
 - b. His death conquers the sin which leads to death.
 - c. He came to *restore life*, & as He said in John 10, the life He brings is abundant, overflowing life.
 19. Paul calls us to live that life as an on-going act of worship & devotion to God.
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20. When we're Living Sacrifices, then all of life is worship to God – it's our religious service.
 - a. Our work & play.
 - b. Our struggles & loving; even our dying.
 - c. It's all for & to Him.
 21. Since Paul wrote this, there have been thousands of men & women who've gone to heroic lengths to offer themselves as a living sacrifice.
 - a. This verse has been instrumental in sending many to the mission field.

- b. Many talented people who could have made a bundle with their gifts, have used them instead in the humble service of the poor & powerless.
 - c. Praise God! That this verse has been instrumental in such heroic offerings.
 - d. But this verse is for all of us, for every believer.
 - 1) And if we think of a living sacrifice only in heroic terms,
 - 2) We'll miss what Paul is really saying here.
 - 3) Here's a little different picture of what it means to be a living sacrifice.
 - a. Picture a little 6 year old girl. She loves to dance & has dreams of being a ballerina.
 - b. For her birthday she get's some tights, a frilly tutu, some slippers, & a tiara.
 - c. She puts them all on & walks out into the living room where her daddy is sitting on the couch watching a game.
 - d. He turns it off & she takes her place in front of him saying, "Watch Daddy."
 - e. Then she twirls around & around, wanting nothing more than for him to take delight in her; in her grace & beauty.
 - f. In that moment, for her, life means one thing – being Daddy's delight.
 - g. What she *doesn't* know, is that because *he* knows that's her desire, though she isn't really all that graceful – she absolutely **IS** his delight!
22. We often evaluate our service to God on the **results** it bears, the impact it makes.
23. I'm convinced God looks for something else; He looks to our heart.
 - a. What He considers is how **complete** the offering.
 - b. What delights Him isn't so much **what's** done, but **why & how** it's done.
24. The greatest command is to love the Lord with ALL our heart, soul, mind & strength.
25. Better to stand alone & twirl with all our might to Him than to stand before 10,000 with eloquent words but no heart for God.
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26. There are a couple more things to look at here but we'll come back to them in a moment.

B. V. 2

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

- 1. Vs. 1 & 2 go together.
 - 2. We're able to **continue** being living sacrifices only as our minds are renewed.
 - 3. But we can't **begin** renewing our minds without the commitment of living for God.
 - 4. We're not to allow ourselves to be squeezed by the world into its way of thinking & living –
 - 5. But instead are to seek the change that comes as a **result** of our minds being renewed.
 - 6. What Paul doesn't spell out is **HOW** our minds are renewed because he took that as a given;
 - a. Renewing of the mind comes as the Spirit of God applies the Word of God.
 - b. **Truth** must supplant the lies the world, the flesh, & the devil have told us.
 - 7. It's then that we know the truth that sets us free.
 - 8. So the key to staying on the Golden Path of Grace & out of the world's poppy field is to abide in Christ, walking in the Spirit & the light of the Word.
 - 9. V. 2 ends by saying that it's only with a Word-enriched outlook that we're able to know what's right & wrong & the wisest course to take.
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10. A good way to understand what Paul is saying here is to compare the words **conformed & transformed**.
- a. **Conformation** is the world's way.
 - 1) It means to be pressed into a mold.
 - 2) Like *Silly Putty*. You can take a ball of *Silly Putty* press it into all kinds of shapes.

- 3) You can press it onto print & it will come away with that image on it.
 - 4) But if you want to conform it to something else, you just ball it up and start over again.
 - 5) It takes many different forms, but at the end of the day, it's still just *Silly Putty*, silly.
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- 6) That's the only kind of change the world can produce –
 - 7) An *outward alteration of appearance* that leaves people the same.
 - 8) Life becomes nothing more than a long parade of changing fashions, hobbies, interests & relationships.
 - 9) People think satisfaction & peace will come when there's a change in their circumstances.
 - 10) But the change that's needed is *within* them, not their surroundings.
 - 11) *Conformation* is not the *change* that brings peace; *transformation* is.
- b. **Transformation** is God's way of change.
 - 1) This word is the same one that describes the change a caterpillar goes through when it becomes a butterfly.
 - 2) It's the same creature but there's been a fundamental change from the inside out.
 - c. As Paul implies, this transformation takes place as the Spirit of God applies the Word of God to our minds & replaces the lies of the world with the Truth of Christ.

III. CONCLUSION

A. "Holy & Acceptable to God"

1. Look again at v. 1 –

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

2. The words "holy & acceptable to God" reminded Paul's Jewish readers of Leviticus 1:9 where of the burnt offering it was written that it was

An offering by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD.

3. The burnt offering was *different* from the other offerings in that . . .
 - a. While the priests & people were allowed to take a portion of the sacrifice for their own use,
 - b. The burnt offering was offered *wholly & only* to God.
 - c. Nothing was held back; it was all set on the altar & rose to God alone.
 - d. It was meant to be a picture of *total consecration* to God, nothing was left for any other purpose or use.
4. And Moses said this offering of total consecration was something God specially enjoyed.

B. Solomon

1. Many years after Moses wrote Leviticus giving guidelines for the burnt offering,
2. Solomon stood in front of the newly built temple in Jerusalem, praying a prayer of dedication.
3. A multitude of sacrifices had been laid upon the altar but the fire was not kindled.
4. Solomon's prayer was sincere as he dedicated himself, the people, & the temple to the Lord.
5. With his last words, fire fell from heaven & consumed the offerings, showing God's delight & acceptance of what had been offered.

C. Present

1. Let's look one last time at v. 1 -

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

2. The key is the word "PRESENT."
3. It's *tense* refers to a specific moment in time.

4. Paul is calling us to respond to God's gracious offer of salvation by coming before Him in a conscious choice of saying, "Lord, take all of me, now."
 - Let my life be Your living through me.
 - Let these hands be Your hands, these feet Your feet, this body Your body.
 - From this point forward, I am without reservation, consecrated to You."
5. When we offer ourselves like that, as living sacrifices, then we are holy & acceptable to the Lord & He will send the fire of His Holy Spirit to consume what we offer.