TITLE: Is My Sacrifice a Living One?

TEXT: Ro. 12:1; Gen. 22:1-12; Amos 5:21-24; Mt. 23:23-39;

1 Co. 6:9-11; Ro. 6:11-16; Col. 3:17; Heb. 13:15-16; Ro. 12:2;

Ro. 8:5-8; Phil 4:8

INTRODUCTION: The title of the message this morning is: Is My Sacrifice a Living One?

In talking about sacrifice to God an often quoted Scripture is:

**Romans 12:1-2(NIV)**  **1Therefore, 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.**

The words living and sacrifice used in the same sentence must have at first sounded strange to Paul’s listeners back then.

They would have been very familiar with the concept of sacrifice because of their sacrifice of animals in their worship of God.

Whenever an animal was sacrificed though its blood was shed, and it died as a result.

They knew nothing about living sacrifices. In fact, living and sacrifice must have seemed like an oxymoron to them, a contradiction in terms.

Yet in their past, in their history, they have a story that all Israelites would have been familiar with that spoke of just that, a living sacrifice.

**Genesis 22:1-12(NIV)   
1Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied.   
2Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.”**  **3Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about.**  **4On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance.**  **5He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”**  **6Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together,**  **7Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?” “Yes, my son?” Abraham replied. “The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”**  **8Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.**  **9When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.**  **10Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.**  **11But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied.**  **12“Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”**

We often look at this story from the vantage point of Abraham. Abraham was declared a man of great faith and righteousness because of what he did here this day in his willingness to sacrifice his one and only son to God.

Less often do we look at this story from the vantage point of Isaac…

When this happened, Isaac was probably not a young child but a young man possibly in his 20’s or even older.

Picture yourself at around 20 years old and your dad invites you to go along with him to go up to the mountain and make a sacrifice to God and when you get there find out that you are that sacrifice.

At this point in his life Isaac was probably a lot stronger that his dad who was 100 when he was born.

How in the world could Abraham bind his stronger son Isaac?

The answer is that Isaac allowed him to! Isaac had that much trust in his father that he willingly allowed Abraham to tie him up and place him on that alter..

**9When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.   
10Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.**

See anything wrong with this picture?

Isaac may have been bound but he could still wiggle and roll. He could have put up some resistance! He could have begged his dad not to do it but we have no record that he did any of that….

The picture that we have is Isaac willingly laying there in full submission to his father….

I believe that Isaac’s faith was just as great as His father Abraham’s was that day. At least faith in his Father Abraham….

I believe that Isaac is the perfect Old Testament example of What Paul is talking about in Romans 12:1 **1Therefore, 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.**

Abraham had made the sacrifice of Isaac in that if God had not stopped him he would have done it. The decision was made in Abraham's heart, so Isaac became a living sacrifice.

Oswald Chambers has this to say about the above verses of Scripture in his devotional “My Utmost for His Highest”:

*This incident is a picture of the blunder we make in thinking that the final thing God wants of us is the sacrifice of death. What God wants is the sacrifice through death which enables us to do what Jesus did, and that is sacrifice our lives. Not - I am willing to go to death with Thee, but - I am willing to be identified with Thy death so that I may sacrifice my life to God. We seem to think that God wants us to give up things.. God purified Abraham from this blunder, and the same discipline goes on in our lives. God nowhere tells us to give up things for the sake of giving them up. He tells us to give them up for the sake of the only thing worth having and that is a life with Himself. It is a question of loosening the bands that hinder the life, and immediately those bands are loosened by identification with the death of Jesus, we enter into a relationship with God whereby we can sacrifice our lives to Him. It is of no value to God to give Him your life for death. He wants you to be a "living sacrifice,"  to let Him have all your powers that have been saved and sanctified through Jesus. This is the thing that is acceptable to God.*

In the oldest records that can be found of the various nations of the earth, sacrifice is always found to have been part of their religious practices. From the time of Adam, our ancestors, not only felt the need to obtain pardon for sins, but to express their gratitude to the supreme being or beings who they regarded as the givers and the benefactors of their life.

"But it is only when we come to the religion of Israel that we find the idea of sacrifice having any influence upon the life.

The other nations offered sacrifices, but there was no turning away from evil. ... In fact, in the case of many heathen countries, their acts of religious worship became, and have become, associated with immoral and degrading practices. Many actually had temple prostitutes employed.

The religion of Israel, however, taught the necessity of personal holiness. The Jews were constantly warned that without personal holiness their sacred assemblies and sacrifices would be unacceptable.

**Amos 5:21-24(NIV)**  **21 “I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies.**  **22 Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them.**  **23 Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps.**  **24 But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!**

There has never been a time when God has been pleased with the sacrifice of individuals who are not determined to live holy lives. He would rather that they not even attempt to worship Him rather than to worship without personal righteousness - justice, mercy and a humble walk with God.

But Israel did not listen to these warnings and by the time that we come to the NT the religion of most people had become a religion of ritual and routine only.

Jesus made this no clearer than when he addresses the religious leaders of His day.

**Matthew 23:23-39(NIV)   
23“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.   
24You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.   
25“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.**  **26Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.**

**27“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean.**  **28In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness……**

**33“You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?**

**37“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.**  **38Look, your house is left to you desolate.**  **39For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.**

True religion demands much more than that we be formally correct in our congregational worship. It demands that we, as individuals, serve God all the time in both body and mind. This is what Paul teaches in Romans 12:1-2.

**1Therefore, 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.   
2Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.**

As Christians we are called upon to be holy in both body and mind; and Paul seeks to motive us "through the mercies of God."

The Gk. word translated "mercies" (oiktirmos) means "pity, compassion for the ills of others."

Theologian Lenski says that mercy is *"the tender feeling of pity for those in distress."*

Up to this point "Paul had been showing that they were dependent wholly on God's mercy and not on their legal righteousness; and because God has shown this mercy, **'Therefore' they should 'present their bodies' to Him as 'living sacrifices.'"**

In Paul's day the Greeks believed that the spirit, not the body, was what mattered. To them "the body was only a shackle and a prison-house; the body was something to be despised and even to be ashamed of."

They did not believe that they would be held responsible for what they did in the flesh.

There are many today who also believe much the same thing. They teach that Christians will not be held responsible before God for what they do in the body. These people "abuse their members by this false teaching" and then "attempt to excuse themselves by alleging that they have a good heart.

But we see from this passage that God requires the service of the body as well as that of the mind."

As Christians we need to understand that our bodies belong to God just as much as our souls do…

**1 Corinthians 6:9-11(NIV)   
9Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders   
10nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.   
11And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.**

What we do in our bodies is important! Paul warns us against believing otherwise when he wrote in:

**Romans 6:11-16(NIV)   
11In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.   
12Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.   
13Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.**  **14For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.**

**16Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?**

Present your body, therefore, as a living and holy sacrifice. Take all the tasks that you have to do every day; the ordinary work at the office, the factory, the home, the school; take the tasks that you perform in your marriage relationship and the parent-child relationship; and offer all of it as worship to God.

Nothing that we do should be done outside the framework of serving the Lord.   
  
 Many Christians find this incredible, but this is what Paul calls our "spiritual act of worship." We must never limit our service to God to only those things that we may do as a congregation on Sundays and Wednesdays. But it must include all that we do, "in word or deed"

**Colossians 3:17(NIV)**  **17And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.**

True religion involves the whole of one's life - as a parent, as a son, as a husband or wife, as a citizen and taxpayer, or as a neighbor.

True religion involves how we conduct ourselves at our place of work or how we may treaty our employees.

 Christians, in every sphere of our life are called upon to glorify God:  in washing and mending clothes and in cooking meals for your family, in working as a janitor, as a student,  in working for the telephone company, as an employee for the city or as a secretary in an office.

In every situation our spiritual service of worship requires that we present our body (what we do in our body) to God as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to Him.   
  
 Worship is not restricted to what we do at Church two or three times a week. It is as wide as the Christian's life.

This is what all of Scripture teaches us.

**Hebrews 13:15-16(NIV)**  **15Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name.**  **16And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.**

Our worship to God in this place will be unacceptable if our service to Him at other times is unholy. For it was He who said: "**I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting."**

To insure that they understood how they were to offer their bodies as living and holy sacrifices, Paul went on to say in:

**Romans 12:2Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.**

Christians are not to allow the world to squeeze them into its own mould. For the world holds to ideas and practices which, for the most part, are simply inconsistent with the doctrine of Christ and in fact are most of the time hostile to it. And the world actively encourages us to embrace these ideas and way of life.

We must resist!

But how? It is possible only through the renewing of our minds.   
  
According to the scriptures, as a man **"thinks in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7).** According to the scriptures there are only two mindsets: One governed by the flesh and the other by the Holy Spirit.   
**Romans 8:5-8(NIV)   
5Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.**

**6The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace;   
7the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.   
8Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.**

The mind set on the flesh is that mind which is determined to be governed by the demands of the flesh.

To be spiritually minded is to be determined to be governed by the Holy Spirit.

In the past, all of us were governed by the demands of the flesh. What we thought, what we said, what we did was determined by what the flesh wanted.

As a result, we lived like everyone else in the world—controlled by our sinful nature.

However, we must change the way that we think in order that we can change the way that we live. We do this by dwelling upon Scriptures such as  
**Philippians 4:8(NIV)   
8Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.**

Church, how we live has a profound effect upon whether or not God will accept the worship that we perform when we gather here to worship together on Sunday mornings, Wednesday nights or any other time we gather together as the body of Christ.

We must learn to serve God on every day of the week; to present our bodies to him as "a living and holy sacrifice." Otherwise, the worship that we perform in the Church will be hollow and unfulfilling.

So this morning; is your sacrifice a living one?

In your relationship with Christ are you allowing Him control of your life? Are you living your life in accordance with the Holy Spirit?

**Those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.**

As we choose to live our life in accordance with the Holy Spirit, our minds will be set on what that Spirit desires and we will be living our life as a living sacrifice to God. One that is holy and pleasing to Him…

Is that your desire this morning?