

Living Sacrifices in View of God's Mercy

Dear Brothers and sisters: "We were buried with Christ through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

About three years ago, a woman named Ashley Bridges was diagnosed with a rare type of bone cancer. The doctors said she had a good chance to beat it if she started immediate treatment. But Ashley chose not to. Why? Because at the time, Ashley was 10 weeks pregnant, and the doctors told her that, in order for the treatment to be effective, the pregnancy would have to be terminated. "There's no way I could kill my child because I'm sick," she said. And so she didn't.

Time went by. When Ashley was eight months pregnant, doctors told her the cancer was terminal, and they had to deliver the baby. So they did. And her baby girl was completely healthy. Then she started treatment for her cancer. Unfortunately, by that time, Ashley's cancer had spread too far. After months of treatment, Ashley bridges died. She gave up her life, because her daughter needed her to. A powerful example of someone loving someone else's existence so much more than she loved her own, believing it was better for her to die in pain, than to live without her daughter.

Can you imagine what life will be like for that little girl? Can you imagine how she'll feel about her mother as she grows up. Will she talk to her family daily of how happy she is to have life? Will she tell all her friends about the ultimate sacrifice her mother made for her so that she could live? Will she tell her children one day how grandma died, so that she and her children would have life? If you were that daughter, wouldn't you want to dedicate your life to your mother for the action of love she showed you?

But what if that daughter didn't do any of those things. What if she changed the subject every time her mother came up? What if she was ashamed anytime people asked her about her mom? What if she never even mentioned her name to her own children? What if she never even sacrificed her own time to visit her mother's grave because she was too busy? What if she got angry with her mom, for not giving her enough?

That wouldn't be right would it? So what makes it different for us?

The Apostle Paul opens today's text, with one simple word, **"therefore."** And that one simple word refers back to the entire foundation he has just laid in the book of Romans, which rests on one person. Someone who loved our existence so much more than he loved his, believing it was better for him to die in pain than to live without you and I forgiven. Someone who at the cross, showed that he came, not to be served, but to be sacrificed, just to show us how true it is that, however ashamed we've been of him, however often we hunger for a long life of comfort, ease, or self, more than we hunger for him, his only desire has always been for us to live with him.

And so Paul opens this text with **"therefore,"** to urge us to look back on God's mercy today...not so that we feel sorry for Jesus. Not so that we feel obligated to fulfill a legalistic requirement. Jesus doesn't look us in the eye from the cross and say, *"Earn this. Make it worth my while for suffering so much for you."* No, our Savior looks us in the eye and says, **"It is finished."** There's nothing left to earn. I've earned it all for you." And so Paul is urging you to respond this morning. **"In view of God's mercy,"** he says, **"offer your bodies as a living sacrifices.."**

So what exactly does a living sacrifice look like? Well Paul begins explaining it like this, **"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."** Not conforming to the ways of the world, that's not an easy thing to do is it? Because sometimes it means sacrificing the things we like, the things we desire, the things we that bring us comfort, that make us feel accepted. Ask any high school student how easy it is to both please God and also have the approval of your peers. Ask any college student how easy it is to speak up for God's Word on a college campus. Sometimes telling your spouse, "I think we should give a bigger offering to the Lord" can even make things uncomfortable in your home. Talking to a friend or a family member about a sin they're committing, can make thing very uncomfortable for a very long time. You can't always please God and also feel comfortable. But that's part of what it means to **offer your bodies as living sacrifices.** You're sacrificing something valuable to yourself, because you value God more. And that's hard to do.

But that's what Paul means when he says, **"Be transformed by the renewing of your mind."** See, faith allows you to live differently than everyone else. And what's amazing, is that faith also allows you to use the simplest and most ordinary tasks you do each day, as a form of worship to God. Paul speaks of it this way:

⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your^[a] faith; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead,^[b] do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

500 years ago, it was believed that only pastors (or back then priests and monks) could truly serve their Lord. But one of the blessings to come out of the reformation was the truth about faith. See faith makes it possible for you to be a ***“living sacrifice,”*** no matter where you are or what you do. And so in that way, faith changes the way you can view each day.

Let me ask you a question: How often, at the end of the day, have you looked back and determined whether or not your day was a success based on how much you accomplished? I do it all the time! But the truth is, such a mindset is destined for failure. Maybe you're the mother who stays at home all day with her children. Cleans up their messes, changes their diapers, carries them around in one arm and tries to get things done with the other. But at the end of the day, you realize you're further behind than when you started. Was that a success? Maybe you're the hourly wage worker who works all day for \$12/hr, but then car trouble on the way home gives all your hard earned cash to the repair shop. Was that a success? Maybe your life has just become one of monotony and it's seemingly the same record playing over and over every day, and you feel like you're getting nowhere. Is that a success? God says it is! But only if you're doing all of it, ***in view of his mercy.***

Unfortunately you and I have a weak human tendency to determine how successful our day is based upon tangible accomplishments. But the thing is, when we fall into that, our lives can become like a pendulum swinging back and forth day after day- one day being proud of what we've done, and the next despairing because of our failures, and we will never be satisfied like that! So how do you determine success? Let me start by saying this: Success does not come from you.

Let me suggest a different question to ask yourself at the end of each day: “Did I worship God today, bring him praise by offering my body as a living sacrifice?” There's only one way this question can be answered with a “Yes.” It's by faith. See, faith allows us to see God's mercy, and then respond by doing all things to his glory.

Or the way the bible says it, ***You also, as living stones, are being built up into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (1 Pet. 2:5)***

And you know what the really wonderful thing is? God says there is no small part in the body of Christ. In other words, God does not base your value on how visible you are or on how much honor or attention you get.

Paul says that every member in the body of Christ has a different function, a different way of living as a sacrifice. God's designed it that way, given us each a specific purpose, because that's what makes the whole body function!

That means if you're a parent, love your children the way Jesus loved you. Be the pastor to your family you were meant to be. Prioritize God's Word to you children. If you are a husband, be the living sacrifice to your wife in view of God's mercy to you. If you're a wife, honor your husband in the same self-sacrificing way Christ did for you. Same thing if you're a child, a student, a friend, a neighbor, a grandparent, a retired person, or even unemployed. Even if you're hearing this from home or in the hospital, serve your Lord by lifting up your fellow believers in prayer.

God designed each part of the body, just where he wanted them to be. He knows how valuable you are to his kingdom, even if you don't always see it immediately.

Can you imagine the decision that woman Ashley Bridges had to make? Her life, or the life of her child. And she gave her life for her daughter who did nothing to deserve such a gift. I'm sure that that daughter will appreciate her mother's sacrifice her whole life through.

So, what about you? How will you respond to your Jesus who gave his life for you and me, who did nothing to deserve such a gift? When people bring up his name, don't change the subject. When people ask you about him, don't be ashamed. When we have a service to remember the ultimate sacrifice he made, don't find an excuse not to be here.

Tell your friends about the sacrifice made so you could live. Tell your children how their Savior Died, so they would have life. Remember Christians, by faith, you are a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. So how will you worship Him TODAY?