TITLE: A Living Sacrifice

TEXT: Ro. 12:1-2; Gen. 22:1-17; Ex. 20:17;

 2 Co. 5:17; Gal. 6:14-15; 2 Co. 9:7-13

INTRODUCTION: This morning I want to talk about what it means to be a living sacrifice.

**Romans 12:1 (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.**

Here we are called to offer our bodies as living sacrifices.

 Sounds like an oxymoron doesn’t it-- To offer our body as a living sacrifice?

 In the day Paul wrote this letter animal sacrifice was still being performed for the remission of sins by the Jewish community.

 His original listeners would have undoubtedly thought of death when talking about sacrifice.

 When an animal was sacrificed it was killed!

 So what was Paul talking about when he used the term living sacrifice?

**Genesis 22:1-17(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.**

When God told Abraham that He wanted him to offer up his son Isaac as a sacrifice I am sure Abraham thought that meant that his son was about to be killed by his own hand.

 Abraham also lived at a time in history when sacrifice meant death.

 Yet Abraham obeyed God even in this great request.

**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.”**

What is written here is really pretty amazing!

 **Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”**

 In Gods view the sacrifice had been made! Abraham did not withhold that which was dearest to him from the Lord….God said: **you have not withheld from me your son.”**

You see the sacrifice had already been made in Abraham’s heart when he decided to obey the Lord even in this great request!

 The decision was made in Abraham’s heart and God looks at the heart…

 So Isaac became a “living sacrifice” as far as his father Abraham and His God were concerned..

 Oswald Chambers shares this thought about these Scriptures:

“This event is a picture of the mistake we make in thinking that the ultimate 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, that is, sacrifice our lives.

 Not— “Lord, I am ready to go with You . . . to death”. But— “I am willing to be identified with Your 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 error, and the same process is at work in our lives. God never tells us to give up things just for the sake of giving them up, but He tells us to give them up for the sake of the only thing worth having, namely, life with Himself.

 It is a matter of loosening the bands that hold back our lives. Those bands are loosened immediately by identification with the death of Jesus. Then we enter into a relationship with God whereby we may 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 strengths that have been saved and sanctified through Jesus. This is what is acceptable to God.”

This is what Paul was speaking to us when he writes in:

**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.**

 Then he tells how we do that, how we become a living sacrifice….

**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.**

**2Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.**

The sacrifice that Abraham made that was pleasing to God was made in his heart, his mind, when Abraham decided to obey God and offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice as God had requested.

 Had God not intervened at that last second the sacrifice would have been made by Abraham!

 God looked at the sacrifice as already having been made where it really counts, in Abraham’s heart, so He stopped Abraham’s knife from going down into his son’s chest.

 Abraham’s sacrifice was not a sacrifice unto death but a sacrifice of life! A living sacrifice, a life completely surrendered to God and God’s will.

 When Scripture says **2Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,** it is saying the same thing that Abraham reveals to us by his example…

 The pattern of Abraham’s world was that in sacrifice there was always death and that death was always in the physical….

 God showed Abraham that through the renewing of the mind that transformation was possible and the result not being death but life…

 Solomon once said that there is nothing new under the sun. What has been will be again and what has been done will be done again—There is nothing new under the sun.

The pattern of our world is probably much the same as the pattern of the world in Abraham’s day.

 A world view that puts self-first, that places oneself on the throne expecting to be served. A world view that said you got to take care of numero uno, number one.

 The pattern of this world, at least in the United States and Western Europe, is that we are owed something, we deserve more even if it comes at the expense of others.

As economies all over the world are finding themselves in great trouble we have seen unrest in the streets of France as people come out in protest.

 In Greece people rioting in the streets in protest.

We even have similar, but even more violent protest in many of our major cities.

 What is the cause of all this unrest and civil disobedience?

 People that want what belongs to someone else, think that they deserve what belongs to someone else, have become very upset when they can no longer get it.

 Much or Western Europe has become socialistic.

The government, big brother, is expected to take care of you. How? Through a myriad of social programs.

 Some people expect that the government owes them and should provide for them from cradle to grave.

 Free food stamps, free or low cost housing, free medical care, retirement benefits for life.

 This is the direction we are now on in our country as well. That is what the 99% protestors across America were all about.

 The rich are too rich and they need to share with us who have less!

Do you realize that around 49.2% of Americans are now receiving some form of Government subsidies?

What is wrong with that?

Simply this---Governments have no money! The government produces nothing! They never have!

 The monies that the government gives away is not their money but money they take from the citizenry through a myriad of taxes.

 All of our politicians seem to be very generous at times with the giving away of money and services but it is not their money that they are giving away. It is the money of the people that they are supposed to be representing that comes from taxes that they impose.

 I don’t know about you but I would probably find myself more generous if it was someone else’s money I was giving away and not my own.

 Today around 40% of the people in this country pay no federal income taxes at all.

 The top 10% of wage earners pay about 71% of all the Federal income taxes paid in this country.

 Just the top 1% of wage earners today pay almost 40% of all Federal income tax.

 The bottom 50% of wage earners pay around 3% of all federal income tax collected and I believe it is about the bottom 40% of wage earners pay nothing.

 We hear a lot about the rich paying more, paying their fair share…In any just society their “fair” share would most likely be a whole lot less than they are paying now not more.

 Why do we get so outraged that the rich are not forced to pay more, pick up even a larger part of the tax bill?

 Because we want to benefit from their money. We don’t want to pay our own share at all.

 Some of our nation’s leadership cries that the rich are too rich and they owe more and more.

 Let me ask a simple question this morning?

Why? Why do the top 10% of wage earners who are already paying 71% of all taxes in this country be expected to pay even more?

 Why do we think that we deserve any part of their wealth? I mean if they pay more that means that we pay less.

 Do the rich owe us who are not rich and if so why?

 I believe I have the answer! It is because of our sinful nature!

 It is our sinful nature that demands that we get that which we did not earn and have no legitimate claim to. That somehow we deserve what someone else has simply because they have it.

 Being the recipients of the benefits that is gleamed from someone else’s labor is becoming the norm in our country as in much of the western world.

 It has become the “pattern of our world”.

And I am not sure God approves…

What is the 10th commandment?

**Exodus 20:17(NIV)
17“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”**

Do not covet! Do not try to get what belongs to someone else!

 And isn’t this exactly what we are doing as a matter of national policy? Coveting the wealth of the rich thinking that we are entitled to what they have.

Is this now the pattern of our world?

As Christians we have been commanded:

**2Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.**

I want to look at two words used here.

The first: conformed

***soos-khay-mat-id'-zo***

**To *fashion* *alike*, that is, *conform* to the same pattern:—conform to, fashion self according to.**

As followers of Christ we are called to not conform ourselves, fashion ourselves according to the patter of the world.

Instead we are called to be transformed:

***met-am-or-fo'-o***

**to *transform*—change, transfigure.**

 It is where we get the word metamorphosis from.

 The process from which a worm is changed into a beautiful butterfly.

 It speaks of a complete transformation, taking on another form completely different from what we were before.

 It is what Scripture is talking about when it says in:

**2 Corinthians 5:17(NIV)**  **17Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!**

Again this is speaking of a transformation, a metamorphosis taking place.

The process by which God takes the worm that we were before we came to Christ and changes us into the butterfly that He has for us to be in Him…

 This transformation can only come about through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ by giving, surrendering, control of our life over to Him..

**Galatians 6:14-15(NIV)**  **14May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.**  **15Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.**

 A Living sacrifice is allowing God to do that which He wants to do with and in our life.

 A Living sacrifice is complete surrender to Him, allowing Him to live His life vicariously through us.

 From a Christian perspective what it boils down to is this: God is to be seen as our provider not the government, not our neighbor or anyone else.

 We need to guard our hearts that we not become covetous of what someone else has thinking that we deserve it simply because we may have less.

Jesus talked a lot about helping supply the needs of others. The widow and the orphan, the sick and those who are in legitimate need.

 But Jesus never said it was the role of the government to do it through cohesion.

The command was given to the Church, given to us as individual believers who have been transformed by the blood of Christ.

 Jesus never demanded that anyone give up their wealth but that as living sacrifices we are willing to surrender our wealth when we see the need and respond as the Lord may direct us to respond.

Giving forced by coercion only leads to resentment..

Giving freely leads to praise to God.

**2 Corinthians 9:7-13(NIV)**
**7Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.**  **8And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work…….**

 **11You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.
12This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.
13Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.**

 This morning, Have we allowed God, are we allowing Him to transform our lives into something a little more like Jesus?

 Are we becoming the new creation that He has called and equipped us to be?

 Are we being transformed and not conformed to the patterns of our world?

 Do we not expect government and others to be the supplier of all our needs but have we learned that God is the supplier of all our needs?

 And when we see the legitimate needs of others are we moved with compassion to help meet those needs whenever possible?

Are we living our lives as living sacrifices to God?